

IMMEDIATE

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*ms*

RESIDENT CLERK

GRPS 1500

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FM DUBLIN 051345Z DECEMBER 1980

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 362 OF 05 DECEMBER 1980

AND TO IMMEDIATE NIO BELFAST

*To place things -*

MR ATKIN'S STATEMENT: IRISH MEDIA REACTIONS.

1. THE STATEMENT IS HEADLINE NEWS IN TODAY'S IRISH TIMES, IRISH INDEPENDENT AND IRISH PRESS. THE TIMES AND PRESS ALSO CONTAIN EDITORIAL COMMENT. THEIR REACTIONS ARE IN GENERAL FAVOURABLE ALTHOUGH THE TIMES AND INDEPENDENT ATTRIBUTE WHAT THEY SEE AS A BREAK THROUGH IN THE BRITISH ATTITUDE TO JOHN HUME'S MEETING WITH MR ATKINS YESTERDAY MORNING.

2. UNDER THE HEADLINE QUOTE BRITAIN HINTS AT NEW BASIS FOR H-BLOCK TALKS UNQUOTE THE IRISH TIMES REPORTS THAT QUOTE POSITIVE MOVES TOWARDS A RESOLUTION OF THE H-BLOCK CRISIS WERE INITIATED LAST NIGHT, AS BOTH THE NORTHERN SECRETARY, MR ATKINS, AND SPOKESMEN FOR THE NATIONAL H BLOCKS/ARMAGH COMMITTEE SEPARATELY INDICATED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION FROM A NEW BASIS UNQUOTE. THE ARTICLE SINGLES OUT MR ATKINS' STATEMENT THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO DISCUSS THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND QUOTE WITH ANYONE WHO SHARES OUR CONCERN ABOUT IT UNQUOTE AND

HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND  
QUOTE WITH ANYONE WHO SHARES OUR CONCERN ABOUT IT UNQUOTE AND  
CONTINUES QUOTE HE SPECIFICALLY ACKNOWLEDGED THE GOVERNMENT'S  
AGREEMENT WITH LAST SUMMER'S FINDINGS BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH SPELT OUT THE RIGHTS TO WHICH ALL PRISONERS  
SHOULD BE ENTITLED. THE SIGNS OF A BREAK IN THE DEADLOCK EMERGED  
AFTER MR JOHN HUME, THE LEADER OF THE SDLP, MET MR ATKINS IN  
LONDON AND RAISED WITH HIM THE TERMS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONS  
FINDINGS. UNQUOTE

3. THE IRISH TIMES POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT, DICK WALSH, REPORTS  
REACTIONS TO THE STATEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION PARTIES  
SEE MYTELS NOS 359 AND 360. HE REMARKED ON THE RARE UNANIMITY OF  
THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION AND GAVE PROMINENCE TO JOHN  
HUME'S APPEAL FOR THE HUNGER STRIKERS TO STOP THEIR PROTEST WHILE  
DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF REDUCED TENSION.

4. UNDER THE HEADLINE QUOTE H BLOCK GLIMMER OF HOPE UNQUOTE  
CHRIS GLENNON, THE IRISH INDEPENDENT'S POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT  
REPORTS QUOTE THE FIRST BREAK HAS COME IN THE DEADLOCK ON THE  
H BLOCKS HUNGER STRIKE. THIS WAS THE UNANIMOUS VIEW AMONG THE  
MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE REPUBLIC LAST NIGHT AFTER A FIRM  
INDICATION THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WAS PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE  
ON CONDITIONS IN LONG KESH..... THE BREAK ON DAY 39 OF THE STRIKE  
FOLLOWED INTENSIVE LOBBYING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS IN DUBLIN AND  
LONDON AND ALSO INVOLVING NORTHERN SECRETARY, HUMPHREY ATKINS, AND  
SDLP LEADER, JOHN HUME..... MR ATKINS MADE CLEAR THE BRITISH  
GOVERNMENTS INTENTION TO CONTINUE TO REFUSE POLITICAL STATUS TO  
THE PRISONERS. BUT HE POINTED OUT THAT NEVERTHELESS THEIR WAS  
A PREPAREDNESS TO DEAL WITH THE QUOTE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS UNQUOTE  
OF THE CONDITIONS IN THE PRISON. UNQUOTE

5. UNDER THE HEADING QUOTE DOOR OPENS ON H BLOCK UNQUOTE, THE  
IRISH PRESS REPORTS CAUTIOUSLY QUOTE INDICATIONS OF AN APPARENT  
BRITISH WILLINGNESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO END THE H BLOCK AND  
ARMAGH HUNGER STRIKES HAVE BEEN WELCOMED BY IRISH POLITICAL  
LEADERS, BUT MET WITH A GUARDED RESPONSE FROM THE RELATIVES OF THE  
HUNGER STRIKERS AND THE NATIONAL H BLOCK COMMITTEE. IN THE LATEST  
DEVELOPMENT ON THE 39TH DAY OF THE FAST BY SEVEN REPUBLICANS  
IN LONG KESH IT EMERGED THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH  
STILL OPPOSED TO THE GRANTING OF POLITICAL STATUS, ARE PREPARED AT  
THE INSISTENCE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS,  
TO DEAL WITH THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE H BLOCKS AND ARMAGH  
PRISONERS. UNQUOTE THE ARTICLE POINTS OUT QUOTE THE SHIFT IN  
THE STATED BRITISH POSITION CAME ONLY THREE DAYS AFTER THE  
LUXEMBURG MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH, MR HAUGHEY, AND THE

THE STATED BRITISH POSITION CAME ONLY THREE DAYS AFTER THE LUXEMBURG MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH, MR HAUGHEY, AND THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, MRS THATCHER. UNQUOTE THE ARTICLE THEN QUOTES THE REACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT, THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, THE RELATIVES OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS, THE NATIONAL H BLOCK/ARMAGH COMMITTEE AND PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN.

## EDITORIALS

AN EDITORIAL IN THE IRISH TIMES SPEAKS OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AS HAVING QUOTE WISELY AND SPEEDILY STEPPED IN TO OFFER ITS SERVICES IN HELPING TO RESOLVE THE IMPASSE. IT DID THIS IN RESPONSE TO A HINT IN AN ANSWER TO A PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, WHICH SEEMED TO SHOW AN OUTBREAK OF COMMON SENSE AND WHICH WAS CONFIRMED BY AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS BETWEEN MR JOHN HUME AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE, MR ATKINS UNQUOTE. THE EDITORIALIST ASSERTS QUOTE IT IS NOT A MATTER OF THE PROVISIONALS WINNING A VICTORY, BUT OF A VICTORY FOR COMMON SENSE AND DECENCY SEMICOLON AND IT IS A CONTEST WHICH SHOULD NEVER HAVE ARISEN. THE STANDARDS OF GOVERNMENTS MUST BE SERENE BEYOND REPROACH ... AS JOHN HUME REMINDS US THE SMALL PRINT OF THE VERDICT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OFFERS A WAY OUT FOR ALL. NOR SHOULD A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM BE ANY AFFRONT TO UNIONISTS, IN PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED BITTER LOSS IN THE LAST TEN YEARS WAR. IT IS IN THEIR INTERESTS TOO THAT VICTIMISATION SHOULD NEVER COME FROM THOSE IN AUTHORITY, AND THAT THE ADMINISTRATION FROM THE TOP DOWN SHOULD AT ALL TIMES BE SEEN TO HAVE CLEAN HANDS AND AN UNDERSTANDING HEART UNQUOTE

UNDER THE HEADING QUOTE A GLEAN OF LIGHT UNQUOTE THE EDITORIAL TO THE IRISH PRESS ADOPTS A MORE CAUTIOUS TONE. QUOTE WHAT IS OF OVERRIDING IMPORTANCE IS WHETHER OR NOT MR ATKINS LATEST RESPONSE IN THE SUSTAINED PRESSURE THAT HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO BEAR UPON HIM REPRESENTS WHAT COULD BE REGARDED AS A MOVE WHICH WOULD .... OFFER REASONABLE HOPE OF ACHIEVING A SOLUTION .... NOT EVERYBODY WILL SEE IN THE ATKINS STATEMENT ANYTHING THAT CAN BE TAKEN AS A POSITIVE ADVANCE. A WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF THE PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND WITH ANYONE WHO SHARES THE BRITISH GOVERNMENTS CONCERN ABOUT IT FALLS DECIDELY SHORT OF ANY GUARANTEE OF COMMITMENT ON THIS GRAVE ISSUE, BUT PERHAPS IT WOULD BE WELL TO EXAMINE THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENT WAS MADE TO WHOM AND THE INTERPRETATION THAT WAS PLACED UPON IT UNQUOTE THE EDITORIAL REPORTS THAT MR JOHN HUME DETECTED WHAT HE SAW AS QUOTE A BREAK IN THE RIGIDITY OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE HUNGER STRIKERS UNQUOTE AND THAT HIS ASSESSMENT QUOTE DESERVES THE WEIGHTIEST CONSIDERATION. HE IS A POLITICIAN OF EXPERIENCE ACCUSTOMED TO

OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE HUNGER STRIKERS  
UNQUOTE AND THAT HIS ASSESSMENT QUOTE DESERVES THE WEIGHTIEST  
CONSIDRATION. HE IS A POLITICIAN OF EXPERIENCE ACCUSTOMED TO  
DEALING WITH AND INTERPRETTING POLITICAL UTTERANCES UNQUOTE.  
THE EDITORIAL CONCLUDES, MR HUMES QUOTE APPEAL TO RELATIVES AND  
SUPPORTERS OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS TO ACCEPT THE OPPORTUNITY OF  
A PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF THE CRISIS, A STEP BY STEP DE-ESCALATION  
WHICH COULD SAVE LIVES AND DIVERT WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE MUST BE  
HEEDED. IT STRIKES A RESPONSIVE CALL IN THE HEARTS OF ALL PEOPLE  
WHO WANT TO SAVE FURTHER SUFFERING AND BLOODSHED, IN IRELAND AND  
IN BRITAIN UNQUOTE.

FIGG

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RESIDENT CLERK

*Prime Minister*

GROUPS 125  
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FROM DUBLIN 041841Z DECEMBER  
TO IMMEDIATE F C O  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 359 OF 04 DEC 1980

*50 pence  
4.12.80*

ADVANCE COPY *mt*

H-BLOCKS

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF STATEMENT ISSUED TONIGHT BY THE IRISH GOVERNMENT.

BEGINS:- THE GOVERNMENT WELCOMES THE INCLUSION IN THE STATEMENT ISSUED TODAY BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OF THEIR WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECT OF THE PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND WITH ANYONE WHO SHARES THEIR CONCERN ABOUT IT. AS IT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW THAT IT IS ALONG THESE LINES THAT A SOLUTION CAN BE REACHED THEY EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT THIS OFFER WILL BE TAKEN UP AND PURSUED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY.

THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVE THAT IT IS IN THE INTERESTS OF PEACE AND SECURITY OF ALL THE PEOPLE OF THIS ISLAND THAT A WAY OUT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION SHOULD BE FOUND AND THEY AGAIN INDICATE THAT THEY ARE READY TO GIVE THEIR SUPPORT TO ANY MOVES WHICH WOULD OFFER A REASONABLE HOPE OF ACHIEVING A SOLUTION. ENDS.

FIGG.