

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Draft

Points to be made to the British Ambassador

Note
I understand that the démarche (made in the absence of the Ambassador) to the Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Taffam, followed generally the lines of his draft, with
S. 20574.

The Irish Government's position on the hunger strike problem is set out in the Taoiseach's statement of July 31. The statement refers to:

- The Government's condemnation of the Provisional I.R.A. as the party primarily and ultimately responsible for the hunger strike;
- Our serious disappointment at the handling of the problem by the British Government;
- Our continuing concern and our continuing commitment to try to help to solve the problem.

2. For obvious reasons, the Taoiseach's statement did not refer to two matters of very great concern to our Government and which we had drawn formally to the attention of the British Government in the Taoiseach's letter dated August 10 1981 to the Prime Minister:

- The fact that the Provisional I.R.A. is strengthening its position politically and otherwise both in Ireland and around the world from the continuation of the hunger strike
- The fact that the continuation of the hunger strike is having a destabilising effect in our own State.

3. The British Government is aware of our dissatisfaction with their handling of the problem. For our part, we see no evidence at the moment of any effort on their part to solve the problem. We would be grateful if they could give us any information now as to any efforts that are in progress or which they propose making. We have

repeatedly made the point to them that the most propitious time for an initiative is not when one of the hunger strikers is moribund.

4. We would like to suggest that the British Government should implement forthwith for conforming prisoners in the prisons in Northern Ireland whatever reforms they propose to implement for protesting prisoners in the event that the hunger strike should end. We believe, as we have repeatedly said, that these reforms should be implemented in a positive manner and should approximate to whatever common ground was reached between Minister of State Alison and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace. Such an initiative at this stage would have a number of advantages in our view:

- Implementation for conforming prisoners would, by making manifest the British Government's intentions, help considerably to overcome what seems to be a growing communications barrier between the hunger strikers and the Northern Ireland Office;
- Continued nonimplementation puts the British Government in an untenable position both logically and morally in that it seems tantamount to withholding from conforming prisoners those "rewards" which are held out to the hunger strikers as an inducement to have them conform.

5. Our sources indicate that the opposition shown by two families of the hunger strikers, the Lynches and the Quinns, in the course of the past 10 days to the continuation of the hunger strike cannot be

taken as a major breakthrough. We have known for several weeks that these are the two families most opposed to the hunger strike and that their opposition cannot be taken as representative of the position likely to be taken by the other families involved.

No responsible party can, therefore, afford now to sit back and hope to see an inevitable decline in the willingness of the protesting prisoners to continue the hunger strike.

6. The Irish Government continues to be seriously concerned at the misrepresentation of its position on the hunger strike as exemplified in Mrs Thatcher's letter to a number of prominent U.S. political leaders last week. For example, our position was, presumably as a result of that misrepresentation and associated briefing of the press by British officials, misrepresented in editorials in yesterday's London Times and Daily Telegraph. We do not of course hold the British Government responsible for opinions expressed in the British or other media, but we must once again ask the British Government to refrain, in communication to outside parties, public statements or press briefings, from citing the Irish Government's position in a way which distorts our view. This continuing misrepresentation, whoever is responsible, only does damage to our efforts to help to end the crisis, efforts which are aimed at depriving the Provisional I.R.A. of the weapon which has given it its greatest success in the current decade of strife.

5 August 1981

cc. Minister for Foreign Affairs
Mr Kirwan
Mr Hourican
Mr Whelan (Department of Foreign Affairs)

Note

The above points are based on instructions from the Taoiseach who has asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs to put them to the British Ambassador to-day. The Department of Foreign Affairs is arranging to have the Ambassador call at Iveagh House this afternoon.