

E. R.



cc PS/S of S (B & L)
PS/Mr Alison (B & L)
PS/PUS (B & L)
Mr Hannigan
Mr Barry
Mr Gilliland
Mr Buxton

Mr Jackson

CONVICTED IRA PRISONERS

Mr Gerry Fitt telephoned me this afternoon to seek our help in providing him with some information. He told me that, since his resignation as leader of the SDLP, he had received a number of unpleasant letters, mainly from the United States, generally abusing him but, in particular, making the point that he was not supporting the "Irish heroes on the blanket in Long Kesh".

Mr Fitt is keen to respond to this correspondence and would like to include in the letters he is going to send, two or three paragraphs which comment on the "Irish heroes on the blanket who are British prisoners of war in Long Kesh". He has something like the following in mind:

"There are X convicted IRA men in the Maze Prison. They have been convicted through the normal judicial processes for some of the most serious offences against the criminal law. They are not political prisoners imprisoned for their beliefs. Of the total of X, Y are taking part in the dirty protest. [Perhaps some sentences to deal with the fact this is self-imposed] Of these Y men a have been convicted of murder, b have attempted murder c of causing an explosion. Amongst these so-called heroes are men who have murdered and maimed innocent men, women and children, for example, (give some examples).

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I do not see why we should not help Mr Fitt in this and I should be grateful if you would let me have some suitable paragraphs. Mr Fitt said that we need not worry about his respecting the confidentiality of our providing him with his information as he would have more to lose than we would if it came out that he was using information provided by the Northern Ireland Office. He said his critics would seize upon this as further evidence as he was "a tool of the British".



A R BROWN
Private Secretary
16 January 1980