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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

PRICE SISTERS

Taoiseach,

You will wish to see the latest comeback by the British Embassy on the above - Foreign Affairs internal note copied to us and attached immediately beneath. It bears out information conveyed by Father Raymond Murray and I would accept the other points he conveyed as equally correct. His judgement that Marion Price may not live longer than six months if she is kept in prison may well be right. I agree that the circumstances justify the Minister for Foreign Affairs raising the matter with Mr. Atkins, in the utmost confidentiality, with a view to the removal of Marion Price to an outside hospital or even the early release of both sisters on compassionate and health grounds. Father Murray has indicated that Dolores Price has become a pacifist. There is no such indication about her sister and the manuscript note by Dolores indicates that in the past Marion was the more determined of the two. Thus there could be no certainty that she would not return to violence. However, I would consider this unlikely. The British may be reluctant to consider release for fear of creating a precedent, raising expectations of an eventual amnesty, strengthening the Long Kesh protest, or simply on the grounds that convicted bombers should be seen, for political and security reasons, to serve their full customary sentence. Again, I feel that in the present case, the circumstances are such as to invalidate or override such arguments.

In view of the point sidelined in the Foreign Affairs note, any approach to the British should not be disclosed, except possibly in confidence to Father Murray, subject to Foreign Affairs views. One can see that if there was speculation about a release which in the event, came to nought, the effect on the sisters, especially Marion Price, could be extremely adverse.

There might be something to be said for the Minister consulting one of our own medical specialists, with experience of Anorexia Nervosa.

W. Kinn

April, 1980.

*Conveyed to
Mr. Michael Collins
O/F.A. PL Kesh
under review
2-4-80*

agreed

*Could she
not technically
be considered
to be in
custody?*

agreed

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Neligan

The Price Sisters

I saw Mr. Smith of the British Embassy on 26 March in an effort to clarify the present condition of Marion Price. Mr. Smith telephoned me on 27 March with the following information:

Marion Price was admitted to the prison hospital on 10 March and has been there since. She had been a day visitor to the hospital for some days prior to the 10 March. She is suffering from Anorexia Nervosa. In addition to the many consultations which Miss Price has had with specialists from the Northern Ireland Health Service, a consultant with specialist knowledge in the relevant medical area was called in (during January) to examine/advise on the condition of both sisters.

A feature of this ailment is weight loss and there have been several episodes of such weight loss which have responded to careful nursing and medical treatment. Recently Marion Price has suffered sustained and gradual weight loss and as a result was admitted to the prison hospital on 10 March. Currently she is not critically ill but her condition is causing concern and requires medical and nursing care which can be provided in the prison hospital.

Mr. Smith indicated that Marion Price has been displaying anger at any inquiries into her state of health. In the opinion of the doctors treating her any public speculation on her state of health or possible release from prison would cause serious physical and emotional damage to her state of health.

I raised the question with Mr. Smith as to when the Price sisters would be likely to come up for release. He is to contact me on this point shortly. There are no plans at present to release her on compassionate grounds.

The above information supports the statements which have been made by Fr. Murray. I assume that you will wish to inform the Minister and give consideration to raising this matter with the British at a higher level (question of transfer to an outside hospital and/or a firm date for release).

Michael Collins
Martin Burke

31 March 1980

Copy for information:

PSM
PSS
F. Murray
D/Taoiseach

W. V. J. Murray
W. Kelly
Do see please. Previous
papers are more recent.
Sh 1/4