

CONFIDENTIAL

RH



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 October, 1980

Dolours Price

I enclose a copy of a letter the Prime Minister has received from Lord Brockway about Dolours Price, together with a copy of a letter to Lord Brockway from Miss Price.

The Prime Minister has seen these letters. She would like to send a sympathetic reply, but without giving any undertaking to act at present. The Prime Minister has asked whether there would be any possibility of moving Dolours Price to another prison were Miss Price to request this. She has also expressed surprise that Marian Price visits her sister so rarely. Do we have any background on the reasons for this?

I should be grateful if you could let me have a draft reply by close of play on Thursday, 6 November.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Roy Harrington, Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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JS

You are overwhelmed,
but please read.



Bonnie Minister.
This Bonnie's letter indicates that she is a woman of some intelligence: the N.I.O. confirms this. I gather it is true that she has disassociated herself from her former collaborators. She will probably claim maximum remission i.e. a date for release in 1983. To seek earlier release would involve using the royal prerogative which would hardly be justified on present evidence even supposing we felt inclined to try. If you agree, I will ask the N.I.O. to provide a reply on standard lines.

① I am amazed that Marian goes to see her so rarely. That itself must be disturbing for a while.

② Can she be moved if she requests?
The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.
10 Downing Street,
London S.W.1.

③ She says 'mentally' I will live or leave each day with them? Is sympathy still seen to be there?

④ One person was killed

⑤ I doubt whether her friends will let her alone when she is out.

Sympathetic doubt please, but doubt whether we can do anything.

Dolours Price

I do not like doing things behind anyone's back, and therefore I asked the permission of Humphrey Atkins to write to you. He readily agreed.

You may remember that eight years ago Dolours and Marian Price received life sentences for being involved in a bombing outrage outside the Old Bailey. Marian was a teenager and Dolours just 22, and they were caught up in adolescent emotion as Catholics by the I.R.A. It says something for them that they insisted that if they took part no human being would suffer. In fact one person was killed, but it is generally recognised that this was due to a fault in the exchange of information in London after a warning had been given. When I have seen the girls since they were both deeply distressed that this casualty should have occurred.

When they were on remand at Brixton Prison they went on hunger strike to demand that they be imprisoned in their homeland in Northern Ireland. They were then heroines among the Republicans, and I knew that if they died there would be Hell to pay in Ireland. I therefore saw Mr. Roy Jenkins, the Home Secretary, and he agreed that I could go to see the girls and urge them to stop their hunger strike, promising that they would shortly be sent to Northern Ireland.

I saw the girls and succeeded in convincing them to end their hunger strike. On this I was complimented in the House of Lords by the ex-Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, who agreed that I had prevented a serious situation there. Disappointed in the delay in sending them to Ulster, the girls renewed their hunger strike. I had then been informed

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25th Oct. 1980

House of Lords · Westminster

that their mother was terminally ill and was distressed by their refusing food. I saw the girls, and then, ~~not~~ revealing my knowledge, they agreed to discuss the matter with their father. I got permission from Roy Jenkins for their father to see them next day, and in consequence they stopped their hunger strike.

From the first I reached an accord with the girls, and they trusted me. Although I am a Humanist, I became almost their spiritual adviser. Dolours wrote to me every week on their behalf, and in my replies I discreetly sought to influence them against violence and the I.R.A. Last year I visited them in Armagh Prison, and I was overjoyed to know that they had now become convinced that violence was wrong.

Marian has subsequently been released on health grounds and Dolours is left isolated in Armagh Prison, not only because she has lost Marian, but because she declines to take part in the "dirty" protest which the other I.R.A. prisoners are pursuing. Her recent letters to me show that she is deeply upset psychologically.

I have been deeply impressed by the mental qualities of the girls and by their personalities. I am quite sure that if Dolours were released she would become active, despite the dangers, in urging her fellow Catholics to refrain from violence. Indeed, in a recent letter she is longing for release in order to urge action for peace.

I am sorry to have written this long letter, but I know you will respond sympathetically. You know how I disagree with you politically, but I always remember your kindness when I was in the House of Commons, and have no doubt about your human feelings.

With good personal wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Penny Brockway

P.S. I enclose a letter just received from Dolours. It illustrates her condition of mind and her convictions. Please return. P.



In replying to this letter, please address the envelope as follows:

Number Name Dobson

..... Armagh .. Prison

20 Somethings
October 1980.

Dear Fenner,

It is such a long time since I last wrote, every day is such a long time to me now and each day I fill with nothing except my tears and heartache and weariness. I move as a clockwork doll, on and on and on 'til exhaustion and, perhaps, sleep overtake me. I am a soul wandering in the darkness, eternally on the precipice, always unsteady on my feet knowing that at any moment I may fall into the abyss. I am trying to put the time in but nothing constructive is left to me, I have no thoughts for "usefulness" all I can achieve now is activity, occupation of time and that by ceaseless movement, anything so that I need not think. It is a form of escape for me, although ultimately I must face the reality, I know it but as yet am unable to face it, it lurks in the background a grey phantom - I close my eyes if I perchance glimpse it. November approaches, I have myself geared up for the momentous dates - 14th, seven years ago, seems like seven million. Then to December and my 30th birthday on the 16th. 30 is a marker in any woman's life, for me it is more, it means almost all my twenties wasted in prison, it means no babies and my fruitful years passing by me, it means a natural instinct thwarted for so long perhaps never to be fulfilled. I don't think Secretaries of State think along those lines, unless they are women!! It does hurt me deeply and badly

and will scar the rest of my life. Marian comes to visit me very rarely, she will visit this week for only the third time since her release. It is the most awful ordeal to part when the visit ends, I cling, she clings, but in the end we must go our separate ways - she to the front gate, me to my cell - it is not fair Fenner, we both suffered enough and are deserving of some mercy, was blood with the flesh in the contract? I will have served eight years in March, even murderers don't serve that, I am doing life for causing an explosion, some people get away with four years for the same charge, the system is not fair or just. I no longer even pay lip service to any organisation, I am made to suffer for that too, each day I live my solitary life and am made to feel an outcast, a traitor to their cause because I have declared it to be no longer mine. I am feeling very, very sorry for myself. All this potential trouble we can expect if there is a hunger strike in 'H' Block has my nerves shattered, it is such an emotional theme with me, am I to live through all those awful memories, I will be eating (as well as any anorexic can!) but mentally I will live and starve each day with them, thank God they will never face the horror of force feeding. Fenner, I must be away before this thing develops, if not in body I think my mind will retreat into some dark corner to hide from it. People are going to die, always people are made to die, if not physically then mentally. I want to live, to love life again, to survive - help me to do that, to speak up for life not for death - I must be allowed to do that. I can't do it here. I am chained to a wall and my voice echos back to me from wire tapped walls. Write, I need you now more than ever, I was strong in Brighton, now I am weak.

love

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