

Wheeler 2  
PA PRIME MINISTER

To see  
MS  
25/11

TV INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL ALLISON, MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND, 25 NOVEMBER, 1980



MS

INTERVIEWER: We asked Michael Allison, Minister of State for Northern Ireland if the Government's stand against the hunger strike might reverse this progress?

MICHAEL ALLISON: No, I think it's precisely because we have treated, and the broad communities on both sides have accepted that it was right to treat terrorists as terrorists and murderers as murderers, that we have got to the degree of success as we have got and that the terrorists are making this last throw as it were to try to divert us and to get some more support back. Because their numbers are way down, their capacity for striking is obviously extremely limited and I think they are on the run. But I must be careful because it has been said before and human beings are capable of springing surprises.

\* \* \* \* \*

INTERVIEWER: If the hunger strike persists, the seven prisoners are likely to reach a critical condition around Christmas. If they die the Security forces expect a renewed IRA military campaign, but they claim they can handle it. The British Government seem set on a final test of strength with the IRA. With all sides locked into confrontation we asked Michael Allison, Northern Ireland

/Minister

Minister with responsibility for prisons if there was any way out.

MICHAEL ALLISON: We will not make any concessions to blackmail, and if they are fighting for a great issue of principle as they see it - political status - then they are banging their heads against a brick wall. But if they are in a muddled way saying we want better prison conditions well then this is a different story. We have done a great deal along those lines already.

INTERVIEWER: What happens when one of them dies?

MICHAEL ALLISON: Well, he dies. He is carried out in a coffin as the fasting prisoners in the Republic, in Dublin, were carried out in coffins in 1940, and it is a tragedy for the man and his family. Nothing changes so far as the conduct of our responsible Government in the Province is concerned.

INTERVIEWER: What happens when the second man or the third man or the fourth man dies?

MICHAEL ALLISON: Again, I can only refer you to precedent. It has happened in Ireland in the past and democratically elected civil government goes on.

INTERVIEWER: Is the Government's principle of treating IRA men as common criminals worth the civilian bloodshed on the streets that many predict will happen?

MICHAEL ALLISON: It is the only way in the long run that we can protect innocent lives because if we treat murder as murder and those who commit murder as criminals, then we have some hope in the end of persuading people that this is a course and a method of action which is profitless. But if we say both your objectives and to some extent your murderous and brutal methods can be specially recognised and given a special dispensation then the risk is a far greater one to the innocent men, women and children who walk the streets of Belfast and other towns in Ireland.