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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

29 October 1981

*Sean M. Paisley*

Thank you for your telegram of 5 October in connection with the end of the hunger strike. I am sorry that I have not been able to reply before now.

I know that you saw Jim Prior on 6 October and that you made your views quite plain to him. You will be aware of his full statement of 6 October explaining the objectives of the changes in the prison regime, and of the subsequent statements by Lord Gowrie setting out the details in the different areas.

I recognise that you feel strongly that the Government was wrong to act as it did following the ending of the duress of the hunger strike but we believe sincerely that the course which we have followed, and are following, is in Northern Ireland's best interests. The principles which I enunciated in Belfast last May have not been breached; we have remained absolutely firm in our determination not to grant differentiation to any group of prisoners on pseudo-political grounds, nor to hand over control of prisoners' day-to-day lives to the paramilitary organisations.

You referred to the many deaths which occurred in the community during the period of the hunger strike. I hope that people everywhere

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realise that I am personally very deeply conscious of the trail of grief and bitterness left behind by these and other acts of terrorism. The very last thing I would want is to do anything which would appear to make light of the sacrifices which many ordinary and innocent individuals have made. I hope you will feel able to accept that the changes which have been made do not compare with the sweeping demands for free association, full remission and freedom not to work which the protesting prisoners made. Our drive against the men of violence will not be diminished - on the contrary, we shall continue to look for steps to make that drive more effective.

On the particular point about restoration of lost remission, you will now have seen details of the scheme. It applies to all prisoners, irrespective of any paramilitary affiliation, but only where they are conforming prisoners and have been so for three months. There is no question of discrimination against the conforming prisoners, since a prisoner who has always conformed will not have lost any remission; what we have done is to reduce, not remove, the punishment given to others following a period of good behaviour.

Yours sincerely,

Rangait Daltan

The Reverend Ian Paisley, M.P.

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