E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN STORMONT CASTLE AT 2.30 PM ON FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER 1980

Those Present: Secretary of State Mr Margetts

Rev Sidney Callaghan, President of the Methodist Church

mins /c

The <u>Secretary of State</u> thanked Rev Callaghan for coming to see him and explained that he was seeing several Church leaders because he was worried that there were differing perceptions of what was the Government's position on the prison situation.

2. The Secretary of State believed that the most important thing to do with bombers and murderers was to keep them out of the way in prison, but not necessarily in damp cells with manacles. It was necessary to find as humane a regime as possible in order to provide an environment where the prisoners' minds could be improved and they could be trained in various skills. This approach, which was admittedly different from that in GB, was necessary because the prison population in Northern Ireland differed from that in GB in that more prisoners, per capita, had been convicted of serious offences and were therefore serving longer sentences. It was also, on average, a younger prison population. The question of changes in regulations on clothing had been considered for the past six months with all sorts of expert advice being given. The decision to change the regulations had been made at the time of the announcement of the hunger strike and it had been deemed wrong to deprive the prisoners of this humanitarian gesture. The Secretary of State stressed the fact that the hunger strikers had been carefully chosen as indeed had the date of the start of the strike, ie in order that lives would be at risk around Christmas time. There was, he added, no moral justification in acceding to the prisoners' demands. There would be Loyalist outrage if there was any giving way and international terrorists would see their way forward with their own

CONFIDENTIAL

E.R.

## CONFIDENTIAL

demands and be boosted in their activities. It seemed as if there was nothing that could be done to affect the extremists and their opinions, but the <u>Secretary of State</u> felt that the ordinary people were at risk since they may well be influenced by those opinions. It was necessary to stop that happening which was the reason for meeting the Church leaders who would be able to put the facts before their congregations.

Rev Callaghan agreed that there should be no yielding on the 3. question of political status. Murder was murder, it could not be excused. There had to be standards by which a community was to be governed, ie the decalogue. He added that he had no "vested interest" in the subject, in that there were no Methodists involved in the protest. He went on to talk about the difficulty in getting the Government's message across to the people of Ireland since the southerners were so different from the northerners in that they displayed a romanticism to the point of ruthlessness. He further believed that the hunger strikers would fast to death. When asked how the Government should handle the situation Rev Callaghan suggested that Government Ministers should meet Churchmen and community leaders around the Province in order to explain the facts. The Secretary of State agreed with the principle of this idea but believed that it would be better and more simply done through the Church leaders themselves. Rev Callaghan wondered whether it would be possible for the four Church leaders to make a joint visit to the H Blocks. He thought Cardinal OFiaich was caught on a hook and should be given the chance of moving to a more reasonable position. The Secretary of State thought the application for such a visit would be received with the greatest sympathy.

4. The <u>Secretary of State</u> gave Rev Callaghan several copies of "H Blocks, the Facts" and thanked him for his support. <u>Rev Callaghan's</u> immediate impression of the pamphlet was that it was in the

2.

E.R.

## CONFIDENTIAL

language of the Times and Guardian rather than that of the Sun and therefore might not get popular appeal.

anthe Unst JONATHAN MARGETTS

Private Secretary

13 November 1980

Distribution:

PS/S of S/(B & L) PS/Mr Alison (B & L) PS/PUS (B & L) Mr Blelloch / Mr Barry/ Mr Wyatt/ Mr Gilliland / Mr Buxton / Mr Gee /

## CONFIDENTIAL