



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Immediate

19 November 1991

FAX

To HQ

For James Farrell

From London

From Brendan McMahon

Subject: Thames Television Report on the  
Brixton Prison escape.

In summary, the report screened this evening makes the following allegations:

- Staffordshire Special Branch recruited an officer in the prison service suggesting to him that he seek a transfer to Brixton - the main remand prison for IRA prisoners. His task was to befriend such prisoners and gather what intelligence he could from them. The prison officer in question was a former member of the SAS and had an understanding of Irish affairs as his mother was Irish and he had been in Ireland on numerous occasions.
- The officer accordingly befriended Quinliven and MacAuley and discussed with them the possibility of escape. This included recounting to the prisoners the detail of an earlier attempted escape by a London criminal which had taken place after Sunday morning religious service. The allegation is that Staffordshire Special Branch were considering staging such an "escape" with a view to getting their hands on other active IRA members outside the prison who might become involved in such a plot.
- However, the plot became too complicated when the prisoners began to seriously threaten the Prison Officer and his family with the objective of obtaining a pistol. It was at this point that Scotland Yard became aware of the plot when the Staffordshire Special Branch requested them to provide special protection for their informant.

- At this point the plot was apparently knocked on the head; the prison Governor (Withers) informed; the prison officer disciplined and transferred to a prison in the North of England.

Four months later both men escaped utilising the plan discussed earlier with the prison officer/informant.

While the programme does not allege that Special Branch masterminded the escape, it does paint a very bizarre picture, including the allegation of possible criminal activity on the part of the Special Branch. At the very least, the report raises a number of very embarrassing questions - most notably for the Home Secretary. You will recall that Baker was subjected to severe criticism after the escape for ducking any responsibility and effectively blaming the Governor (Withers) and a Home Office official (Babier). Subsequent investigations have exonerated all officials involved with the exception of Withers, where the Home Office said that had he not retired shortly after the escape (as planned - he was 65) he would have been disciplined.

It remains to be seen how accurate the report turns out to be. However, attached is the text of a Labour Party statement issued today calling for a statement from the Home Secretary. I understand that the Home Secretary will make a statement on the matter at 3.30 p.m. tomorrow. If there is any truth in the allegation, it will prove a major embarrassment for Baker and could conceivably threaten his political career.

Barry Sheerman MP Huddersfield



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

071-219 5037

## PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday November 19th

For Immediate release

## LABOUR DEMANDS STATEMENT ON BRIXTON ESCAPE

Mr. Barry Sheerman M.P., Shadow Home Office Minister, today (November 19th) demanded a statement from Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, on the escape from Brixton Prison of 2 IRA suspects on July 7th.

Mr. Sheerman said ' Home Office sources are now confirming allegations in the Thames Report programme to be broadcast this evening. I understand that this alleges that a prison officer who was working secretly for Staffordshire Police Special Branch gave the IRA suspects the escape plan. He appears to have told the authorities about his work in February, yet the men escaped using the plan in July.

' The escape raises enormous issues about the accountability of surveillance work, and the competence of the Home Office. If reports of the programme are accurate then it is a catalogue of appalling blunders. The Home Secretary must make a statement to the House on this matter.'

ENDS

For further information please contact Barry Sheerman M.P. on 071 219 5037.