

RESTRICTED

1. Miss McGowan
2. Mr Jackson
3. PS/Mr Alison (B)
- 1/6/80*
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MINISTER'S LETTERS TO PROTESTERS' NEXT OF KIN

As it is now a month since the next of kin received their letters from the Minister I have prepared an appraisal of their impact so far. Mr Alison will recall that letters were issued in respect of 355 male protesters and 31 females; no letters were sent to the relatives of the 5 loyalist male protesters.

2. We know that, apart from the terrorist organisations, the main source of support for the protesters comes from relatives; however a significant number of these are thought to be less than fully committed and a few oppose the protest. It may be assumed then that the degree of response to the Minister's letter should give some indication as to the active degree of support there may be. Although a trickle of replies and returned letters are still coming in, it is therefore somewhat surprising that so little comment has as yet been received. However, rather than become too sanguine about this, it is worth noting that at least one relative of each Armagh protester has signed a propaganda sheet which Frank Maguire forwarded to the Secretary of State on 28 May.

3. The first written 'reply' came from Mr Clarke of Letterkenny, Co Donegal, who returned Mr Alison's letter endorsed with the legend, "I have never heard as much bull shit in all my life"! Mrs McCool from Londonderry, who has 2 sons protesting, next responded negatively by refusing to accept the letter. After this, the number of 'responses' increased in variety, including letters written in reply, abusive scrawlings on returned Minister's letters, a shredded copy of the letter and letters returned through changes of address.

4. Ten relatives have so far written in reply; some were quite abusive and suitably inscribed their epistles with republican slogans; others were more reasonable. All, however, affirmed their unwavering support for full "political status" and most repeated as 'indisputable' facts some of the false allegations put out by the protesters. In view of this we do not consider that it is worthwhile trying to prolong correspondence with these particular writers. They have therefore been thanked for their letters and told that their comments have been noted. Should there be any instance in which a relative expresses

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doubt at the wisdom of the protest or indicate opposition to it, then we shall, of course, reply. Mr Alison did ask in particular about the allegations made by Mrs Quinn and a submission is attached together with a suitable draft official reply, if the Minister would like one to be issued.

5. In addition to the letters mentioned, 2 further replies have been received. That tireless propagandist, Mrs Hinchey of the Dungiven Relatives Action Committee, was unable to pass over the opportunity of replying, though she was not sent a letter. Another person sent a 4-page essay but her surname has been written illegibly in Irish. Interestingly she did include a copy of the counter letter issued by the H Block Information Centre on 5 May 1980 in reply to Mr Alison (copy attached). The letter is of very poor quality and, though our copy was apparently unsigned, others were evidently signed by Kieran Nugent and another released protester. This letter does indicate that PIRA/PSF took Mr Alison's letter seriously enough to warrant their equivalent of a Minister's case!

6. As for the remaining forms of response, one recipient returned his letter covered in republican slogans and with a suggestion that the Minister might be headed for a hotter location. Another returned his letter with an abusive 'reply' on the back. The McClenaghan family returned their letter torn to pieces; the writing on the unstamped covering envelope was that of Miss Margaret McClenaghan, from whom the Minister will recall we have had much tendentious correspondence. Nine letters have been returned by the Post Office, marked gone away/not known; for 8 of these, Special Branch have been able to supply new addresses and we have sent these letters to their new destinations.

7. It is, of course, not known what effect the letters may have had on the great majority of recipients who have not so far replied to us, though this may in time become clear. Within the prisons, there is some suggestion that at Maze the letters have been an influence on the recent reduction in the number of dirty protesters.

8. I shall keep you in touch with any further developments.

A K Templeton

A K Templeton
Division 4 (B)

6 June 1980

cc PS/S of S (B & L)
PS/Mr Alison (L)
PS/PUS (B & L)
Mr Hannigan
Mr Marshall
Mr Barry
Mr Wyatt

Mr Moriarty
Mr Gilliland
Mr Buxton
Mr Truesdale
Miss MacGlashan
Mr Beattie