

E.R.

14 MAR 1984

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cc: PS/SOS (B+L)-M Mr Reeve
PS/Mr Scott (B&L)-M Mr Boys-Smith -M
PS/PUS (B&L)-M Mr Wood -M
PS/Sir E Bell Mr Jackson
Mr Brennan-M Mr Kerr
Mr Bourn Miss Simmons
Mr Buxton Mr D McNeill
Mr Merifield Mr Ginn
Mr Angel -M Mr Needham -M
Mr Gilliland Mr Bickham -M
Mr Doyne-Ditmas
Mr Norris-M
Mr Edis

Mr Palmer

PRISONS - GOVERNOR McCONNELL'S LETTER

The Secretary of State was very grateful for your note of 12 March commenting on the cryptic references in the late Governor McConnell's letter. The advice provided valuable background in assisting him to assess the situation.

Rec

R P CLEASBY
Private Secretary

13 March 1984

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Circulate down to DP and

return to me

PS/Secretary of State

JLJ

16.3.84

PRISONS - GOVERNOR McCONNELL'S LETTER

1. The Secretary of State asked for comment on the cryptic references in the letter written by Governor McConnell and read out at his funeral.
2. The relevant references are -
"You will be gathered today asking questions which only full investigation of the facts will reveal. Clearly, in attempting that process to continue, someone has decided I should play no further part in the proceedings! I feel sorry for him and can only pray his part in the story will one day be revealed."
3. There is no straightforward meaning in the words themselves. We have therefore sought an explanation in the wider context of Mr McConnell's past actions and his attitudes at the time of writing the letter and also of Mrs McConnell's statements about her husband's views.
4. Mr McConnell was a graduate entrant to the Prison Service as an Assistant Governor. He served both in the field and at Headquarters and was as well known for his abrasive manner and impetuous decision-making as for his intelligence and enthusiasm for his work. When well directed and controlled he was a major asset; when acting on impulse he was regularly the cause of confrontation with prison staff and prisoners alike. He was also a man of deeply held convictions. Once he had made up his mind - which he did quickly - it was difficult if not impossible to convince him that he might be mistaken.
5. Mr McConnell was totally convinced that a major factor in the Maze escape was the "appeasement" of Republican prisoners after the ending of the Hunger Strikes and in particular the policy of putting such prisoners to work. He felt that there was a strong political direction

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in prison policy (he would have said "interference") from the NIO which ran counter to his views on the proper methods of control of paramilitary prisoners. He felt strongly that neither politicians nor senior civil servants understood prison matters and should leave Governors to get on with their job.

6. On the work issue Mr McConnell was obsessive in his belief that the directive from Prison HQ instructing Governors to put Republican paramilitary prisoners to work once they ended their "no work" protest was misguided and contributed to the escape. As he had been Chairman of the Maze Work Allocations Board which was responsible to the Governor for decisions on work he felt extremely strongly on this point though there is no evidence that he held such strong views prior to the escape. Certainly there is no record of his having raised strong objections at any time either with the Governor or with HQ.
7. The Republican "no work" protest finally ended in early November 1982. Mr McConnell was in the chair at the subsequent Work Allocations Board meetings on 18 November 1982 and on 8 and 16 December 1982 at which large numbers of Republican ex-protesters were allocated work. At none of these meetings do the minutes record any objection to the work allocations or to concern at the allocation of Brendan McFARLANE as an orderly in H8 (confirmed at the meeting of 18 November 1982).
8. The Hennessy Report later criticised both the decision to make Brendan McFarlane an orderly and the decision to create additional orderly posts so as to provide employment for all prisoners. Para 3.11 of the Hennessy Report states -

"Another reason (for the large number of orderlies) was that the Governor had been instructed at the end of the most recent hunger strike to provide employment for all prisoners ending their protest. Because the capacity of the workshops and training courses was insufficient to provide employment for all, the Governor felt there

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was no alternative but to create additional orderly posts in the H Blocks. It would in our view have been prudent to have sought the advice of Prison Department who were unaware of the difficulties before doing so."

9. Mr McConnell felt these criticisms personally and was convinced that Hennessy had wrongly blamed the Governor and his staff when the real fault lay with the NIO for insisting on work being allocated to Republicans. He argued that if the NIO had not so insisted then McFarlane and others would not have been orderlies and the escape would not have occurred.
10. Mr McConnell's arguments do not stand up. NI Prison Rules (like those in the rest of the UK) provide that all convicted prisoners are required to work. The only exceptions are Special Category prisoners. Prison HQ was therefore entirely justified in directing the Governor of the Maze to put Republican prisoners to work once they ended their protest.

The "direction" from Prison HQ was conveyed at a meeting of Governors on 12 December 1982 and was readily agreed to by the Governor of the Maze. The record shows that the Governor was directed to ensure that Republican ex-protesters were allocated to prison industries. In fact McFarlane had already been allocated orderly duties by this date as had a considerable number of other ex-protesters.

11. Mr Gordon Lakes (Deputy to Sir James Hennessy) was at the funeral last week and he told me that Mr McConnell had consistently pressed his conviction of the NIO's responsibility for the escape with particular reference to this work issue, on to the Hennessy Team but that they had firmly rejected it much to Mr McConnell's displeasure.
12. Because of his personal feelings of resentment at the Hennessy findings Mr McConnell took a leading role in the production of various press statements defending the Governors and attacking Ministers and the NIO in the period immediately following publication of the Hennessy Report.

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He also volunteered to give radio and TV interviews and did so at his home giving his name but appearing on TV only in silhouette.

13. There is abundant evidence from his colleagues that Mr McConnell was in a highly emotional and agitated state on the day following his radio and TV interviews. This was the day on which he wrote his letter. It would seem that it was only after his appearance on TV that he fully appreciated the risk he had incurred both by exposing himself on the media and by speaking in a manner which might provoke retaliation from PIRA.
14. The letter therefore reflects his concern for his personal safety (though he did not raise this fear officially) and his dissatisfaction with the findings of the Hennessy Report.

These 2 matters were linked in Mr McConnell's mind though the only link between them is Mr McConnell himself. There is nothing more to be revealed about work for Republican prisoners and there was no need whatsoever for Mr McConnell to make his media appearances. It follows therefore that there is no rational explanation for the cryptic references in Mr McConnell's letter other than that they are a reflection of his upset and agitated state of mind at the time.

15. Mrs McConnell's statements on radio today confirm this interpretation. In Bill McConnell's mind "the truth" had not been published by Hennessy and he attributed this to "political constraints". The reality is much more mundane. Hennessy simply did not accept Bill McConnell's view of events and the report reflected this.

David Palmer

12/3/84

cc PS/SofS
PS/Mr Scott (B&L)
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PS/Sir E Bell
Mr Brennan
Mr Bourn
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Mr Merifield
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