

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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# Northern Ireland Office

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NIO/4/11

*a note of hysteria  
beginning to creep in!*

*many*  
*11/2/1, 25/4*

26 April 1978

*1/5/78*

There are currently 299 prisoners in the Maze Prison who for propaganda purposes are refusing to keep clean.

Yet the H units at Maze provide among the best prison conditions in the United Kingdom. The units each cost over £1m, and associated with them are recreational facilities that include a £100,000 indoor sports hall and 2 all-weather sports pitches.

There are also prison industries designed to provide worthwhile employment where a prisoner can have a satisfying job which also results in the production of useful goods. Vocational training is also given and plans are in hand to double the scope of this type of instruction.

By observing the rules through working and wearing prison clothes prisoners can have weekly visits, and can wear their own clothes (of an approved type) during recreation periods or when seeing their visitors - privileges which are unequalled in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In spite of breach of prison rules these prisoners continue to have the following: A monthly visit, normal meals, toilet facilities and normal medical facilities. In their cell they have: Prison clothing (including underclothing) at all times; a blanket at all times; a mattress and bedding - always at night and generally during the daytime; furniture - all the time; electric light (controlled by the prisoner) - on all day, and into the late evening. One hour's exercise is available, as are library facilities. And, at a cost of about £350 per week per unit, oil-fired central heating at a

minimum of 65 degrees F. Mass is also celebrated in the units.

Until recently these prisoners availed themselves of most of these facilities, and still do, so far as taking their visits and attending religious services, wearing prison clothing in both cases.

Now the prisoners say they will not wash themselves or use the toilets. They are also refusing to empty their chamber pots. This, say their propagandists, is all done as a form of protest.

The protest consists of some prisoners, not all, deliberately setting out to create bad conditions out of very good conditions and then to make propaganda from those conditions. But who are these prisoners who smear their cell walls with excreta, break up their cell furniture, take the springs out of their beds? Of the 299, 74 have been convicted of murder or attempted murder, 80 for firearms offences, and 82 for explosives offences, including 47 for causing explosions. Altogether these prisoners are serving a total of 2,900 years, plus 44 life sentences.

All these prisoners have been tried and convicted in open court. And, as the increasing number of people through the courts shows, those who murder, burn and wreck will get caught and do get caught. Just like these prisoners.

And, just like these prisoners, anyone who is convicted of a crime carried out after 1 March 1976 will not get special category status. This is, and remains, the Government's firm policy.

All prisoners in custody will continue to get equality in medical treatment, with the right to see a doctor on request. Any prisoner requiring medical treatment will receive it.

The health of these particular prisoners has been, and is being, monitored by medical personnel, and currently the medical authorities report that the health of the prisoners has not deteriorated.