

CONFIDENTIAL

Ireland



Prime Minister

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PRIME MINISTER

THE MAZE PRISON

You will wish to know how things stand.

*Ember reports that all the protests were being called off have proved premature. But there is general confidence that, for the reason at A, it is only a matter of time. I have spoken to Bernie Nally urging the need for circumspection. He lost the point.  
Date 23/11*

I made a statement in the House on Friday last about the Maze hunger strike, and broadcast its essential message to the people of Northern Ireland that afternoon. The text of the broadcast had been made available on Thursday evening in the prisons of Northern Ireland and at 7.45 pm that evening the hunger strike was called off. The substance of what was said to the prisoners about the regime available to them if the protests were ended was in every detail the same as set out in my earlier statement - they have gained only what was on offer before the strike began.

There is no doubt that we have scored a notable victory over the IRA: they know it and the people of Northern Ireland know it. But we have nothing to gain and much to lose from self-congratulation; the facts can speak (and in the media are speaking) for themselves.

A | There is now a great deal to play for in ending the blanket protest and the dirty protest. There are enormous practical and psychological problems in moving from the conditions which have obtained in the Maze Prison for the last four years to a normal prison regime, both for the prisoners and the prison officers themselves. We shall not find the transition easy. So far there has been no actual move by the prisoners but there is incessant talking and consultation. Our hope is that, having gone to the brink and failed to move the Government, they will not find the will to sustain the lower levels of protest, which they must now know will achieve nothing and which they are not being encouraged by those outside to

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do. The Government's presentation of its determination and of what is on offer must be sustained.

There is inevitably much confusion in the minds of the prisoners and their supporters outside. The prison authorities and the Governor of the Maze Prison are well seized of the need to proceed with both firmness and sensitivity in what could be a long, drawn-out end to the affair.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Defence, and Sir Robert Armstrong.



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HA

23 December 1980

(Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State in his absence)

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