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## Hunger Strike 'deal' papers published

By Allison Morris

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New claims about a deal that could have ended the 1981 Hunger Strike have come to light in transcripts of an interview with one of Margaret Thatcher's top aides.

The document shows Sir John Blelloch, a senior member of British intelligence who was seconded to the Northern Ireland Office, say it was reaching agreement on the wording of a communication to prisoners which led to a fatal delay. What went wrong with the 'deal' has been the subject of much controversy over the years.

In an interview conducted at the Ministry of Defence in 1986, Sir John Blelloch talks about the controversial breakdown in talks in the crucial days before west Belfast man Joe McDonnell, pictured above, died after 61 days without food. The transcript will be published on the Bobby Sands Trust website ([www.bobbysandstrust.com](http://www.bobbysandstrust.com)) today, after coming into the possession of former Sinn Fein director of publicity Danny Morrison, right.

It gives an insight into the thinking of the British government in the crucial days before the fourth republican hunger striker lost his life, escalating the protest to the point where six more men would die.

Mr Blelloch, now retired and living in England, was seconded to the Northern Ireland Office during the first and second hunger strikes before transferring back to the MoD.

He would later serve as permanent under secretary at the NIO until 1990.

In the transcript he talks about the delay by the British government in getting a deal to the prisoners which could have ended the fast without further loss of life.

"The problem as always was seeing whether we could find some fresh statement of the government's position, which abided by our principal objectives which we adhered to throughout the hunger strike but nevertheless constituted some sort of opportunity for the prisoners to come off it," he said.


"As far as I remember the delay on that was actually getting final agreement to the text of what might be said, which was not easy, and in the event McDonnell died before that process could be completed and of course thereafter it collapsed."

He also states that Margaret Thatcher had been unwilling to move on any of the prisoners' demands and the proposed deal was solely intended to give the inmates a chance to come off the fast.

"There was absolutely no change in the government's position on why it stood where it was, what was available to the prisoners and, insofar as one could say this in advance, what would happen as the protest ended."

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