

RECEIVED BY
5-2 JUL 1981
PRIVATE OFFICE



10 DOWNING STREET

2 cc
= 3 JUL 1981
Mr Palmer

PS/S 92(B)-
P2/ Mr Ashon f-B
PS/PUS (L) N
Mr Marshall
Mr Blalock-M
Mr Moriarty
Mr Wyatt-M
Mr Palmer-M
Mr Harrington
Mr Chesterton

From the Principal Private Secretary

Mr Pabell

RESTRICTED

RECEIVED
1546/TMB
- 2 JUL 1981
STORAGE

2 July 1981

Mr Tompkins

JLJ

Dear Brian,

7.7.81

TELEPHONE CALL FROM DR GARRET FITZGERALD

3 S/P - to see.

Dr Garret FitzGerald, the new Taoiseach, telephoned the Prime Minister at 1800 yesterday evening. The line over which the conversation took place was particularly bad, and I am afraid that there were periods when Dr FitzGerald was inaudible, but I think that I have pieced together the essentials of what he had to say.

After thanking the Prime Minister for her message of congratulations on his appointment as Taoiseach, Dr FitzGerald said that he was looking forward to co-operating with the Prime Minister and to continuing the work which she had started with his predecessor. Nothing but good could come from this process. The Prime Minister said that there were now regular bilateral meetings between her and the Taoiseach and the next one was due to take place in London. On the assumption that Dr FitzGerald wished to continue with them, she was ready to try and find a convenient time for the next meeting, but she had to warn him that the present moment was a very busy time for her, as it was no doubt for him. Dr FitzGerald replied that he was anxious to move on to the next bilateral meeting as soon as appropriate and as soon as it was convenient. He had to pick up the reins in Dublin. But he hoped that his office and the Prime Minister's could agree upon a date for a meeting. In the meantime he was anxious to have an early word with the Prime Minister on one particular matter, the H Block situation. He had seen Sir Leonard Figg about it earlier in the day, and there were two points he wished to put to the Prime Minister. First, speed was very important. The hunger strike which had ended last December had been resolved at a very late stage indeed, and he did not believe that this way of proceeding could operate again on this occasion. The work which had been done already should be pushed ahead. He did not know the details of the contacts between the Northern Ireland Office and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, but he believed that the Commission were working along useful lines. The second point that he wanted to make was that the Commission should have the opportunity to explain to the prisoners in the Maze what was proposed so that there was

no misunderstanding. He hoped that if the Commission could be allowed access to the Maze, the prisoners would end their protest on the basis of various arrangements which he believed were desirable in order to improve their conditions.

The Prime Minister said that Mr Alison had already met the Commission and had had a useful exchange of views with them. He could certainly have another meeting with them, although he probably would not be able to do that in the next twenty-four hours since he would almost certainly be attending an important debate on Northern Ireland in the House of Commons the following day. Nor could she agree that the Commission should be allowed to meet the prisoners. Prisoners were allowed to see only their relatives, their solicitors and their priests. If the Commission were given access to them, it would look as though they were acting as intermediaries in a negotiation between the British Government and the prisoners, and this was something which she could not accept. It remained her earnest hope that the hunger strikers would end their protest, and she thought that the statement issued by Mr Atkins the previous day might be sufficient to encourage the families of the prisoners and the clergy to try to persuade the hunger strikers to end their protest.

Dr FitzGerald said that he saw the difficulty of letting the Commission have access to the prisoners, but he hoped that the Prime Minister would be prepared to consider further her position on his request. Another meeting between Mr Alison and the Commission would be very helpful but it would need to be held very quickly. Friday might be too late: he was concerned about the deteriorating condition of the hunger striker McDonnell. He wondered whether there was any possibility of Mr Alison meeting the Commission later that evening.

The Prime Minister said that she did not believe that Mr Alison should rush into a meeting as quickly as that. She would, however, see how soon a meeting could be arranged but she had to repeat that she thought that Friday morning would be reasonable. She reiterated her hope that everybody would urge all the prisoners on hunger strike to end their protest, for to continue it would be a futile waste of their own lives.

Dr FitzGerald concluded by saying that the Prime Minister did not have to convince him of that. He was grateful to her for agreeing that Mr Alison should meet the Commission again as soon as possible.

I am sending copies of this letter to Stephen Boys-Smith (Northern Ireland Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours etc,

Ann White

Brian Fall Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

RESTRICTED