

Ireland

Prime Minister. Mr Atkins was just for questions
in the House yesterday but the Marian
Price affair was not mentioned.

MR. ALEXANDER

for
- Shaw

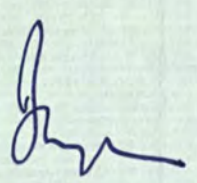
Shaw
- 9/5

David Gilliland of NIO telephoned today about the Marian Price affair and, more particularly, the Sun's leader page comment. He said that, while the Price release might cause us difficulty in England, the temperature on the subject in Northern Ireland was very low indeed. The Protestant majority were not making anything of it.

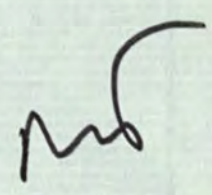
Moreover, he believed that the English newspapers were putting the wrong interpretation upon her being out of danger. He believed that it referred to her being out of physical danger, since she clearly remained very ill.

However, Mr. Gilliland said that one of the major Irish Catholic magazines published today praises Mr. Atkins' intelligent and flexible handling of present problems and, more specifically, of the release of Marian Price as a good humanitarian move and evidence of his common-sense approach to problems.

Mr. Gilliland said that on the whole it was one of the best articles they had had in a newspaper widely read by the Catholic and Republican community which is exactly the target they needed to hit.



B. INGHAM



9 May, 1980

CONFIDENTIAL
From THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

Prime Minister. (2)
See in particular the final
paragraph. *Print*

7/5 May 1980

For Print

Dear Mr. Alexander

MARIAN PRICE

You inquired earlier today about the editorial piece about Marian Price in this morning's issue of 'The Sun'.

To the best of our knowledge this is a speculative piece based on stale information, the source of which can be traced back to what was said to the Press by a member of the staff of the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast (RVH), on the basis of Marian's stay in that hospital last week. It does not reflect any up-to-date information in the hands of 'The Sun'.

... There was a more helpful comment in last week's 'Sunday Telegraph', a copy of which I enclose.

The medical advice on which the Secretary of State decided to release her, and to which the article refers, was quite specific: had she been kept in prison she would have died but if released she had a chance of recovery. She is not under statutory or other formal supervision, but our information is that the medical advice is being borne out: she is making a recovery. Our chief concern is that she avoids any re-involvement with the PIRA. Such evidence as we have since her release indicates that her allegiance to PIRA is at ebb. This evidence confirms the intelligence assessment which my Secretary of State considered before deciding to release her on licence.

Finally, the Prime Minister will wish to know that although Marian went to a hospital outside Dublin after being recognised in the RVH, she has since returned to Belfast. And in this respect we place some confidence in the involvement of Cardinal O'Fiaich, with whom we continue to keep in touch.

*Yours sincerely
Mary Wright*

MRS MARY WRIGHT

CONFIDENTIAL

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

4 5 80

Tempering Justice

MR ATKINS should not be reproached for his decision to release Marian Price from Armagh prison, where she

has been serving a life sentence for her part in the Old Bailey bombing in 1973. The girl, it would seem, is desperately ill and such possibility of survival as she may have depends on her release from custody. She is not now trying to put pressure on the authorities by refusing to eat or engaging in any other kind of self-abnegating protest: but to leave her where she is would be to convert a life sentence into a death sentence. Moreover, she can be brought back, without trial, if she shows any signs of reverting to terrorist activity.

Humanity, in such an extreme case, should make it easier rather than harder for the Government to stick to its flat refusal to grant political status to those prisoners who are trying to further their cause by fouling their cells and engaging in other nauseating forms of "moral blackmail."