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NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND A DUP DELEGATION
IN STORMONT CASTLE ON 26 SEPTEMBER 1983

The Secretary of State and Mr Scott saw Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson of the DUP on 26 September to discuss the escape from HMP, Maze, on 25 September. Mr Palmer, Mr Gilliland and Mr Lyon were also present.

The Secretary of State outlined briefly what was known of the circumstances of the escape and the current situation. Inmates in H7 Block had overpowered prison officers at about 3.00 pm on 25 September and had taken control of the Block, including the security control area. They had hand guns. One officer had been shot, but was now recovering satisfactorily. An hour later the prisoners had attempted to make good their escape through the main gate. They were recognised and a fight ensued but 38 got away on foot. Ten were quickly recaptured and taken back into the prison. Five were recaptured later and taken to Castlereagh. Two were caught on 26 September. Twenty-one were still at large. There were a number of disturbing points arising from this incident which needed to be investigated. He had therefore arranged for Sir James Hennessey, HM Chief Inspector of Prison, to undertake an immediate enquiry. He was also seeking a report from the Chief Constable and the GOC on the action taken following the escape.

Dr Paisley said that the people of Northern Ireland were very alarmed by the incident. The DUP had for some time been worried about the situation in the prisons. They had reported allegations, such as Mr Robinson's report that there was a gun in the Maze, and had made clear their concern both about the Maze and Magilligan, but he did not consider these were taken sufficiently seriously by the Northern Ireland Office. The escape at the Maze, and the placing of live bullets on a hot stove in Magilligan, showed that the DUP's concerns were justified. Nor could they accept any suggestion that the escapees at the Maze had been helped by the Loyalists' wish for segregation. If there had been any Loyalists in H7, they would have been killed at the beginning of yesterday's escape. Loyalist prisoners had already been told by some prison staff that their safety could not be guaranteed.

Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson considered that the escape could only have

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been organised with assistance from prison officers. They believed that guns and ammunition were smuggled into the prison by officers. The search procedures were too rigorous to allow the extensive smuggling that would have been necessary to provide the amount of arms and ammunition found. Dr Paisley had also been told of written reports from the prison workshop suggesting that metal detectors had been deliberately tampered with.

In further discussion, Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson said that the incident seemed to reveal a good deal of slackness in security procedures at the prison. Nor could they understand why the guards on the control towers had not fired on the escaping prisoners. They thought some police officers might be uncertain about whether they would be liable to be charged with murder if they shot and killed an escaping prisoner. Nor was the position of civilians, such as farmers, acting in a similar way clear. They were concerned too that the Secretary of State seemed not to have received yet a report from Magilligan prison about the live rounds on the hot plate and reports that a Republican prisoner had not returned from compassionate home leave.

Dr Paisley said that he felt it appropriate to call for Mr Scott's resignation. He was Minister responsible for prisons and given the seriousness of the incident he should accept responsibility and resign.

The Secretary of State, concluding a long discussion, said that there was no evidence that Loyalist prisoners were involved in the escape, but the fact that they were not present in the Block may have meant that the prison authorities were not alerted to the prisoners' intention in the planning stage. There was certainly evidence of collusion between the factions to achieve segregation. The Government's policy was not to permit segregation where it was possible to avoid it. He had noted what Dr Paisley and Mr Robinson had said about the incident. The facts would need to be fully investigated by Sir James Hennessey. It was possible that guns could have been smuggled into the prison by visitors. He had been informed that all the metal detectors had been recently replaced and that only four had been found faulty in the last year, but he invited

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Dr Paisley to let him have further information to identify workshop reports to which he had referred. Prison officers in the Maze were unarmed: those who held personal protection weapons left them at the gate. All prison officers coming into the prison were searched. The search procedures would clearly be investigated by Sir James Hennessey. He had noted that one Republican prisoner had not returned from compassionate home leave. This matched a Loyalist prisoner who had recently failed to return. They were the only two/^{life sentence}prisoners in 102 granted compassionate home leave who had failed to return. Neither the security forces nor civilians were given immunity from any action they might take to apprehend an escaping prisoner. It would be for the Director of Public Prosecutions to decide in any particular incident whether any prosecution should be brought. The Secretary of State could not accept Dr Paisley's suggestion that Mr Scott should resign. Such an approach was not consistent with the current understanding of Ministerial responsibility. In any event, the Secretary of State was himself ultimately responsible. He would await Sir James Hennessey's report and decide in the light of it what action to take.

Ullrich Conf

for J M LYON
Private Secretary

27 September 1983

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