

to Press



Am Hassan

MD

PRIME MINISTER

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE BILL:
DISQUALIFICATION OF PRISONERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF
IRELAND

We agreed at Cabinet on 4 June that our Bill to disqualify for membership of the House of Commons convicted persons detained in prison in pursuance of a sentence of more than twelve months should disqualify only those in prison in the United Kingdom and should not extend to the Republic of Ireland.

Since we took that decision, it has been reported that the Provisionals intend to nominate as a candidate at the pending by-election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone someone serving a prison sentence in the Republic. Although there are arguments of practicability and simplicity in restricting the disqualification to the United Kingdom, these are less strong now that the disqualification does not extend to people released on parole or on licence, and there was a very strong feeling in the debate on Second Reading of the Bill that it would be indefensible to allow prisoners in the Irish Republic to escape the disqualification.

The Committee Stage of the Bill is on Thursday. Subject to your views and to those of any of our Cabinet colleagues, I propose to have an amendment tabled this evening to extend the disqualification to prisoners in the Irish Republic.

I am copying this minute to Cabinet colleagues, to Sir Robert Armstrong, and to First Parliamentary Counsel.

Law

23 June 1981