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VLB

Ireland

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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

11 November 1980

Dear Lord Browder,

Thank you for your letter of 25 October about Miss Dolours Price. I am fully aware of the close personal interest which you have taken in her and her sister, Marian, over a number of years.

I have read your letter and its eloquent plea on behalf of Dolours. I have sent a copy of it, and the enclosure, to Humphrey Atkins so that he is aware of what you have said and what Dolours has written. I recognise that you are convinced that Dolours has renounced violence, and this will certainly be taken into account when her case is reviewed by Northern Ireland Office Ministers. As you know, however, she is still subject not only to the life sentence imposed in England in 1973, but also to a concurrent sentence of twenty years' imprisonment for conspiracy to cause explosions. Even allowing for the half-remission system which applies in Northern Ireland, this sentence will not run out until 1983.

I have made enquiries about Dolours' current state of health. She suffers from periods of depression, severe at times, but the doctors consider that she is a much tougher personality than her sister. Fortunately neither her mental nor physical health is giving cause for serious concern at present, but the prison medical officer (who can call on expert consultant advice as and when he thinks it necessary or desirable to do so) and the nursing and other staff at the prison will continue to keep a close but friendly eye on her.

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I do understand that Dolours must be feeling a sense of greater isolation following her sister's release. I am afraid, however, that in view of the current medical reports which I have described, there are not sufficient grounds for releasing her on licence from the life sentence and remitting the balance of the concurrent fixed term.

I should perhaps add, lest there is any doubt in your mind on the point, that Dolours Price is accommodated in a separate part of Armagh Prison along with two other remaining women special category prisoners. The accommodation which these prisoners have is exceptionally comfortable by prison standards - they have free access to a very well-equipped kitchen. They are entirely separated from the women taking part in the dirty protest action.

I am returning herewith, as you requested, Dolours' letter to you.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Webster

The Lord Brockway

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

2 November 1980

Letter to mine

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 29 October with which you enclosed a copy of one from Lord Brockway about Miss Dolours Price, together with a copy of a letter which she had sent to him.

I attach a draft reply for the Prime Minister's consideration. I am afraid that as Armagh is the only prison in Northern Ireland for women (there are only 61 women prisoners altogether), there is no prospect of moving Miss Price to other surroundings. We expect to open a new prison for women at Maghaberry, Co Antrim, in about September 1982, but that will still be the only women's prison as Armagh will then be closed.

We have confirmed that Marian Price has visited her sister only four times since she was released on 30 April. She visited twice in July, on 1 October and 3 November. I am afraid that neither we nor the prison concerned can say why Marian has not visited her sister more frequently. It may be that she does not find it a happy experience to return to the prison where she spent nearly five years, but this is no more than conjecture on our part.

The Prime Minister will wish to know that the latest medical reports give no cause for serious concern about Dolours Price's condition. She does suffer from periods of depression, indeed despair at times, but her depression is of the reactive type and is not a constant feature of her condition. She is not regarded as a serious suicide risk. We shall of course continue to keep the case under close review.

Dolours Price is one of only three women special category prisoners at Armagh. She has a cell of her own, is nowhere near the women taking part in the dirty protest and has free access to an excellent kitchen.

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

DRAFT LETTER

FILE NUMBER.....

ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE.....

<p>To</p> <p>The Lord Brookway House of Lords London SW1</p> <p>(Full Postal Address)</p>	<p>Enclosures</p>	<p>Copies to be sent to</p> <p>(Full Address, if Necessary)</p>
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LETTER DRAFTED FOR SIGNATURE BY The PRIME MINISTER
(Name of Signatory)

Thank you for your letter of 25 October about Miss Dolours Price. I am fully aware of the close personal interest which you have taken in this girl and her sister, Marian, over a number of years.

I have taken careful note of the points you make on behalf of Dolours Price. I have sent a copy of your letter, and the enclosure, to Humphrey Atkins so that he is aware of what you have said. I recognise that you are sincerely convinced that Dolours has renounced violence, and this will certainly be taken into account when her case is reviewed by Northern Ireland Office Ministers. As you know, however, she is still subject not only to the life sentence imposed in England in 1973, but also to a concurrent sentence of twenty years' imprisonment for conspiracy to cause explosions. Even allowing for the half-remission system which applies in Northern Ireland, this sentence will not run out until 1983.

I have made enquiries about Dolours Price's current state of health. She does suffer from periods of depression, severe at times, but

The doctors consider that she is a much tougher personality than her sister. Neither her mental nor her physical health is giving cause for serious concern at present, but it goes without saying that the prison medical officer (who can call on expert consultant advice as and when he thinks it necessary or desirable to do so) and the nursing and other staff at the prison will continue to keep a close but friendly eye on her.

I do understand that Dolours must be feeling a sense of greater isolation following her sister's release. I am afraid, however, that in view of the current medical reports which I have described, there are not sufficient grounds for releasing her on licence from the life sentence and remitting the balance of the concurrent fixed term.

I should perhaps add, lest there is any doubt in your mind on the point, that Dolours Price is accommodated in a separate part of Armagh Prison along with two other remaining women special category prisoners. The accommodation which these prisoners have is exceptionally comfortable by prison standards - they have free access to a very well-equipped kitchen. They are entirely separated from the women taking part in the dirty protest action.

I am returning herewith, as you requested, Dolours' letter to you.

Paul

