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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: Taoiseach.

From: Michael Lillis.

CONFIDENTIAL

John Hume telephoned yesterday and today about recent developments on the hunger strike issue.

1. Hume had a visit yesterday from the McCluskey family of Dungive and Fr. McEldowney. Fr. McEldowney said that the mood of the prisoners whom he had visited yesterday and who included hunger strikers and non-hunger striking protesting prisoners, reflected a greater realisation that they "were getting nowhere". At the same time, the determination of the hunger strikers to continue with their protest is undiminished. Fr. McEldowney's private assessment was that the hunger strike could be solved or at least suspended now on a pretext which could involve less substantial concessions than the prisoners had originally stood out for.

2. Fr. McEldowney made the following proposal to Mr. Hume which emanated, he said, from a prominent member of the Provisionals in the H-Blocks:

The British Authorities would separately inform Mr. Hume and the Irish Government of the details of what reforms they would implement in the event of the hunger strike ending (or being suspended);

Mr. Hume would personally inform those on hunger strike of these details and would confirm that the Irish Government had been given the same information as he had.

3. Hume told Fr. McEldowney that he would not take any action unless he had a specific authorisation from Brendan McFarlane to proceed. He asked Fr. McEldowney to take this matter up with McFarlane.

4. Hume phoned this morning to say that he had learned from Fr. McEldowney that McFarlane had learned of the proposal yesterday evening and had asked to see Fr. McEldowney immediately. Hume had arranged with the Northern Ireland office (to which he did not disclose any of the details of the proposal) that Fr. McEldowney be admitted to see McFarlane this morning.

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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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To:

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5. I asked Hume how he envisaged such a proposal being implemented and I mentioned that he was aware of course, that the Government did not see itself as playing a role in the actual solution procedure. He said that what he envisaged was that he would ask the British to inform himself and the Irish Government in writing and in identical terms what the reforms were. He would then confirm with us that we had received the same information as he had. He would then speak directly to the hunger strikers and (a) tell them what was on offer and (b) confirm that he had received the same information as had the Irish Government in this matter.
6. I mentioned the above to the Taoiseach who indicated that it would be preferable that Hume, rather than the Irish Government, should make an approach to the British if necessary to implement this proposal.
7. Hume also mentioned another proposal which emanates from Connradh na Gaeilge. The President of Connradh (Albert Fry?) has met with the prisoners, including the hunger strikers on a number of occasions. The proposal is that the hunger strike would be suspended on the British conceding the right of prisoners, including hunger strikers, to communicate orally and by letter with outsiders including visitors through the medium of the Irish language. Hume's view is, though this proposal may seem somewhat bizarre, that it reaches the heart of the symbolic element in the hunger strike protest.

Note:

I understand that Mr. Kirwan has had an approach on this proposal.

Michael Linn

19th August, 1981.

c.c. Minister for Foreign Affairs Designate Dooge.
Mr. Kirwan.
Messrs. S. Whelan and M. Bourke (D/Foreign Affairs).