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Cc Stephen Boys-Smith
(N10)



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 July 1981

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

The Maze hunger strike

As you know, Philip Woodfield came in here this evening to brief the Prime Minister on the situation in regard to contacts with the hunger strikers in the Maze prison. He explained to the Prime Minister the sequence of events in the last 36 hours leading up to this afternoon's statement by the PIRA about the need for an official to go in to the Maze to meet the hunger strikers.

Mr. Woodfield told the Prime Minister that Mr. Atkins felt that the Government had to respond to the PIRA statement either with a statement of its own along the usual lines refusing any negotiation or by sending in an official to clarify the position to the hunger strikers yet again. The official would set out to the hunger strikers what would be on offer if they abandoned their protest. He would do so along the lines discussed with the Prime Minister last week and communicated through "the channel". He would say that the prisoners would be allowed to wear their own clothes, as was already the case in Armagh prison, provided those clothes were approved by the prison authorities. (This would apply in all prisons in Northern Ireland.) He would set out the position on association; on parcels and letters; on remission; and on work. On this last point he would make it clear that the prisoners would, as before, have to do the basic work necessary to keep the prison going: there were tasks which the prison staff could in no circumstances be expected to do. But insofar as work in the prison work shops was concerned, it would be implicit that the prisoners would be expected to do this but that if they refused to do it they would be punished by loss of remission, or some similar penalty, rather than more severely.

Mr. Woodfield emphasised that the official would not be empowered to negotiate. He would simply be making a statement about what was on offer to the hunger strikers if they abandoned the hunger strike. The statement would be spelling out what had been implicit in the Government's public statements and explicit in earlier communications on "the channel". We would aim to avoid argument on the conditions under which the meeting had been arranged. We would simply say that we had done it on our own terms. There could be no guarantee that acting in this way would end the hunger strike. However there

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had been one or two indications that the hunger strikers were hoping to come off their strike. Mr. Woodfield added that from a purely parochial, Northern Ireland, point of view, there might be a good deal to be said for letting the hunger strike continue. But in the Secretary of State's opinion, the broader view, taking account of the situation in the Republic and the United States, argued for a further effort to end the hunger strike.

The Prime Minister said that she was less concerned about the situation in Dublin than about that in North America. If we were to act along the lines envisaged by the Northern Ireland Secretary, there would be obvious arguments, notably the possibility of Doherty's early death, for acting soon. She agreed that a further effort should be made to explain the situation to the hunger strikers. The official who went in should stick closely to the statement which had been drafted last week and communicated down "the channel" to MacFarlane. He should go in to the prison early tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, "the channel" should be activated tonight and informed of the Government's intentions. The Ambassador in Dublin should also be put in the picture. The Home Secretary should be briefed tomorrow morning.

However following further discussions, in the course of which it was drawn to the Prime Minister's attention that any approach of the kind outlined above to the hunger strikers would inevitably become public whether or not it succeeded, the Prime Minister reviewed the proposal on the telephone with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Mr. Atkins confirmed that it would not be possible to keep the initiative quiet once it had been communicated to the hunger strikers. The Prime Minister said she had thought the approach could be made on the same basis as before and that therefore nothing would be lost by trying. However it seemed that this was not the case. She was more concerned to do the right thing by Northern Ireland, than to try to satisfy international critics. Mr. Atkins observed that, from a purely Northern Ireland point of view, he would rather do nothing.

The Prime Minister asked whether it would not be sufficient for the official to repeat the Secretary of State's previous statement. Mr. Atkins said that he did not think this would do the trick.

The Prime Minister asked whether if a detailed offer along the lines set out above were made and failed, he could hold the prison officers. Mr. Atkins thought that this would be just about possible. The Prime Minister pointed out that once the offer of own clothes had been made publicly, it would have to be implemented whether or not the hunger strikers called off their strike. Mr. Atkins agreed. After further discussion, the Prime Minister decided that the dangers in taking an initiative would be so great in Northern Ireland that she was not prepared to risk them. The official who went in to the prison could repeat the Government's public position but could go no further. The Secretary of State agreed but added that he would have to make sure that no steps had been taken to activate "the channel".

I learned this morning (19 July) that "the channel" was in fact activated .

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POINTS TO BE MADE IN REPLY TO DUBLIN

1. HMG agree that only para-militaries would benefit from any effect on Anglo/Irish relations of any further deaths of hunger strikers.
2. Those who wish to avoid such a situation should advise the hunger strikers to cease their action.
3. The latest statement from the protesters calls for "negotiations". That is not possible.
4. We have always understood the position of the Irish Government to be opposed to all form of negotiations with subversive organisations.
5. The British Government have made clear their readiness to clarify to the hunger strikers the Government's position as set out in the Government's statement of 8 July.
6. That statement reflects what was said to the ICJP about the areas in which movement is and is not possible.
7. The ICJP's statement did not make clear the limits to Government action and as such is not a basis on which a Government official could speak to the hunger strikers.
8. There is no "solution already arrived at".

Background

It is important that the reply be firm if the hunger strikers and PSF are not to be encouraged to keep going.

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Come in for clarification not for negotiation

On clothing what went down channel,

Work - look after yourselves

^{attribution} - L penalties if you don't do your work.

Contingent on hunger strike being called off.

Hunger strikes to be seen & held there.

MacFarlane can be drawn up as ordinary
prison: will be seen there.

~~Notify~~ Notify Channel: ∴ ① May help if they know in advance
② Not dependent.

Recall how in the morning: when prison opens
up: 08.30.

AA - Channel's themes not all in one room.

Blebbach will work to last Monday's statement

: V. similar to channel, but more precise.

Same as 8 channel + police and prisoner committee L.

3 changes ① refer to situation in which hunger
L support of protest is called off.

② segregation - "avoiding trouble between
groups" - more general language.

③ "adjoining" wings

No secret deals: once I've said ~~it~~ ^{it}, it will become
public.