

File
CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 April 1980

Roy,

Marian Price

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute to her of 29 April about the case of Miss Marian Price. We have discussed the problem on the telephone. As you know the Prime Minister, after a little hesitation, has agreed that Mr. Atkins should proceed on the lines proposed.

I am sending copies of this letter to Ian Maxwell (Lord Chancellor's Office), John Chilcot (Home Office), Michael Richardson (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Richard Alexander

Roy Harrington, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



PRIME MINISTER

MARIAN PRICE

This young woman, now aged 26, is the younger of two sisters convicted of two counts of causing an explosion and one of conspiracy to cause explosions in connection with terrorist offences in London in 1973. She is at present in Armagh Prison, to which she was transferred from Great Britain in 1975. She is serving concurrent sentences of 20 years and life imprisonment. Her health, which has been declining for some time, has now reached a state where I am advised that she is in imminent danger of death: an abrupt acceleration in her decline has become apparent within the last 2 days. I have concluded that the right course is to release her on licence.

Both Marian Price and her sister have been suffering for some time from * ~~~~~ * The physical condition of Marian is much the worse, and her case is made more difficult by complex associated psychiatric factors. There is no doubt that her illness is genuine: it is not consciously controlled. Having considered the results of a medical case conference last week which took the views of two independent medical consultants, and having personally discussed the matter with my department's medical adviser, I am satisfied that there is no more that can be done in the prison hospital at Armagh: her physical health is such that she would die quite soon (and her decline would become irreversible before that) while her * ~~~~~ *

I have considered the possibility of transfer to the secure ward at the Musgrave Park Hospital. In her present state of mind she might refuse it (in which case she could not be forced to go and might become conscious that she was challenging us to let her die). But even if she agreed to go, there is no ground for believing that she would recover there. The doctors' judgement is that it will not be possible to arrest her decline in conditions of custody.

To leave her in prison is clearly to sentence her to death. Whatever her offences - which did not include murder - that should not be permitted to happen if it can reasonably be avoided. I am advised on medical grounds that her release on licence is the only course offering a hope of her recovery though recovery is by no means certain, would be very slow and might never be complete in physical or psychological terms. I regard that as the overriding factor but I am also convinced that release on licence is the right course having

* ~ * Passages deleted and closed under
FOI Exemption. (C)Wayland, 4 March 2014

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

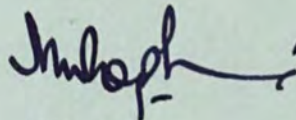
weighted both the political factors and the reasonable expectation of the public that those who commit serious offences must expect severe punishment.

There will, of course, be reactions in Northern Ireland and perhaps also in Great Britain. Many here and abroad will recognise the humanitarian considerations: there would certainly be substantial criticism if she were left to die, which would be the worst outcome in political terms. I believe that criticism of a decision to release can be met by making clear how desperate is her state of health, and how imminent is her death if nothing were done. I would not expect that the Provisional IRA would make much capital either way. The two sisters and their family have avoided publicity and I would expect them to continue to do so, but if she became a PIRA activist she would be liable to recall to prison to continue serving her life sentence.

The case creates no precedent for others (Marian's sister Dolours, though ill, is not in a state requiring removal to an outside hospital or release). Marian Price's case is clearly distinguishable from that of a person voluntarily undertaking a hunger strike, who - as in the case of Frank Stagg - would be allowed to die if he persisted in it.

I am accordingly informing the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice of England (where she was convicted) and of Northern Ireland with a view to releasing her on licence later this week. The balance of the determinate sentence of 20 years to which she is subject would need to be remitted by means of the Royal Prerogative; as the amount of special remission is substantial and the case is likely to attract public comment, the Palace would be informed in advance of any announcement.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Lord Chancellor, the Home Secretary, the Lord Privy Seal and Sir Robert Armstrong.



PP

HA

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

29 April 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL
(Security)
IT IS ORDERED THAT
THIS IS TO BE KEPT IN ORDER

CONFIDENTIAL
The following information is being furnished to you for your information only. It is not to be disseminated outside your organization without the express written consent of the originator. This information is being furnished to you under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552, and is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was originally intended. It is the policy of the Department of Defense to release information to the maximum extent possible without prejudice to the national defense. This information is being furnished to you under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552, and is not to be used for any purpose other than that for which it was originally intended. It is the policy of the Department of Defense to release information to the maximum extent possible without prejudice to the national defense.

29 APR 1960

11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

CONFIDENTIAL