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- 7 -

EUROPE

NORTHERN IRELAND

Visits to places of detention

As arranged with the Government of Northern Ireland, the International Committee of the Red Cross has just made a further round of visits to the different categories of prisoners held in custody without trial in Northern Ireland.

The Red Cross team of two delegates, one of whom is a doctor, and both of whom are Swiss, visited Crumlin Road Prison, Belfast, on 14 December, Long Kesh Internment camp, near Lisburn, on 15 December, and the transit centre on board the depot ship "Maidstone" in Belfast harbour on 16 December. In all these establishments, the delegates were able freely to carry out their task and to converse privately with the internees and detainees of their own choosing. As usual, the ICRC reports on these visits will be sent direct to the Government of Northern Ireland.

A further visit by delegates of the ICRC has been arranged for the month of April.



COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

2.

R E P O R T

ON THE VISITS CARRIED OUT BY DELEGATES FROM THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS
TO PLACES OF DETENTION IN
NORTHERN IRELAND
October 1971

HER MAJESTY'S PRISON, CRUMLIN ROAD, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Visit by Mr. Philip Grand d'Hauteville, ICRC delegate, and Dr. François Leu, ICRC doctor-delegate, both of Swiss nationality.

Date of visit : 5 October 1971

Previous visit : None

Official in charge : Mr. J.W. Mullin, Governor.

Location : The Crumlin Road Prison is in the street of the same name in a Belfast suburb.
It was built in the first half of the 19th century and comprises an administrative building with four wings, laid out somewhat like the shape of a hand.

Capacity : 475 prisoners

Number of prisoners : 864, including 74 detainees and 41 internees lodged together in wing C. The convicted prisoners were lodged in the other three wings.

Accommodation:

Most of the internees and the detainees were lodged two by two in cells designed for one person. All the cells, of which there were about 70, were in three storeys overlooking a central hall which was used as a mess and a meeting room. Although many of the window panes of the cells were broken, the accommodation was acceptable. The internees and detainees complained, however, that there was a shortage of cupboards in which to store their personal effects and that the central hall was sometimes cold.

Sanitation:

The sanitary fittings (showers, baths, washhand basins and WCs) had not been designed for the number of prisoners currently in the prison. The delegates did not consider, however, that that was a problem and the internees and detainees did not make any complaint in that respect.

During the night when cells were locked (from 9:20 p.m. to 7:30 a.m.) the internees and detainees had chamber pots which they emptied in the morning. This old-fashioned system met with the general dissatisfaction of the internees and detainees.

Food:

The kitchens were clean and well-kept. At the time of the visit the food was appetizing, plentiful and well prepared. It was taken to wing C in insulated containers by convicted prisoners.

Canteen:

The canteen was clean and well-stocked. It was accessible to detainees and internees once a week. It sold the usual choice of consumer goods.

Dress:

The internees and detainees wore their own clothes. The Governor told the delegates that he had that very day purchased a washing machine for the internees and detainees.

Medical and dental care:

Medical care was provided for the whole prison by Dr. Girvan who was, however, on holiday at the time of the visit, his place being taken by Dr. G.C. Lughridge.

Dr. Girvan was one of a five-doctor medical partnership. Outside consulting hours and during weekends there was a stand-by service. At the request of one of the doctors, specialists in the various branches of medicine could, when necessary, visit the prison.

The prison hospital comprised a consulting room, a dental cabinet, a kitchen and two wards containing a total of 27 beds.

The medical staff consisted of 8 prison officers who had taken a course in nursing.

The hospital was clean and the stock of medical supplies, although limited, appeared to be well-chosen.

There was a National Health Service record card for each patient.

Emergency cases were sent to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast.

Relations with the outside world:

mail : Internees and detainees were authorized to send and receive four letters a week.

parcels: Internees and detainees were permitted two parcels a week.

family visits: The detainees were entitled to two fifteen-minute visits, or one thirty-minute visit each week. Internees were allowed one thirty-minute visit each week.

Both detainees and internees considered the visits very insufficient and asked that they be granted more liberally.

Work:

None

Leisure and physical exercise:

No work being required of internees and detainees all their time could be considered leisure time. Their cells were unlocked from 7:30 a.m. to 9:20 p.m. During that time, they were free to do as they wished within wing C or the large adjoining courtyard (lawns, paved walks and shelters). They also had access to the football ground, in groups of 60 from Monday to Friday, for one hour and ten minutes each day, and to the gymnasium in groups of 16 three times a week.

Detainees and internees could watch television every day in the mess until 9:20 p.m. and could go to the prison cinema every Monday.

The administration provided equipment for football and indoor games, as well as books and newspapers.

Treatment and discipline:

According to the Governor, the detainees and the internees relations could be considered "fair to good". Internees and detainees complained they had been ill-treated for several days following their arrest. However, they made it clear that since arriving in the prison they had no complaint of that nature.

Interviews without witnesses:

The delegates talked freely and without any time limit with all internees and detainees who wished to speak to them. The main subjects of discontent which emerged from those discussions were: 1. overcrowding in wing C; 2. the lack of any occupation; 3. the short duration and infrequency of visits.

Religion:

All internees and detainees were Roman Catholic. They were regularly visited by the Rev. Father Divine, a priest with whom the delegates had a talk. Father Divine and three Protestant Chaplains of various denominations administered also to the other inmates of the prison.

Remark:

The Ministry for Home Affairs had appointed a Board of Visitors of 25 members to inspect the prison and supervise its administration and living conditions. The Board of Visitors participated in deciding the imposition of disciplinary measures. With a view to reporting to its monthly meeting, it sent twice a month, and without notice, two of its members to inspect the prison. During their visit, the ICRC delegates met one of the members of the Board of Visitors, Captain Montgomery.

Conclusions:

There is unquestionably overcrowding in the Crumlin Road Prison. It is not only physical, but also psychological.

The prison was designed for 475 inmates; there were 864. Some cells, intended to be individual had two or even three inmates. However, the ICRC delegates found that the air space per inmate in each cell was sufficient. The sanitary fittings, which were perfectly clean, were also considered adequate.

On the other hand, the prison could more readily be considered overcrowded from a psychological viewpoint. Indeed, in the opinion of the convicted prisoners who work eight hours a day, the small cells were inhabitable since they only spent little time in them. On the other hand, for the internees and detainees without work, the confines of the small cells were hardly tolerable: privacy was non-existent.

The experience of the ICRC delegates has led them to form the opinion that herding together and the absence of privacy lead invariably to mental and psychosomatic disorders. Consequently, pending the implementation of measures which the authorities could take to reduce overcrowding, the ICRC delegates recommend the authorities to develop recreational facilities by :

1. Improvement of the C wing library; speeding up the circulation of books among the various wings.
2. Setting up a workshop for wood, leather and other crafts, under a skilled craftsman who could give courses.

The ICRC delegates also recommend the authorities to study the possibilities of increasing the number and duration of visits to internees and detainees.

The ICRC delegates hope that the adoption of these recommendations will enable them to observe an appreciable improvement of living conditions for the internees and detainees during their next visit in December.