

Why was the hunger strike not settled in July 1981 once six men had died and the substance of the Five Demands seemed to be on offer?

Peter Taylor, *Provos. the IRA & Sinn Fein*, Bloombury Paperbacks, 0-74753-818-2, p. 249

The simple explanation is that the IRA wanted to extract the maximum propaganda advantage from what was becoming a conveyor belt of death, and did not wish to do anything that would impede its progress. However, this is a mistaken analysis and a misunderstanding of the prisoners' mood and the IRA's relationship with them. They had been on protest for five years, they had been brutalized and had seen six of their comrades waste away to painful deaths. To accept anything less than what their comrades had died for would be betrayal. The sheer intensity of what had happened and the bonds that had been forged between the prisoners meant that there could be no compromise. Although some doubts were expressed, there was no manipulation of the hunger strikers either by the IRA outside the prison or the leadership within. Laurence McKeown put it succinctly.

We were committed to something. Unless someone was coming in and saying 'Right, you have your own clothes, you won't do prison work, you have all your demands', short of that we wouldn't have entertained it. It was all or nothing at that stage. The fact that so many people had died made us even more determined.

Before he left the meeting on 29 July 1981 with the hunger strikers, Adams asked if they had any questions. 'Have we got any heavy gear [armaments] yet?' one of them asked. Adams did not record his reply.