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① Mr Bell 321  
② POL 12/5 129/5

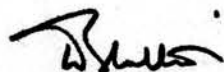
B/678/RE

1. Mr Blelloch
2. PS/S of S (3)

cc: PS/PUS (I&B)(M)  
Mr Bell ✓  
Mr Moriarty (M)  
Mr Palmer  
Mr Buxton (M)  
Mr Gilliland  
Mr Jackson  
Miss MacGlashan

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR JOHN HUME

1. I submit a draft brief for the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr John Hume tomorrow evening, together with a covering letter from the Private Secretary to Private Secretary No 10. It should reach No 10 by close of play today.
2. On the hunger strike, I have tried to keep to existing language. Para 4 however is a cock-shy which you may well think better left out. It's attraction is that it helps throw the onus of inflexibility onto the Provisionals.



D E S BLATHERWICK  
Political Affairs Division

12 May 1981

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BRIEF FOR PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR JOHN HUME, MEPPoints to MakeHunger Strike

1. We cannot concede a special status for prisoners convicted of terrorist offences. To do so would give a boost to Provisional recruiting, risk a severe Protestant reaction and destroy the essential position that they are criminals, not prisoners of war.
2. It is neither accurate nor helpful to say that if only the Government could "be flexible", the hunger strike issue could be solved. The Provisionals stated at the beginning and end of Sands' fast, and have restated since, that they want all five demands. This to everyone can only mean a special, political status. The Provisionals have coldly decided that the deaths of Sands and his colleagues are necessary for their ends. It is they who are inflexible, not the Government.
3. We have shown flexibility. We allowed the 3 Dublin MEPs (Blayney, de Valera and O'Connell), the ECHR representatives and the Pope's representative to visit the Maze in the hope that they could find some way to persuade Sands to come to a solution. I hope Hughes will even now respond to the Pope's plea.
4. We would of course be willing to examine possible small changes in prison conditions, as we have in the past, if we did not know that this would be of no account to the Provisionals.
5. We are prepared, as always, to listen to representations from responsible quarters on all aspects of the environment for all conforming prisoners. We were prepared to give the ECHR all facilities (though we can hardly initiate a complaint against ourselves) and told them so before they responded to Sands' complaint. It unfortunately appears that they are not willing or able to pursue further cases at present.

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Reaction in Nationalist Areas

6. The possible reaction of the Catholic community to further deaths of hunger strikers is worrying. What reaction does Mr Hume expect? Will it last? Could it result in wider general support for the Provisionals? How can we prevent an alienation of the Nationalist community - apart of course from giving in to the Provisionals' demands?

The Way Forward

7. We are thinking carefully how to proceed. It will be essential to offer a political way forward, not only in order to demonstrate the negative nature of the hunger strike, but to encourage people in the Province to think constructively about the future and to choose the peaceful and democratic option. The local elections on 20 May and the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies should help this process. We shall need to consider after the local elections whether we are in a position to try to restart talks with the political parties in the Province.

Anglo-Irish Joint Studies

8. Officials are working on lines agreed between Mr Haughey and myself in December. I hope that when we meet again (perhaps in July), we shall be able to take the Studies forward. It is important for all of us in the UK to develop our friendship with the Republic not only because of our mutual concern over Northern Ireland, but because we have very many bilateral interests in common.

Local Elections (defensive)

9. We would be very reluctant to postpone the local elections on 20 May. To do so would be a surrender to the Provisionals. It would put off the next step in the political process, which we want to restart. And it would make the SDLP appear the tools of the Government, which Mr Hume cannot want.

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BACKGROUND NOTES:

Hunger Strike

1. The talking points are largely self-explanatory. Mr Hume is likely to press the Prime Minister to make some concession to the hunger strikers, in order to encourage a solution. Last week-end, the press reported him as saying that if the "own clothes" and "free association" issues could be resolved, then the hunger strike could be brought to an end.

2. The protesters have, however, made it clear, time and time again, that the central issue is not about increased flexibility but about political status. The Government has introduced improvements in the kind of matters - clothing, letters and parcels, remission - which are alleged by some to be what the hunger strikers are concerned about. Despite this, the five demands - which would involve a severe loss of control by the prison authorities and which constitute political status - still stand. They are the rights to:-

- (a) free association (ie the right to run the prison as a POW camp);
- (b) own clothing (ie paramilitary uniforms);
- (c) avoid prison work;
- (d) increased visits and letters privileges;
- (e) restoration of full remission.

3. This claim cannot be conceded since it is not a matter of flexibility but a matter of principle. This cannot be fudged.

4. Sands died on 5 May, on the sixty-sixth day of his hunger strike. Francis Hughes, who will be on his sixtieth day on 13 May, could die at any moment. McCreesh and O'Hara will be on their fifty-third day. They should survive until later next week.

Local Elections

5. Individual members of the SDLP (including Mr Hume) were complaining bitterly last week that if the local elections were to go ahead as planned on 20 May, their vote (and that of the moderate Unionist parties) would suffer: increased polarisation between the communities would favour independent "green" Republicans and Mr Paisley's DUP. The arguments against such a postponement are briefly set out in the speaking notes. NIO have considered the question and are firmly in favour of going ahead. There are signs that this view is now beginning to prevail in the SDLP too, though Mr Hume may conceivably raise the point.

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DRAFT LETTER FROM PS TO PS, NO 10PRIME MINISTERS MEETING WITH MR JOHN HUME, MEP, 13 MAY

1. The Prime Minister is seeing Mr John Hume tomorrow, 13 May. I enclose a brief.
2. Mr Hume asked the NIO at the end of last week if we would facilitate a meeting between him and the Prime Minister. He then told the press that he had sought such a meeting. On the Secretary of State's instructions, I told him on 11 May that by leaking his request he had put us in a false position which he would have to regularise by approaching you direct. This he did.
3. Mr Hume told us that he wanted to discuss with the Prime Minister his "two points" for ending the hunger strike (these are explained in the background attached to the brief). We told him firmly that a discussion on these lines with the Prime Minister would serve no useful purpose. He then proposed a general talk, citing the Prime Minister's invitation to him during her visit here in March to come to see her whenever he was worried about the situation in the Province. It is on this basis that the meeting is to take place. <sup>N.P.</sup> The Secretary of State hopes that it will be possible for Ministers to have a general discussion very soon of the way ahead in Northern Ireland, embracing the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies as well as the hunger strike itself. We hope that in the meantime the Prime Minister will find the line

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in the speaking notes attached acceptable.

On the general situation in the Province, you will have my  
letter of May.

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