

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/79/3115
Creation Date(s):	22 November 1978
Extent and medium:	7 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.

Present ~~Block~~

Minister

Fr. Raymond Murray, Chaplain, Armagh Prison, Mr. Ben Briscoe, T.D.

1. The Minister in welcoming Fr. Murray said that he was always glad to meet with persons interested, on humanitarian grounds, in the conditions obtaining in prisons in Northern Ireland.

2. Fr. Murray in his opening remarks indicated that he had been Chaplain in Armagh Prison for 11 years which although it was a prison for women had been used for the imprisonment of men for the period December 1971 to August 1972 when men from Holywood and Girdwood were detained there. He said that during that time men were "coming in in droves" with obvious signs of ill-treatment and from that on he had become very interested in the question of the ill-treatment of prisoners. Complaints about the prisoners in Armagh in the period December 1971 to August 1972 were made through Diplomatic channels and in many of these cases the Judge dismissed the case. Fr. Murray said that the problems of ill-treatment of suspects and prisoners had continued, in his opinion, to a larger or lesser extent right up to the production of the "Castlereagh File". Fr. Murray concluded his opening statement by saying that "H-Block is now the real problem".

3. In reply to a question by the Minister as to whether he had any official assignation to Long Kesh, Fr. Murray said that he had not. Fr. Tom Toner he indicated is the Chief Chaplain and is assisted by Fr. Sean Cahill and Fr. John Murphy. It appears that on Sundays up to 15 priests may be required because of the need for separate Masses in each compound. Fr. Murray said that the only time that the prisoners in H-Block get out during the week is for Confession and Mass. He then went on to compare the conditions obtaining in Armagh Prison with those obtaining in H-Block. He said the units which had been built in Armagh Prison to cater for what might be loosely called the special category women prisoners was the same as those in H-Block. However, there the comparison ended as the cells in Armagh were beautifully kept by the prisoners.

He indicated that in ~~long~~ ^{H-Block} ~~block~~ the windows were broken out by the prisoners in order to release the fumes. Each cell had two mattresses, two blankets and towels with basins of drinking water and utensils for urine and excrement. Mattresses, he said, were wet from rain and urine and the stench in each cell is very bad with even the wind coming through the open windows.

4. In reply to a question from the Minister as to when he had been last in H-Block Fr. Murray indicated that he had not been there since 16 September and he understood that it had improved since Archbishop O Fiaich had visited.

5. When the Minister asked whether Fr. Murray had any difficulty in getting in to say Sunday Mass he said that he did not but that he only goes occasionally whilst Fr. Faul goes every Sunday. At this point Fr. Murray went on to refer to the locking up of the prisoners for 24 hours and to the fact that all recreational and other facilities had been withdrawn from them. He indicated that Mr. Mason, the Secretary of State, had set out to break the prisoners strike in support of their demands for political status and that the prisoners had reacted to the degrading treatment which they had to suffer i.e. treatment by the officers when they were going to the toilets and showers. Fr. Murray adverted to the lack of privacy in the toilets which had half-doors and said that amongst other things Prison Officers pass "remarks about their bodies and wives". He said that as a result of the degrading treatment they suffered at the hands of the prison officers the prisoners refused to go to the toilets. He also said that when the prison officers came to the cells to clean out the excrement and urine utensils that instead of taking them out they tossed them on to the beds etc. Fr. Murray also stated that of course there were personal searches carried out on prisoners and that each prisoner who would have a visit would have his "back passage" examined. He then gave a broad outline of the substance of a conversation he had with some of the Prison Authorities when he was on a visit. He said that he was advised that when prisoners are being brought out to meet a person they have to be cleaned firstly and that often these prisoners resist and have to be perhaps manhandled to some extent. He was advised that this cannot be avoided.

6. In reply to the Minister as to how often the cleansing of prisoners is carried on, Fr. Murray said he did not know. He went on to refer to the affect conditions were having on the prisoners and said that he was aware of three Armagh men in cells, one of whom, Malachy Trainor, who, although he had been in an Irish class with him, he did not recognise.
7. When Minister asked for an outline of the latest knowledge of Fr. Murray and Fr. Faul of the position, Fr. Murray indicated that beatings were still taking place particularly when the prisoners were being taken out for washing and in this context he instanced the McCluskey injuries. He also went on to refer to cases such as Leo Fleming's son who had not been seen by his father for 17 months because Fleming like a number of other prisoners will not take visits as to do so they would have to put on prison clothes.
8. Minister "What can be done to improve the position as far as you are concerned?"

Fr. Murray in reply indicated that he considered that the loss of the right of association and the loss of remission caused very severe suffering, as did excessive lock-ups in the short-term. He instanced the case of prisoner Nugent who had been locked up for 24 hours each day for 2 years. He stated that he considered the Government had overstepped itself in that that it had taken a gamble to break the strike and imposed stricutures they were not entitled to impose, such as lack of association. "Surely the minimun rules have not been abided by in H-Block", he said. He considered that the prisoners will not give up and he stated that Fr. Faul and himself were dealing with the problem on human rights grounds but "the Provo top brass do not care a damn but it fits into their schema of things". "It will suit them if someone died as is likely as the people would then be aroused", he said. Fr. Murray then referred to the fact that the Prison Visitor Dr. Deeney had said that the treatment being meted out to the prisoners is unjust, and went on to illustrate two cases in Armagh which, he said, were very serious: (i) Monica Craig who was down to 5 stone in weight. If the Minister and Pope Paul had not appealed she would have died. (ii) Case of a girl who was suffering from Annoxia Nervosa and the case of a girl who had cut her wrists.

Is this not
Monica
Craig and
was she
not
released

9. Fr. Murray also asked why if women prisoners are allowed to wear their own clothes, men prisoners in Long Kesh are not granted the same facility.
10. The Minister having indicated to Fr. Murray that he keeps abreast of developments in H-Block through the many channels open to him and the Department stated that the information which comes through is "not always in accord with the position as Fr. Murray and others may see it". In this connection, the Minister referred to the medical condition of the prisoners etc. The Minister further stated that he would always welcome a full statement from Fr. Murray in relation to the matter but of course he had to be very careful to compromise his own position in his meetings with Mr. Mason etc. He indicated of course he does not have the facility of going into Long Kesh to see the actual position and that he has to pursue the cases on the best evidence available. In this connection, the Minister referred to the steam cleaning process and other improvements which had been introduced and which he hoped would lead to a possible improvement in conditions. The Minister also at this stage referred to the "Godfathers" of violence and to Bishop Daly's statement and said that even if Britain was disposed to make concessions to the prisoners, and there was no evidence that it ^{would} ~~would~~, he felt that the climate in Europe at the moment particularly having regard to the terrorism situation in Germany and elsewhere is such that there would be criticism of any Government giving ground to those engaged in violence and for this reason Mr. Mason knows that he is on very secure ground. The Minister indicated that he would like to keep in regular contact with Fr. Murray and would always endeavour to assist those whose appeals were on humanitarian grounds and as such were distinguishable from propaganda exercises on behalf of the provisionals. In this context, the Minister adverted to the fact that after Dr. Ó Fiaich's statement the provisionals had taken action which in effect took the ground from under the Archbishop. He referred to the fact that he had spoken in Derry to four mothers who had sons in Long Kesh and indicated that he hoped that there was a gradual improvement in the situation and even though there was slow progress and H-Block really was a problem it was being used as propaganda by the IRA and was being reacted to by Loyalists. Fr. Murray referred to the fact that the Government had defused the

situation in Portlaoise and said that "surely something could be done to defuse the situation in H-Block".

11. Fr. Murray then adverted to conditions for women in Armagh Prison which he stated were now worst than ever. He wondered why Mr. Mason why Mr. Mason was taking such a hard line now and said that women remand prisoners were locked up for 23 hours per day. He indicated that for recreation the prisoners were confined to two larger cells and that not more than four prisoners were allowed on a wing at any one time whereas up to April there had been free association for prisoners awaiting trial. He drew the Minister's attention to the case of the McMahon and McCann women from the Short Strand area who had been on remand for 14 months before they "got off". He also referred at this stage to the fact that there was at least one prisoner in Long Kesh awaiting trial for two years. The Minister indicated that he had been in touch with the British authorities with regard to this and other similar type cases and he had received a number of excuses from the authorities including the lack of Judges, barristers etc. At this stage, Fr. Murray alleged that the Security Authorities were arresting people at a deterrent and stated "a lot of people from Short Strand area were taken up as deterrent" and with remand so long this is a form of internment.

12. In response to the question from the Minister as to his views on medical conditions, Fr. Murray said that medical conditions were very poor and in fact the Authorities "just do not care". He instanced the case of girls with Anorexia Nervosa and said that he and others had to keep pushing the authorities to assist. He referred to the woman prisoner in Armagh, already mentioned, who had cut her wrists and said that she had not yet been seen by a psychiatrist. The Minister said that he would appreciate "hard information" as such would make our representations all the more effective. Fr. Murray undertook to supply details of particular cases and went on to state that in his opinion there were a number of men in H-Block who were not in the IRA. One such, he said was Tony Quigley who was travelling in a car which was stopped by the Security Authorities and was found to have explosives. Quigley was sentenced to 4 years imprisonment. Fr. Murray felt that while Quigley was not in the IRA and never will be, he is still "on the blanket". Fr. Murray said that he was sure that the mental equilibrium of many of the prisoners was very much in doubt now and he said that Quigley for instance is one such

person whose mental equilibrium, he would think, has been affected.

13. The Minister indicated that he would like to be kept "posted" and said that he would be glad to see Fr. Murray and Fr. Faul "within reason". He would have to be very careful to distinguish between those interested in the situation in H-Block for propaganda purposes and those who had a humanitarian interest in it. He indicated that he was aware of Fr. Murray's work in the U.S. and said that he felt, without wishing to dictate in any way that Fr. Murray should be selective in persons or agencies he might use in America as some might be only concerned in undermining what he and others who were interested in the situation on humanitarian grounds were trying to achieve. Some of the people and agencies in America "had not just questionable bona-fides but were mal-fides". The Minister gave a broad outline of his approach to the Irish American situation and stated that his attitude generally speaking was "not to tell the Americans what they cannot do but to advise what they can do and to enlist their support for what the Government aims to achieve". The Government at all times would seek to ensure that the Irish-American people were fully aware of the status or lack of it of persons such as Ruairi Ó Bradaigh. The Minister felt that there was now a greater understanding in America of the situation.
14. When Fr. Murray indicated that he felt that there was a need for a proper procedure or forum for complaints to be channelled through the Minister indicated that of course the Section in the Department had got complaints from him before and that he, the Minister, would be only too glad to receive a full statement from Fr. Murray. He said that at all times it would be open to Fr. Murray to channel complaints to him or to the Section. The Minister said that he did now have a reasonable perception of the issues as Fr. Murray saw them. Fr. Murray said that the people in Northern Ireland were emotional and did not often see reason and that there was a kind of love/hate relationship with the South with the result that people in the North often wondered "what our own people are doing to help". He wondered whether it would be possible for the Government to make a public statement in relation to the human rights aspect of the H-Block and thereby show its concern. The Minister said that of course the Government was very anxious to assure the minority community of its

concern and of course would also wish to ensure that there would be dialogue with "the other Community". When Fr. Murray stated that he felt the Loyalists in Long Kesh would also be anxious to obtain special category status. The Minister responded that, of course, the Government in the South would have difficulties in relation to this whole question of special status in that we have never conceded such a thing in the South and we could not support the concession of that status in the North when we would not be prepared to concede such a status here.

15. Fr. Murray indicated that from his conversation with families of Loyalist prisoners in Long Kesh he was convinced that the Loyalists would support a statement on the human rights aspects of the Long Kesh situation and that in fact they would like the support and help of the Government in this aspect of matters. He said that he was convinced that there were a number of UVF men in Long Kesh who were innocent of the crimes for which they had been convicted.