

BILLY WRIGHT ENQUIRY

Day 50: Wednesday 9th April 2008

Witness: Mr Brian Noel McCready, a retired civil servant

Mr McCready joined the Northern Ireland Civil Service through their graduate entry scheme in 1968 and held various posts before being appointed to the Northern Ireland Prison Service Headquarters to assist with the implementation of the Hennessy recommendations in September 1983. As part of this job, he attended the Maze weekly. Following the implementation of these recommendations, Mr McCready was transferred to the Police Division of the Northern Ireland Office in September 1984 where he remained for 10 years. In 1994, he was transferred again to oversee the supplies and services department of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS). Following discovery of the tunnel at the Maze in late March 1997, Mr McCready was tasked with heading the Steele Implementation Team. His role involved assessing and reporting on the feasibility of implementing the recommendations laid down in the Steele Report. In 2002, Mr McCready became Secretary of the Sentence Review and Life Sentence Review Commission where he remained until he retired in December 2006.

Mr McCready confirmed the makeup of the Steele Implementation Team which consisted of Mr Thomas Woods, the then Deputy Governor at the Maze, Witness N, a Maze Desk Officer at NIPS Headquarters and an Administration Officer from Office Support. He was also assisted from time to time by Witness W from Prison Estate Management (PEM) and Witness ZW from the manpower team.

When questioned by Counsel to the Inquiry, Derek Batchelor QC, Mr McCready confirmed that he had the authority to organise the implementation of any physical security measures emanating from the Steele Report. The witness was asked about his awareness of the security problems and fire risks within prisons. He noted that the Maze was a dangerous place to be for prison officers if a riot broke out. He made reference to an instance when the prisoners had got onto the roof and threw a burning bin which raised the concern of how to evacuate staff if a fire started. One option that was identified was to reverse a lorry up to the grille gate and get staff out in this manner should a serious fire break out. These concerns were confirmed in a document from the Principal Inspector who visited the Maze on 20th June 1995 to the Governor which stated that no written risk assessments were yet available on site and requested that suitable steps be taken to protect officers from risks to their safety.

The witness recalled the testing of the fire authority vetted short duration breathing apparatus (SDBA) which was installed and ready for use in case a fire situation arose in which staff and prison officers could not be evacuated immediately. He also recalled discussions about the use of a tunnel to evacuate staff and prisoners if this situation arose but he could not remember the outcome of these talks. He believed that the use of a vehicle to evacuate

staff (mentioned above) negated the need for a tunnel.

Mr McCready was questioned about the refurbishment and repair programme of the H Blocks. His understanding was that the concrete and flat roofs of the Blocks could not withstand the harsh weather conditions and therefore they required a lot of maintenance. He believed that Mr Masefield of NIPS would have had overall responsibility for the refurbishment programme but that Witness ZW would have been responsible for overseeing the day-to-day works. Mr McCready thought that it was policy to refurbish an empty block at any one time. This involved rotating and relocating prisoners from a block that needed repair into an empty block where work had just been completed. As he understood it, this procedure was followed. He was also asked if he knew why Block H6 was the last block to be scheduled for outstanding works in cells and in-cell electricity supply provision. The witness could not answer this question.

The witness was questioned about the Steele Report. He noted that at his initial meeting with the Governor, it appeared that not all of those present had read the report. Therefore, he organised for copies of relevant sections of the report to be circulated to each governor grade. He felt it was important that management and staff were aware of the recommendations which he would be implementing.

Mr McCready finished his role with the Steele Implementation team on 25th June 1997. At this time, Mr Mogg, Director of Operations, was on sick leave and Mr McCready held a 'watching brief' over the desk sections until a new Director of Operations was appointed the following year.

In June 1997, Mr McCready believed that cell checks and other new operational orders recommended by the Steele Report had been completed and to his knowledge were being carried out. He acknowledged that other physical security measures such as the installation of cameras and fences would take time.

However, a minute from Mr Shannon (Chief Executive of NIPS) to Mr Masefield on 15th May 1997 noted that the control room footage showed no evidence of effective head counting on the monitor, nor had one member of staff been involved despite the fact that the Emergency Control Room (ECR) report that all blocks had completed head counts and that numbers were returned. The witness acknowledged that from this, there did appear to be difficulties with the implementation of the wing-based recommendations of Steele. He was not aware whether staff were carrying out orders on the ground but from his experience, any assistance that he required from staff was forthcoming. Mr Shannon also highlighted confusion among staff about what was required of them and conflicting practices between blocks. Mr McCready was surprised at this given that Mr Shannon's note commissioning his team stated that measures that needed to be put in place immediately were already in place.

The Steele Report recommendations made searching a top priority at the

prison. A discussion took place around cell searches and fabric checks (checking walls, floors and ceilings to make sure that no one had dug a hole and covered it with a mat or a piece of furniture). Steele recommended that, at a minimum, fortnightly searches of whole blocks at unpredictable times should be carried out, as well as searching of cells and daily fabric checks. This would require the reorganisation of staffing levels and resources. Mr McCready acknowledged that given that Maze staff had worked 16,000 additional emergency hours (AEH) in the last financial year, they needed to review manpower levels to ensure that a dedicated search team would be available and that searches would be thorough and comprehensive. The witness confirmed that manpower levels were his main concern at the time which was why he later asked for a manpower review. Costs were a secondary issue and not something that he looked at.

The witness was asked about a minute from Mr Masefield to Mr Mogg entitled, 'Action Programme to Implement the Maze Tunnel Inquiry Report'. The governing Governor is stated as having lead responsibility for the Programme for Refurbishment of H1 and H2 and the Programme for Installing in-cell Power Blocks. Mr McCready assumed that this responsibility would have fallen within PEM's remit. There did not appear to be any arrangement for the monitoring of these programmes but the witness acknowledged that this may have been addressed at a later stage.

Mr McCready was asked if he was aware that [paramilitary prisoner] Officers Commanding were accompanying staff during cell checks which Mr Shannon raised as a concern in a minute to the Governor. The witness was not able to comment on the relationship between Block Governors and staff but he did note that governors' orders could have been better expressed so that everyone knew what they were doing.

The witness was aware of a security issue with the outer grille as it was one issue that they looked at when considering security arrangements. The problem stemmed from prisoners who wanted to remain in the exercise yards until 10pm rather than 7:45pm, particularly in the long, warm summer evenings. This caused potential difficulties as the bulk of prison staff on evening duties finished at 8:30pm. Mr McCready noted that an electronic lock and override would have been more effective than a manual system from a staff safety point of view but he was unsure if this ever came into place.

The witness was asked about two searching options which were identified:

Option 1 – involved searching the yards and was very staff intensive (approximately 66 officers required)

Option 2 - did not involve searching the yards and it required less staff (approximately 48 officers).

Mr McCready confirmed that although he envisaged possible problems and security risks with both of these options, his team considered option 1 to be more effective and sustainable in the long term as well as providing a safer working environment for staff. From memory, the witness believed that one block search using this method was carried out between May and December

1997. The lack of searches, despite being a top priority in the Steele Report, may have been, according to the witness, due to uncertainty around staff search teams which had not yet been agreed. The witness had no personal operational experience of the searches.

In a minute from Mr Masefield to Mr Mc Cready regarding the implementation of the Steele Enquiry recommendations and actions agreed by the steering group dated 9th June, it was agreed that a search would take place on 16th June. The witness does not think that this took place. In terms of searches, no action appeared to have been taken from June until the following January when full block searches became a weekly feature.

Mr McCready acknowledged that from Mr Mogg's reference to extremely poor and negligent management and staff as well as the evidence noted above, that in terms of physical security measures, it would appear that by December 1997, very little had been achieved despite agreement on what needed to be implemented, as recommended by Steele.

Mr McCready was asked about the financial implications of implementing the Steele recommendations. The witness could not comment on this. If the recommendations could not be achieved using the existing budget, this would be grounds to approach the Minister for further finance. This was not the responsibility of the witness, nor was he aware of this request was ever made.