

**CONFIDENTIAL**



10 DOWNING STREET

*cc Martin*  
From the Private Secretary

*Indel File*  
VLS  
cc FCO  
HMT

*CJ*

Message from Mr. Haughey

As you know, the Irish Ambassador called on the Prime Minister this evening to deliver a message, of which I enclose a copy, from the Taoiseach to the Prime Minister about the hunger strike.

For the most part, Mr. Kennedy confined himself to repeating the contents of the Taoiseach's message. I do not, therefore, propose to record his remarks in detail. However, one or two points may be worth noting:

- (a) Mr. Kennedy said that if it were possible for HMG to look again at the regime in the Maze Prison, and the other prisons, now was the time to do so. There was a slight lull. Once the next hunger striker died, the situation would deteriorate again;
- (b) The Irish Government sensed from their contacts in the North that there was at present a sense of bewilderment and puzzlement among the relatives of the hunger strikers about what exactly the future held. This was also shared by some of the prisoners. This was something which could, perhaps, be exploited;
- (c) The continuation of the present stalemate would ensure a continuous increase in the propaganda support for the IRA. They might fail to win political status but they would win the propaganda victory. They had already gained a great deal since last October;

/ (d)

(d) The Taoiseach believed that it would be possible, e.g. through the approach advocated by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, to "eliminate" some of the points being made by the IRA. Even if this failed to end the hunger strike, it would help in the propaganda war. The Taoiseach, who was very anxious to help, stood ready to discuss the situation with the Prime Minister on the telephone.

The Prime Minister said that the failure of the hunger strikers to complain to the European Commission on Human Rights made it clear that they in fact had no genuine complaints about the prison regime. Their objective was quite different. They would not be diverted by concessions. The difficulty with the approach advocated by the Taoiseach was that it went along with the salami tactics of the IRA leadership.

The problem in Northern Ireland had not been created by HMG. But there was a general expectation that HMG should solve it. It was not clear how, and in any case if HMG did succeed in solving the immediate problem, they would simply be presented with another problem to solve which further concessions would be sought. The recent statement by the Irish Bishops had been excellent but it seemed to have had little effect. The IRA was in the hands of left-wing extremists who were not greatly interested in the views of the Church.

In conclusion, the Prime Minister said that she would of course consider the Taoiseach's letter but it was not easy to see what HMG could do. It was for others to move.

You should be aware that the Prime Minister mentioned, in passing, the complaint which one of the hunger strikers had apparently intended to address to the European Commission on Human Rights but which, as you know, seems never to have been dispatched. On the way out, I tried to indicate to Mr. Kennedy the sensitivity of this piece of information. However, he seemed not to have realised the significance of what the Prime Minister had said, and I judged it better not to pursue the matter.

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The Prime Minister also informed Mr. Kennedy, very briefly, of the Government's intention to amend the Representation of the People Bill so as to extend disqualification to prisoners serving a sentence of more than 12 months in the Republic of Ireland. Mr. Kennedy welcomed this news. He thought the amendment would remove a potentially serious source of embarrassment to the Government in Dublin.

I am sending copies of this letter and enclosure to Roderic Lyne (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Nihal Alexander

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Northern Ireland Office.