

## ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

### PAPER ON RECENT EVENTS AT HMP MAZE BASED ON EVIDENCE PROVIDED ON A CONFIDENTIAL BASIS BY A NUMBER OF RELIABLE SOURCES

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**INTRODUCTION :** There has been growing concern within the wider community in Northern Ireland about the running of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Public confidence has been undermined by the numerous breaches of security in recent years in Northern Ireland's prisons ranging from a mass escape of PIRA prisoners to murders, bomb explosions, shootings and the smuggling in of all sorts of contraband including illegal drugs. 1997 has seen a number of such serious breaches including an incident in which a gun was used at Maghaberry Prison involving two of the INLA prisoners (McWilliams and Kennaway) who were subsequently involved in the murder of Billy Wright. There was also the chance discovery of an IRA escape tunnel at the Maze Prison in March.

Since the PIRA ceasefire, in July the Northern Ireland Office have engaged in a so-called confidence building process which has been primarily designed to deliver concessions to the PIRA. A key part of this process has been a significant relaxation in the Prisons regime, including the withdrawal of certain restrictions previously imposed on Prison visits. This relaxation has contributed to the two most recent incidents at the Maze Prison, the escape of PIRA prisoner Liam Averill and the murder of LVF prisoner Billy Wright. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the evidence which has been brought to our attention concerning the circumstances surrounding these two serious security breaches, to further highlight some of the present inadequacies in the prisons regime and to pose a number of questions which must be addressed by a full, independent public enquiry.

**THE ESCAPE OF LIAM AVERILL :** It is reported that Liam Averill, who was a PIRA prisoner at the Maze prison, made his escape disguised as a woman and left the prison with a group of women and children who were attending a Christmas party for prisoners families hosted by the Prison authorities. According to our sources, the so called O.C.'s of the various paramilitary factions at the Maze had allegedly reached an agreement with the Governor that none of the women or children attending the Christmas parties would be searched on entering the prison. Furthermore, it is alleged that the Governor also agreed to drop the normal procedure whereby the visiting families are accompanied by Prison Officers in the minibuses to the visitor location and that on the day of Liam Averill's escape the women and children travelled to and from the visitor centre inside the prison unaccompanied by prison officers.

Such a relaxation in security, if substantiated, would undoubtedly have assisted Averill in making good his escape using the clothing, hair dye/bleach and make up which were probably smuggled in on that day and utilising the cover of the unaccompanied families to complete his exit from the prison. We are told that the Governor was present at the Christmas party on the day of the Averill escape and participated in the festivities. It is therefore clear that Liam Averill effected his escape right under the Governor's nose, taking full advantage of the relaxation in security which, it is alleged, the Governor had personally sanctioned.

Following Averill's escape, the prison authorities were alerted to his absence some hours after the event by the so called O.C. of the PIRA in the Maze. It is our understanding that to date no head count has been carried out of the PIRA prisoners at the Maze, nor has a search been conducted of the H-Blocks in which the PIRA prisoners are located. Therefore, one wonders what steps have been taken to verify Averill's escape, apart from the information provided by the PIRA O.C. in the Maze?



**THE MURDER OF BILLY WRIGHT :** The events leading to the murder of Billy Wright may well have begun around the time that Liam Averill escaped, because it is probable that two of the guns used in his murder (a PA63 Handgun and a Derenger Pistol) were smuggled into the Maze during the Christmas party season. Certainly the relaxation in the searching and accompanying of visitors to these parties would have made it possible to smuggle virtually any kind of small firearm or explosive into the Maze prison and pass them over to prisoners. The fact that the INLA and LVF prisoners were both located in the one H-Block, also undoubtedly contributed to the ease with which the perpetrators were able to commit this murder. A further point to bear in mind at this stage is the fact that both the INLA prisoners, McWilliams and Kennaway, had been involved in the previous gun incident at Maghaberry prison only months before and yet it appears that no special steps were taken to monitor their activities at the Maze!

According to the information provided to us and corroborated by several sources, at approximately 09.30hrs on Saturday 27th December, just half an hour before Billy Wright was shot, a governor at the Maze prison ordered a Prison Officer who was manning the observation tower overlooking H-Block 6 to leave the tower and report for duty at the visits section. On leaving the tower, the officer immediately contacted his Prison Officers Association (POA) representative to express his concern about this order. A brief discussion ensued and the officer was dispatched back to the tower pending clarification of the order. He was on his way back to the observation tower when at approximately 10.00hrs the shots were fired which killed Billy Wright.

It is beyond dispute that had the officer in question been manning the observation tower at H-Block 6 when the INLA prisoners, McWilliams, Kennaway and Glennon climbed onto the roof of the H-Block, he would have been able to raise the alarm immediately and triggered the security response which would have prevented the murder of Billy Wright. The decision of a governor to remove this man from his post at this particular time was undoubtedly a crucial factor in facilitating the access of the INLA prisoners to the forecourt where they committed the murder.

Some press coverage has quoted security sources as saying that only two guns were in the possession of the INLA prisoners who carried out the murder and yet we are informed that the INLA prisoners concerned actually surrendered two 'zip' type home made hand guns in addition to the PA63 handgun and Derenger pistol plus two sets of wire cutters. Additionally, we are informed that there were possibly three different calibre of bullets recovered from the murder scene including a bullet which had been struck by a firing pin but which had not fired, perhaps indicating the attempted use of a 'zip' gun.

Other press reports spoke of at least four prison officers who were accompanying Billy Wright and another prisoner at the time of the murder. Our information is that Wright and the other LVF prisoner in the minibus were accompanied by only one Prison Officer in the back of the minibus with a driver in a partitioned section in the front. Although I understand that no shots were fired at either the driver or the escort in the minibus it is clear that shots were fired by the INLA prisoners at Prison officers who were operating the gates to H-Block 6.

In the immediate aftermath of the murder the alarm was raised and the emergency procedures swung into action. During the emergency the control of the electronic locks on the grilles inside the H-Block was taken over by the Emergency Control Room and this prevented some officers from getting out of the wings to safety for some time after the shooting and also prevented them from gaining access to the forecourt area in which the minibus was situated in order to administer first aid. In addition, the officers who had been manning the gates were also required to evacuate the location for their own safety and there was, therefore, a further delay in bringing the minibus out of the forecourt to a safe location. It is not clear whether the immediate administration of first aid to Billy Wright could have prevented him from dying as a result of the wounds inflicted by the INLA gunmen.



About one hour after the shooting we understand that the INLA prisoners indicated to prison staff on the wings in H-Block 6 that they had been responsible for the murder of Billy Wright and that they would be prepared to surrender themselves to the Rev. Murphy who is a Roman Catholic chaplain at the Maze prison. That surrender took place about two and a half hours after the shooting and was preceded by the handing over of a box by the INLA prisoners in the presence of Rev. Murphy which contained the alleged murder weapons. The three INLA prisoners were then removed to the reception area of the prison by the Immediate Reaction Force (IRF) who handed them into the custody of the RUC. The prison staff who were on duty were stood down at their normal time and no search was carried out in H-Block 6 until the following morning, almost 24 hours after the murder of Billy Wright.

#### **OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO PRISON SECURITY AT HMP MAZE :**

The following points have been made to us in terms of the inadequacies of the present prison regime at the Maze prison :

1. Staff are not allowed to patrol within the visits room to properly supervise visits.
2. As a result visitors and prisoners are able to pass contraband and weaponry between each other without interference.
3. Intercourse frequently takes place between prisoners and their visitors and they also have the Governors permission to request a 'box' visit whenever they want. This is a closed visit which takes place in the Legal Visits location, behind a closed door with little or no supervision.
4. Prisoners are free to move around the visits room, sitting in on other visits and thus causing identification problems. They can also move between visit blocks if they so choose which further adds to the difficulties.
5. Visits often run on longer than permitted and visit times have become more and more relaxed. Prisoners also have more than their entitlement of visits, some having two visits in one day, others having a visit every day. This places additional strains on staff resources and has meant that staff who are manning the observation towers have been reassigned on occasions to visits duties as was the case in the Billy Wright murder.
6. Visits staff, including search staff, normally finish at 12.50hrs for lunch and 16.50hrs for the day, but prisoners are sometimes still on visits and pass through the search area after these times, returning to their blocks unsearched.
7. Searches are not carried out in the Prison blocks at the Maze without the advanced knowledge and permission of the prisoners. Searches are negotiated with the 'O.C.s' of the various paramilitary groupings, sometimes weeks in advance.
8. No surprise searches are carried out in the Maze prison. If search teams arrive at a prison block unannounced they are refused access to the wings by the prisoners.
9. When searching a block, staff are often told to remove only 'life threatening' objects but not other contraband.
10. Prisoners often refuse to be locked up while a search takes place causing a risk to staff safety. We are told that during the prior negotiations the Governors will usually agree not to lock up the prisoners.
11. Prisoners usually negotiate with the Governor on the subject of full 'strip' searches during a block search. This often means that prisoners will only receive a 'rub down' search.



12. Many staff believe that the block searches which are carried out are merely a 'paper' exercise for the purpose of creating the appearance that regular searches are conducted at the prison.

**SOME KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED BY AN INDEPENDENT PUBLIC ENQUIRY :**

1. Why is Governor Mogg both Governor of the Maze prison and Director of Prisons Operations in the Northern Ireland Office? Given the importance of the Maze prison should the post of Governor not be full-time? Is there a potential conflict between the respective roles?
2. Were the families attending the Christmas parties at the Maze prison searched on entering the prison and if not who took the decision to drop the normal search procedures?
3. Were the families attending the Christmas parties at the Maze prison accompanied by Prison staff whilst they travelled in the minibuses to and from the parties inside the prison?
4. Why has no headcount or block search been carried out in the PIRA block since the escape of Liam Averill?
5. Why was the Prison officer on duty in the observation tower at H-Block 6 on the morning of the murder of Billy Wright removed from his post and assigned to visits duties? Who took this decision and what was the response by the Governor to the representations made by the POA on this issue?
6. Why was there no special supervision of the INLA prisoners, McWilliams and Kennaway given their involvement in the previous gun incident at Maghaberry prison?
7. How many guns were in the possession of the INLA prisoners and how were these guns smuggled into the Maze prison? Were any of these guns 'manufactured' in the Maze prison and if so where did the materials and ammunition come from?
8. When was the last time that the INLA block was searched by prison staff prior to the murder of Billy Wright?
9. Why were the INLA and LVF prisoners located in the same H-Block especially given that neither paramilitary groupings have declared a ceasefire?
10. How did the INLA prisoners gain access to the roof of the H-Block undetected by prison staff?
11. Why was the INLA block not searched until almost 24 hours after the murder of Billy Wright?
12. Why is staff access to wings controlled by the prisoners?
13. Why do staff have to negotiate with the prisoners to carry out a search of the blocks?
14. Why is there no punishment wing in operation at the Maze prison?
15. Why are prison visits not properly monitored and supervised and why are visits allowed to run over their time without proper body searches afterwards?
16. Why are prisoners permitted to use mobile phones and what steps are taken to monitor calls from these phones?