

National H-Block/Armagh Committee

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PRESS STATEMENT

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REPLY to Mr. Michael ALISON

The British government will make no compromise in face of the H-Block/Armagh prison protest, the House of Commons was told on Wednesday by Mr. Michael Alison, Northern Ireland Minister of State, who added, "I find it difficult to believe that the prisoners do not understand this."

The British government has never itself understood Ireland and Mr. Alison is no exception. Otherwise, he would not find it so difficult to understand the H-Block/Armagh prison protest. What is more, Mr. Alison does not want to understand the problem. It is British policy not to understand the problem - otherwise, they would have to accept the fact that the prison issue is political and face the reality that the prisoners are political prisoners.

British policy is crystal clear to the prisoners as to the vast majority of Irish people. It is the policy of all occupying British forces the world over, that is, to portray all opposition to their unjust authority as 'ordinary crime', and the people who take part in that opposition as 'criminals'.

The wonder is that Britain can be so thickskulled, even for her own sake, as to allow another hunger strike, potentially more serious than the last one. Surely they can see that the consequences will only serve to confirm the view that the prison issue is essentially part of the political arena of the north and that there is a fundamental difference between the Republican prisoner and the common criminal. What more evidence will be necessary to prove the case for political status?

Already, five years endurance of a prison protest, unique in history, and a hunger strike for 53 days have awoken, both North and South, strong feelings of sympathy for the prisoners. Also, there is a considerable strengthening of conviction that what is really at stake is an all-out British attempt to eliminate every peaceful and moral challenge to their unhappy authority.

Fr. Piaras O Duill
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