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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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F. 2.

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Memo.

Meeting between Minister for Foreign Affairs
and relatives of hunger strikers, August 6th,
3.p.m.

1. The relatives have been asked to be in the Department of the Taoiseach at 2.45. They will be provided with tea and sandwiches. The meeting will take place in the "Ante-Chamber" on the ground floor starting at 3.00 p.m. The relatives have been told that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will have to depart at 4.00 p.m.
2. There is now a possibility that the Taoiseach may participate for a brief time, possibly at 4.00 p.m. This remains to be decided.
3. The following are some of the points repeatedly made at recent meetings by the relatives and some of the points in reply used by the Government side.

4. Five Demands.

The relatives have themselves demanded that the Government publicly support the granting of the five demands to the prisoners. We have said that we have not at any stage publicly or privately supported the granting of the five demands. To do so would be to insist on complete confession by the British Government to everything that was being demanded i.e. capitulation by the British. We have supported publicly and privately a settlement, and we have particularly supported the idea of a settlement based on the common ground worked out between the ICJP and the British Government on the one hand and the ICJP and prisoners on the other at the beginning of July.

5. Portlaoise.

The relatives have insisted that the Portlaoise regime conceives the five demands in full and ask why we won't ask the British, therefore, to back the demands. This creates some difficulties for us as the Minister is aware. In practice we have refused to discuss the Portlaoise regime on the grounds that we do not discuss with relatives the question of our own security arrangements.

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6. Withdrawal of Ambassadors in London and Dublin.

We have urged the argument, and it has been to an extent accepted, that withdrawal of ambassadors has the effect of cutting off official communication and therefore severely reducing any capacity we might have to influence British colony.

7. Withdrawal of Irish security forces from the Border.

Hitherto we have replied that we are not prepared to discuss the Government's security arrangements in the context of the hunger strike.

8. Ineffectiveness of Government's Efforts.

The relatives have repeatedly criticised the Government's efforts in severe and sometimes bitter terms for being ineffective and, in some cases, hypocritical. The general thrust of the criticism is that our "condemnation" of the British should be more public. We can now point to the fact that the Taoiseach publicly criticised the handling by the British of the hunger strike in his statement of July 31st. We have in earlier meetings said that we are doing our best but that we must be allowed to be judges of what is and what is not possible, or desirable.

9. For our part we have argued that we believe that Provisional IRA or at least those who are in charge of the prisoners military structure within the prison could order the hunger strike to be ended. We have put this point to the relatives and their reaction has varied from impatience to downright rejection of the viability of the idea. Some of the events of the last week, i.e. the position taken by the Lynch family as well as the initiative by the Quinn family will be in the relatives' minds, but the attitude of this group (with the possible exception of the McCluskeys, the latest family to be involved) is much harder line.

10. The Minister might make the point that the continuation of the IRA's campaign of violence is in the eyes of the world underpinning humanitarian sympathy for the hunger strikers. He might say that and end to the Provisional IRA's campaign of violence would obviously change the situation completely and put more pressure than any other event or agency possibly could on the British to solve the problem in an acceptable way immediately.

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11. The relatives have hitherto by and large, despite difficult exchanges across the table with the Taoiseach and/or Professor Dooge, refrained in public from severe criticism of the Government. This should be borne in mind, it is suggested, when any idea of making demands on them which they clearly will not comply with is under consideration. It is useful, both politically and diplomatically, that the Government is seen to have a continuing relationship with the relatives of the hunger strikers.
12. The Taoiseach telephoned after the above had been dictated and indicated that he would come to the meeting briefly at 3.45 p.m. and remain until 4.00 p.m. He said that the relatives could be told by the Minister that he would do this and the circumstances of his return to Dublin earlier than expected should be mentioned.
13. The Taoiseach felt that it should be explained emphatically to the relatives that the Government's efforts to help to end the hunger strike were causing continuous and increasing political problems for the Government here. The fact was that the Government had now gone beyond the point which public opinion by and large assumed to be the extent to which the Government should become involved. The Government were nevertheless prepared to continue to use its influence with the British Government in every appropriate way and to take the political risks at home which are involved.
14. The Taoiseach felt that the Minister should not ask the relatives to call on the Provisional IRA to end their campaign of violence now. On the other hand, he felt it would be appropriate that the Minister should say that the continuation of the campaign and the escalation of it in recent days was making the Government's task extremely difficult if not impossible.

M. Lillis.
6 August, 1981.

c.c. Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Private Secretary to the Taoiseach.
Mr. Kirwan, Mr. Hourican.
Mr. S. Whelan and Mr. M. Collins, D/Foreign Affairs.