

CONFIDENTIAL

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Prime Minister

The Home Secretary is unable to
agree to the early release of the
Gillespie sisters.

HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT

-6 JUL 1983

Dear John,

A.T.C. 7/2

Thank you for your letter of 21 June about the release of the Gillespie sisters.

The Home Secretary is very sympathetic to the views of the Irish Government in asking for the early release of the Gillespie sisters and would like to be helpful, even if, as seems likely, early release would not actually frustrate the demonstration that the Provisionals are planning. (It would be very difficult to guarantee that a new date of release could be effectively concealed from those planning the demonstration; and once they knew of it, the date of the demonstration could be changed accordingly.)

Unfortunately, however, there is no means available of giving effect to the request unobtrusively by administrative action. If there were, the Home Secretary would be prepared to take such action. The only way in which it would be possible to effect the early release of the Gillespie sisters for this purpose would be for the Home Secretary to recommend the exercise of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. His predecessor considered a plea for the early release of the Gillespie sisters on compassionate grounds in March this year, so that they could visit their father on his deathbed, but felt obliged to refuse. It would in the Home Secretary's view be inappropriate for him to recommend to The Queen the use of the Royal Prerogative for the kind of purpose that is now suggested.

The Home Secretary appreciates that this will come as a disappointment to the Irish Government, but hopes that they will understand the reasons why he feels unable to help. If there are any further considerations which they wish to put forward, he would of course be ready to look at the matter again; but on present information he could not justify the action suggested.

I am sending a copy of this letter to John Lyon.

Yours ever,

Tony Rawsthorne

A R RAWSTHORNE

7 JUL 1983



CONFIDENTIAL

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



BF

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

A R Rawsthorne Esq
Private Secretary/
Home Secretary
50 Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON SW1H 9AT

24 June 1983

Dear Tony,

*Await Home Secretary's
view. A.J.C. 27/6.*

RELEASE OF GILLESPIE SISTERS

John Holmes copied to me his letter of 21 June on Anglo-Irish relations which referred to the case of the Gillespie sisters currently serving terms of imprisonment in Styal Prison, Manchester.

Mr Prior agrees strongly that we should follow the course proposed by Mr Barry. It was the main point in Mr Barry's mind when Mr Prior spoke to him recently and Mr Prior considers it would considerably help to improve relations if we could assist. Quite apart from the advantage to Anglo-Irish relations which might accrue at minimal cost it is in our interests to counter a Sinn Fein demonstration which will likely be used for propaganda purposes in Northern Ireland. As you know, Sinn Fein derived much publicity from their showing in the General Election and the reception for the Gillespie sisters which Mr Barry has predicted would further encourage the morale of the party's supporters.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes and to John Coles at Number 10.

Yours ever,

John

J M LYON

NH

CONFIDENTIAL

Ireland
Apr 80
Price sisters

24 JUN 1985

111/12 11
100 11
99 2
88 3
77 4
GG 55

Ireland



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

21 June 1983

RF
 Annul Home Secretary
 ref. M 2/6

Dear Tony,

Anglo-Irish Relations

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary met the Irish Foreign Minister for half an hour in the margins of the European Council in Stuttgart on 19 June. I enclose an account of their talk.

You will see that Mr Barry made the suggestion that the Gillespie sisters might be released a little before the time expected, in the hope of disrupting a demonstration planned by the Provisionals to mark their coming home to Donegal. Supposing that the Gillespie sisters were imprisoned in Northern Ireland, Sir Geoffrey Howe undertook to pass this suggestion on to Mr Prior. I understand, however, that they are in Styal Women's Prison in Manchester and it would presumably fall to the Home Secretary to authorise their release.

From the FCO point of view there would be attractions in doing as Mr Barry proposed. The Irish authorities have shown that they are a little suspicious of our attitude towards the Provisional Sinn Fein and to do as Mr Barry suggests in this instance would help reassure them. It seems likely also that a successful demonstration in Donegal might further raise PSF morale in Northern Ireland. That cannot be in our interests - though clearly the extent to which PSF demonstrations would be undermined by early release cannot be very certain.

Perhaps you could let me know the Home Secretary's view. If officials need to be in touch about it, Republic of Ireland Department here (Patrick Evers - 233 3994) would be the best point of contact. I should add that if the difficulties are insuperable Sir Geoffrey Howe would in any case wish to give Mr Barry a reasoned reply.

/I am sending



I am sending copies of this letter to John Lyon at the Northern Ireland Office and John Coles at Number 10.

Your ever

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Holmes", written in a cursive style.

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A R Rawsthorne Esq
PS/Home Secretary
50 Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON SW1H 9AT





10 DOWNING STREET

CF -
to note
for meeting
for.

Pine Myster.

Mr Pinar would
like a brief meeting
about this case.

Agree?

—

JF

NB

meeting

Cancelled due
to election

3/5

Yes

Steve

7/5/85

Tim

Earthen

15.45

on

12th

Nov. at 4.15.

Could you arrange
pse. 15 minutes

T.

1974
Cause: explosion
Dunne

2

SD IRA

PRIME MINISTER

I understand from the Home Office that there is considerable pressure for the convicted IRA terrorists, the Gillespie sisters, who are at present in Styal Prison, to be released to attend the funeral of their father in the Republic on Sunday. The pressure comes from the Government of the Republic, from the SDLP and Cardinal O'Fiaich, etc. Although the Gillespie sisters are due to be released in August, the Home Secretary has taken the view that he could not possibly agree to the temporary release of convicted IRA terrorists to the Republic, even so close to their final release date. The Home Secretary thought, however, in view of the likely publicity, you might like to be aware of his decision.

15 April, 1983.