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NORTHERN IRELAND PRISONS

A BRIEFING NOTE

26/1/84

Prison Department
Northern Ireland Office

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1. THE PRISONS

General

- 1.1. There are at present 6 penal establishments in Northern Ireland: 4 of which house male adult prisoners, one female adult prisoners, and one male young offenders.
- 1.2. The male prisons are HM Prisons, Belfast, Magilligan, and Maze. A new female prison at Maghaberry was opened in March 1986. The purpose-built Young Offenders Centre for males is located at Hydebank Wood, Belfast, whilst the female Young Offenders Centre forms a small unit within the female prison at Maghaberry. A new male prison at Maghaberry will receive prisoners during the latter part of 1986 and into 1987.

Belfast Prison

- 1.3. Belfast prison is an old traditional type of prison completed in 1854. Situated near the centre of Belfast, it has been extensively modernised over the years and houses some 500-600 male prisoners. Although a number of life sentence prisoners and short term prisoners are held here its primary role in recent years has been that of a remand prison.

Maze Prison

- 1.4. This establishment is situated 14 miles west of Belfast and was first opened as Long Kesh Internment Centre in September

1971.

It began to receive convicted prisoners in 1972 when it was re-named HM Prison, Maze. The Maze prison complex consists of compounds housing the remaining special category prisoners and H Blocks, housing prisoners in cellular accommodation.

- a. **The Compounds** - This consists largely of nissen huts within wire-mesh compounds. Each compound houses members of a separate paramilitary faction (Provisional IRA, Ulster Defence Association, Ulster Volunteer Force) and contains 3 living/sleeping huts, dining accommodation, ablutions, an education hut and a recreation area. At one time 22 compounds were in use; today only 4 are occupied, housing in the region of 160 prisoners of whom 120 retain special category. All but a handful of the latter are life sentence prisoners. The remaining 40 inmates are short term and work as orderlies.

- b. **The H-Blocks** - These were constructed between 1975 and 1977 to house prisoners in cellular accommodation following the decision to end new admissions to special category. It currently holds around 700 prisoners, of whom around 300 are serving life or other indeterminate sentences and the remainder are long-termers serving 4 years or over. The great majority of these prisoners have been sentenced for crimes linked to the main terrorist campaigns and many retain strong paramilitary links. Perhaps the best-known feature of the prison is its accommodation

blocks, known as H-blocks because of their distinctive shape. A block comprises 4 wings, each containing 25 cells, ablutions, dining hall and exercise area. There are 8 H-blocks with 800 cells and given that there are around 700 prisoners, there is no overcrowding. The prison also has all the facilities expected for a major long-term institution - library, sports hall and fields, industries, vocational training, 2 new chapels and a hospital.

1.5. Magilligan Prison

The prison is situated on the coastline of Co Londonderry some 70 miles from Belfast. It was first opened in May 1972 comprising 8 nissen type huts. These have been replaced by 3 H-blocks similar to those at Maze. Magilligan prison houses an average of 300-350 low and medium risk prisoners, many of whom are nearing the end of their sentence. The prison has extensive prison industry and vocational training workshops.

1.6. Hydebank Young Offenders Centre

The purpose-built Centre at Hydebank Wood was opened in 1979 to accommodate 300 young male offenders aged between 17-21 years, serving a period of detention of less than 3 years. The Centre comprises 5 self-contained houses, each of which accommodate approximately 60 inmates in single cell accommodation. Each house is sub-divided in 4 units, each of which has separate dining and recreational facilities. The average daily population of the Centre is in the region of 200 inmates. A

balanced training and education regime is offered to the inmates.

1.7. Maghaberry Prison (Female)

This establishment, which is situated approximately 4 miles west of the Maze Prison, was opened in March 1986 when the former women's prison at Armagh was closed. Maghaberry (Female) is Northern Ireland's only women's prison and provides accommodation for all untried and sentenced women prisoners. The prison, currently holds around 30 women inmates, and provides facilities of a high standard including single cell accommodation for up to 56 inmates. All cells have integral sanitation and a full range of facilities such as a purpose-built hospital, a gymnasium, chapel and library. Accommodation is in the form of two-storey houses which are each divided into self-contained units capable of housing 7 inmates. Each unit also has its own kitchen and separate association room equipped with colour televisions and record players. Each unit also has a special cell equipped for accommodation of a mother and child. One of the units has been designated as a young offenders centre for a small number of female inmates.

1.8. Maghaberry Prison (Male)

This prison, which will open in stages during the latter part of 1986 and 1987, will house around 430 prisoners in

single cell accommodation. All cells have integral sanitation. A full range of facilities are available including an education block, prison industry workshops, gymnasium, football pitches, hospital.

PART 2 THE SYSTEM AND ITS CHALLENGES

Prison Population

2.1 There are around 2,000 prisoners in Northern Ireland.

Maze (Cellular)	700
Maze (Compound)	150 (including 120 special cate
Belfast	550
Magilligan	300
Maghaberry (Female)	30
Young Offenders Centre	200

2.2 The prison population rose dramatically during the early years of the civil unrest from the level of the 1960s when it was around 600. A very much higher proportion of the total than GB are relatively young and are serving very long terms of imprisonment: nearly 460 are serving life imprisonment or sentences of detention during the Secretary of State's pleasure (the equivalent of a life sentence where a person was under 18 at the time of a murder).

Staff and Headquarters

2.3 The Prison Service consists of just over 3,300 members, of whom about 3,100 are in the uniformed grades, 60 are Governors and 160 are civilian employees. The prison system, including the Prison Service College which caters for training, costs some £87m a year to run, over 80% of which is taken up by staff costs.

2.4 The Prison Service is subject to the authority of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Some of its members work alongside civil service colleagues at Prison Department Headquarters, part of the Northern Ireland Office. The Headquarters consists of 4 Divisions dealing with Prisoners Regimes, Security and Operations, Personnel and Works, and Education. Some 160 staff are currently employed.

The Terrorist Problem

2.5 The most difficult problems of the Northern Ireland prisons over the last 15 years all arise from the same basic phenomenon: that of dealing, in an ordinary prison situation and under ordinary prisons legislation, with a population consisting of a majority (at present about 70%) of prisoners whose offences were committed on behalf or at the behest of paramilitary organisations and who with varying degrees of of commitment retain their links with those organisations. These prisoners seek to justify their offences on the ground that they were committed for a political cause - either to drive the British out of Ireland or as part of a response to extrajudicial violence on the Republican side. Such prisoners also enjoy considerable, if fluctuating, support within their respective communities. This can provide them with a powerful means of exerting external pressure on the prison system in addition of course to activities or attacks by the organisations themselves.

2.6 The nature of the prison population also means that prison officers in Northern Ireland are subjected to constant intimidation by prisoners and their supporters. Officers have to contend regularly with organised harassment, both physical and verbal, from inmates whose aim is to prevent them from properly carrying out their duties thereby undermining security and control of the establishment. This problem is found to a greater or lesser degree in all establishments but is most acute at Maze Cell Block prison which houses the bulk of the terrorist hard core, both Loyalist and Republican. The existence of segregated wings (see part 3 below) at Maze has tended to intensify this difficulty.

Officers - and their families - are also regularly threatened outside the prisons by both Loyalists and Republicans. Considerable numbers have received serious threats over the years and these continue. Officers' property has also been attacked. Terrorist organisations have killed 25 members of the Prison Service, murders that have taken place inside officers' own homes, on their doorsteps, at Church and on the streets.

PART 3 - A CALENDAR OF MAJOR EVENTS

3. Against this background it is not surprising that prisons have been a regular focus of conflict and protest, as the following list of main events shows:-

- 1972 Republican prisoners, supported by loyalists, launched a major campaign and hunger strike to obtain what they call "political status". The Government of the day subsequently granted special category status. Prisoners holding such status were allowed to wear their own clothes, received special parcels and visits and were accommodated in compounds divided up by paramilitary groups.
- 1972-74 Confrontation from both republican and loyalist special category prisoners continued, with the aim of extending their privileges still further. This phase culminated in October 1974 when republican prisoners burned the Maze compounds and attempted to launch similar attacks in the other prisons.
- 1975 The Gardiner Committee report recommended the ending of special category status, by now equated in the public mind with "political status". Government accepted this proposal and embarked on what became known as the criminalisation policy. All prisoners entering the system would henceforth be treated comparably and entry to special category would be progressively restricted.
- 1976 The republican response to the new policy, which was started in March 1976, was violent. A major campaign of murder and intimidation was launched against prison staff. The first prisoners to be refused special category would not put on prison clothing, but "wore" the bed blankets provided. Hence the origin and name of the

"blanket protest". Loyalist prisoners also took part, but mostly in much smaller numbers and with less obvious commitment.

1978 As the blanket protest failed to produce the restoration of special category the increasing number of republican protesters (over 300) resorted during 1978 to the "dirty protest". This entailed the destruction of all cell fittings a refusal to use the toilets, the smearing of food and other items on the cell door and walls and the pouring of urine into the corridors.

1980 The final stage of stopping all new admissions to special category began on 1 April 1980 and no prisoner charged with an offence on or after that date was admitted to special category.

The dirty protest, backed up by a powerful external propaganda campaign, also failed to produce the restoration of special category. (The external campaign was based on the "five demands", which were presented as basic prisoners' rights but were in essence intended to amount to special category.) Seven republican prisoners then embarked on the first hunger strike from October to December 1980 intended to obtain the five demands.

1981 The first hunger strike having not achieved its goals, the claim was made that government had reneged on a supposed deal. This was taken as the pretext for the second hunger strike whose explicit aim was the achievement of "political status". The dirty protest (in which the loyalists had never participated) ended with the start of the second strike. Ten prisoners died the course of the strike which, as had been intended, generated major tensions and confrontations outside the prisons. It ended substantially as the result of pressure from the prisoners'

next of kin. As part of the process of prison reform, prisoners were allowed to wear their own clothes, but otherwise their demands remained unmet. This failure caused a fundamental rethink on the republican side which henceforth decided on a more subtle - though if necessary violent - approach to the restoration of special category. This was based on the subversion and intimidation of staff in the wings, made easier by the attainment of segregation.

1982 The steady decline in the republican blanket protest saw a rise in republican numbers in the "mixed wings" of Maze Cellular. Loyalist paramilitaries claimed this to be a threat and launched a campaign - at least partly in collusion with the republicans - for segregation. Segregation had been one of the issues implicit in the various protests in which Republican prisoners participated over a number of years. In October 1982 Loyalist prisoners in Maze engaged in various forms of protest and wrecked over 200 cells. They began their own dirty protest including smearing excrement over cell walls and as a result had to be separated from Republican prisoners, initially for reasons of hygiene. After the dirty protest was called off the Loyalists continued their protest by refusing to accept the Governor's orders regarding accommodation and work. Attempts to reintegrate the prisoners were met with violence. The resulting segregation still persists - 16 wings of the prison are exclusively Roman Catholic, 5 Protestant and 9 mixed - but has never been formally recognised. An integrated, fully-conforming prison population able to enjoy as purposive a regime as possible remains Departmental policy.

October 1982 also saw the start of the campaign to stop strip searching

female prisoners in HM Prison Armagh. This procedure had not been used at Armagh for some time and when it was re-introduced in October 1982 following a breach of security, some of the prisoners immediately mounted a campaign to have it stopped. Throughout this campaign which still continues there have been many grossly exaggerated statements made by prisoners and their relatives, and many of these have been circulated to well-meaning groups and individuals at home and abroad (particularly the USA) in an effort to have pressure brought to bear to have the searches stopped. The search procedures are similar to those in the rest of the United Kingdom and, it is reliably believed, in most other countries in the Western world including the United States of America. The whole question has been regularly reviewed and, although as a result reduced to a minimum, this has perhaps predictably had little effect on the propaganda campaign.

1983 On 25 September 1983 segregated republican prisoners staged a mass break-out from Maze Cellular. Thirty-eight prisoners escaped, 19 were quickly recaptured; 6 have since been rearrested and two have died in terrorist operations. One prison officer was killed during the escape. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir James Hennessy was tasked with carrying out a full inquiry into the escape. His report and recommendations were accepted by the Secretary of State and have since almost all been implemented.

1984 In February 1984 the Loyalist prisoners in Maze Cellular abandoned their protest which had begun in 1982 and agreed to accept the Governor's orders regarding accommodation and work. In the meantime the republican/loyalist segregation campaign had spread to Magilligan where in

May 1984 22 Loyalist prisoners took part in a short-lived hunger strike to obtain segregation at that establishment. Having not achieved this, a second and larger strike was staged in August of the same year. Once again the strike was unsuccessful though it did attract more public interest. Government gave a commitment to restore a better balance between the factions in the wings and this was done.

1985-86 Three of the 27 prisoners, who had been convicted on the evidence of INLA supergrass Harry Kirkpatrick, embarked on a short-lived hunger strike. The hunger strike was called off by the prisoners pending their appeal.

4. THE REGIME

- 4.1 The treatment of prisoners is governed by the Prison Act and the Prison Rules. The Act is the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953, as amended over the years, and the Prison Rules (Northern Ireland) 1982 which came into operation on 1 September 1982.

Half Remission/Conditional Release

- 4.2 All prisoners serving sentences of more than 5 days are eligible for half remission of sentence for good conduct. A prisoner is credited with his remission at the start of his sentence and given an Earliest Date of Release calculated accordingly. Remission may be lost under Prison Rules for disciplinary offences.
- 4.3 A prisoner serving a sentence of more than 12 months who is released from prison with remission is liable to be ordered to serve the remaining balance of this sentence if he is convicted of fresh imprisonable offences during this period.

Clothing

- 4.4 Shortly before the start of the first hunger strike in October 1980, the Government introduced official-issue civilian clothing for sentenced prisoners (unconvicted

and special category prisoners were already allowed to wear their own clothes and other prisoners had been allowed since March 1976 to wear their own clothes of an approved type, during association periods and for visits). Following the ending of the second hunger-strike in October 1981 it was decided to allow all sentenced prisoners to wear their own clothes, or a mixture of their own and official-issue items. Items resembling prison officers' uniforms, associated with paramilitary organisations or which are otherwise unsuitable or offensive are not permitted. A full range of official-issue civilian clothing is available for those prisoners unable to provide for themselves.

Leave Arrangements

4.5 Arrangements exist for pre-release home leave for prisoners serving fixed sentences. Compassionate home leave (CHL) is granted to sentenced prisoners in Northern Ireland on a much more liberal basis than in Great Britain: escorted visits are frequently not a practicable proposition because of the risk to prison staff. CHL for life sentence prisoners who have not received a provisional date for release was reintroduced in August 1985 following suspension of the scheme for almost 2 years because 2 such prisoners failed to return to prison. All life sentence prisoners who have a provisional date for release and those who have not but have served a qualifying period of 6 years are eligible for consideration

4.6 Certain fixed-sentence prisoners who have served a qualifying period are also considered for a period of leave at Christmas (usually 5 days). These arrangements were started in the late 40s by the then Northern Ireland Government and have been continued by successive administrations since the introduction of Direct Rule. They are intended to maintain and strengthen family links, important for a prisoner's return to the community.

Visits, Letters, Association, etc.

4.7 Letters

Prisoners are allowed one statutory and one additional privilege letter out each week paid for by the prison. Further letters may be sent at prisoners' own expense. Letters can be received in reasonable proportion to those sent.

4.8 Visits

One statutory and 3 additional privilege open visits are allowed each month. Visits last half an hour, although facilities exist for extended visits when necessary.

4.9 Parcels

A weekly parcel of reading material, fruit and toilet articles is allowed. Special, larger parcels are permitted at Christmas, Easter and Halloween.

4.10 Exercise

There is a statutory exercise period of one hour a day in the open air, subject to weather conditions. Those prisoners who are not working are given an additional hour's exercise daily. Recreation is also available through the use of the gymnasium and playing fields.

4.11 Association

Three hours' association is given every evening (to watch colour television, pursue education, watch film shows, play indoor games, such as snooker, darts, etc). There is also association during the day on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

4.12 Radios, etc

Prisoners serving over 2 years may keep a personal radio set in their cells. In addition, prisoners are allowed access to record players, guitars and mandolins.

4.13 Newspapers and Reading Material

There is access to newspapers and also use of the well-stocked prison library. Paperback books are extensively received in parcels.

4.14 Use of Earnings

Prisoners may use their earnings from prison work and a fixed amount of their private cash to buy items from the prison tuck shop.

4.15 Cell Crafts

Prisoners are allowed to do water colour painting and handkerchief painting in their cells.

MEDICAL SERVICES

- 4.16 All prison establishments except Maghaberry Female and the Young Offenders Centre have full-time Medical Officers supported by part-time Medical Officers; the Medical Officers at Maghaberry and the Young Offenders Centre are local general practitioners who work part-time in the prison. All Medical Officers have ready access to consultant advice as and when this is considered necessary or desirable.
- 4.17 Each penal establishment has a prison hospital in which prisoners can have such medical assessment and treatment and nursing care. Three prisons have X-ray units. A unit within the prison hospital at Belfast is used for prisoners with psychiatric problems which can be handled by the staff and with the facilities available, under the direction of the visiting consultant psychiatrists.
- 4.18 Since 1974 the Prison Medical Service has been administered by the Department of Health and Social Services which is responsible for health and personal social services in Northern Ireland. The Prison Medical Service is not therefore part of the Prison Department.
- 4.19 A full range of dental treatment similar to that in the Health Service is provided and any special services outside the experience of the Dental Officers is provided

by a restorative consultant and an oral surgeon who attend the prison hospital when required. The overall general health is the responsibility of the Prison Medical Officer who refers those requiring dental care to the Dental Officer. Professional and managerial responsibility for the Prison Dental Service lies with the Chief Dental Officer, Department of Health and Social Services. Ophthalmic Services are provided by visiting opticians.

WORK/VOCATIONAL TRAINING

- 4.20 Since the escape in September 1983 it has not been possible, for a number of reasons, including security, to reopen the prison industry workshops in Maze. (A number of the weapons used in the 1983 escape from Maze are thought to have been manufactured by prisoners in these workshops.) However, the range of work available includes employment in the prison laundry, kitchen, vocational training courses such as motor vehicle body repair, welding, carpentry and horticulture and orderly work, eg cleaning duties within each wing. PI continue at Magilligan.

EDUCATION

- 4.21 An extensive education programme is available to all prisoners ranging from remedial to Open University level. A system of flexistudy (ie learning packages with tutorial support) forms the main element in the education programme at Maze.

Traditional classroom methods of teaching are used elsewhere in the system. More than half of the total prison population in Northern Ireland are pursuing some form of education.