

E.R.

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PS/Lord Gowrie(I&B)

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PS/Secretary of State(I&B)-M

PS/PUS (I&B)-M

Mr. Marshall (L)-M

~~Mr. W.E. Bell~~

Mr. Palmer (DH)

Mr. Buxton

Mr. Doyne-Ditmas

Mr. Corbett (L)-M

Mr. Templeton

Mr. Blatherwick

THE PRISON PROTEST: NEXT STAGES

We have done as well as we could have expected in the coverage which yesterday's Press Conference received. With some minor errors of interpretation (e.g. the 9 o'clock news and this morning's Irish News did not understand that the prisoners are not getting anything in respect of "free" association), the media got it broadly right.

2. On the Orange side Dr. Paisley's antics were predictable and we shall have to wait to see whether on that side of the community disagreement with the package grows on the back of Dr. Paisley's outbursts or whether, as I suspect will be the case, the Protestants had already discounted what we have now done.

3. On the Green side we have had welcoming noises from most of the familiar figures though as far as I am aware the Dublin Government have kept silent. However if the prisoners continue, as I expect they will, to protest, the spokesmen for moderate Catholic opinion will press us to do more. They have already prepared the ground for that. Cardinal O Fiaich talks about "a step in the right direction", Bishop Daly talks about "a significant move in the right direction", Mr. Logue of the SDLP says that the moratorium is "a period in which to tie up loose ends" (= add a bid more to the package).

4. If the protesters during the moratorium continue to make clear that they are not available for anything which we could

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call work, as is likely, we shall then have to start punishing them again. I have already expressed a personal view on how we might deal with that within the prison. I think we must also prepare the ground now for dealing with that presentationally. There is a danger that if things turn out this way the Cardinal, Bishop Daly, the SDLP et alia will once again say not only that we have muffed our chance but more damagingly that:-

- (a) they had understood (despite what you and the Secretary of State said on television) that we would in fact interpret work as educational and cultural activities, and that we have therefore changed our minds (because the PM is back from Australia);
- (b) that we have shown bad faith, deceived the prisoners and the Catholic community ; and
- (c) that once again it is all our fault that the protest continues.

5. We can deal with this if we use every effort now to make quite clear that what you and the Secretary of State said on television is what we mean; the liability to do work of all kinds remains but over a period of time some additional educational activities will be added - not substituted. I have so instructed the Press Office. I think that if you go into the prison to clarify the statement (and there is much Press speculation that the prisoners will ask for that today) it would be important to concentrate on getting across the message that they will have to work or be punished. Less damage will be done by killing now the expectation of an end to the protest than by having to kill it a month hence.



D.J. WYATT
7 October 1981
(MR/ly)

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