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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: Taoiseach,
From: Liam Hourican.

Second Toomebridge meeting: Monitoring Committee

Taoiseach,

Last night's decision to set up the Monitoring Committee represents an important victory for the Priests, Councillors and a number of the relatives over Sinn Fein. It came unexpectedly towards the end of a long and difficult meeting which saw recriminations on many sides. For example, the division within the families was more marked than ever with the Lynchs and Quinns vigorously criticising the tactics of the Provisionals, while being attacked by other families for promoting splits. Bernadette Mc Aliskey remained hard-line while other members of the H-Block Committee wanted to call for an end to the strike. Adams's handling of Wednesday night's visit to the prison was attacked by some as a cosmetic exercise which did not fulfill the request made after the first meeting.

Those present included Joe Austin of Sinn Fein (but not Adams), Seamus Ruddy (I.R.S.P.), most of the families, Mrs. Mc Aliskey, Mr. Canning and Fathers Faul and Murray.

The Monitoring Committee was first proposed to Sinn Fein at the early morning meeting in Belfast on Wednesday. Adams turned it down flat. He subsequently claimed that the hunger strikers rejected it too. Now the tables have been turned on the Provisionals. The creation of the Monitoring Committee must have the effect of reducing their control over what happens in the prison.

The British are unlikely to view the committee with much enthusiasm either. They may quibble about allowing it access or giving it official recognition. But, even if this is withheld, the Committee should be able to function in some fashion. This is because a

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number of its members (the Priests) already enjoy regular access to the prison for pastoral reasons.

The composition of the Committee is likely to be as follows:

The Cardinal,
Bishop Daly,
Fathers Faul and Murray,
Hugh Logue (for the I.C.J.P.),
Jimmy Canning and
another Dungannon Councillor,
John Robb and
Mrs. Mc Aliskey for the H-Block Committee.

Not everyone is happy about Bernadette's inclusion, but it was offered last night as a way of buying off her hostility.

I suggest that the Government here give an early indication of support for the Committee.

Fathers Faul and Murray were reported to be extremely helpful last night. They were openly critical of the Provisionals. Two nights previous Adams agreed to meet the relatives only after Fr. Faul had threatened to invite the N.I.O. and the media to Toomebridge so as to expose the Provisionals behaviour.

Seamus Ruddy (I.R.S.P.) also made one helpful suggestion last night. He said even in advance of a cessation of the hunger strike, the British should be asked to implement their promised reforms immediately for the conforming prisoners. There is a substantial number of these, even on the Republican side - mostly short sentence men.

It may be necessary to be quite severe with the relatives about steps which the Irish Government could or would take. The hard-liners have been justifying their stand with the argument that intense pressure on Dublin will result in pressures being mounted from here which the British could not resist.

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Bernadette Mc Aliskey last night outlined the following senario:

Dublin withdraws its Ambassador and expels British Ambassador.

The Punt and Sterling immediately fall.

The business community takes fright and demands surrender by the British Government.

The strikers thus win their five demands.

Some relatives scoffed at this version of what might happen. But clearly there are credulous people who believe in something like this.

Sean Hickey

31st July, 1981.

Copies sent to:

Professor Dooge,
Mr. John Kelly,
Mr. D. Neligan,
Mr. Nally,
Mr. W. Kirwan,
Mr. M. Lillis.