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PRIVATE NOTICE QUESTION

DÁIL QUESTION addressed to the Taoiseach by
Deputy Seán Sherwin for answer on
Wednesday, 29th November, 1972.

QUESTION:

To ask the Taoiseach whether he intends to have Mr. Seán Mac Stiofáin released in view of his serious condition; and, if not, why.

REPLY:

It is not the normal practice to give public information about the affairs or the health of a particular prisoner but, because of the exceptional circumstances of this present case, I propose to reply to this question.

This man was convicted only a few days ago of membership of an unlawful organisation. It is not suggested by anybody that he was not in fact a member. On the contrary, in an interview which he gave to Radio Telefis Eireann and the substance of which was broadcast on radio on Sunday, 19th November, he himself unmistakably held himself out as a person in a position of authority in that organisation.

Mr. Mac Stiofan has been given a fair trial before the Courts and has been found guilty. It is open to him to serve his sentence or to appeal against it or his conviction. Nothing can be gained by continuing the hunger strike in an attempt to frustrate the course of justice.

If a member of such an organisation, and especially a self-confessed leader, could secure his release from prison through resort to a hunger or thirst strike the inevitable consequence would be that not only he but all his associates would be effectively above the law of the land and free to act as they choose and would be seen to be so.

This is so for the obvious reason that other prisoners, now or in the future, need only adopt the same tactics to ensure that they too would be released.

Accordingly, the issue in the present case is nothing less than whether Parliament, Government, the Courts and the law are all to surrender to an unlawful organisation. The challenge to the institutions of the State is direct, deliberate and unmistakable. The Government have no choice but to meet it. The consequences that may ensue are regretted by the members of the Government as they no doubt are regretted by everybody with a normal human concern for human life. The consequences, however, are not of the Government's making.