

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
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S W 1

29 June 1981

Dear Michael,

... I attach the record of Mr Alison's meeting last Friday with members of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace at Hillsborough Castle.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Roderic Lyne (F.C.O) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,
Noel Cornick*

NOEL CORNICK

SD

cc · PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Mr Alison (B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
Mr Blelloch
Mr Marshall
Mr Wyatt
Mr Moriarty
Mr Palmer
Mr Ranson
Mr Harrington
Mr Jackson
Mr Corbett
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Templeton

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

FURTHER MEETING WITH THE IRISH COMMISSION FOR
JUSTICE AND PEACE - FRIDAY 26 JUNE 1981

Mr Alison had a second meeting with representatives of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace - once again at their request - on Friday 26 June at Hillsborough Castle. The members of the Commission present were Mr Hugh Logue, Bishop O'Mahoney, Mr Brian Gallagher, Father Oliver Crilly and Mr Jerome Connolly. Mr Alison was accompanied by Mr Blelloch, Mr Wyatt and Mr Palmer.

2. The Commission explained that they had sought a further meeting because they required clarification of some of the matters discussed at the previous meeting, on 23 June. Their view that a mood existed which favoured the prospect of a resolution of the prisons protest had in the meantime been reinforced, and they felt that there were some hopes now of finding a solution on the basis of the changes which the Minister had suggested might be made to the regime for conforming prisoners.

Association

3. The Commission asked for further information about how in practice some mixing of prisoners from different wings of the H-Block could be arranged. Mr Palmer showed the delegation a plan of a block and explained in detail the facilities available during evening and weekend association, the provisions for educational classes, sports and exercise, and the degree to which there was already association between prisoners from different wings (in classrooms, during work and training and in the sports hall). Mr Logue, while accepting that the prison authorities must have overall control, wanted to know why prisoners from one wing should

not mix with those from another in the same block during association periods, effectively making two recreational areas interchangeable. Mr Alison explained the operational problems which might arise from larger numbers of prisoners moving about. He would need to refer this suggestion to the Prison Governor since he himself could not speak authoritatively on its operational feasibility.

4. Mr Logue also suggested that the exercise yard of each wing might be extended so that two yards were adjacent to one another, and wondered if an interchange between wings, similar to what he had proposed for recreation inside the wings, might be possible for outdoor exercise. He wanted to know why it was necessary to lock cell doors at certain times of the day; this was only done for short periods and there was a considerable psychological difference between a locked door and an unlocked one. Mr Logue did not envisage that what he was proposing would increase the problems of security, and felt that this could have a significant effect on the prisoners.

5. Mr Alison was not at all sure that the structural changes implied by these proposals would be feasible. It was made clear to the Commission that H-Blocks had been designed to prevent prisoners from escaping; additional prison officers would be required if larger numbers of prisoners were together within one area (there could be up to 50 prisoners in one wing alone). Prisoners could not be left to wander freely. The men in the cells were young and active and had every reason for trying to escape. Mr Alison reiterated the doubts which he had expressed at the meeting on 23 June. Small adjustments to the arrangements for association within the cellular system seemed to him to be a very long way from what the hunger strikers were seeking. He was quite prepared to have the suggestions investigated by people who had the necessary operational expertise, but he did not feel convinced that 'nuts and bolts' issues such as these were likely to lead anywhere. The Commission said they attached great significance to these details. They believed the prisoners' relatives might be persuaded that they amounted to reasonable proposals. Feelings in the community and the attitudes of the families led them to hope that there could be a solution based on such detailed issues, but there was very little time because the opportunity would be

completely lost once another hunger striker had died. They hoped the Government would be able to offer that -

- (i) during normal exercise and during recreation there might be association between wings; and
- (ii) except for security checks and counts, cell doors might be left open.

Mr Alison said that without commitment these matters could be looked at fairly quickly.

Segregation

6. The Commission wanted to know if segregation could continue. Mr Alison explained that this had arisen because of the protest and would not normally be acceptable in the cellular prison. The Government could not concede the principle that no attention is paid to the background and religious persuasion of individual prisoners and that the prison authorities must be able to control the disposition of prisoners within the prison. Integration was an essential part of conformity. The Commission thought that this issue could be a real stumbling block. They suggested that the de facto situation arising from the protest could be maintained, at least for a time, after prisoners were conforming in other respects - perhaps until Maghaberry was available. In the interests of everyone they felt that it would be worth overlooking this principle, in the light of the prospect of a dramatic new situation. From the authorities' point of view, given the antipathy between prisoners of different persuasions, surely the exercise of control would be easier if segregation persisted.

7. Mr Alison told the Commission that he was fully aware of the potential difficulties of integrating former protestors, but the principle was that a 'compound' situation could not be allowed to operate in the cells - with the opportunities it presented for a prisoner 'command' structure. He also reminded the delegation of the loss of privileges - in particular loss of remission - which must result if prisoners insist on protesting.

Clothes

8. The Commission referred briefly to the discussion on this at the earlier meeting. They felt that a requirement to wear clothes which did not resemble prison officers' uniforms or paramilitary uniforms and which were not outlandish would be accepted as reasonable.

Work

9. The Commission accepted that it was reasonable to expect prisoners to do 'orderly' work, for example cleaning cells, cleaning the wings, distributing food. They suggested that a clarifying formula might be devised indicating that prisoners must do orderly duties of this type, that a rota should be established for this purpose in each wing and that 'in the last analysis' the prison authorities should approve it. Mr Alison pointed out that within this type of 'orderly' work there was an element of what prisoners might interpret as 'demeaning' work. Similarly, in the two other main areas of work - the 'industrial' and 'intellectual' types - there were potential difficulties over the sort of thing which prisoners felt disposed to do, even though attempts would always be made to resolve any differences to mutual satisfaction. Mr Wyatt also referred to sensitivities which could arise in work outside blocks (eg in the kitchens) for the benefit of all prisoners. Republican prisoners might object to doing work which benefitted UDA prisoners, prison officers etc. It was necessary to be realistic. Mr Alison drew a distinction between routine, day-to-day work essential to the running of the prison, and other types of work, while pointing out that the dividing line between these two areas was blurred. The Commission thought that the former type was not likely to create difficulties. Mr Logue suggested that the word "work" might be replaced by "activity".

10. Mr Alison pointed out that in all liberal prison regimes, prisoners were required to engage in useful and constructive work. They received a trivial sum by way of payment and the product of their work benefitted the rest of the community. However, it was possible that some prisoners would object to doing work which contributed to a system which they found objectionable. It may

therefore be necessary at times to penalise prisoners who were not co-operating. It must be the prison authorities who had the final decision.

11. It was agreed that the most likely sticking point was in the area of 'industrial' work. Father Crilly thought that prisoners on long sentences would have little incentive to do this type of work and might resist it simply because of the element of compulsion. He regarded choice as an important factor. Mr Logue wondered if an avenue could be found by distinguishing between work which was paid and work which was not. He suggested a formula along the following lines -

- (i) all prisoners should be required to engage in useful activities;
- (ii) prisoners may opt for work for which there was payment;
- (iii) prisoners' activities would be determined by their abilities, aptitudes and the length of their sentences;
- (iv) although prisoners' preferences would be observed as far as possible, resources and the availability of different types of work would have to be taken into account.

Father Crilly thought that the distinction between 'essential' work (ie work necessary for the running of the prison) and 'non-essential' work could be the key to a resolution of the difficulty. Mr Blelloch pointed out that there were 'grey' areas between these two types, which in a general atmosphere of conformity would not be a problem, but the prisoners in question were not accustomed to conformity.

Remission

12. Mr Alison explained the present system whereby prisoners who ceased protesting could have some of their lost remission restored, and assured the Commission that the Government would continue to seek a generous and imaginative response to prisoners who gave up the protest. However, the authorities had to reserve the right to award penalties where appropriate. Father Crilly asked for a "dramatic" response in a situation where 400 prisoners might abandon

the protest. The particular configuration of the attitudes of prisoners' families and the community generally at this time indicated that the prisoners might be prepared to accept that an H-Block could never be a compound, and this change in attitude required a very magnanimous response. He envisaged full remission.

13. Mr Alison reminded Father Crilly that the existing remission arrangements were already generous, and may well have prevented the protest developing on a larger scale than it had. It had to be remembered that the last few years had been a period of great stress for the prison authorities. To give the protesters half-remission as soon as they ceased protesting would be seen as a betrayal to others - outside and inside the prison. It was quite inconceivable to give back all their lost remission straight away. Father Crilly repeated his view that the scale of what could be achieved - ie 400 protesters ceasing to protest - needed to be matched proportionately by the Government. Mr Alison repeated that a response to such a situation would be imaginative, but there were many factors to take into consideration.

Books

14. There was some discussion of the books available in the prison library; the Commission felt that there was perhaps too much 'censorship'. They accepted that books on eg military training could not be provided and that there were resource limitations, but they particularly asked that a new translation of the Bible in Irish should be made available. They thought that the prisoners were likely to press for this, and it could have symbolic significance. Mr Alison did not think there would be any difficulty about providing this book.

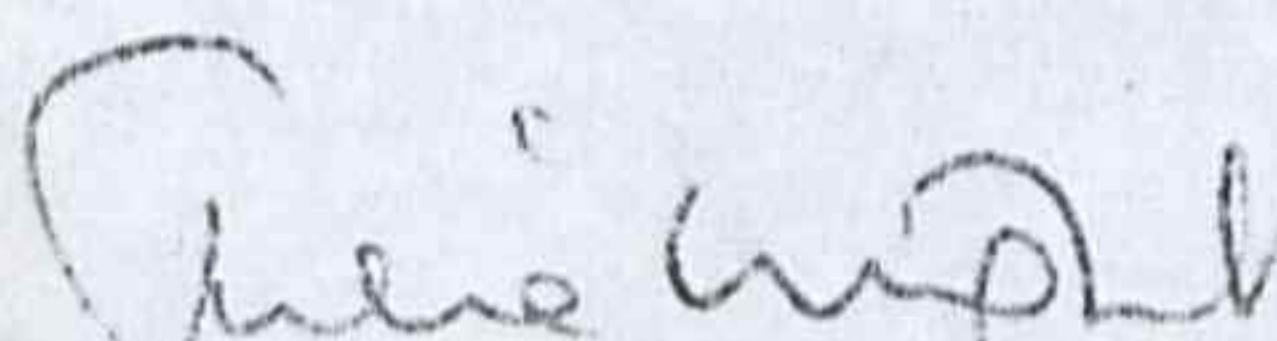
Presentation

15. The Commission were concerned about the distrust which existed because of the alleged breach of faith at the end of the last hunger strike. They thought that, to dispel this distrust, whatever was on offer to the prisoners would need to be implemented as soon

as a hunger striker requested sustenance. Mr Alison agreed that distrust had arisen previously and should be avoided, but in his judgment there had been no breach of good faith in December. He emphasised that this meeting must not be regarded as negotiation; it was a discussion of what was, or might be, realistic. He was inclined to think that the time was ripe for the Government to make a considered public statement about its response to the proposals put forward by the ICJP. He did not think anything could be said about remission, however. There would need to be another means of communicating the more detailed information on 'nuts and bolts' issues. Mr Logue thought that it might be necessary for the Governor to communicate with the prisoners, and also suggested that the Government should write to the ICJP. If there was to be such a letter, it was important that parallels could not be drawn with the 'five demands' and he therefore suggested including in it some general information on leave, privileges, recreation etc.

16. Mr Alison thought there might be a public statement followed by an open letter to the ICJP providing a more elaborate commentary, but he would reflect on this. Bishop O'Mahoney said that if a solution was found, the Church would create an atmosphere of profound thanksgiving. The Commission thought that this was important and might detract from political claims of victory.

17. The meeting, which lasted slightly less than 4 hours, was conducted, like the last meeting, in a frank and friendly atmosphere.


J M WRIGHT (Miss)

PS/Mr Alison

27 June 1981