

RIYADH PRESS CONFERENCE

KEITH GRAVES, BBC

10.30 BST 21/4/81

Have you got any observations on the visit by the three MPs to Sands?

Prime Minister:

There is no question of political status for someone serving a sentence for crime. Crime is crime is crime. It is not political, it is crime. There is no question of granting political status. I just hope that anyone who is on hunger strike for his own sake will think fit to come off hunger strike but that is a matter for him. With regard to the visits by the Members of Parliament of the Republic of Ireland, I thought it right to let them see people on hunger strike in the Maze Prison. They did so, but I understand Mr. Sands is still on hunger strike. I regret that he has not decided to come off it.

There can be no concessions?

No, no concessions, no possible concessions on political status. To do that in fact would put many many people into jeopardy. Everyone said that a crime which you and I regard as crime, described as crime, and which is a crime, where there is an attempt to say it is ^{not} a crime, it is political. If that was the case, then everyone I am afraid would go in fear.

The rest of the prisoners to indulge in optional work, then maybe hunger strike would end?

What they are trying in fact to achieve is the trappings of political status without calling it political status. The prison regime in Northern Ireland for those who abide by the rules is amongst the most liberal in the UK. We set it out in full last time there was a hunger strike. It is a very humane regime. We are always ready to consider anything which would help to make a prison regime which is still a prison regime even more humane. We are not prepared to consider special status to certain groups of people. Anything which is arranged would ~~be~~ → [have to apply to the whole of the United Kingdom and would be] ← [justified only on the grounds that it would be more humane for prisoners having regard to their prison sentences.]

PRESS ASSOCIATION

Will you meet the three MPs as they have requested?

Prime Minister (paraphrase)

It is not my practice to meet MPs of other countries about a UK citizen resident in the UK. If they wish to communicate with me, then they should do so in the customary way through their own government.

WORLD AT ONE -- TUESDAY 21 APRIL

Prime Minister: There can be no question of political status for someone who is serving a sentence for crime. Crime is crime, it is not political, it is crime and there can be no question of granting political status. I just hope that anyone who is on hunger strike for his own sake will think fit to come off hunger strike but that is a matter for him. With regard to the message by Members of Parliament of the Republic of Ireland we thought it right to let them see people on hunger strike in the Maze Prison. They did so. But I understand Mr. Sands is still on hunger strike and I regret that he has not decided to come off it. There can be no possible concessions on political status. To do that, in fact, would put many many people in jeopardy. Everyone says that a crime which you and I regard as a crime, describe as a crime, and which is a crime, if ever those attempt to say that it is not a crime, it is political, then everyone, I'm afraid, would go in fear.

Dr. John O'Connell: Well naturally I'm very disappointed. I think its very sad at a time when a man's life is in danger that anyone should adopt an intransigent attitude.

Interviewer: Will you be able to bring the matter up in the customary manner as she suggests?

Dr. John O'Connell: Well I'll try every way. Indeed if she feels that the matter is not urgent enough that it should be gone through the normal, through protocol, I would certainly conform to that and I will certainly resort to that. But I think that we're in a position that you don't abide by protocol. I made a direct appeal to her to Downing Street and I would have thought that she would have responded on humanitarian grounds and they are the grounds on which I made the appeal to her.

Interviewer: Will you be approaching Mr. Haughey, perhaps, and asking him to raise the matter at the next Summit?

Dr. John O'Connell: Yes I will. Indeed I don't think we've time there for the next Summit. I think we're too close to this
/ man's

man's death. We can talk about it later but its too late I think.

Interviewer: So you'll be making further direct approaches, will you?

Dr. John O'Connell: I will indeed, where possible. But I am alarmed at the phrase in her statement, to the effect that political status is what we're seeking. There's no question of political status, indeed, I didn't know this, that she was looking for political status. I didn't know that at all. Indeed I thought that, indeed I was talking about improved conditions in the prison and the same conditions as apply in Southern Ireland here - there's no question of political status. What they were seeking was the right to wear their own clothes, having the option to wear their own clothes for one, and number two, the work, the question of work. They explained to me that it was a question of cleaning out their own cells, their own block, gymnasium, recreation room, and undertaking crafts.- part of their educational programme. So there is no question of political status here, its a question of conditions in the prison. .And I think we should be clear on this.

Interviewer: But in fact when you ask for those, when you press for conditions to be changed, aren't you in fact suggesting special status - that they would be treated differently from other prisoners?

Dr. John O'Connell: There is a precedent for this. The prisoners in the special security blocks in the prison have these already. The right to wear their own clothes and work. This already exists. And of course it was William Whitelaw who granted this before. So there was no question when they had it before that they were treated as political prisoners. I think we must be very clear on that, there is no question of political status for them..

PRIME MINISTER: PRESS CONFERENCE, SAUDI ARABIA - 10.30 am 21/4/81

ON-THE-RECORD: NORTHERN IRELAND

"There is no question of political status for someone serving a sentence for crime. Crime is crime is crime. There is no possible concession of political status. To do that, in fact, would put many people in jeopardy.

"It is not my habit or custom to meet MPs of a foreign country about a citizen of the UK resident in the UK. If they wish to make representations, and if they wish to do so with speed, they should do so through their own Government in the customary way."