

CONFIDENTIAL

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

GREAT GEORGE STREET,

LONDON SW1P 3AJ



Michael Alexander Esq.,
10 Downing Street
London
S W 1

22 June 1981

Dear Michael,

At OD Committee last week (OD(81)^{12th} Meeting) my Secretary of State was invited to lay before Cabinet, for consideration on 25 June, a paper which would

- a. consider the composition and terms of reference of a body to advise on the special problems of managing Northern Ireland prisons; and
- b. contain a proposal for the establishment of a non-elective political advisory body.

My Secretary of State will be circulating his paper tomorrow morning. It requires no explanation on point b. above; but as regards point a., having considered the matter further, in the light of the OD conclusion, and after consulting the Home Secretary, my Secretary of State has concluded that he must recommend to the Cabinet that it would be inappropriate to establish at this moment the sort of enquiry on prisons which was envisaged by OD Committee.

OD concluded that, for the reasons recorded in the minutes, there would be objections to setting up a Committee related in any way to the hunger strike. My Secretary of State is now persuaded, on the basis of his further examination of the matter, that there are serious objections to announcing now the establishment of a committee explicitly unrelated to the hunger strike and their security implications. The Home Secretary agrees. The reasons are referred to very briefly in the paper, and it may be useful for me to spell them out here in a little more detail:-

- a. Either it would be regarded as incredible that we should set up such a body unless it was to concern itself with the immediate problem - we should be suspected of creating a route to give concessions - or it would be seen as "fiddling while Rome burns".
- b. The international reaction would be especially severe. It would be likely to convict us of precisely the inflexible and inhumane attitude which we are trying to pin on the other side.

.../

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

.../

- c. It would impose an impossible responsibility on the Committee's members. They would be established as a committee to examine the prison regime, but to ignore the hunger strike deaths which would go on around them.
- d. An announcement in the terms proposed would have to say that the Committee was not to concern itself with the hunger strike, and so would imply that we were concerned only with getting the special category prisoners into cells. That would be especially provocative to moderate Catholic opinion. We would be seen by them as saying that we were indifferent to the hunger strikers' deaths, and the troubles on the streets.

... My Secretary of State regards those arguments as particularly compelling at a time when the Irish Catholic Bishops, in their statement of last week (copy attached) have come out in support of so much of our cause. They, like the statement of American Bishops also made last week, commend to both sides the statement of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. Announcing a committee so emphatically unrelated to the hunger strike or these important statements by Catholic opinion would be seen as a deliberate rejection of their moderation, even though in several points they support the Government's position.

It is for these reasons that my Secretary of State would regard it as most unwise to set up such a committee at this stage - though it will certainly be needed at some stage to consider our longer term problems and preparatory work as agreed by OD can continue. He therefore proposes that in the renewal debate, the only new announcement should be that related to the agreed move on the political front.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of OD Committee, and to David Wright.

*Yours sincerely,
Noel Cornick*

NOEL CORNICK

SD

CONFIDENTIAL

TO: THE SECRETARY OF STATE

CATHOLIC PRESS @ INFORMATION OFFICE DUBLIN

ATTENTION: NEWS DESK

STATEMENT FROM THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ISSUED FROM THEIR MEETING IN MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, TODAY, 17 JUNE 1981:

WE ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE SERIOUS AND DETERIORATING SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THE CONTINUING HUNGER-STRIKE IN THE MAZE PRISON AT LONG KESH HAS LED TO INCREASING POLARISATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY. NOT ONLY HAS IT CLAIMED THE LIVES OF FOUR YOUNG MEN WITHIN THE PRISON BUT IT HAS BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY MURDER, BOMBING AND STREET VIOLENCE IN WHICH MANY MORE LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST. THE DEATHS OF HUNGER-STRIKERS HAVE ALSO BEEN FOLLOWED BY OUTBREAKS OF ARSON, INTIMIDATION AND WILFUL DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY. THIS HEIGHTENED LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AND VANDALISM, THE PLIGHT OF THE INNOCENT VICTIMS OF INTIMIDATION AND TERROR, THE DEEPENING DIVISIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, HAVE CONSEQUENCES NOT JUST FOR THE NORTH ITSELF BUT FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE WHOLE ISLAND.

EVERY DEATH AND SERIOUS INJURY THROUGH VIOLENCE CALL FORTH A DEEP AND INTENSE SORROW, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE RELIGION AND POLITICAL OUTLOOK OF THE VICTIM. WE EXPERIENCE AN EQUAL SADNESS AT ALL DEATHS WHETHER THE VICTIMS BE PROTESTANT OR CATHOLIC. WE FEEL EQUAL SYMPATHY AND COMPASSION FOR ALL WHO MOURN.

WE REPEAT WHAT THE NORTHERN BISHOPS SAID DURING THE FIRST HUNGER-STRIKE LAST NOVEMBER:

"THE VIOLENCE IN OUR MIDST HAS GENERATED A HIDEOUS SPIRAL OF MURDER, BOMBING, ROBBERY, THE BREAK-UP OF FAMILIES AND DISRESPECT FOR LIFE ITSELF. IT HAS FILLED GRAVES AND PRISONS. IT HAS EVEN CONTINUED UNABATED IN RECENT WEEKS. WE SOLEMNLY DECLARE THAT THOSE WHO KILL, WOUND, THREATEN OR INTIMIDATE, THOSE WHO PUT PEOPLE IN FEAR OF THEIR LIVES OR ENDANGER THEIR LIVELIHOODS, ARE GUILTY OF EVIL DEEDS CONTRARY TO THE LAW OF GOD. THEY STAND IN CLEAR OPPOSITION TO THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST AS PREACHED IN ALL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES. AS CATHOLICS WE MUST ONCE MORE PROCLAIM A DECISIVE NO TO ALL KINDS OF VIOLENCE."

MANY OF THESE EVILS SPRING FROM THE EXISTENCE OF PRIVATE ARMIES OR PARAMILITARY ORGANISATIONS WHICH CLAIM THE RIGHT TO WAGE WAR. NOT ONLY HAVE THEY SENT OUT THEIR MEMBERS TO CARRY OUT CRUEL AND MURDEROUS DEEDS, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO EVIL BY URGING THEM TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE. WE MAKE OUR OWN THE APPEAL WHICH OUR HOLY FATHER MADE IN DROGHEDA TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF IRELAND:

"IF YOU HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UP IN THE WAYS OF VIOLENCE, EVEN IF YOU HAVE DONE DEEDS OF VIOLENCE, COME BACK TO CHRIST, WHOSE PARTING GIFT TO THE WORLD WAS PEACE. ONLY WHEN YOU COME BACK TO CHRIST WILL YOU FIND PEACE FOR YOUR TROUBLED CONSCIENCE AND REST FOR YOUR DISTURBED MINDS!"

WE ARE NOT UNMINDFUL, HOWEVER, OF THE INJUSTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND OVER THE YEARS WHICH CREATED A CLIMATE FOR EASY RECRUITMENT BY PARAMILITARY ORGANISATIONS. NOR DID THE PRESENT IMPASSE IN THE

EFFORTS WERE MADE TO FIND A SOLUTION LAST YEAR. IF THE PRESENT EFFORTS WERE TO FAIL THE CONSEQUENCES THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE ISLAND COULD BE VERY GRAVE INDEED. THERE COULD BE A DANGER OF RESORT TO STILL MORE VIOLENT POLICIES. THERE COULD BE RISKS OF INSTABILITY THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE STRUCTURE OF OUR SOCIETY. WE THEREFORE IMPLORE THE HUNGER-STRIKERS AND THOSE WHO DIRECT THEM TO REFLECT DEEPLY ON THE EVIL OF THEIR ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES. THE CONTEMPT FOR HUMAN LIFE, THE INCITEMENT TO REVENGE, THE EXPLOITATION OF THE HUNGER-STRIKES TO FURTHER A CAMPAIGN OF MURDER, THE INTIMIDATION OF THE INNOCENT, THE INITIATION OF CHILDREN INTO VIOLENCE, ALL THIS CONSTITUTES AN APPALLING MASS OF EVIL.

WE APPEAL ALSO TO POLITICIANS AND GOVERNMENTS AND WE REMIND THEM OF THE SOLEMN WORDS OF THE POPE IN DROGHEDA:

"TO ALL WHO BEAR POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE AFFAIRS OF IRELAND, I WANT TO SPEAK WITH THE SAME URGENCY AND INTENSITY WITH WHICH I HAVE SPOKEN TO THE MEN OF VIOLENCE. DO NOT CAUSE OR CONDONE OR TOLERATE CONDITIONS WHICH GIVE EXCUSE OR PRETEXT TO MEN OF VIOLENCE. THOSE WHO RESORT TO VIOLENCE ALWAYS CLAIM THAT ONLY VIOLENCE BRINGS ABOUT CHANGE. THEY CLAIM THAT POLITICAL ACTION CANNOT ACHIEVE JUSTICE. YOU POLITICIANS MUST PROVE THEM TO BE WRONG. YOU MUST SHOW THAT THERE IS A PEACEFUL POLITICAL WAY TO JUSTICE. YOU MUST SHOW THAT PEACE ACHIEVES THE WORKS OF JUSTICE, AND VIOLENCE DOES NOT."

AT THIS CRITICAL JUNCTURE WE WELCOME THE RECENT STATEMENT ON THE HUNGER STRIKE FROM THE IRISH COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE AND WE COMMEND IT TO BOTH SIDES AS A POSITIVE EFFORT TO FIND A WAY OUT OF THE IMPASSE. LIKE THE COMMISSION WE CALL ON BOTH SIDES TO GIVE AN INDICATION OF THEIR WILLINGNESS TO MOVE TOWARDS A SOLUTION. WE ASK THE PRISONERS AND THOSE WHO SPEAK FOR THEM TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSALS ON CLOTHING, ASSOCIATION AND WORK WOULD, IF IMPLEMENTED, PROVIDE THE AVENUE FOR A SOLUTION. WE ASK THE GOVERNMENT TO SHOW A CORRESPONDING OPENNESS ON THESE ISSUES.

THE PRESENT DISTURBING SITUATION SHOULD MAKE US ALL THE MORE DETERMINED TO WORK TOGETHER FOR A SETTLEMENT. WE URGE INCREASED UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC AND CLOSER SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH. WE APPEAL TO ALL THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THE PROMOTION OF GOSPEL VALUES IN AN IRELAND INCREASINGLY THREATENED BY SECULARIST STANDARDS. WE ASK PEOPLE NOT TO ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE CARRIED AWAY BY DANGEROUS EMOTIONS. WE URGE THEM TO SEEK THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND TO REDOUBLE THEIR PRAYERS FOR A JUST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT CONFLICT. WE DIRECT THAT AS FROM NEXT SUNDAY PRAYERS FOR PEACE BE INSERTED AMONG THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES EVEN ON WEEKDAYS.

WE ASK PEOPLE TO PERSEVERE IN PRAYER ALWAYS. WHAT OUR LORD SAYS TO US IS THAT "WE OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY AND NEVER TO LOSE HEART".

ENDS