

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

**IRELAND**



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2011/127/1087
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	1 July 1981
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	2 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Note of telephone conversation between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister Wednesday, 1 July, 1981.

The Taoiseach thanked Mrs. Thatcher for her message of congratulations on his appointment as Taoiseach. He looked forward to continuing the work started by her with his predecessor. In a 1979 policy document, he himself has pointed the way to an approach along these lines. He was anxious to move on to the next meeting as soon as possible and as soon as it was convenient for both sides. He would need some little time to take up the reins here. The matter could be sorted out by their officials.

His purpose in telephoning was to make two important points in respect of the efforts to find a solution to the H-Blocks situation about which he had spoken to the British Ambassador. Even before taking office, he had kept in close touch with the efforts being made to resolve the situation and he had maintained this contact over the last two days.

The first point he wished to emphasise was that at that moment, speed was of the utmost importance. The tactic which had been adopted on the occasion before Christmas would not work on this occasion.

The Taoiseach reverted, to stress again that he was anxious to push ahead with work on and pursuant to the Joint Studies but that the urgent priority was a solution of the H-Block situation. This could be presented very helpfully.

He had met members of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace who had informed him in a general way of the state of progress of their exchanges with Mr. Alison, the Minister for State. He was not aware of the details of the exchanges but he had a general knowledge of the state of play.

It was also of importance that the Commission delegation have an opportunity to explain the position of the British Government to the prisoners so that there would be no misunderstanding.

He appreciated that there could be no negotiation and that the British Government wished to avoid any appearance of negotiation. What was being sought was a meeting simply for the purpose of explanation. Among the members of the Commission delegation, he believed that Mr. Hugh Logue would be particularly effective in explaining matters.

He believed that this would help greatly towards a solution on the basis that we all desire - an end to the protest on the basis of arrangements the British Government believe should be brought in to improve prison conditions.

Speed was now of the essence. However, we believe considering the weak condition of McDonnell that it was now of the utmost importance that the proposed meeting between Minister for State Alison and the Commission should take place as soon as possible and certainly before Friday. A single meeting was envisaged with no going back for clarification on modification, no to-ing and fro-ing.

(At this point, the Prime Minister responded to the Taoiseach. It appeared that she stressed the need for Mr. Alison to prepare himself for the major annual debate on Northern Ireland affairs in the House of Commons on the following day and to attend at and participate in the debate; and that in these circumstances, it was reasonable that

the meeting take place not earlier than Friday. Her reference to access may have been slightly more open at this point.)

The Taoiseach responded that if that could be done, it would be most helpful. The members of the Commission delegation would be anxious to speak to all prisoners and not simply to some to whom delegation members were related. He envisaged access for Mr. Logue and possibly another member of the delegation.

(Mrs. Thatcher referred, possibly at this point, to prison rules or practice where for some time previously access to the prisoners had been confined ~~to~~ *to relatives and clergymen.*  
*TO RELATIVES AND CLERGYMEN*)

The Taoiseach enquired when the debate would end (and Mrs. Thatcher replied).

The Taoiseach enquired whether if the delegation were to fly over that evening, they could be met in London that (i.e. Wednesday) night. He said he was sorry to press the point but that everything that had been achieved could be lost if Mr. McDonnell died. He expressed appreciation of the sensitivity that had been shown by the British Government hitherto on their dealings with the Commission for Justice and Peace.

(There was a further response by Mrs. Thatcher), following which the Taoiseach again referred to the risk of all going wrong.

(Mrs. Thatcher apparently referred to conceding political status to those guilty of violent crime). The Taoiseach said that he himself held the strongest views on the subject and had expressed them openly what it was not particularly popular to do so.

The conversation concluded with an exchange of expressions of expectation for an early meeting as soon as mutually convenient.