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Northern Ireland Information Service

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Stormont Castle,
Belfast BT4 3ST
Telephone Belfast 63011
Telex 74163: 74250: 74272

Great George Street,
London SW1P 3AJ
Telephone 01-233-4626
Telex 1918889

Ulster Office,
11 Berkeley Street, London W1
Telephone 01-493-0601
Telex 21839

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

8 JUL 1981

The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace have held a series of discussions with Mr. Alison, Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office, at their request in order to clarify the Government's position on the prison regime in an effort to bring about an end to the current hunger strike in the Maze Prison. They have also visited the prisoners on a number of occasions. The Government has not been in negotiation through the intermediary of the Commission. It was and remains grateful for the strenuous efforts which the Commission have made to contribute to a resolution of the prison protest.

2. I issued a carefully considered statement on 30 June on Northern Ireland Prison Regimes and nothing which has happened since then has led me to think that anything in that document should be changed.

3. The statement of 30 June made it clear that we cannot agree either that a particular set of prisoners should be given preferential treatment (and I welcome the indication in the prisoners' statement of 4 July that this is not now one of their demands) or that the Prison Authorities can abdicate control over how the prisons are run and how life goes on in them.

4. The statement also made clear that the Government, as its actions in the past have shown, will continue to maintain and where possible improve the present enlightened and humane regime with flexibility in its administration.

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The only key to advance is for them to end the strike.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE PROTEST ENDS?

1. Protesting prisoners have been segregated from the rest. Other prisoners are not segregated by religious or political or any other affiliation. If there were no protest the only reason for segregating some prisoners from others would be the judgement of the prison authorities, not the prisoners, that this was the best way to avoid trouble between groups.
2. Prisoners who give up their protest would get the association non-protesting prisoners now get. That is to say three hours each evening, all their weekends plus periods for exercise, physical education, games and meals. There is little immediate scope for expansion. The suggestions of the Commission for Justice and Peace that adjacent wings should share association in recreation rooms and exercise areas depends on satisfactory arrangements being made for supervising and controlling movement and it would take time to arrange the necessary physical facilities for this.
3. During association prisoners would have the privilege of wearing their own clothes. At all other times they would wear civilian-type clothing of a non-uniform kind. By comparison with most other western countries this is a liberal regime, but we would not rule out the possibility of further development.
4. All prisoners are in practice as well as in principle liable for domestic tasks inside and outside the wings, eg for orderly duties and in the laundries and kitchens. No one will be excluded as of right from the liability to work in prison workshops. We will add to the range of activities so far as and

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as quickly as we can. The Commission for Justice and Peace have given us examples of such activities. We shall look closely at these but at the end of the day it will be for the prison authorities to decide what jobs a prisoner does.

5. Any prisoner who abides by the rules is already allowed 8 letters, 4 visits and 4 parcels a month. Those giving up their protest would get this straight away. And it is more than they have been asking for.

6. 50% remission is awarded for good behaviour. It is forfeited by those who breach prison rules by protesting. In practice prisoners who have given up their protest have had up to 1/5th of lost remission restored.