JOCK STALLARD MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS LONDON SWIA OAA

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Sent to NIO

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JS/SW

17th June 1981

Dear Frame Minister,

I am writing in my capacity as Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party Northern Ireland Group concerning the continuing situation in the Maze Prison.

Our Group has already stated its firm rejection of political status but is in favour of a "humane and responsive" approach to all aspects of prisoners living and working conditions within a common regime, as mentioned in your Government's statement of 23rd October 1980.

We share the concern expressed recently by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace, inter alia, about the growing resentment in the nationalist community giving rise to increased alienation from Government and creating a climate for recruitment by para-military organisations, particularly amongst the young, and we are also concerned at the evidence of increased polarisation throughout the community in Northern Ireland.

We are also concerned that responsible leaders views and exhortations have not been taken seriously, thus undermining the authority of democratically elected representatives and increasing the threat of more and worse violence.

We therefore appeal to you and your Government to look again at the situation in line with the promise "to keep the situation under review", and we suggest that:

- 1. Prisoners in the Maze, at present permitted to wear their own clothes for part of the time, should be allowed to do so at all times (as in Armagh Prison).
- 2. That some move might be made to increase opportunities for association (as in Portlaoise Prison, for example).
- 3. The question of prison work should be reviewed in order to ensure that the work is of the greatest possible cultural and educational value.

We believe these reforms could be extended to all prisoners and would remove objections raised by those who are opposed to any change in the Maze. Although we have not been able to visit similar establishments in the Republic, we do know that the Government there has been able, by introducing reforms along the above lines, to avert some of the problems which have arisen at the Maze.

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We would, of course, be happy to discuss these suggestions with you at any convenient time. Meantime, we look forward to a reply which will demonstrate that you and your Government are prepared, given the circumstances, to be more flexible in an attempt to restore an atmosphere that will allow responsible leaders here and in Ireland, North and South, to concentrate on finding a peaceful political solution to the tragic problems of Northern Ireland.

In Stalland

Jock Stallard MP Chairman Northern Ireland Group PLP.

Rt Hon M Thatcher MP Prime Minister 10 Downing Street Whitehall LONDON SW1