



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 January, 1981.

Dear Jim,

I have noted the points made by the Ulster Unionist Council at their recent meeting, as reflected in your letter of 13 January.

I am grateful for the Council's appreciation of the Government's handling of the recent difficult situation at HM Prison Maze. We have always set our faces firmly against granting any kind of political status. Successive administrations since 1972 have in fact made it plain that those prisoners who have been placed in a special category and are at present lodged in the compounds at Maze, in no sense enjoy political status. But it is certainly true that they are held under special conditions, and I made it clear in answering Enoch Powell on 15 January that I do not like that state of affairs. But as you know, shortage of cellular accommodation makes any change in the regime of special category prisoners impracticable at present. Even when that constraint has been removed we shall have to consider very carefully, in the light of the extent to which public faith may have been pledged by successive governments, whether it would be right to change the conditions in which these particular prisoners serve their sentences.

On the subject of the arrangements made following my meeting with the Taoiseach in Dublin last month, on which we

/ have already



have already exchanged correspondence, there is really nothing to add at present to what I said in reply to your question in the House on 15 January. Arrangements for the conduct of the joint studies are still at a preliminary stage, and we shall take account of your suggestions as these arrangements develop.

On your final point, you may be assured that the Government has no intention of holding a referendum in Great Britain on the subject of Northern Ireland's future constitutional status. Such a referendum would be inconsistent with the principle that Northern Ireland will not cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of the people of the Province and the agreement of Parliament at Westminster.

Yours ever,

(SGD) MT

James H. Molyneaux, Esq., J.P., M.P.