

PROTEST AT HM PRISON MAZE: DESCRIPTION OF HMG'S POSITION

Principles

1. HMG has consistently asserted certain principles in respect of prison administration on which it would not be prepared to compromise. These principles are:-

- (i) No political or special category status for any prisoners. Any differentiation of treatment of a certain group or class of prisoners in Northern Ireland is objectionable under this principle. This principle was endorsed by the ECCHR in its Partial Decision of June 1980.
- (ii) The prison authorities must remain fully in control of the prison administration and of the major elements of day to day life in the prisons.

2. Subject to those principles, HMG has shown itself to be flexible and willing to introduce changes in the prison regime for both conforming and protesting prisoners. (The reference to protesting prisoners here relates to any prisoners who do not conform with prison rules irrespective of the alleged motivation for their crimes.) Most of the following changes were introduced after the Commission made its partial decision in June 1980. Irrespective of any protests, the Government is keeping under review the scope for improvements in the regime applicable to all prisoners in Northern Ireland.

3. Additional Privileges made available to protesting prisoners:

- (i) Provision of plimsolls, vests and shorts for exercise.
- (ii) Weekly letter in and out instead of monthly.
- (iii) Two visits a month instead of one.

} 23.3.80

- (4) One extra hour's physical recreation each week in the gymnasium.
- (5) One evening's association per week
- (6) Availability of "closed" visits for prisoners who refuse to be searched.
- (7) Books and newspapers made available in each wing.
- (8) Compassionate home leave on death of a near relative made available on the same basis as for conforming prisoners.
- (9) For those prisoners on a "clean" protest:

August/
September
1980

- (i) the rate of loss of remission was halved as compared with those on the "dirty" protest.
- (ii) A special monthly parcel is allowed containing up to 4 lbs of fruit and toilet articles.
- (iii) One hour extra exercise each day is allowed.

January
1981

4 Ex-protesting prisoners

Following a review a partial restoration of lost remission is now being given to those who have discontinued their protest and are now fully conforming.

5 All prisoners

All prisoners now benefit from the Government's decision to abolish prison uniform as such and to substitute prison-issue civilian-style clothing which is available as a personal issue to each prisoner.

Despite the action in January last of a number of protesting prisoners involving the destruction of cell furniture and damage to cells, all protesting prisoners have now been issued with beds and bedding, tables and chairs and the issue of other cell furniture continues. At the request of protesting prisoners, writing material and pens were provided as were additional books and newspapers.