



cc: N10

Ireland

DSG

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

11 December 1980

Dear Ferrer,

Thank you for your further letter of 26 November about Dolours Price. You asked if she could be allowed a short period of leave over the Christmas period.

For many years there has been an arrangement in Northern Ireland under which certain sentenced prisoners can be considered for a few days' leave at Christmas. However, for a number of years the general rule has been that prisoners serving life sentences are not considered for this (or any of the various other forms of short home leave) until they have been given a provisional date for their release on licence.

This means, I am afraid, that Dolours is not eligible for consideration for leave at Christmas under the scheme as it operates at present. You will, I am sure, understand that any exception made in her case would have to be considered for other prisoners who have been detained for long periods under life sentences and sentences of detention during the Secretary of State's pleasure.

Humphrey Atkins is aware of this correspondence and has taken note of your enquiry.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd) Margaret Thatcher

The Lord Brockway.

BK

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

10 December 1980

Type for PM's signature

Dear Michael

On 27 November you wrote to Roy Harrington enclosing a request from Lord Brockway that Miss Dolours Price should have a short period of leave this Christmas. I am sorry that I was not able to reply within the period given.

There is a scheme in Northern Ireland (introduced by the Northern Ireland Government in 1948 and continued by successive administrations under Direct Rule) under which certain prisoners can be considered for a few days leave, normally about 5 days, at Christmas. However the practice for some years has been to exclude from considerations life sentence prisoners who have not been given a provisional date of release. Apart from the seriousness of such prisoners' offences, the view has been that there must be a risk that, with no definite date of discharge to look forward to, they may be tempted to abscond. In the case of fixed-sentence prisoners, leave is only considered for prisoners in the last stages of their sentence.

This means that Dolours Price is not eligible for consideration for Christmas leave. Any concession granted to her would, in fairness, have to be considered for other prisoners serving indeterminate sentences who have been in prison for a long time. There are at least twenty male "lifers" who have been in prison for as long or longer than Miss Price (for 14½ years in the cases of Gusty Spence and Robert Williamson, convicted of the murder of a Roman Catholic barman in 1966).

It so happens that we are at present having a fresh look at the policy in regard to the grant of leave of various kinds to life sentence prisoners who have been in prison for a number of years, but it is scarcely conceivable that this review will be completed by Christmas or - even if it is - that it will lead to any reconsideration of the position of Dolours Price, at any rate so far as this year is concerned.

I attach a draft reply to Lord Brockway for the Prime Minister's consideration.

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

DRAFT LETTER

FILE NUMBER.....

ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE.....

To

Lord Brockway
House of Lords
London SW1

(Full Postal Address)

Enclosures

Copies to be sent to

*Not entered
await covering
letter
N/O to MODSRI 10/12 (?)*

(Full Address, if Necessary)

LETTER DRAFTED FOR SIGNATURE BY PRIME MINISTER
(Name of Signatory)

Thank you for your further letter of 26 November about ~~Miss~~ Dolours Price. You asked if she could be allowed a short period of leave over the Christmas period.

For many years there has been an arrangement in Northern Ireland under which certain sentenced prisoners can be considered for a few days' leave at Christmas. However, for a number of years the general rule has been that prisoners serving life sentences are not considered for this (or any of the various other forms of short home leave) until they have been given a provisional date for their release on licence.

E.R.

Downs
This means, I am afraid, that ~~Miss Price~~ is not eligible for consideration for leave at Christmas under the scheme as it operates at present. You will, I am sure, understand that any exception made in her case would have to be considered for other prisoners who have been detained for long periods under life sentences and sentences of detention during the Secretary of State's pleasure.

Humphrey Atkins is aware of this correspondence and has taken note of your enquiry. ~~on Miss Price's behalf.~~

Ireland.

27 November, 1980.

I enclose a copy of a further letter which the Prime Minister has received from Lord Brockway about Dolours Price. I should be grateful if you could let me have the text of a reply which the Prime Minister might send to Lord Brockway by Wednesday, 3 December.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Roy Harrington, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office. }

RRB

C.F. 9

R27
PPS



26-11-80

House of Lords · Westminster

Dear Prime Minister,

Dolores Price

Thank you for your letter. I very much appreciated your detailed consideration.

May I add one suggestion. Could she not be allowed Christmas leave? I am sure she would return.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Penner Brockway