

27 October 1980

PA

MS

MR J ENOCH POWELL (South Down): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on the recent changes in prison rules in Northern Ireland and on the situation at Her Majesty's Prison Maze.

MR ALISON

My rt hon Friend who for reasons which the House will understand is in Belfast today, announced on 23 October that following a detailed study of the requirement to wear prison uniform in Northern Ireland, the Government have decided to abolish this uniform as such, and to substitute civilian-type clothing. No amendment of Prison Rules is involved. The change will apply to all male prisoners; it will not affect the privilege accorded to those prisoners who obey the Prison Rules, of wearing their own clothes at weekends, for recreation and visits. The new clothing will be introduced as quickly as the administrative arrangements can be made.

This change arises from the Government's determination that their attitude to prisoners' living and working conditions should be guided at all times by a humane and enlightened approach, and they will continue to keep the prison regime under review with this principle in mind.

Several prisoners in Maze Prison claim to have started a hunger strike today in support of their demand for political status. The Government have made it amply plain on numerous occasions that they cannot and will not concede this issue of principle.

The situation at Maze Prison is calm. It is too early to say whether the prisoners will carry out their threat of a prolonged hunger strike. The Government would still hope that they would heed the advice of Churchmen and many others not to do so. But if they do, they must understand that the Government cannot give way on the principle that those found guilty of some of the most vicious crimes for what they claim are political motives are less blameworthy than others.



Thur 20 Oct

Thur 13 Oct 83

Thur 14 Oct 82

Thur 15 Oct 81

Thur 16 Oct 80

1088

1975

3x365

→ 27 Oct 1983

28 Oct 1980

543 days

4 days

77 weeks

$\frac{543}{7}$