



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

25 September 1981

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 14 September about the possibility of Fenner Brockway visiting the hunger strikers in Maze Prison.

I am deeply saddened by the waste of lives there has been, not only among the hunger strikers but among the wider community in Northern Ireland, as a result of the tensions and violence which the hunger strike has caused. It is in all our interests to bring the hunger strike to an early end and I fully share your and Fenner Brockway's concern. For that reason I considered his offer very carefully when he originally made it, and have done so again as a result of your letter. I respect the spirit in which he has made his offer, but I remain convinced that it would be wrong to accept it. If he were to negotiate on his own account (without committing the Government to implement whatever he might identify as a possible settlement) he clearly could not succeed. Nor could he act as our intermediary. The Government have made clear throughout that we will not negotiate with the prisoners either directly or through intermediaries because this would concede to the prisoners (and also to their leader who would presumably be appointed their spokesman) a status which we must not accept.

We have made clear on a number of occasions our willingness to make improvements in the prison regime but we are not ready to do so under duress. It is worth emphasising however that the regime is already liberal, and conditions in the prison are by general agreement, of a high standard. We cannot jeopardise our control of the prison by making changes which undermine the position of the prison authorities.

/ I hope you

I hope you will see therefore why for those reasons I regard negotiation as impracticable. Indeed it would be wrong in humanitarian terms if the result were to raise the hope of the prisoners that they might win concessions by persisting with their hunger strike.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

The Rt. Hon. Michael Foot, M.P.