

cc. PS/Mr Alison (B)

Father A Reid CSR
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31st October 1980

Thank you for your further letter of 14 September in connection with the protest at Maze Prison. Mr Alison acknowledges again the thought and sincerity which you have brought to this difficult issue.

You will by now have seen the terms of the statement made by the Secretary of State on 24 October in connection with the hunger strike by certain of the protesting prisoners at Maze. This made clear that the Government will not make any concession on the principle of special category status for prisoners who claim a political motive for their crimes. The statement went on to explain the Government's decision to abolish the existing prison uniform for all sentenced prisoners in Northern Ireland, and to substitute civilian-type clothing issued by the prison authorities. This announcement has not prevented the prisoners from carrying out their threat to start a hunger strike on 27 October.

In view of the latest developments the Minister doubts whether it would be helpful for him to comment on the points which you made in your letter. It seems to him, however, that the recent statements by and on behalf of the protesting prisoners confirms what he has suggested to you previously - that what is at the heart of the protest is not the separate questions of uniform, work or prison treatment, but the creation of a separate category of political prisoners. That is an issue of principle on which the Government is not prepared to

make any compromise, but it will continue to ensure that all prisoners are treated as humanely as possible despite whatever action some of them may take to disrupt the prison system.

DAVID BROOKER
Private Secretary to
Mr Michael Alison,
Minister of State