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CONFIDENTIAL



cc FCO

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

15 December, 1980

Thank you for your letter of 16 December. I have spoken with Dermot Nally and made the points in your letter.

Mr Nally was unable to throw any light on the misunderstanding which appears to have arisen somewhere about a visit to the Maze by Gerry Adams on Sunday. However, he said that "his boss" had the impression that Adams "could be useful" if he were to see the hunger strikers alone. Mr Nally said that it was the belief of the authorities in Dublin that the PIRA leadership (who are apparently referred to in Dublin as "the contractors") were opposed to the hunger strike. I explained that we here were unaware of any other request for a visit by Adams to see the hunger strikers.

Mr Nally did not ask me whether we would allow Adams to visit the hunger strikers if a request were made and I did not say we would not do so. It is possible therefore that we will hear more of this. But I explained that we were not prepared to conduct business with para-militaries or to negotiate with anyone on the basis that a change in HMG's stance was possible. We were, of course, prepared to go on explaining to anyone who would listen what was available to the prisoners should they decide to conform. I added that anything the Irish Government could do to get this message across would be very welcome. Mr Nally indicated that he had taken the point.

I asked Mr Nally whether there was any particular significance in his request for a visit by Father Meagher. Mr Nally said that there was none beyond the fact that Father Meagher was known to be helpful and reliable. He would certainly do his best to sell what was on offer.

Mr Nally said that the Irish authorities would be proposing, through the Ambassador in Dublin, that we should consider whether we would be prepared to accept phraseology on the clothing issue which would envisage the provision to prisoners of "clothes provided or approved by the prison authorities". He said somewhat defensively "you probably won't look at it". I gave him no encouragement to suppose that we would.

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I should perhaps record, since this may be the first of a series of letters, that I agreed with Mr Nally that he and I would be the normal channel in the next few weeks for urgent communication between the two Governments on matters concerned with the hunger strike. I have cleared the arrangement with the Prime Minister.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Paul Lever (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

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Northern Ireland Office

SP