

BILLY WRIGHT ENQUIRY

Day 49: Tuesday 8th April 2008

Witness: Referred to as Zak. Zak had been working as a Clerk of Works at Magilligan Prison when the Maze cellular compound was being constructed. He subsequently went to work at Prison Estate Management (PEM) where he rose through the ranks to become supervisor of trades staff. His job entailed going around all the prison establishments on a daily basis to check that the prison trades staff were carrying out maintenance work.

When asked by Counsel to the Inquiry, Derek Batchelor QC what difficulties there were in terms of maintaining the H Blocks at the Maze, Zak explained that all the buildings within the Maze were very high maintenance due to usage and weather. He mentioned that the flat roofs would be problematic from time to time. When questioned about potential security problems that might arise from the low level roofs, Zak noted that there was always the potential to get on the roofs.

Zak was aware of the refurbishment programme at the Maze in the 1990s. He stated that the Maze management had responsibility for determining the sequence in which the blocks were to be refurbished but these sequences were often amended due to riots or other disruptions involving the inmates.

Zak explained that in-cell power did not fall under the remit of PEM due to the extent of the work. This was the responsibility of the Department of Environment (DOE) Works Services. Despite a letter from Mr Masefield which states that Mr Mogg, Zak and another person were asked to confirm with the contractor that he would start the in-cell work in H1 on Tuesday 17th June, Zak maintained that he had no input as far as the in-cell power contractor was concerned at all and that the other person named in the letter was the contact person.

Security project meetings were held on a monthly basis. The Governor or Deputy Head of the Works Department, Security Department and PEM and possibly representatives from Headquarters Security and Operations Division would have attended to discuss security issues. There were ongoing discussions around the provision of two tunnels in order to evacuate staff in the event of a rooftop protest. Zak could not recall the outcome of these discussions.

Zak was aware of the reduction in staffing levels for the Maze Maintenance and Estate Services in order to have enough discipline officers to cover all posts within the prison. The consequence of this was that contractors were increasingly brought in to complete maintenance works. Zak confirmed that all trades staff had to train as Prison Officers. Therefore as staffing levels were reduced, trades staff could be redeployed within the prison to other officer duties. One disadvantage of using contractors therefore as opposed to trades staff was that contractors had to be escorted around the prison and

particularly within occupied areas which used extra resources. However, there seemed to be no problem in relation to the quality of the work carried out by the contractors.

Witness: Miss Irene Orr. Irene joined the Northern Ireland Prison Service in 1976. She transferred to HMP Magillan as Deputy Governor in 1981 before starting as the Head of the Administration Department in the Maze in 1992. In December 1994, she was appointed Head of Inmate Services until about Sept/Oct 1997. In this role, Irene was responsible for the operations of visits, parcels and all services to the inmates such as library and education services. Irene Orr became Head of Maintenance and Estate Services in late 1997. She was the first person to work with Trades or be in charge of any Department in Trades who was not a qualified trades officer.

Miss Orr was questioned about the legitimate acquisition of supplies and goods by prisoners, and in particular, she was asked how small works items might get to prisoners as listed in her report to Mr McCready on 5th June 1997. She could not envisage any reason why prisoners or a wing would have these items as they would only be brought in for the purposes of education.

The witness was asked to give an account of the process of searching parcels that arrived at the prison, which ultimately fell under her area of responsibility. All parcels were opened and checked. Parcels were passed through the various scanners and x-ray machines, which improved over time. She felt that the system operated well during her time at the prison.

There was a discussion around the organisation and running of family days and Christmas parties. Although, it was the Governor V who drove and organised these events, Irene stated that they exercised greater sensitivity (staff were more friendly) with regard to searching on these days in order that the children and families enjoyed themselves. However, she was adamant that searches were conducted with the same rigour as they were on other occasions. She was satisfied with their search procedures and did not recall any problems or complaints from staff or visitors from these days.

The Board of Visitors recommended in their Annual Report that a standard procedure be clarified following the discovery of the escape tunnel in March 1997. The Security Department was tasked by the Steele Report implementation team to prepare achievable and sustainable search procedures applicable to the Maze prison. Irene Orr stated in a note to Witness ZH that these procedures had now been introduced and to date appeared to be meeting the requirements as laid down by the Steele Report. However, this was not the case. She could not recall where she got this information from as she would have had no personal knowledge of security search procedures. To the best of her knowledge, she assumed that she would have got this information from the Security Department.

When questioned about her appointment to Head of Maintenance and Estate Services, the witness replied that she believed it was her background in

administration and management that was required for this role, as around this time, a decision had been made to look at the privatisation of the Trades Department (which was eventually extended to all prisons across Northern Ireland) in order to improve working practices and efficiencies. It was a case of finding obvious and sensible efficiency savings rather than placing financial constrictions on necessary work which had to be completed. Irene confirmed that financial considerations did not have an impact on necessary or major repairs being completed. She also acknowledged that she was responsible for the general management of the Department and that Mr Lyons, Governor V, oversaw the technical aspects of the Department as she did not have this expertise. PEM were responsible for checking the work of the contractors and signing it off as completed satisfactorily.

Miss Orr explained that most of the Prison Officers in the Trades Department did not like the changes that accompanied the reduction in staff numbers during the restructuring phase. Therefore a rotation system was introduced where trades officers rotated between discipline and trade duties.

With regard to maintenance jobs, she confirmed that a remedial maintenance form was completed for minor faults and jobs. However, a serious fault, such as a hole in a fence inside the prison would have triggered an alarm and would have been repaired quickly. It would have been the responsibility of the Senior Officer in Trades to prioritise repairs and allocate to the trades officers. She advised that she did not remember any holes in the fences at the Maze even though there was one in December 1997. She did not remember having any direct dealings with this matter.

The witness was questioned about who was responsible for a fault in a camera. She explained that these were reported by the Emergency Control Room (ECR) immediately to the contractors who were available 24 hours a day.

Irene Orr acknowledged that there had always been problems with the Maze roofs which had leaked since the day the H blocks were built and she remembered rooftop security being discussed but she was not aware of the outcome of any of these discussions. Her primary concerns about the roofs were always cosmetic concerns in repairing leaks as opposed to security concerns.