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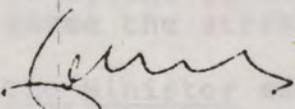


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Mr Murray
Can you also obtain (from Mr Hillis?)
a copy of the note of the meeting with
Meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs
and the British Ambassador in Government Buildings
at 12 noon 7 August 1981
Tatham
LWH
7.8.81

- 205744
1. The British Ambassador called at his request to see the Minister at Government Buildings today.
 2. In some brief introductory remarks he referred to the difficult time experienced in Government Buildings with some of the hunger strikers relatives yesterday and said that a request by them to call to the British Embassy had been turned down precisely on the grounds that the British felt that there might be a sit-in in the Embassy.
 3. The Ambassador then said that he had received a telegram this morning from London in reply to the Minister's meeting with Tatham on Wednesday. He proceeded to read from the telegram. He said that the British authorities noted that our objectives and theirs were similar and that there was nothing between us on this score. He said, however, that there was no grounds for believing that the proposal made by the Minister last Wednesday would end the fast. The British Government hoped that we would appreciate that the minor changes that the British authorities stood ready to make were a long way short of the five demands. The Ambassador made reference in this context to the statement made by Jimmy Drumm at the funeral of Kieran Doherty on 4 August. He proceeded to outline, in brief, the British reasons for their rejection which he said were being given in confidence. He said that their difficulty was that if they were to retain control over the prison only very limited improvements could be made. He suggested that it may be that at some stage the strikers would be looking for a colourable reason for coming off the strike and it would be important to have something to offer at that stage. If they were to use these concessions now they would have 'wasted their powder'. In response to press queries about the subject the Ambassador said that they would be saying that they did not believe that such a move (i.e. the giving of concessions to conforming prisoners) would cause the strikers to end their fast.
 4. The Minister said that the British authorities considered reaction was the same as the initial reaction of Mr. Tatham when he raised the matter with him last Wednesday. The Ambassador replied that they had very little left before they started giving into the five demands. The Minister then proceeded to outline again the reasons why we had put the proposal to the British in the first place and stated that it was the British Government themselves who had stated that if the hunger strike ended there could be generous improvements in conditions. He said this appeared to contrast with what the British were now saying. The Minister wondered, as he said he had done previously, how the British saw it all ending if they were proposing to make only minor changes. The Ambassador speaking personally said he could not see how the strike was going to end. The strikers knew what was on offer. They did not need clarification. He listed the various chances (ECHR etc.) which had been given to the prisoners as a way out and said that all that the prisoners had done was retreat. At some point he thought that they would have to see that a compromise could be found if they wanted it. The British authorities had on offer the offer to clarify which could be taken up any time.

5. The Minister said that what the Ambassador was saying was the same as Mr. Atkins had said at the meeting on 10 July i.e. that they expected the prisoners to capitulate. Our judgement was that this was not likely and that there was a long queue waiting to take the place of hunger strikers. The only gainers in this situation were the IRA. The Ambassador said he was well aware of this and people in London were very concerned and desperately scratching their heads about what to do. He thought that there might be a bit of movement and referred to the prisoners' statement last night. His instructions from London had been issued without knowledge of the prisoners' statement but he had been in contact with London this morning about the matter. The Minister said that the British media appeared to regard the statement as conciliatory but the Ambassador appeared to discount this and said that the BEC reference to this effect was a mistake. The Government had no control over what the BEC said. In response to a query from the Minister as to whether the British might have any other ideas at the moment the Ambassador said that they had not and that the only thing that was there was the offer of clarification to the prisoners.
6. The Minister said that he understood that the British had received the Red Cross Report. The Ambassador replied that they had received only a summary but gave no indication of what the content might be. The Minister said that the ICRC report might be a straw in the wind. He had hoped that the suggestion that we had made last Wednesday might have allowed the British Government to outbid any suggestions that might be made by the Red Cross. The Ambassador again repeated that if they did what we had suggested they would only be worse off.
7. In a brief reference to the editorial in the London Times last Tuesday the Ambassador agreed that, although the article was written by an ex-patriate Irishman, it suggested very little understanding of the situation.



M. Collins
7 August 1981

- c.c. PSM
- PSS
- Mr. Whelan
- Mr. Lillis
- Mr. Kirwan