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CONFIDENTIAL

Mr David Barry
Department of Foreign Affairs

2 June 1986

Subject: Birmingham Six

Dear David

I visited today at Wormwood Scrubs prison, Mr Richard McIlkenny and Mr William Power, two of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974. (The Embassy has now visited five of the six, the one outstanding being Mr Gerard Hunter in Durham.)

By prior agreement I saw the two men together and we discussed their cases and welfare for one hour. Mr Power initially seemed the most likely critic of our role to date. He claimed that in 1977 he had asked to write to the Embassy but had been refused on the grounds that he was a British citizen. He also said that he had never met an Embassy official before.

I expressed surprise at the incident in 1977, and assured him that we would have taken this up had we been aware of it. I explained to them both the continuing strong interest of the Government in their convictions, and the particular activity of our Minister and Ambassador in recent months. They seemed rather isolated from the other four men, being unaware, for example, of the letters sent to us at Christmas suggesting a collective meeting.

They described to me separately the period of their arrests and questioning. Their descriptions were identical to these given to us by Mr Hill, Mr Walker and Mr Callaghan. Mr Power has four children but is now divorced; Mr McIlkenny has five daughters. Both

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were living in Birmingham at the time of the arrests. Mr Power was emphatic in his condemnation of IRA methods, while exposing their objectives. He recalled the forensic tests done on them at the time and the findings of Dr. Skuse who later testified to finding traces of nitroglycerine on his hands and on Mr Hill.

Mr McIlkenny surmised that if there was any way in which they could be released without the British authorities losing face, then that was the only hope. Both men asked me about our activity and expressed satisfaction with the personal approach of our Minister to the Home Secretary. They also asked about our knowledge of the work of others, such as Ms. Gareth Pierce, Mr Chris Mullin and Sir John Farr, M.P.

I explained our continuing close contact with the British authorities at present as well as our communication with the persons named above. They both expressed appreciation for the visit which I believe was helpful in conveying our role and concern to the two men. I stressed to them the continuous access in the Embassy to them or their representatives at all times and said that we would be closely following developments in the coming weeks.

By coincidence, Ms. Gareth Pierce was at Wormwood Scrubs this morning (visiting Peter O'Laughlin and Patrick McLaughlin who she is representing). As we were departing I introduced her to McIlkenny and Power who she had not met and she expressed the hope to them that a favourable decision would be obtained from the Home Office.

In conversation afterwards I said that we would be interested to see a draft of the work produced by Mr Chris Mullin ("Error of Judgement") which he has presented to the Home Office. She understood that this was now under consideration by them. She confirmed that the research contained an interview with the man who actually planted the bomb in Birmingham and who allegedly had planned to give warning to those in the public houses at the time. Ms. Pierce did not seem particularly optimistic about the forthcoming Home Office response but she said that in her view the Irish Government had at this stage done everything possible as regards representations. She presumed

that we would not take a negative response well in view of the unusual weight behind those representations.

Ms. Pierce told me that there will be a public meeting in Dublin on 18 June 1986 about the Birmingham Six. She has been asked to speak at it, as apparently has Mr Paul O'Dwyer from the USA and Mr Sean MacBride. (We would be grateful for any additional information on this which you may obtain in Dublin!) We agreed to keep in touch in the coming weeks about the Home Office considerations.

Yours sincerely

Orla O'Hanrahan

Orla O'Hanrahan
Third Secretary

c.c. Ambassador
Staff
PSM