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① Mr. Bell
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27/5

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

PROTESTS AND SECOND HUNGER STRIKE - WEEKLY BULLETIN NO 12

0900 HOURS THURSDAY 14 MAY - 0900 HOURS THURSDAY 21 MAY

PRISON DEVELOPMENTS

1.1 Maze Hunger Strike, O'Hara continued his fast in the prison hospital and has now deteriorated rapidly. He has not passed fluid or been able to drink for some time. He is critically ill and death is thought imminent (probably within 24 hours).

McDonnell's condition is not giving any cause for concern and he remains in H.5.

The prisoners' weights are:-

	Day of Strike	Weight on first examin- action	Weight today	Weight loss during week	Overall Weight loss
Patrick O'Hara	61	11st 3½lbs	8st 21bs*	5lbs	3st 1½lbs
Joseph McDonnell	13	11st 4½lbs	10st 8½lbs	7lbs	10lbs

* O'Hara was last weighed on 19/5

1.2 On Saturday a miniature camera was discovered in McCreesh's bed; only one shot had been taken. It is not known if it is the same camera which took a poor quality picture, allegedly of O'Hara, published by the Irish Press on 20/5. On Tuesday a pocket tape-recorder was found in O'Hara's bed but it did not have a battery and there was nothing on the tape. Although staff have suspicions as to how these items were introduced, there is no concrete evidence.

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1.3 Death of McCreesh McCreesh started to become confused at the weekend and was virtually unconscious by Monday (18/5). Subsequently he rallied somewhat before the final rapid decline on Wednesday (20/5). He died this morning, the 61st day of his strike, at 02.11 hours and shortly afterwards the body was removed to Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry. (A deliberate choice as Newry is only a few miles from Camlough, the family home.) The timing of the funeral is not yet certain but may be on Saturday (23/5). An announcement from PSF has already declared that a further hunger striker will replace McCreesh today or tomorrow.

2.1 Visits to Hunger Strikers During the period McCreesh and O'Hara were visited by their families and by a representative of their respective organisations. O'Hara was also visited by Fergus McAteer (IIP Councillor). McLaughlin was also visited by his family while McDonnell received no visitors.

2.2 Father Brian McCreesh Undoubtedly the major focus of interest over the period other than McCreesh's death was the circumstances of the McCreesh family visit to Raymond on Saturday (16 May) following indications that he might have wished to end his fast. The facts are as set out in the NIO statement issued on Tuesday night (18 May):-

"On Saturday McCreesh indicated his willingness to accept nourishment and medical treatment. He was, however, in a confused state of mind and the doctors in attendance did not regard his statements as sufficient to authorise medical intervention in view of his mental state and his previously clearly expressed contrary views.

"The doctors accordingly asked to see McCreesh's closest family relatives, told them that McCreesh had indicated his willingness to accept nourishment and medical treatment but because of his confused mental state they now sought guidance from them. After the family members had visited McCreesh, the family acting through Father McCreesh, a brother of Raymond McCreesh, gave clear and unequivocal advice to the doctors that there was to be no medical intervention.

"The wish of the family was accordingly respected."

Following reports on BBC radio that the family and, in particular, Father McCreesh had been instrumental in keeping McCreesh on the strike the family, through the medium of PSF, had demanded that certain medical staff should be replaced and that an inquiry should be held into events on Saturday. The Department rejected these demands, stating it was satisfied that "medical and other staff had behaved with complete and utter propriety". In fact the reports were substantially true. As McCreesh was by this stage partially deaf, the family had to raise their voices and a considerable part of the conversation was overheard by hospital officers outside. From this it was clear that Father McCreesh had a rather surprising line of support for the hunger strikes and his brother's part in them. He is now reported to be suing the BBC for defamation!

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3

3.1 Maze Protest The protest again remained static at 415 - this represented 2 joining, 1 abandoning and McCreesh's death. In anticipation of this death minor solidarity gestures began at Maze on Tuesday with 16 conforming prisoners refusing to work; the same number refused to work on Wednesday and 20 today.

The distribution of tables and chairs has now been completed.

3.2 The ECHR The Commission has now declared admissible the Article 8 (correspondence) and Article 13 (right to a national remedy for breaches of the Convention) aspects of the Maze case; this has not been made public. It is now for the Commission to decide on how to proceed with the complaints. No press statement has been made by the NIO and none is expected. Despite confused press reports to the contrary, the Commission is also not expected to make any public comments at this stage.

4.1 Other Protests - Armagh The Armagh protest continued unchanged at 29. Two additional prisoners refused to work this morning.

4.2 No other reports of solidarity actions have been received.

5. Prisons Assessment The situation remained as noted in previous bulletins. First indications are that McCreesh's death will not be marked by any more reaction in the prisons than the previous deaths.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN NIO

6. Correspondence This has continued to follow the pattern noted last week. Of note was the telegram from Cardinal O'Fiaich to the Prime Minister urging the Government to be flexible on work and clothing.

THE DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

7.1 The Campaign Approximately 15,000 people attended the funeral of Francis Hughes in Bellaghy, Co Londonderry. As at Sands' funeral, the Provisional IRA provided paramilitary trappings to the ceremony. The RUC diverted the funeral cortege away from the Protestant areas of Bellaghy. Some youths began throwing stones and bottles at the police but they were stopped by stewards who were supervising the mourners. Martin McGuinness, Chairman of PIRA's Provisional Army Council, declared that Francis Hughes had sacrificed his life to deny the policy of criminalisation and described him as "an unconquerable man, part of a cause that can never be broken".

7.2 Throughout the week numerous vehicles have been hijacked, petrol bombs and stones have been thrown at the security forces and several H Block rallies have been held. Five British soldiers were murdered in Co Armagh on 19 May and in claiming responsibility the Provisional IRA warned the British Army, "You are fighting a war which you cannot win". Commenting on the murder, Father Faul, an outspoken supporter of the hunger strike said, "How can people put forward the value of non-violent protest in the prisons when all their good work is negated by a savage deed like this? One lesson from Long Kesh in recent weeks is the superiority of the sacrificial fast over the violence of the paramilitaries. That lesson has now been lost". Rev Brian McCreesh, the brother of hunger striker Raymond McCreesh, sent a telegram to Mrs Thatcher asking her to respect his brother's "dignity" and to "save his life". The Prime Minister replied that the 5 demands were not in the gift of a democratic government to grant.

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7.3 The National H Blocks/Armagh Committee demanded that councillors elected in the province's local elections should withdraw from the council chambers in protest at conditions in the Maze Prison. It called on its supporters not to vote for candidates who had refused to withdraw.

7.4 News of McCreesh's death in the early hours of 21 May produced petrol bomb and gun attacks on the security forces in West Belfast.

7.5 Mr John McMichael, a spokesman for the Ulster Defence Association, urged Mrs Thatcher to settle the hunger strike within the context of general prison reform as prisoners from Loyalist paramilitary groups would also benefit from improved conditions.

8.1 Political Following his visit to the Prime Minister on 13 May John Hume received what was reported to be a "sympathetic hearing" when he met the Labour Party leader, Michael Foot, on 14 May for talks on the H Blocks and other political issues. The meeting coincided with criticisms by his party's Northern Ireland back-bench group over his support for the bipartisan approach on Northern Ireland and also over Mr Don Concannon's visit to Bobby Sands a few days before his death.

8.2 At the Requiem Mass for Francis Hughes the Parish Priest, Fr Michael Flanagan, told the congregation that the ways of violence which had been tried over the past 12 years were the "wrong ones". In an appeal for reconciliation he said there had to be forgiveness and trust, one towards another.

8.3 Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich preaching at a Confirmation in Middletown, Co Armagh, called it a "black day in the history of the North" and continued, "the whole sad litany is a terrible indictment of the cruelty and violence in our midst, which spares neither Protestants nor Catholics, neither security forces nor paramilitaries, neither adults nor children".

8.4 On the same day Mrs Thatcher publicly rejected an impassioned plea from Cardinal O'Fiaich for more flexibility over the Maze hunger strike. She said that the resolution of the Maze issue did not lie with the Government but "with the hunger strikers themselves, their families and advisers". She added, "more directly it lies with the leaders of the Provisional IRA who have taken a cold-blooded decision that the unfortunate men now fasting in prison are of more use to them dead than alive".

8.5 Following diplomatic efforts in Strasbourg by Mr Brian Lenihan, the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, there are reports that the ECHR has been considering whether it should proceed under the "friendly settlement" provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights on the 2 remaining complaints from a human rights case brought against Westminster by 4 prisoners in 1978.

8.6 Three separate groups of priests (60 from Armagh parishes, 24 from Dromore) have urged the Prime Minister to enter into negotiations with the prisoners' representatives "to prevent loss of life and turmoil in the community". They accused HMG of having shown "little humanity" and urge the PM "to realise she is dealing with Irish nationalists who differ from her in loyalties and religion".

DEVELOPMENTS OUTSIDE NORTHERN IRELAND

9.1 The Campaign - Irish Republic The violence in Dublin which had followed Francis Hughes' death (see last week's bulletin) was condemned in a statement issued by the National H Blocks/Armagh Committee (NHAC); "Small and unrepresentative elements seem set on obstructing the National Committee's stated policy of peaceful and dignified demonstrations." The Committee decided against holding a march on the British Embassy, Dublin to mark Hughes' funeral and instead staged a vigil outside the GPO building. A spokesman for the Irish Republican Socialist Party attacked the Garda's "unrestrained ... brutality" in dealing with anti-H Block demonstrations. A number of businesses closed in the Republic, particularly in the border areas, on the day of Hughes' funeral, and 2 Dundalk newsagent shops were petrol bombed for stocking British newspapers.

9.2 The County Kerry home of a retired British judge was burnt in an arson attack, bringing the number of buildings destroyed in such a way in the Republic since Sands' death to nine. There was an attempt to burn St John's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Sligo, and the names of Bobby Sands and Francis Hughes were scrawled on gravestones at the Cathedral. Westport House, County Mayo, which is owned by Lord Altamount, was occupied by members of an H Blocks Action Committee in a peaceful protest.

9.3 The NHAC warned Fianna Fail TDs representing Dublin constituencies that they would be lobbied to pressurise Mr Haughey into calling upon Mrs Thatcher to concede the 5 demands. Relatives of the hunger strikers made personal visits to Mr Haughey and urged him to act quickly. A petition containing 250,000 signatures mostly collected in Ireland was delivered to the Taoiseach's office again, calling upon him to act. Gerry Adams, Vice President of Provisional Sinn Fein, criticised Mr Haughey for encouraging the hunger strikers to seek the intervention of the European Commission of Human Rights. According to Adams, the Commission's intervention "was doomed to failure ... unless it can proceed on a clear understanding that the British Government are committed to achieving a settlement based on the prisoners' just demands. Mr Haughey knows this".

9.4 The United States Noel Cassidy, a former protesting prisoner in the Maze, continued his tour of the United States publicising the anti-H Block campaign. Boston City Council has renamed the street on which the British Consulate is situated, "Francis Hughes Avenue".

9.5 Europe Sisters of O'Hara and McCreesh travelled to Paris in the hope of seeing President-elect M Mitterrand. The Toulouse offices of ICL France were bombed and the slogan "English power kills in Northern Ireland" was daubed in French on the remains. A British diplomat's holiday home in Corsica was destroyed by a bomb and pro IRA slogans were painted on the collapsed walls.

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MEDIA

10.1 The 'Irish Press' (15 May) reported that the flurry of meetings on the ECHR should be taken as an encouraging sign - "By now the British must be so desperate to get themselves off the hook that any finding of the Commission would be welcome - the difficulty appears to be over who is going to take the first step. This is no time for delay ...".

10.2 On 16 May, the 'Irish News' spoke about concessions. The answer that HMG has given to those like John Hume who call for compromise is that "any change would only be the thin end of the wedge. More and tougher demands would follow". But, it suggests, "there is a simple way of testing this hypothesis - try it. Make concessions on prison clothing and see what the response is. One thing is certain: the current policy of inflexibility is getting us nowhere".

10.3 After the confusion surrounding the reported request of Raymond McCreech to come off the hunger strike, and the subsequent denials of this by his family, the 'Daily Telegraph' (20 May) asked "Is there anything in any code of morals which should debar the prison authorities from exercising reasonable care to ensure that hunger strikers are not exposed to moral coercion by those who wish them to persist in their strikes? Suicide is no longer a crime in English law, but conspiracy to induce suicide is".

10.4 The 'Belfast Telegraph' of the same day began its leader: "Anyone who still believes that the Provisionals inside the H Blocks are protesting for humanitarian reasons had his answer in the bomb that killed 5 soldiers near the border yesterday".

10.5 On 21 May, the 'Irish Press' again called for compromise, though admitting that the deaths of the 5 soldiers in Newry this week will have made a settlement much more difficult. It continued: "The tragedy is that with every death, with every day that passes it becomes harder for the prisoners to compromise on intervention by ECHR, because such compromise would not be seen merely as a climb-down to Mrs Thatcher's pressure, but as a betrayal of those gone before, notably Bobby Sands."

10.6 The front page of 'An Phoblacht' (16 May) was again printed in black instead of the usual green, this time as a mark of respect to Francis Hughes. Much of the issue was devoted to tributes to Hughes, while the rest of the paper covered the new hunger strikers and the continuing H Block campaign.

10.7 Press coverage of the situation overseas has not increased, and in general is becoming more favourable to HMG, especially in the United States.

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OVER L ASSESSMENT

11. The overall situation inside and outside the prisons remains very much as noted last week. There is no sign that PIRA's will to continue is weakening, as shown by Adams' statement yesterday in which he strongly and personally attacked Mr Haughey and also confirmed that ECHR intervention would only be acceptable with a prior commitment from HMG on the 5 demands. The disciplined terrorist campaign continued over the period with the 2 notable incidents of the rocket attack on the RUC in Belfast (1 dead) and the landmine explosion outside Newry (5 dead). After the latter incident it was significant that the PIRA statement emphasised it was not connected with McCreesh's imminent death. The trend meanwhile continues for civil disorder to give way to organised terrorism, though rioting could be expected to peak again given suitable developments.

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