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C O N F I D E N T I A L

FM DUBLIN 18:1925Z JUNE 1981

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 203 OF 18 JUNE 1981

AND REPEATED FOR INFO TO NIO (BELFAST)

HUNGER STRIKE.

FROM TATHAM.

1. IN THE AMBASSADOR'S ABSENCE I WAS ASKED TO CALL AT 1800 ON THE IRISH COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, WHERE I MET THE CHAIRMAN BRIAN GALLAGHER, BISHOP O'MAHONEY PLUS HUGH LOGUE AND FATHER CRILLY FROM NORTHERN IRELAND. THE LAST TWO DID MOST OF THE TALKING.
2. THEY WANTED HMG TO KNOW THAT FROM CONTACTS THEY HAD HAD WITH PRISONERS FAMILIES OVER THE WEEK-END AND FROM VISITS BY FATHER CRILLY AND MR MCGILL TO THE MAZE ON 16 JUNE THEY BELIEVED THERE WAS GENUINE INTEREST AMONG PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN RESOLVING THE HUNGER STRIKE IMPASSE ON THE LINES OF THE I.C.J.P. STATEMENT OF 3 JUNE. THEY CLAIMED TO BE REINFORCED IN THEIR BELIEF BY TWO TELEXES THEY HAD RECEIVED TODAY FROM THE REPUBLICAN PRESS CENTRE IN BELFAST WHICH AS FAR AS THEY KNEW HAD NOT BEEN RELEASED TO THE PRESS AND WHICH SEEMED CONCILIATORY.
3. THE I.C.J.P. MAINTAIN THAT THE PRESENT LULL OF 10 DAYS BEFORE THERE IS IMMINENT DANGER OF ANOTHER DEATH SHOULD BE USED TO END THE STRIKE. THEY POINTED TO THE DISASTEROUS SIDE-EFFECTS OF THE HUNGER STRIKE IN ULSTER, THE GAINS H-BLOCK SUPPORTERS HAD MADE IN THE DAIL ELECTIONS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH AT A TIME OF A WEAK OR UNSTABLE GOVERNMENT IN DUBLIN. HMG SHOULD NOT SEE THIS APPROACH AS A SIGN THAT THE STRIKERS OR THE HARD-LINERS WERE CRACKING, BUT RATHER AS A CHINK OF SANITY AMONG THE LESS COMMITTED WHICH COULD PROVIDE AN OPENING AND MIGHT ENABLE HMG TO SEPARATE CATHOLIC OPINION FROM THE HARD-LINERS. IT WAS VITAL THAT SOME EXPRESSION OF BRITISH INTEREST SHOULD BE RECEIVED WITHIN 24 HOURS. OTHERWISE THE HARD-LINERS COULD TELL THE FAMILIES THAT THE BRITISH WERE NOT INTERESTED AND BRING THEM BACK TO THE PROVISIONAL CAMP.

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4. I EXPLAINED THAT WHILE I WOULD PASS ON THIS APPROACH THE ISSUE WAS A HOT SUBJECT IN LONDON AND THERE WAS NO CHANCE OF A SUBSTANTIVE REPLY WITHIN 24 HOURS. I ALSO POINTED OUT THAT IF HMG WANTED TO FOLLOW UP THE QUESTION THEY MIGHT PREFER NOT TO DO SO IN DUBLIN OR USING THE I.C.J.P.: THEY ACCEPTED THIS. I HAVE SINCE LEARNT THAT LOGUE HAS BEEN IN TOUCH BY TELEPHONE WITH WYATT IN BELFAST.

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U N C L A S S I F I E D

FM DUBLIN 18:1645Z JUNE 1981

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 201 OF 18 JUNE 1981

AND REPEATED TO PRIORITY NIO (BELFAST)

STATEMENT FROM THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE:
H-BLOCK HUNGER STRIKE.

1. THE IRISH CATHOLIC BISHOPS, MEETING IN MAYNOOTH ON 17 JUNE, ISSUED A STATEMENT ABOUT THE HUNGER STRIKE (COPIES TO RID AND NIO (B) BY BAG.) THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS CONTAIN THE MOST IMPORTANT POINTS IN THE STATEMENT.

BEGINS.

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.....

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-STRIKERS 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.....

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.

ENDS.

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2. THERE HAS BEEN NO RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT FROM PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN SO FAR. HOWEVER, DAVID O'CONNELL IS QUOTED IN THE IRISH PRESS OF 17 JUNE AS NOTING THAT THE 3 JUNE STATEMENT BY THE IRISH COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE MADE REFERENCE TO ONLY THREE OF THE FIVE DEMANDS, AND THAT THE COMMISSION HAD "CLOUDED THE ISSUE IN VERBIAGE AND FUDGED IT." HE WENT ON "PERHAPS THEY ASSUME THAT IF THE 3 ITEMS WERE DEALT WITH THESE TWO (I.E. VISITS AND FULL REMISSION) COULD THEN BE SOLVED, BUT WITH OUR EXPERIENCE WE MUST NOT MAKE THAT ASSUMPTION AT ALL". HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE EXPRESSED A WISH TO MEET THE COMMISSION IN ORDER "TO INFORM THEM OF THE FACTS OF THE MATTER".

3. M.I.F.T.

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