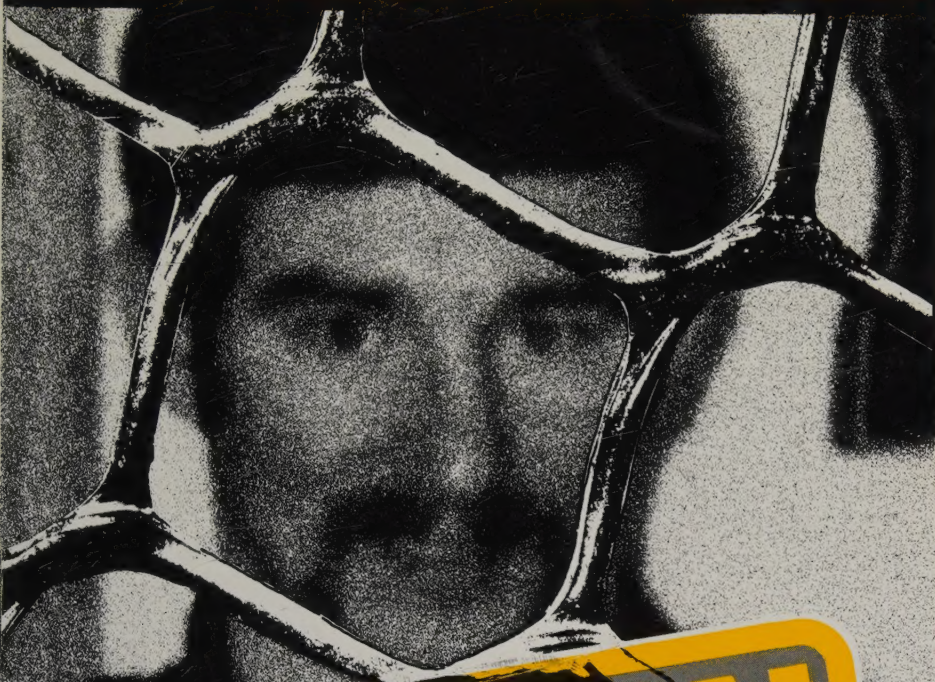


THE PRISON DIARY
OF THE IRA VOLUNTEER RAYMOND MACLAUGHLIN



INSIDE AN ENGLISH JAIL

with AN INTRODUCTION by GERRY ADAMS

8
4.25

BORDER
line
PUBLICATIONS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

INSIDE AN ENGLISH JAIL

BORDER
line
PUBLICATIONS

INSIDE AN ENGLISH JAIL

1911

INSIDE AN ENGLISH JAIL

Raymond McLaughlin

Borderline Publications
Dublin, 1987

Published in 1987 by
Borderline Publications
38, Clarendon Street
Dublin 2.

©Mary McLaughlin

ISBN No. 1 870300 04 1

Cover Illustration by Karl Mooney.
Typeset by Laserworks Co-operative (Tel: 794910)

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Not long ago I received a phone call from a man I know - he said he had to see me urgently - he had a manuscript he wanted us to publish. We met in a café during August. The man insisted we drink from a half bottle of vodka he was carrying in his briefcase; I said I didn't want any at that time of the morning. We drank some vodka.

He was a friend of old - we were very close for a few years during the middle 70s when we would go to the park every Sunday and play soccer. He was lord of the field then. The team has broken up now, we don't play soccer anymore. Most of us work with words now.

But we still live in a country where the powerful continuously try to ban reality and history, though harsh facts break these absurd laws each day and night. Truth is still subversive in the 32 Counties - more than it ever was.

So when my friend asked me *"How can those who don't know where they come from find out where they're going?"* I was forced to reply in a vague way about not resigning ourselves to live a life that is not ours - forced, as we are, to recognise, an alien memory as our own. *Joy takes more courage than grief,* I said, *we are accustomed to grief.* He was not impressed.

He drank up and said *"I brought this manuscript here because it is going to be published here"*. I read it, people I trust read it, and we decided to publish. Reamonn's manuscript springs from a wounded consciousness; a consciousness that projects a harsh reality and yet is fully aware of the individual limitations in perceiving and living that reality, let alone in trying to change it. It is written in a language which is plain and fearless, but more beautiful than that used by conformists to greet the twilight.

I hope this book makes a small contribution to the development of a collective memory which retains what is worthwhile in this divided country. A memory which knows more than we do - a memory that doesn't lose what deserves to be saved. A memory which respects human beings like Reamonn and gives worth to people like Mary McLaughlin whom I have had the privilege to meet and get to know since. That memory may help to preserve for the generations to come - in the words of the poet - *the true name of all things*

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The first of the two volumes of the "The Great Gatsby" series is now available in paperback. The second volume, "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide," is also available in paperback. Both volumes are available in paperback and hardcover. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$4.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$4.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$14.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$14.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$4.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$4.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$14.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$14.95.

The second of the two volumes of the "The Great Gatsby" series is now available in paperback. The first volume, "The Great Gatsby," is also available in paperback. Both volumes are available in paperback and hardcover. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$4.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$4.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$14.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$14.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$4.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$4.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$14.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$14.95.

The first of the two volumes of the "The Great Gatsby" series is now available in paperback. The second volume, "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide," is also available in paperback. Both volumes are available in paperback and hardcover. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$4.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$4.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$14.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$14.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$4.95. The paperback version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$4.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby" is available for \$14.95. The hardcover version of "The Great Gatsby: A Study Guide" is available for \$14.95.

From his brother

Reamonn was born in Buncrana Town, just fourteen miles from Derry City, in 1951. As I was the last born in the line of eight boys I, of course, can't remember this momentous event. Our childhood was like that of many other working class kids in the area, playing in the hills that surround the beautiful Lough Swilly. Many's the day was also spent swimming in that Lough. Yes, beauty did surround us in abundance, but beauty alone could not sustain a growing family, and so father had to take the well-trekked path of emigration to England to keep the body and soul of our family together. This was a very emotional time, especially for mother, who wept bitter tears.

The stark realisation of total poverty was all too much in evidence, not alone in our family, but in most households in the area. For many years, our father had to be away in search of work knowing that the sons he was working to keep alive would ultimately end up taking the same road of emigration.

Reamonn was hardly 15 when he found himself on the boat to England. He tried to find work all over England, meeting many young Irishmen like himself who all had the same story of poverty and oppression to tell. Reamonn's political ideas took root during this period.

In the early seventies, Reamonn met and married Mary. About this time also he was becoming very aware of the war being waged in Ireland, and it was not long before he took the decision to join in the freedom struggle. All the while, he kept working on the building sites in England.

In mid-1973 his son Pdraig was born. Just over a year later, Reamonn stood in the dock of a British Court. His comrade James McDaid had been blown to bits in a premature explosion. Reamonn received a twelve year sentence. He commented that the only thing he was sorry for was that James had died, and he himself had been captured.

After this sentence, Reamonn did not give up the fight. In the years ahead he and his comrades took part in roof-top demonstrations and in pitched battles in prison wings and in so doing systematically

demoralised British prison regimes. Of course, as the number of Irish P.O.Ws was small, they were easily isolated throughout the vast network of British prisons, suffering sensory deprivation and long periods of abject torture.

Reamonn was released on December 28 1983, having spent his last year in total isolation.

On his release, Reamonn drove himself into local republican politics and inevitably back into the arms of our gallant revolutionaries waging war against British occupation and imperialism in our country. He was an incorruptible socialist and a dedicated fighter whose whole purpose in life was that of undoing the shackles of physical and mental oppression from our people.

Reamonn, you oft-times said that as life was a journey, an ongoing struggle to achieve the liberation of our body and mind, then all things upon that road would have meaning. You said that *the meaning of things would not be immediately clear to us and, at times, we would know and suffer grievous pain. But this should not leave us in the dark, for even in the dark - we must perceive the meaning.* You and I were blood brothers, you and I were soul brothers, and through your being, I have discovered the nexus of fraternal love that is within the liberation struggle. The road is hard but I have no doubt that we will converge in victory.

Colm McLaughlin
Magilligan Prison, Derry

Mary McLaughlin remembers

In 1971 I met Raymond at a dance in a city in the English Midlands. We discovered that we had much in common, as both of us came from Republican backgrounds. I am from Tyrone, Raymond was born and reared in Buncrana, Co. Donegal. Within 12 months we were married and in 1973, while living in Birmingham, we had a wee son, Patrick, who is now 14.

Raymond was born on August 8 1951. He was only 14 or 15 when he left Ireland to work in the building sites in the English Midlands - he was working as a steel-fixer when I met him. The first major and direct political influences on him were the events of 1973-74 in the 6 Counties. He was also shaken by developments in England, where four of the ten people convicted of the Old Bailey bombings in 1973, Dolores and Marian Price, Gerry Kelly and Hugh Feeney went on hunger strike demanding to be sent back to Ireland to complete their sentences. Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg also participated in this prolonged sacrifice which was the first of a long series of protests of Irish prisoners in English jails.

Michael Gaughan died while on hunger strike on June 3 1974. An amicable yet fiercely determined young Republican from Ballina, Co. Mayo, Michael was given a hero's burial; and there is no question that his death, combined with the massive political support it received, forced the British hand and gained the sweet victory of repatriation for four of the nine prisoners.

Raymond was arrested in Coventry on November 14 1974. He was on a military mission and got taken when his comrade, James McDaid, was killed in a premature explosion at the Coventry Central Telephone Exchange. About one in the morning of November 15, the police came and arrested me and Raymond's brother who was staying with us. They told me Raymond had been killed and tried to make me

"explain everything". They threatened me and told me I would be charged as an accomplice.

I was released at one o'clock the next day. Raymond, in the meantime, had been charged with conspiracy to cause an explosion. He was later charged also with carrying a firearm - which by the way belonged to McDaid and not to Raymond - and the actual causing of the explosion. About a year later he was sentenced to 12 years for each of the three counts - all to run concurrently.

He was released on December 28 1983. He came back to Buncrana and we set up home here. Raymond spent almost ten years in English jails and the book you have in your hands was written during the early part of 1984. He would sit into the early hours and write. He told me he wanted to explain about the prisons and the people who inhabit them - the P.O.Ws, the ordinary prisoners, Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English. And the others he had met: the Libyans, the Spanish, the Mexicans, the Palestinians, the Italians, whatever. I think he wanted to express things he had never been able to talk about.

Raymond had changed in prison. When we had first met in 1972, we used to go to pubs, drink and dance, socialise a lot. Now he was quieter, didn't go for all this pub lark; he was also far more educated, politically conscious and articulate. Far more serious. It took him a while to get used to Buncrana and Ireland in general, from which he had been away for so many years.

We both started working with the Republican Movement. Raymond put his heart and soul into it. I had shared his ideals and dreams during the earlier period in England - now I began to experience and feel what it all meant. During those years in England I realised that we were not the only family going through this bitter prison experience - the separation, the pain and the tears. Patrick growing up on a diet of prison letters. Very quickly we got into the thick of things. Raymond became Chairperson of the local Cumann - we were into 1985 and suddenly, on April 24, arising out of an incident near the border, Raymond was on the run, this time from the Free State Police. He remained on the run till September 9 when he

drowned accidentally while myself and Patrick were swimming with him in a pool in Shannon.

Raymond had a military funeral with full honours despite persistent attempts by the Gardai to stop and intimidate us. My son Patrick and I still live in Buncrana and Raymond is buried a short distance away. I feel he is still very close to us; his ideas, his example, what he taught us, his love for people and freedom, his desire for liberation and socialism, they all guide our actions here. I have stayed with the Republican Movement and I hope that this book will help many others, both in and out of the Movement, see some part of the truth for which Raymond and so many others gave their lives.

Buncrana, Co.Donegal

Introduction

Shortly after he was released from prison, I met Reamonn Mac Lochlainn at a political meeting in Milford, Co. Donegal. He had hitch-hiked from his home in Inishowen. As we parted that night I little thought I would see him again as quickly as I was to, but as fate would have it, it was to the Inishowen peninsula I was dispatched to convalesce after a shooting attack. There I met Reamonn again, and his wife Mary and son Patrick, and in that beautifully rugged place, so far removed from the dreary prisons where Reamonn had spent nine and a half years, I got to know him and his family a little better. I flatter myself that our conversations may have motivated Reamonn to write this unique little book. That it is being published now and in its present form is a tribute to the endeavors of Mary, his resourceful and determined wife, because Reamonn tragically is no longer with us.

On September 9 1985 he died in a drowning accident. Prior to that he had been on the run for several months, following an incident in which ammunition was found in a car he was travelling in. The suddenness and the nature of his death was a shock surpassed only by the feeling that it was all very unfair to Patrick and Mary who were once again to be left alone.

Days later we were all to be reunited in our sorrow in Inishowen, where it was my privilege to give the funeral oration, this time surrounded by a massive contingent of Special Task Force, Special Branch men and scores of Gardai riot squads. Their presence was in itself a testament to Reamonn's political life.

Inside an English Jail gives us an insight into his prison life. More than that, as was his intention, it gives us an insider's view of conditions in British prisons and particularly the conditions inflicted upon Irish political prisoners. Thus - and this was written in the days before the Birmingham Six became a *cause célèbre* - we read, "We were present in this prison when the six innocent Irishmen, who were later convicted of the Birmingham bombings, were brought in. They were forced into boiling hot baths and battered to a pulp by the screws. For the next year they endured probably the worst treatment inflicted on any Irish prisoner since O'Donovan Rossa in the 1860s.

They were battered on many occasions but by far the worst aspect was the constant psychological torture. The nightly hammering on their doors to deprive them of sleep, being spat upon and suffering verbal abuse at every opportunity. They lived in an environment of total hatred and their protests of innocence were treated with contempt and derision. Like all Irish political prisoners their visits were rigidly supervised with a glass panel separating the prisoner from his loved ones. Their visitors were frequently abused, insulted and on occasion assaulted." Other victims of British judicial frame-ups including the Maguires, the Guildford Four or Judith Ward and Carole Richardson suffer a similar fate.

It was no easier for the Republican P.O.Ws but they at least had a political commitment to sustain them. There are over 30 of these prisoners in jails throughout Britain, plus three on remand and at least a dozen innocent victims of frame-ups. The vast majority of them are classified as top security category 'A' prisoners. They are subjected to the most repressive prison regulations that can be officially imposed. For example, two women republican prisoners, Ella O'Dwyer and Martina Anderson, are regular victims of a punitive , frightening and degrading policy of strip-searching.

The Irish prisoners are special prisoners. They serve special long sentences. They receive special treatment in comparison to ordinary non-political prisoners. This treatment amounts to special brutality during interrogation followed by special show trials.

The special treatment inside the prisons includes victimisation by the prison staff, special visiting conditions and special long indefinite periods in solitary confinement sometimes in special control units. The Irish political prisoner who completes his or her sentence is then usually the victim of a special deportation to Ireland, despite the refusal of the British authorities to grant the same privilege to those seeking repatriation to Ireland while serving their prison sentence. It should be noted that in sharp contrast, all British soldiers found guilty of offences committed while members of the occupation forces in the North of Ireland have been returned to England to serve their sentences.

The bulk of Irish political prisoners are held in seven top security prisons. These form the so-called dispersal system. This book gives the reader a look at life for an Irish prisoner within this system. It is an indictment of that system. It is also an indictment of British policy toward the Irish community in Britain and especially the use

of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (P.T.A.) against that community. On a wider scale it is an indictment of British policy towards Ireland and a testimony to the unselfish and patriotic motives of these political prisoners who are captured republicans imprisoned because of their commitment to reversing that policy.

The British presence is an illegal and immoral presence. For as long as there has been a British political and military presence in any part of Ireland there has been Irish resistance and inevitably Irish political prisoners.

A democratic solution to this colonial problem must be based upon the right of the Irish people to national self-determination. A British disengagement as a part of this solution must include an unconditional release of all political prisoners. In the meantime those political prisoners in Britain wishing repatriation to Ireland should be transferred to there. Their families have the right to this minimum facility.

The British government have always consistently resisted such a reasonable demand. At the time of writing the British Home Office is considering a strategy '*Managing Long Term Prisons*' which advocates a system of psychiatric units for holding prisoners whose views they consider to be dangerous. Irish political prisoners will be the main victims of this new regime. Already many Irish prisoners have been held in special control units. The British Home Office strategy will institutionalise the penal policy of holding Irish prisoners in these units or for lengthy periods in solitary confinement.

Shortly after the turn of the century Tom Clarke, the 1916 signatory who served fifteen and a half years in various English prisons wrote:

"Here in England they go into hysterics over the horrors and brutality of Siberia and ring the changes of humanity of the English prison system. The truth is that as far as a refined system of cruelty is concerned there is nothing on God's earth to compare with the treatment which we Irish political prisoners have been receiving at the hands of the English government."

Reamonn Mac Lochlainn's *Inside an English Jail* shows that little has changed since that was written.

Gerry Adams,
November 1987
Belfast.

View from A 3/45.

for Padraig.

Through the steel shrouded porthole
Birds weaving majestic patterns
Against the crimson sky,
Sailing gracefully through
An archipelago of grey-blue clouds
Serenading the setting sun.
I feel alien, a stranger in paradise
Not worthy of this festival of aviation,
Humbled - a mere planetarian
Among those who soar heavenwards
And dive-glide along the horizon
To kiss the sun goodnight.
They become acrobatic silhouettes as a finale,
Moving darkwards to roost.

Raymond McLaughlin.

1975

I was arrested immediately prior to the pub bombings in Birmingham in 1974, when an operation went tragically wrong and my comrade, James McDaid, was accidentally killed. After the pub bombings I was among a group of Republican prisoners who were battered senseless in Winson Green Prison. The other lads were Stephen Blake, Jimmy Ashe, Martin Coughlin, Gerry Young, Joe Duffy, Tony Madigan, Pat Guilfoyle and Gerry Small. However, the physical beating turned out to be tolerable in comparison to the heavy psychological pressure which was inflicted on us. The prison warders hammered our doors with batons every single night for weeks, to ensure that we didn't sleep. We were forced out of bed at 6.00 am every morning and our breakfast was invariably interfered with. Pieces of hair, comb-teeth and spittle, were only some of the things found mixed in our food.

We were present in this prison when the six innocent Irishmen, who were later convicted of the Birmingham bombings, were brought in. They were forced into boiling hot baths and battered to a pulp by the screws. For the next year they endured probably the worst treatment inflicted on any Irish prisoner since O'Donovan Rossa in the 1860s. They were battered on many occasions but by far the worst aspect was again the constant psychological torture. The nightly hammering on their doors to deprive them of sleep, being spat upon and suffering verbal abuse at every opportunity. They lived in an environment of total hatred and their protests of innocence were treated with contempt and derision.

Like all Irish political prisoners, their visits were rigidly supervised with a glass panel separating the prisoner from his loved ones. Their visitors were frequently abused, insulted and on occasions, assaulted.

The harsh reality of life in Winson Green at that time is clearly illustrated in an encounter between a "born again Christian" screw

and Republican P.O.W., Pat Guilfoyle (*Tipp*). The screw lampooned *Tipp* for being a Godless Republican and warned him that he was on the road to hell. *Tipp* replied, with characteristic wit and much justification, "On the road to hell? I have already arrived!"

In May 1975, six weeks after being sentenced to twelve years imprisonment, I was moved from Winson Green to Gartree, which is one of the seven top security prisons. Gartree is situated in the English Midlands. My arrival at this establishment was a strange experience after having endured the torments and rigours of Winson Green. Now the relative freedom of Gartree was very difficult to take in. For the first time I was allowed to mix with other prisoners, go on exercise and watch a little television. However, after spending a couple of weeks there, I soon learned that my initial impression of Gartree had been a very inaccurate one. For me it was the equivalent of the pit pony being brought to the surface. At first he thinks he is in heaven, but he very soon realises that he can't leave the pit compound and the grass is as scarce on the surface as it was on the pit face!

Later still I was to learn that sensory deprivation and relative freedom play a very important role in the control of English jails, for those prisoners who refuse to accept the penologists' version of relative freedom can very soon expect to end up in one of the special isolation units. Believe me, after spending six months or more in one of those sensory deprivation units, the mundane existence of limited television viewing, an extra hour of exercise a week and the sheer ecstasy for being able to communicate freely with other prisoners, can take on the appearance of a luxurious life style, - for a while!

For the benefit of those who wish to inform themselves on the matter, the following is a brief outline of security in long term prisons in England such as Gartree, Long Lartin, Albany, Parkhurst, Wormwood Scrubs, Wakefield and Hull. These are the seven dispersal prisons in which all Category A prisoners are held. In the British penal system Category A is the highest in a range from A to D. Category D prisoners are usually held in semi-open prisons. On the other hand, for Category A prisoners freedoms are strictly curtailed. This despite the strict security surrounding these prisons.

When a Category A prisoner is moved from one location to another he is guarded at all times by at least three screws. One carries a radio hand-set through which he keeps in constant contact with the central security monitoring base. The second is a dog-handler in charge of a specially trained Alsatian guard-dog, which menacingly

accompanies every move of the prisoner. The third screw carries the Category A book in which he logs the precise time and date and details where the prisoner was taken from and where he is to be taken to.

In all Category A prisons there are security cameras strategically located and linked to the central monitoring base which keeps constant track of the activities of all prisoners. These cameras are a focus for resentment by the prisoners. So much so that in two of the above prisons where there were cameras located in the corridors, prisoners broke them so often that they were withdrawn and replaced by increasing the number of screws on duty.

All Irish Republican Prisoners of War are held in these security paranoid institutions. In theory a prison governor is supposed to be in charge of Category A prisoners. In reality, however, a junta is normally made up of two Principle Officers (P.Os), two or three Senior Officers (S.Os), and headed by a Security Governor.

This group holds enormous influence in determining how their particular prison is run because all governors will invariably refuse to interfere with any administrative decisions taken on "security grounds".

Another aspect of Category A is the amount of incidental detail kept on file for each prisoner. In the nine and a half years I spent in English prisons, literally every movement of every day is recorded. For example, a typical entry might read "On 3rd February, 1978 prisoner McLaughlin was located in the wood-workshop at 11.30 am" or "6th July, 1980, prisoner McLaughlin was held in isolation unit at Wakefield prison". This type of obsession for petty detail holds true for each and every Category A prisoner.

The Category A prisoner can also expect to undergo intensive security searches. To facilitate this there is a special squad of screws, known to prisoners as the *burglars*. These special searches often mean being forced out of your bed in the early hours of the morning so that your cell can be thoroughly searched from top to bottom. This routine usually lasts at least an hour and is an excuse for harassing prisoners. Following such searches it would be common for a prisoner to be dragged off to the solitary confinement unit because he had an extra book in his cell or they found a factory made cigarette or some other equally petty reason. For all prisoners, however, the most degrading aspect of special searches is, without doubt, the strip-searches, where prisoners are forcibly stripped naked and

every part of their body is scrutinised by often perverted and sneering screws.

Anyway, I was in Gartree about six weeks when Paddy Mulryan and Gerry (Mo) Cunningham arrived. It is a rare and great moment when you meet imprisoned comrades for the first time. One feels a bond that is inexplicable to the uninitiated. Two weeks later Gerry Young arrived from Bristol and this became our team until the New Year. As soon as the lads had settled in we began to discuss the overall situation in this prison. We decided that we would not tolerate closed visits, that is, visits where a glass or perspex screen separated us from our visitors.

Gerry Cunningham was delegated to relay our decision to the prison governor. Consequently the governor refused our demand. Gerry asked why we were the only prisoners undergoing this type of treatment as other Category A prisoners had open visits. The governor tried to shrug him off by replying that he would "look into it". A few days later Gerry was called to see the governor again to be told that Republicans were not just Category A prisoners but "Special Category A" and so therefore we could only receive special security visits. Officially there is no such grade as "Special Category A" but the Governor just used this double-speak to justify his repressive visiting conditions.

The four of us had another meeting and decided that from the following Monday, September 1 1975, we would refuse to do prison work and refuse to wear prison clothing until the closed visiting was abolished. We endured this for four weeks with no apparent progress so we decided to step up our protest and go on hunger strike.

In the early stages of our protest we got a "stiff" (prison communication) to the Press through a friendly prisoner. However, the only paper to publicise our protest was the *Sunday People* which trivialised the protest by referring to it as the "No Kiss Protest", the opening paragraph went something like this:

"Four lunatic Irish bombers are living starkers in their modern prison cells because the prison authorities won't allow them to kiss their wives or girlfriends".

After sixteen days on hunger strike the late Frank Maguire, M.P. for Fermanagh/South Tyrone, was allowed in to see us. He informed us that Eddie O'Neill, Jody Coughlin and other Republicans in Long Lartin had gone on hunger strike in solidarity with us. We were greatly heartened by this news, even euphoric for a few hours! About two days later the Governor approached us and said that if we ended

our protest, he would immediately review the closed visit regime. We asked for a meeting between ourselves to decide on future tactics.

This was an emotion-charged reunion in which we playfully mocked each other about the terrible state we were in. Gerry Cunningham was the worst, a little over ten stone at the best of times, he looked emaciated at seven and a half stone. I remember with some humour that when he talked his jaw-bone appeared to unhinge behind his grisly beard. Anyway after the inevitable blackguarding we got down to the serious business. We decided we would come off our hunger strike for one week, if at the end of this week the closed visit system was not abolished we would resume our fast. However, two days after we had suspended our hunger strike the Governor informed us that closed visits had now ceased. Instead they were replaced with supervised visits which meant that a screw would sit in on every visit. So despite the fact that our victory was only a partial one, we had succeeded in getting rid of the glass partition. In the coming years however, the supervised visits were to become a source of much friction.

One interesting anecdote about this protest happened when we were about ten days into the hunger strike. The prison's Catholic Chaplain came to see me and began berating me in his pseudo upper class accent about the childishness of our protest. I cut him short and reminded him that we were prisoners of war and as such we were entitled to humane visiting conditions. He proceeded to lampoon the War of Liberation, referring to what he called "terrorist atrocities". I replied that there was only one terrorist army in Ireland and that was Britain's colonial army. At this point the argument became very heated and in the middle of it all I recalled the fact that this pillar of the church was a known homosexual. So I did the unforgivable and asked him straight out if he was gay. At this he became very red in the face and rushed out in a rage, slamming the cell door behind him. To my shame afterwards, I roared laughing to celebrate this small sweet victory. Needless to say he never visited my cell again.

In mid-November 1975 a rumour was circulating in the jail that one of the people who had been convicted of the Birmingham bombings was about to arrive in Gartree. "Informed sources" reckoned that he wouldn't last a week before he was done in. Sure enough two days later Gerry Hunter arrived after having spent a full year of solid psychological torture, with a few severe beatings thrown in for good measure.

At 3.00 pm on the day of Gerry Hunter's arrival I was taken from the workshop for a security search. On the way back to the wing a screw said to me, "I see that one of your colleagues has arrived here". I asked, "Who is it?" and he replied, "Hunter is the name". "He's not one of my colleagues, he is an entirely innocent man!", I replied. The screw made no further reply so the conversation ended. A few days before Gerry Hunter arrived in Gartree, we, the Republican prisoners, discussed what we should do in the event of an innocent Irish prisoner being attacked. We decided that we should do our utmost to defend any such prisoner under these circumstances.

So when I arrived back on B wing after work that evening, Paddy Fogarty informed me that Gerry Hunter had been housed on the same landing as me. I collected my evening rations and went straight up to his cell. On seeing Gerry, whom I had known from Winson Green prison, I was absolutely shocked by his appearance. He had lost nearly two stone in weight. His cheek bones were sunken and he had a haunted look about him. When we shook hands I watched his eyes carefully. The insecurity, uncertainty and fear in those eyes reminded me of how a rabbit reacts when it is being hunted. Gerry was, in effect, a psychological wreck and I knew that my efforts to reassure him that all would be well in Gartree did not sound at all convincing. I went back to my own cell and I was almost physically sick when I thought about what this totally innocent man had gone through. I knew also that his future would be just as bleak because in that hysterical climate no English screw or prisoner wanted to believe that he was innocent. Besides, in their naivety they were certain that no English policeman or judge would participate in the frame-up of an innocent man!

Speaking of Gerry Hunter brings to mind another amusing anecdote from Gartree. A few months prior to his arrival an incident occurred which was to have a bearing on Gerry Hunter's integration. I was having a wash in the recess between two Cockney prisoners when one said to the other, "*Hate them all Harry* has arrived here". The other replied, "That's all we fakking need then ini't, that fakking loon". I remember thinking to myself with some trepidation, who in the name of Sweet Jesus is *Hate them all Harry*. I began to envisage all sorts of horrendous creatures. However, when I was walking back to my cell a newly arrived prisoner came out of the cell next to mine. Instinctively I knew that this was *Hate them all Harry*. So this stockily built, ruddy faced, balding character was the much feared demon! We exchanged nods but no words. However in the coming

weeks I got to know Harry well. He was a lively, intelligent but eccentric character who had served twelve years in prison. Politically a born anarchist, he respected no authority, hated capitalism, disliked communism, and also had no time for cliques, gangs or bureaucracy. Nor did he like Cockney prisoners, who generally like to talk about money in telephone numbers while at the same time they would come to his door looking for a roll-up cigarette.

Harry had a pet budgie in his cell which he had trained to talk as well as do various other tricks. And an acquaintance of his kept asking him for his prized bird. Harry became so exasperated by the persistence of this "friend" that during one of his pleas for possession of the bird, Harry leapt up, took the budgie from the cage and bit it's head clean off. He then offered the body to his "friend", who left the cell rapidly leaving the budgie in his wake and never returned.

This was only one side of Harry. He was normally an extremely generous person who would give you anything, provided he thought your need was genuine.

Anyway two week after Gerry Hunter's arrival the tension in Gartree, and especially on B wing, was at an extremely high pitch, all because of Gerry's presence. This terrible atmosphere was getting on my nerves so much that at 6.00 pm one day in late November, when the doors were being opened for association, I stepped out on the landing and made a declaration, not out of any sense of bravery but because the strain was almost unbearable. I declared to all the prisoners on the landing that Gerry Hunter was an innocent man framed by the British police and that anybody who wanted to harm him would have to come through me; and he had better be prepared for drastic measures. The silence that followed was devastating then *Hate them all Harry* breached it by saying, "Mack is right, Gerry is only a little guy, but if he was six feet tall, none of you would attempt anything". Harry's welcome backing proved decisive and as a result the tension eased greatly. In the weeks that followed Gerry's integration to Gartree became a lot easier and he soon began to tell how he and the other five were framed.

I will never forget Harry's decisive intervention in that precarious situation. I don't think that my declaration would have carried much weight without Harry's approval. A few months later Harry, Geordie and myself were discussing the war situation in the North. Harry said he believed the British should withdraw from Ireland, but his companion disagreed remarking, "What kind of Englishman

are you anyway?" to which Harry replied, "I am not an Englishman, I am a citizen of the world!"

In early December, 1975 Gerry Cunningham and myself began a hunger strike for repatriation. A week later we were joined by Paddy Mulryan, Gerry Young and John McCloskey in Parkhurst. It was supposed to have been a general hunger strike by all P.O.Ws in England but because of lack of communication and contradictory messages reaching the other prisoners, very few P.O.Ws knew exactly what our demands were. As a consequence the hunger strike was very patchy. Anyhow on the fifteenth day of hunger Gerry Cunningham had a visit and was informed that the Republican movement was totally opposed to a hunger strike, especially as the 1975 truce had been broken down and the bombing campaign in Britain had resumed. Having received this information we decided to end the hunger strike unconditionally. Due however to poor communication, something which bedevilled us over the long years in England, two days after we ended our fast Frank Stagg and Gerry Mealey began their hunger strike in the dark and dismal dungeons of Wakefield prison in Yorkshire.

Meanwhile, three of our P.O.Ws in Wormwood Scrubs had begun a roof protest in which they destroyed the prison roof during a bitterly cold two day period. This demonstration of direct action by Martin Coughlin, Stephen Blake and Roy Walsh cheered us up immensely. The lads lost six months remission each and spent long periods in solitary confinement before being dispersed to different prisons.

1976

Just after Christmas Billy Armstrong, who had been convicted of the Old Bailey bombing in 1973, joined us in Gartree. Billy brought us news of what was happening in Albany prison on the Isle of Wight. This was our first direct encounter of a Republican P.O.W. being moved from one long-term prison to another. Thus it helped give us a

valuable insight into the inter prison moves that lay in front of all of us in the future.

Through these lighter moments a dark shadow hung over us as our two comrades lay slowly dying in Wakefield prison. January 1976 ebbed slowly away with none of us daring to utter what was inevitable. As events have shown we were deceiving ourselves into thinking that maybe, just maybe, the British would relent and our gallant comrades would survive.

January slipped into February and the bitterly frosty weather appeared to emulate the harsh uncivilised attitudes of the British Home Office. About a week into February two of our comrades in Wakefield, Tony Madigan and Peter Shortt, climbed on the roof to protest at the Home Office refusal to negotiate with Frank and Gerry. They stayed on that roof for fourteen hours in the most atrocious weather, displaying placards condemning the British Home Office.

Two days before Frank died he persuaded Gerry to end his hunger strike for the sake of his wife. Gerry reluctantly did so and on the 12th of February Frank passed on to life's immortal dreams, joining Michael Gaughan his staunch comrade and close friend in the long heroic line of comrades who sacrificed all for the age old dream of Irish freedom. As a mark of respect the P.O.Ws refused to work or leave their cells until Frank was buried.

Following the death of Frank Stagg the Free State Government exposed itself as the heartless toady of British imperialism when they kidnapped his body. Refusing him his last request, that he be buried with his comrade Michael Gaughan, was a display of unbelievable hatefulness which I hope will never again be repeated by any Government calling itself Irish. The disgraceful episode where they poured concrete on top of his coffin in a futile attempt to ensure that his dying wish was not granted, does not bear description. This dastardly act could only be perpetrated by people consumed with hatred and fear of the undying spirit of freedom which is demonstrated by gallant warriors like Frank Stagg.

Early one morning in March I was taken from my cell and brought to the wing Governor's office. While I was there I was shown the front page headlines of that morning's *Sun* newspaper. It read, "Hang the Bombers". There followed a story about long-term prisoners in Gartree prison who were threatening to hang all "IRA Bombers" in the jail if there were any further bombings in England. The Governor asked for my reaction, I replied, 'It's nothing but hysterical rubbish

and propaganda". He then asked if I wished to be moved to the protective custody wing. I told him that I didn't feel this was necessary as I could look after myself. I was then taken back to my cell.

Later on my way to the workshops I met with the other Republican P.O.Ws. They told me they had all been given the same treatment, however their spirits were surprisingly high and so we acted as if it was all a joke. In fact Gerry Young went to the mailbag workshop where he managed to make several small nooses out of pieces of rope which we hung on the bolts of our cell doors. At first the screws were delighted to think that this was the beginning of a campaign against us. However, later, when they found out that we had carried it out ourselves they appeared to be very disappointed! Many of the other prisoners thought this was a great joke so thanks to Gerry's quick wit we pulled through with flying colours what otherwise might have been a nasty incident .

In May Billy Armstrong was moved to Parkhurst while Paul Holmes, one of his co-defendants in the Old Bailey bombing trial, was moved to Gartree. Paul, a very mature and conscientious Republican Socialist, proved to be of immense value in getting serious political discussion going. "Accept nothing as true without a clear analysis", was his favourite dictum. Paul was also a great lover of the Irish language and culture, so over the next few months the group's political, social, economic and cultural debates were greatly enlivened.

A couple of weeks later Peter Shortt joined us from the block, having spent three months in solitary confinement for the Wakefield roof-top protest. Peter, an Ardoyne man to the bone (no pun intended!), was a committed Republican and a sharp and contentious debater.

At the end of June Stephen Blake arrived from Hull via Manchester where he had spent twenty eight days on a cooler, i.e. solitary confinement. Stephen, from Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, was to make many excursions through the British penal system on coolers in future years. Four days later Gerry Mealey, still recovering from his long ordeal on hunger strike, arrived from Wakefield. In the week previous to this Gerry Cunningham was moved out to Hull prison. With so many ghostings (sudden moves in the middle of the night), the feeling was that I had to be next because of all the Republican P.O.Ws I had spent the longest time there. Two days later it came to pass, I was moved to Hull.

Hull prison in Yorkshire was markedly different from Gartree in that it dated to Napoleonic times and has a Dickensian air of bleakness about it. The food or "scram" as the locals called it, has the reputation for being the best in the dispersal prison system. A Liverpudlian fellow prisoner once equated it to a modest factory canteen and that certainly is high class prison food! However if the food was reasonable, the rest of the prison was a disaster. For one thing Hull had a reputation for putting more people into solitary confinement and for longer periods, than any other prison in England. As well as that the exercise yard is the smallest yard in long term prisons measuring only fifteen square yards.

A clear indication of tension in any prison is the number of fights between prisoners. This strange phenomenon of prisoners attacking each other in moments of high tension, rather than attack their jailers, who, after all, lock them up and generally demean and degrade them, is not so strange if the underlying reasons are examined. The principle explanation is quite simply that if you attack a fellow prisoner you will lose, at most, fourteen days remission. Whereas if a jailer is attacked you are guaranteed to lose 180 days or six months remission. In moments of tension or frustration therefore, those who have trouble controlling their emotions are tempted to take out their feelings of oppression on their fellow prisoners, rather than attack the source of the problem. I suppose that this is probably true of society as a whole and is, I suspect, the reason why street fighting is so common in working class areas.

Hull was a cacophony of Liverpudlian, Mancunian, Geordie and Scottish accents. Add to that Yorkshire, West Indian, Asian, Cockney and Irish and you could probably imagine it as a modern day setting for the biblical tale of the Tower of Babel. You would probably be wrong however, as out of this apparently irreconcilable mass, was formed a coherent, militant grouping, which when exposed to danger, stood solidly together.

During the seven weeks I spent in Hull there were football matches between English, Scottish, Irish and Black teams. These proved to be tough gruelling games with the Scottish having by far the best team. Although there were only fourteen Irishmen in this prison, we had the next best team. Once a week we were allowed into a dusty, caged up area to contest our version of international football. This always led to arguments and fights with the occasional stabbing.

Anyway on my initiation into this sporting activity, I had the supreme pleasure of being on the Irish team that beat the English 1-0 with the goal being scored by an Orangeman! The Irish grouping consisted of Martin Brady of the "Dog Batt" from the Falls, as tenacious and as generous a Belfast man that I have ever met. Gerry Cunningham, Strabane's version of Georgie Best and Che Guevara rolled into one. Joe *Yoga* Duffy, who was more often seen in the lotus or crab position! John Walker, a gregarious Derryman, who was one of the six framed for the Birmingham bombings, and another innocent Irishman, Patrick Maguire, who was, together with his wife and two children, framed for possession of explosives.

The Governor of this institution was named Kearns and had been a British P.O.W. in Japan during World War II. Kearns' favourite utterance was: "After spending two years in a Japanese concentration camp and being forced to do slave labour on the Burma road, the riff-raff of British society who end up in these institutions will never gain any sympathy from me, no matter how hard their plight, and nothing they could every do would upset or degrade me!" Needless to say many militant prisoners tried to make him eat his words over the years.

They tried everything from punching, head butting, dousing him with urine and covering him with shit, but he took it all quite unmoved and his reputation for being an iron and unflappable disciplinarian grew to that of a legend - until, that is, the bold Ronnie Moreland arrived on the scene and found his weakness. After a lot of thought, Ronnie reckoned he had found the chink in Kearns' armour, so he put in a request to see the Governor. After the usual preliminaries Ronnie launched his attack by stating quite calmly, "I believe, Mr. Kearns, you helped murder your comrades-in-arms by building the Burma road, how many of your unfortunate comrades did you help murder anyway, is your conscience not bothering you?" At this the Governor leapt up fuming and attempted to physically attack Ronnie. He was restrained by the screws, who then rushed Ronnie out of the office up to the segregation unit. This helped ruin Kearns' reputation and delighted every militant prisoner in Hull Jail.

On Sunday August 29, Gerry Cunningham arranged another "international" with England. The excitement had been building up when on Tuesday morning August 31 1976 we got word through the prison grapevine that yet another prisoner had been beaten up in the segregation unit. By that afternoon the place was buzzing as word was filtered round that there was to be a sit-down protest in the

centre of D wing between C and A Wings. As the afternoon progressed into evening, the screws, through their network of prison grasses (informers) got word of what was afoot. So the Governor called a hasty meeting of all security personnel and they decided to position a goon squad in the gate lodge in anticipation of any outbreak of trouble. Obviously these developments had taken place unknown to us prisoners.

By seven in the evening about seventy of us had gathered on D Wing centre. So the scene was now set for a major confrontation. The mood of the prisoners was sombre yet determined to show the prison junta that brutality would be resisted by, at least, a significant minority. As expected, of course, all the Republican P.O.Ws were present.

At 7.30 pm a Deputy Governor appeared and was immediately quizzed by a host of prisoners about the condition of the prisoner who had been battered. The Governor denied that the incident had ever happened, adding that it was only a malicious rumour, manufactured by trouble-makers to foment strife and break up the good relationship between staff and inmates. We replied that if that was the case then he should bring the prisoner from the unit to the centre and if he was uninjured, as was claimed, then we would all disperse immediately. The Governor refused this reasonable request on the grounds that we should respect his word as a senior member of staff. This only had the effect of causing the more cynical among us to burst out laughing.

The screws began to try to disperse us at 7.45 pm, by selecting certain individual prisoners among us and threatening them with the consequences of their actions. This met with no success at all, so at 7.55 pm, five minutes before "bang-up" a screw opened the gate that led to A Wing. Immediately a cheer rose from the prisoners as we all rushed towards the gate. At this point I had been standing beside the gate so I was among the first three to enter A Wing. When we had all entered A Wing a security P.O. locked the gate and was heard to say, "They are alright in there, we can contain them easily". If ever a man was made to eat his words, then this senior member of the junta certainly was.

One minute later some prisoner threw a bucket of water in the air and let loose with a Celtic war-cry. With that practically every prisoner on the wing began to destroy everything he could get his hands on. Every door was torn from its hinges and thrown from the high landings to the ground floor. In ten minutes flat the interior of the wing was almost totally destroyed. Then four of us broke through

to the A Wing roof and walked back to E Wing roof, as this was where the segregation unit was located. It took us ten minutes to break through this roof, as soon as we entered the wing we began to break down the doors in order to free the prisoners who had been confined to isolation for one petty reason or another. This was certainly the high point for me and reminds me of a very interesting anecdote.

One of the lads with me, a Londoner named Billy Gould had had a fight with a fellow prisoner a week before the riot occurred in which Billy was an easy victor. However four days before the riot the vanquished prisoner was told by the Governor that he was to be transferred to another prison. He immediately drafted a stiff (prison letter) and sent it up to Billy on the wing, through another prisoner. What he had to say went something like this, "Lucky for you I am leaving this prison, otherwise I would go up on the wing and put a hammer through that baldy skull of yours, etc". A classic piece of bravado. This incident was to turn into one of tragi-comedy when Billy and I began to break down his door during the riot. I heard him stammer in a very nervous voice asking, "Who is there?", with Billy replying in mock anger, "It's that baldy bastard who you threatened to get!" After a few seconds Billy broke the ominous silence with loud laughter. The situation eased greatly when we eventually broke down the door. He and Billy shook hands with Billy declaring that there is only one enemy now and they are outside with riot shields and heavy coshes!

After we had freed all the prisoners in that unit we went back to A Wing along the roofs and noticed that Joe (Mooney) Duffy, Paul Hill, Martin Brady and a few others had made their way on to D Wing roof and were hurling bricks and slates to the ground. This turned out to be the best tactical move made during the Hull prison riot as D Wing's roof overlooked all the lines of approach to A Wing gate. The entrance to rioters H.Q.!

When I went back to A Wing I found much confusion amongst the prisoners. Some had got over their earlier anger and said that we had done enough to prove our point. Others thought that we had destroyed our case by smashing up the place. But the most militant and coherent grouping thought that since we had come this far, we should go the whole way and attempt to smash up the whole prison. Confusion and dissension reigned.

At around 9.00 pm a decision was made that unified the prisoners at a very decisive point. Unknown to us the security junta had recom-

mended that A Wing be attacked and recaptured by a seventy five strong goon squad. Meanwhile about ten of us had left A Wing to join up with the lads on D Wing roof. The lads had cleared the section which overlooked the centre, this gave us the perfect vantage point for what was to come. Of course we had never planned it that way, nevertheless had it been planned we couldn't have done a better job of it.

At 9.15 pm the goon squad attacked, coming from the basement, along D Wing landing from C Wing, altogether in a determined and disciplined rush. But if their advance was disciplined, their retreat was anything but. From the moment the goon squad was spotted they were bombarded by a hail of slates and bricks. Only two or three of them actually reached A Wing gate but as they did a thunderous roar rose above the bedlam, "Retreat men!" and the ensuing scramble to get out of that battle area reminded me of Lonnie Donnegan's ballad *Down the Mississippi to New Orleans* - Well they ran through the landings, they ran through the basement, they ran through the places where the rats couldn't go!!

Our aerial superiority proved decisive with the net result being a great victory for the prisoners. This was a massive boost for our morale and helped strengthen the unity among all sections of prisoners. This battle proved to be of immense significance in the course of the riot, because never again during the three and a half days that we occupied the prison did the goon squad attempt to retake our positions. So, effectively the running of the prison was left in our hands.

In the wee small hours of the morning, I was sitting on C Wing roof with another prisoner reflecting on the night's momentous events. He interjected with a calm, yet poignant, observation of what it had all meant: "This is the latest hour that I have been up for eight years". For him the return of some degree of personal freedom, to be free to decide what time to go to bed and get up. To be free to talk to whoever you pleased, without being told by a screw that it would look bad on your record for parole. To be free to eat what you pleased, when you pleased, within limits of course! To assert his individuality even within the context of a prison riot, was an important event for this man. Because when the riot was over he would again have to toe the line and suppress his individuality.

Later that night an attack was made on the canteen for provisions by four selected prisoners. They managed to get some food but were intercepted by fifteen of the goon squad. They suffered head wounds

inflicted on two of them and a third prisoner had his ankle broken by their heavy coshes. We got our men back to A Wing where we set up a makeshift hospital in the screws' changing room. This was run by John Walker, one of the innocent men convicted of the Birmingham bombings. Johnny proved to be very efficient at this task and won much praise from fellow prisoners for his enterprising medical contribution.

Some of the militant section were seething with anger at the goon squad's treatment of our lads. So, it was decided that about twenty of us would take over the canteen and bring back all the provisions to A Wing. We succeeded in doing this without any further opposition from the goon squad, who had retreated in fear after rumours had spread that one of our lads had died as a result of wounds inflicted on him by them. They believed that this group of prisoners were set on revenge, so we took advantage of this and broke into the screw's canteen also. We took away every scrap of food and some cash that was there. The food was stored and distributed equally among all prisoners. We were undecided what to do with the money because we, as prisoners, had no use for it. But next day we found a great use for it.

The dawn of September 1st broke uneasily over Hull prison. The prisoners had control of the prison, but the sometimes paranoid fear that the goon squad would attempt another, bigger, attack, led to some dissension. As a result a trickle of defectors began to abandon the besieged community. Among them was a self-proclaimed hard-man from Liverpool. His leaving was met with wild hoots of derision from the prisoners, especially his fellow Liverpudlians, who were, in the main, a solid bunch of lads.

Late that morning, a small bunch of working class kids, began shouting to us and cheering us up from the road directly opposite A Wing roof. So it was decided, amidst a lot of friendly banter, that here was a good cause that could be served by the money we had liberated. Makeshift purses were hastily put together and the best throwers were delegated to throw these "money bags" to our supporters, the working class kids of this area. Most of the money made it safely over the wall. The ensuing scramble between the police and kids for possession, showed up the repressive face of the British constabulary. Some of the kids were tripped up and at least one was handcuffed and taken away for his valiant efforts to gain our prize. This only succeeded in bringing more kids from the neighbouring areas to the scene. So we gathered all the footballs in the prison and proceeded to kick every one of them over the wall. This caused near

panic among the police, but the kids thoroughly enjoyed it all. It was all great entertainment for us and helped ease the pressure for a while.

In the afternoon it was decided to take over C Wing entirely as there had been a number of sightings of screws spying from vantage points in C Wing. It had also been rumoured that another attack might be launched from there. About twenty of us, including four P.O.Ws, Martin Brady, Ger Cunningham, Joe Mooney and myself, entered C Wing through the roof. Billy Hughes, a staunch Liverpoolian, was the first down. We began to gather every chair on the wing and proceeded to barricade every entrance and exit.

Unknown to us, three or four homosexuals had banged up together in one cell at the beginning of the riot on C Wing. Henry Hill succeeded in battering down their door. When he informed all of us of the situation, in his raucous Scouse accent, the gay prisoners were anything but gay. They trooped out to be greeted with cat-calls and virtually every kind of obscenity in the English language. We didn't detain them long because the main part of our business was yet to be carried out.

We then set about breaking down the door of the prison office to get our prison files. When we eventually got them, a kind of anticipatory silence broke amongst us. Then there was a laugh here, an expletive there and an exclamation somewhere else, as we began to analyse the intelligence they had on us. I was pleased to read that I was regarded as an "inveterate IRA man" but took umbrage when they described me as "extremely devious and cunning". Like all hill-farmer stock, I would have a certain amount of cunning in me, but there's not a devious bone in my body!

On a more serious level though, their intelligence wasn't particularly good. Most of the lads who had broken into this office, could be loosely called jail militants, so they weren't that surprised about what was written in these files. Back in A Wing there was shock among many of the prisoners when they discovered the absolute contrast between what they had been told by screws about certain things, such as parole, and what these same screws had subsequently written in their records. Shock or no shock, it was a salient lesson for these people on the duplicity of the screws and their masters, the governor class. Unfortunately to some of these people illusions are far more preferable than reality.

That evening Ger Cunningham, Martin Brady and Joe Mooney, together with some other lads, had got hammers and chisels from one

of the workshops. They began to chisel away at a big chimney stack on D Wing. When they had chiselled away half the bricks on one side of it, they tied a makeshift rope to the top and began to pull it down. There was loud applause and cheers from the prisoners and, as the chimney toppled, two notorious Cockneys, Blackie Sexton and Bertie Coster, made majestic bows to the onlooking gallery of screws and policemen.

By late Tuesday evening the riot was gradually losing its impetus. The prison was virtually wrecked and it only remained for small groups to go around adding the final touches. The previous night a fire had been lit on the roof of the administration block. This was an extension of D Wing and could be reached by walking across D Wing roof. There was a parapet on the roof of this block which overlooked the gate lodge. We had two prisoners stationed here at all times, to watch every outward and inward movement of the screws. Earlier that day, a British army Saracen armoured car entered here and proceeded to patrol around the perimeter fence. This led to instant rumours that a Para assault was likely from the air. In turn this caused panic among a section of wavering prisoners, but most level headed prisoners knew that this type of scenario was not on.

At about 11.00 pm on Wednesday night, a report from the parapet stated that a fire hose had been brought in through the gate and there had been attempts to get it up to the top of the gate lodge. On hearing this, a group of us made our way to the parapet in an attempt to stall the screws from getting the hose into position. Six of us lined along the parapet throwing bricks and slates at the screws on the gate lodge. Although one direct hit on a screw was scored, we failed to stop them. As soon as the fire hose was set up they began to use it. At first the water hit the door twenty feet below us and I clearly remember thinking that after all their efforts, the hose didn't work properly. No sooner had I registered this than we were hit by the second blast of water and were sent flying from the parapet on to the roof of the administration block. We were all soaked and in some shock. Ger Cunningham developed vertigo from this incident and he had to crawl on his hands and knees along the admin roof, D Wing roof and finally on to A Wing. This journey took him twenty five minutes, when walking it had only taken him two minutes. He was in a particularly bad state for the next few hours.

I remember taking off my clothes and wringing them out by the fire on the roof. I then went back down to my old cell in C Wing for my first real sleep since the riot began. A couple of hours later I was

wakened with the news that a Geordie friend of mine had had his cell burned out by unknown prisoners. We went down immediately to try to stop it but there was nothing we could do and it was burned out completely, destroying all his books and possessions. I went back to sleep thinking that this act of treachery had broken the tremendous sense of solidarity that had existed among all the prisoners during this riot. Personally, and this holds true for most P.O.Ws, this was the first time I had felt a deep empathy with my fellow prisoners. In the two years I had spent in prison up to this date, I had encountered much hostility, many misunderstandings and, in some instances, open hatred. There were, of course, notable exceptions to this treatment. These generally came from prisoners with some degree of political awareness. For example, the people who were convicted in the "Angry Brigade" trial were of immense help to us. One of them, Jake Prescott, was involved in this riot. This genial Scotsman was very conscious of his international duty and never ceased in his attempts to explain the Irish war to the other prisoners. I found no flaws in this incredibly open and generous character, except for a tendency to be overly sympathetic to the political mistakes of Mao Tse Tung!

This riot was a watershed in the relations between P.O.Ws and the militant section of the English prisoners. It marked the beginning of a grudging respect for each other and greatly eased the terrible hostility of the previous two years.

Thursday, September 2 opened with disgruntled reports of a shortage of food. As the prison was totally wrecked, there was a sense of where do we go from here, as we had achieved what we had set out to do. At 11.00 am word filtered around that the authorities had agreed to our demand that we have a meeting with a Home Office official. Four delegates were promptly elected to meet this Home Office functionary. We delegated Martin Brady, as the P.O.W. representative. Bertie Coster, Peter Lynch and Jake Prescott were the other representatives. Basically the agreement that was reached was this: The Home Office would hold an internal inquiry into allegations of brutality in Hull prison, prior to the riot. I should say at this point that I personally saw and spoke with the prisoner whose assault sparked off the protest. I can state categorically that there were visible signs of injuries on his face when we opened his door in the block. The H.O. official promised that no prisoner would be beaten up after the surrender of Hull prison and that no prisoner's property would be broken or interfered with. After this "agreement"

our representative agreed to surrender at 10.00 am on Friday, September 3.

When they came back with this agreement, the prisoners held a general meeting where a small section argued that we hold out for another few days. But the general consensus was to accept the agreement, this was reached with a show of hands. The rest of this day was spent scrounging the prison for food and having long discussions with friends and comrades, in the full knowledge that a mini diaspora was about to begin.

At 10.00 am on Friday the O.C. called us together for a last talk before we surrendered to the screws. We decided to go down as a group, rather than skulk down in an intermittent fashion. Eight of us went down together, although four were innocent men who had been framed for IRA actions.

11.00 am, it is a beautiful day and the prisoners are all happily singing their protest songs, mainly of the Bob Dylan variety. The feeling is that we have had a great victory, no matter what should happen in the aftermath. Most Republican and militant prisoners firmly believed that, irrespective of the agreement with the Home Office, we were in for a severe hammering from vindictive screws out for pure revenge. 12.00 am, the Irish crew are together, awaiting our turn to pass back into the hands of the screws. The mood is that of an American wake - happy, yet sad. Happy in our staunch comradeship, yet sad because we realise that it will be years before we see each other again.

The O.C., Martin Brady, is the first to pass back into the care of the screws. His parting words were typical D Company. "When you face these screws, remember that you are Republicans, Oglaigh Abú!" It was my turn to go now so I shook Ger Cunningham's hand firmly and then the others in turn. I then walked through to the place where they were searching and checking our property. About twenty screws were standing around, jeering and making snide remarks. I then walked along a corridor to B Wing. About half way along this corridor a fat, puffy screw said to me, "We are going to bomb you, you Irish bastard". "No way", I retorted, and kept walking. But my retort enraged him into kicking me in the leg just below the knee. I just barely stayed on my feet, as I was carrying a box. I reached B Wing reception, to be greeted by more loud jeers, and I handed over my property to a screw. I was then ordered to strip in front of thirty jeering, cheering screws. When I had stripped off all my clothes, I was ordered to turn around so that they could inspect my anus.

Revolted at the thought of this, I refused point blank. But they clearly meant business because four of them grabbed me and swung me around after a struggle, then they proceeded to check my anus while the others made obscene remarks. After this I was ordered to put my clothes back on, except for my boots, which they exchanged for a pair of slippers, presumably for their own protection!

I was then ordered up to a cell on the third landing. Four screws followed me in and ordered me to strip again. Despite more protests on my part, I was again forced to strip. Quite a few of the screws were wearing riot gear and glorifying in their new found power. This was a vain attempt on their part to gain full control of us. They had had their prison smashed up, so their spirits and morale were very low.

The cell I was in was completely empty, not only that but there wasn't any glass in the windows. Ten minutes later Mo Cunningham was put in the cell opposite me. I found out later that he had gone through the very same process as I had. An hour later when the screws were checking the spy-holes, one asked the other, "Is that one of those Irish bastards?" The other replied that indeed it was. The first one then began to shout many and varied obscenities about myself and my wife, then began to snigger childishly.

At 3.00 pm I needed to go to the toilet badly, so I began to bang on the door until a screw came along to ask me what I wanted. "Toilet", I replied. To which he responded, "Do it in your cell, you animal", and then walked away. The only option left to me was to attempt to urinate out the window. Later in the evening I managed to contact some of the other prisoners by shouting out the window. I learned that most of them had encountered the same treatment.

From my window, I could see prisoners being put into police and prison vans to be taken to other prisons. I wondered when my turn would come. I spent an hour checking where certain prisoners were located, by again shouting out the window. At 7.00 pm my door was unlocked and a screw threw in a filthy mattress and a horse blanket. 8.00 pm, I was slopped out. I went to wash my hands, I was told by a particularly embittered screw, whom we had nicknamed *Shirley Temple*, that I was to use the sink with the dirty water in it as this had been reserved for Paddies. I ignored him and began to wash in one of the other sinks. For this act of defiance, I was frogmarched back to my cell. After spending the next couple of hours talking out the window to other prisoners about the latest developments, I went to bed around 11.00 pm. I slept with my clothes on as I expected the worst. At least three times that night, screws walked the landings

banging on doors with their batons, causing sleeplessness, apprehension and anger among the prisoners.

7.00 am on Saturday morning I heard the screws opening the cell opposite me. I leapt up straight away, looked out the spy-hole and saw about ten screws around Mo's door and twenty more along the landing. Two of them were known to us as particularly violent or dogs. Mo was dragged out of the cell by three or four of them, while the others punched and kicked at him. I kicked and banged my door and shouted at them to let him go. But it was only a half-hearted attempt, because I knew, even in my anger, that there was nothing I could do. Mo was dragged out of my sight but I could still hear scuffling. A couple of minutes later he was trailed back again and thrown into his cell. As they slammed the door after him, one of them shouted, "we ought to hang this bastard".

They proceeded down the landing, slopping out prisoners and beating them as they went along, though none as badly as Mo. As they approached my door I could feel my adrenalin pumping. When the door swung open I walked outside at a brisk pace, as an act of bravado, but as I reached the landing, they began to rain down blows to the back of my head and neck. I was kicked at the back of my knees and I stumbled through a hail of kicks and punches until I reached the toilet area. I was given twenty seconds to finish. Needless to say, during the return journey to my cell I was subjected to the same treatment.

At 7.30 am Mo's door was opened for breakfast, as was expected the screws gave a repeat performance. But this time Mo socked a couple of them. He was easily subdued by their numbers. They then proceeded around the landing again, until they arrived at the cell before mine. When the prisoner refused to go, a screw remarked, "that's all right, we'll give your share to the Irish bastard". Hearing this didn't help my morale. On leaving my cell, I was forced to run the gauntlet again. This time I was stopped at the corner by two dog screws who ordered me to say, "God save Ulster" and "God save the Queen". I replied that I would say no such thing. A screw using a stage Irish accent, immediately tried to mimic me. I was then thrown across to where the breakfast was being served. I reached for a tray but it was kicked out of my hand straight away. I soon realised that I wouldn't be getting any breakfast today.

So I attempted to make my way back to the cell but I was intercepted by a boot aimed at my chest. I somehow managed to grab hold of his ankle, and I threw the screw over the grub table. At this point

another screw punched me hard in the stomach but I was determined to stay on my feet. I knew if I went down I was finished. So I walked through the gauntlet again, only just managing to stay upright until I was thrown into the cell.

In the cell I stood against the window with my fists clenched, a subconscious habit of mine, wondering if more was to come. Sure enough a screw started to roar, "Unclench those fists, you bastard". I refused and when the door opened, I thought, Jesus they're coming in again. About seven or eight screws came in and stood in a semi circle around me. Dog number one punched me in the mouth, cutting both my lips. I felt the blood streaming out of my mouth. This appeared to satisfy them as they then left the cell. After this I catalogued my injuries which now consisted of a badly swollen face, cut lips, a row of lumps on the back of my head, a cut at the back of my knee and stiffness all over my body.

9.30 am, I heard Mo's door being opened again. I feared the worst for him but was relieved when I heard them say, "You are on escort", meaning that he was being transferred to another prison. Ten minutes later my door was opened and I was taken down to the reception area, where I was handcuffed to Dog number two. He tried to goad me by saying, "you are not so tough now, you bastard". I was then put in line behind Mo, whose head was hanging to one side. I later learned that he had taken a karate chop to the neck. I then heard them shouting Yoga Joe's name and heard the scuffles as he was brought down. When I turned round to see him, his face was in a terrible shape. Then Bertie and Peter, two Category A prisoners, were brought down. They were followed by Paul Hill, another of the innocent Irish prisoners. All of us were badly battered, but they had not broken our spirits. We were consoled with the thought that we could receive bad hammerings for days, spend months or years in isolation, but we, the Hull prisoners, had taken part in the biggest riot in English prison history. No amount of torture or ill treatment could alter this fact.

The six of us were handcuffed and ready to go when Dog number two, an ex-para shouted, "Remember Bloody Sunday", and "Screws rule Hull OK!" A pathetic attempt to counter the banner we had slung from the roof, "Provos Rule Hull, OK!" We were then frog-marched to a police meat-wagon and locked into single compartments. At this point I was happy to leave Hull, even though I felt there was worse to come.

The police van consisted of eight individual cubicles, four on each side. The peeler locked the six of us into these cubby holes and left two screws sitting in the aisle between us. When we were about a mile from Hull prison, I struck up singing *The Foggy Dew* and was joined immediately by Mo Cunningham and Paul Hill. This act of defiance enraged the screws but they were unable to do anything because the peeler had the keys. Another small victory over the screws. The rest of the journey was uneventful.

Three of the lads were dropped off at Leicester, Paul Hill, Peter Rajah and Bertie Coster. Joe Mooney was moved on to Canterbury and Mo and I were moved to Wandsworth. It was 5.00 pm when we arrived in this dismal Victorian monstrosity. On arrival we had a dour reception committee waiting for us. The Wandsworth Heavy Gang contented themselves in giving us the heavy psychological treatment, after they had seen the extent of our injuries. We were put into cells 40 and 42 on CI. We were later to discover that these are two special punishment cells. They were both without heating and they also had perspex windows, which effectively barred any communication.

Next morning being a Sunday, I asked the screw to take me to Church. Not because I was a regular Church-goer, but because I wanted to see around me. However they refused to allow me to go. At about 11.30 I was eating dinner in my cell when in marched the Catholic chaplain, a captain in the Territorial Army. However, when he saw the injuries to my face he stopped in his tracks. I could see that he was fumbling for something appropriate to say. Then he uttered this classic, "In Russia you know, they send prisoners to psychiatric units". The clear implication being that they may batter you senseless in English jails, but sure they're not as bad as some others. I was so astounded by this remark that all I could say was, "Get out! Get out!" and these were the first words that we exchanged!

A few days later, he came back again, this time our conversation was more civilised and I began to understand him a bit better. He was a typical middle class liberal, full of nice illusions about "British democracy" and with a sense of fair play towards the lower orders, i.e., prisoners, black immigrants, working classes, etc. But like all liberals, when they feel threatened by these self same lower orders, he became a primitive conservative. He was apolitical and naive, and unknown to each other, both Mo and I were attempting to educate him to the realities of the Irish war and British internal politics. The least mention of socialism sent him into fits of rage and he would

extricate himself with that typical sectarian phrase, "I would rather be dead than red". Ironically the constant uttering of this meaningless saying by him, led me to manufacture an equally meaningless phrase to counter it, "I would rather be slew than blue!"

The regime in this prison was very harsh. We were locked up 23 hours daily. 24 hours if it was raining. To make matter worse we were allowed neither radios nor books. Around mid-September, I overheard two social prisoners discussing a sit-in protest in Albany, in which the Irish P.O.Ws were battered senseless. The details were very sketchy, but the two lads were very enthusiastic about the "bottle" (courage) shown by the Irish prisoners. As we had no access to any kind of newspapers, it was a full ten months before I could get the facts about this protest.

Big Brendan Dowd was put on Rule 43, i.e. he was put in isolation and not given any reason. So the other Republican prisoners decided to undertake a peaceful sit-down protest in solidarity with Brendan. But the Albany regime refused to negotiate, instead they sent in the Mufti Squad (Minimum Use of Force for Tactical Intervention!). This gang battered the lads senseless with their batons. At the end of this brutal and thuggish assault on defenceless prisoners, Sean Campbell had a broken leg, Eddie Byrne a broken arm, Pat Fell had a broken nose and Con McFadden, Liam McLarnon and John McCluskey received various lesser wounds. All were thrown into empty segregation cells and denied medical aid. But by far the most sinister aspect of this whole episode, was the dawn transfer of Eddie Byrne to Parkhurst's F Wing, a half-way house psychiatric unit, where he was injected with a very dangerous drug known as Paraldehyde. This rendered him totally unconscious for three days. After he awoke, he was in a severe state of disorientation for a further ten days. The long term effects of this drug are not fully known. But Eddie has suffered bouts of depression ever since, which is completely out of character for an optimist such as Eddie.

Since then, Eddie Byrne, through his own terrifying experience, has compiled a lot of information on drug abuse in English jails, which in time may help to lift the lid on this dastardly practice in Britannia's Dungeons.

All the lads were sentenced to massive amounts of loss of remission, up to 690 days. Just recently Sean Campbell and Pat Fell won their cases against this decision in the European Court of Human Rights. By that time, however, they had served their sentences, lost remission and all!

About mid-October we were moved from C Wing to H Wing, another segregation unit. Still Mo (Gerry) and I hadn't seen each other. A month later Michael O'Reilly, a Belfast Republican, arrived after being sentenced to ten years at Birmingham Crown Court for incendiary devices. Michael was a man who epitomised all that is best in Republican self discipline, whose quiet nature belied his unshakable determination. A few days after his arrival the screws started to get sick of exercising us individually, so one day they consented to exercising us all together. That hour we had together every day became precious. Gerry was a great one for choosing obscure and esoteric subjects to debate. At first Michael was amazed by these but after a few weeks he was in tune with Mo's eccentricities.

One afternoon Mo undertook to destroy the arguments for paedophilia. Well to explain the situation more clearly, we had an understanding that whichever subject was chosen, he would argue for and I against, or vice versa. This was the debating trick we used to keep our minds sharp while in solitary. Anyway the debate began with both of us throwing arguments back and forth, but this was an off day for Mo, as he couldn't pin me down with any decisive points. An hour had passed and he still had not scored what should have been an easy win for him. This enraged and led him to forget that the views being put forward were not our own. I will never forget when we parted to go back to our cells, he looked at me with eyes blazing and said in a scathing tone, "Call yourself a Republican, you're nothing but a sexual pervert!" I was amazed but Michael looked on with a benign, almost supercilious, smile. An hour later I was still laughing in my cell at my great victory over Mo. Next day, after he had time to think it over, we looked at each other and began laughing loudly. Again Michael could only look on benignly!

On December 15 Mo, a French-Canadian called Saint-Germain and I were moved to Leicester Prison, where the following day we were charged with committing "grievous offences" during the Hull riot. While we were there we met up again with Paul Hill, Bertie Coster and Peter Rajah who were being charged with similar offences. Blackie Sexton, a renowned Cockney with a tremendous sense of humour, had arrived on the previous day along with Jimmy McCartney, a staunch and principled Scotsman, from Durham jail. So there were now eight of us to face the kangaroo court the next day. Inevitably many anecdotes and stories were swapped through the windows that night.

Next day the charade began at ten in the morning. Jimmy McCartney was wheeled in and within seven minutes he was found guilty on all charges. He received four hundred and fifty days loss of remission and six months in the block (solitary confinement). Then it was Mo Cunningham's turn, again guilty on all charges, 420 days loss of remission and seven months in the block. It was then my turn and I received exactly the same as Mo. The dispensing of justice was moving in top gear, within the space of an hour all of us were found guilty on all charges and sentenced to the equivalent of fifteen years imprisonment, between seven of us. The other, Paul Hill, serving natural life for something he didn't do, couldn't lose any remission!

Blackie Sexton lost the most remission, over seven hundred days in all. To make matters worse, he had the dubious pleasure of being congratulated on his anniversary by the President of the Board of Visitors. A dumbfounded Sexton asked "What anniversary?", and the supercilious chairman replied, "I see by the records that you were first sentenced on this day sixteen years ago". Blackie replied sardonically, "Thanks for nothing".

A week later Mo, Saint-Germain and I were brought back to Wandsworth. On our arrival the gloating screws began shouting joyously to each other about the massive amounts of remission we had lost. Later that evening I heard a prisoner being dragged down to the block. He was screaming in agony at the beating that was being meted out to him. There was nothing new about this in Wandsworth except that this was a wet and dismal Christmas Eve. The prison was profoundly silent in monotonous misery. Each cubicle of despair housed a tortured creature, crying silent tears, feeling every blow inflicted on his unknown comrade.

On Christmas Day the routine remained the same as always, but at 3.00 pm the door opened and the Chief walked in and announced, "As it's Christmas Day, the Governor has given permission for prisoners in solitary to have their beds in". To this patronising rubbish I replied, "As it's 3 o'clock I think I can manage another five or six hours without it." The chief walked out with a big grin on his face, saying as he went, "As you wish McLaughlin".

1977

The new year, 1977, started much the same as 1976 had ended, except that a couple of lads from the Hull riot had finished their punishment and had gone back up on to the main wing.

The following is a sketch of what a typical day spent in solitary confinement in Wandsworth jail entails. At 6.00 am a screw switches on the white light and switches off the red one, that is kept burning at night. This is the signal to rise from my luxurious wooden bed, and fold my horse blankets in readiness to be taken out at slop-out time. At 6.15 am the screw pulls back the spy-hole (called a Judas in prison slang), to check if you are out of bed. If not you will be entertained to an intensive lesson in English swear words. A typical example would go something like this, "Listen cunt, where the fak do you think you are? Butlins, you bastard?!" 6.30 am the screw pulls back the three bolts on the door, there are three bolts on the doors of all Category A prisoners. 7.00 am the door opens for slop-out. This consists of taking your chamber pot and water basin out to be emptied. You then refill your water basin with hot (usually luke-warm) water for shaving. You are also issued with a small spoonful of coarse powder to brush your teeth.

7.30 am, you are unlocked again, this time for breakfast. This always consists of a bowl of gruel, three slices of bread and margarine plus one cocktail sausage, not forgetting, of course, your cup of diesel (tea). After breakfast I would exercise for half an hour in my cell and then sit on the chair until 9.00 am.

My suite is made up of one chair, one table, one wooden bed, one basin, one chamber pot, soap, toothbrush, book and pen. The only reading material available is of the penny-dreadful variety. So there is absolutely no way of altering the boredom except to let your

mind drift aimlessly. Anyone who has spent much time in solitary knows that this practice must be curbed.

The political prisoner has the advantaged position in this regard. He feels a strong bond of comradeship with his fellow P.O.Ws, and he feels strongly linked to the struggle for national liberation in Ireland. This is always a great source of strength to the political prisoner. He knows that any suffering he may endure is for a noble objective and that he is not an individual who can be isolated and forgotten, but part of a great movement.

9.00 am, the door is opened again so that you can get water to wash your knife, fork and spoon, a five minute operation. The cell is twelve feet by six, therefore you know that if you walk up and down the cell 440 times, you have done a mile. This is a chore that I would perform three or four times daily. At 9.30 am I would usually read the cheap novel for an hour. The books on offer are either detective stories or westerns, so the educational value is nil. But at least it lifts your mind from the gloomy greyness of the cell for a while.

11.30 am and you walk about twenty yards along the landing to collect your dinner, as soon as the door has opened. The dinner ration is made up of an inedible pie, a spoonful of mashed potato and carrots. After dinner is the most boring part of the day. The prison is totally silent, I get up to the window to have a look at the gloomy prison complex. The window has three sets of bars and a black cage tied to the wall. The purpose of this cage is to prevent anyone from the cell above passing down contraband, i.e. cigarettes, tobacco or extra food, and it works. After five minutes of this depressing viewing of the prison workshops, I get down, sit on the chair and attempt to sleep, but this always fails. I then pace the floor until the mile is walked, then maybe pick up the book again for half an hour. I hear keys jangling and things being moved about, the screws are back from dinner. 1.30 pm, the door is opened again and the screw utters the immortal words, "Slop-out!" I take the tin tray to the table and change the water in the basin, I also manage to get a few sheets of toilet paper. Between this and 3.00 pm I usually write bits and pieces to keep my mind active.

I really look forward to exercise time, it is the highlight of our day. At 3.00 pm the door is opened and I am taken to the exercise yard. This hour is spent walking around the exercise yard which is forty yards in diameter. A number of us are exercised together and we spend this time exchanging little pieces of information. For instance one of us may have seen the headline of a newspaper on a screw's desk

or the padre may have unwittingly dropped a piece of news. This news would be devoured, especially if it was relevant to the guerrilla war in Ireland. Mo had a great collection of yarns which I never ceased to enjoy, or in the event of there being no news available, we would debate obscure and esoteric subjects, usually with humorous consequences.

The exercise hour is the quickest hour of the day and it is always a big disappointment when the screw signals the end of exercise. At 4.00 pm we slop out for the last time and receive our last meal of the day. This always consisted of five slices of bread and margarine, a razor thin slice of corned beef and a cup of tea. Around this time the padre usually drops in for his minute and a half of empty platitudes and then away again. In prison the padres one meets are usually very right wing politically, as they are vetted very carefully by the British Home Office. In my opinion, the two most essential qualifications needed to become a prison chaplain are to be politically conservative and to suffer from a serious lack of compassion.

Mo Cunningham repeatedly asked this padre to intervene on behalf of some prisoners who were receiving brutal treatment in this block, but all to no avail. He was present in Mo's cell one time when a prisoner was being beaten and dragged through the block, but he still refused to intervene.

At 5.30 pm I begin my second set of exercises of the day. This normally takes me three quarters of an hour. I then strip wash from a plastic bucket. 6.30, after my workout, the dime novel looks appealing. I generally read this until eight o'clock. This period of the day tends to pass fairly quickly.

8.00 pm I am allowed to take my wooden bed back into the cell and I also receive a cup of diesel tea. The tea is revolting and the only way I can describe it is to say that to drink it takes an acquired taste, a taste which takes a long time acquiring. 8.30 pm I get up to the window to try to contact Mo and Michael for a short talk, however this is usually unsuccessful due to the distances involved. If no contact is made I look out at the black night. The fog and the smog of a winter's night in London is an eerie sight!

I can see a mouse tugging at a slice of bread thrown out by some well fed prisoner. I remove my gaze from the mouse's labour and look further up the black alley, between the workshops I spot a screw and his guard dog sniffing around, a nightly ritual. I overhear two "Rule 43" prisoners, who are kept segregated on the landing above us, they are discussing a suicide attempt by one of their mates. This is the

fourth attempt by different prisoners since I came here. There are two categories of "Rule 43" prisoners. 43(A) are either sex cases or touts who are segregated for their own protection. 43(B) are prisoners who are considered subversive by the security junta and governor class, and are kept here for the good order and discipline of the prison!

10.00 pm, the screw comes along and puts out the white light, while at the same time putting on the red light. I often wondered if some of the existentialist philosophers had spent some time in prison, would it have affected their consciousness. To quote one of them, "Seriousness is an accident of time, it consists in putting too high a value on time, eternity is a mere moment, just long enough for a joke" (Hermann Hesse).

In February 1977 Michael Reilly was moved to Wakefield prison, we were sad to see him go, but it would be better for him to experience his first long-term prison. A week later the four lads from the Balcombe Street trial arrived. Hughie Doherty, Joe O'Connell, Harry Duggan and Eddie Butler. I didn't know what was happening, but I guessed from the amount of screws running urgently around the Block at 9.00 pm that a person or persons on the top security list were being moved in.

When all the excitement had died down and the screws had gone off duty, I tried to contact the newcomers, but could not communicate with them. Early next morning I heard more unusual noises and much excitement. But it wasn't until breakfast time that I found out the full story. Mo told me that the four lads, who were captured in Balcombe Street, had been sentenced the previous day to life imprisonment, with a recommendation that they serve at least thirty years in jail. They were then brought to Wandsworth and the next morning three of them were dispersed to different prisons, leaving Hughie Doherty in the dungeons with us. Hughie was moved into Cell 42, the cell without heating. So he too was to spend time in this notorious cell, which had been located directly beneath the Hangman's Cell.

Two weeks later Brendan Dowd arrived from Albany, after emptying the contents of his chamber pot over the governor. So for the next month the crack was good. Then Brendan was moved out and Hughie was moved up on to the main wing.

One anecdote worth telling about Brendan is as follows: there is a metal grille built into the centre of the floor at Wandsworth, where all the wings meet. Prisoners are forced to clean it every day to keep the metal shining and no prisoner is allowed to walk on it. When

Brendan arrived, he was told to walk around it. However on hearing this, Brendan decided to take the bull by the horns and walked straight across it. He had no sooner reached the far side when about ten screws surrounded him and proceeded to frogmarch him around their precious monument five times, with the repeated reminder that, "Next time, you Irish bastard, you shall walk around the centre".

Soon after James (*Spotter*) Murphy arrived, having been sentenced to ten years. He spent a week in solitary with us then he too was moved onto the wing.

At the beginning of March the Hull police arrived at the jail to take statements about the beatings given out after the Hull riots. Mo and I were taken over to see them and when we asked what they wanted, they told us that a policy inquiry was being held into the beatings and that they were looking for statements with a view to prosecuting. We explained that we would say nothing to them unless our solicitors were present at the interview. We then walked out. We were dubious of the whole set up and expected to hear no more about it. However a week later they arrived back with our solicitors in tow. After a long and frank discussion with my solicitor, I decided to make a statement to the police, with a written proviso signed by my solicitor, that I would speak only about the beatings of prisoners after the Hull riots.

I also learned from my solicitor that, apart from the police inquiry, there was another major inquiry being carried out by the P.R.O.P., a radical prisoners rights organisation. Apparently they had received communiques from prisoners scattered throughout England's jails. We had heard absolutely nothing about these developments, which clearly shows how complete was our solitary isolation in Wandsworth. Another thing we found out was that the stew we had been given the evening after our surrender at Hull had been badly contaminated with urine. It seems that the screws who worked in the kitchens had taken it in turns to piss into the stew. We were so hungry at the time, we had eaten it without noticing.

On my return from seeing my solicitor and the Hull police that day, the usual procedures for moving Category A prisoners was suspended. At all times there had been at least one screw in front of us, but this day all three stayed behind me. My senses were immediately alerted. When I reached the bottom of the stairs I saw two trustee prisoners lurking suspiciously. The feelings that I had of being walked into a trap increased. As I walked between these two

trustees the first one gave me a wallop, I instinctively leaped at him, pinning him to the wall and began to punch at him. In the meantime trustee number two came at me from the rear. They must have been making very poor work of beating me because the screws ended up having to join in. The resultant melee saw me being thrown against the wall. Then one particularly hateful Coventry screw, whom I can still remember vividly, began to punch me to the body while the others held me. Thankfully this warped little toady had neither enough strength or technique to put into effect his innermost desires. My own wish at this time was to give this ghost-faced sadist a hard boot in the privates, but I had no room to manoeuvre, so I contented myself by throwing him aside. Meanwhile the trustees had gathered up their brushes and began to hammer me with the brush handles. Luckily the confusion was such that their efforts were largely unsuccessful. Eventually, sick of the poor job they had made of me, they gave up and dragged me back to my cell.

When they left my cell the chaplain arrived. He obviously had known what had just happened as he appeared to be somewhat nervous and shocked. However seeing that I wasn't too badly beaten eased him a bit. He was no longer as naive as he had been when we had first met some months past. But how many more beatings would I have to endure before I succeeded in turning him into a socialist? Although I had by no means beaten my five assailants or inflicted heavy injury on any of them, I felt that their inability to crush or subdue me had given me a moral victory, at least.

Two weeks later Pat Guilfoyle arrived from Gartree on a twenty eight day cooler. Pat had grown a beard without permission and when he arrived at Wandsworth he had it forcibly shaved off. Then big Sean Kinsella arrived with a big black Castro like beard. Since Pat had been forced to have his beard removed, one screw was heard to remark that he couldn't be an IRA man as he had no beard! This immediately prompted Pat to start regrowing his without permission!

Sean Kinsella is a big easy-going Monaghan man who has won enormous respect for himself among Republican prisoners in English jails. Sean was a barber until he decided to cast aside all thoughts of personal wealth, to head for the hills with an armalite in one hand and a barber's kit in the other! One day a Cockney, on hearing that Sean was a barber, was heard to remark, "What does he part your hair with then, a forty-five?"

My time in solitary was almost at an end, however it must be said that in all the time I spent there one of the things that most influenced me was an old tattered copy of *Germinal*, which was written by the famous French author, Emile Zola. Somehow this had got mixed up among the escapist dime novels that we were normally issued. *Germinal* is the singularly most vivid book that I have ever read on working peoples' struggles against Capitalism. There isn't a romantic syllable in the whole book. Hard reality stares you in the face from each page. Perhaps I had the dubious advantage of reading it in the spartan conditions of solitary confinement, but I believe it is one of the strongest arguments ever put forward, showing the dire need to bring about a socialist society.

In June, almost ten months after our arrival in Wandsworth we were moved out to other long term prisons. Mo Cunningham was taken to Long-Lartin and I was shipped out to Albany on the Isle of Wight.

It was a beautiful June day as we travelled through the south of England towards the Isle of Wight. The journey was uneventful and the conversation among the screws had the monotonous similarity that I was to hear again and again over the years. They talked mainly about their cars, holidays they had enjoyed or were about to embark on, or they spent their time back-stabbing their colleagues.

When we arrived at Portsmouth we got the ferry over to the island. For security reasons prisoner's escorts were given priority, so we were first on the ferry and first off. The move from Wandsworth's dungeons to the relative freedom of prison island was a welcome one. On arrival at Albany I was given a routine medical check-up. When I was weighed I was shocked to find that I was only ten stone three pounds, the lightest I had been since I was sixteen years old.

I was allocated to C Wing where I met Mo's brother, Busty Cunningham, who was also doing a twenty year stretch for bombing operations in London. This tenacious wee Strabane man had a passion for punk music and Manchester United, otherwise he was quite normal! He was a much better footballer than his brother Mo, in fact off the field he was quiet and unassuming but on the field his skill and turn of speed were a joy to behold.

Busty brought another Republican to my cell to see me, his name was Liam Baker and he had been sentenced for conspiring to blow up the QE2 liner, on which he had been a "winger". Liam had the most exquisite beard I had ever seen, it was blue/black, tinted with grey. Among his compatriots, Liam was known as a dapper dresser and I believe he cut a dash around many a town in his famous three piece

suits. From Belfast, Liam was a very competent sketch artist. He also had a great *grá* for the Irish language, which he had learned to speak fluently while in prison.

Later I met big Sean Kinsella, whose favourite maxim on prison life was, "Prison life never gets too hard as long as the old Oglagh keeps battling on". This saying of Sean's clearly shows the very strong links between the P.O.W. and the War of Liberation in Ireland.

Next day I met Paddy Mulryan, Kevin Dunphy, Pat Fell and Sean Smythe, the latter being three more innocent Irish prisoners. Paddy Mulryan is a likeable Dubliner with a keen political mind, who enjoyed nothing better than a heated political debate. He was also a fine runner, one of the best among the P.O.Ws, and the best P.O.Ws were usually the best runners in long-term jails. Kevin Dunphy, who had a physique like a mini-Tarzan, was also a good runner. Kevin was also a general handyman, if someone wanted something made quickly for a visit, Kevin was the man to do it. He always offered his help with a great generosity of spirit. Pat Fell from Coventry was on D Wing, he studied as an Open University student. Sean Smythe, an innocent man framed together with the Maguire family, could only be described as a Belfast character. He loved slugging matches, and never failed to be in the middle of some controversy. One day while engaged in an argument with Sean Kinsella about the Provies he claimed he was a Sticky Officer and had a gun hidden away. However when Sean asked him what kind of weapon it was, he became very flustered, so Sean put it to him that maybe it was a blunderbuss, to which Sean Smythe gratefully replied, "Aye, aye, that's what it is!" The four or five of us who were in the company then burst out laughing at Sean Smythe's little act of bravado. Believe it or not, to this day he doesn't know what we were laughing about!

About two weeks after I arrived in Albany, there was a General Election in the Free State and there was an outburst of joy, among the Irish prisoners, when the Coalition were unceremoniously dumped out of government by the Irish people. We obviously had no illusions about their successors, but the mere fact that hated figures like Cooney and Cruise O'Brien had lost their seats was a cause of great celebration among the P.O.Ws. When Sean Kinsella heard the news he jumped out of his prison bed at 3.00 am and shouted from his cell window that C.C. O'Brien had lost his seat. Next morning I met with a query from an irate Cockney, who had been woken from his sleep,

"So who the fak is this Conor Cruise O'Brien anyway? Lost his fakking seat, 'as he? Hope someone smashes it over his head when they find it!"

The feud between the Official and Provisional IRA in August 1977 was a dispiriting affair. But it exposed the counter revolutionary role being played by the Stickies, who claimed to be socialists and to be fighting in the interests of the working classes when in fact the only people they had attacked since 1972 had been working class nationalists.

In September Anthony Cunningham arrived on D Wing after having been sentenced to ten years for being linked in some way to the Balcombe Street Four. He was a dark, serious Falls Road man with a wealth of knowledge of characters from the Civil Rights period and stretching back to the 1920s. Anthony was an intense debater, when he allowed himself to be drawn, but the most unathletic Republican I met in English jails. He wouldn't have walked only he had no alternative! He used to love shouting at us as we ran around the yard with the sweat running from us, "Go on ya boy ya!" in a mock County Down accent. Until one day a County Down lad who was running behind us, unknown to Anthony, shouted back at him, "Go away ya dosser ya. You're as useless as tits on a bull!" Anthony, taken aback at first, responded in good cheer, with the inevitable "Go on ya boy ya!"

Sean O'Conaill arrived in mid-September from Gartree suffering from terrible stomach pains. At this point he was a few days on hunger strike, protesting at his lack of medical attention. Every time he complained from his stomach pains, he was given an aspirin and a glass of water. He had been suffering from these pains since 1974 but had receive no medical attention whatever from the prison doctors. We complained vociferously to the governor and they eventually agreed to have Sean's stomach X-rayed. Next day he was taken to Parkhurst prison to have the X-ray and he was found to be dying of cancer. The cruel irony of this was that had the cancer been treated earlier, it could have been cured. So Sean O'Conaill died because of medical neglect. A man of integrity, an English man who had attempted to join the IRA but who had his application rejected because it was feared he may have been a spy. Instead of becoming disillusioned, he organised his own unit and carried out an attack on a Colonel in the British Army in Newcastle. The Colonel was fatally injured. Later when Sean found himself surrounded by police, he attempted to fight his way out, but eventually after a spirited battle he surrendered. In jail he was especially badly treated because he

was an Englishman who had opposed British Imperialism in Ireland. Rest easy comrade for the struggle continues.

In November Tony Madigan arrived from Parkhurst. Tony was a tall Galway/Birmingham man who had been given a ten year sentence for bombing operations in Birmingham, he had been with me in Winson Green. He was a great politico, always lively in discussions and a committed Republican Socialist. Tony had been on the protest on the roof of Wakefield when Frank Stagg died on hunger strike. He has some great memories of Frank which he proudly cherishes.

Eddie O'Neill from Coalisland in County Tyrone also arrived in November, from Leeds where he had spent ten weeks on a cooler. In September Paul Norney, Ronnie McCartney and Eddie were captured climbing the outer wall of Wormwood Scrubs. Their escape was foiled when about fifteen screws, who were about to clock off duty, were summoned to capture the lads. After a brief resistance they were taken to the Block. Two weeks later Eddie was moved to a dungeon in Leeds, where the red light was kept on all night. He was forced to wear escapees' clothes, trousers with a yellow stripe down each side and a square yellow patch on the back of this jacket, hence the term "being on patches", as the description of a prisoner on the Category C Escape List.

A highly intelligent Republican, Eddie is a great conversationalist. The few months we were to spend together in Albany were a great benefit to me and to all of us. Ed and I used to run around the old goat track, discussing every topic under the sun. Eddie was of *seanachie* stock and had a wonderful way of telling stories which kept you listening attentively, irrespective of whether the story was about politics, poetry, religion or any other aspect of civilisation. Like Paul Holmes, Eddie had been interned for a while in the early 1970s and he had volumes of stories from this period.

The month before Christmas is known as Famine Month among prisoners, because the screws cut back the already meagre rations in this period. They do this so that they can be seen to give us a little bit extra for two days at Christmas. It is the old psychological game, you starve a man for a month then give him half decent food for two days and you might convince him that he is living in the lap of luxury.

Well on Christmas Day we all got our wee individual cakes, six inches in diameter, a slice of turkey and our annual ration of Brussels sprouts. As you can imagine, everybody was deliriously happy! On Christmas Day Anthony Cunningham refused to eat his food, to show

his contempt for this amateur psychology. To our eternal shame, none of the rest of us backed Anthony. But we did have the decency not to eat in his company!

1978

The new year 1978 began with much discontentment with our visiting conditions. The visiting room was a two door affair. At the outer door two screws and a police woman, who searched the women visitors, sat watching everything. Two more screws sat at the inner door, watching and listening to everything. In the middle of the room a table stretched from wall to wall preventing any physical contact between the prisoner and his visitor. These type of visits are very repressive because they prevent a natural flow of conversation. You are always conscious of the screws listening and this puts an intolerable strain on visits.

In mid-February, after having continually pressed the governor and the Board of Visitors to change the visiting conditions, we decided to protest. We were all agreed on the fact that a protest should be made, but we could not agree on what type of protest we should adopt. Eventually we put it to a vote, three voted for a roof protest and four voted for a refusal to do prison work.

In theory, the Board of Visitors is supposed to be an independent body whose function is to ensure that any grievance a prisoner may have is thoroughly investigated. In practice, however it is merely a rubber stamp for the governor. The following is an illustration of its contemptuous attitude.

I went to see the Board of Visitors concerning our visiting conditions. I asked them why it was that we, the P.O.Ws, were being singled out for these repressive visits while every other prisoner in Albany was receiving Open Visits. Their chairman stated that the Home Office had laid down guidelines on how special security visits should be supervised. I then handed him a letter which I had received from my solicitor which set out a question asked in the House of Commons by Jean Maynard, M.P. for Sheffield, Brightside,

about visiting conditions in Albany and throughout the dispersal system. The answer given by the Home Office representative was that all prisoners received similar type visits and that Irish prisoners were treated no differently from any other prisoner. This letter had them in a quandary, but the chairman of the Board, an ex-admiral and member of the Conservative Monday Club, soon recovered by saying, "You may petition the Home Office about this anomaly but your complaint is rejected". I immediately replied that the Board of Visitors was supposed to act as a collective body and that he, as chairman, held no dictatorial powers, he therefore had no right to reject my complaint without consultation with the other members of the Board.

This appeared to further enrage him, he proceeded to order me out of the room, saying that he would send for me when they had reached their decision. While waiting out in the corridor, I knew that the answer would be the same, but suffice to say that I had taken great pleasure in putting one over on the old admiral! Two minutes later I was recalled only to be told that my complaint had again been rejected.

In every Dispersal Prison there is a resident psychologist whose job it is to make parole reports on long-term prisoners. From time to time most prisoners are called up by this deity. But as our policy was to refuse all interviews with prison personnel, we never got to see these deities. However one morning I had no wish to go to the workshop so I acceded to their request. This really surprised the screw who had asked me. Anyway about ten o'clock I was brought up to the psychologist's office. I walked in and sat down opposite her while she went through the motions of sorting her very important papers. When she formally opened the interview, I stood up and told her that I, as a P.O.W., never gave interviews to prison personnel. As I was walking away she asked, "Well why did you come here?" I answered, "Well Ma'm, I just wanted to see what a psychologist looked like!" She didn't know what to make of this so I left her with a puzzled look on her face.

At the beginning of April, we embarked on a "no work" protest. We were immediately taken to the solitary confinement block. So with all the Republican prisoners, barring the innocent Pat Fell and Sean Smythe, in solitary, we began a campaign of disruption. By this I mean that we made a lot of noise, we shouted to each other for prolonged periods, sang and banged doors, and, of course, the ordinary

prisoners down there with us, joined in. The result was that the screws felt they were losing control of the unit.

One night an Irish prisoner named Delpinto from Derry was brought down to solitary and they put him in a cell without a light. As he was next door to Eddie O'Neill he shouted to Eddie about his predicament. The outcome of this was that we made an impromptu decision to bang and kick our doors until he was given a light bulb. We kept up this barracking for two full hours, until they finally relented and young Delpinto was presented with a light bulb. Screws take minor defeats like this very seriously, so a few of us were told that the next time we went on a cooler in a local (short-term) prison, we would get the "treatment" for our arrogance.

A few days later they were coming around to take us for our weekly bath, but when they reached Busty Cunningham's door he was doing his daily work-out. He asked them to take the lad in the next cell first so that he could finish his exercises. They refused saying that you have it now or not at all. Busty repeated that he was finishing off his work-out, so they slammed the door shut on him.

The word soon got around of what had happened with Busty. Soon we had every man on the block banging and shouting and generally causing as much noise as possible. We kept this up for a least four hours, but this time they didn't relent, so we decided to cool it for two hours, to give us time to plan new tactics. Within an hour they came and brought Busty for his bath!

The cells in this block contained no beds, only a mattress on the concrete floor. The governor's excuse for this was that seven years ago a group of prisoners used their beds to break down the internal walls. When reminded that these same walls had been rebuilt with special reinforced steel and it would therefore be futile to attempt to break them with parts of a bed, he refused to accept this logic. He insisted on behaving in an infantile and petty way by punishing all prisoners for something that was perpetrated by another group seven years previously. He was adamant that no beds would be installed while he was in Albany, so the situation could only lead to direct confrontation.

Two days later Stephen Blake from Letterkenny arrived on C Wing. The news was brought down to us by the Block cleaner. Eddie O'Neill was moved out to Gartree and later that evening Pat (*Tipp*) Guilfoyle arrived from Gartree to A Wing. Speculation was rife in the Block that another P.O.W. would be moved out and I was the favourite. But as I explained to Kevin Dunphy, only three out of the

favourites ever win. This reply caused great hilarity among the P.O.Ws. But at 6.00 am the next morning there were shouts of "3 to 1 on that you're going to Wakefield" and I cursed them all in good humour.

So I left the solitary block in Albany with a touch of nostalgia for the lads I was leaving in that concrete dungeon. When I reached Albany's reception area, I studied every screw's face to see if I recognised any of these fine gentlemen who had come to take me to another of Albion's notorious dungeons. I didn't know any of them, however I did detect the harsh tones of Yorkshire in their accents. So the 3 to 1 favourite, Wakefield, was definitely on the cards.

We caught the 8.00 am ferry to the mainland. At 9.00 am we left Southampton and headed north in the prison van, escorted front and back by armed Special Branch. We moved steadily up along the east coast of England, skirted London and drove through Oxford's narrow, hallowed streets. Seeing the mediievally robed students strut about pretentiously reminded me of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster, contemplating the Iron Duke's statement that the Empire had been won on the playing fields of Eton. I was heartened with the thought that these pretentious pups would never sustain that Empire.

We arrived in Leicester at half past noon. We were given dinner. I was locked in a cubicle, still handcuffed, I had to eat the dinner in bondage, so to speak! At 1.30 pm we hit the road again. The landscape in Leicestershire and Derbyshire is nondescript, but when we reached the Pennines the scenery changed dramatically. The sheer ruggedness of the landscape is breath-taking and much as I dislike Yorkshire screws, I have a great affinity for the pre-historic Pennines. It is almost as if you are travelling back through time. There is a cold loneliness in the misty peaks and hill-tops which, given a little imagination, could lead you to believe that the Glacial Epoch had just passed!

We arrived in Wakefield at 4.00 pm. The entrance to this prison is particularly depressing. It is a dilapidated Napoleonic structure with damp, crumbling walls exuding a rancid smell which would depress the spirit of Job. The whole atmosphere was so oppressive that by the time they had checked and cross-checked my belongings, given me my evening meal and banged me up, I was just about ready for a roof job!

At 6.00 pm the cell doors were opened to give us two hours recreation. The first thing I heard was the soft and gentle Belfast accent of one Tony (*Red Flash*) Clarke. I looked over the landing to

locate the owner of this sweet accent when my eyes fell on the red-haired, athletic looking gentleman, whose voice was still assaulting some Yorkshireman's ear. I called to him, "Where can I find Jimmy Ashe or Michael Reilly?" two of our P.O.Ws who were in this prison. At once Tony responded to a fellow P.O.W. and he came up to my cell to tell me all the *scéal* on the prison.

He told me that we were together on C Wing with Paddy Armstrong, one of those who had been framed for the Guildford operation. Also there were Michael Reilly and John Hayes. The latter was an extremely dedicated and genuine Dublin Republican who was serving twenty years for bombing operations in London. Recently he had been given a further four years for assaulting Kenneth Littlejohn, the British spy who had infiltrated the Officials in the early 1970s. On D Wing were Paul Norney, from Belfast, Jimmy Ashe, a Dublin Brummy and Mick Murray, an iron-willed Dubliner, who was later to endure five years on the Blanket in two British dungeons.

On A Wing were Joe Mooney and Billy Armstrong, a wily Belfast Republican who was convicted of the Old Bailey bombing operation. Billy, another *seanachie*, regaled us with war stories. While in prison he had spent two periods on patches for escape attempts. Next day I had the opportunity of meeting all of them while on exercise, except, that is, for Mick Murray who was in the Block finishing off 60 days solitary confinement for assaulting a screw who had constantly harassed him.

This first meeting of comrades in a new prison is a phenomenon which I have difficulty in describing properly. To say that there exists an intense, almost spiritual feeling of solidarity between newcomer and settled comrades, is perhaps to underestimate the bonds of comradeship expressed at these meetings.

In Wakefield the exercise yard is tiny, measuring only thirty yards by five. With a prison population of 750, this is hopelessly inadequate. If every prisoner came out for exercise at the same time, the yard simply couldn't hold them. Because of the massive overcrowding most prisoners don't exercise on a regular basis in this prison. Nevertheless even the tiny minority who attempt to take advantage of this period of fresh air every day find themselves cooped in like battery hens.

A week or so after I arrived Mick Murray was released from the isolation unit. His ability to articulate his thinking was severely curtailed after spending 60 days, that is two whole months, without

speaking to another human being. Still we had a hearty reunion and talked of old times. Mick is an excellent but dirty debater, very much of the old school - a Cathal Brugha type of Republican. A man of vast experience and much respected among his comrades.

Three weeks later Vince Donnelly from Castlederg in County Tyrone arrived from Long Lartin. Vince was doing thirty years recommended for bombing operations in London. When he arrived in Wakefield, Vince was on hunger strike because of the lack of proper medical treatment. He ended his hunger strike when we explained to him that there were other developments in the offing. Vince is a tremendous character of high spirits from the Sperrin range. Another natural *seanachie*, he has a wealth of folklore stories and stories of the building sites in England. In appearance, he is a double for the comedian Walter Matthau and he often imitates this American comic to the hilarity of his captive audience! An unbreakable Republican, Vince has spent many long periods in solitary because of his principled refusal to bend in any way to the prison authorities.

On July 5, a Sunday, we were taken from our cells and frog-marched to the Isolation Unit. The prison was thoroughly searched and they found escape equipment in the form of a couple of handmade ropes, a crude knife and four pounds in single notes. This gave them the excuse to round up every Republican P.O.W. in the jail and take them to the unit. Our cells were completely empty but at 9.00 pm they came around to give us a book each to read. When they came to *Red Flash* Clarke he asked for a cowboy book. The screw performing this chore, thinking he would make a fool out of *Red Flash* said, "All your mates asked for political books, so why is it you are looking for a cowboy book?" Tony looked him in the eye and said, "Well you know, when in Rome do as the Romans do!" The screw nearly cracked up and went away scowling.

Next morning after breakfast Billy Armstrong and Vince Donnelly were moved out on coolers to Strangeways prison in Manchester. Later Michael and John Hayes were moved to Armly prison in Leeds and still later Tony Clarke and myself were shifted to Durham prison. Mick Murray and Paul Norney were kept in the Isolation Unit.

When I arrived in Durham, I discovered that Hughie Doherty was there on a cooler from the Special Security Block (SSB) in Leicester. That night we managed to make contact through the window and Hughie informed me that Eddie Butler was also on a cooler but he was being held in Strangeways. Our conversation was sporadic because of the distance separating us, we also found it diffi-

cult to understand each other. *Red Flash* derived great amusement from this and called out the window that it was the first time he had met two Donegal men who couldn't understand each other!

Next morning Hughes left a book in the recess for me which I had been meaning to read for a long time, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. I believe that this text is essential reading for anyone who is interested in understanding the economic, political and social problems besetting this world. It is a clear and concise analysis on how the major capitalist powers use foreign investment to impoverish small underdeveloped countries. The Irish Free State is a classic example of this form of exploitation. After the "Tan War" the Free State was given nominal independence and the first thing they did was turn their guns on those forces in Ireland who opposed imperialism in its entirety. The British had withdrawn militarily from the 26 counties but they still controlled it through the massive financial investments they held in the Free State semi-colony. The Free State is a neo-colonial state, just like Kenya, Zambia, Pakistan or Malaysia. The British pulled out militarily from all those countries, but still control them economically through massive foreign investments.

To understand the parallels between the Free State and other neo-colonial countries, books written by the powerful Kenyan author Ngugi Ula Thieng'o are highly recommended. Some examples are; *Weep not Child*, *A Grain of Wheat* and *Devil on the Cross*. These demonstrate the total subservience of the Kenyan ruling class to the dictates of British Imperialism. Ngugi's scathing attacks on this corrupt system have resulted in his being held for lengthy terms of detention for political offences. Recently he has spoken from the platform of an Irish solidarity movement in London and proclaimed that he is proud to stand with his Irish comrades.

Hughie's books had been sent on from Leicester, so he became my illicit library for the time I spent there. This highly principled, fiercely determined Republican from Carrigart won immense respect from everyone who met him. Having got to know this comrade, it was with mixed feelings that I left Durham. This filthy, dilapidated, Victorian prison held no attraction for me but leaving staunch comrades was another matter.

Within a few days of my return to Wakefield, I had a fair idea of what had happened in my absence. Mick Murray had been moved to Wormwood Scrubs. Vince Donnelly, John Hayes and Billy Armstrong were put on patches for attempting to escape. This meant that they

were not allowed to take part in recreation. From 6.00 pm to 8.00 pm prisoners were allowed to watch television (black & white) and play darts. Those on patches were allowed to go to work as normal but they were excluded from exercising with the rest of us.

A special exercise period was set aside for the six Category E prisoners, four of whom were Republican P.O.Ws. Paul Norney was the fourth. An ardent and unapologetic Republican, Paul had been on patches since the previous October when he had attempted to escape from the Scrubs with Eddie O'Neill, Eddie Byrne and Ronnie McCartney. The other two were Frank Davies, a West Indian who was serving twenty-one years for the "Spaghetti House Siege" in London, and a Cockney named Jameson. So the situation was set for confrontation.

During this same month there was a roof top protest by Republican P.O.Ws in Gartree. Those involved, Eddie O'Neill, Martin Brady, Phil Sheridan, Paul Holmes, Gerry Mealey, Peter Shortt and the innocent Paul Hill sold the screws a dummy by creating a distraction in the exercise yard. The seven lads were assisted onto a lower roof by 6'2" John McCluskey from Fermanagh. Having succeeded in getting all the lads on to the roof, John unfortunately was caught himself and taken to the Isolation Unit. The seven stayed on the roof for two days. At the same time the Prisoners Aid Committee (PAC), led by Jackie Kaye, had organised a protest in the form of the largest march in Britain since Bloody Sunday. Over 8,000 people took part to call for the repatriation of Irish prisoners. Jackie deserves credit for unifying the fragmented left on this issue, a feat not performed before or since this march. Some sections of the left are only too willing to use shibboleths or distortions to opt out of giving support to the War of Liberation in Ireland. Others, a small minority, thankfully remain dedicated to this struggle. Anyway after the seven lads came down from the roof protest, they were stuck in an Isolation Unit for two months.

In mid-August I decided to go on the blanket for repatriation. As a result I was in the Isolation Unit, the infamous F Wing. I was given a towel to wrap around me but no blanket. My bed was removed from the cell between 6.00 am and 8.00 pm. The only time that I was allowed out of the cell was at 7.00 am to slop out. During the weeks that I spent on the blanket, I never talked to another prisoner and only very infrequently to a screw.

When my wife visited me in October she informed me that there was no support among the other P.O.Ws throughout England for a

sustained blanket protest. So I decided to come off the protest. Bad communications played havoc with our plans in English jails. The usual thing happened only two weeks after I abandoned my protest, three other P.O.Ws in Albany went on it. These were Busty Cunningham, Liam Baker and Anthony Cunningham. They stayed on it for eighteen months. A week after they began *Iron Will* Mick Murray joined it and stayed on the Blanket for five years.

Meanwhile back in Gartree developments took a serious turn following the forcible drugging of a black prisoner. Michael Blake was serving life for something he always swore he hadn't done. Despite the fact that he had received new information in relation to his case, the prison authorities consistently refused him access to his solicitor. Through sheer frustration he got involved in a couple of verbal confrontations with the prison governor. After the second of these, he was dragged to the Isolation Unit and forcibly injected with Paraldehyde, rendering him unconscious for three days.

Later on that evening word filtered back from the Isolation Block to the wings about the drugging incident. Soon a delegation had been formed from the various factions in the prison. The delegation then approached the B Wing governor and requested that one of them be permitted to visit Michael in the Block to verify that he had not been ill-treated. This reasonable request was sternly rejected, so the prisoners felt that they had to make a protest to protect themselves from being subjected to a similar fate.

They set out to smash the place up. Soon the news had spread to the other wings but the main concentration of the riot remained on B Wing. There were pockets of resistance on the other wings, but no major outbursts. Once again the P.O.Ws participated, some in the thick of the trouble, others on the fringes, according to the level of action or the particular wings they were allocated to. The riot lasted all through the night. It was the first instance of a prison riot caused directly by the misuse of drugs on defenceless prisoners.

Doctor Smith, the prison doctor in Gartree, compiled a report on this riot which he titled *The Long Night*. He totally obscured the real reasons for the disturbances. Instead he blamed the riot on politically motivated prisoners and dangerous psychopaths. He recommended that these prisoners should be kept permanently in Isolation Units. He also recommended that all literature entering the prison be strictly censored and that socialist and anti-democratic books should be completely banned. He further stated that only books dedicated to the "democratic ethos" should be allowed in!

This doctor spent nineteen years as a psychiatrist in Broadmoor, a prison for the mentally ill. Many prisoners believe that this has led him to view all problems as psychiatric ones. This 'democratic' doctor has the unenviable reputation of sectioning off more prisoners than any other doctor in British prisons. This practice is known in the prison slang as "nutting off" and is a fairly regular practise in English prisons. I will give two more illustrations of the drug abuse in Gartree in order to show clearly that Michael Blake's treatment was not an isolated incident.

Gerry, an English prisoner from Kent, had the reputation of being a militant prisoner. When he arrived in Gartree he was consigned to the mail bag shop. Gerry refused to do this degrading work, as he had consistently refused all through his sentence. So for a period of two months he stayed in the Isolation Unit rather than sew mail bags. Then the 'democratic' doctor entered the scene to interview Gerry. Now Gerry knew that an interview with this doctor was usually the preliminary move in the "nutting off" process. He admitted that this knowledge scared the hell out of him but decided to stick to his principles and refuse to sew the mail bags. However a week later the 'democratic' doctor requested that Gerry come for a second interview. Gerry refused but within the hour the 'democratic' doctor arrived at his cell door to tell Gerry that he would be back in two hours' time to interview him. Gerry still declined.

Half an hour later Gerry was given his evening rations. After he had eaten he sat in the corner of his cell, as was his custom. A few minutes later when he tried to get up he became very groggy. When he did eventually reach his feet he had to lean against the wall. Confused and disorientated, he was unable to fathom out what was happening to him. Then suddenly the cell door opened revealing the 'democratic' doctor flanked by two medical orderlies. "I presume that you have got the message", he said. Gerry then remembers trying to speak but he was unable to do so. This warning was enough for Gerry, next morning he went back on the wing and began to sew the mail bags.

Parallels to this misuse and abuse of dangerous drugs can be observed in the writings of American psychiatrist Dr. B. F. Skinner, whose theories on Behaviourist Psychiatry have definite fascist leanings.

The second illustration concerns the period I spent in Gartree from 1975-76. One night during recreation I was watching a *World in Action* programme about drug abuse in Russian psychiatric hospitals.

The narrator explained the dangerous side effects of such commonly dispensed drugs such as Valium, Mogadon and Largactyl. The latter was developed to stop cattle roaming too far on the Australian prairies. When administered to humans, their actions become zombie like. In the prison that night the audience of prisoners were fascinated by this programme. The only interruptions were the occasional cat calls of "Commie bastards" or "Rusky monsters", then about five minutes from the end of the programme a screw issued the nightly authoritative shout of "Treatment!" At this about half the audience trooped off to stand in line for their daily doses of Valium, Mogadon and Largactyl! None of them could see the terrible irony involved let alone suggest that a similar investigation should be made into drug abuses in English jails.

I actually saw prisoners competing to see who could consume the most Mogadon while the laughing medical orderlies looked on! It has become quite useless trying to tell prisoners about the dangers of taking these drugs. Many have become addicted to them and depend on them to get a night's sleep or to withstand the utter monotony and boredom of prison life. The prison authorities have a vested interest in maintaining the present system as it is a means of controlling at least a part of the prison population. While this system of abuses continues, outbreaks like the Gartree drug riot are inevitable. Such assertions as the 'democratic' doctor's that the riot was politically motivated are patently untrue. It would be more honest to admit that the drug abuse of prisoners is politically motivated.

Back in Wakefield. A few days after I ended my Blanket protest, word was circulating among the lads that we should do something to show solidarity with the lads in Gartree. Especially so as some of the Gartree protestors had arrived in the Wakefield Isolation Unit. These included one P.O.W., Martin Brady from the Dog Battalion. No one was quite sure who was organising the thing and there was an uneasy feeling that the screws had manipulated the whole situation. Consequently the prisoners were slow off the mark and any thought of protest ended when about twenty prisoners were moved on coolers to other long-term prisons.

The cooler is a form of internment within the prison system whereby a prisoner can be dragged from a long-term prison to a local (short-term) prison for an indefinite length of time. This can range from one month to the end of your sentence. Personally I have experienced coolers ranging from one month to twelve months.

This form of internal internment is used extensively against Republican P.O.Ws. For example, two P.O.Ws, Hughie Doherty from Donegal and Eddie Butler from Limerick were held on coolers for two years in almost total isolation, without ever being given any reason for this terrible treatment. Brendan Dowd spent two years on the Ghost Train being shunted from one Isolation Unit to another. In that two year period he was moved between eight prisons. It was no coincidence that Brendan's trip on the Ghost Train happened in the period immediately preceding the appeal by the four innocent people accused of the Guildford bombings. As it happened Brendan was a key witness for the defence in this appeal! After two years in isolation Brendan was unable to express himself clearly in court and the judge seized on this as a pretext for dismissing the appeal against conviction of four completely innocent people: Paul Hill, Gerry Conlon, Paddy Armstrong and Carole Richardson. Being a P.O.W. and privy to the true facts of the Guildford operation, I have no doubt that the British judiciary and the British Home Office conspired together to ensure that Brendan Dowd, the key witness, was sufficiently disorientated when he reached the witness stand.

Vince Donnelly and John Hayes returned from their coolers in Manchester and Leeds, respectively, in the beginning of December. The two lads were in jubilant form as usual. The message that their high spirits were declaring was, "You'll never break a P.O.W."

Just before Christmas we decided that we should, voluntarily, join our comrade Martin Brady in the Isolation Unit. Martin had been brought to Wakefield as a result of the Gartree Drug Riot. So on Christmas morning we walked down to the offices on our various wings and requested that we be taken to the Isolation Unit. The screw in charge of C Wing refused to do this when I asked him. So I looked at Tony *Red Flash* Clarke and said, "It looks like we'll have to smash the office windows!" *Red Flash* replied, "A sort of Christmas rough-house, you mean?" At this the screw said, "Listen lads, if you're that desperate I'll take you down".

On D Wing Vince Donnelly was having similar trouble. However when the screw refused, Vince decided on direct action and pulled the tie from the screw's neck saying, "Is that enough for you or will I wrap it round your neck again?" The screw got the message and Vince was frogmarched to the Block.

This particular year Sean Hayes was the only Republican to show his contempt for this post-famine Christmas rations. The rest of us indulged ourselves quietly in our cells, in case Sean should hear us!

While we were making the most of Christmas, the Prison Security Guards, unknown to us, were investigating what they thought was our strange behaviour in volunteering to go to the Block. Having jumped to a series of conclusions, they decided that a major escape attempt was imminent! So they contacted the police Special Branch through a special liaison officer. Consequently the police went on full alert and sealed off the whole area around the prison for the three days we remained on the Block. Afterwards it emerged that they had feared that the IRA were going to blast a way to freedom for us. Such is the paranoid stuff that security screws are made of!

1979

We entered 1979 in a mood set for confrontation because none of our demands had been conceded. We had asked to be given the same rights as other prisoners in Wakefield. Our demands were:

1. Abolition of the repressive visits, experienced only by Irish Republicans,
2. An end to the "patches" escape status for the four Republicans now on it,
3. Access to the Educational Programme,
4. Access to the Gymnasium.

The governor flatly refused to negotiate on any of these demands so we had no alternative but to engage in various types of sabotage operations which are best left undisclosed.

At the end of January 1979 myself and three others, Gerry Cunningham, Joe Mooney and Paul Hill, were called to give evidence in the trial of eleven screws and an assistant governor, who had been charged with assaulting prisoners following Hull Riot in 1976. Altogether about seventy prisoners and two screws were to give evidence in this unique case, the first of its kind in English penal history.

I was brought to the court in the company of two Cockney bank robbers, Bertie Coster and Stephen Doran. At all times we were under heavy police escort and when we arrived at York Crown Court two

police snipers were on display on the roof-tops of surrounding buildings. We were taken down to the basement cells where I was able to communicate with two other prisoners whom I hadn't met since the riot. After five hours waiting in the cells I was finally called to the witness stand. My initial impressions were that the actual court room itself is designed to over-awe ordinary working class people. The judge is sitting on high, like a king on his throne, while the barristers, dressed like medieval courtiers and with their squeaky upper class accents, lend a Shakespearian air to the whole charade. I must admit that as an Irish revolutionary, I did not feel at all comfortable in those extravagant surroundings.

My cross examination began. As expected my interrogators were hostile in the extreme. They had no defence against the seventy prisoners, nor indeed against the two screws who were prepared to give evidence against their fellow screws. Ironically one of these two screws was also named McLaughlin! Instead they tried to win sympathy for the accused by portraying the prisoners, and especially the IRA prisoners, as mad psychopaths. As you can imagine therefore, I got my share of the flak. I was accused of trying to destroy the fabric of society. When I, quite innocently, asked him to define what he meant by the "fabric of society", my interrogator became flustered. He was unable to put his pompous generalisation into ordinary words! He then proceeded to make wild and inaccurate statements relating to the War of Liberation in Ireland, which I tried to refute. I was in the witness stand for one and a half hours that day. I was recalled the next day for a further grilling. This time the line of attack changed, the barrister was grasping for straws when he stated, "As Irish Republicans do not recognise British courts, you are therefore breaking the terrorist (sic) code by giving evidence in this court room". My reply was simply that Irish Republicans do not recognise British courts established in Ireland, but we could not deny the British the right to establish their own courts. He then harangued me about the IRA execution of screws in the North of Ireland. My reply to this was that the screws in the Six Counties were armed and they were paid mercenaries who had chosen to take part in the attempted criminalisation of Irish political prisoners and indeed, of the War of Liberation.

The trial lasted until March and concluded when the jury found eight of the twelve accused guilty. Predictably the judge was extra lenient to these "much maligned" officers who, he reckoned,

were "acting under great stress". The eight were sentenced to four months imprisonment, suspended!

A week before the end of this trial I was moved from Wakefield to Armly Prison in Leeds on a cooler. There was absolutely no reason for this cooler, so I suspected some sort of frame-up. Later I found out the reason for this unusual move.

On the day of the judge's verdict I was allowed to exercise with an English prisoner whom I hadn't met before. He began to talk about the Screws' Trial and informed me that if they were sentenced, they would serve their time in Leeds prison. I then told him that I was one of the prisoners who had given evidence against the screws and he replied that, "It's going to be an interesting situation when they get here". However the old judge's leniency solved the problem by preventing this interesting situation from taking place!

During this cooler, I met a Cockney bank robber whom I had known in Gartree. He had been moved from Hull after a mini-riot had taken place there two months previously. As we walked around the yard he told me some astonishing stories about deals made between the London bank robbers and the Robbery Squad of the Metropolitan Police. According to him, it was common enough for individual members of the squad to supply inside information on bank and other payroll operations, for a percentage of the proceeds of the robbery!

One of the most ironic stories I have ever heard concerns this police robbery squad. According to my Cockney friend, this squad discriminates in favour of crooked coppers when it is recruiting. The newcomer is given a two week trial period to ascertain their suitability, if they prove to be 'honest coppers', i.e. if they aren't sufficiently corrupt or susceptible to bribes, then they are returned to their former unit! At first I found these stories incredible but this man proved to be so reliable in all my dealings with him that I have to accept his word. Later I was to hear similar tales from other London bank robbers which would appear to corroborate the earlier stories.

When I was moved back to Wakefield in May, I was encouraged to undergo a one hour, strenuous, run around the yard with Tony *Red Flash* Clarke. My comrades assured me that the reason for this run was to demonstrate to the screws that irrespective of whether they excluded us from the Gymnasium or sent us on coolers, we intended to stay in top shape.

By this time Tony had become a very strong runner, possibly the best in the Dispersal System in the long-distance category. He didn't

have the speed for sprints but he had great stamina and loved pounding his way around the yard, hence the nick-name *Red Flash*.

Another Republican, Jimmy Ashe, had had a pair of running shoes sent in to him with the brand name *Silver Flash* on the side. One day while running around the yard, Jimmy was boasting about how comfortable these shoes were and how they helped him develop speed. At this red haired Tony sped past us and Vince Donnelly remarked, "I don't care how good these *Silver Flash* are, but they will never keep up with our *Red Flash*." So Tony was re-christened by the bould Vince, from the Sperrin range.

The summer of 1979 brought no changes in attitude from the security junta towards Republicans. They continuously refused to negotiate on any of our demands and they gloated in their harsh treatment of us P.O.Ws. The four lads on patches were having a particularly bad time, they were the subject of the worst excesses of the screws. A clear example of this niggling, petty and often brutal treatment occurred one day in June. Paul Norney, on his return from work was pushed into his cell and had the door slammed after him without being given his dinner rations. Paul banged on his cell door and shouted repeatedly that he be allowed out for his dinner ration. All he got in return was abuse and insults from racist screws. So, not surprisingly, Paul decided to take direct action. He dismantled the bed and using it as a club and ram, set about opening his door. After about three minutes he had broken the door sufficiently wide enough to squeeze out through. Having left down his club, he eased himself out and walked up to the first screw demanding that he be given his dinner. The stupefied screws, who had never experienced such competent, direct action before, relented and gave him his meal!

As a result, Paul was taken to the Isolation Unit where he was held in a sound-proof cell for the following six weeks. Paul's form of immediate action was much admired and talked about among his fellow prisoners. Subsequently I gave him the nick-name *Young Tiger*, an affectionate term for a thoroughly dedicated and principled Republican.

Towards the end of June an incendiary device exploded in the Education Unit in Wakefield Prison. Another device was found in a workshop and, according to the *Wakefield Mercury*, the prison was surrounded by a "ring of steel". British army bomb disposal experts were called in and the prison was closed down and thoroughly searched. That evening Vince Donnelly, Sean Hayes and myself were moved out on coolers to Durham, Leeds and Manchester, respectively.

My stay in Strangeways Prison was four weeks of bitter, racist abuse from National Front screws. This is no idle name-calling as, according to a survey in the *Guardian*, 40% of the screws in Manchester Prison were active members of the National Front. Needless to say they gloried in their bigotry by openly wearing their NF badges while on duty. These screws vented their hatred on Irish and black prisoners, especially.

While I was being held in this prison I was informed by an English prisoner that there had been a debate in the House of Commons on how the IRA had managed to smuggle sophisticated incendiary devices into a top security prison! Apparently a lot of hot air was generated by many alarmist and sensationalist speeches about this horrendous breach of security.

Anyway on our return to Wakefield, Tony Clarke and I were placed in the Isolation Unit. Next day we were taken to the reception to be interviewed by the Special Branch. We refused to comply when we were confronted by Branchmen who attempted to interrogate us. We disrupted the whole affair and eventually they gave in and left. Later they returned to interview Vince Donnelly, and Vince politely advised them to leave. When they persisted with their questioning, Vince picked up the table and threw it at them ... they got the message!

Three days later Tony Clarke was charged with causing a fire. Unusually, the Special Branch returned the following day and dropped the charges! Tony and I were kept in the Isolation Unit until early November under the pretext of a police investigation. It was said that an inquiry was underway and we were expecting to be charged. The long months in isolation led to angry frustration and I remember writing to my brother, Columb, "Is fearr an t-imreas nó an t-uaigneas" - Strife is better than loneliness.

Soon we began to make our discontent apparent to the junta who controlled the Unit. We had very little scope in which to operate, except through direct action. In effect we had two real choices, either physical attacks on screws or governors or throwing the contents of our piss pots over them. We had no illusions about this being successful on its own, because the junta could easily contain us by kicking the hell out of us and throwing us into strong-boxes. Our main hopes were that somehow word would filter back to the wings and our comrades there would do something to alleviate our dire situation.

The situation cooled somewhat when a new governor arrived at my cell to announce that the police had finished their investigations and

wouldn't be pressing charges. He further declared that he had three options open to him:

1. He could keep us down in the Isolation Unit indefinitely;
2. He could move us to another prison; or
3. He could put us back on the wing.

Finally he grandiosely declared that he would return us to the main prison.

I tried to remain nonchalant but underneath I was highly delighted to be getting out of that tomb. Half an hour later while waiting for the screws to take us back to the wing I heard Tony *Red Flash* whistling my favourite tune, *The Foggy Dew*, this was a sure sign that Tony was in top form. I roared, not sang, a verse of *Sam Hall* in return, just so that we could let each other know that we were alive and well and far from defeated!

When we arrived back on the main wing the first thing he said to me was, "We'll have a celebration run tomorrow". I looked at him and replied, "As long as you whistle *The Foggy Dew* all the way!" At this we both burst out laughing.

Later when we met the rest of the lads we were showered with precious prison gifts, a bit of cheese stolen from the kitchens, a bar of chocolate somebody sneaked in on a visit and a book on some subject close to your heart.

Next day I went back to the "Miscellaneous Shop" where Frank Davis, a black prisoner convicted for the "Spaghetti House Siege" in 1975, was still writing his book, *The Way Forward in the African Revolution*. This was a political analysis of the conflicts in Zimbabwe, Angola and Azania. Frank's theory was that the revolution should not stop to consolidate in the event of a national victory such as in Mozambique, Angola or later in Zimbabwe. Instead the revolutionaries should press on for the full liberation of southern Africa, by tackling the major threat of the racist apartheid system, supported by American, British and French imperialism. Basically Frank was a Pan-Africanist who disliked and distrusted the stage by stage revolution being fought in Africa.

Frank was one of those who had been on patches for a long period, so most of his time was spent in his cell reading or writing. He was extremely well read and a highly competent political debater. He had read practically everything that Kissinger had written in order to have a clear understanding of an intellectual imperialist. To tell the truth, in Kissinger he could hardly have chosen a nastier specimen of that particular breed!

Anyway, one morning in December (the Famine month!) Frank and I are sitting at the back of the workshop discussing Kissinger when in come the *burglars* (screws whose job it is to conduct raids throughout the prison). They informed me that they were taking me back to the wing for a special security search. They frogmarched me to my cell but when we got there, instead of searching the cell, they ordered me to pack my kit as I was being moved out on another cooler. They then took me to the reception block where I was handcuffed to a screw and put in a prison van. I was then moved out of Wakefield, under heavy police escort, to Durham Prison, a journey of some two hours. We travelled through some of the finest hill and dale scenery in England. The dales of North Yorkshire are beautiful even in the middle of winter. Through the darkened prison van I was able to take in this splendid view which helped break the tiresome monotony of the journey and distracted me from the asinine conversation of the screws.

When I arrived in Durham I was strip-searched and my kit was thoroughly examined. I was then taken to A Wing, the Block. Two hours later, through the bush-telegraph, I discovered that Paddy Armstrong, an innocent Irishman who was wrongfully convicted of the Guildford bombs, had been moved out to Durham also. Paddy informed me that Billy Armstrong and Frank Davies had also been moved out on coolers. Later still we contacted Eddie Butler, one of the Balcombe Street Siege P.O.Ws. By this time Eddie had spent eighteen months in isolation. He and Hughie Doherty had been moved out of Leicester Maximum Security Unit in June 1978. Hughie was now in Manchester. The two lads were to spend a further six months in isolation before being moved to prisons where they were allowed minimum association. That is to say they were kept permanently in special units, where only eight to ten other prisoners are held. So year in and year out they see the same faces. The lads in these units exist in a semi-isolated world which must make prison much harder to bear in psychological terms.

I talked to Eddie as much as I possibly could through the windows at night. This is not the most congenial way of conducting a discussion, but we were at least able to bring each other up-to-date on recent events. Talking to a comrade whose situation is much worse than your own, brings your personal hardship into perspective and deepens your commitment to struggle on.

Frankie Fraser, a famous Cockney prisoner, jailed in 1966 with the Richardson gang, would often join in our conversation. Frankie was on a permanent Ghost Train, meaning that every two months or so he

was moved on from one prison to another. Throughout all the English prisons Frankie has been moved more often than any other individual.

Frankie began prison life with a five year sentence for robbery. He then got a further ten years for involvement with the Richardson gang. And on top of that he got an extra five years for stabbing a screw during the Parkhurst riots in 1969, during which his two legs were broken. He was clearly a prison militant who never compromised and paid dearly for it! A jovial person by nature, he would always look at the humorous side of things. He and Eddie got on well together.

The Christmas rations that we were given in Durham were definitely the worst I had received in prison. Christmas dinner consisted of a razor thin slice of turkey, three inches in diameter, three potatoes, two of them rotten, and a spoonful of mushy peas. This remark from Frankie sums up the seasonal hospitality: "Typical fakking Norvenors, so used eating coal down the pits that they think Newcastle Brown Ale and mushy peas are the bread and water of life!"

At twelve midnight on New Year's Eve almost every prisoner in Durham got up to their windows and shouted greetings to all and sundry. For five minutes the place was bedlam, then they all climbed down and lay in their beds, probably contemplating just what the Happy New Year would bring!

1980

On January 8 1980, I was moved back to Wakefield. Immediately I sensed a powerful anger amongst the P.O.Ws, especially Vince Donnelly, Paul Norney and Sean Hayes. The three lads were still on patches after 18 months, which meant that on top of the generally repressive system in operation at Wakefield, they had to endure extra deprivations. They were not allowed out of the cells at association time, they weren't allowed to exercise with the other

prisoners, finally they were forced to sleep in cells where the lights were kept on through the night. The latter is in direct contravention of the United Nations Charter on Prisoners' Rights, which states:.. "Any measure which induces sleeplessness or which is aimed at preventing sleep, is tantamount to torture". Yet, Human Rights didn't concern the security junta, who revelled in harassing P.O.Ws.

Having made several approaches to the governor which all ended in curt dismissals of our requests, we decided to take direct action. So, on the afternoon of January 10 at 3.15 pm, we simultaneously smashed up the workshops that we were allocated. I shoved a chair through the screw's window in my workshop and taking a heavy handled brush, jumped up on to the long worktable and smashed four of the hanging fluorescent lights, leaving a trail of sparks and crackles in my wake. I then leapt to the parallel table and proceeded to smash the other lights when to my disgust the brush handle broke. Afterwards a Cockney named Bernie Wheeler claimed he knew what I was thinking: "For a minute you looked at it in disgust and I could almost hear you thinking out loud, 'Typical British workmanship'". Anyway, faced with the dilemma of a broken broom, I jumped to the floor, lifted a chair and promptly finished the job off. At that the workshop door spun open and about twenty screws came running in. I continued to smash windows with metal brackets until they literally dragged me off.

Meanwhile the lads in the other workshops were busy demolishing every machine in sight. Vince Donnelly and Paul Norney managed to get hold of two hammers and were doing a very professional job of destroying as much machinery as possible when the screws came in. One foolhardy little Scottish screw attempted to disarm Paul, but he soon retreated to the safety of his colleagues when he got a wallop on the leg with the hammer. Vince and Paul told the screws that they would lay down their hammers and go voluntarily to the Isolation Block provided the screws didn't attempt any heavy stuff. In the immortal words of Jimmy Ashe, it was a "Mexican stand-off". The screws agreed to the P.O.Ws' terms but Paul Norney and Vince still received a few sly blows from behind as they made their way to the Isolation Unit.

After the smash up began, the screws were informed that the IRA and their satellites were on the rampage! So, apparently one of the bright sparks in the junta reasoned that if we were prepared to smash workshops, then logically it must follow that we would smash the furniture in the cells. To prevent this sinister plot, after we were

brought down to the Isolation Unit, the screws rushed in and tore every piece of furniture from the cells and threw it all in a pile on the floor below, breaking most of it in the process! We later named this syndrome *The logic of a Yorkshireman in panic* and it became the source of many jokes about Yorkshire screws in the coming years.

In a blatant act of revenge, the screws turned off the heating in the cells. Combined with the absence of any furniture, this proved to be an intensification of the sensory deprivation practised in this unit, where prisoners are unable to communicate with other prisoners. The regime later decided to intensify the punishment by refusing to allow us our jackets in the cold cells. According to their new ruling, jackets could now only be worn during exercise periods. To show our contempt for these petty minded automatons and their rules, we refused to ask for the jackets when going on exercise. So January, February and March were spent enduring the cold, loneliness and automatic cut-backs in rations imposed on us by the officially sanctioned psychological torture unit.

It was almost impossible to communicate through the specially reinforced windows of the Isolation Unit. But if you were extremely persistent, you could manage to get a few sentences across to your neighbour. Despite the isolation we were not without our amusing moments. For example one night Jimmy Ashe and I spent about fifteen minutes trying to contact Vince Donnelly, who was cursed with deafness in one ear. Eventually Vince responded and I shouted back, "Where the hell were you?" He retorted, "Ah Jesus lads, I was half way through the Sorrowful Mysteries when you interrupted me!" This response left me in convulsions of laughter since I knew that this old pagan hadn't said the Rosary in decades (pardon the pun!).

On another occasion, an extremely cold February night, Sean Hayes decided to serenade us all by singing, or should I say shouting for he hadn't a note in his head. Anyway Sean's song was *The Monto* and I vividly remember clinging to the frozen bars with flakes of frost in my beard, listening intently to the bould Sean's rendering of this old Dublin ballad. It was one of those moments when deep solidarity overcomes the worst conditions of imposed sensory deprivation. These brief humorous moments stand out clearly against the long, grey, silent hours of monotony spent in the tomb.

In April we were released from isolation. To celebrate, the *Red Flash* and I had a long run around the exercise yard with Tony whistling my favourite ballad, *The Foggy Dew*.

Around this time the Mufti Squad (Minimum Use of Force for Tactical Intervention) brutally attacked a peaceful sitdown protest in Wormwood Scrubs. During this incident over forty prisoners were injured with many needing treatment for head wounds following the baton charges of the Mufti Squad. Among those injured were Roy Walsh, Gerry Young and *Punter* Bennett, all P.O.Ws. Another Irishman, Ralph Carey from Derry, was battered senseless by these uniformed thugs. *Gyp* was one of those rare diamonds who strongly supported the P.O.Ws in every jail he was in. As well as being a tough individual he was also a very generous person. He had spent thirteen long years in English jails yet had never compromised himself or lost his personal integrity. He was one of those Irishmen with whom I am proud to have been associated, irrespective of whether he ended up in jail for political or social reasons.

At night we could hear the Mufti Squad being drilled out in the yard. The shrieks and the shouts of the commanders was farcical and many of the militant prisoners used to call abuse at these mule teams. By day the commanders would be seen strutting about like Hitler's Brown Shirts. In the meantime all the P.O.Ws began to intensify their physical training by running around the yard every day, and by doing sit-ups, press-ups and pull-ups on the handle of a broom laid across the walls of a toilet cubicle. Later three or four social prisoners joined us in these daily workouts.

The screws became very anxious about this and began to question prisoners about the purpose behind this training. Word filtered back to us about the screws' anxiety and a suitably dramatic story was concocted and leaked to known grasses. The story went something like this - the IRA and its allies were setting up a squad to be named the Prisoners Against Repression Team (PART), so that if the Mufti Squad was used against prisoners then PART would spring into action against known dog screws.

In the three days following the leading of this story about fifteen prisoners, loosely associated with P.O.Ws, were called before the governor to be quizzed on their membership of PART! The incredulous prisoners responded with various versions of "Who or what the hell is PART?" Eventually the screws cottoned on to our leak, by this time however the story had caused much hilarity among our fellow prisoners and caused the security junta much embarrassment!

About six weeks after this incident I was moved out early one morning on a cooler to Leeds Prison. This was my fifth from Wakefield and it led me to reflect deeply on the inequity of this so-called

cooler system. Vince Donnelly also had five coolers from Wakefield. Sean Hayes had four, Tony Clarke and Billy Armstrong had three each and Paddy Armstrong and Michael Reilly two each.

The draconian use of this system, under the guise of protecting the security, good order and discipline of the prison, led to the unmistakable belief that the coolers were being used exclusively against P.O.Ws in an attempt to break our resistance. The regime also hoped that it would end our influence among the militant sections of prisoners in English jails. From our point of view resistance is not only important in maintaining our influence, but it is also essential for the cohesion and unity of the unit in each jail. It is also necessary to maintain personal dignity amidst the constant harassment and degradation consistent with spending long years in dilapidated Victorian penal dust-bins, run by security juntas whose paranoia has to be seen to be believed. The constant use of coolers against P.O.Ws is meant to be a deterrent to other prisoners. The message is clear, - associate with the P.O.Ws and you can expect the same treatment. So the cooler system is politically motivated and its main aim is to isolate and demoralise P.O.Ws in English jails.

Towards the end of my twenty eight day cooler in Leeds I began wondering, as is always the case on coolers, whether the authorities would extend my time there by another month, move me back to Wakefield or transfer me to another long-term prison. Early in the morning of July 10 my questions were answered. I was taken to the reception area to be met by and handcuffed to a Wakefield screw. This seemed to indicate that I was going back to Wakefield and thoughts of that dung-house sent anger spiralling through my veins. In the prison van I sat in angry silence watching every signpost in the expectation that we would soon be turning off for Wakefield.

It wasn't until we passed a sign post without the dreaded name of Wakefield that I experienced great relief and joy as I realised that I was being taken to another long-term prison. The rest of the journey down the M1 posed more questions: Where was I going? Which P.O.Ws would be there? Would I be reunited with certain special friends of mine? and What was happening to the comrades I had left behind at Wakefield?

The further we travelled, the surer I became of my final destination. As we were on the M1 leaving Yorkshire, that ruled out Wakefield and Hull. When we passed Leicestershire, Gartree was eliminated. By passing Birmingham, we were excluding Long Lartin and when we turned off the M1 at Bedfordshire and headed towards

Oxford, circumventing London, this ruled out Wormwood Scrubs. This left only two other possibilities, Albany or Parkhurst, both on the Isle of Wight. As I had been in Albany before it was odds on that Parkhurst would be my destination. Only then did I realise that the screw who was navigating was an ex-Parkhurst, this was final confirmation of how correct my deductions had been.

We arrived at the gates of Parkhurst at 6.00 pm. I was immediately brought to the block and told that the *old man*, the governor, would see me the next day. True to form the following morning the Governor of Parkhurst lectured me in this patronising way, on his hopes that I would *settle down in his prison*. I explained to him in very clear terms that I was an Irish P.O.W. and that his interpretation of settling down had no meaning to me.

He proceeded to boast about the great facilities supposedly available in Parkhurst. This amazed me because only the previous year four P.O.Ws and big Lanigan tore the roof off two wings in protest at the lack of facilities, as well as the vindictive use of the cooler system against P.O.Ws in this jail. The four lads, Martin Coughlin, Eddie Byrne, Gerry Small and John McCluskey, spent two days ripping the slates from this Victorian monstrosity. During the operation the screws attempted to hose them down, only to be prevented by the intervention of the other prisoners calling abuse from their locked cells. When the roof-top protest threatened to get out of hand and turn into a full scale riot, the screws desisted from attempting to use the hoses. It was this inter-prisoner solidarity that was the only healthy thing about Parkhurst.

Anyway, to return to the governor's patronising lecture, he finished off by informing me that I was allocated to B Wing. I was put on the ground floor where there are six cells occupied by Category A prisoners, all doing extremely long recommended life sentences. Amongst these was Gerry Conlon, an innocent Irishman, wrongly convicted of being involved in IRA operations. Unless something is done about this travesty of justice, Gerry Conlon will serve a thirty year recommended sentence.

Three of the others, an Englishman, a Scotsman and a German, were doing twenty year "recs". Finally there was an Anglo-Irish Jew who was doing an eighteen year rec. To those who are not familiar with the terminology, this means that the prisoner must complete at least the recommended period of years before he is even considered for release! The nature of these no-hope sentences places an intolerable psychological strain on the prisoner, which in a great many

cases, ends up destroying him. This destruction of the prisoner, as official policy, was confirmed for me during the Hull riot, when, having broken into an office, I was able to read the record of a prisoner serving a recommended sentence. Part of this report, written by an Assistant Governor, stated, "This man must not be released until he is a cabbage". This splendid piece of compassionate humanitarianism is indicative of the barbarous attitudes prevalent among the juntas who govern England's prisons!

On my first day on exercise in Parkhurst I was greeted by Eddie O'Neill whom I hadn't seen since the previous Christmas when he had spent five months on a cooler in Winson Green. Eddie was there the day that Mountbatten and the eighteen Paras were executed. The following morning at about 7 am five or six screws burst into Eddie's cell and kicked him senseless before he even had an opportunity to dress himself. They then had the audacity to charge him with assaulting the screws. Naturally he was found guilty!

I also met Gerry Young whom I hadn't seen since Gartree in 1976. We all exchanged our many stories, needless to say the crack was great for a while. Gerry told me about the Mufti Squad in Wormwood Scrubs the previous year, which I have already related elsewhere. I also met Paul Hill, another completely innocent Irishman, serving a lengthy sentence having been framed for IRA operations.

Eddie and I began running together, and with Eddie anything could happen. We usually managed to combine our running with political, economic or philosophical discussions. Ed had a great talent for asking the kind of questions which made you think deeper and forced you to constantly re-evaluate your own position on any given subject. He was at his most impressive when explaining complicated theory. Often, for the crack I would play the devil's advocate, just to liven up the debate and cause a wee bit of controversy, but Eddie was incredibly resourceful and more times than enough the devil's advocate found himself playing a losing hand!

Two weeks later I got a visit from my wife Mary, in the course of which I learned five other P.O.Ws had been moved out of Wakefield in the four days following my removal. This was the largest permanent dispersal of P.O.Ws from a prison at any one time and constituted a significant victory for the prisoners' dignified stance against discrimination at Wakefield. Vince Donnelly was sent to Hull, Paul Norney to Wormwood Scrubs, Sean Hayes to Gartree and Tony Clarke to Albany. Two months later Jimmy Ashe also ended up in Albany, so

the old Wakefield crew were effectively scattered throughout the English prisons.

The first hunger strike in Long Kesh had a tremendous effect on us in the English jails. We felt extremely frustrated at our inability to do anything effective in support of our gallant comrades. It was especially difficult for us as there were only three P.O.Ws in Parkhurst, so our scope was very limited. When the hunger strike ended in dramatic fashion we fervently hoped that the Brits had learned their lesson. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

Also at this time Gerry Tuite escaped, an event which gave a tremendous boost to the P.O.Ws' morale. It was great to see one of our own beating their much vaunted security system. Following this in the week before Christmas, Eddie O'Neill was moved out to Hull Prison. The screws claimed to have found a key which they linked to Eddie and others.

Christmas seldom passed without some petty act of harassment and this year was to be no different. A couple of days before Christmas Day the governor informed all the prisoners that the Common Fund was not to be paid this year as he had given it to the cook to cover the expense of the special Christmas dinner. Naturally enough a row erupted. The Common Fund is a tax of 3 pence which is taken from each prisoners wage every week, so that usually we would have an extra £1.50 to spend in the prison canteen. To say the least, the governor's arbitrary decision to confiscate it was highly unpopular among the prisoners. A delegation went to meet him but his only defence for this petty vindictiveness was to waffle on about the cost of living. It was useless trying to be logical with this public school educated buffoon whose superior attitude indicated that he would treat working class and black prisoners as he would a trained chimpanzee. Pat them on the head, feign admiration for their base intelligence while explaining why it was economically/ politically/socially impossible to concede to their totally unrealistic demands. If this patronising brush-off didn't work then the big stick would be brought into play. Accordingly the governor threatened that if we didn't return to our cells and see reason, then he had many punitive options open to him. The delegation left and although Christmas passed without any major disruptions, there were many small acts of sabotage carried out over the festive season. So it was that we entered the fateful year of 1981, in the same monotonous day-to-day fashion.

1981

A week into the New Year Vince Donnelly arrived from Leeds Prison, where he had spent the previous four months on a cooler, following a stabbing incident in Hull. The Governor of Hull was a ruthless disciplinarian who sentenced prisoners to lengthy periods in solitary for trivial offences. For instance a prisoner was sentenced to twenty eight days for "refusing to obey an order". Anyway Vince arrived in Hull after spending over two years in the House of Horrors, i.e. Wakefield. One day a Hull screw spat in his face and told him that the Wakefield screws had passed on the word that he (Vince) should be given some special treatment. Vince, however, replied that if they persisted they would get some special treatment themselves. He also warned the governor to call a halt to the victimisation. Nevertheless things went from bad to worse until finally Vince decided on direct action. He procured a home made knife from a militant prisoner and proceeded along to the governor's office where he coolly stabbed him with the home made device. The governor wasn't seriously injured, but Vince was dragged off to the block. Soon afterwards he was moved to Leeds Prison where he was subjected to more vindictive and savage treatment. Three months later he was tried and found guilty at Leeds Crown Court and was sentenced to four months imprisonment! This apparently lenient treatment is irrelevant in Vince's case as he is already serving a thirty year recommended sentence, therefore another four months will make no real difference to his future.

Vince's arrival in Parkhurst was a great boost to me as I was the only P.O.W. on B Wing and Vince was located in a cell opposite mine, on the same landing. I must admit that amidst the hardships of prison life, we had some great crack together. Vince was the Walter Matthau look- and act-alike. One day we were waiting for the dinner rations and somebody asked "What's for dinner?" A wise cracking Cockney quipped, "Steak and chips", and Vince retorted, quick as a flash, "Oh no, not again!"

In prison bad food is always a source of discontent but there are periods when you become so accustomed to eating dished out dross that you no longer think about what you are consuming and you eat it to fill your empty stomach. One day when I had gone through the ritual of picking up my food and returning to my cell to eat it, I had just sat down when a half-caste prisoner called Pablo entered my cell and said angrily "Are you going to eat this shit?" I looked at the food which I had just begun to eat, a spoonful of cold, mushy peas, a half rotten potato and a small square of repulsive gulash. I looked up at Pablo and asked "Are there any more unhappy customers out there?" He replied, "Yes, a few".

So I went out and walked to the senior screw's office, by which time Vince and five or six others had joined me. When we entered the senior screw was sitting at his desk writing. I placed the food in front of him and asked, "Would you eat this crap?" "I don't have to", he replied and I said, "Well neither do we!" We then demanded that the cook be brought onto the wing to inspect his own cooking. After much arguing and the appearance of another few prisoners at his door he relented. When the cook arrived about thirty prisoners had congregated, all in a very militant mood. The cook was a Geordie and when I pressed him about the standard of the food he replied that the meal was wholesome and adequate. I pushed the plate up to his face and said, "Right then, if you think so, then you eat it". Much to my surprise he began to eat the cold dross, commenting after that it was "quite nice". At this many of the prisoners became furious and we all pushed in closer to him and the four screws who surrounded him. Then the Wing Governor came on the scene and some prisoners directed their anger towards him. He in turn threatened to bring in the Mufti Squad. Nevertheless we insisted that we weren't going back to our cells until we got a different meal.

Meanwhile word had spread to C Wing and the prisoners there who were already locked up began to bang on their cell doors and shouted encouragement to us. The situation remained tense and some of us began to prepare for a Mufti Squad assault. However, after a hurried discussion with the cook and the senior screw, the Wing Governor relented and we each received a piece of cheese and a slice of corned beef, the best rations we had received in a long time. This wee victory was a great morale booster for all the prisoners. I fully expected to be sent on a cooler for my part in the dispute, as this is the usual way they have of taking revenge on anyone who refuses to be

intimidated. On this occasion, much to our surprise, the man from the Sperrin Range and myself were not moved out.

One of the few Irishmen I had any trouble with in prison was a man from Aranmore Island who was known as *An tarbh baoil*, a very intelligent but neurotic individual. He had spent three years in the British army guarding the interests of British capital in Africa, as he now realises to his cost. He had spent a year in a mental hospital suffering from the illusion that he could direct air traffic in and out of Heathrow Airport, near London. Other times he believed that he was on the run from the CIA because he had passed secrets to the KGB. He lived in this fantasy world for about a year until eventually he was cured. He told me that the morning he woke up in that dismal hospital and realised the life that he had been leading for the past year was pure fantasy, rendered him the loneliest man in the world. He explained, in graphic detail, his humiliating experiences in that mental hospital, this changed my whole perspective on the mentally ill and how they are treated.

I related to him a story about a prisoner in Wakefield who had broken down and was only able to sit in his chair all day, totally unaware of his surroundings. He explained to me that although this man may have appeared to be totally idle, he was in fact, living a very active fantasy life in his mind.

Life with *An tarbh baoil* could also be amusing: one evening he was arguing with a fellow from Armagh when the Armagh man became exasperated and shouted, "*An tarbh*, go away you oul' head-case!" Quick as a flash *An tarbh* retorted, "I have a certificate to prove my sanity, your permit to walk around here is totally unofficial!"

However the screws used the fact that he could be nussed off again to frighten him into becoming their *agent provocateur*. I warned him that he was being used but he continued to cause trouble for me and the other P.O.Ws. As he was located on my wing, the onus was on me to sort it out. I succeeded in doing this one Saturday morning in the toilet recess. Nevertheless when I left the prison he again attempted to cause trouble and this time Vince Donnelly left him minus three of his teeth. As a result, he attempted to stab Big John McCluskey from Fermanagh, on C Wing. Fortunately John was carrying a jug of hot water and he threw the contents over *An tarbh baoil*. John sustained a cut to his hip, but he managed to finish *An tarbh's* antics for good.

In March 1981 I was moved out on a cooler to Winchester which is situated about ten miles from Southampton. Winchester is the typi-

cal, dilapidated, Victorian monstrosity. I was kept in a converted strip cell which was without any form of heating. In a similar cell opposite me was Kevin Dunphy (*Mini Tarzan*) from Kilkenny. Kevin was on a cooler from Albany. We weren't allowed to exercise together but we were able to converse through the doors at night when the main body of screws had gone off duty. This wee man took all the hardships philosophically and we had many a laugh together about the drink we hoped to share on our release - after all we had less than three years each to serve!

After a month I was moved back to Parkhurst where I discovered that Vince had just returned from a move to Bristol. To celebrate our safe return Vince foraged around for four days until he managed to purloin the ingredients for a bucket of hooch. We celebrated with it a week later. Elsewhere however events had moved on, despite the minor celebrations for our reunion. Our minds were heavy with the thought that across the sea in Long Kesh our comrades had just started the second hunger strike.

Almost immediately I was moved out on a cooler again, less than two weeks since my return from Winchester. This time I was taken to Canterbury Prison in Kent. Canterbury was the cleanest and least dismal local prison that I was ever in. The regime appeared fairly relaxed but this was irrelevant to those of us on coolers as we were locked up twenty three hours a day.

While I was in Canterbury the valiant Bobby Sands died in Long Kesh and I remember feeling incredibly frustrated and powerless. The immensity and nobility of his sacrifice stunned and impressed the whole world but the harlot in Downing Street refused to acknowledge his supreme sacrifice. Two weeks later the bould Francis Hughes died. This courageous warrior from South Derry died as he had lived, battling, in an unyielding fashion, against the forces of occupation.

A week later I was moved back to the Isle of Wight, but this time I was taken to Albany and placed on C Wing with Kevin Dunphy, Jimmy Ashe and a Palestinian P.O.W. called Salim Mohammad who was a sound and reliable friend of the Irish P.O.Ws. On B Wing was Roy Walsh, a staunch Belfast Republican, Busty Cunningham from Strabane who had spent over four years in Albany, and Paddy Hill, an innocent Irishman wrongfully convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings. Paddy was a jovial man from Belfast who had been subjected to a year of terrifying psychological torture before being framed for the Birmingham bombings.

Another of those who had been made scapegoats for Birmingham, Hughie Callaghan, was on C Wing. Hughie's nerves were very bad after all that he had suffered and it was a terrible scandal to have to watch any innocent person being put through so much torment and anguish. Ronnie McCartney from Belfast was also on C Wing. Ronnie was a staunch wee trooper from the Falls Road who loved studying and making things. *Punter* Bennett and Tony *Red Flash* Clarke, also from Belfast were both on A Wing. The *Red Flash* was still running; unfortunately for myself, however, when I arrived in Albany I was suffering from sciatica, so I could only watch Tony doing the long distance kick!

Two weeks after I arrived Busty Cunningham was moved to Long Lartin and a few days later Kevin Dunphy was moved to the Scrubs in London. Meanwhile in the Six Counties Patsy O'Hara and Raymond McCreesh had died and the political tension was at a crisis point. The Medusa Thatcher spat venom and hatred while our comrades nobly endured the cruellest hardships. Comrade after comrade died in a most extraordinary demonstration of revolutionary courage. The names of Bobby Sands and his brave comrades became synonymous with the fight against repression worldwide. They won the hearts and minds of oppressed people everywhere and they demonstrated the inherent nobility of the Republican Socialist struggle to the Irish people.

We were unable to make any serious protest in Albany during this long and tragic hunger strike, even though in our hearts we wanted to make some defiant gesture in solidarity with the incredible sacrifice of our comrades.

It was also around this time that there were two protests by P.O.Ws in English jails. In Wormwood Scrubs Paul Norney, John McCluskey and Billy Armstrong climbed on to the prison roof and destroyed a good section of it. When they came down they were beaten up in the solitary confinement block; a week later they were badly beaten again because the screws felt that they were being arrogant. All three of these P.O.Ws were hardened to these frequent beatings but young Paul seemed to be getting more than enough. He was beaten up in practically every prison he resided in. In Long Lartin the Mulryan brothers, Paddy and Andy, together with Paul Holmes, Martin Brady and Gerry Cunningham climbed onto the prison roof where they stayed for six days displaying their banners of protest. On the final day of the protest some Sinn Fein members picketed the prison in solidarity with the lads. A megaphone was used to

communicate messages of support. When they eventually came down they were given long periods of solitary confinement. One of the Sinn Fein people watching from outside expressed great admiration for the lads because of their tremendous spirit after so many long years in prison.

While comrade after comrade died in Long Kesh our minds were concentrated totally on their unparalleled sacrifice. The mood in the jail was sombre and there was talk of one or two Volunteers from English prisons joining the strike. The idea for this stemmed from our frustration at being unable to do anything concrete to aid our comrades. However other comrades believed that a hunger strike in England would only take the focus away from the lads in the Kesh. While the argument prevailed the frustration continued and the chance of another hunger strike in England remained a distinct possibility right up until the end of the hunger strike.

The ending of the hunger strike was an uncertain period for us, none of us knew exactly what was happening. While we were immensely relieved that no more comrades would have to die, we felt very bitter at the role of the Catholic Church, and in particular Fr. Faul, whose treacherous manipulation of the relatives played into the hands of the British. The Church's fear of Republican Socialism led them in objective terms to direct collaboration with Thatcher. What was equally as cynical was their pretence of apparent, rather than real, concern for the prisoners and their relatives. At the end of September Noel Gibson, a stout-hearted *Oglach* from County Offaly, arrived in the jail. Noel had been sentenced to life imprisonment for wounding a policeman in Manchester and for various conspiracy charges. He had just finished four months in solitary for knocking out a screw in Hull. Noel, together with Roy Walsh and Stephen Nordone, was expert at dumping pots of shit over screws and governors. These tactics were deployed to reverse the degradation heaped on the P.O.Ws by the security junta and their underlings!

Noel, Roy Walsh, Ronnie McCartney and myself were avid GAA fans, so we decided to utilise the special hour of exercise on a Sunday afternoon by playing Gaelic Football instead of the usual run. At first there were only four of us kicking around but gradually the rest of the P.O.Ws joined in. After them the two Palestinian P.O.Ws joined us, then Nageeb Gasmi, the Libyan comrade and an Iranian. The English, Scots, Welsh, West Indian, Latin American, Indian, Spanish, Turkish and Italian prisoners joined us giving the game a real international flavour! It took us about three weeks to teach them the

basics. However, the end result was as enjoyable a spectacle as any Irishman has ever witnessed! We had two multi-national, multi-racial teams built around Noel Gibson and Roy Walsh on one side and Ronnie McCartney and myself on the other. To top it all our referee was a Kerry traveller named Gerry Kelleher. Although he was a strict disciplinarian with regard to petty offences, if you knocked someone out or punched an opponent he would turn a blind eye! That's not to say this ever actually happened as the games were generally very clean affairs. I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed the eight Sunday games we played together. Every time I took a free kick and watched the ball soar before dropping towards a sea of black, white and brown faces, I thought how much Mick O'Connell, Páidí O'Shea or Matt Connor would get great delight from this multi-racial game of Gaelic Football. The names and faces of those staunch lads from all parts of the globe, who risked much to play Gaelic Football with us Irish P.O.Ws, remain with me still.

It was inevitable, yet we hoped against hope that it would not happen, but as always it did. There was a mass move-out of prisoners during a dinner period. Men were shouting from every wing in an attempt to find out what was going on. Amidst all the confusion and bedlam my door was flung open and a screw shouted in, "You're on escort". This time I found myself on a cooler in Winchester. Roy Walsh, Noel Gibson and Ronnie McCartney ended up on coolers in Canterbury, Wandsworth and Bristol respectively. So too did practically everybody who had participated in our games of Gaelic Football in Albany Prison during October and November 1981. One simply mustn't mix sport with politics, eh what old boy!!

In December about half of those who had been moved out were brought back to Albany. The remainder were scattered throughout Britain's dungeons. We tried to resume our games of football, but the same enthusiasm couldn't be strummed up among those prisoners who had previously shown great interest in our native game. To put it bluntly, many of the lads had been scared off, intimidated by the regime, so it was back to running only during our holy hour on Sundays.

It was around this time that the supergrass Christopher Black became the Brits' spearhead in their campaign to break the IRA. A strategy of recruiting some of the foulest, meanest so-called informers and deviants that ever walked.

Psychologically this event was a severe blow to the P.O.Ws' morale in the short-term. However once we began to analyse the reason for introducing this strategy, we realised that it was only the

latest in the long line of assaults on the War of Liberation following in the footsteps of Internment, Bloody Sunday, Criminalisation and the Ulsterisation policies.

Christmas came around once more. This was the time of the year when the screws, traditionally, pretended to be Christians for a day. Normally this farce extended to them putting Christmas decorations in their office and cynically wishing everybody *Happy Christmas!!* Two weeks before Christmas Day the governor printed the prisoners Christmas menu, making sure that it got to the hands of the local press so as to portray prison conditions as idyllic. A Prisoners' Committee smuggled out a letter to the local paper explaining the politics behind the Christmas dinner and offering to donate the prisoners' dinners to the old people's home. The press contacted the governor and his bluff was called when he refused to donate the dinners. His excuse? - it was contrary to prison regulations!!

1982

1982 began quietly. At the beginning of February Stephen Blake arrived from Hull. Stephen was one of the P.O.Ws who was most frequently moved around. He used to remark that he daren't unpack his belongings because he was bound to be shifted the next day!

Things were very quiet in Albany, but in Wormwood Scrubs in London the lads were particularly busy. Three P.O.Ws, Paul Norney, Martin Coughlin and John McCluskey, took part in yet another rooftop protest against prison conditions. In D Wing, the maximum security wing in the Scrubs, prisoners were locked up for twenty three hours a day. It was commonly known in the jails that the Scrubs was now being used as a punitive prison in an effort to intimidate those lads who refused to be broken by the security junta. The three lads stayed up for two days, when they eventually came down they were very harshly treated. Each received 112 days in solitary confinement and lost six months remission. Yet despite the severity of these sen-

tences the lads were not deterred or discouraged from fighting for better conditions for all prisoners.

On July 10 1982 I was on my way back from exercise when I was informed that the Assistant Governor wished to see me. Somehow I knew from the look in the screw's eyes that it was serious. I kept thinking that my father was dead. Normally I would take it easy going to the A.G's office, but this time I ran the two flights of stairs and sped along the corridor. When I entered the office the Assistant Governor looked up at me and picking up what seemed like a telegram, he coldly read the confirmation of my father's death. I was shattered. Reduced to a child I was unable to comprehend that the immortal man had passed from this earth, his great strength dissipated, a true friend lost forever. For the first time I was glad to hear a screw turning the key in my cell door because I wanted only to be left completely on my own.

Later that day I asked the governor permission to go to my father's funeral. He answered that he would contact the Home Office. I knew that they would refuse, but I was bound by a strong of friendship to my father to make this request. Wee Ronnie and Tony Clarke organised the sending of a wreath and mass card on behalf of all the P.O.Ws in Albany.

On Monday evening, six hours after my father's burial the governor called me up and informed me that my request to attend the funeral had been refused by the Home Office!!! I made some comment on the heartlessness of the Home Office and left.

Three weeks later a massive move-out on coolers took place. The reason for this was that over the previous three months there had been many minor protests concerning the terrible quality of the food, i.e. one day hunger strikes and the occasional display of temper when a prisoner would throw the vile concoction against the wall. But still the junta remained indifferent and the quality of the food remained consistently terrible.

To achieve solidarity and unity of purpose amongst a prison population of more than 300 is usually near impossible, yet we accomplished this feat because the food was so bad. Almost every prisoner refused to work for three days at the beginning of the strike. On the first day three prisoners went to work and they were hissed and booed by all the others who were in cells overlooking the workshops. One prisoner threw a bottle of urine which smashed on the ground beside the three scabs splattering one of them with its sweet smelling contents, much to the merriment of all onlookers! Later in the evening

one of the scabs' cells was set on fire while he was down collecting his evening rations and next day no scab dared walk the perilous trail to work.

As a result of the strike every prisoner was put on report and each of us received a £5 fine or the equivalent of four weeks pay! They didn't put us in solitary simply because they couldn't put all 300 of us in the block. The strike had little or no effect in achieving its objective, which was to improve the quality of the food. So two weeks later another one was organised with a small difference this time. Five black-legs felt brave enough to walk the line, however the jeering and shouts of scab, black-leg and every other expletive in the book was so intense that two of the would-be scabs ran back to their cells. This really encouraged the lads so they intensified the jeering further. Nevertheless the three remaining scabs continued along black-leg avenue to the workshops. That evening the screws guarded the scabs' cells and accompanied them as they collected their rations. However the screws couldn't possibly protect them every minute of the day for the rest of their sentences and the scabs knew this so they had themselves put on Rule 43A which is protective custody. A week or two later they were moved out to Category B and C prisons where the conditions were much better and the internal security much less strict, as a reward for their treachery.

All the prisoners were again fined £5 and the following day fifteen of us were picked as agitators and moved to dungeons in local prisons all over England. Almost all the P.O.Ws were moved, these included Roy Walsh, Noel Gibson, Tony Clarke, Ronnie McCartney, James Bennett, Stephen Blake and myself. James Ashe was the only P.O.W. not to be moved.

I ended up in Canterbury in Kent which isn't the worst of the cooler prisons, even though you still remain locked up for 23 hours a day like the rest of them. I remember watching from my window the three weeping willow trees that were just barely visible above the prison wall, for hours on end. The view depressed me so much and sent many existential thoughts circling in my mind. I associated them with death and in particular the death of my father, which still hung heavy with me.

A month later I was taken to the reception area with my belongings. While I was being handcuffed an old Belfast man came in. We were put in the same cell, an unusual occurrence, and he asked me for a roll-up. I apologised saying that I didn't smoke. He asked me where I was from, I replied Derry. He told me that he had worked with a

few Derrymen in Butlin's holiday camp in 1954 and that he was now doing six months for assaulting a peeler while drunk on wine. I retorted that too much after dinner wine wasn't good for one. He looked at me quizzically and said, "Ah jaysus, will you stop taking the rise out of me!" We both enjoyed a hearty laugh until the screws came along and took me to the waiting prison van.

I was taken back to Albany via Southampton. The journey from Canterbury to Southampton was the fastest and roughest that I had ever experienced in a prison van. I had to stay in a police cell in the basement of Southampton police station for an hour while we waited for the ferry to the Isle of Wight. During that hour I remember reading the mass of graffiti plastered all over the walls, for example, *Bongo Davies - three years for police assault; Dingo Headbanger Arkwright - 7 years for GBH, etc.*

The day after I arrived back I found out that Roy Walsh had been moved to Lincoln and that Ronnie McCartney, Tony *Red Flash* Clarke and Stephen Blake had been moved to Durham. That is from the most southerly prison to the most northern. Durham is famous for three things:

1. It has the worst food in the English prison system;
2. The solitary confinement block contains the smallest cells in the English prison system;
3. All Category A prisoners are forced to exercise in a cage seven yards by five.

Of the others Noel Gibson was in Winchester and James *Punter* Bennett was in Bristol. All of us had been brought back except Ronnie McCartney who had been moved out to Parkhurst.

In October a French prisoner's cell was searched and a bar on his window was found to be cut through; he was dragged off to the block. Later a story circulated that a car had been stopped on the island, escape equipment found in the car was linked to the French prisoner. Four days later a further intensive search was carried out, this time Noel Gibson's cell got a particularly meticulous search. The cell was stripped bare and screws found a hole in his wall which was plastered and painted over. So Noel joined the French man in the block. During his stay there we used to go to church on Sundays to check that he was alright and pass a few bits and pieces to him. I remember one Sunday wee Ronnie and myself were thrown out of the church for continuously conversing with Noel, so new comrades had to be found to carry out the task. Stephen Blake and an Irish social prisoner named Joe Maher were delegated the responsibility, although later they

too were thrown out. As a result, before Joe left he accused the priest of collaborating with the security junta. After spending three months on punishment Noel was moved out to the Scrubs.

Eddie O'Neill arrived from Hull and brought with him plenty of interesting news. The previous January and February there had been a serious confrontation between a number of P.O.Ws, namely Eddie, John McCluskey, Martin Coughlin, Stephen Nordone, Con McFadden and the screws over their blatant intimidation tactics during visits. What actually was happening was that the screw sat beside the prisoner and his visitor thus ensuring that the visit was strained and preventing the natural flow of conversation between prisoners and their loved ones.

Worse was to follow. During one of Stephen Nordone's visits with his family (a twice yearly occurrence) the screws interrupted his visit and ordered him back to his cell for a cell search. Stephen refused saying that the search could wait until the visit was finished. Nevertheless the screws insisted that he come and they began to drag him along. Naturally Stephen resisted and head-butted the screw. Eventually, the other screws managed to drag him out. Rather than take him to the cell for the supposed search, they dragged him down to the block where they kicked the hell out of him.

Word of what had happened soon spread to the wings and immediately the other P.O.Ws, including Ed O'Neill, John McCluskey and Martin Coughlin, stormed the Wing Governor's office and demanded that Stephen be released from the block. A heated argument ensued with more and more screws appearing on the scene. Finally, a *melée* broke out in which a number of pieces of office equipment were damaged and the lads were skull-dragged to the block. Next morning Stephen Nordone dumped a bit of shit over a screw as soon as he was unlocked causing five or six screws to storm into his cell and kick the daylight out of him again. They then went around banging every cell door in the block with their batons. By this time the tension scale indicator was reading boiling point. The screws kept their batons drawn as each prisoner was marched down for breakfast. As each man went down he was met with threats of extreme violence.

The battle ground was being prepared with the screws on the high ground with superior numbers and weapons. Yet the unconquered spirit of the P.O.Ws was clearly evident when a screw spat on Eddie O'Neill and threatened him. Eddie threw the rations over the screw and when he attempted to follow through he was dragged away to

his cell and given a severe kicking. Later that evening all the P.O.Ws were moved out on coolers to Durham, Leeds and Manchester.

After Eddie's welcome arrival Paul Norney suddenly arrived on the scene from the punitive Scrubs. Paul had endured more lock-up in the previous four years than any other P.O.W. They tried to break Paul both physically and mentally but they succeeded only in making him stronger. Two weeks later Vince Donnelly arrived on my wing. His arrival helped to perk up my spirits greatly.

As a result of the change and increase of the P.O.Ws we attempted to restart the Gaelic Football games on a Sunday. This time we hadn't much success but we doggedly continued with a few players and so practised the noble art. Eddie, Vince and myself were very enthusiastic, but unfortunately our enthusiasm wasn't contagious enough!

Meanwhile in the wing Vince and myself formed a distilling, brewing partnership called The Sperrin Special or *ten day hooch*. The work to make this hooch was a slow and complex operation. First yeast, potatoes and sugar had to be "borrowed" from the kitchen, so we had to have a reliable contact in the prison kitchens, or at least know someone who had a contact there. Anyway sugar and potatoes could be obtained fairly easily through the barter system. But yeast was another matter. Therefore as the Cockneys would say, if you wanted yeast you had to put plenty of tobacco up front. When eventually you get all the necessary ingredients, the next step is to get hold of a plastic two gallon bucket. To get this you have to bribe the prisoner who does the wing cleaning, i.e. you give him a half ounce of tobacco or put him in for a share of the hooch.

This accomplished, you brew the yeast on its own for an hour to make sure the chemicals are working, then add the chipped potatoes and sugar. At this stage, you have to find someone to keep it for you, because when you are on Category A you are liable to have your cell searched at any time. Usually you go back to the cleaner who will have access to a hot place. It is usually better if you have promised him some of the finished article, as this will give him more incentive to look after it properly. The cleaner is a key member of this team-operation because the yeast needs a supply of sugar every day and this can be a very delicate part of the whole operation. Anyway, the screws, in my experience, have managed to locate about 50% of all brews put down.

The first effort that Vince and I attempted succeeded so we invited a few friends in for the drinking session. Included among these was a

Latin American prisoner named Antonio Sanchez who had been framed by British Intelligence for spying for Cuba. So five of us got well drunk on about twelve pints, and the stuff actually tasted good, thanks to the Master Brewer - one Vince Donnelly!

The word soon spread that Vince was a wizard with the old hooch, so he quickly attained the position of chief adviser to all potential hooch makers!! Vince is forty five years old and fitter than most twenty five year olds. To maintain his fitness he does interval running, i.e. he runs two fairly slow laps of the prison yard then one very fast one and so on. At this time Eddie O'Neill and myself were running together and while we ran we usually engaged in a relaxed discussion of various topics. Personally I always found these runs thoroughly satisfying.

Christmas 1982 arrived and the inevitable famine before the feast occurred. During this time we were fed some of the worst food that I ever had the misfortune to eat. On Christmas Day, as usual, all the so-called Christian screws put on their false smiles as they dished out our portions of turkey followed by pudding and cream. Oh my, what a feast we had, the charade lasted all of twenty four hours!!

On New Year's Eve night Vince produced some of his favourite brew. Jimmy Ashe, Antonio Sanchez and myself along with Vince got stuck into the ten day old hooch. The ten day old is probably the most mature brew one is likely to sup while a guest in her majesty's dungeons. In the interests of security we put a wooden wedge at the bottom of Vince's cell door to deter the screws from attempting to confiscate the brew during the party. Jimmy Ashe sang *The Internationale* - the Maoist version! Vince gave a rendering of *Sean Dun na nGall*, Antonio sang a Latin American revolutionary song which called on the workers and peasants to fight against fascist tyranny and I recited Pearse's *The Rebel*. All in all it was a great night, although as a consequence Vince's cell was searched thoroughly three or four times a week for the next month and so we were forced to be teetotallers once again!!

1983

In mid-January Roy Walsh was moved out to Gartree. At the end of January about ten prisoners were brought to the block because of another shin-dig over the quality of food, this time on C Wing. The row started when a Cockney prisoner put in a complaint about his food. The screw he was complaining to became very aggressive and pushed the Cockney lad away. Having taken enough the prisoner dumped his food over the screw and a rumpus developed which resulted in about a hundred screws arriving on the scene. After the *melée* ten prisoners were skull-dragged to the block and given long terms of solitary confinement, coupled with severe losses in remission. No P.O.W. was involved.

On January 18, Jimmy Ashe was released. This was a very emotional time for us all. Jimmy was the first of the P.O.Ws that I had seen released although seven had gone before him, from different jails. It is the strangest feeling seeing one of your comrades disappear from your midst, especially as time in a long-term prison tends to make you think that everyone is a permanent fixture in this unreal world. Anyway Jimmy can and Jimmy went and a month later it was almost as if he had never been with us, though I'm sure he will contradict me!

At the beginning of February a prisoner was stabbed on B Wing. Afterwards we found out that a certain screw had approached the man two weeks earlier and asked him to pass on information about the people he was mixing with in the prison, who were also Cockneys. The prisoner refused and thought no more about it. The screws however didn't forget and they began to circulate the false rumour that he was a sexual pervert who had been sentenced for sexual crimes against children. Now a prisoner of this type is regarded as the lowest form of life by his fellow prisoners and it is always a possibility that, during his time in prison, someone will attempt to injure him. As it turned out the prisoner whom the screws had labelled a pervert had a violent row with a well known crank.

This crank decided that as his opponent was nothing more than a child molester, then he was fair game. So he went and stabbed him.

After these facts had been discovered a delegation of prisoners asked the Wing Governor to remove the screw as he was a danger to prisoners' lives. This request was refused. However three days later when an attempt to throw a bucket of shit over him was unsuccessful, he was moved to administrative duties!

A month later there was another stabbing when a white prisoner stabbed a black prisoner after a row over a miniscule amount of money. This wasn't a straightforward racist thing because the two people involved had been the best of friends up until this incident. Basically the macho syndrome, plus the fact that a man's pride assumes supreme importance while in jail conflicts, is the cause of more fights inside than anything else. Nevertheless, the fact that the authorities made no attempt to prosecute the white prisoner showed a discriminatory and racist attitude on their part. The offending prisoner in fact was moved to another prison after spending just three weeks in the block. Two months later he was returned to Albany and placed on another wing.

It has been my experience that the security junta has a vested interest in ensuring that racial tension is maintained at boiling point, in order to keep the prisoners fighting among themselves. Thus, by internalising any conflict the prison regime remains secure. I know of a few prisoners who were guaranteed parole in return for stirring up racial tensions. The P.O.W. policy was one of positive neutrality, that is to say we explained the evils of racism and the political reasons for it to any white prisoner who was prepared to listen and, generally speaking, we had a good and friendly relationship with black prisoners. We had particularly close relationships with black, politically aware prisoners, especially the three who had been convicted for the "Spaghetti House Siege", Frank Davies, Wesley Dick and Bonsu Monroe. These men were totally committed to the revolutionary struggle, and apart from our political relationship with them they were very interesting individuals. But there was a small element of black prisoners whose thinking was closer to the establishment line and the right wing English prisoners, than to ours. In fact they viewed us as trouble makers and used the racist thing as an excuse for inaction. It was indeed ironic that this section of non-political, black prisoners should see prisoners of war in the same light as the fascist element of National Front prisoners did!!

In mid-March there was a two day strike for a system of half remission along the lines in operation in the Six Counties. Another demand was that lifers be given reasons for being refused parole. There was another strike for similar reasons at the beginning of April.

In mid-April there was another row in C Wing over the food. Apparently one prisoner found earwigs and other insects in his rations and wasn't given any satisfaction when he and three others complained about this latest food quarrel. As a result the four prisoners were dragged off to the block. At this particular time tensions were so high that the smallest confrontations could have led to a full scale riot. All the ingredients for a major confrontation were there: atrocious food, repressive visits, with three prisoners and their families particularly affected when their wives had to endure being strip-searched prior to their visits in April. This led to much hostility being directed at the screws. There was also a very bad attitude towards the workshops, where there was an attempt to make long-term prisoners sew mail bags, a degrading and demeaning task. This workshop was known as the punishment shop.

I was consigned to this workshop even though I had consistently refused to sew mail bags throughout my sentence. There were ten of us in this workshop and everyone was unhappy about being stuck in this decrepit hole. So a meeting was held at the back of the workshop and after very little discussion it was decided that we would all refuse to sew mail bags and demand that the workshop be closed down. This we felt was a reasonable request as there was no economic gain from this type of work as most of the bags that were sewn were discarded and dumped. Of course we knew that the real object of this demeaning exercise was to degrade and punish the prisoner. The security "Principle Officer" came to the workshop and when our demands were put to him he rejected them outright, saying that we had until the following day to rethink our position! This P.O. was a cocksure Brit who gloried at being in a position of authority. He was a really obnoxious character who loved to give the impression that he was a hard man. Anyway we told him that our position had been well thought out and there would be no change. Next morning all ten of us again refused to sew mailbags. Surprisingly the authorities made no attempt to take us to the block. Between us we exchanged a few strained jokes that we were being prepared for coolers.

We were banged up during the dinner period from 11.30 to 1.30. At about 12.30 my cell door was opened abruptly and four screws stood

there menacingly, one of them uttered these words contemptuously, "Pack your kit McLaughlin, you're on escort!" I packed my belongings and was taken to the reception area.

I was moved out to Bristol on a cooler. The next day Vince Donnelly organised a strike throughout the jail in pursuance of our demands to have the degrading mailbag shop closed down. The strike was very successful with all prisoners refusing work. For his trouble Vince was moved out on a cooler to Norwich, a jail which isn't normally used for coolers.

The day following Vince's removal four of the lads who had been in the mailbag shop with me, Jimmy Mohan, a great hearted Irish traveller, Winey McGhee, Bob Davies and another lad named Lennie, climbed onto the roof of the mailbag workshop, wrecking it and the roof of an adjoining workshop. They stayed up there for two days. Eventually when they came down they were taken to the block. Later that evening Jimmy Mohan and Winey McGhee were given severe hammerings and our "friend" the security P.O. was heavily involved.

Next day a screw on B Wing reached to open a cell door. Finding his hand covered in shit, he turned to the nearest prisoner and roared "Clean that fakking door!" The prisoner refused on the grounds that he hadn't put it there. The screw then turned to another prisoner who also refused. The screw, over-reacting, rang the alarm bell and a squad of Mufties came charging onto B Wing from the gate lodge where apparently they were stationed for just such an eventuality. These Mufties batoned, kicked and elbowed every prisoner who happened to be in their way. Initially this onslaught led to prisoners on the second and third landings taking defensive measures. They barricaded the stairway from the first to the second floor, thus preventing the Mufties from inflicting injuries on the prisoners housed there. However, inevitably situations like this where defensive measures have been taken often result in offensive measures being taken, because the more tactically able among the defenders realise that attempting to hold ground when the odds are stacked against you leads only to demoralisation and capitulation. Therefore it was decided to go on the offensive and that meant wrecking everything around them in revenge for the injuries inflicted on their innocent fellow prisoners by the Mufties. Included among the defenders were three P.O.Ws, Paul *Tiger* Norney, James *Punter* Bennett and Tony *Red Flash* Clarke. When most of the second and third landings were wrecked someone began to pound away at the outer wall with a

heavy steel cell door. A few more joined in and after five minutes they had breached the wall, making a hole large enough to climb through, thus facilitating a relatively easy climb to the roof.

Eight of the defenders managed to scramble onto the roof. Among these were two P.O.Ws, Paul Norney and Tony Clarke. Among the others were a Palestinian P.O.W. named Fahid and a Scottish prisoner, Charlie McGhee, no relation to Winey McGhee!

Prior to the eruption on B Wing the other wings had been out on exercise, but when B Wing erupted an attempt was made to herd them back to their respective wings. This was peacefully resisted and when the B Wing defenders burst through the wall and climbed on to the roof, two of the P.O.Ws who were in the exercise yard, Eddie O'Neill and Stephen Blake, ran over to B Wing and, after climbing the sheer and dangerous face of B Wing, joined their comrades up on the roof.

They stayed up there for five days, receiving food from their fellow prisoners. Especially helpful to them was Nageeb Gasmi, the generous, stout-hearted and immensely popular Libyan prisoner.

In my experience I had met two of the Libyan P.O.Ws who had served sentences in Britain's jails, Nageeb Gasmi and Hassan Masri. I felt a great empathy with both of them and I was highly impressed by their sincerity and commitment to the Libyan revolution. Normally Irish P.O.Ws would be very sceptical about becoming too closely allied to any other section of prisoners, but the Libyans were accepted immediately and a great affinity grew between the two groups. As always Vince Donnelly had a witty explanation for this phenomenon, "Sure aren't they the dark Irish!" Vince would passionately argue that the Berbers were originally Irish, but Nageeb steadfastly refused to believe his interpretation!!

Nageeb always observed the Muslim festival of Ramadan which meant that he could not eat or drink anything between dawn and sunset. This period often lasts for as long as eighteen hours in the Ramadan month, which is usually July. Many a day I saw Nageeb with his tongue literally hanging out with thirst, yet he steadfastly refused to break his fast.

Anyway at the end of their five day vigil on the roof the lads concluded an agreement with a Home Office functionary. Generally the agreement was that the grievances of the Albany prisoners would be publicised and that the prisoners would not be assaulted by the Mufti Squad. When they did come down the lads were dispersed to prisons all over England. Eddie O'Neill was taken to Brixton, in

London, Tony Clarke went to Strangeways in Manchester, Paul Norney and Fahid were brought to Durham. They were all held in solitary confinement, most of them remained in solitary for up to a year.

Paul and Fahid were kept in especially bad conditions. They were held in converted strip-cells, their beds were made of wood and screwed into the floor and their "chair" was also just a square piece of wood screwed into the floor. As well as this the cell was without proper heating and the food was atrocious. They were locked in these cells for twenty three hours a day, with only one hour for exercise in a yard, or cage, measuring only seven yards by five. This cage was completely enclosed by wire and was locked after the prisoners entered. Paul and Fahid were held in these diabolical conditions for a year.

At the end of the riot twenty prisoners from Albany arrived in Bristol. At about 8.00 pm one evening there was a lot of commotion and I guessed that something unusual was happening. I heard doors being opened and closed and a little later I heard familiar voices shouting to and fro. I wasn't long finding out directly from the men involved just what had happened in Albany. A couple of English lads and a Spaniard who were on my wing related the events in great detail, through their windows. Of course this isn't an ideal way to communicate as it requires a great deal of stamina to carry on a conversation, with the noisy generators usually making things more difficult. However we did manage and I was able to glean some very valuable info on the Albany riot.

Two weeks after their arrival in Bristol all except two of the prisoners were allowed on normal location. The exceptions were F. Rameo, the Spaniard, and a young Cockney named Paul. These two and myself were kept in isolation until mid-July.

During that time my wife Mary and my son Patrick came to visit me, but the visit was so repressive that I almost hooked the screw who was sitting between Mary and myself. Mary restrained me, although later I was skull-dragged to the block for threatening an officer. For this so-called crime I got seven days in the block. Nevertheless when you consider that I was already in solitary confinement, then you will begin to realise the illogicality of the "penal process".

One day while walking around the exercise yard I thought I detected a Derry accent from the ranks of the screws. With every circuit of the little yard, I became more and more certain that it was indeed a Derry accent. Two days later this screw was detailed to

bring me to the bath-house for my weekly bath. My curiosity got the better of my usual circumspection when dealing with screws, so I asked him point blank, "What's a Derryman doing working as a screw in Bristol?" His reply explained everything, "I'm not from Derry, I'm from Londonderry!!" To which I replied, "Where's that then?" He pretended to laugh and we continued on our way in silence.

In mid-July my cell door was flung open and a screw barked, "You're on escort". On the way down to the reception area I kept wondering which prison I was going to now. When we reached the reception I realised exactly where we were going because there, before me, was a "dog" Principle Officer from Wakefield, who was best known for this renowned utterance, "The only people I hate more than the blacks are the Irish!" This nasty, arrogant piece of trash from the wilds of Yorkshire loved to put the boot into prisoners, especially Irish prisoners. When he was putting the handcuffs on me he muttered sarcastically, "Don't you remember me McLaughlin?" Responding to the malicious intent I retorted, "No, one Yorkshire screw looks much the same as another to me". To which he replied, "Well you'll remember me when you've finished your term with us, I promise you!" Defiantly I replied, "I can endure anything that you wasters can dish out!" I said this with more hope than conviction because I knew that I was headed for the most repressive isolation unit in England's prison system.

The three hour journey from Bristol to Wakefield was as oppressive as it is memorable. In between "Aye, lad" and "Ee its great lad", came a stream of racist abuse. Not just anti-Irish but anti-everything. This bunch of little Englanders were the nastiest and most abusive screws that I ever had the displeasure to travel with. But I was able to draw solace from the fact that I had only six months left to serve; I kept watching the haunting scenery as we travelled through the Pennine range. Even the twentieth century motorway that we were travelling on barely detracted from the prehistoric atmosphere and imagery that exists amidst modern industrialised England.

When I arrived in Wakefield my belongings were checked in the reception area. About ten minutes later three screws from F Wing, the Control Unit, arrived to take me to the silence unit. Their faces were familiar, they were long-term screws in the silence unit. The walk through the thirty yard cage to the entrance of the unit brought back haunting memories of previous sojourns in this psychological torture chamber. We entered through a steel gate in the twenty foot high, white wall which surrounds this sensory deprivation unit. We then

walked up the grilled ramp to the unit proper. My few belongings were thoroughly checked again and one of the screws said, "I see McLaughlin's only got six months left to serve". The other smirked and said, "We'll see if we can lengthen it for him". At this they all laughed.

I was placed in a cell next to the toilet recess where the constant whining of the fan and the periodical spurts of the water distributor were to keep me company for the next six months! The rules of the unit are stringently imposed:

1. Absolutely no communication, verbal or otherwise, is allowed between prisoners;
2. Each prisoner must be exercised individually;
3. No contact whatever is allowed between prisoners in the unit and prisoners on the main wing (impossible anyway).

Next day the P.O. in charge of the unit, named Pound, came and told me that my behaviour and actions would be closely monitored for the next two weeks, to ascertain whether or not I would be suitable for the main prison! I looked at him in sheer amazement and laughed hollowly. He left saying that as I had only six months left to serve I would be almost certain to go on the main wing.

For the next two weeks Pound, Yeats and one or two other screws attempted to engage me in vague conversation about my post-release plans. I gave the stock answer that I had learned in prison not to make plans for the future. This ended every conversation.

At the end of the two weeks "probation", the governor called me up and said, "Having studied your reports that have arrived from Albany, I have decided that you will not, under any circumstances, be allowed to enter the main prison. Furthermore, you will remain here or be moved to a similar unit elsewhere until you have finished your sentence". I replied simply, "Thank you", and gave him the socialist clenched fist salute. This just happened to be my birthday so obviously the governor knew exactly what I wanted!!

Three weeks later Stephen Blake arrived from Liverpool. He was placed at the far end of the unit, which meant that we had absolutely no hope of communicating. Stephen was no stranger to this dungeon either; he had spent many periods here during his year's stay in Wakefield from 1977-78.

F Wing in Wakefield and the isolation unit in Wormwood Scrubs are modelled on an American system first introduced to Europe when the Stammheim unit was built to house the Baader-Meinhoff urban guerillas. When the system came to England, in the form of F Wing,

it was designed by an architect in conjunction with a team of psychologists from the British Home Office, headed by a man named Streiker.

It was designed for maximum isolation. For example, the windows are about three foot deep, two foot wide and one foot high, made up of three inch square tiles of frosted glass. There was no glass in two of these tiny squares and that doubled as my source of fresh air and my view. This view consisted of the twenty foot white wall that surrounded the unit. This wall was painted with abstract lines of the most dismal colours, i.e., grey, dark green, and black. The official explanation for these abstract designs was that the exercise yard that ran between the white wall and the unit was so narrow, that the designs helped give the illusion of more space!!

I believe that this is absolute nonsense and after discussions with P.O.Ws and other prisoners who have spent long terms in this unit, I firmly believe that the abstract designs are part of the process aimed at disorientating those prisoners who are unfortunate enough to end up in these psychological torture chambers.

From 6.15 am to the 10.00 pm lights out was sixteen hours of unrelenting boredom. My only relief was my daily session of yoga, which helped me to discipline my mind and so withstand the severe lack of outside stimulation.

In early October I heard about the great escape from Long Kesh. My spirits soared; Christ, the impossible had happened! This was surely the most significant escape in Republican prison history.

Everyday the governor or one of his underlings called at each cell and asked each prisoner how he was. This insincere charade fools nobody. Personally I decided that since the governor decided to keep me in this dungeon, I would refuse to recognise him anyway. I either turned my back on him or gave him the clenched fist socialist salute. This appeared to disconcert him. He was typical of the British upper classes in that he could sentence you to death today and tomorrow he would assume from his position that you should behave as obsequiously as a serf. It's the natural order of things, don't you know! However when a prisoner adopts and maintains an attitude in defiance of their authority, it rattles their armour.

Three of the screws on F Wing had similar names to three of the most famous poets who ever wrote in the English language, namely Shelley, Yeats and Pound. Shelley is my favourite poet and I derived much pleasure from his masterly and illuminating works. Amazingly his namesake, the screw, was the most genuine and hu-

mane jailer that I had met. This soft spoken Scots man must have had difficulty maintaining his own identity among the other screws. That is to say, after we P.O.Ws had smashed up the workshop most of the screws behaved like the Gestapo, but this man had the ability to look at things from a distance. He must have had an inner strength because a weak screw would have been intimidated into behaving like the herd.

Once again after the Harrod's bomb the atmosphere in the jail was charged with tension and most of the screws showed their absolute hostility to anything Irish. To his credit Shelley never made a single hostile remark or gesture, in fact he behaved as if nothing had happened. The other two "poets" were more typical and would have been very much at home with their famous namesakes' fascist leanings. However they were no intellectuals, just the automatons who are relied on to put the theory into practise. In fact most of the screws in this unit used to glory in the cliché, "Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die!"

Time crept by and after what seemed like a century had passed, the first of December arrived. The first day of the last month I was to spend in England's jails. I was burning with anticipation on the inside but I tried not to let my emotions show and I was as cool as possible on the outside.

For the last month a West Indian prisoner named Wesley Dick was located in the cell next to mine. One of the trio who was involved in the Spaghetti House Siege, he was a very politicised prisoner. With considerable difficulty we managed to engage in half-heard conversation, if the cursed fan wasn't working. He was, understandably, very upset at America's tyrannical invasion of the small island of Grenada. He had a close friend who was a teacher on the island and this made his feelings that bit more bitter.

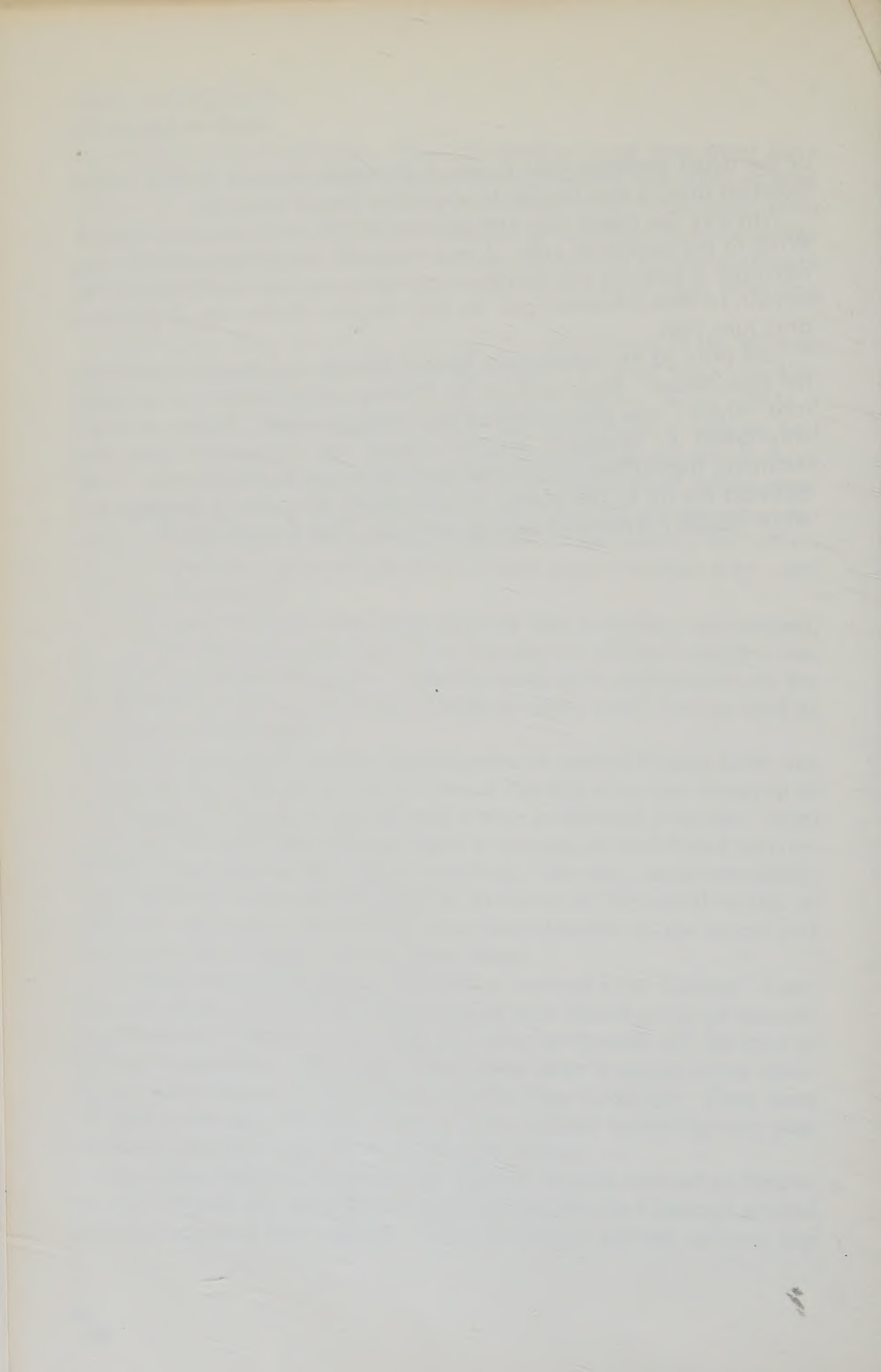
A week before Christmas Liam Baker arrived from Gartree. Liam was one of the four P.O.Ws charged and later found guilty of assaulting Kenneth Littlejohn, the Brit spy who infiltrated the Stickies in the early seventies. The other three were Sean Kinsella, from Monaghan, Sean Hayes, a Dublin lad, and Pat *Tipp* Guilfoyle. They were all held in solitary for four months prior to their receiving four year jail terms for their part in the Littlejohn Affair.

Two days before Christmas the Special Branch arrived to inform me that I would be excluded from Britain and the Six Counties as soon as I was released from prison. Then Christmas arrived without any

of the usual pretence that it was a Christian festival; in fact in the isolation unit, it was similar to any other day of the year.

Anyway the magic day arrived and at 7.30 am I was taken from F Wing to the reception area. I was naturally delighted to be leaving although it grieved me that two comrades and other friends had to remain in that inhuman pit. In fact Stephen Black was kept there until June 1984.

Just prior to my release two Special Branch men handcuffed me in the gate-house. They took me to Pudsey police station, near Bradford, where I was photographed and finger-printed. At one o'clock I was taken to Bradford airport where we discovered that the incoming flight from Dublin had been diverted to Manchester. They escorted me on to the plane. As the plane rose slowly through the white clouds I remember saying joyously, "Free at last!" Sin É.



INSIDE AN ENGLISH JAIL

Inside an English Jail is not a book of theoretical analysis or political pamphleteering. It is based on the conviction that oppressed people have the right to fight back and tells of the personal and human consequences of involvement in the struggle for national liberation - for Ray McLaughlin, nine years in English jails.

This book recalls the prison diaries of John Mitchell, George Jackson and Jacobo Timmerman. Ray McLaughlin's memoirs also inevitably address current debates on the Birmingham Six, Section 31, Extradition, Arrest and Detention, and the conditions of prisoners everywhere.

To publish this book now, especially in the aftermath of Enniskillen, is to stress further the injustice and inhumanity of the prison system. It is to give a voice to one who experienced deprivation and torture in forms ranging from contaminated food to organised physical and mental brutality. It is to restate a question of human rights and justice, without fear.

BORDER
line
PUBLICATIONS

Printed in Ireland
ISBN: 1 870300 04 1
£4.25

KS-777-457