



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2018/28/2799
Creation Dates:	3 February 1988
Extent and medium:	3 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Confidential

PAF ~~Sec 7.1~~
~~Sec 7.2~~
Sec 5.3.1 pl.

Meeting with Fr. John Murphy, Head Chaplain of Northern Ireland
and Maze Prison Chaplain, Lisburn, 3 February 1988

There is considerable interest among Republican prisoners in the Maze in the Hume/Adams talks with significant support among prisoners for the development of nationalist unity in Northern Ireland. This is against a background of a certain unspoken feeling among some Republicans that the "war" is probably not winable in the short to medium term. He perceives two reactions among Republicans - one which sees some future in pursuing a political role (this view is largely held by the older prisoners) and an alternative scenario of "one last great push to vindicate their struggle in the eyes of future generations". This second strand of thinking, while by no means dominant, is nonetheless an undercurrent and represents something akin to a "blood sacrifice" philosophy. Overall, he thought most prisoners were quite hopeful regarding the talks and felt "there was more in them than met the eye". In that context, there was a general conviction that John Hume may have some sort of understanding with the British Government in bringing the Provisionals in from the cold. In that context, they see a significance in the fact that there has been little or no adverse public comment, other than the predictable Unionist reaction which they see as being very low key. A further element which they perceive is the fact that as already reported in my report of 10/12/87, the Life Sentence Review Board are increasing the life sentence from an average of 10/11 years to 13/14 years. This is seen as a ploy to put pressure on prisoners families to put pressure in turn on the Provisional leadership. (In that context, it is noteworthy that Gerry Adams in his recent articles and statements has made specific reference to the effect which ceasefire rumours were having on prisoners' families).

He reported on the situation at the new Men's Prison at Maghaberry where a hunger and thirst strike had been conducted by four Loyalist and three Republican prisoners from Friday

evening, 29 January until 3 p.m. on Monday, 1 February. As already reported in my report of 10/12/87, the new men's facility at Maghaberry has been set up under a reforming governor McLaughlin, and there are indications that the long-term plan of the NIO is that Maghaberry will effectively set a new standard for prison rules and regulations in Northern Ireland. However, McLaughlin is deeply unpopular with the Prison Officer's Association (POA) who in the early 80's passed a resolution of no confidence in him. The current trouble began when McLaughlin went on leave on Friday and the prison officers began to insist on the full implementation of the rules and regulations which triggered this protest. Fr. Murphy's perception is that the POA will do its utmost to undermine any attempt at reform and, to that end, are running Maghaberry in as strict a way as possible.

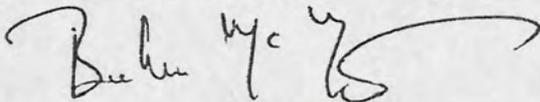
He reported there were no great problems at Maghaberry Women's prison and his information is that the strip-searching being conducted is being conducted "officially" - i.e., in a largely perfunctory way and there are no complaints from the women prisoners. (His own perception is that any public protests could well be counter-productive in this area).

In regard to life sentence review, he perceived a trend that an increasing number of Provisionals were involving themselves with the Life Sentence Review Board - this being in effect the only way out. There are rumours current in the Maze that a large number of release dates may be issued in the near future. He again made the point that such men released after serving fairly lengthy periods, rarely if ever return to active service. It is not just that they don't want to return to active service but, to his mind, also that they cannot return. Apart from the security risk for the Provisionals, there is a significant gap between older and younger IRA members with a certain amount of antipathy between them. Fr. Murphy made the observation, also made by other observers, of the significant difference between the generations with the younger generation being less pure in its idealism and less disciplined with the

result that there are differing perceptions and priorities as between the generations.

He mentioned the problems with compassionate parole in Northern Ireland where he felt that the amount of time granted is far too restricted. He mentioned that in the South prisoners were often let off three days for a family funeral, while in the North such compassionate parole is usually limited to twenty-four hours. Compassionate parole for a visit to a sick parent is severely limited - sometimes to as little as six hours, which includes travel time etc. He sees little or no logical sense to these type of restrictions which only serve to further irritate prisoners.

He mentioned that he had heard of the appointment of John Blelloch as Permanent Under-Secretary of the NIO in London. He had had a considerable number of dealings with him during the Maze Hunger Strike when he had been very impressed with him and his ability to cut through red tape to arrive at real and meaningful decisions. He intended to re-establish contact with him again in his new position.



Brendan McMahon,
5 February 1988.

cc A/Sec Gallagher
Councillors D.I.

3297p

Box.