

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/79/3202
Creation Date(s):	1-3 March 1978
Extent and medium:	9 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.



Mr. Swift
To see pl.
RVS. 7/3

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR
Telephone: 01-235 2171
TELEX: 916104

IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

3rd March, 1978

Confidential

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Donohue
Pl. see Mr. Swift's direction
in margin below
RVS. 8/3
Mary 64D, 9/23

For the Attention of Mr. Raphael Siev, Anglo-Irish Section 9/3/78

64D

- (1) I wish to report that Sister Sarah Clarke of the Friends and Relatives of Prisoners' Committee called to see me at the Embassy this morning. She handed me a copy of the attached text of the remarks prepared by Father Faul for the meeting in the House of Commons sponsored by Joan Maynard M.P. and Tom Litterick and organised by Mr. Gerry Lawless of the Sunday World which was held on 1 March, 1978. As Father Faul was unable to travel to London for the meeting, because he was ill, Sister Sarah read his prepared speech to the meeting. The meeting, which took place in Committee Room 10 at the House of Commons, was attended by approximately 100 people and was chaired by Mr. Tom Litterick. Miss Jacqueline Kaye of the Prisoners' Aid Committee - at whose instigation Cedrick Thornbury is taking a number of cases to the European Commission - attacked Sister Sarah and her organisation on the grounds that they were not actively working for a political solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. Sister Sarah told me that Miss Kaye had referred to the Provisional I.R.A. as the exclusive inheritors of the Republican tradition and as the only group who could establish democracy and freedom on the island of Ireland. Miss Kaye argued that the treatment of prisoners both in the North and in Britain by the British Government was consistent with their determination to achieve a military victory in the armed struggle which was taking place in the North. What was inconsistent was the British Government's refusal to give prisoner-of-war status to the Provisional I.R.A. prisoners both here and in the North. I am attaching a copy of the PAC's most recent newsletter which was distributed at the meeting.

Please ensure
that this is
recorded
with previous
papers
Miss Kaye and
the PAC

- (2) Sister Sarah said that a number of those who attended were

9/23

.../...

members of the International Tribunal on Britain's presence in Ireland which was launched in the House of Commons earlier this year. I am also attaching a copy of their most recent pamphlet which was requested by Mr. Micheál O Cinnéide of Anglo-Irish Section some weeks ago. A revised and extended list of the supporters of the Tribunal is contained in the attached document.

*Was on the
Party delegation
in 1976?*

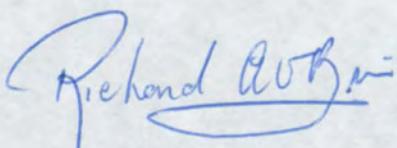
Mr. Jack Clafferty, who is a member of one of the Labour Party's committees on Ireland and an active Trade Unionist in London, also spoke at the meeting (Clafferty was born in Co. Donegal). Mr. Jim Reilly of Provisional Sinn Fein attacked Father Faul's reference to the "2,000 Republican or Catholic prisoners". He said that the use of sectarian language continue to divide the people of Northern Ireland and he urged that such sectarian phraseology should be rejected by those working for better conditions for prisoners in Britain and in the North. He approached Sister Sarah after the meeting in the course of which, I understood, there was a rather heated exchange during which he told her that Republican prisoners were the responsibility of the Sinn Fein movement and that she and Father Faul should mind their own business. After the meeting, she was also approached by a member of the Belfast Relatives Action Committee who have, she said, recently established a branch in London.

- ③ In the course of the conversation with Joan Maynard, she learned that, together with Tom Litterick and some other Labour back-benchers, Miss Maynard had, earlier that day, discussed the operation and implementation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act with Lord Shackleton. Sister Sarah understood that the meeting had taken place at Shackleton's request but that while he listened to their views, he made no comments nor did he leave them with any impression of his own thinking on the Act.

Sister Sarah said that she was also approached after the meeting by Mr. Stuart Paul, an American who is now living in Islington and who writes for the "Intercontinental Press", which she understood was a New York based paper, and "Ireland Unfree" which is published in London. Paul was anxious to be put in contact with Father Faul and to obtain the documentation which had been given to Amnesty International

..../....

in the course of their visit to Northern Ireland at the end of last year. I understand that Sister Sarah has written to Father Faul about Paul's request. Sister Sarah mentioned that she had regular contact with Sister Miriam Corcoran, who teaches at Spalding College, Louiseville, Kentucky, and who sent her the attached documentation - Irish American Reporter and The Review of "Society under Siege" which appeared in the National Catholic Reporter on 17th February, 1978. Sister Sarah said that Sister Corcoran had been contacted by Irish societies in Louiseville and requested to accept the tital of Irish Person of the Year - which, I understand, she did.



Richard A. O'Brien
First Secretary

1/3/78

The care and Welfare of Prisoners in Northern Ireland
and of Irish Prisoners in England.

Fr Denis Faul

(1) The problem of prisoners is the problem of Peace. In the North of Ireland at the moment there are approximately 2000 Republican or Catholic prisoners -- both these words are loose descriptions of large groups of men-- and about 800 Loyalist prisoners. For every prisoner one can count ten or maybe twenty people, relatives, friends , neighbours. The problem therefore can include as many as 60,000 people drawn mainly from certain small clearly defined areas which are often areas of underprivilege and poverty. A very combustible mixture, one can see and when one considers the widespread suspicion of the processes of law and order- the allegations that brutality of one kind or another was used in extracting signatures to statements, then the mixture can often catch fire with regrettable consequences for the community at large.

It is impossible to see how peace can be established without some solution being found to the problem-the existence of such a large number of prisoners, the doubts about their guilt in law or in fact, serious complaints about disparity of sentences, ill treatment after arrest, diplock courts; the lack of total absence of security forces personnel from the prisons after seven years during which many serious charges of murder and brutal ill treatment were laid at their door , the latter being upheld at the European Court of Human Rights . Justice must be impartial and balanced and seen to be so; the relatives of the prisoners do not see it so.

The stated policy of the British Government is that there will be no amnesty for prisoners in Northern Ireland. If one accepts that the British Government is as sincere in this belief as they are in every other part of their Irish policy, then the prospect is that THOUSANDS OF RELATIVES WILL BE GOING TO SEE HUNDREDS OF PRISONERS ON PROTEST IN THE YEAR 2005 or 2010. These poor people will be from the most deprived areas of Belfast and Derry. To leave these people without hope for the next 25 or 30 years is not a recipe for peace.

Ten years ago there were about 600 prisoners in Northern Ireland ;now there are 3000;thaat is not due to a rise in the crime rate of breaking and entering, rape and drunken drivin -g. It is due to crimes that are politically motivated. These men are sentenced by special courts after being interrogaated by spe
cial methods under detention by emergency special laws , and sente
-ced to special long sentences ;yetany claim they may make to have
have a special category statu in the prison is denied.This denial
led to a protest by approximately 300 prisoners at the present
time ;they refuse to wear prison clothes ork to do prison work:
These are the men on the blanket. These men are insreasing in
number every day and bybtge Summer time will number 500 and go on
increasing. What like Catholic public who are opposed to viole
nce , will t_hink when 1 in eve ry thousand of the Catholic
population(1 in every 200 males) is naked in Long Kesh under
protest, i leave to the immagination.Extend this situation onan
increasing scale for 25 years and see the true dimensions of a very
serious problem for the peacemaker in Northern Ireland .

There are about 260 prisoners on the Blanket
at present in ~~XX~~~~X~~~~XX~~~~XX~~ H Block 5 and H Block 3 in Long Kesh and
6 in the Crumlin Road prison and 24 women in Armagh prison who
can wear their own clothes , but who refuse to do any work.
The average age of these prisoners is 20 years and about 50%
are 18 years, another grim portent for the future. 80% have
been charged on signed statements (their own);76.6% have been
found guilty on these~~s~~alone Many say the signed statements were
taken under duress ,but the courts accept the evidence of the
prosecution.

Living conditions. There are two prisoners in each cell ,
although the cells were built for one prisoner;this may not be an
advantage as prisoners cannot choose or changec their cell mate
and they may get on each other's nerves.

They are locked in their
cells 24 hours a day except for a few minutes "slopping out" in the

morning, when two prisoners ~~at~~ a time go to empty their pots. (the longest time out of the cell is mass time on Sundays, about 45 minutes). It is alleged that some don't get slopped out within the time allowed and that ,if this happens, they have to keep their unemptied pots for another day.

A basin of water is brought to each cell after slopping out for washing. The prisoners could go to wash-basins outside the cells for washing and shaving but they ^{were} allowed only one towel and as they use this to cover themselves they would have no towel for drying themselves. They have asked for a second towel but have been refused .They refuse therefore to use the washing facilities outside the cells. Most of them grow beards because of the lack of proper facilities for shaving;they are allowed one tube of tooth paste every seven weeks.

The prisoners on protest are not allowed cigarettes, tobacco newspapers, radios, any kind of games and no books or reading materials except religious books and magazines. They are called "strippers" and "streakers" bby the prison officers.

~~The~~ prisoners do not get ~~a~~ any exercise except what they can do in their cells;those who try to do physical exercises in their celss find that they are very exhausted after a short time and so the tendency seems to be not to do such exercises.The reason for the coming on of such exhaustion is lack of fresh air and ~~the~~ lack of normal exercise like walking. Also there is really no room in the cells for doing physical exercises properly.

Food. Dinner is at 12.45 p.m. and tea at 5 p.m. and a cup of tea at 7 p.m.Comments on the food are adverse, "cold"etc. The thin slices of meat are described as "blotting paper".There ~~see~~
~~-ms~~ to be little variety and the quantity is "not enough".The reason why the food is cold is because it has to be brought around to the cells, but the allegation was made that the prison staff delay the distribution of the food, making tea themselves while the food can be seen sitting~~s~~there.

Toilet facilities.This normally means

Seems

a pot in the cell used by the prisoners. It is possible to get out to the toilets but permission seems to depend on the attitude of individual prison staff. A bell is used to attract the attention of the prison staff and the allegation was made that one prisoner who rang the bell a number of times for permission to use the toilet, was given a punishment of time "on the boards" for "improper use of government property.

Prisoners on the blanket suffer constant or at least frequent psychological mental strain which could have bad effects in the long run. It seems prisoners often feel like screaming or letting off steam by banging furniture around the cell. One man released after ten months on the blanket (on appeal) said he felt it difficult to mix with people and had a tendency to be withdrawn into himself. He felt the urge to go away from people and sit by himself; another said he kept going into trances and sitting staring at the wall while people tried to bring him out of it; he went dizzy on one occasion in public and began to smash up the place and then fainted.

Prisoners complain about prison officers conduct about slapping or messing them about in various degrees and bad language. They allege that if they make such allegations, that they are in danger of being charged with "swearing at a P.O." or being put on some charge and then put "on the boards". It is impossible to ascertain the truth or otherwise of these allegations in the welter of accusations and counter accusations.

To entertain themselves the prisoners hold concerts, quiz competitions - even debates. They do this by standing at the doors of their cells and shouting; they also say the Rosary in this way. It seems now that this type of communication has become more difficult, if not impossible, because the "crack" between the door and the door jamb, through which the prisoners shouted and through which they could see, has been covered and sealed with a metal strip. Once at least when the prisoners were saying the Rosary, there was a lot of rattling of doors and banging of batons and noise outside. Rosary beads they allege, have been confiscated and missalettes.

Medical Treatment

5/

Disatisfaction is expressed with medical treatment, but that is a common complaint in all institutions. They allege however that some prisoners have been threatened with refusal of medical or specialist attention if they do not put on their xxexxx prison clothes, but no case of a man actually being refused attention has been quoted. Colds are the commonest form of illness and once they are contracted they are difficult to get rid of because of the run down condition of the prisoners. Skin rashes and dandruff are also common ailments due to lack of fresh air (they never get outside) and lack of proper nutriments. One prisoner who was nine days "on the boards" got frost bite. Pains in legs, joints, elbows, shoulders are also common apparently due to lack of intexxx exercise. Eyesight complaints are also alleged - this may be due to the glare of lights on the white walls of the cells and short range viewing all day every day. Cold and bare feet may lead to kidney complaints, arthritis.

Visits are allowed once a month for half an hour but the prisoners must put on clothes. Letters are nowx allowed once a week, but this is a recent concession.

Punishment cells. There are 28 of them, one padded. The furniture is a wooden bed and pillow and chair and "pot" (it is alleged that the pot has no lid). It is also alleged that there is no heat worth talking about in the punishment cells - the only ventilation seems to be through a pipe in the wall. The prisoner cannot see out of the punishment cells. Mattress and bedclothes are brought in at night. There is no reading material but a copy of the Bible is provided. It is alleged that frequent punishments on the boards" are handed out for trivial and sometimes false offences. One was put on the boards" for making chess men out of toilet paper; one was sent there for three days because the fly leaf of his Bible was removed although others had been in the cell -- the charge was "damaging government property". Some prisoners have been given as much as 15 days on the boards. One because he complained that he did not get a clean towel one week; another for ringing the bell to go to the toilet (Charge "misuse of government property").

Punishment in H Blocks

6/

Bedding is removed from the cells once ^A every fortnight for three days as a punishment --during the day only - it is restored at night. The prisoners do not speak to the prison visitors as they regard them as part of the establishment. The prison welfare men refused for a time to go into H block as a protest at the exceptionally harsh treatment of the men there. One man had his wedding ring confiscated; those who have lost limbs find the cold hard to endure; one man who had to go to hospital was chained.

It is clear that British treatment of the helpless Irish has not changed for the better over the centuries and it will have the same disastrous consequences --in 2010 and 2020 for anglo -Irish relations . Coercion has never succeeded.

Fr Denis Faul

Denis Faul

1/3/78