

NOTE OF A MEETING WITH PROJEX 2000 EX-PRISONERS GROUP -  
10 SEPTEMBER 1998

Officials present:

R Spence, Permanent Secretary	)	
Stewart Martin	)	DOE
Errol Gunning	)	
Adrian Arbuthnot		T & EA
Ann Williams		DED
Seth Speirs		CJSD, NIO

Projex 2000 representatives:

Ken Cleland, Chairman  
Brendan Mackin, Vice Chair  
Tommy Gormon, Project Director  
Martin Snodden, EPIC  
John White, Prisoner Aid & Post Conflict Resettlement Group  
Liam Stone, Tus Nua  
Paul Mageean, Council for the Administration of Justice.  
Peter Quinn, Industry (Rural)

Introduction

1. Mr Cleland explained his group's remit to highlight the difficulties faced within society by politically motivated ex-prisoners. Over the entire conflict period some 21,000 people had been affected, whether through conventional imprisonment or internment. Whilst within the prison system, about 12% had obtained 3rd level education qualifications and many more had acquired manual or technical skills of value to society. On release, most of these persons faced disaffection, disadvantage and hence discrimination in their efforts to return to and play a full part within society. These persons are now largely in the 35 - 45 age group and in some areas account for up to 50% of the long term male unemployed. Projex 2000 advances the case for sympathetic treatment of all politically motivated prisoners and is endeavouring to persuade industry generally of the contribution which they may now have to offer. Although there has been much research over the years, there has been no real co-ordination and Projex 2000 regards itself as the catalyst most likely to be able to achieve change in the way in which these ex-prisoners may be re-integrated to society. A further 400 of these prisoners are due for release over the next 2 years.

Issues

2. Project 2000 representatives then spoke in turn identifying the issues which they believe need further and urgent attention:

- (a) Para 5 of the 'Agreement' places a responsibility on Government to act to assist re-training and re-integration of these prisoners but there is, as yet, no



discernible action forthcoming. The Private Sector needs to be persuaded of Government's commitment and it is thus vital that the correct signals are conveyed as a matter of urgency;

- (b) Identification of vocational training requirements is necessary and Projex 2000 undertook to provide definitive data on this to the NIO within the next 2 weeks. Arrangements need to be put in place to provide this training whether within the Maze or, if more appropriate, in T & EA centres. Assurances were provided that a high level of prisoner co-operation and flexibility could be expected to avail of this initiative;
- (c) Examination of the Rehabilitation of Offenders rules is required as sentences of over 30 months are unable to be expunged. The rate of re-offending from within this group is 15 times lower than that of the conventional criminal and the application of the standard rules is not therefore helpful;
- (d) Upon release, Criminal Damage and Criminal Injury legislation rules on the qualification for compensation debar these people from access to monies which are available to the wider population and the inherent unfairness of this needs to be examined;
- (e) Public sector rules on 'screening' of contractor's workforces can result in a reluctance to employ these ex-prisoners as public sector contracts are of great significance to many sectors of industry;
- (f) The public sector must examine innovatively the scope to avail of the skills on offer, including offering the opportunities for 'co-operatives' to compete on a level playing surface, for example, in providing building and maintenance services to the Housing Executive;
- (g) The application of PAFT & TSN rules to this minority group is highly significant, again in sending signals to industry which is looking to Government for a lead;
- (h) Social regeneration initiatives are vital and seed-corn finance is needed to establish and expand Projex 2000's role and enhance its capacity to become a self sufficient and viable group capable of remaining central to these issues for the foreseeable future;
- (j) Specifically, the rules on PSV licensing almost invariably result in applications from ex-prisoners being refused, necessitating appeals to either the Review Body (vehicle licences), or the Courts (taxi drivers' driving licences). It is claimed that most appeals from politically motivated ex-prisoners are successful and there is no evidence that these licences have subsequently been suspended or revoked (this claim is being examined by Transport Licensing & Enforcement Branch!);

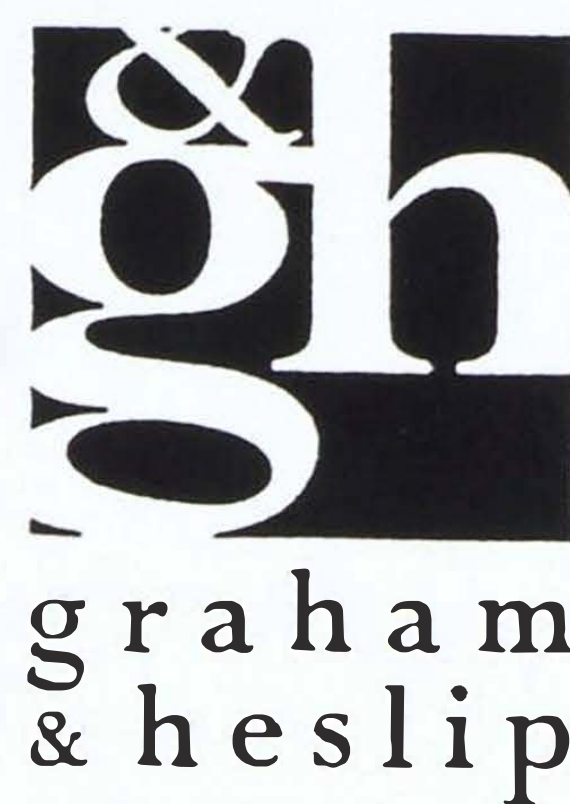
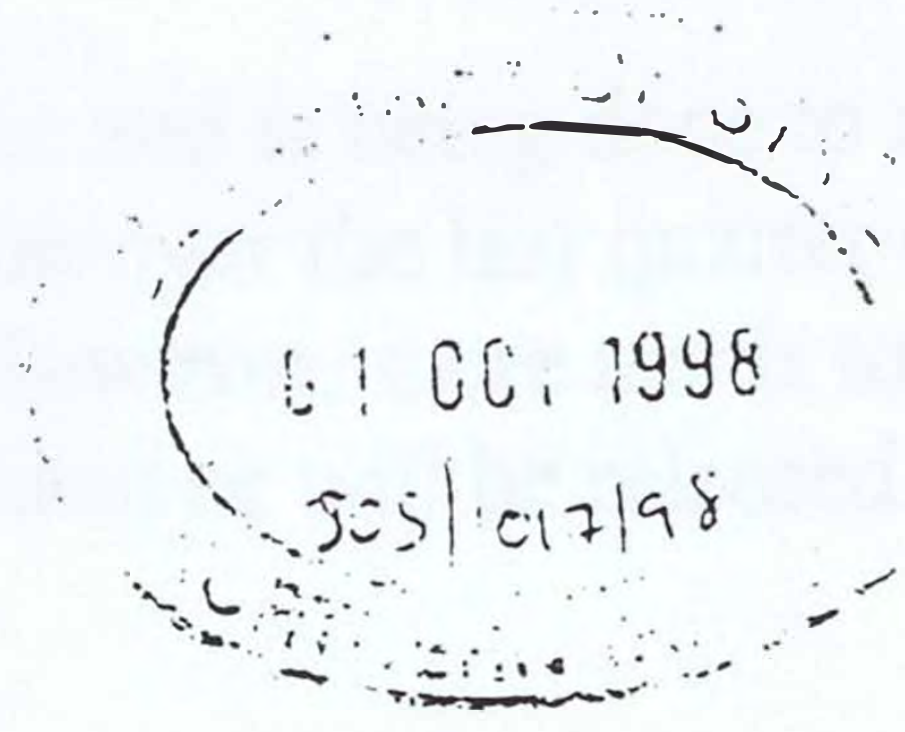


- (k) Projex 2000 representatives also asked for Section 42 of the Fair Employment legislation to be repealed, especially in the light of the ECHR judgement in the "Tinnelly" case. This currently exempts from the scope of the legislation an act done for the purpose of safeguarding national security or of protecting public safety or public order. There is no scope to appeal a sect. 42 decision in NI.
3. Mr Cleland concluded by emphasising that Government had a clear duty to examine these and associated issues and that it would be vitally important for decisions to be cascaded to all relevant operational levels.
4. Officials commented on the rules within their respective areas of expertise, clarifying that any significant departure from current practices/policies could only be undertaken as part of a much wider and centrally driven initiative.
5. Mr Spence explained that the DOE had already suffered a cut of £36 million from its Community Development budget and that further reductions may yet arise. Nonetheless, he undertook to report the views to Mr Adam Ingram MP, the Minister responsible for NIO matters. Mr Cleland indicated that he would write to Ministers seeking a meeting.

E Gunning  
15 September 1998



29 September 1998



Dr M Mowlam

PS Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
Belfast, BT4

Dear Dr Mowlam

I am writing on behalf of Projex 2000 to seek a meeting with you to urge Government's commitment to a more comprehensive and integrated approach to the vital task of reintegrating politically motivated prisoners into the community.

Projex 2000 is a group which includes employers, trade unionists, the public sector nominees (T&EA and PBNI) and representatives of Republican and Loyalist prisoner welfare groups. It was set up following a consultancy report jointly commissioned by PBNI, Extern and NIACRO and in response to the concerns of a group of leading business people from the private sector.

The Good Friday Agreement contained a clear recognition by the two Governments of "the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, retraining and/or re-skilling, and further education." Not enough is being done to implement this commitment.

The Government also committed itself under New TSN to addressing more effectively the needs of disadvantaged people and areas, including the individuals who find it difficult to play a full role in society. In addition, the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative has committed Government to adopting flexible and innovative, cross departmental approaches to achieving a more coherent and effective response to the needs of vulnerable groups. These commitments have to be reflected in the treatment of ex-prisoners.



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Mr.M.Long (Managing)  
Mrs.M.L.Cleland (Secretary)  
Mr.G.Chestnutt  
Mrs.R.Craig



We recognised that much has already been done and is being done to assist the thousands of people who have been in prison over the last quarter of a century as a consequence of "The Troubles." However, more needs to be done to help those who have already been released or will be released over the next two years.

We want all of these people to play a positive and constructive role in building a peaceful, more prosperous and equitable society. But this will, in our view, not happen unless there is a more comprehensive and integrated approach involving the relevant parts of the public and voluntary/community sectors and with appropriate private sector involvement.

We believe that:

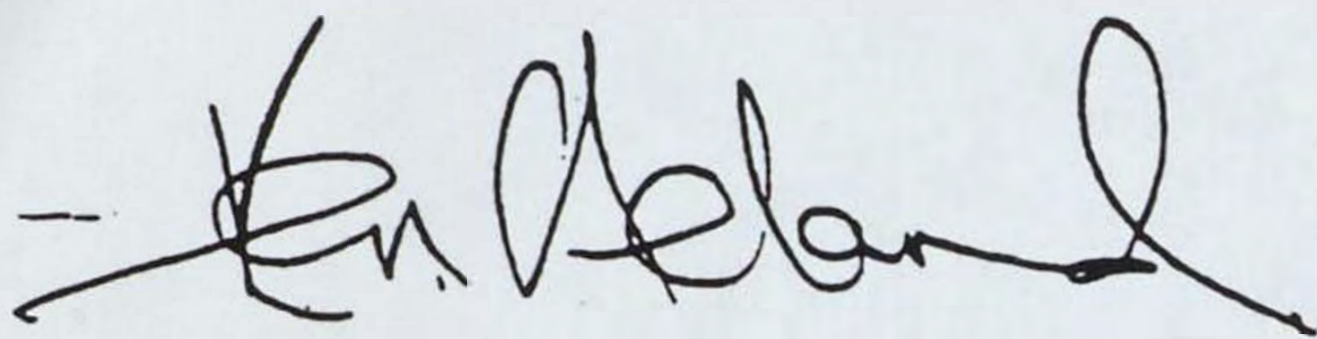
- ◆ just as Government has appointed a Minister to have oversight of measures to help victims of violence, there is a need for a lead Minister to oversee the reintegration of prisoners into society; Adam Ingram as the security Minister and the Minister with responsibility for the economy, would seem to us to be the most appropriate Minister.
- ◆ the nominated Minister should be supported by a small Civil Service unit which would, inter alia, co-ordinate action across NIO and the NI Departments.
- ◆ there should be a review of legislation, policies and practices which inhibit the movement of ex-prisoners into employment.
- ◆ immediate steps should be taken by the Prison Service to identify training needs, particularly in the area of vocational skills, of those due to be released over the next two years.
- ◆ further steps should be taken to increase access by prisoners who have been released to appropriate educational and training facilities.
- ◆ adequate resources should be made available to community development organisations working with ex-prisoners.
- ◆ further encouragement and assistance should be made available to ex-prisoners seeking to establish small businesses which are not being supported by the conventional banking system.



- ◆ Government should explain to a sometimes sceptical public (including private sector employees) the need for measures like this.

We would be glad to expand on these points at a meeting with you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Cleland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Ken Cleland  
Chairman - Projex 2000