



Bishop's House  
St. Eugene's Cathedral  
Derry BT48 9AP  
Ireland

Tel. Derry 62802 (STD CODE 0504)

5th January 1980

Mr. Humphrey Atkins, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for N. Ireland,  
Northern Ireland Office,  
Stormont Castle,  
Belfast BT4 3ST.

Dear Mr. Atkins,

I have been very concerned about the situation in the H Blocks in the Maze Prison for some considerable time. I visited there about eighteen months ago and was horrified by what I saw. I wrote to Mr. Mason about this and discussed the matter with him on several occasions.

Whilst I accept that the form of protest is objectionable and that it is undertaken by the prisoners on their own initiative, I still feel that something should be done to try and break the deadlock. It is terrifying to think that some of these men have chosen to live in these conditions for such a long period of time. I think that they must be saved from themselves. I dread to think of what the mood of these men is likely to be when they are eventually released.

I feel very strongly that, without any surrender of principle, some strategy could be devised whereby all prisoners in N. Ireland could be permitted to wear their own clothing. I do feel that the present type of prison uniform is excessively humiliating and Dickensian. I don't think that such a decision would, in any way, weaken prison security. I do think it could go some way towards easing the present tense and worrying situation.

The H Block situation is the main propaganda plank that the IRA has here and abroad. I think it would be unwise to assume that there is a total lack of concern or interest amongst the minority population here about this problem. Although there have been relatively small attendances at recent H Block protests and marches, I know, from my own contacts with many of my people, that there is significant concern in the Catholic community about the H Block problem. There is considerable sympathy especially for the families of those held there. Many of these families are good and decent people who are respected in their own localities. I hasten to add that the Catholic community is completely revolted by the callous murders of prison officers. My own experience would also suggest





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that support for the IRA is at it's lowest ebb ever in the Catholic community. I am hoping that this attitude will persist. That is why I am worried about the Maze situation. The death of a prisoner there would certainly signal a massive IRA propaganda campaign that might attract some more support to them, especially amongst the young.

I would ask you to give serious consideration to this matter. I believe it to be most important and urgent.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

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+ Edward Daly  
Bishop of Derry