

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2011/39/1822
Creation Date(s):	[1981]
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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Meeting between the Minister and
Vice-President Bush of the U.S.A.

- A. Effects of the confrontation between British Government and hunger strikers.
- (i) in Northern Ireland
- It has generated an entirely new level of support for the IRA among nationalists in the North.
 - It has dangerously polarized opinion in the two sections of the community there (cf. the local election results).
- (ii) in the Republic
- By giving a national profile to individuals in jail in Northern Ireland which they would never have had otherwise, it has led to two prisoners being elected to Dáil Éireann at the recent general election.
 - This has destabilised national politics (the indeterminate election result).
 - A sitting T.D. may now die in Long Kesh which will produce a strong emotional reaction here and will give the IRA the opportunity to run another prisoner in the ensuing bye-election with hopes of success.
- (iii) in the U.S.A. and other countries
- It has produced a clear upsurge of support for the IRA around the world, and particularly in the U.S.A.
 - This will increase the flow of material support for violence (already up in the last six months of 1980 from U.S. groups contributing to the I.R.A.).

In summary, the confrontation has enabled the I.R.A. to mount a propaganda campaign which simultaneously appeals to potential recruits to violence (I.R.A. recruitment is reportedly up in Northern Ireland and in our border areas) and to the humane sympathies of less committed people. The consequent gains in support outweigh in our view

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any other consideration arising in regard to the prison situation. The British Government appear to have been willing to enter into confrontation in the belief that the prison protest is the IRA's last card and that the Government can win the prison "battle". Events have proved and continue to prove that they are losing the war all around them in the process.

B. The Need for and Possibility of Achieving a Solution

From our point of view, finding a solution to the situation is of fundamental and far-reaching importance.

The present period seems particularly opportune because

- (a) there is a lull in the series of deaths by hunger strike which will end in early July and may not thereafter recur and
- (b) the prisoners, their families and their associates outside the prison seem at this stage to be exhibiting signs of tension and doubt, which suggests that they might respond to a properly conceived approach.

As regards the possibility of a solution we believe that as a first point the British Government should in all the circumstances accept the need for action and look beyond their present stance.

As regards possible means of reaching a solution, the European Commission of Human Rights may make suggestions, which the British Government has said they would consider, but the Commission's work is proceeding too slowly to be relevant to the present temporary respite. The British Government might state clearly, as they did by agreement with us before Christmas, what they are offering to conforming prisoners. The nature of their offer might be based on proposals by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (a Catholic Church body) relating to overall prison reform on clothing, association and prison work.