

BACKGROUND

1. This paper sets out to record and analyse the events of the republican hunger strikes at the end of 1980 in support of the campaign for political status by convicted republican prisoners in the Northern Ireland prisons. The background to the strikes was set out in detail in the paper entitled "The Hunger Strike: Looking Ahead" given limited distribution under Mr Marshall's minute of 25 November 1980.
2. Fundamentally, a number of republican prisoners were protesting through some degree of non-conformity with Prison Rules that the circumstances of their imprisonment were different from those of ordinary criminals because the motive for their crimes was political.
3. The protesters translated their demand for political status into five demands affecting their conditions in prison:
  - a) The right not to wear prison uniform.
  - b) The right not to do prison work.
  - c) Freedom of Association.
  - d) The right to organise recreational facilities, to one weekly visit, to one weekly letter in and out, and one food parcel a week.
  - e) Restoration of full remission.
4. In October 1980 it was announced on behalf of the protesting prisoners that a number of them would begin a hunger strike from 27 October in support of their demands. So that the Government's

position should be clearly understood from the outset, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Atkins, made a statement on 23 October which is attached at Annex A. The crux of the Government's position which remained unaltered throughout the hunger strikes was contained in the following passage:

"The Government will not and cannot make any concessions whatever on the principle of political status for prisoners who claim a political motive for their crimes. All have been convicted of criminal acts by due process of law"

#### STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

5. This paper will first set out the development of the hunger strikes and supporting protests in Maze and Armagh prisons; it will then outline the measures taken by the Government to deal with the situation. Finally it will attempt to analyse the events during the hunger strikes to determine the likely causes of the final outcome and to draw relevant lessons for the future.

#### THE HUNGER STRIKES

6. Seven hunger strikers were named to begin their strike by refusing breakfast on Monday 27 October. They were:

Brendan Hughes

John Nixon

Thomas McFeely

Raymond McCartney

Leo Green

Sean McKenna

Thomas McKearney

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7. Profiles of the original seven hunger strikers are attached at Annex B. In view of the different rates of deterioration of health which were to develop.

Brendan Hughes was acknowledged by republican sources to be the leader of the group.

27 October - 7 November

8. At the beginning of the strike the seven remained in their dirty cells with three of them sharing their cells with protesters who were still taking food. However, on 6 November all seven were moved to single furnished cells in a wing of H-3 Block to facilitate medical supervision. The hunger strikers did not foul or damage their cells, and prison staff commented on their co-operative attitude as the strike got properly under way.

9. During this first fortnight the strikers were visited by their families, the prison chaplains and prison staff. On 3 November Brendan Hughes was visited by Tim Pat Coogan, editor of the Irish Press and by Danny Morrison of Provisional Sinn Fein. On 3 November the Maze was filmed by a crew from Channel 5, New York.

10. The dirty protest at the Maze continued with some 150 further prisoners joining the protest during the period. On 7 November at HMP Maze there were 510 dirty protesters and 53 prisoners refusing to work. There remained 28 women on a dirty form of protest at HMP Armagh.

11. The hunger strikers' and the protesters' morale was reported to be high based on optimistic reports of the development of the H-Block campaign at home and abroad. An intercepted note provided evidence of this and referred also to 12 further candidates for the hunger strike if any of the seven should die or give up the strike.

7 - 14 November

12. By 14 November the seven strikers had lost between 6 and 9lbs since their initial weighing on 3 November. The hunger strikers remained co-operative with the prison staff and were treated as unfit, conforming prisoners confined to bed in their cells. They were, therefore, not required to work nor to wear prison clothing so they were no longer receiving withdrawal of privileges and loss of remission for daily non-conformity.

13. During the period all seven strikers were again visited by their families and three were visited by their parish priests. Five of the strikers sought and were granted permission to see solicitors ostensibly to make wills. It was noted that McCartney was being visited regularly by a solicitor Oliver Kelly and his wife Eilish Kelly a barrister; it was thought that they were acting as links with agencies outside the prison.

14. There had been a drop in the net total of dirty protesters during the period. On 14 November there were 488 dirty protesters and 37 prisoners on a no work protest. The morale of the hunger strikers and the protesters was reported still to be high.

15. On 14 November a camera team from Granada TV's World in Action visited the prison to film for a programme on the criminal background of the hunger strikers. The team spoke with Hughes and McCartney.

14 - 21 November

16. At the end of this period the hunger strikers had lost between 9 and 14lbs but their health still gave no cause for concern. On 20 November it was decided to administer the wing containing the hunger strikers with staff from the prison hospital. In response to this the seven hunger strikers, continuing their co-operation with prison staff, decided to take baths and asked for pyjamas. They also said that in future they would slop out (prison officers had been doing this for them up to that time). Hughes asked for association and Nixon requested a hair cut. These responses by the hunger strikers in fact brought about a prison hospital conforming regime. The seven were treated from this point as sick, conforming prisoners.

17. Visits to the hunger strikers by their families and parish priests continued. McCartney received another visit from Mrs Eilish Kelly, and McKearney was visited by a solicitor and witness to finalise his will.

18. On 21 November there were 482 dirty protesters and 30 prisoners on a no work protest. The number of women protesters at Armagh remained at 28 but there <sup>were</sup> increasing rumours that a number of women prisoners were about to begin a hunger strike in support of the demand for political status. These rumours were supported by requests by the women prisoners to take their additional, privilege visits for November in order to inform relatives of their intentions. It was rumoured that among the female hunger strikers would be Mairead Farrell (their spokeswoman), Mary Doyle and Christine Beattie.

19. The Republican Press Centre in Belfast announced on 20 November that three or four women prisoners at HMP Armagh were expected to go on hunger strike in the near future. The statement said that this action

"would remove the simple concession of civilian clothes from being a central issue" and would "clarify (the women's) demands and those of the H-Block protesters as a package of five demands amounting to political status."

20. The morale of protesters, hunger strikers, and the prison staff was assessed as remaining high; although clearly the initial momentum of increasing numbers joining the dirty protest in support of the hunger strike had dropped away and was continuing to decline gradually.

21 - 28 November

21. The seven hunger strikers were now receiving daily medical examinations and although their condition gave no immediate cause for concern, their blood analysis showed signs of deterioration.

22. On 27 November the Prison Medical Officer decided that the hunger strikers were no longer strong enough to receive visitors in the prison visiting area. Arrangements were therefore made for visits to take place in two empty cells in the hunger strikers' wing.

23. The hunger strikers again received visits from relatives and parish priests. Mrs Eilish Kelly continued to visit several of the strikers and Mr Pat Finucane (another solicitor and member of the National Smash H Blocks Committee), both ostensibly visiting on legal matters. Finucane's brother was a dirty protester at the same time. On 25 November McFeeley was visited by a Mr Fergus Black described as a friend or relative. Black turned out to be a reporter from the Irish Press. The Irish Press of 26 November published a report of the interview.

with McFeeley. McFeeley claimed that morale was high, although McKearney's condition was giving cause for concern. McFeeley was quoted as saying, "We are all going downhill fast, but there will be no compromise. We are going all the way.....if there are repercussions it won't be our fault. It will be the British Government's

24. The number of dirty protesters had reduced to 470 and the number of prisoners on a no work protest had dropped to 17. There were now 29 female prisoners at Armagh on their form of dirty protest. Rumours still abounded that some of the women would begin a hunger strike on Monday 1 December. Token three-day fasts by seven republican remand prisoners at a time had begun at Belfast Prison.

28 November - 5 December

25. On 2 December the seven hunger strikers were transferred to the Prison Hospital. This move was to facilitate closer medical surveillance rather than the result of any significant deterioration in the strikers' health. They continued to receive daily medical examinations and although there was no undue cause for concern, three had complained of minor ailments, nausea, headaches and vomiting.

The strikers were taking daily periods of association in the hospital dining room.

26. As expected, three female prisoners had begun a hunger strike on 1 December. The three strikers were:

Mairead Farrell

Mary Elizabeth Doyle

Margaret Mary Nugent

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their weight loss by 5 December ranged from 8 to 10lbs. They had been moved to one clean, furnished cell on 3 December and had not fouled it in any way. They were receiving daily medical examinations and their condition gave no cause for concern.

27. The number of dirty protesters on 5 December was 468 and there were 15 prisoners refusing to work. At Armagh, 26 women prisoners remained on their dirty protest. Token three-day fasts continued in Belfast Prison.

5 - 12 December 1980

28. The seven hunger strikers remained in the Prison hospital and continued to receive daily medical examinations. During this period they were also examined by a consultant physician. The condition of five of the strikers remained weak but satisfactory; however the conditions of McKenna and McKearney had deteriorated and were giving some cause for concern. Both were having difficulty in holding down the water with salt that they had been taking.

McKenna had not been well enough to take association from 11 December and it was clear that the time was approaching when he and possibly others would have to be moved to an outside hospital for more intensive medical surveillance.

29. On 10 December DUS Belfast visited HM Prison Maze and spoke to the seven hunger strikers together in the presence of the Governor. He read out the Secretary of State's statement of 4 December (at Annex C) and answered questions so that there should be no confusion in the minds of the strikers as to the Government's position. The following day a

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statement was issued on behalf of the hunger strikers; it noted the visit but said that they had no intention of abandoning their action: "while accepting that the NIO have broken the ice.....they (the NIO) have got to approach the situation realistically and have to deal.....through or representative here. Nothing significant has changed."

30. During this period the hunger strikers were visited as before by close relatives and priests. Visits by solicitors and other legal representatives had diminished. Hughes, the hunger strikers' spokesman, received a number of significant visits during this period from Danny Morrison (thought to have links to John Hume, and to PIRA through PSF) and a priest, Father Meagher (thought to have links to the Irish Government). These visits occurred as follows:

<u>8 December</u>	Hughes visited by Morrison
<u>9 December</u>	Hughes visited by Meagher
<u>11 December</u>	Hughes visited <u>twice</u> by Morrison.

31. On 12 December McCartney, Green, Nixon and McKenna were visited by Mr and Mrs Kelly the solicitors.

32. At Armagh Prison the three female hunger strikers continued with their fast. They were co-operating with prison staff and were not fouling or damaging their cells. They continued to take daily exercise and were given daily medical examinations although their condition gave no immediate cause for concern. On 12 December their individual weight loss was the same within half a pound at 15lbs each. Farrell was visited by her parish priest and members of her family while Doyle was visited by her solicitor, Mr Morgan. Nugent had so far received no visitors since she began her hunger strike.

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33. The number of dirty protesters seemed to have levelled off at 466. The number of republican prisoners refusing to work increased to 18. At Armagh Prison the number of female prisoners on their dirty protest remained at 26. Token three-day fasts continued at Belfast Prison.

12 - 19 December

34. This was the crucial week in which the hunger strikes ended. A key factor was the progressive deterioration in the health of Sean McKenna in particular.

Doctors were now contemplating the imminent move of the hunger strikers to Ward 18 of the Musgrave Park Hospital.

35. On 15/16 December a further 30 republican prisoners at HMP Maze began a hunger strike in support of the others. However, the health of this 30 and the three female hunger strikers at Armagh gave no immediate cause for concern. Attention was focused on the approaching crisis in the health of the original seven with McKenna causing most concern and McKearney not far behind.

36. Father Meagher visited McKearney on 14 December and all the

hunger strikers except McKenna on 16 December. The Kellys visited McKenna on 13 December and McCartney on 14 December. Mr Finucane visited Hughes and McFeeley on 18 December. All the hunger strikers were visited by their families during this period.

37. The other hunger strikers refused to agree to treatment for McKenna and on Thursday 18 December it was decided that his condition was so serious that he should be moved to the Musgrave Park Hospital. The other six hunger strikers were told by the Prison doctors that his condition was critical and that there was very little time before they too would be as close to death.

38. Once McKenna had been moved to the Musgrave Park Hospital events moved quite rapidly during the evening of 18 December:

6.30 pm The prison authorities reported a dispute between Hughes and McFeeley. Hughes wished to call off the hunger strike but McFeeley refused. Hughes requested medical treatment for McKenna which was granted and the information was passed to the medical staff at Ward 18 in the Musgrave Park Hospital who immediately began intensive treatment. Hughes asked to see the dirty protesters' spokesman, Sands, and this request was granted.

7.45 pm In the presence of the Deputy Governor, the Prison Medical Officer, Fathers Toner and Murphy the Prison Chaplains, and Sands each hunger striker in turn requested food and medical treatment. Sands asked permission to speak to each of the 30 other male hunger strikers and this was granted.

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3.45 pm

Sands was returned to his cell. The 30 hunger strikers were reported to be stunned at the news but gave no indication of their intentions at this stage. Fathers Toner and Murphy left the prison.

10.00 pm

It was agreed that Father Meagher could speak to Sands and Hughes together when he arrived at the prison at approximately 10.30 pm. Meagher's request that Danny Morrison should visit Armagh Prison that same night was turned down but it was agreed that Meagher could visit the hunger strikers in Armagh the following day.

It was also agreed that McKenna's family could visit him in hospital during the night.

11.00 pm

Father Meagher was allowed into a prison hospital ward with Sands and they were permitted to speak to Hughes in the sight of prison staff but out of earshot.

11.10 pm

Meagher was permitted to telephone Belfast 23214 and he spoke with a woman. He then rejoined Sands and Hughes.

11.45 pm

Meagher asked to see the Assistant Governor on duty and requested an immediate meeting with 533 PJ McKeown from H6, 96Z R McCallum from H4 and 140 S Walsh from H5. He also requested that Danny Morrison should be permitted to visit Sheila Darragh in HMP Armagh the following morning. His requests were noted to be passed on to the authorities. However, the immediate meeting was turned down on the grounds of security and Father Meagher was told that the earliest time that such a meeting could take place would be 7.45 am the following morning. Meagher reported this

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back to Hughes and Sands.

11.55 pm Meagher again asked to speak to the Assistant Governor with Sands. He made the following statement, "Reference the blanket protest, Mr Morrison (editor of An Phoblact) has a visit with Sands tomorrow and I request that Gerry Adams accompany Morrison on that visit to deal with the question of resolving the current blanket protest on the basis of the new proposals." At this stage Meagher brandished two documents, one thick one entitled "Regimes in Northern Ireland Prisons" and another two-page document, the title of which could not be made out by the Assistant Governor. Meagher's requests were noted and he left the prison at 12 minutes past midnight.

39. The following morning, Friday 19 December, at 7.45 am Sands was allowed to speak to the spokesmen of the other protesting blocks as Meagher had requested. The 30 other male hunger strikers took their breakfasts indicating that they too had called off their strike. At 8.0 am all protesting prisoners at the Maze and Armagh received a two-page document entitled "What Will Happen When The Protests End." This set out the Secretary of State's statement of the step by step approach to be followed by the protesters if they wished to achieve the rights and privileges available to conforming prisoners. A copy is attached at Annex D. A copy of "Regimes in Northern Ireland Prisons" is attached at Annex E.

40. On Friday 19 December, Father Meagher visited Armagh Prison and saw the three hunger-strikers and Sheila Darragh who was clearly the women prisoners' spokeswoman. After the strikers had taken exercise with those on the dirty protest (which provided association and

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therefore an opportunity to confer), the three hunger strikers declared their intention to begin taking food again. The republican hunger strikes were over.

41. A statement was issued on behalf of the seven hunger strikers which said:

"We the Irish Republican political prisoners in the H-Block prison hospital, having completed 53 days of hunger strike in demand of our just right to be recognised as political prisoners have tonight, December 18 1980, decided to halt our hunger strike action.

Having seen the statement to be announced by Humphrey Atkins in the British House of Commons and having been supplied with a document which contains a new elaboration of our five demands which were first enumerated upon by Humphrey Atkins in his statement to the House of Commons of December 4, we decided to halt the hunger strike.

In ending our hunger strike, we make it clear that failure by the British Government to act in a responsible manner towards ending the conditions which forced us to a hunger strike will not only lead to inevitable and continual strife within the H-Blocks but will show quite clearly the intransigence of the British Government".

#### ACTION BY HMG IN DEALING WITH THE HUNGER STRIKE

42. Government policy towards the hunger strike was founded on the same principles that had governed the handling of the dirty protests: there could be no recognition of political status; no differential

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3 treatment for groups of prisoners because they claimed political motives for their crimes; and no surrendering of control within the prisons to groups of prisoners. At the same time the Government was committed to acting within the spirit of the Decision of the European Commission of Human Rights on the Maze protest to show flexibility and humanitarian concern towards the protesters.

43. During the first half of 1980 a number of minor privileges were restored to protesting prisoners including extra letters, one extra visit per month and one hour's association for one evening a week. These were not taken up by the protesters, except for visits just before the hunger strike began.

44. During September and October a Working Party on Prison Uniform and Work examined these aspects of the prison regime and in mid-October recommended no significant changes to the work regime but recommended the adoption of prison-issue civilian type clothing instead of denim uniform for wear by prisoners during working hours. This was to be introduced as soon as was administratively possible within the prison system.

45. It was decided that the Government's position on the Northern Ireland prisons should be given considerable publicity to offset republican propaganda both at home and overseas. Overseas posts, particularly in USA and in Europe were given detailed background briefing; and two pamphlets "H-Blocks: The Facts" and "H Blocks: The Reality" were given wide circulation.

46. The Secretary of State made a statement on 23 October which, in

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anticipation of the impending hunger strike, set out the principles on which the Government's position was founded, described those measures which, while adhering to those principles, had been taken to modify the prison regime, and finally, announced the proposed introduction of prison issue civilian clothing.

47. As the hunger strike progressed considerable efforts were made to ensure sensitive handling of demonstrations supporting the hunger strikers and to prevent the alienation of moderate Catholic opinion in the North. Constant soundings were made of both communities to gauge the effect of government policies. Church and community leaders were briefed and consulted as the strike developed.

48. However, certain key events assume particular significance in the context of eroding the hunger strikers' will to see their action through to death if necessary. In chronological order they are:

- 23 October: Secretary of State's statement on the Maze protest pre-empting the start of the hunger-strike
- 27 October: Seven prisoners begin hunger strike in HMP Maze.
- 24 November: Prime Minister meets Pope in Rome.
- 27 November: Issue of public statement by Cardinal O'Fiaich and the five Northern Ireland Bishops calling on hunger-strikers to end their strike.
- 28 November: PUS meeting with John Hume.
- 1 December: Three women prisoners begin hunger strike in HMP Armagh.
- 1/2 December: Meeting between Prime Minister and Mr Haughey in the margins of the EEC summit.

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- 2 December: Seven hunger strikers moved to Maze prison hospital.
- 4 December: Publication of long answer to written PQ by Paul Marland setting out the Northern Ireland prisons regime. Placing in library of the House detailed document on Prison Regimes in Northern Ireland. Helpful public response by John Hume.
- 8 December: Prime Minister's talks with Mr Haughey in Dublin.
- 10 December: DUS Belfast visits hunger strikers in the Maze to explain Secretary of State's statement of 4 December.
- 13 December: Consultant examines all seven hunger-strikers at HMP Maze.
- 15 December: Meeting at Stormont Castle between DUS(B) and Fathers Toner and Murphy. (Note of meeting at Annex F). 23 further prisoners at HMP Maze join the hunger-strike.
- 16 December: Seven further prisoners join hunger-strike at HMP Maze.  
Telegram sent to Prime Minister from Cardinal O'Fiaich and other Northern Bishops appealing for her personal intervention.
- 17 December: Proposal for settlement from John Hume based on information supplied by Fathers Toner and Murphy (Note at Annex G).
- 18 December: Hume proposals rejected as granting the substance of political status.  
McKenna moved to MPH.  
Text of Secretary of State's statement delivered to Maze and Armagh prisons.

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Six remaining original hunger-strikers call off their strike.

19 December: Protesters at Maze and Armagh receive copies of Secretary of State's statement. All hunger-strike~~s~~s called off. Secretary of State announces end of hunger strike to Parliament.

#### ANALYSIS OF REASONS FOR ENDING THE HUNGER STRIKE

49. There are a number of factors which may have contributed in varying degrees to the end of the hunger strike:

- a) Lack of outside support for the strikers' cause must have contributed to a sense of futility among the strikers whose only major firm constituency of support lay in the republican areas in the North and mainly in West Belfast. Reports of the lack of support in the Irish Republic must have proved particularly disheartening.
- b) The sensitive handling of the H-Block protests by the security forces (mainly the RUC) avoided public disorder and contributed to the generally favourable view of the Government's handling of the issue.
- c) The statement by Cardinal O'Fiaich and the five Bishops on 28 November appealing for an end to the hunger strike must have provided another severe psychological blow, since before then the protesters had every reason to believe that their cause had the sympathy and tacit support of the Catholic hierarchy.

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- d) The unequivocal rejection of political status by the Government and, in particular the Prime Minister, offered the protesters no real hope of a capitulation by HMG. In particular in the latter days of the strike it was becoming apparent that the Government was gearing itself up to deal with reactions to the first striker's death.
- e) Probably the single most important factor was that the seven hunger strikers just did not have the will to die. They may have been misled into thinking that their protest would succeed easily, and as it became increasingly clear that their deaths were going to be in vain, the fear of death probably became an increasingly significant factor. This effect was undoubtedly enhanced by the different rates of deterioration of health (in particular McKenna's distressing and rapid decline towards the end of the fast). By watching McKenna, the other six were given a preview of the fate which awaited them. Their death was clearly going to be painful and degrading and the leader Hughes was burdened with the responsibility of standing by and watching one of his subordinates die, probably in vain, while he still lived. When the decision was made to remove McKenna to the Musgrave Park Hospital, the doctors made it very clear to Hughes and the others that he was about to die and that the other hunger strikers would follow soon. This was undoubtedly the critical point for the strikers and it is evident from the reported argument between Hughes and McFeeley that Hughes' determination had given way at this point under the double stress of responsibility for McKenna's death and the

imminence of his own death. Once the group's leader had succumbed it was almost inevitable that the others would eventually follow suit.

- f) A factor, the importance of which is more difficult to assess, is the influence upon the hunger strikers' determination of the various intermediaries who were probably carrying ambiguous and confusing messages in and out of the prison. There were undoubtedly links to Provisional Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA through families, the Kellys, Finucane and Danny Morrison. There were links to John Hume through the Prison Chaplain, Father Toner; and there were probably links to the Irish Government via Hume and through Father Meagher. Some or all of these agencies may have persuaded the hunger strikers that the Secretary of State's statement of 4 December and its supporting Prison Regime document held out the prospect of achieving the substance of their five demands which would allow them to claim a triumph and give them a degree of control over their life within the prison. This, if true, would have vindicated the hunger strikers and would have allowed them to call an end to the dirty protest. There can be little doubt that Father Meagher's visit to the prison during the evening of 18 December was for the purpose of showing the protesters the Prison Regime Document and an advanced copy of the Secretary of State's statement of 19 December which was to be given to all protesting prisoners at the Maze and Armagh at 8 am on 19 December. Meagher probably intended to persuade them to read an offer of the substance of their five demands into these two documents and thus to end their strike.

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However, the seven had decided to call off their fast before Meagher arrived. Nevertheless, Meagher was probably able to help placate Sands and to provide the framework for a face saving exercise by the protesters. The subsequent collapse of the face saving exercise has probably finished Meagher as a credible intermediary in the eyes of the protesters.

#### CONCLUSIONS

50. The decision taken prior to the beginning of the hunger strike that any moves by the Government should only be taken then and not once the fast had begun was undoubtedly correct. Any moves by the Government during the hunger strike would have been seen by the prisoners as a weakening of the Government's position and would have encouraged them to hold out for more even to the point of death. Because the hunger strikers had achieved nothing and the Government's firmness of purpose was apparent, the futility of their action was manifest.

51. The considerable efforts made to explain the Government's position clearly to all interested parties (particularly Catholic church leaders and moderate Catholics) were extremely worthwhile both in eliminating ill-informed comment and in obtaining useful public statements of support. They also undoubtedly helped to dampen down loyalist apprehensions of a Government deal with the protesters.

52. The even-handed and low-key approach by the security forces to demonstrations in support of the hunger strikers, together with PIRA's policy of non-violence during the strike, prevented any major outbreaks of public disorder and reduced tensions between the Catholic community and the authorities and between the Catholic and loyalist communities.

53. There were advantages in keeping the hunger strikers together during their fast since the different rates of deterioration of body functions allowed all to be influenced by the state of the weakest member of the group. This is particularly significant in its effect on the group leader if he proves to be physically one of the stronger members of the group. Isolating each striker might well help one of the more determined strikers to fast to death because he would be insulated from the influence of his fellow strikers and their physical state.

54. The prison medical officers and consultants can also help in deterring death by making the hunger strikers fully aware of each other's condition and the consequences of their actions.

55. It was clear from the way that the hunger-strike developed that the hunger strikers acted with a great deal of autonomy within the umbrella of the republican movement and were not directly responsive to the wishes of the leadership of PIRA or PSF.

56. One factor of over-riding importance in handling a hunger strike in the Northern Ireland prisons is the need to carry the Prison Governors and the Prison Officers along with Government policy. The Prison Officers in particular have a considerable financial stake in the dirty protest and will not readily fall into line with measures to end the protest if they feel that not only their pay but their standing vis à vis the prisoners is threatened.

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