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① Mr. Ben 16/9
② POL
14/9

E.R.

Northern Ireland Office
Dundonald House

MR BLELLOCH

REQUEST BY MRS McCLOSKEY FOR AN INTERVIEW WITH THE
PRIME MINISTER

From the viewpoint of Prison's Department we conclude on balance that the disadvantages of granting this request as presently framed outweigh the advantages but there are sensitive political and PR factors to be weighed here and you will no doubt wish to consult with PUS.

As we see it, the pros and cons are as follows:-

Cons

- (1) The three women include Mrs Hinphey who is well known to us as an awkward correspondent on behalf of protesting prisoners;
- (2) While no publicity is promised it is doubtful if this line could be held;
- (3) The possibility of an acrimonious meeting (and this possibility relates mainly to the presence of Mrs Hinphey) is a risk we would not wish to run especially if it then became public.

Pros

- (1) We believe Mrs McCloskey will bring her son off hunger strike as death nears. Anything to encourage this would be helpful.
- (2) It would enable the Prime Minister to demonstrate her concern at the needless waste of life from the hunger strike while at the same time reiterating that the five demands could not possibly be granted.
- (3) A good meeting on the lines of (2) above could help

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Mrs Lynch and Mrs McCloskey to influence other mothers of hunger strikers.

It may be that we could limit the meeting to the two mothers of the hunger strikers. If so, I think that the balance would move to being in favour of such a meeting. I enclose a draft reply for the Prime Minister and draft covering letter to No 10 accordingly.

Brian Palmer

B D PALMER

11 September 1981

cc PS/Secretary of State (B & L) M
PS/Mr Alison (B & L) M
PS/PUS (B & L) M
PS/Mr Bell ✓
Mr Marshall M
Mr Moriarty M
Mr Wyatt
Mr Doyne Ditmas
Mr Buxton
Mr Harrington M
Mr Blatherwick
Miss MacGlashan
Mr Jackson

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LETTER COVERING LETTER FROM PS/S of S TO PS/PRIME MINISTER

I refer to your letter of 7 September enclosing a letter from Mrs McCloskey, a mother of one of the hunger strikers in the Maze Prison.

There are strong arguments for and against a meeting especially as we have doubts whether it really could be kept secret as Mrs McCloskey suggests.

On balance however my Secretary of State considers that such a meeting would be beneficial. Mrs McCloskey is believed to be willing to seek medical intervention on behalf of her son when he nears death. This attitude by relatives could prove a key factor in defeating the hunger strike and is to be encouraged where the opportunity arises.

If the meeting were limited to Mrs McCloskey and Mrs Lynch - two mothers of hunger strikers - it would be easier to defend should it become public knowledge and in any event Mrs Hinphey, the other woman mentioned in Mrs McCloskey's letter, is known as a troublesome correspondent over some years with the Northern Ireland Prison's Department on behalf of protesting prisoners.

I enclose a draft reply for the Prime Minister accordingly.

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DRAFT REPLY BY PRIME MINISTER TO MRS McCLOSKEY

In your letter of 1 September you said that you would like to meet me in order to give me a better understanding of your position in relation to your son, Liam, who is on hunger strike in the Maze Prison.

I would be willing to agree to such a meeting if it could be limited to you and Mrs Lynch who are both mothers of hunger strikers and on the basis, as you propose, that there should be no publicity either before or after it. To include anyone who does not have such a close personal relationship with the hunger strikers would widen the meeting in a manner which I could not accept.

If you would wish to follow-up this proposal perhaps you would telephone my Private Secretary () to arrange a date and time.

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