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① Mr Bell
② POL *W. J. W.*

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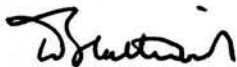
Mr Wyatt

cc: PS/PUS (I&B) - M
Mr Bell ✓
Mr Marshall - M
Mr Blelloch
Mr Moriarty - M
Mr Ranson
Mr Palmer
Mr Gilliland
Mr Abbott - M

HUNGER STRIKE: MESSAGE TO THE CARDINAL

A 1. Your minute of 21 May asked me to think about a possible message to Cardinal O Fiaich. The Cardinal has since let loose another shaft (copy attached), which reinforces the case for action on our part.

2. I submit a self-explanatory draft from the Prime Minister together with a draft covering letter to No 10. I have tried to bring out elements of reassurance for the Catholic community, and to butter up the Cardinal. I have not inserted the idea that the influence of the Church is the key to progress but it is latent in the concept of consulting the Cardinal anyway.



D E S BLATHERWICK
Political Affairs Division

22 May 1981

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DRAFT LETTER FROM PS/SECRETARY OF STATE TO PS No 10

HUNGER STRIKE: MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO CARDINAL O FIAICH

B The Prime Minister wrote on 15 May to Cardinal O Fiaich, the Catholic
C Primate of Ireland, in response to the latter's telegram of 13 May.
A Both messages were published. On 21 May the Cardinal issued a
further statement to the press: I enclose a copy.

As the Cardinal says, the impasse over the hunger strike and the continuing deaths of hunger strikers have sharply raised the temperature in the Catholic community. We detect no great upsurge of support for the IRA. However, as yesterday's election results demonstrate, the community is increasingly polarised, and Catholic opinion is becoming increasingly Nationalist. There is widespread genuine concern for the hunger strikers' fate (not necessarily for their cause) and a growing conviction, however illogical it may seem on the facts of the issue, that it is up to Government - as the stronger party - to find a way out of the dilemma which threatens to drag the community back into the dark days of the early 1970s.

The feelings of bitterness, despair and frustration which show through the Cardinal's statement are therefore widely shared. At the same time, there is some feeling in the minority that the Government has not taken enough notice of the Cardinal's appeals. The Secretary of State believes that a message which sought to enlist the Cardinal's help and to reassure him - and through him the Catholic community - could be very helpful at this stage.

The Secretary of State therefore hopes that the Prime Minister will agree to respond to the Cardinal's statement, and I enclose a draft. The timing of its release will be important. We think that the maximum impact would be made if it were to go to the Cardinal, and the press, on Sunday evening 24 May, after the funerals of McCreech and O'Hara.

We have of course considered at length what else might be done to halt the creeping process of Catholic alienation. Our case on the hunger strike, which is a good one, has been getting through. The problem

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is that people nevertheless believe it is up to Government to provide some (unspecified) solution, and so long as we are unable to point to moves towards this end we shall inevitably continue to be blamed. The ECHR intervention should help us hold the line, though it is not yet clear what publicity we shall be able to make of it in the circumstances. We believe however that the problem can be contained in the immediate future, though we shall need to keep a close eye on the situation.

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DRAFT MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL
TOMAS O FIAICH, ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH, ARA COELI, ARMAGH

I was planning to write to you again, following my letter of
15 May, when I saw your statement of 21 May to the press.
I know how strongly you feel about the unhappy situation in the
Province, and am grateful for your constant outspoken condemnation
of violence.

The deaths in Northern Ireland, and the suffering which has
followed - not least those among the Catholic community - have
aroused widespread horror and sadness. I send my sympathy to
all who have been injured or bereaved. The problems of the
Province are among my most pressing tasks; and you as a man of
God must know how heavy I feel the responsibilities which lie on
my colleagues and myself. I take no satisfaction seeing young
men starving themselves to death, however deeply I repudiate the
means they choose to pursue their cause. I hope that even now,
when four young men have died and another lies gravely ill, this
needless chain of deaths can be brought to an end. This is
surely a time to look at the matter afresh.

What do the hunger strikers want? Is it really the right to wear
their own clothes and do the work they choose? No. They repeat
time and again that they want far more than this. Had the issue
been one of changing a few minor prison rules, the problem would
have been cleared up long ago. Do they then demand a humanitarian
prison regime? They already have it; conditions in the Maze are
among the best in the world and the Government is committed to

yet further improvements. A united Ireland, then? If so, hunger strikes, death and violence are not the way to win the hearts of their fellow-Irishmen. A legitimate path lies through the ballot box, the reconciliation of the differing traditions in Northern Ireland and the democratic process.

What then do they want - or rather, what do the shadowy and evil men behind them want? They want a separate prison status as justification for their acts of violence. They want a propaganda victory. They want to turn Catholic against Protestant and Nationalist against Unionist, and to stir up the feelings of the minority community against Government and the forces of law and order. They want to stop the healing of old wounds, for it is only amid hatred and fear that they can thrive. That is why they are careful to demand of us what they know no responsible Government could concede. They want concession or stalemate, not a resolution of the problem. And concession by the Government would be the greatest encouragement the men of violence have ever had. This we simply cannot give them, not because we will not, but because we would be failing utterly in our responsibilities to the community were we to do so.

I appeal to you, as leader of the Catholic Church in Ireland and leader of the Catholic community in the North, to help us bring this tragic situation to an end. In asking this of you, let me say three things.

The Government is committed to the well-being of all people in the North, without favour or discrimination. Our duty is to everyone, Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Nationalist.

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The Government is determined to root out the men of violence, from whichever part of the community they come. Violence can never be justified whatever its goals, and however misled may have been the persons who were responsible for it. On this one cannot compromise. It is the duty of Governments to ensure that ordinary people can go about their business in peace, and no-one looks forward with greater hope than do I to the day when peace returns to Northern Ireland.

The Government will continue to do all it can to encourage and facilitate efforts to bring the hunger strike to an end. I heartily welcome the renewed involvement of the European Commission on Human Rights, whom we will again assist fully in their task. But we cannot give terrorism a new opportunity nor encourage others down the terrorist path by giving the men of violence the victory which they so desperately seek.

I hope that my colleagues and I may have your prayers, your understanding and your support in our arduous task.

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