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| Reference Code: | 2016/22/2042 |
| Creation Dates: | 19 June 1986 |
| Extent and medium: | 3 pages |
| Creator(s): | Department of Foreign Affairs |
| Accession Conditions: | Open |
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CONFIDENTIAL

Mr David Barry
Department of Foreign Affairs
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*Paul
Please arrange at "X"
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PA B6

26 June 1986

Subject: Visit to Mr Gerard Hunter: Frankland Prison, Durham
(Birmingham Six)

Dear David

1. I travelled to Durham on 19 June 1986 to visit Mr Gerard Hunter at Frankland Prison. This completed the Embassy visits this year to the six men convicted of the Birmingham bombings in 1974; the others being Mr Patrick Hill, Mr Hugh Callaghan (Gartree, Leicestershire) Mr John Walker (Long Lartin, Worcestershire) Mr Richard McIlkenny and Mr William Power (Wormwood Scrubs, London). I talked with Mr Hunter for almost two hours. (I did not take notes during our discussion, the following is a reconstruction of the conversation.)
2. He appeared physically well and said that he did not have any specific welfare problems. He did refer to "petty harrassments" in the prison and said that he was finding it difficult to settle in Frankland. Mr Hunter asked me why the Irish Government (in his view) had neglected the Birmingham Six for twelve years. He said that he and Mr Powers had had letters ignored in 1979-80 and suggested (courteously) that it was Embassy policy not to visit "IRA prisoners". I explained to Mr Hunter that the cases had been of long term interest to us; we would always acknowledge letters and I would check our records on this. I said that our Minister Mr Barry and our Ambassador has a strong interest in them and referred to the statements and representations following the

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'World in Action' programme in October 1985. Our Minister had written to Secretary of State Hurd and we were maintaining close contact with the British authorities about their considerations at present. Regarding visits, we looked at each request on its merits and regardless of the conviction concerned - the rights and welfare of each prisoner, including the fifty Category A prisoners. I mentioned that the Embassy had visited about twelve Category A prisoners so far this year. Mr Hunter seemed somewhat mollified by this information and expressed surprise that there were over 1,000 convicted Irish prisoners in Britain.

3. We went on to discuss the background to his arrest. He is from the Ardoyne area of Belfast and came to Birmingham in search of work in the late 1960's. He is married with four children. Mr Hunter mentioned that he now had marital problems and had not seen his wife (who is still in Birmingham) for over a year, although he was hoping for a visit from her soon. He described to me (in detail identical to that of the other five) the decision to attend the IRA funeral of McDade in Belfast, the journey to the ferry and the arrest itself. He recalled the five days of detention before charging and the various assaults and deprivation of food and sleep which he experienced during that time. He pointed out some small scars on his face which remain after the attacks on him.
4. Mr Hunter seemed a little sceptical about the attention given to the forensic evidence examined by the programme; in his view these experiments could have been done a long time ago. However he agreed that their morale had been lifted by the programme (which he did not view owing to irritation with the arrangements made by the Governor as to who would be permitted to see it). Mr Hunter suggested that the British authorities "had learned their lesson" following the alleged miscarriages of justice regarding Birmingham, Guildford and Mrs Maguire. He thought that in recent times they were making "different sort of arrests". He offered the view, regarding the Brighton bombing, that Magee, while probably actively involved in the IRA, was not actually responsible for that incident. He did not substantiate this proposition.

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5. Mr Hunter did mention that he did not mix easily with IRA prisoners and was critical of their policies. He condemned the use of violence and said that he saw IRA murder as murder and nothing less. He thought that Irish prisoners should have the right to serve their sentences in Ireland and that we should be more active on this issue. (I explained our approach to this - on a case by case basis, mindful of humanitarian consideration, etc. - and mentioned Shane O'Doherty's transfer. (On the latter point, Mr Hunter mentioned that he had heard that Mr O'Doherty had developed communist sympathies and had lost some of his religious fervour.)
6. I promised to send Mr Hunter some of our statements in relation to the subjects discussed and responded to his enquiries about our visits to the other five men in whose welfare he expressed an interest. I assured him of our continuing concern about the Home Office's considerations and emphasised that the access which he and other prisoners had to the Embassy on welfare matters. (He had referred to other prisoners currently in Frankland such as Eddie O'Neill). Mr Hunter expressed appreciation for the visit which hopefully was helpful and was well received, despite the criticisms recorded above.
7. We have sent by fax to you the reply by Minister of State Mellor to Mr Hume on 16 June about the cases. You have presumably already seen the Irish Press articles of 14, 18 and 19 June 1986. We should be grateful for a copy of the letter issued to the Minister last week as well as the draft reply in the Dail as soon as they become available. We are endeavouring to obtain a copy of the draft of Mr Mullin's forthcoming book.

Orla O'Hanrahan

Orla O'Hanrahan
Third Secretary

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