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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

PROTESTS AND SECOND HUNGER STRIKE - WEEKLY BULLETIN NO 28

0900 HOURS THURSDAY 3 SEPTEMBER - 0900 HOURS THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER

The Bulletin is produced by Liaison Staff (B), Political Affairs Division (B) and Prisons Administration Division (1)(B).

PRISON DEVELOPMENTS

1.1 Maze Hunger Strike None of the 6 hunger strikers is giving any cause for concern and none of them is displaying any specific symptoms. The ear trouble which McCloskey had recently, has for the present, cleared up. Pickering has recently had treatment for an ear infection which he has had since birth and as with McCloskey this has now cleared up. Mention of this in the local press is thought to emanate from relatives as a possible pretext for abandoning the hunger strike. Ex-hunger strikers Quinn and McGeown were moved from Ward 18, Musgrave Park Hospital back to the Prison hospital on Tuesday (8/9); they are eating a normal diet and are not expected to rejoin the strike.

The prisoners' weights are:-

	Day of Strike	Weight on first examin- ation	Weight today	Weight loss during week	Overall Weight loss
Liam McCloskey	39	10st 9 lbs	8st 8 lbs	5½lbs	2st 1 lb
Patrick Sheehan	32	9st 6½lbs	7st 10 lbs	4 lbs	1st 10½lbs
John McMullan	25	10st 3 lbs	8st 8 lbs	4½lbs	1st 9 lbs
Bernard Fox	18	10st 6 lbs	9st 3½lbs	5½lbs	1st 2½lbs
Gerard Carville	11	10st 3½lbs	9st 7 lbs	8 lbs	10½lbs
John Pickering	4	11st 12 lbs	11st 7½ lbs	4½lbs	4½lbs

1.2 Retirement of Devlin (Day 53) At approximately 14.10 on Friday (4/9) Devlin's consciousness became clouded and his family were summoned. His mother and brother duly arrived at 16.05. After seeing Devlin and the doctors, they then gave the necessary written approval to effect medical treatment. This was instituted immediately and he left the prison hospital at 16.45 on transfer to the Intensive Care Unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital. The following day he was moved to Ward 18, Musgrave Park Hospital, and is now eating normally. It is expected that he will make a full recovery.

1.3 Retirement of McKeown (Day 70) In the event McKeown's condition worsened considerably towards the end of the week and his family accepted prison facilities on Saturday to enable them to stay in the prison hospital overnight. When the doctor examined McKeown at approximately 11.35 on Sunday (6/9), he had largely lost mental and physical control and his mother signed the necessary document to save his life. He was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital at 12.35 and the next day subsequently to Ward 18, Musgrave Park Hospital. He is now eating normally and is expected to make a complete recovery. In the event Mrs McKeown remained true to her conscience, despite the efforts made to prevent her from intervening.

1.4 New Hunger Striker John Henry Pickering refused breakfast on Monday (7/9). He is a 25-year-old single man and a native of West Belfast. As a change of practice PIRA have not stated who he is replacing although he was

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a co-defendant of Kieran Doherty who died on 4 August. With Doherty and as a member of the same 5-man PIRA bombing team, he was captured in South Belfast on 25 August 1976 after vehicles in which the team were travelling had been intercepted by police. Pickering and 2 accomplices escaped and sought refuge in a house in the vicinity where they held the elderly occupant hostage. Following the intervention of a priest however the hostages were released and the 3 terrorists surrendered. Pickering was convicted on 24 January 1978 of possessing explosives and firearms and sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment; an 8-year sentence for false imprisonment was also imposed to run consecutively. On 13 March 1978 Pickering was convicted of 4 further offences and sentenced to life imprisonment on a murder charge and 16 years for robbery, firearms and explosives charges. His appeal was dismissed on 11 June 1980. These convictions related to the robbery and bombing of a garage in South Belfast. The owner, a 77-year-old man was shot by Pickering and died from his wounds a short time later. Pickering has been protesting continuously since 27 January 1978 and although he has not come to notice as a leader among the prisoners, he did participate in the mass hunger strike of December 1980.

2. Visits to Hunger Strikers Sheehan, who was visited by his parents on Monday (7/9) was the only hunger striker to receive a visit during the period.

McFarlane was visited on the same day by Jim Gibney, PSF.

3.1 Future Hunger Strikers - INLA statement It was announced at the National H-Block/Armagh conference in Dundalk on Sunday (6/9) that INLA would not be replacing Michael Devine who died on 20 August. The statement, which purported to come from the INLA "officer commanding" at Maze Prison, said that the British Government was being "far more intransigent" than had first been expected and added that if the INLA continued to maintain its ratio of one hunger striker for every 3 PIRA members "all our prisoners will be dead within 6 months". They added "any future volunteers will be placed on hunger strike in a lower ratio to the IRA."

3.2 Speaking at the same conference, Gerry Adams, Vice-President of PSF, said that the hunger strike would continue despite the intervention of 4 of the prisoners' families. He had not been surprised by their action and current hunger strikers had been warned that their families "were the weakest link in the chain" he said.

4.1 Maze Protest The number of protesters has fallen by one from last week due to the abandonment of the protest by a prisoner in H.4 who was "fed up with the protest." There are currently 396 prisoners on protest and 7 prisoners in the conforming blocks who are refusing to work. Numbers are now the lowest since last October.

4.2 Armagh Protest Unchanged at 27.

5.1 Smuggled letters An important letter from McFarlane to a future hunger striker was found in the prison on 2 September; it is dated 29 August 1981. It shows that J M Devine has volunteered for the strike and the communication is intended to prepare him for it. Devine is serving 10 years for explosives offences and comes from Strabane. He was not one of the 30 hunger strikers. In the letter McFarlane states, "Please give very serious thought to your decision. What lies ahead is a very gruelling and agonising struggle. The stakes are very high and the price of victory equally high. After I hear from you I will let you know your position on H/S list. You should now inform your family that within a few weeks you may be on H/S. Please ensure that they understand your decision and position 100%. This is essential."

5.2 A second letter was found written by the former INLA hunger striker Nixon. Although it was some 2 1/2 - 3 weeks' old it is significant in its reference to the fact that "things are not too good at all down here. We

honestly do not know what the outcome of this dilemma will be."

5.3 An important letter from Striker McMullan to his father was found. It was written on Saturday (5/9) following Devlin's defection. An extract of significance reads as follows:-

"As you know Matt's family requested medical intervention last night, I cannot emphasise to you strongly enough the danger of such action, not only is it undermining the whole hunger strike but for every time a family intervenes it will probably cost the lives of 2, 3 or possibly more hunger strikers. Apart from this it only serves to prolong the agony, as I personally would go back on to the hunger strike if the family intervened." This has been the first indication that a prisoner might return to the strike.

5.4 A letter was found in H.6 smuggled in from a released protester outside. The most significant extract is "How is the morale in there, mine is shattered out here. I am getting some sickness out here."

5.5 Letter to McCloskey. This letter, which was not smuggled was written by his uncle. An extract of interest is as follows:-

"For we will stand by you on hunger strike tomorrow, or off hunger strike tomorrow."

6.1 Prisons Assessment During the period under review the trends running against the strike noted previously gathered momentum. The first major break occurred when relatives agreed to medical treatment for McKeown and Devlin. This brought the number taken off by relatives to 4 and the total "retirements" to 5. Whatever the positive face which PSF and the prison hardliners seek to put on this development, it has been widely heralded as the beginning of the end of the strike. Aided by the intervention of the Church militant in the shape of Father Faul it seems that relatives have, for the time being, taken over the destiny of the strike. This morning's contradictory statements concerning the relatives' attitudes indicates the continued and evidently deepening conflict between the Faul and PSF lines.

6.2 No deaths have occurred since Devine's (20/8) and none are expected for another 3 weeks; this will be a gap as large as that between the last of the first group to die (P O'Hara) and the first of the second (J McDonnell). The absence of the pressure which an imminent death can engender is something which PIRA have tried to avoid, since it makes it that much harder to sustain campaign momentum; this was the evident reason for their reverting to a one-prisoner-on-a-week policy after the 'replacement' system resulted in gaps. This present hiatus in deaths will be a further blow to the campaign.

6.3 The second major development was the announcement by INLA that they were reducing participation in the strike. Although they have hedged their bets by merely talking of a lower representation, the inference must clearly be that they see little future or hope in the prison campaign. Whether their evident declaration of intent to withdraw will make it easier for PIRA to do likewise is problematical; it does at least provide a precedent.

6.4 Notwithstanding the very clear difficulties now facing the campaigners, the continued determination of the prison hardliners should not be underestimated; outside setbacks in the past have not had a notable effect on the virtually closed system operated by the protesters. Fr Faul recognised this too when he claimed that the strike could drag on for several months yet. McMullan's letter gives evidence of such determination and there is every reason to believe that efforts may be made to "encourage" those who have retired to return to the strike. Pickering and Fox are thought to be of a similar mould to McMullan.

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THE CAMPAIGN

7.1 Northern Ireland Father Paul, a visiting chaplain to the Maze Prison and a well known Republican sympathiser, made a number of statements during the week concerning the hunger strike. He thought that it might drag on for another 2 or 3 months and end in "chaos, recriminations, abuse and containing the seeds of another hunger strike". He accused the British Government of inflexibility, but also urged the campaigners to re-appraise the hunger strike strategy. He believed that the campaign was becoming a predominantly Belfast affair and that the remainder of the Province was showing less enthusiasm. On 8 September the National H-Blocks/Armagh Committee criticised the Church for pressurising the prisoners to abandon the hunger strike rather than urging the Government to concede the prisoners' demands. Father Paul retorted that he was not responsible for families intervening to save hunger strikers' lives. Rather, he claimed, relatives had put pressure on priests to persuade hunger strikers to give up the fast.

7.2 Meanwhile relatives of the 6 hunger strikers issued a statement on 9 September supporting the hunger strike as a means of securing the prisoners' demands. "We call upon the British Government to ensure a permanent end to all the prison protests by implementing the conditions outlined by the prisoners." However earlier in the week "The Irish Times" (5 September) revealed that some relatives had sought to end the hunger strike after Owen Carron had been elected in the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-election.

7.3 Danny Morrison (PSF) announced on 7 September that the trend of families taking people off hunger strike would "at some stage be reversed by a man going back on hunger strike."

7.4 The largest anti H-Block rally during the week was held in Andersonstown, Belfast, on the evening of 3 September. About 600 people participated and the principal speaker was Bernadette McAliskey. According to press reports about 200 anti H-Block protesters marched through Castlederg, County Tyrone, on 9 September. About 300 loyalists were involved in a rival march organised by the DUP. There were no serious incidents.

8.1 Political Owen Carron's request for a meeting with the Taoiseach - 24 hours after he had met the leader of the opposition Mr Charles Haughey - was rejected when the Irish Government's Press Office issued a statement on 3 September which said, "It was not considered that such a meeting would serve any useful purpose". Aidan Corrigan, Carron's PRO, retorted that such a refusal was an affront to the entire Nationalist population who gave Owen Carron such a decisive mandate in the recent by-election. At the same time, he repeated the call by Kevin Agnew TD that the Taoiseach move the writ for the Cavan-Monaghan by-election.

8.2 In South Armagh, the resignation of Independent H-Blocks candidate, Mr Tommy Lynch, will result in a by-election at the end of September. In this case, the SDLP's nominee Mr Jack McMahon finds himself in direct opposition to anti-H-Block candidate Mr Jimmy McCreesh, father of dead hunger striker Raymond McCreesh. The outcome of this particular by-election will be awaited with interest.

8.3 While the Conference was taking place, Dr Cahal Daly, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, was making a major sermon at Knock which received extensive media coverage. In it, he denounced violence in all forms, declared more hunger strike deaths to be futile, and in particular urged the hunger strikers to direct their undisputed courage into "the noble task of promoting life and love, not to the planning of squalid schemes for inflicting death".

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8.4 The Irish Times (8 September) carried a report of an exclusive interview given by Tony Benn in which he said that there needed to be a political initiative - "involving people who are called terrorists" - and the withdrawal of British troops from NI. Britain, he said, should aim for the reunification and independence of Ireland. Northern Ireland looks set to figure prominently at the Labour Party Conference.

8.5 In the same issue, it was reported that the ICJP, following talks with its English opposite number, had indicated that it "could not see how either commission might usefully mediate now".

8.6 Other developments worth noting were Governor Hugh Carey of New York's criticism of Mrs Thatcher and HMG for failing to resolve the hunger strike in which he described the British attitude as "implacable, obstinate and stubborn"; reports (without further elaboration) that Cardinal O Fiaich discussed the hunger strike with the Pope during a trip to Rome; and a report (no details) that Mr Dooe had raised the same subject with Lord Carrington during a meeting of Foreign Secretaries in London.

9.1 The Republic The National H-Block/Armagh Committee (NHAC) held a recall conference at the Fairways Hotel, Dundalk, on 6 September. According to press reports 900 anti H-Block campaigners attended. Prior to the conference Bernadette McAliskey had announced that the aim was to "put muscle" on the sympathy which the H-Block campaign had aroused. The conference elected a new NHAC and the most prominent campaigners were returned to serve on it. David O'Connell and Gerry Adams, both Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF) Joint Vice-Presidents, topped the poll and Bernadette McAliskey (formerly Public Relations Officer) and Father O'Duill (formerly Chairman) were also re-elected. Members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and People's Democracy (PD), trade union officials, a leading figure in the Gaelic Athletic Association (Joe Keohane) as well as PSF members were elected on to the new committee. The NHAC hopes to co-opt 10 more members from amongst the hunger strikers' relatives and trade unions. It also intends to choose a 15-member executive from within its ranks to handle the day to day affairs of the campaign. Paddy Duffy of the SDLP also attended the conference.

9.2 At the conference Sean Flynn (an IRSP representative on the NHAC) read a statement (see 3.1 above) outlining the Irish National Liberation Army's (INLA) future attitude towards the hunger strike. Flynn's suggestion that a ratio of one INLA striker to 10 PIRA would be more equitable is interesting in that there have never so far been more than 8 hunger strikers at a time.

9.3 Gerry Adams stressed that the hunger strike would continue, though he claimed not to have been surprised that the relatives of Devlin and McKeown had intervened. McAliskey declared, "We must be prepared to take the institutions of power in this country apart" in order to win the prisoners' five demands. She also indicated that more activity within trade unions was required. Owen Carron's (PSF) decision not to take his seat at Westminster was debated. McAliskey and Michael McCloskey (brother of Liam McCloskey, the hunger striker now closest to death) spoke against Carron's decision. An IRSP representative claimed that abstentionism had been "foisted upon the National H-Block campaign". However a motion calling on successful anti H-Block candidates to take their seats was rejected, and the conference decided that in future constituency conventions would be held to choose candidates and to decide whether or not to pursue an abstentionist policy. Owen Carron himself did not speak in the debate. A motion suggesting that a non-prisoner candidate should contest the Cavan-Monaghan by-election (caused by the death of Kieran Doherty TD on hunger strike) was defeated. Earlier in the week a PD spokesman, Brian Hughes, had called on Paddy Agnew TD, a protesting prisoner, to resign his seat so that 2 anti H-Block TDs could cause uproar in the Dail. The conference also decided that once the prisoners' five demands had been won the campaign would be extended to prisoners in England; presumably meaning Irish terrorists in English jails.

9.4 Also on 3 September the Provisional IRA issued a statement through the Irish Publicity Bureau in Dublin appealing against "unproductive and undisciplined street rioting". On 8 September the Dublin Branch of the Building Workers' Trade Union voted to support the five demands. However James Kemmy, an Independent TD and a member of the Union's executive, was confident that the national executive of the Union would not endorse this decision by one of its branches.

10. Elsewhere Eamon O'Connor has continued his hunger strike in Australia (see last week's bulletin). A representative of Sydney H-Block Committee claimed that 27 Federal politicians had signed a statement calling on the British Government to grant the five demands.

11.1 Great Britain On 8 September a steward escorted an anti H-Block protestor from the Trade Union Congress at Blackpool.

11.2 It was announced that Owen Carron will lead a delegation of 100 hunger strikers' relatives to London on 17 September. They intend to lobby political parties, trade unions and embassies, to stage vigils at Westminster Abbey and Cathedral and to hold a press conference.

MEDIA

12. After Lawrence McKeown and Matt Devlin ended their fasts last weekend, the 'Irish Press' (7 September) admitted that it had "greatly weakened the protest" and that "there now seems no possibility of the prisoners wringing any concessions from the British Government by means of the hunger strike alone." The 'Irish Independent' went so far as to say "A British Government which will allow so many prisoners to die will not yield now. The campaign should be called off".

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

13.1 As noted above the first major setbacks have occurred in the campaign. Firstly the impact of further deaths is diminished by the likelihood that relatives will ask for resuscitation. Secondly there is now a major gap in the chain of deaths. Then the weakening of the INLA commitment now poses a threat to republican unity on the prison side. Finally, the intervention of Father Paul as the champion of relatives' rights has posed the campaigners with a definite problem since it is impossible to brand him as a 'tool of British imperialism'. Nevertheless, it is clear from a number of indications, mentioned above, that the strike is not over so far as PIRA are concerned. The weekend NHAC Conference also envisaged preparations for a long campaign with its selection of a new committee, and prolonged talk of future policy and by-elections. The appeals for republicans to register for voting purposes - an entirely new departure in recent history - must be seen in the same light.

13.2 Developments directly associated with the strikes have tended to overshadow other aspects of the campaign. Carron has had a quiet week and has not commented on the recent PIRA murders in Tyrone. On the streets there has been little trouble and terrorism has continued at the level noted recently. On the terrorism front it is worth noting this morning's PSF/PIRA statement that recent

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killings do not represent a new departure but are merely "successes" in PIRA's terms. There is still no sign of any major and prolonged offensive, though the threat to the strike and the continued failure to move HMG must be causing considerable frustration in the organisation.

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