

SECRET

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
S W 1

Ms. Andrews

MS

17 July 1981

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Prime Minister

Dear Michael,

Andrew 17/7

In your letter of 14 July to Stephen Boys Smith reporting the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary earlier that day, you asked for a note about the possibility of putting glucose in the hunger strikers' drinking water. I attach a note prepared here which has been approved by my Secretary of State.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Halliday (Home Office), Roderic Lyne (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Adam Wood, (Lord Privy Seal's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
M W Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

SD

SECRET

Glucose

1. The Red Cross have been invited to report on conditions in the prisons of Northern Ireland. If the hunger strikers suspend their fast while the Red Cross investigation is carried out, it will be able to proceed without being under the constraint of continuing deaths. If, however, the fast continues, the Red Cross investigation will be conducted against a tense background, each day it takes carrying the risk of a further death. In this situation the question arises: why not prolong the strikers' lives by (covertly) adding glucose to their drinking water?

2. In terms of principle there are a number of considerations to bear in mind:

- (i) Announced Government policy is that hunger strikers will not be given nourishment or medical treatment against their will. To put glucose into the water they drink would be contrary to this policy.
- (ii) It must be morally questionable whether it is right for the Government, albeit with the best and most humane motive in mind, to take action (even if only temporary) which would be flatly contrary to its announced policy. It would be a piece of calculated deceit, designed to do by covert means what we have so far been unable to do by persuasion and are unwilling to do by force, viz stop the strikers dying.
- (iii) It would come very close to an admission that HMG's present policy on handling the hunger strike is wrong.

3. In addition there are certain practical problems to be overcome. We have not - for reasons of confidentiality - asked the doctors how much glucose would be needed, in what doses and with what frequency, to prolong a man's life; nor how long it could be

effective. Whatever the answers to those questions may be, someone has to put the glucose in the water - someone who can be trusted to do it secretly and conceal what he has done from his colleagues and the world. The medical staff concerned would refuse on ethical grounds. The prison staff might do it, but it is inconceivable that such an action would not rapidly become known, either by a deliberate leak (Dr Paisley has wide-ranging contacts throughout the Protestant population, and the prison officers are almost wholly Protestant) or by indiscretion. Such publicity would not enhance HMG's reputation for integrity. It might be possible to persuade a regularly visiting priest to do the job (though it would be difficult for him to do it without the prison officer seeing it, even though it could probably be done without the hunger striker's knowledge if he were in a state of extreme deterioration). Nevertheless, it would be taking an enormous risk to trust HMG's public repute to someone whose natural sympathies lay with "the other side".

4. Even if a covert means of adding the glucose could be found, the frequent and regular tests carried out by the medical staff on the strikers' blood and urine would soon reveal to them that some funny business was going on.

5. In short, a British prison does not have the facilities available in a police state to carry out this kind of operation. It is an undertaking which, if it were to be embarked on at all, should only be undertaken in conditions in which total security can be guaranteed. Such conditions do not exist in the Maze - on the contrary, the risks of a leak must be higher in the special circumstances prevailing there than in most other UK prisons.

6. This note is written in terms of keeping one hunger striker alive. But if in practice it meant giving glucose to a number of strikers (at least those furthest along the road), this would seriously compound the whole problem.