

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code: 2005/151/716

Title: Information note on Francis Stagg [Frank Stagg, convicted at Birmingham Crown Court in the United Kingdom on 1 November 1974 on a charge of criminal damage, conspiring to commit arson and management of Coventry Unit of the IRA], referring in particular to his hunger strike while in Long Lartin Prison, Worcestershire, England.

Creation Date(s): [October 1974]

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 3 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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Mr Francis Stagg

Francis Stagg born Co. Mayo 1942; arrested on 16 April 1973 in Coventry and tried in Birmingham June 1973, together with Fr Fell and five others. Convicted on 1st November 1974 on charge of conspiring to commit arson, conspiring to commit criminal damage and taking part in control and management of the Coventry Unit of the IRA.

During the trial the prosecution alleged that Stagg was the commanding officer of the Unit. The evidence against him consisted mainly of maps found in his possession with targets for attack marked on them and also indication of his association with co-accused.

At the trial, Stagg stated he believed in a United Ireland but not in the use of force. He claimed that the group was formed to be ready to go to Ireland to back up police and military in the event of civil war consequent on British withdrawal. He admitted membership of the Coventry Barnes and McCormack Cumann of Sinn Fein.

Imposing sentence of ten years on 1 November 1974, Judge Ashworth stated that Stagg was not as blameworthy as Fr Fell but he was passing deterrent sentences to mark the extremely grave nature of the crime. Leave to appeal was sought in June 1974 on grounds of disparity between the sentence imposed on Stagg (and his co-defendant Lynch) and sentences passed in other similar cases, but this leave was refused, the Judge stating that the case had to be seen against a background in which the rule of law and order had been endangered by criminal acts of the IRA.

On the 30th March previously, Stagg with Holmes and Gaughan went on hunger strike lasting 69 days for improved facilities and political prisoner status. Stagg did not want to be moved to Northern Ireland as the Price Sisters were asking at this time, but to the mainland (from Parkhurst Prison on the Isle of Whight). He was reportedly close to death when he came off hunger strike apparently on orders from the IRA following the death of Michael Gaughan. Approximately six weeks later

he was moved to Long Lartin Prison, Worstershire.

He is now on hunger strike once again since October 6 in protest against body searches (which oblige him to completely strip) before he is allowed to see visitors. Newspaper reports from which the bulk of the information regarding Stagg has been obtained, indicate that the Home Office has said that such searches are not unusual for "A category" prisoners such as Stagg. He has, however, been told by the Prison Governor that he will be searched in this manner before and after every visit in the future, according to his sister. According to newspaper reports the Home Office could not comment on this specific claim that all future searches would be strip searches, but said that it was a matter for discretion of the Jail Governor

The latest official information on Stagg was obtained in a low profile enquiry made by the London Embassy through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 23 October 1974. It confirmed that Stagg is on hunger strike but is at present taking water. The Embassy was informed that in accordance with the principles set out in the Home Secretary's July statement Stagg has been formally warned in front of a witness that he is considered to be rational and that the Prison Authorities have no obligation to feed him. To date he has refused all medical tests except weight. According to the FCO which obtained its information from the Home Office he is at present 30 lbs. heavier than he was at the termination of his hunger strike at Albany Prison on the Isle of Whight last year.

One of Stagg's reasons for going on hunger strike is his claim that he is stripped naked when being searched. FCO state that, in fact, the procedure for searching a prisoner is that he is requested first of all to remove the top half of his clothing, when these have been examined he is then allowed to put them back on and he is then requested to remove the lower half of his clothing.

With regard to the report that Stagg has requested to be sent to Northern Ireland, the FCO state that no formal request has been made to the Prison Authorities at Long Lartin. However, they are aware that he has mentioned this request to the medical officer at the Prison. Last July the Embassy was informed by the FCO that Stagg had formally applied on 2nd July 1974 for transfer to Northern Ireland. He had received a reply from the Home Secretary informing him that his request was being kept under review.

FCO also stated that Stagg had, some time ago, made an issue of not being allowed to have gramophone records. FCO explained that records were forbidden to him because they are made from a highly inflammable material.

On the question of visiting the FCO specified that prisoners are allowed a monthly visit and a discretionary two weekly visit. This discretionary two weekly visit had been granted prior to Mrs Stagg's request to see her husband on Friday the 18th October 1974. However, the Prison Authorities intend to review the visiting arrangements for Stagg in the very near future and the FCO undertook to keep the Embassy informed of developments in this area.

Mr Stagg's sister is reported as saying that if it was made clear to her brother that every future search was not to be a strip search, he might change his mind regarding the hunger strike.