

SECRET

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

3



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

18 December 1980

Michael Alexander Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Mr. Alexander

*ha
Mud*

... I now enclose a copy of the statement which my Secretary of State
... will make in the House of Commons at 11 am tomorrow. I also enclose
... a copy of the text which will be given to the prisoners tomorrow
morning. Copies of the latter will be in the prison later tonight,
ready for distribution. Arrangements to record my Secretary of
State's television broadcast are in hand: we hope to make the
recording tonight.

A copy of both documents needs to be made available to the Irish
Government tomorrow morning. For that purpose I am sending a
copy of this letter and enclosures direct to Mike Newington in the
Foreign Office, and would be grateful if he could arrange for the
enclosures to be sent immediately to the Ambassador. We should
like him to make arrangements to hand the text of the Commons state-
ment and the note entitled "What will happen when the protests end"
to the Irish Government. In order that other action which is in
hand may have an opportunity to take its course and result in
messages to the Irish Government, it would be ideal for the documents
to be given to the Irish Government rather later than 9.30 am (when
I understand the Ambassador has a provisional appointment).

I know that you had it in mind to warn Dermot Nally that this material
is on its way. You will no doubt emphasise that it is already a
definitive text, and is not subject to amendment. You should not
hint at the other action which is in hand (though it would obviously
be useful to know if Nally has received any messages) because the
Irish should certainly not know of it.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Paul Lever (as well as to
Mike Newington) and to David Wright.

*Yours sincerely
Mary Wright.*

P.P. R A HARRINGTON

*P.S. You will have heard by now that this
letter has been overtaken by events, but we
thought you should have this material anyway.*

SECRET

O.R.

PA
MS

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
THE SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S PRISONS

Mr Speaker, I will with permission make a statement about the position in Northern Ireland prisons.

The seven Republican prisoners, who were in the 5^{3rd} day of their hunger strike, ^{have} yesterday, ~~begin~~ to take food. This includes the one prisoner who had been moved to Musgrave Park Hospital in view of his grave condition. In addition I can confirm that every prisoner at the Maze took breakfast this morning.

This is most welcome news. The hunger strike could not achieve its object, and it is encouraging that the influence of all those who sought to persuade the prisoners of that fact was finally effective.

I sincerely hope that the same conclusion will be drawn by all prisoners, men and women, who have been protesting in the cause of political status, including the three remaining hunger strikers at Armagh.

With the full support of the House,
As the House knows, the Government has made it clear all along that it was not prepared to grant political status. The European Commission of Human Rights considered the case for political status made to it by the protesters, and rejected it. They asked the Government to keep the humanitarian aspects of the prison regime under continuing review. We responded positively to that request with the changes in the spring and summer which I ^{repeated} set forth in my statement of 4 December. That remains in every particular the Government's position.

Yesterday I sent into the Maze and Armagh prisons a summary based on the Government's statement of 4 December which set out what will happen

.R.

when the protests end. A copy of that summary, which I shall be repeating in a broadcast to the people of Northern Ireland later today, has been given to every protesting prisoner. I will arrange for the text to be printed in the Official Report.

The Government earnestly hope that the knowledge of what will happen when the protests end will lead all the prisoners concerned, to stop protesting.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE PROTESTS END

On the fourth of December the Government set out clearly what is available to all prisoners in Northern Ireland prisons.

2. We hoped that this would bring an end to the protests. Two more weeks have passed. The protests continue. Those on hunger strike are two weeks nearer death.

3. Their demand for political status is not going to be granted. The European Commission of Human Rights has considered the case made to it by the protesters for political status, and has rejected it. The Commission asked the Government to keep the humanitarian aspects of the prison regime under continuing review. The Government responded positively to that request with the changes on nine specific points which I set forth in detail in my statement to the House of Commons on 4 December. It is our concern that these protests and the hunger strike should not lead to pointless deaths. To the protesters and those on hunger strike I want to say:

There is no reason to go on. The Government has made its response. I want to spell out for you and your families what will happen when the protests end.

4. First of all, any such prisoner will be put into a clean cell. If, as I hope, all prisoners end their protests, we shall have the task of cleaning up all the cells right away and this would take a week or ten days.

5. Within a few days clothing provided by their families will be

Contd.....

given to any prisoners giving up their protest so that they can wear it during recreation, association and visits. As soon as possible all prisoners will be issued with civilian-type clothing for wear during the working day. From then on, as I said in October, denim prison uniform becomes a thing of the past for all prisoners.

6. They will also immediately become entitled every month to eight letters, four parcels and four visits.

7. Prisoners who end their protest will be able to associate within each wing of the prison blocks in the evening and at weekends. If large groups of prisoners cease their protest simultaneously, a few days may be needed for cleaning up.

8. We want to work out for every prisoner the kinds of available activity which we think suit him best - work (including of course the work of servicing the prison itself), vocational training and educational training. Again if groups of prisoners come off the protest together, getting this programme organised will take some time.

9. On the question of remission - and this will be of special importance to the prisoners' families - provision already exists for lost remission to be restored after subsequent good behaviour. We shall immediately start reviewing each case individually.

10. We do not want any prisoners to die: but if they persist in their hunger strike they will not be forcibly fed. If they die, it

will be from their own choice. If they choose to live, the conditions available to them meet in a practical and humane way the kind of things they have been asking for. But we shall not let the way we run the prisons be determined by hunger strikes or any other threat.

11. Northern Ireland prisons are acknowledged to include some of the best in the United Kingdom. The boards of visitors will continue to play their part in maintaining this position. For our part we will, subject to the overriding requirements of security, keep prison conditions - and that includes clothing, work, association, education, training and remission - under continuing review.

12. It is the Government's earnest wish that, in the light of these possibilities, all prisoners now protesting in one form or another will bring their protest to an end. ~~In particular, these~~ on hunger strike have nothing to gain by fasting to death. The time to stop is now.

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

18 December 1980