

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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TELEX

DATE 7/11/80

PRIORITY
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TO LONDON
FOR AMBASSADOR
REPLY BY _____
SUBJECT _____

FROM H.Q. _____
FROM NELIGAN EXT. _____

FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF NOTE
OF DISCUSSIONS AT THE
BRITISH EMBASSY ON 5 NOVEMBER
1980:

X-X

Confidential

X
Discussion at British Embassy on 5 November

(Present: Figg, Newington, Moriarty, Staples (Br), Nally, O'Rourke,
Welton & Keenan (Ir))

H-Block Protest

1. We expressed our deep concern referring to the effects of the protest on security, on recruiting and on propaganda. We offered to assist in finding a go-between. We offered help in facilitating any initiative to find a compromise. We pointed out that they knew fully already about our prison regime and our attitude on political status.
2. The British said they were just as concerned and were watching the situation closely. They are ready to make changes if they think they will work. They remarked on the fundamental difference between Portlaoise and the Maze (Portlaoise houses only subversive prisoners; consensus exists in southern society regarding treatment of subversives). The British had the impression that the prisoners, or some of them, are not concerned with concessions or change but with victory. They also said that they have to take into account the attitude of prison staff who have to implement changes in the regime. The British would be interested in any suggestions we might have and would be ready to make immediate contact in such a case. In other comments they said the Provisional leadership seemed to be worried about the strike because IRA hunger strikes have failed in the past. The Provisional leadership were letting it be known that they no longer had complete control over the protesting prisoners. Newington suggested that a realistic aim might be to persuade the prisoners to accept civilian clothing and to resume washing and using the lavatories but to permit them to continue to be on the protest (e.g. not to work).

One-day meeting

3. Having heard that we now preferred to organise the forthcoming meeting on one day, the British representatives noted the position and tentatively agreed, observing that they would need to consult their Prime Minister. Newington admitted that the overnight idea

had originally been his. In discussion it was suggested that some suitable reason should be presented by British officials, e.g. timetable requirements, the risk of demonstrations.

Other Minister(s) accompanying

4. The British noted our proposal now to have ^{the} an Energy Minister and tentatively agreed. Given the difference in responsibilities both Mr. Atkins and Mr. Howell would be the Tánaiste's interlocutors. They said the number of topics for discussion under the energy heading was large and might require long discussion.

5. On a personal basis Mr. Newington floated once more the idea of a Treasury Minister (probably Biffen) attending the meeting. Possible matters for discussion would be restructuring of the Community Budget, the CAP, the EMS, economic policy generally, including monetarism, interest and exchange rates and also international issues. He suggested that we should look at this idea.

Conference

6. We clarified our desire for a conference to discuss inter-Governmentally with appropriate involvement of the Northern parties the three dimensions of relations previously referred to by us. The conference would not be economic or social (those topics should be covered by closer political co-operation) but would be concerned with the "totality of relationships between the two islands". We indicated that the conference could be "dressed up" in any way they liked provided it were held with the agenda we had indicated. It was agreed that we should (on 17 November) look at draft language describing the scope of the conference for use e.g. in the next communiqué. The British reaction on a personal basis was in summary not unreceptive. They emphasised their need to sell it to Mrs. Thatcher and the resulting need for correct presentation, both internally and publicly. The purpose of the conference might be to consider "relations between the different areas of these islands". They raised the question of whether a yes or no should be expected from their side at the

