

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Statement by

The General Board of Assembly

30th October, 1980

The hunger strike now started and the escalation of protest in support of claims for political status for certain prisoners engaged in a so-called dirty-campaign in the H-Blocks of the Maze Prison can only inflame our situation, deepen the divisions in our land and threaten many innocent lives.

The vicious, criminal acts for which such prisoners have been convicted, their disregard for the human rights and the lives of others must never be forgotten or justified, nor the fact that their present degradation and jeopardy is entirely self-inflicted.

Yet Christian Churches, in faithfulness to God our Saviour, must be concerned for guilty men and women as well as for the innocent, even in the suffering and degradation they bring upon themselves.

In the storm of propaganda, we welcome the studied report on The H-Block Issue prepared earlier this year by the Irish Council of Churches Advisory Forum on Human Rights, and the Council's own representations made over many months both to Departmental authorities and the Secretary of State.

We support the Forum's conclusions that "an end to the Provisional IRA campaign of violence would lead to an end to the H-Block protest. This ought to be the prime aim of those concerned with human rights and the welfare of prisoners". At the same time "the conditions of prisoners must be such that they will not create more problems in the rest of society, in terms of violence, law and order, confidence in Government, etc." This is the importance of pursuing on-going prison reform even in our situation. It was emphasised by the European Commission on Human Rights, when they rejected the political status of prisoners "which they are not entitled to under national law or under the European Commission."

The General Board re-affirm support of the Government in steadfast refusal to grant political status to prisoners convicted of terrorist offences.

Considering also how the present hunger strike in the Maze Prison and the orchestrated support for it outside the Prison are being used to give a boost to spurious propaganda the Board urge the media to give less publicity to such a blatant campaign.

And the Board can only add their voice to the many who have urged all those involved to call off their dangerous protests for the sake of all the people of Ireland and their future, both North and South.

CHURCH HOUSE,
BELFAST, BT1 6DW