

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Donald A Lamont
Republic of Ireland Dept

Date: 13 June 1996

cc PS/Sir John Wheeler - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Shannon - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr White - B
Ms Checkfield - B
Mr Fisher - B
HMA, Dublin - B

18/6
Mrs Seaf
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PA
IGC ale

Mr Bell - B

HANDLING OF PRISONS ISSUES AT IGC MEETINGS

1. So many people have commented on this issue that I would feel odd if I did not join in. The Home Office will be replying soon to Clare Checkfield's letter. For my part, I agree that it would be wrong for the Secretary of State to claim ignorance, or decline to comment, when the Irish could reasonably expect that, even if he were not responsible, he would be bound to have been consulted.
2. It would be more difficult, I think, if the Irish were to engage in nitty-gritty exchanges about the specific circumstances of individual prisoners, setting aside questions of transfers or repatriation. It would also be awkward, of course, if the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland were to be put in the position of arguing in any detail the Home Secretary's policy in England and Wales, while being responsible for a different policy.
3. In other words, there is a line to be drawn, where the Irish can be told quite reasonably that the information is available to them from other and more appropriate channels. Their Embassy in London is assiduous in gathering information about the circumstances of individual prisoners and, as Veronica Sutherland has commented, there is advantage in developing lines of communication between London and Dublin on this issue. A team from the Prison Service here, for example, is visiting Dublin next Tuesday.

(SIGNED)

Donald A Lamont

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