



Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London SW1

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*MS*  
*The Humphreys,*

You may remember that a meeting at No 10 about a month ago, I raised the possibility of feeding the hunger strikers intra-venously.

We can not make concessions to the demands of the IRA and their sympathisers, since to do so would almost certainly lead to further demands. All that a concession would probably do would be to bring us closer to granting political status. On the other hand any more deaths will do great damage both in Ireland and abroad, with consequences that can not be fully foreseen. Hence a continuation of the hunger strike carries considerable dangers for us in Ulster and elsewhere, yet any concessions to bring it to an end are impossible.

The only way out of this impasse, it seems to me, is to stop the hunger strikers from killing themselves. This could be done either by intra-venous feeding or by further restrictions on those whom the strikers are allowed to see, a point which I raised at Cabinet last week. Indeed a combination of these things would probably be necessary since any relations and priests allowed in might well be fanatical enough to wrench out 'the drip' and smash the equipment. Forced feeding was abandoned, as I remember, partly because it was dangerous and repulsive, and partly because it was thought that if people wanted to die they should be allowed to do so.

/These

The Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
Great George Street  
London SW1

These reasons have now lost their force. Intra-venous feeding is not repulsive - many of us have undergone it - nor I think is it dangerous; and the avowed political objectives of these hunger strikers remove their cases from the realm of purely personal decision. The Irish Roman Catholic Bishops referred to 'those who direct them' and to the 'contempt for human life, the incitement to revenge, the exploitation of the hunger strikers to further a campaign of murder, the intimidation of the innocent'. To interfere with the (partly) self-imposed martyrdom of these people would not infringe any principle that I know of despite the so-called Tokyo Declaration of 1975.

The IRA would certainly be enraged by our stopping their supply of martyrs, and would undoubtedly cause trouble in the prisons and outside. But I think that any such trouble would be far less than the difficulties caused by a further succession of deaths in prison, renewed violence and greatly increased tension on both sides of the border. And the decision could be easily justified as the logical extension of our present policy : we have been thoroughly reasonable throughout and have produced a remarkably liberal prison regime; but, as this has had no effect on the intransigence of the IRA, we have no alternative but to stop the strikers dying. In doing so we would surely have the support of the Irish Bishops and most other reasonable people.

Of course if the relatives of the present strikers really are more sensible than their predecessors and you are able to reach an agreement with them, none of this will be necessary. Or there may be insuperable technical objections, in which case I apologise for intruding. But, if no such agreement is likely and the technical difficulties can be overcome, then I think what I have suggested is preferable both to surrender, which is unthinkable, and to a continuing series of deaths, which will be highly dangerous.

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I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and to the Attorney-General.

*Yours* ✓  
*Law*