

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2013/27/1597
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	July 1983
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	7 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
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Secret

Present Situation in the Maze Prison

I met separately on 4th October with the Catholic Chaplain in the Maze Prison, Fr. John Murphy, (at his home outside Belfast) and with Fr. Denis Faul (at his home in Dungannon) to ask them about conditions in the Maze Prison, following the breakout of 38 republican prisoners on 25 September last, of whom 19 are still at large. Fr. Murphy asked that anything he said to me, other than that which Fr. Faul might mention, be kept totally confidential, especially from any British or Northern Ireland contacts we might have, until such time as it became public. His reason for this is that visits are being curtailed at present and in these circumstances if the information leaked to the public, or the British became aware we had it, it would compromise his position. Likewise with Fr. Faul those points he asked to be kept confidential are so described.

A. The following are the main points made by Fr. Murphy:-

- The tension in the Maze between prisoners and the members of the Prison Officers Association (lower ranks, mostly wardens) is greater than at any time he can recall during his six year chaplaincy including the period of the hunger strike and of the campaign to murder prison wardens which was brought to an end by the Cardinal in 1980.
- In effect the Prison Officers Association is dictating the handling of matters within the prison and the management of the prison is powerless to enforce its wishes. The prison officers, the vast bulk of whom are Protestants from the hardline Unionist tradition, are harsh and callous in their dealings with prisoners and are taking delight in making life rough for them. They are looking for an end to any privileges which were obtained as a result of the hunger strike, especially those which provide for a limited degree of free association among prisoners.
- The main problem is that the authorities are not in control of the prison and that the prison officers will not carry out what they are instructed to do. The authorities are very dissatisfied with the situation.



- The escape from the prison was not coordinated with the outside. There was nobody waiting for the escapees when they broke out and they each of them took their chance. Some of them had no idea of where they were going and walked into army patrols because of their ignorance.
- The factual reports of the escape as given in the newspapers are reasonably accurate but not complete. The prisoners had command of H-block 7 for almost two hours. Two wardens were shot as was a prisoner.
- The escapees did not intend to kill anybody. One warden was shot in the head in H-block 7, and is still in hospital. Fr. Murphy believes he was trying to raise the alarm and slipped, the bullet which was intended for his legs hitting him in the head. The escapees, who were waiting for the food truck at the time, sent a paramedic (Medical orderly) to treat the shot man. It was Fr. Murphy who told the first eleven to be recaptured (those who did not get beyond the perimeter fence) that Mr. Ferris had died. He is satisfied they were not aware of the man's death until he so informed them. The second prison officer was shot in the leg trying to recapture one of the prisoners (Mr. Cann) scaling the barbed wire outer fence. One prisoner was shot in the leg by the Army. The Army was confused because many of the prisoners were in prison officer garb.
- Fr. Murphy cannot think of any way the inmates could have got guns other than in collusion with one or more prison officers. There are suggestions among the prison officers that money may have changed hands, and one prison officer mentioned to him that certain bank accounts should be checked.
- The men escaped from H-Block 7 and passed through all the prison security gates without being noticed. This area is controlled by the prison officers. It was only when they emerged from the prison proper and headed for the main gate in the perimeter fence, which is patrolled by the Army, (which does not have access to the prison), that they were spotted. The outer gate was then blocked and the prisoners



sought to escape over the barbed wire fence. It was between the prison proper and the perimeter fence that nine escapees were recaptured by the prison officers. They were stripped naked, thrown lengthwise into the back of a van, taken back into the prison and were dragged across the compound. They all have lacerations of the back and buttocks as a result.

- Most of the prisoners were recaptured by the incoming shift of prison officers.
- The prison orderly on the food truck, Armstrong, who is a prisoner from another H-Block, and whom the truck driver (a prison officer) claims was acting under duress was severely beaten by the prison officers, losing some teeth. He had not sought to escape. Fr. Murphy said a confession in his ear. He did not, as reported by Fr. Faul, give him the last rites.
- Armstrong was eventually taken to the prison hospital. The others were not. They were refused their clothes and were offered prison issue clothing. These they refused and they are now on the blanket.
- The Army treated those escapees whom they caught outside the prison very well. In one instance they refused to hand one of the recaptured escapees over to the RUC without maintaining an Army presence. The prisoners have no complaints against the Army.
- Those recaptured escapees who were brought to Castlereagh speak of no ill-treatment there. There were two or three isolated incidents where the RUC ill-treated recaptured escapees.
- All of the recaptured escapees were severely ill-treated by the prison officers once handed into their custody. None of them have been returned to the H-Blocks but are in (a) cellular confinement or on the boards (blanket protest).



- The prisoners who remained in H-block 7 (over 80) were transferred to H-Block 8. When passing out of H-Block 7 they had to pass by two prison officers with dogs. Fr. Murphy has seen physical evidence of a dog bite in one instance. He will during the course of the next few weeks as he visits each prisoner privately, establish the extent of the dog bites. He is convinced more than one man was bitten. [Fr. Faul says 18 men suffered bites].
- There is reasonable doubt as to whether the prison officer who died, Mr. Ferris, who had two stab wounds from sharpened screw drivers in his abdomen, and whom it is said had a third wound in his neck, died from his wounds or from a heart attack. Fr. Murphy, who visited the dead man's wife hinted she had been told he had died from a heart attack. [Fr. Murphy said this might be a very important factor should some or all of the escapees be returned for trial].
- There are no private conjugal visits of the type reported in newspapers in recent days. The only exception to the usual visit with each party sitting at a different side of a table is when a marriage occurs. In that event the couple are allowed ten minutes together but with an open door guarded by a prison officer.
- The escapees had a lot of luck in getting out. Some prison officers were lax. Segregation, which is now the practice in the Maze, must have helped but not significantly. Mr. Farlane, who was the leader of the escapees, would not have taken many into his confidence. Had there not been segregation, and had there been loyalists in the H-block, the latter might well have been savaged by the republicans.
- There was almost a repetition of the breakout on 3 October when some of the prison officers in another H-block were overwhelmed by republican prisoners.
- There has also been serious trouble in a loyalist block within the last week.



- Explosives have been found within the last week in the Maze as well as in Magilligan. The former were in the legs of tubular steel tables.
- The authorities in the prison would prefer not to have segregation. They are also concerned about the association of prisoners within the H-Blocks. Since the break out there has been no association between the arms of the individual H-Blocks, only within each arm, thereby avoiding association across the central control block.
- Fr. Murphy has had a meeting with Mr. John Bourne, Under-Secretary in charge of Security and Prisons at the NIO, telling him of the above. He has also informed the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace and intends to report to the International Association of (Catholic) Prison Chaplains. He has kept his bishop, Dr. Daly, informed.
- Fr. Murphy accepts that in the circumstances it would not have been unreasonable for prison officers to punch the escapees and those who remained in H-Block 7. He considers they committed a grave injustice in dragging the prisoners naked across the compounds, in the beatings they neeted out and in the way they treated those being moved from H-Block 7 to H-Block 8. This mistreatment of prisoners has to be stopped. If it is not the Provos will start killing prison officers again. The Northern Ireland authorities have a duty to see that it is stopped. He himself could not publicly involve himself. He helped Fr. Faul gather the information which was released by him to the press and he is happy he did so. He expects much of the information above will emerge as visits resume. He was also responsible for Bishop Cahal Daly's statement of *27 September*

- B. The following are the main points made by Fr. Faul.  
(I have not repeated some of the points above which he also made)
- When seven escapees were returned to the prison on Wednesday 28 September from Castlereagh they were badly beaten by 12 prison officers in the prison reception area.



- The prison officers, who are almost without exception poorly educated Protestants, have taken complete control. While welfare visits were allowed last week for loyalist prisoners, there were none permitted for Catholics. There is blatant sectarianism within the prison.
- The officer who is second in command in the Maze is a Catholic named McLaughlin. His instructions to the prison officers not to beat the prisoners were completely ignored. (Confidential)
- According to a Catholic Officer in the prison, who at great risk to himself, visited Fr. Faul in Dungannon, the beatings are the worst he has ever witnessed. (Confidential).
- Information about the beatings is scant because since the escape three wardens accompany any visitor, who thereby feel intimidated, as does the prisoner who is visited. (Confidential)
- There is a great danger that the Provos outside, who will get to hear of the beatings, will take revenge and kill prison officers, who are very easy targets.
- During the beatings the prison officers in vain demanded guns from the prison management. (Confidential).
- The British must take control of the prison and a proper investigation of the beatings by the RUC with access to solicitors should be held. He would urge the Irish Government to do everything possible in this regard. This should be done as much for the sake of the prison officers as for any other reason.
- One reason why the prisoners wanted to escape was that some of them, coming near to the end of their sentences, feared being implicated by supergrasses leading to further terms of imprisonment.
- Some of the "soldiers" in the turrents surrounding the prison may well be dummies.



- The prison authorities have let it be known they do not want him to say his usual weekly Sunday Mass in the prison, following the reports he gave to the media last Sunday. If they try to prevent him entering the prison he will vigorously oppose them.
- He intends to publish a booklet on the matter in due course.

*D. Ó Ceallaigh*

D. Ó Ceallaigh  
5 October 1983