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CONFIDENTIAL

12 December 1989

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Attention: Mr. Michael Collins, Anglo-Irish Division

Visit to Mr. Dick McKelkeny, HMP Full Sutton, 7 December 1989

I visited Mr. McKelkeny on 7 December. I gave him a copy of the statements by the Taoiseach and the Minister during the Dail Debate on Anglo-Irish Relations. The visit lasted approximately one hour.

Statements by the Taoiseach and Minister

As instructed I handed over the text of the statements made on 23 and 24 November by the Taoiseach and the Minister respectively. I went through the text of both statements and pointed out the very strong line being taken by the Government on this case. I availed of the opportunity to refer to the Resolution of the European Parliament on the Birmingham Six case and highlighted the call in the Resolution for a report from the Parliament's Legal Committee on the case of the Birmingham Six. I drew his particular attention to the fact that the Resolution had been welcomed strongly by the Minister and especially the Resolution's call for a "thorough review". He is able to keep in touch with the Irish news via RTE radio which he is able to receive clearly. He catches all the Irish news bulletins from 4 p.m. onwards. He was interested to hear the Taoiseach on the radio at the time of the Dail debate.

Temporary transfer of Billy Power to London

I explained that the Embassy had made representations to the Home Office regarding the temporary transfer of Billy Power to Wormwood Scrubs. McKelkeny thought that Power would be approximately 28 days in Wormwood Scrubs although he had been told he would be moved for three weeks.

Permanent transfer of Power and McIlkenny from Full Sutton to another prison

I reminded him that as confirmed on the recent visit by Mr. Murray and I, the Government would fully support their request for a transfer from Full Sutton. I explained that this had been taken up with the Home Office at the highest level on a number of occasions since we had last spoken.

Meeting between the Minister and Paddy McIlkenny and Breda Power

I explained that the meeting between his brother and Billy Power's daughter had taken place on 17 November at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin. McIlkenny has not seen his brother Paddy since the beginning of the year but he hopes to see him in the next week. I explained to him that the meeting had gone well and he confirmed that he had been given the same impression of it. He looked forward to having an opportunity to discuss the case with his brother in the near future.

I told him that meeting that their relatives had asked that the six men would be kept fully up to date with developments at the political level. The Minister had undertaken to keep them fully in the picture and that the Embassy would continue to do this at every opportunity. I asked him about contacts with various interested parties. He admitted to not being as well informed in this area as he should. He hoped to get a fuller report on this from his brother when they meet. He said that his brother Paddy would march in Dublin on Saturday in the torch light procession for justice. He had heard that he was very pleased with the meeting with the Minister and top officials of the Department.

Taoiseach's response to McIlkenny's petition

He did not raise directly his letter to the Taoiseach asking for Government support or endorsement for their petition to the European Commission on Human Rights. At one point when he was talking about correspondence with various figures he joked that when he had last written to the Taoiseach it took three months to get a reply. I explained that in matters as serious and complex as the Birmingham Six case our views are worked out at the highest level in consultation with all the relevant authorities. The Government had to very carefully consider how best to advance their interests at each juncture. He did not take the opportunity to refer further to that request. He said that for the first time in 16 years that the Taoiseach has come out in support of their case publicly and he appreciated the fact that the Taoiseach had backed them back in 1986.

Categorisation

I explained that the Embassy had pushed hard at the Home Office on the question of the categorisation of the six. He said he had the support of the Governors in Wormwood Scrubs where he had spent ten years. He and Power were moved on 4 July 1989 from there to Full Sutton. He said he had originally been encouraged by a Governor in Wormwood Scrubs to apply for re-categorisation. I explained to him that while the petition by himself and Power to the Home Office for decategorisation had been refused that the categorisation of all six was being considered by the Home Office at the moment. The Embassy was in constant touch with the Home Office and it was hoped that a decision would be made on this in the near future.

Religious practice

He said both he and Power were very religious. A new priest has now been appointed as a part time Chaplin. They now have mass weekly on a Saturday morning but confessions have to be fitted in at the same time. He gets on well with the Church of England Chaplin who is ex-British Navy. The Chaplin is very sympathetic and has read Chris Mullin's book and is getting to know him. He said that the Governor is a "bad evil bastard". His Wing Governor is an ex-Catholic priest who left the Church to get married but he has found him so far to be unfriendly. His own wife and daughters live in Birmingham.

Hassle from other prisoners

He was surprised to see the suggestion in The Irish Post recently that he was getting hassle from other prisoners. He had written to The Irish Post to put the record straight. I told him that his letter had been carried in the edition of 9 December. He had arranged with the Welfare Officer on his wing to make a private phonecall to his wife to reassure her.

He did say that Billy Power had been unhappy to leave Wormwood Scrubs where he spent ten years. He said that they had access to daily mass and communion there and with a wide variety of church activities. They were actively involved in all of these and they had daily groups of prayer meetings. McIlkenny said that Billy Power had never mentioned to him he wanted to go on the block (into solitary confinement). He did say that he himself is more self-confident and prefers to stand up for himself. He said that he and Billy don't actually mix on their wing. They each have certain friends and Billy does not mix as well as he does. McIlkenny admitted that Billy Power does not tell him everything. There is a certain amount that he keeps to himself and Billy may have had hassle that he did not tell McIlkenny about. He said that he has never seen letters from Power and he added that Power "has difficulty with his spelling". You will have seen that on our last visit to Power and McIlkenny neither of them referred to problems with other prisoners.

Food conditions

He said that twice in the last three weeks he has had to go into the kitchen to stop the staff giving out portions of liver which were completely rotten. They had not been involved in the protest about the quality of prison food but he did say that it had been particularly bad since our last visit.

International publicity

He said that the "Brits" are getting uncomfortable that they are "having so much flak". He said that if Douglas Hurd was still Home Secretary that Joe Kennedy would have been allowed to make a visit to them. He was glad to see that Kadar Asmal would be taking their case up with the UN. He said that it was very desirable to internationalise their case as much as possible. He said that since the release of the Guildford Four there has been considerable correspondence from young people in particular who are now getting interested in the case.

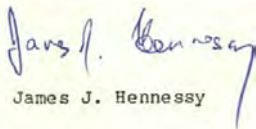
Times of original interrogation

He referred again to the dispute over the times of the original interrogation. This has been covered in our previous reports. He was quite adamant that he had been seen by Skuse at 3 a.m. as he was still wearing his watch.

West Midlands Serious Crime Squad

He said that George Reade was a bad and evil man and was partly responsible for their difficulties. McIlkenny said that Reade had written a report that the Six were top IRA men to cover his own position. He said that one of the Welfare Officers who was sympathetic to him in Wormwood Scrubs had actually shown him this report in contravention of regulations. He said that it is very frustrating that the authorities still take the word of Reade after all that has happened.

He referred to the current enquiry into the West Midlands Police. He repeated points reported previously. He referred to the involvement of Superintendent George Reade in the Buckley case where Reade and other officers went to his house, assaulted him and threw him down the stairs. He alleged Buckley had sustained a broken elbow and had subsequently taken an action against the police. He claimed that in the wake of the conviction of the Birmingham Six the West Midlands Police were able to what they liked with suspects.


James J. Hennessy