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Statement by Protesting Prisoners, 7th August, 1981.

We, the Republican prisoners in the H-Block have been asked to elaborate on July 4th's statement. We again reiterate we are not seeking elitist or preferential treatment. Secondly, we are not seeking to take over the prison. To suggest otherwise would be ludicrous. With the fundamental British policy ^{not} in question, there is no acceptable reason why a solution as envisaged in this statement should not be implemented.

The British refusal to settle leaves us with no alternative but to continue this strategy. Their defiance, based on the reality that an obvious and principled solution exists, challenges the authority of every body concerned in Ireland. It is our opinion that every authority has pursued a moderate approach which the British have treated as weakness and dismissed contemptuously. If further deaths are to be avoided, more vigorous pressure will have to be applied to the British by the Irish authorities, namely the Dublin Government, the S.D.L.P. and the Catholic Church.

There is a vast difference between prison conditions and the prison system. Prisoners can be held in decent conditions but still be treated as sub-human. We are convinced that

our prisoners are entitled as human beings to retain their dignity and self respect.

No elaboration is needed on the clothing demand. Prison clothes are either abolished or retained. As we have pointed out, it takes good-will and the all-important desire which breeds respect to end this issue. We have already said that what the regime regards as work, we do not.

The Government's "what happens when the protest ends" statement compounds our point that the prisoners are an unopinionated, robotic object in their eyes, something whose entire life is totally programmed. This Government's attitude is wrong and can only lead to more death.

As pointed out in our July 4th statement, we are prepared to clean our wings and blocks. We are also willing to paint our blocks. We are prepared to do our own laundry, if facilities are made available in our own blocks. Also given the facilities, we are prepared to do our own cooking within our own block.

The term 'self education' seems to have caused some confusion. Basically, we define self-education as the

right to choose how you feel you should be educated and what subjects you should pursue in your education. It must be realised that while the Government recognise education as work, it is almost impossible to participate in cultural or academic activities during the working day. In fact, a prisoner has to forfeit his association to attend a class. Day-time education is only available for the educationally sub-normal.

The machination for an educated system as is envisaged by us already exists. We envisage an educational system where prisoners having proven outstanding tutorial ability can blend with outside teachers to provide an excellent educational system. It is fact that the Irish language which was originally only limited to a few prisoners has been taught by the aforementioned prisoners to eighty per cent of all blanket men. So successful has this self education system been, that Irish has virtually replaced English as the principle language in the protesting blocks. Likewise, there are blanket men who are exceptionally adept in handicraft and blanket men who are accomplished musicians, all of whom would be willing to pass on their knowledge. The primary orientated education would be the

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Irish language, culture and history. Also, we would like to have the best of the wide range of educational subjects which are available at present to the conforming prisoners.

There will be prisoners taking A and O'level examinations and open university examinations and teachers will be needed to provide specialist education. We do not object to this.

As can be seen, a substantial degree of compatibility exists. But it takes the Government to meet us half-way, as we have met them as illustrated above.

We are not going to engage in unrewarding and demeaning work. There is no reason why we should not have the freedom of the wing for association between the hours of lock-up. It would be of benefit educationally and with prison officers guaranteed immunity from attack or rebuke. The supervisory roles would not be diminished.

Segregation is a must if any degree of harmony is to exist within the prison. Wing visits should not

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present any problems to the authorities. Letters, visits and parcels are, at present, a privilege to conforming prisoners, to be withdrawn as the regime sees fit. We would like them to be a right. Remission, as we pointed out, is only a by-product of this issue. There is no reason why full remission cannot be restored.

We call on all concerned in this issue, the British, the Dublin Government, the S.D.L.P. and the Church and all bodies who are involved in this issue, to respond to this statement. It should not be disregarded solely because we wrote it.