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Long Kesh H-Blocks

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1. At the meeting on 2 June 1978 between the Minister and Con Murphy and Seán Ó Síocháin of the GAA about Crossmaglen GAA Grounds, Mr. Murphy raised the question of conditions in Long Kesh and asked the Minister for his evaluation of the position. The Minister said that there was politically no prospect of the British Government wavering on this issue in the light of, on the one hand, the forthcoming general election and the attitudes adopted by Mrs. Thatcher and the Conservative Opposition, and on the other hand, European developments on terrorism, where attempts were being made to get away from the idea of political status for those accused of criminal acts. While the Minister had discussed the question with Mr. Mason, he thought the central point was that the families of those in Long Kesh were being exploited by the Provisional IRA.

2. Mr. Murphy enquired if the conditions in the H-Blocks were as bad as was being suggested. The Minister said that in general the facilities in the Blocks were good but hygiene was obviously deteriorating as a result of the campaign and loyalist reactions were now likely to cause a further deterioration in conditions. The Minister could hold out no prospect of any change in British Government attitudes on special category though there was perhaps a possibility that some new designation of the prisoners might be agreed to. The Minister also pointed out that the H-Blocks were a major problem in that they constitute the biggest recruiting aid available to the IRA.

3. Mr. Murphy said that he was under considerable pressure in respect of conditions in Long Kesh and that he considered that the GAA might be forced to adopt an attitude on the question, on humane grounds. A proposal had been made that the GAA should finance a publicity trip to the U.S. on the subject and this proposal constituted a real problem. The Minister pointed out that the Irish National Caucus will use and abuse any information that came their way and that they would undoubtedly take advantage of such a publicity trip and of the GAA involvement in it. Such a proposal

would be outside the normal activities of the GAA and the Association should be aware that the Taoiseach and the Government would object to it. The Minister said that he and the Government were fully aware of the problems to which conditions in Long Kesh give rise but that it was necessary to bring home to the parents of those in the H-Blocks that the present campaign ties the hands of anyone trying to help.

4. It was agreed that further contacts on this subject could take place as appropriate.

Hugh Swift

H. Swift

7 June 1978