

PRIME MINISTER TALKING TO MICHAEL ALISON, 4 JULY, 1981

SUBJECT.

cc. Hunter etc.

PM: Oh Michael what a marathon, whatever happened?

MA: They do like talking. You know we were motoring on the three demands for three areas of change, so we had to spend a good deal of time going over them all. On two of them, namely association and work as you know we were indicating areas of So that needed a good deal of plotting over. But then we spent a long time on clothing; then of course its all or nothing. And following your instructions I stone-walled and said there were no circumstances in which the Government could be seen or actually effect the buying-off of the hunger strikers by openly and directly conceding a change in clothing. So that's where they were pressing us. And I did indicate that the only way forward in this area is for the hunger strike to stop unequivocally and this would bring into play paragraph 19 of the Public Statement which amongst other things said that improvements in the general prison regime are a different matter, there is scope yet for further development.

PM: Yes, within the control and security clause.

MA: But above all without any explicit and automatic link with the ending of the hunger strike. So they went away at the end of the day having, I think, registered finally that there was no way in which they could go into the prison and say if you do this then this will happen. But the formula is that if the hunger strike stops then it will create an environment in the prison and outside in which it will be possible for the Government to consider moving forward on the general lines of improvement. That's where we are at present, they went away to think about that over night. I think they are coming back now at 11.00 hrs and I think they are going to say to me - OK, it's just possible that that formula will work but only if we can have some idea as to how soon improvements will begin to materialise. We are reflecting on that but I am so far saying that there is no possible means of giving them any time.

PM: They do realise to do this that control and security must remain that's the absolute principle?

MA: Oh yes, I've used your formula. The effect is choice effectively remains

/with the Governor

MA:- with the Governor, in other words total control over the ... which can be brought in.

PM: Michael what a terrible time you must have had.

MA: It's all very engaging and friendly and we have a good atmosphere and a good spirit.

PM: It tries one's patience doesn't it.

MA: I don't mind it, I'm quite happy to do it. I'm used to it now. I think it's all part of the process.

PM: I think you are marvellous and I am very grateful to you.

MA: We are not by any means through yet and my own feeling is that we haven't got anything like enough on offer in relation to their demands to stop the strike, but I may be wrong. I tend to be pessimistic.

PM: On the news this morning they said that there was a meeting in Dublin too?

MA: I think that's quite possible, in the middle of our meeting yesterday the Taoiseach rang up from Dublin to speak to Hugh Logue (?) probably I think to say to him that the families were with him and what was the atmosphere like.

PM: I rather gathered it was a meeting in Dublin with the families. They are anxious to get it off aren't they.

MA: There is one area which is going to be a little sensitive in a way Prime Minister. That is the difference between the hunger strikers and the back-up of 400 men who are on the protest. Now I think our objective is to get the hunger strikers off the hunger strike, and

PM: That would stop the deaths.

MA: Yes, I don't think we should get the protesters off the protest at the same time.

PM: You cannot get everything Michael.

MA: Right. Now it follows from this if I can just elaborate slightly. That if we then within a fortnight or three or four weeks began to do something about own clothing in an atmosphere of calm and not under duress then we might find that the protesters were still on protest and would then find that they were benefiting from a new regime of clothing in their protest if you see what I mean?

PM: But surely any new regime available to full conforming prisoners.

MA: Well the point is that prison clothing is not a privilege, its automatic to all prisoners who will actually put on clothing; so you would then find that the protesters were able, because clothing is not a privilege but a right to have own clothing while still on protest. But actually if we can live with that because that is exactly the situation which prevails in Armagh Jail where the women wear their own clothing. So I think we can get round that one without too much trouble and this lies someway behind ...

PM: I think we will meet that one later.

MA: So we deal with the hunger strike.

PM: I think that's the main objective.

MA: So you confirm to me that I am to stand firm on this position

PM: Oh indeed Michael

MA: under any circumstances yield own clothing under duress.

PM: On indeed yes,