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File PR 59/84/2

Note classification, file needs to be upgraded.

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RT. Ops Room

PRISONS

ASSESSMENT OF END OF LOYALIST HUNGER STRIKE  
AT MAGILLIGAN PRISON

1. This assessment has been produced in conjunction with Liaison Staff.
2. The loyalist hunger strike formally ended on Friday 5 October 1984. Although this was described as day 47 by the prisoners, the strike had effectively been called off on 18 September (day 30 for the 2 earliest participants) with a one day resumption between 24/25 September. Accompanying the end of the strike a statement was signed by all 10 strikers; a copy is attached for reference.

Why the strike ended

3. A number of factors contributed to bring about an end to the strike.
  - (i) The Government stood firm. Despite a misleading media campaign which flourished for a time, the Minister's statement of 26 September made it quite clear that no segregation was in prospect at Magilligan. The Authorities' determination had already been established in a practical way by the move of the 4 least affected ex-strikers into mixed accommodation on Monday 24 September. Although this produced an immediate resumption of the strike, until the prisoners were moved out again for ease of examination, it sent a very clear signal to them that they would not be allowed to retain the segregation they had very temporarily achieved as hunger strikers. They had therefore to decide whether or not to continue seriously with the strike.
  - (ii) Prison Staff stood firm. A major factor in our being able to hold the line on this strike was the support given by the Governor and his supervisory and basic grade staff. Although at least one incidence - and possibly more - of staff subversion did emerge, there was no doubt that staff supported Government policy, so long as they were confident that they were being kept fully informed, and that they remained determined to run a normal integrated prison in which they were in control. This firmness communicated itself to the prisoners and to the paramilitaries who replied with threats in their customary fashion. With Government and prison staff not yielding, it must have become clear to the strikers that no deals were in the offing and that their strike really would be to the death. The role played by staff raises an important point in handling paramilitary prison crises. Thus although the absence of a firm Government statement arguably allowed the prisoners to stop their hunger strike on the first occasion - a plus to the Department overall - the uncountered rumours of "segregation just round the corner" had a serious though temporary affect on morale at Magilligan. There has perhaps at times been a tendency to take staff rather for granted; Sir James Hennessy commented on the effect which staff perceptions of government policy had had on the situation at Maze. Recent experience at Maze shows that if - for whatever reason especially if they

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feel they are being kept in the dark - staff do not support a policy it cannot be implemented or if it is, will not be sustainable.

- (iii) Short of a death, the maximum purely political (that is, without major acts of terrorism outside) interest and support had probably been achieved. The hunger strike weapon is not popular in the loyalist/unionist community, nor is the cause of loyalist prisoners capable of generating the same depth of community or international concern as that of republicans. ██████████ and Robinson had played their hand well, knowing as they did that major concessions were not to be forthcoming. They were able with others to deflect the paramilitaries from indulging in too much overt action; this would, they correctly assessed, have made any moves by government almost impossible as well as have reduced the political credibility of the prisoners' plea for "safety". Having achieved a peak of publicity which because of the situation at Maze they knew to be uncomfortable for government, the platform was built for further pressure on government which was best achieved without the continuation of the hunger strike. The means of cementing the fairly broad Unionist support for "safety" and of using it as part of the exercise to get the prisoners off the hook, were provided by the Assembly debate on 3 October. This debate - and its successful outcome from the prisoners point of view - provided a further powerful ground for retiring "with honour" as the prisoners' statement confirmed. The Secretary of State's letter to Party Leaders, sent just before the Debate, was generally well received and played its part in producing the right political climate for ending the strike.
- (iv) Outside pressure to end the strike also came from the paramilitary organisations. The UDA in particular had never been enthusiastic about the strike preferring to raise political support for the campaign and once it had been suspended they were keen that it should end with suitable face-saving for the prisoners concerned. This was provided by the Assembly debate and the various pledges of support from councillors and individuals. The attitude of the UVF was more hawkish and although they obviously concurred with the end of the strike, the threat of staff attacks remained particularly strong from this quarter.
- (v) There is little doubt that the relatives, though in general supporting the principle of separation, had no enthusiasm for continuation of the strike. Had it persisted it seems likely that the embryonic relatives groupings which were emerging would have become a force with which the prisoners would have had to reckon. Even if the prisoners could have lost sight of the fact that their release dates were imminent their relatives would not have done so.
- (vi) The transfer out on 4 October of 26 RC's including the known republican command structure sent a clear signal to the prisoners. When added to the transfer in of 14 Protestants (from the segregated wings at Maze admittedly)

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it showed that the authorities did acknowledge the problem of balance in H3 and had acted in advance of the end of the strike to remedy it. As a tactical move at the prison this made the strike more untenable, while still very much failing to grant the strikers what they wanted. (At Maze, unfortunately, the 26 RC's had all but one worked themselves into segregated accommodation within 24 hours of their arrival through intimidation of Protestant prisoners and the desire of staff not to have any conflict. This "success" was noted by both staff and inmates at Magilligan.)

- (vii) Finally the commitment of all 10 to fast to the death was not there. Although the determination of the prisoners did surprise most observers, it was clear by mid September that they were looking for a way out. Paradoxically they also remained - and still remain - very determined to obtain segregation and this tended to keep them on the strike. Even allowing for the unpredictability and sheer stubbornness of some Loyalist prisoners, it is difficult to believe that men shortly due for release could actually have starved themselves to death. They made a very determined gesture and one which, just possibly, could have been pursued to fatal or near-fatal conclusion.

### The Future

- 4.1 The prisoners' statement - clearly not written by themselves and obviously brought in by Peter Robinson - is a very thin document. Despite containing much impressive phraseology it mainly pins hope on future "negotiations" by Messrs Robinson [REDACTED]. Following from the previous meetings with Ministers - which we think Robinson reported fairly factually to the prisoners - all parties must know that this too is not going to bring about segregation. The statement must therefore be seen as a face-saving device, which merely allows the prisoners to retire from this particular battle while continuing the war on other fronts. Logic would therefore suggest that a resumption of the strike was unlikely - as does information from the prison. However since we are dealing with Loyalists among whom impetuous action is often a substitute for strategic consideration, resumption cannot be completely ruled out in the short term. Whatever transpires, the authorities will no doubt be accused of reneging on a deal which never existed; the first such claims have already been reported.
- 4.2 The behaviour of the 10 ex-hunger strikers since 5 October gives an indication of how they see the way forward and of how the segregation campaign is likely to develop. When all 10 were moved into a mixed wing in H2C with 4 other Protestants and 13 well-chosen Roman Catholics no trouble at all emerged from the latter groups. The 10 then set about trying to intimidate them, to incite them to react, and finally to come to some collusive arrangement proving "fear". All these initiatives failed and staff were on hand to ensure that adequate support was given to the conforming prisoners. Having failed to stir up the wing and being unable to do the attacking as that would be so obviously counter-productive the loyalists next announced they were in fear and would not enter the dining hall. This entirely spurious claim depended on their being allowed to carry their meals back to their cells where they would sit in self-imposed lock-up bemoaning their fear and intimidation. Instead of this most were very quickly dispersed

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among the other conforming blocks. Those who moved then mixed, the 3 who stayed continued to refuse to do so or to eat in the dining hall. That remained the pattern on 11 October but on the following day all 10 took their meals and joined other prisoners for association. By 12 October the strike and its immediate consequentials therefore seemed to have worked through the system without any resumption.

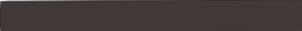
4.3 Since the prisoners have not achieved their goal, but have generated public support and interest, future activity at Magilligan is likely to remain at a high level particularly in H3 and among the ex-hunger strikers. The segregation campaign is most likely to be pursued along the line noted over the last couple of years; that is -

- (i) There will be attacks by Protestants on Catholic prisoners, presented as "pre-emptive strikes" or an "inability to live together".
- (ii) Protestant prisoners may retire to self-imposed lock-up eating in cells in H3 and claiming mortal fear despite being in a majority in all wings and blocks.
- (iii) Finds may be made of poison, bullets or explosive substances; explosive devices may be manufactured.
- (iv) Catholic prisoners may attack Protestants for the same reasons; they are less likely to retire to their cells having ruled the roost in H3 for some time. The failure of the Loyalist hunger strike could galvanise more activity from the republican side which has been quiet recently.
- (v) The threat of a prisoner's death within the prison must become larger again.
- (vi) Outside attacks may be made on prison staff by either faction.
- (vii) A degree of collusion may be expected but this should not be exaggerated. It has at times been blatant but often has been a communality of aims, rather than a direct working hand in hand.
- (viii) Meanwhile, outside on the legal and human rights plane, the ECHR and the local courts are going to be used actively to press the prisoners' cause.

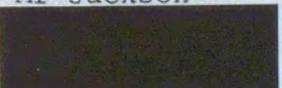
  
Prison Information Unit

15 October 1984

cc PS/SofS (L&B)

  
PS/PUS

  
Mr Jackson

  
Mr Hilditch *PH/6*

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