

Ireland



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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Michael Alexander Esq
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16 December 1980

For
Nally
16/12/80

Dear Michael

You agreed with Roy Harrington that, during the next few days which may see the death of one or more hunger strikers, it is particularly important to have a single, direct and authoritative line of communication to the Irish Government. Their Embassy in London shows signs of trying to "get in on the act"; our Embassy in Dublin, in the interests of its relations with the DFA, needs to avoid bypassing the DFA even though we know that, on this issue, it is the Taoiseach's office alone which matters. We agreed that, for urgent messages, the line of communication should be through you to Dermot Nally.

I should emphasise that we think it imprudent to let the Irish Embassy realise that they are being cut out in this way. We shall therefore answer outstanding queries in general terms, and hope that we do not receive any more.

There are three points which we should like you to put to Nally straight away:

- (a) We have had somewhat garbled queries from the Irish Embassy about "how Gerry Adams got on when he visited the Maze yesterday". The only request involving him was that for a quadrilateral Hughes/Sands/McAliskey/Adams meeting - the request which you have already mentioned to Dermot Nally and which we turned down without giving reasons. (The request and its refusal have not so far had any publicity.) It would be helpful if you would emphasise to Nally that we have had no request other than that already made and refused.
- (b) If, however, the Irish have channels of communication which lead to Adams, it would be useful for them to be used to make quite clear that we are not going to conduct business, in or out of prison, with paramilitaries. But we are quite prepared to go on explaining what is available to the prisoners once their protests end, when they will become conforming prisoners receiving privileges. We would welcome the help of the Irish Government in getting across our willingness to continue to explain these matters.
- (c) You should know that Dermot Nally telephoned Ken Stowe this morning to let us know that they believe it would be helpful for us to facilitate a visit to the prison by a particular Roman Catholic priest, Father Meagher (pronounced Maher). He is to visit this afternoon. It would be useful for Dermot Nally to explain what he

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believes Father Meagher's role to be. If Meagher sees himself as a negotiator, it is important that the Irish should make clear to those in contact with Meagher that mediation or negotiation in the hope of a change in HMG's stance is out of the question, although obviously we have no objection to his explaining again the advantageous features of the regime available after the protests end. (This direct approach from Nally indicates that the Irish also feel a need for direct communication although, for reasons you and Roy agreed upon last night, it would be right for the channel to be via you.)

I should add that I shall be writing you later today with an up-date on the hunger strike and a look-forward to the next few days.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Paul Lever (and for immediacy to Mike Newington) in the FCO.

*Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins*

M W HOPKINS

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