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Reference Code:	2021/51/431
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Loyalists - Conversation with Brendan McAllister

10 September 1997

Brendan McAllister of Mediation Network visited the loyalist prisoners in the Maze yesterday (9 September). The following points emerged:

1. The UDA prisoners - normally the most volatile - appeared "very settled", though they had hopes that the ongoing peace process would positively affect the release regime. When McAllister put this to the UDP's John White, White said that they had "to keep their people happy" by talking tough. White referred to the "perception" that republicans were more favourably treated and conceded the point that the concessions to republicans on SSUs for example could not be applied to loyalists since none had ever occupied them. At any rate, the loyalists handed over a document outlining their views on prisons to McAllister. The Provos gave McAllister permission to give the loyalists their own paper; this exchange should help coordinate the demands of the paramilitary prisoners generally.

2. McAllister visited the LVF wing to see Billy Wright. The LVF inmates have been in solitary confinement since they burned their wing in July. They are not allowed association at any point (even meal times). Their are being supervised by the Maze quick reaction force rather than regular prison staff. These officers are dressed in boiler suits, armed with long shields and batons and wear visors which only reveal their eyes. They communicate through hand signals. (These precautions are to ensure that they cannot be identified). The wing is deadly quiet. Communication is through a grill in the door.

3. Wright is very angry at this treatment and described it as discrimination. It was an attempt to humiliate him. He said that the loyalists on the street view it as the oppression of those who oppose the sell out of the peace process, a process that Wright said was designed to lead to a united Ireland. He warned that this treatment would lead to the

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death of a prison officer. All he wanted was equal treatment with other paramilitary prisoners. He said that the LVF was formed when he was in prison (implying he was not party to that) and said that the authorities had assisted in its formation by granting them a wing of their own - a move that could not now be undone. He claimed that Ian Paisley had tried to intervene but to no avail. He complained that he was unfairly blamed for actions on the outside with which he could have had no involvement.

4. Wright said that he had given an interview to a BBC journalist in which he had said that the LVF did not intend to wage war on nationalists in Northern Ireland (i.e. their focus would be the South).

5. McAllister said that it was clear that Wright was "jumped on from a height by someone in the system" (i.e. that only a senior figure within the NIO could impose such a harsh regime on the LVF inmates). Other loyalists would swear that "Wright was MI5"; certainly Wright indicated that he was "stitched up" by being invited, as he alleged, by an MI5 agent to transfer from Maghaberry to the Maze. He had earlier claimed to McAllister that an MI5 agent had first proposed to him (when he was in Maghaberry) that the LVF would be granted recognition by the authorities in the Maze.

6. It is unclear what to make of these allusions and allegations about the LVF and MI5. The families of the 40 people murdered by loyalists in Wright's mid-Ulster heartland since 1989 suspect that the killers enjoyed some form of immunity.

7. By way of caveat, the Provos in the Maze support Wright's demands for parity on the basis that it is "a prisoner of war camp" in which all inmates should enjoy the same rights and privileges. "Honour among revolutionaries" as McAllister commented.

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Security Section
10 September 1997

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