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20/6

18 June 1980

1) Miss McCannan - to see

2) Mr Templeton S.C.J.

Mr Naisell

20.6.80

You wrote to me on 22 May enclosing an article from "Hibernia". This contained speculation, based on my announcement of 30 April about the Chief Inspector of Prisons, about possible concessions in regard to the prisoners protesting against the refusal of special category status.

I was glad to note that the Official Unionist Party agrees with me that it will be helpful to us in Northern Ireland to be able to make use of the services and advice of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

I had already had my attention drawn to the remarks reported in the "Hibernia" and stated to have been made by a representative of Provisional Sinn Fein. I cannot think why my reference to the Chief Inspector carrying out an inspection at Maze Prison should have led Sinn Fein, or anyone else, to infer that some form of concession on the special category issue was going to be forthcoming. I have said many times, and I repeat it again, that I have no intention of being deflected by protests, in the prisons or outside, from the policy of not giving special treatment to persons convicted and sentenced through the courts for criminal offences.

We recognise that we have a duty to treat all prisoners as humanely and as fairly as possible, irrespective of the nature of their offences. This obligation applies even when they are taking part in a uniquely provocative form of protest action in support of which a number of prison officers have been murdered and others attacked. The regimes of the various groups of protesting prisoners are under constant review to see if there are any further measures which can



reasonably be taken on humanitarian grounds, but without prejudice to our stand on the central issue of special category status. As you know, the further measures which I announced on 26 March were rejected by the prisoners.

I have considered whether I should make a public response to the statement made in the "Hibernia" article, but I think that to do so would attract further attention to what was said on behalf of Provisional Sinn Fein and give rather more weight to the article than it deserves.

Finally, I should add the statement in the article that Category "A" prisoners in England and Wales are allowed to wear their own clothes is quite misleading. It is true that they are allowed some minor items of their own (underwear, tee-shirts, sandals and some items of sportswear), but apart from these they are all required to wear prison uniform. As you know, sentenced prisoners in Northern Ireland who are conforming with Prison Rules can wear their own clothes in association periods and for visits - this concession is not allowed in England.

Hidden copies:

PS/SOS (B & L)
PS/Mr Alison (B & L)
Mr Hannigan
Mr Moriarty
Mr Wyatt
Mr Gilliland
Mr Jackson ✓
Mr Gee