

BILLY WRIGHT INQUIRY

Day 48: 7th April 2008

Witness Mr Ray Connery, the Head of Technical Support at Estate Management Department of the Northern Ireland Prison Service

In 1997 the department Mr Connery worked for was known as Prison Estate Management (PEM) and it looked after all the major building works and minor works and maintenance within all prison establishments. Mr Connery had assisted the Supervisor of Works at HMP Maze to draw up specifications and prepare drawings for prison plans and would meet with the Governors definitely once a month, but always at least once or twice a week. At such meetings maintenance, major or minor works of the establishment and refurbishment programmes would have been discussed for example. Mr Connery says that the PEM were involved in the refurbishment programme in 1997 which involved introducing in-cell power. During the early part of 1997 Mr Connery says that PEM were made aware of the discovery of the tunnel in H7 and that this had consequences for the refurbishment programme because the block could not be entered at this time. Mr Connery said that he was satisfied that the refurbishment programme was dealt with efficiently and decisions were made by the right bodies. The operations division, the PEM and the Maze management were all involved.

Mr Connery said that it was the Maze management who would have decided the order of the blocks that were refurbished as he himself was not a prison man and had little real knowledge. Mr Connery said that the refurbishment programme was halted from time to time or redirected and did not move with any sort of urgency because when working in a jail one could never guarantee the smooth working of a project. Mr Connery agrees that when particular situations occurred, there would be particular alterations made to the refurbishment programme, other blocks could be repaired or there could be a cessation of the programme altogether. Mr Connery said that costing or financing a project was never an issue because the management ensured that the safety of inmates and staff would be upheld. Mr Connery claims that it could not be determined how long a refurbishment programme would take because there were many influences acting on it, but it could take years.

Mr Connery gave evidence about the roofs and said that for prisoners to gain access to the roof is not a happy situation. Mr Connery says he developed design drawings and specifications for to carry out samples of roof protection. A Control and Restraint team from Maze staff tested the roof. Mr Connery said that with all the history of rooftop incidents he wonders why a solution or prevention had not been found earlier as he agrees that there was no great expense and no great complexity in installing it.

Mr Connery was then questioned by Professor Coyle. Mr Connery said that there were inspections carried out of all pieces of equipment and functions within the blocks, including the fabric of the building. Mr Connery said that refurbishment could have been carried while prisoners were still in the wing

but this depended on the amount of refurbishment being carried out, and if this was the case there would have been concern for the safety of the contractors because of the amount of equipment the contractors would have been using it was better to isolate them from prisoners. Mr Connery said that because there was no time- frame on the refurbishment programme there was no view taken about the overall cost of it.

Witness Mr Francis Roland Lyons.

Mr Lyons had worked with the Northern Ireland Prison Service for some time, but in 1997 Mr Lyons was working at HMP Maze in the Trades Department, that is, the prisons maintenance department. Mr Lyons said that since 1991 till 2000, the number of people working within the Trades Department diminished from 40 to 15 because PEM had done more and more of the work and the Trades were only for maintenance. During 1997 Mr Lyons liaised with PEM about work which was too big for the Works department to do, although there was no financial limit to the work they could do, the Trades Department could really only perform maintenance, such as floor repairs, sinks etc. The Trades Department would find out about such repairs by a Remedial Maintenance form filled out by Block Prison Officer.

With hindsight, Mr Lyons said that knowing the Loyalist Volunteer Force and INLA were not on ceasefire and the weak points in H Block it would have been wise to ensure that the block that the two opposing factions occupied were refurbished and modified so that there were no way these factions could get to each other. Mr Lyons said at the time he believed it was safe. Mr Lyons says that it is perplexing that bacon slicers had replaced the turnstiles in H1 and H3 but not in H6 with the two opposing factions and would have considered it a priority. Mr Lyons said that it was the Security and the Governor who decided the priority of maintenance. Evidence is shown that reveals that H6 is the 7th block to be refurbished and so not at all a priority, Mr Lyons said he would have expected a higher degree of prioritisation and there was little degree of urgency with the refurbishment programme, even though the bolts on the turnstiles were always faulty and allowed prisoners in and out of the exercise yard in the night, allowing them to set bonfires and to do so with no control.

Mr Lyons spoke at length about the turnstiles and fencing safety and security issues and the protection of the roof and discusses the different options. Mr Lyons said how prisoners were able to climb on to the roof by putting blankets over the S-wire at the top of the fence and so this was not a sufficient mechanism for preventing prisoners gaining access to the roof, however it did slow them down, this was a critical thing to do because it gave more time for alarms to be called and so forth. Despite all the evidence showing that the fence in H6 was weak and needing reinforcing, there had been three years where it was identified as a weak spot, and still by 1997 nothing had been done to change this problem. Mr Lyons said that a problem that was endemic at the

Maze was that there was no great urgency to do anything.

Mr Lyons claimed that he thought HMP Maze was going to close shortly after the Good Friday Agreement; it was the outside political climate rather than the internal factors.