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CONFIDENTIAL

DR. SLOAN

NOTE OF A MEETING TO CONSIDER MEDICAL ASPECTS OF THE DIRTY PROTEST
AT MAZE PRISON AT 2.30 PM ON 12 FEBRUARY 1980 IN DUNDONALD HOUSE

Present: Dr Sloan Mr Barry
Dr McKeown Mr Jackson
Dr Bill Mr Hilditch
Mr Chambers
Mr McKechnie (Secretary)

Action by

1. Publicity for the Medical Role

The meeting took note that the Secretary of State's reply to the "arranged" Parliamentary Question about the medical care of prisoners had been given on 16 November 1979. The reply had not attracted widespread publicity, but it was agreed that it would be very valuable to have this authoritative statement on record as a point of reference when dealing with enquiries about medical facilities in prisons here.

2. Visits to Protesting Blocks

2.1 Mr Barry reported that a request had been received on behalf of 4 Labour back-bench MPs to visit Maze and Armagh Prisons on 19 or 20 February. Dr Bill said that he would be happy to meet bona fide MPs, but Mr Barry pointed out that this particular group could ask difficult questions which, if not carefully handled, might lead to adverse publicity. Mr Hilditch was concerned that in only 1½ or 2 hours it would be difficult to convey an accurate impression of the prison to the MPs. It was agreed that there would be no objection to the visit to Maze, provided that prior Ministerial approval was obtained but in the current tense situation at Armagh it might be preferable for the MPs not to visit that establishment for the time being.

Mr Barry

2.2 Mr Jackson informed the meeting of another visit. The Secretary of State had invited 4 clergymen representing the World Council of Churches to visit Maze Prison; this visit would take place on 10 March in the afternoon.

3. Discharge Procedures for Protesting Prisoners

It was noted that these procedures had been working well; no special arrangements were now being made in regard to discharges of protesters.

4. Application by Republican Prisoners to the ECHR

Mr Jackson reported. All queries having been dealt with, it was now a matter of waiting for the Commission to give its decision on the admissibility of the application, possibly in March 1980.

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5. The Possibility of Further Industrial Action by Prison Officers

Mr Barry reported that the Minister would be seeing the full area committee of the POA that afternoon in the continuing negotiations about the emergency allowance. He pointed out that while the May Committee had recommended that there should be no increase, the Government had offered a substantial increase from 1 April. While this did not meet the Prison Officers' demands it provided a useful basis for ongoing discussion. It was noted that the POA had no great appetite for industrial action, on this occasion, it was hoped that the meeting with the Minister would help to restore the matter.

6. General Health of Protesters

6.1 Dr Bill stated that there had been no change in the protesters' general health; there was no evidence of serious illness.

6.2 The incident on 30 November when the chairs were smashed and the broken pieces used to damage the internal metal window grilles and the outer translucent sheeting was discussed. Mr Hilditch pointed out that it had been considered safer for the prisoners to have all the broken, jagged pieces of window material removed before replacement commenced, but this had naturally delayed completion of the task. However it was progressing well; only one wing has still to be repaired. Mr Barry remarked that while the protesters' deliberate destruction had brought discomfort on themselves, and proved costly to the tax-payer, it had been utilised in Government publicity to indicate the continuing futility of any attempt to deal more reasonably with those taking part in the dirt campaign.

7. The Treat of a Hunger Strike

It was agreed that while this threat had receded, vigilance should continue; the threat remained, and it was possible that it would be invoked in March for the purpose of celebrating the 2nd anniversary of the start of the dirty protest.

8. Alleged Assaults on Prisoners

8.1 Mr Hilditch reported that there has been no increase in the average number of allegations of assault - 6 per week. Usually they related only to the minimum amount of force being used to search an unco-operative prisoner and so could be dismissed. However the case of McGillicuddy and Berkery was different.

8.2 They were involved in an incident on 30 December 1979. According to official prison records neither asked to see a doctor. Indeed ^{during} a cell round on 2 January 1980 no complaints were made to Dr Emerson. However rumours circulating in the prison and a letter from Fr Toner on 6 January had prompted prison staff to instigate an investigation.

8.3 On 8 January Dr Emerson interviewed McGillicuddy. He refused to be medically examined and made no allegations of assault. The doctor could see no evidence of marks.

8.4 On 9 January Dr Bill examined Berkery. He made verbal and written allegations of a beating on Sunday 30 December 1979 at 7.30 when he said he had sustained a black eye and injured nose. Dr Bill found remnants of these - the eye being a fading yellow - which he could not assign to a particular day, but thought they were 7 to 14 days old.

8.5 Mr Hilditch had conducted a preliminary hearing at which he decided that there was a prima facie case of an assault by a prison officer. He had referred the matter to the Northern Ireland Office in accordance with the Code of Discipline.

8.6 Mr Gibson had carried out a full inquiry for the NIO; his report was not yet available, so the case should be treated as subjudice.

8.7 The prisoners' solicitor, Mr Finnucane (who has a brother on the dirty protest) had informed the RUC, who had interviewed the prisoners and would be interviewing prison staff. The police would no doubt:-

- (a) send a report to the NIO as required in all Criminal Injury claims, and
- (b) send a report to the DPP for a decision as to whether there should be a criminal prosecution of prison staff.

8.8 Mr Hilditch informed the meeting that all the protesting prisoners were now being asked every morning, except on Bank Holidays, if they had any applications (which would include a request to see the doctor). In addition a doctor did his weekly cell round. It was agreed these measures were sufficient, but that Mr Hilditch should instruct a Class Officer to open each cell door and announce loudly when a doctor was on his weekly round; it was also agreed that the NIO should not make a judgment on the disciplinary aspects until the decision of the DPP on the criminal position was known.

Mr Hilditch

9. Correspondence from France

This massive letter-writing campaign (which could have been organised by Fr Murray through a European Catholic group) appeared to have started in Lyon and spread to other parts of France. It was noted with interest that none of these letters had been addressed to Dr Bill or Dr Emerson. The medical staff to whom letters had been sent were Dr Moffett and Dr Glasgow, who had been involved with people coming off the protest. It was agreed that all interested parties should continue to be kept informed of any new developments and that no replies should be sent to these letters.

10. Special Measure to Prevent Disease

10.1 Dr Sloan reminded the meeting that it was fortunate that in the closed community where the dirty protest was taking place, and where those concerned were denying themselves full medical

surveillance, there had as yet been no communicable disease. However continuing vigilance was required to ensure as far as possible that this remained the case.

10.2 He expressed concern particularly about pulmonary tuberculosis which, if it were imported into the prison, would be difficult to deal with and would be a risk to all prisoners and staff. The aim must therefore be to prevent TB from getting into the prison by detecting it at the earliest possible moment.

10.3 DHSS and NIO had already been discussing provision of an x-ray unit at Belfast Prison, in the context of need already arising within the prison population there. DHSS had advised against installing a unit to be operated by Hospital Officers under the direction of medical officers, as was done at Maze and Magilligan. If a unit were to be installed at Belfast, it would be necessary to agree to seek radiographer staffing. NIO were considering this. The relevance to the current meeting was that such a unit at Belfast might be used to "screen" prisoners before transfer to Maze.

10.4 Mr Hilditch raised the possibility of chest x-rays being done on arrival at Maze. Once the Maze x-ray unit was moved from the Compound to the Cellular prison, the practical difficulties would be much less. It still remained to be seen whether prisoners would agree to chest x-ray on arrival.

10.5 It was agreed that the transfer of the Maze x-ray unit should be expedited with this in mind.

11. Health of Operators (Cleaners)

Mr Hilditch was concerned that operators did not always wear the full protective clothing. So he proposed to give them written advice. Mr Barry warned that care must be taken not to unduly alarm operators, thus making it difficult to get them or perhaps giving them a reason to ask for more money. It was agreed that Mr Hilditch would draft a warning notice in consultation with Dr Bill, who could obtain further advice of necessary on the industrial medical technicalities involved.

Mr Hilditch

Dr Bill

12. Hair-cutting for Protesters in H5

Mr Hilditch said that the hair and beards of prisoners in H5 were particularly long. Mr Chambers and he thought this posed a security risk, in that it was more difficult to search them. However it was pointed out that to cut their hair forcibly would contravene current medical policy, which provided that force should only be used in a medical context where there was community health hazard. It was agreed that no such hazard existed, so the hair could not be forcibly cut on medical grounds; but in view of the concern of Mr Hilditch and Mr Chambers, Mr Barry undertook to discuss the security aspect with Mr Truesdale.

Mr Barry

13. The Dirty Protest at Armagh Prison

It was noted that while this was not within the meeting's terms of reference, it was clearly of interest; it seemed that the

women protesters were about to embark on their version of the dirt campaign, and Republican propagandists were claiming that the action of the women was linked with the Maze action. It was agreed that the meeting should note the account of events at Armagh given by Mr Barry and based on his minute of 12 February to Mr Alison (copy at Annex A).

14. Next Meeting

The next meeting was arranged for 2.30 pm on Tuesday 6 May 1980.

A E McKECHNIE

6 March 1980

Distribution: Those present
PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Alison (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
Mr Hannigan
Mr Marshall
Mr Irvine
Mr Wyatt
Mr Gilliland
Mr Buxton
Mr Clift
Mr Gibson
Mr McFadden