



Ref. A04748

MR. SANDERS ^{ms}

I was rung up by Mr. Dermot Nally in the Taoiseach's office this morning. The first purpose of the call was to discuss the date for the next meeting of the Steering Group of the Anglo-Irish joint studies.

2. Mr. Nally went on to talk about the current situation in Northern Ireland. He said that the Taoiseach and his colleagues were very worried that, if Mr. Sands died in the next five or six days, "the whole area would go up in flames". The Taoiseach had asked him to convey the message that he was extremely anxious to help in any way he could, and to ask us whether there was anything he could do which might be helpful. Mr. Nally said that the Taoiseach would have to do something today or tomorrow because of the political pressures in the Republic of Ireland.

3. Mr. Nally emphasised that the Taoiseach's concern was purely the humanitarian one. The Irish Government did not want us to meet the demands for political status. He wondered whether there was any future in getting the European Commission of Human Rights (ECHR) involved. He had heard the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the television yesterday say something which suggested that something in this area might be acceptable.

4. I said that my understanding was that the ECHR had made it clear that there was no official locus for the Commission in the matter, because they had no complaint before them. I understood, however, that certain Commissioners had expressed a willingness to offer their good offices on a personal basis. I did not think that we should exclude the possibility of some of the Commissioners visiting Northern Ireland on a personal basis, so long as there was no suggestion that they were coming to mediate between Mr. Sands or other prisoners and the Government.

5. Mr. Nally quickly disclaimed any idea of mediation. He said, however, that there were certain recommendations in paragraph 64 of the ECHR Report last year, which might provide a basis on which Commissioners could say that there was a continuing ECHR interest which they should be following up.



6. Mr. Nally said that the Taoiseach would be sending a message "through normal channels" later in the day, but in view of the shortage of time the Taoiseach was anxious to get this thought in to us at the earliest possible moment.

7. I reported this conversation to Mr. Marshall in the Northern Ireland Office. He thought that it would be right to wait until the message was received, presumably through the Irish Ambassador here or through Mr. Figg in Dublin, and then look at that together with the approaches received from members of the ECHR.

8. I am sending copies of this minute to Mr. Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Mr. Harrington (Northern Ireland Office).

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

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22nd April, 1981