

From PUS
23 November 1988

L/11/49/DMC

Note for the RecordProfessor O'Malley

When O'Malley came to see me (and while he took full notes, the discussion was not recorded: neither was Michael Alison's) I opened up by recapitulating some points that I had sought to make at our earlier discussion as follows:

- i. We believed from the beginning that the prisoners meant what they said about wanting full satisfaction of the five demands.
- ii. We were under no illusions about the real meaning of the five demands, that is to say, the reintroduction of special category status.
- iii. Though the prisoners would clearly prefer the five demands to be satisfied en bloc, no doubt they would settle for one at a time. The importance of this was that yielding one at a time might well lead to an intensification of the strike rather than the reverse.
- iv. It would be naive not to allow for the fact that the prisoners and the IRA would seek to make the best of the situation when the strikes ended: and their position would be greatly eased if they could claim that there had been negotiations with Government and that they had secured advantage to themselves from those negotiations.

It was against the background of these points that any discussion ought to proceed. In particular the background suggested pretty clearly the very great dangers of "negotiation" and/or of seeming to begin to abandon a part of Government's stance adopted at the outset. O'Malley took very careful notes of all this.

We then got on to his detailed questions. As regards the first two, I said that I had forgotten that there was a Father Maher until I received his questions but that on being reminded his was a name that I remembered in association with the first hunger strike. It was absolutely true from my recollection that Mr Atkins had prepared a statement on the night of the 18th December, the text of which was delivered to the Prison as one more in the series of statements that had been put out, both to clarify the Government's position and the facts of the prison regime and, hopefully, to provide an opportunity for the prisoners to say "enough is enough".

The precise means of delivery of copies of the statement was a matter of very minor importance, though it would not have been surprising to have asked a priest to do this since their comings and goings into and out of the Prison were less conspicuous than some. It would also have been natural to avoid using one of the two Maze Prison priests for this purpose. In the event, of course, McKenna was taken to the RVH and the first strike called off before, as I recalled, the statement actually reached the Prison: but the important point was that the text delivered to the Prison was the same as that subsequently delivered.

When we got on to his third question I rested mainly on the account that Michael Alison had given him, but in relation to both that question and the fourth, in answer to O'Malley's referring pretty directly to contacts between "Mountain Climber" and the IRA, I rested on two main propositions:

- a. I did not myself believe that there were in effect two Government positions, one being deployed by the NIO and one by somebody else.
- b. Of course Government, in seeking to publicise and explain its position, used a very large and diverse number of contacts, including ones where we could be reasonably sure that any message would in due course find its way to the IRA.

(signed)

JOHN BLELLOCH

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