

These reasons have now lost their force. Intra-venous feeding is not repulsive - many of us have undergone it - nor I think is it dangerous; and the avowed political objectives of these hunger strikers remove their cases from the realm of purely personal decision. The Irish Roman Catholic Bishops referred to 'those who direct them' and to the 'contempt for human life, the incitement to revenge, the exploitation of the hunger strikers to further a campaign of murder, the intimidation of the innocent'. To interfere with the (partly) self-imposed martyrdom of these people would not infringe any principle that I know of despite the so-called Tokyo Declaration of 1975.

The IRA would certainly be enraged by our stopping their supply of martyrs, and would undoubtedly cause trouble in the prisons and outside. But I think that any such trouble would be far less than the difficulties caused by a further succession of deaths in prison, renewed violence and greatly increased tension on both sides of the border. And the decision could be easily justified as the logical extension of our present policy: we have been thoroughly reasonable throughout and have produced a remarkably liberal prison regime; but, as this has had no effect on the intransigence of the IRA, we have no alternative but to stop the strikers dying. In doing so we would surely have the support of the Irish Bishops and most other reasonable people.

Of course if the relatives of the present strikers really are more sensible than their predecessors and you are able to reach an agreement with them, none of this will be necessary. Or there may be insuperable technical objections, in which case I apologise for intruding. But, if no such agreement is likely and the technical difficulties can be overcome, then I think what I have suggested is preferable both to surrender, which is unthinkable, and to a continuing series of deaths, which will be highly dangerous.

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I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and to the Attorney-General.

Yours
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