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Mr Buxton

CURRENT LULL AT MAZE CELLULAR

You may be interested to see the attached assessment of the reasons for PIRA's current exceptionally low profile at Maze Cellular, which has been causing us some concern.

*46 → Mr [unclear]
M. McCabe very interesting: but of suspect that the calm is of the before the storm: variety rather than being real or permanent.*

A K Templeton

**A K TEMPLETON
Prison Information Unit**

5 June 1985

**DIV/10 2942
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REF. TO 2301**

- cc Mr Gilliland
- Mr Merifield
- Mr Reeve
- Mr Coulson
- Mr Bickham

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PRISONS

THE CURRENT LULL - AN ASSESSMENT

1. For more than six months now the Northern Ireland prison system has enjoyed the largest period free from internal overt paramilitary challenge since terrorist prisoners began to be held in any numbers. We know broadly why Belfast, Magilligan, Maze Compound and Armagh should be so quiet, but what stands out is the apparent absence of confrontation at any level or to any significant degree at Maze Cellular. We can make a fairly good guess that the loyalists there are reasonably content and the mixed wings are not a particular problem. What therefore of PIRA whom we know to represent the real and sustained challenge to the Prison system? (Dominic McGlinchey's efforts to rally INLA have not yet made it a major independent force.) Notwithstanding the murder of PO Kerr, a few ripples in the wings and an ongoing propaganda campaign of sorts PIRA has clearly and deliberately maintained a policy of no confrontation within the prison. Their activity at times has almost amounted to co-operation, even in areas where trouble would have been expected. This paper attempts to explore some of the reasons for this behaviour but is inevitably rather speculative as we have not been able to obtain any hard intelligence as to the reasons for - and likely duration of - the lull.

Escape Planning

2. We know that PIRA continues actively to plan for another escape; this can best be done in an atmosphere of apparent calm which helps both in conditioning of the uncompromised and in subverting the weak among staff. Planning and preparation can then go ahead with less likelihood of attracting the staff attention which might be drawn if there were a period of confrontation. It is worth noting, however, that escape planning does not have to take place in a period of calm; experience of special category in 1974 would disprove that. There must therefore be other - and in view of the length of the lull - substantial reasons for the present situation.

3.

Long Term Prison Strategy

4.1 The PIRA prisoners know what they want - special category; how not to get it - by dirty protest and hunger strike; and how they may get considerably towards it - by following their strategy of the last few years. This had involved the judicious use of confrontation and calm as need be. A policy of selective violence and intimidation aimed both at subverting staff (for escape purposes) and at driving them out of the new segregated wings first psychologically, then physically (for control and escape purposes) had made real progress by late 1984. Since then the staff have regained a degree of control of movement which so far the prisoners have not really resisted. Either, therefore is our success more apparent than real, or is the organisation prepared to acquiesce in this loss of a near free association which we know is very important to paramilitary control and highly desired by the prisoners? A "political" reason has already been suggested for this; there are also some reasonably convincing reasons inside the prison why the calm has continued.

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- R.
- 4.2 PIRA may well see the present period as one of consolidation of the gains of the last five years. These gains are real, substantial and the structure would not wish to jeopardise them, particularly the winning of segregation. We should not underestimate the effectiveness of our policy here in keeping the prisoners guessing. Although de facto segregation has been conceded at Maze it has not been recognised de jure and we have continued to confront it elsewhere. Ending it does remain, theoretically, an option, an option which confrontation could conceivably provoke us into trying. To know that PIRA fairly consistently over-estimates us is, however, something of a dubious comfort!
- 4.3 PIRA may of course hope to regain the lost ground - their tactics worked before, why should they not again? The regaining of a freer association would not be made possible by open violent confrontation. Carefully aimed violence and intimidation might do the trick again, but we have no evidence that they have yet seriously re-embarked on such a venture. PIRA also are believed to know that we are considering physical changes to the blocks to assist in controlling them; by causing no trouble it has been suggested they might hope to persuade the staff that such a move was unnecessary and uneconomic.
- 4.4 We know that the opening of Maghaberry is viewed with considerable forboding, particularly if Magilligan remains open. PIRA does not wish to see its numbers reduced either overall in the prison or in the individual wings. By showing that segregated wings at Maze can function apparently without trouble, they may be attempting to send a signal into the system - disturb us and there will be trouble. Besides, PIRA is thought to believe that Maghaberry is less secure than the Maze and that we will not wish to entertain the prospect of segregation there; neither fact should, they may reckon, dispose us to move them.
- 4.5 In similar vein it has been suggested that PIRA could be preparing for the arrival of special category prisoners. By conforming they might make it easier to demand the peaceful and parallel regime of the special category inmates - backed up by suitable "encouragement" to the system, of course.

R.

- 4.6 A further explanation of short term quiescence has also been offered in terms of expected additional regime improvements. Extra exercise, sport and limited handicrafts have been given. Good behaviour - and suitable propaganda - could be expected to reap some further rewards.

Durability of the "peace"

- 5.1 Viewed in the above light it might be that the prisoners now feel they have achieved enough to forego major or open confrontation. On this interpretation we could expect the recent pattern to continue. At some points the PIRA profile might be raised - planned assaults, organised complaining, resumption of subtle intimidation. The only major action would be escapes whose purpose is clear, backed up by occasional murders to send a "message" into the system.
- 5.2 A continuation of peace would, however, run contrary to the experience of the last 15 years. Peace does, of course, have its own dynamics - even "volunteers" may like the quiet life - and Sinn Fein has added a new dimension to the picture. Nevertheless, there are possible pointers to a less quiet future. Firstly PIRA has not yet gained enough of special category; its imprisoned members may grow impatient if "progress" is not seen to be made. Secondly it is believed that many in the prison are not over keen on political activities. They could easily seek to complain that the war was being neglected and those who fought in it. This could lead to a demand for action, which if not sanctioned could take place anyway. The hunger strikes were thought to have been pressed on unwilling members of the outside organisation in this way. Similarly, if the _____ were to be eclipsed in favour of a more naked militarism, the prison card could come rapidly to the fore. "Full POW status" - ie special category - would become much more important to the organisation in such circumstances. A "split" would similarly destabilise the prisons, particularly with so many "hardliners" inside; as would any formal break with INLA. Finally we too could raise the profile if we decided to embark on any policy which the command structure saw as a direct or immediate threat.

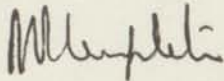
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Conclusion

6. There are convincing strategic and tactical reasons, albeit speculative, as to why it is now so quiet at Maze Cellular. If all the present major factors remain constant, no great change in PIRA's prison policy would be expected. An escape attempt seems the most likely development of any magnitude inside. Some form of relatively low profile challenge to control would also seem possible - this would end the present period of near complete calm. Major disruption of the protest kind seems least likely, but there are a number of potential destabilising elements, any one of which could bring about a higher PIRA prison profile.



A K TEMPLETON
PIU

31 May 1985

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