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CC PS/SOS (B&L)
PS/Lord Gowrie (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Bell ✓
Mr Blelloch
Mr Marshall
Mr Wyatt
Mr Moriarty
Mr Buxton
Mr Palmer
Mr Doyne Ditmas
Mr Blatherwick
Mr Harrington
Mr Chesterton

① Mr Bell
② POL
4/10 13/10

MEETING WITH CARDINAL OFIAICH, STORMONT CASTLE, 30 SEPTEMBER 1981

Present:

Secretary of State	Cardinal OFiaich
Mr Wyatt	Father Faul
Mr Boys Smith	

Cardinal OFiaich called at the invitation of the Secretary of State and was accompanied at his own request by Father Faul. Father Faul gave the Secretary of State a large selection of his own pamphlets on the alleged misconduct of members of the security forces and the prison service.

2. The Secretary of State said he was aware that there had been misunderstandings in the past but hoped these could be avoided in the future. He was anxious to be able to talk frankly to the Cardinal on this and other occasions. Cardinal OFiaich welcomed the Secretary of State to Northern Ireland and expressed the hope that it would be possible to build up a relationship of trust and confidence with him.

3. The Hunger Strike

Cardinal OFiaich invited Father Faul to set out his understanding of the hunger strike. Father Faul did not think that more hunger strikers would die unless any of them suffered a sudden collapse. He believed the families would take them off before death. He had visited Block H3 on Sunday 27 September and had found mixed views about continuing, but he expected more people to join the strike. McFarlane had not sought to speak to him on that occasion. He emphasised to the Secretary of State the strength of feeling amongst the protesting prisoners: they were relatively isolated, were inward looking, and they had a deep sense

of loyalty to each other after "five years of suffering and ill-treatment", as they did to their colleagues who had died on hunger strike. Though he acknowledged the physical conditions in the Maze were not unsatisfactory the atmosphere was oppressive and sectarian. The prison staff were of different religious and political loyalties and men on the protest had suffered cruel and degrading treatment. He knew of the view that the protesters had committed violent crimes and must serve their punishments. But their attitude was influenced among other things by the belief that the security forces had committed illegal acts and yet had escaped prosecution; he could document 120 cases in which the security forces had killed people, as he could some 1,000 cases of torture.

4. Father Faul believed that even if the hunger strike ended - as he hoped it would - the problem which gave rise to it would continue. The prisoners would be very bitter if they were forced into defeat, and needed some cover if they were to climb down. They had no trust at all in the British Government or the prison authorities, and believed they had been deceived the previous December. They wanted changes to the regime at least approaching what they had sought. He appreciated the fear that if changes were offered the protesters would raise their demands, but he believed nevertheless that to end the hunger strike it was essential to take the sting out of defeat by making concessions.

5. In Father Faul's view work and association were now the sticking points amongst the protesters, but the prisoners would be helped to end the hunger strike if they could receive back all their lost remission. If they did some 140 men would be released from the Maze and some 20 women from Armagh. He did not think that those released were likely to resume terrorism: men usually gave only a very limited part of their life to terrorism and on release they would have passed the age when they would wish to participate. There would also be strong pressure from their families to keep them from resuming. He reminded the Secretary of State that some 8 out of 10 of the Republican prisoners came from families with no previous criminal record. A generous gesture by the Government on remission could help create a fresh atmosphere and would take away the sense of defeat. He and Cardinal OFiaich acknowledged that remission had not in the past featured so

prominently amongst the demands. This was partly because remission, like the question of parcels, had not seemed to present the same degree of difficulty as other questions such as clothing, and it was partly because remission was very important to the families who were now playing a more significant role.

6. The Secretary of State noted that Cardinal OFiaich and Father Faul believed Lord Gowrie's meeting with the relatives of the hunger strikers had been useful. He emphasised that he wished to see an early end to the hunger strike and would avoid any talk of victory or defeat; nor would he wish the Government to claim any credit. He referred to the TV and Radio interviews he had given the previous day in which he had indicated Lord Gowrie's readiness to help clarify the kind of change which it will be possible to make once it was established the strike was over.

7. The Secretary of State noted what Father Faul had said about the attitude of the protesting prisoners. On his visit to the Maze he had found the atmosphere less sectarian than he had expected. Amongst conforming prisoners there had been co-operation and friendliness irrespective of religious or political affiliations. He had also met a protesting prisoner keen to talk to him but afraid to do so. He appreciated that any changes which might be made to the prison regime at the end of the hunger strike would have to be precise and clearly established so that there was no chance of misunderstanding and subsequent recrimination. He was having these matters examined in detail. But the first essential was for it to be clear that the hunger strike was at an end, notwithstanding Father Faul's view that it would end only when the prisoners knew exactly what changes were to be made if they stopped. Cardinal OFiaich wondered how far the results of the Secretary of State's examination of possible developments could be given in confidence to interested people, including perhaps leaders of all the main political parties. The Secretary of State saw great difficulty in this proposal but would ask Lord Gowrie to bear it in mind. The Secretary of State also noted Cardinal OFiaich's view that matters had been mishandled the previous December and that the first hunger strike could have been prevented from starting, but he did not wish to comment on earlier events. Changes to the prison regime would be associated with practical difficulties which would have first to be overcome; a more generous regime on clothing, for example, would take some weeks to introduce.

8. The following further points were made during the discussion:

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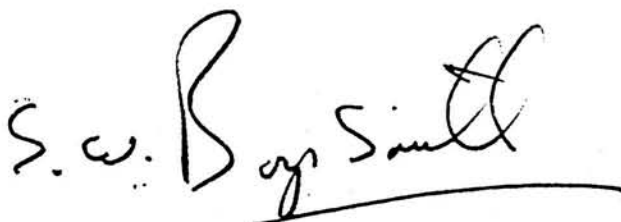
control. The matter was thus central to how the prison was to operate. Although Father Faul might believe that a regime akin to that in the compounds was desirable, and that such a regime was one which led to low rates of reconviction, the reintroduction of special category was not the Government's policy.

- (b) The Government appreciated that if the protest suddenly ended it would not be possible immediately to provide all prisoners with suitable work. Although the situation was hypothetical, activities would have to be rearranged to make opportunities for work available.
- (c) Father Faul emphasised the importance to the prisoners of being able to maintain their military structure. The OC was in charge, and the atmosphere in the protesting blocks was military. He had been struck, for example, by the extent to which the prisoners viewed the deaths of their colleagues on hunger strike with the same kind of calm acceptance that soldiers had towards the death of their fellows in battle. He appreciated that the Government would find it difficult formerly to recognise the military structure, but its existence presented particular difficulties in the allocation of work. He hoped it would be possible for the Government to give informal or unofficial recognition (perhaps through a so-called welfare committee which represented the prisoners' interests but in fact spoke for the OC) so that the prisoners could decide for themselves on the allocation of orderly duties.
- (d) Cardinal OFiaich had been struck by the contrast between the atmosphere in the Maze and that in Magilligan. In Magilligan the Governor and staff seemed to have a rapport with the prisoners and to be familiar with their individual qualities and background. There was not the same degree of understanding in the Maze, although the Secretary of State pointed out that he had found good and relaxed relations between prisoners and staff in the conforming blocks and in the workshops.

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- (e) The hunger strike had in the Cardinal's view undermined much of the effort which had been put into weaning people from the PIRA. It had increased both recruits and funds for the PIRA as well as sympathy and support for the organisation. He hoped however that recent polarisation would lessen once the hunger strike was over; it had quickly faded after the end of the hunger strike in December.
- (f) Father Faul pointed out that there would never be peace in the Province whilst some 1,000 men were in prison for terrorist offences. In due course it would be necessary in his view to grant an amnesty.
- (g) Father Faul referred to the way in which the absence of a satisfactory complaints procedure in the Maze Prison, although not an element in the current hunger strike, was a source of grievance to the prisoners.

9. In conclusion the Secretary of State assured Cardinal OFiaich that he would be happy to have further talks with him. He hoped that the Cardinal would feel free to call if he had matters to raise.



S W BOYS SMITH
Private Secretary

1 October 1981