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Mr Teyfelin
JCT

M. Jackson O/R
24/7

22.7.81

MT
23/7

cc Mr Boys Smith (B & L)
Mr Smith (B & L)
Miss Wright (B & L)
Mr Blelloch
Mr Marshall - M
Mr Moriarty - M
Mr Wyatt
Mr Palmer
Mr Jackson
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Harrington - M

HUNGER STRIKE : MEETING HELD IN STORMONT HOUSE
AT 5.15 pm on 19 JULY 1981

Present:

Secretary of State
Mr Blelloch
Mr Truesdale
Mr Jackson
Mr Boys Smith

The Secretary of State said that three factors bore on the consideration he was giving to changes which might be made in the prison regime when the hunger strike ended:

(i) The first was the attitude of the prisoners.

They had made clear that they sought negotiation with the Government, rather than simply the clarification of earlier statements, and also the recognition of the legitimacy of the PIRA command in the prison. The Government had issued a response earlier in the day to their latest pronouncement. McFarland had also made his position clear to the ICRC.

(ii) The second was the Irish Government. It was concerned about its position and about the pressures imposed upon it. The Irish Government was pressing the British Government hard in an effort to ensure the speedy settlement of the hunger strike and had suggested, for example, that co-operation on security matters might be at risk if the necessary flexibility was not demonstrated.

(iii) The third was the ICRC. Its representatives were still in Northern Ireland and were pursuing their investigation of the prisons. The representatives were by all accounts sound and reasonable.

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The Secretary of State said that he would hold to the principles he had already enunciated. But the hunger strike was bound to end at some stage, although he could not say when, and it might then be right to make changes of some kind to the prison regime. One such change might possibly be to allow male prisoners to wear their own clothes, as female prisoners in Armagh Prison did already. This would not lessen the ability of the prison authorities to maintain control. He sought the views of Mr Truesdale and Mr Jackson on the likely reaction of Governors and prison staff to a change of this kind.

Mr Truesdale made the following points:-

1. Governors might point out that the ECHR had concluded that the requirement to wear a prison uniform was satisfactory. In those circumstances they might wonder why the Government saw fit to allow prisoners to wear their own clothes.
2. The Governors might also believe that once the protesting prisoners had achieved their demand on clothes they would think that in due course they would have further successes. He pointed out that prisoners could manipulate the regime by, for example, sabotaging workshops in a way that obliged the authorities to exclude them. He believed also that the protesting prisoners would seek further changes on association with a view ultimately to allowing movement between the blocks. He accepted that some kind of 'no work' protest was likely to continue for the indefinite future.
3. If improvements were made to the clothing regime it was possible that some conforming prisoners might become non-conforming.

Mr Jackson made the following points:-

1. There was a general assumption amongst Governors that at some stage prisoners would be allowed to wear their own clothes. A good deal of thought would have to be given

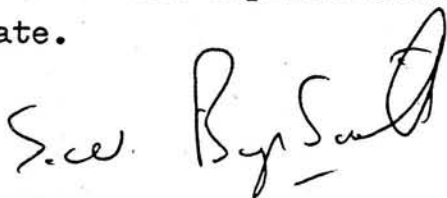
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to working out the details before the change could be implemented; it was important to ensure that recognition was not given to spokesmen of the prisoners in, for example, making the arrangements for laundering prisoners' personal clothing.

2. There was a degree of concern in the prison service that a decision to allow prisoners to wear their own clothes would prompt pressure for further and perhaps less acceptable adjustments to the regime. Some members of the prison service saw the Government's statement of 8 July as inconsistent with its firm pronouncements on matters of principle; they believed that the present regime was a fair and satisfactory one and were not convinced that changes were required for their own sake. They also believed that relaxation of the rules on association was inconsistent with the principle of the H Blocks which were designed to confine and separate dangerous men.
3. Prison officers were very aware of the dangers to which they and their families were exposed and of the number of their colleagues who had lost their lives over recent years. This, together with their loyalty to the Crown and their firm belief in the preservation of law and order, would be factors in their reaction to any changes which might be made.

The Secretary of State noted the points which Mr Truesdale and Mr Jackson had raised. He confirmed that he was not proposing to allow prisoners to wear their own clothes simply in the hope that this would persuade the protestors to conform.

It was agreed, in the light of the discussion, that Mr Alison should meet representatives of the Prison Governors at an early date.



S BOYS SMITH

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