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Reference

DUS/ 174

-7 APR 1978

N.I.O. BELFAST

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Secretary

TREATMENT OF PRISONERS AT POLICE CENTRES

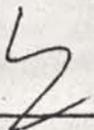
1. Dr Weir asked me to see Dr Irwin, a Police Surgeon, today. Dr Irwin struck me as a solid and unemotional man, concerned about his own professional standards, and aware of the difficulties of the police. He is not a trouble-maker or an agitator but is concerned with the general public good, with the dignity and effectiveness of law enforcement and with the human rights of persons in custody. I found him a completely credible witness.
2. Dr Irwin said that recent representations to the Police Authority had effected no change. He was alarmed at the number of prisoners showing signs of injury which could not have been self-inflicted. These were continuing, and were associated with a group of eight or ten policemen who were consistently described to the doctors by injured prisoners and who were familiarly known to the doctors as the 'goon squad'. He was convinced that these officers were maltreating prisoners under interrogation as a matter of policy approved by the Chief Constable. There was a marked increase in the incidence of injury when Deputy Chief Constable Herman was absent on leave.
3. Relationships between the Police Surgeons and Chief Constable seem to be poor. The Surgeons are annoyed that although they had written to the Chief Constable on three occasions alleging ill-treatment of prisoners he had publicly denied on TV that they had even made representations to him. They also complained that minutes of liaison meetings with the RUC were doctored to exclude their complaints and then used by the Chief Constable in discussion with the Police Authority to argue that the Surgeons had not complained to the police.
4. The Surgeons also feel that they were used to secure a favourable report from Amnesty International, and are determined not to be so used again.
5. Dr Irwin said that in the event of further controversy they might find it necessary to issue a public statement contradicting the Chief Constable. From their contact with families and prisoners GPs they were satisfied that the cases they were concerned about were known to outsiders and would be used to secure a return visit of Amnesty International. If asked by Amnesty, they were not prepared to stand over the present position and would have to express their doubts about interrogation methods and the non-implementation of agreed precautionary procedures. Some of the injured prisoners might take civil action and the surgeons would be required to give evidence on oath.
6. It is very obvious to me that the doctors are nearly at the end of their patience and are getting little satisfaction from the Police Authority and less from the Chief Constable. Some of them have been subjected to personal threats by anonymous phone calls. The Surgeons reinforce the message we were already getting from our own medical officers. The police surgeons are however independent contractors and may well feel impelled to public utterance.

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7. Dr Irwin was well aware of the possible political repercussions of any controversy on the subject and was most concerned to prevent trouble and to avoid a public outcry if at all possible.
8. You might wish to inform Mr Pritchard in NIO of the present state of play, and in view of the possible political implications, the Minister.



M N HAYES

5 April 1978

cc Dr Weir

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