

The

CAPTIVE VOICE



An Glór Gafa

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The Voice of Irish Republican Prisoners of War



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The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa is a quarterly magazine written in its entirety by Irish Republican POWs currently being held in Ireland, England, Europe and the US. It is published by Sinn Féin's POW Department.

Irish republicans have always recognised that resistance to British misrule does not end upon their arrest. The battles to be fought and the tactics to be employed may change but the enemy remains the same. In the words of our comrade Bobby Sands:

"The jails are engineered to crush the political identity of the captured republican prisoner; to crush his/her resistance and transform him/her into a systemised answering-machine with a large criminal tag stamped by oppression upon his/her back, to be duly released on to the street, politically cured — politically barren — and permanently broken in spirit."

The establishment of this jail journal is a tribute not only to our families, friends and comrades, whose strength and support have been inspirational to us all, but also is a

clear recognition that we are what we are — political prisoners, unbroken in our deep-rooted desire for freedom.

The Captive Voice affords us a platform and an opportunity to present in print our views on those topics and issues which affect daily life both inside and outside of the jails. The magazine contains political analyses of current national and international affairs, culture, short stories, poetry and the latest updates on prison-related campaigns and issues. Satire and humour can also be found within the special features, cartoons and artwork illustrations.

We have been pleased and greatly encouraged by the response to the magazine. It is hoped that the sharing of our feelings and experiences through the pages of *An Glór Gafa* will be both beneficial and enjoyable for all our readers.

We are determined that our message and our captive voice shall be heard by many.

— The Irish Republican Prisoners of War. ■

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By Micheál Ó Dochartaigh

We welcome correspondence with ideas, suggestions or comments on the contents of *The Captive Voice/An Glór Gafa* or on any subject of concern to prisoners.
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The

CAPTIVE VOICE



An Glór Gafa

WHY DOES BRITAIN treat its political prisoners so vindictively and leave itself open to the opprobrium of the civilised world?

As we go to print, Róisín McAliskey, eight months pregnant and in poor health, remains incarcerated in the most appalling conditions. She faces no charges and has no opportunity to present a legal defence against this Kafkaesque situation. Ordinary decent people cannot understand the logic behind such ill-treatment. Even if the campaign for her release proves successful, questions remain.

Why should a heavily-pregnant woman weighting only seven stones and suffering from asthma, ulcers, painful joints and malnutrition be considered a security threat? Why is it necessary to hold her captive in a cell with no natural daylight, with the lights kept on all night, with most personal possessions removed from the cell at night? Why can she not avail of a hour's exercise, sunlight and fresh air? Why is she held in a prison which lacks the medical facilities to safeguard the health and life of a pregnant woman? And why does the British government deem it necessary to strip-search several times a day this most unlikely to security risks in these most several secure conditions? In short, what possible reason is there for Britain's seemingly gratuitous physical and psychological abuse of Róisín McAliskey?

Many human and civil rights groups would like to know the answer — including Amnesty International which, for only the second time in relation to the Anglo-Irish conflict, has issued an "urgent action" appeal. Irish TDs, British MPs, European MEPs, US representatives are all asking questions about the ill-treatment of this young Irish woman and the obstinate refusal even to release her on bail. Ordinary people are taking to the streets, lobbying and letter-writing on her behalf. Still Britain refuses to relent. Why?

Is it due to a colonial arrogance with Britain still treating the "natives" with all the subtlety and compassion of a Maxim gun? Or is there more to it — some callous political calculation which holds that the ill-treatment of political prisoners is somehow in the best interests of the British establishment?

One clue may lie in the recent book by Sister Sarah Clarke (reviewed here on page 28). She shows that state repression, including the ill-treatment of prisoners, works at a certain level. Repressive measures such as the PTA, strip-searches, exclusion orders, miscarriages of justice and so on are designed, with some success, to intimidate and silence anyone who might ask questions about Britain's role in Ireland. To that extent Britain is using its ill-treatment of Róisín McAliskey as an example of what could happen to any ordinary person whom the British government might perceive to be a threat to their interests.

Secondly the undermining of international legal principles through extradition is used by Britain with the specific intention of criminalising internationally the republican struggle. Joe Doherty presents a cogent argument to this effect in his article. In the context of a peace process stalled by British intransigence, Britain obviously has an interest in shifting the focus of international intention away from the campaign for peace and justice and towards sensationalist court cases — portraying its conflict in Ireland as a law-and-order problem rather than the failure of British rule.

However this is a high-risk strategy, borne of bankrupt policies and increasingly-desperate tactics. Previous attempts at repression in general and the criminalisation of political prisoners in particular have ultimately resulted in the criminalisation of the British government in the eyes of the world. The ill-treatment of Róisín McAliskey may well expose the real nature of Britain's attitude to the Irish people.

Therefore the imprisonment without charge and ill-treatment of this pregnant young Irish woman is not only an urgent humanitarian issue. It is also a broader issue of civil and democratic rights, arising from Britain's continuing involvement in Ireland. For that reason the campaign for the release of Róisín McAliskey must be prioritised by the friends of all political prisoners and by the friends of justice and peace.

IMAGINE

RAYS of light penetrated the darkness and quiet of my bedroom as the sun began to rise. Normally such an early incursion, especially on a Saturday morning, would have been met with silent screams of protest. The type kept for the reality of Monday mornings. Today however was not like that. I was enjoying contemplating what lay ahead. In my semi-conscious state, day-dreams collided to produce bliss.

The telephone was the vehicle the world chose to destroy my serenity. As it screamed into life I reacted instinctively by grabbing for my watch. Damn! I had slept in. The phone continued to scream: "me me, me me, me me". I regained my composure enough to lift the instrument from its cradle. Yes, I did know what time it was. Yes, I was on my way. No, I wouldn't forget anything. Putting the phone down I was quite pleased at the level of indignation I had managed to inject into a voice which, after all, had to that point been heard only in my head.

Since then, any opportunity to put a few miles on the clock were seized upon, astounding my family and friends with my new-found generosity when it came to providing lifts, or picking up packages that a mere mortal's mode of transport could not cope with. This however was short-lived as I quickly bored everyone to death with the Shogun's capabilities. It was about then I received an unexpected letter, which in turn provided a worthy challenge for my new toy.

Some months previously I had applied for a permit to shoot grouse. Such is the demand that those who are responsible for allocating these jewels have resorted to picking names from a hat; a practice which until today I had regarded as very undignified. Glancing over the permit, my name typed in bold capitals, I began to appreciate the subtleties of their system. Indeed, by the time I had placed it safely away I had



Drifting through the mundane tasks that took their turn to conspire against my speedy departure, I once again indulged in gratuitous contemplation of what hopefully lay ahead: and why not? How often do desire and reality come together to provide what, for me, was the perfect combination of material circumstance and the right person to share it with?

The material perfection came by way of a brand-new, long wheel-base, six-seater, four-wheel drive, turbo, diesel, Mitsubishi Shogun, which I had recently taken deliver of.

become a firm advocate of it. Throughout that day, thoughts of the permit intermingled with those of the Shogun providing many satisfactory scenarios in all but one important detail. Who to share this day with? Images of family and friends came to mind and just as quickly departed. All were deserving, but likewise just as predictable. A huge grin hijacked my face as Jacqueline's

image penetrated my sub-conscious. Long black writhing hair, the type you could curl up and die in, complemented what for me was perfection. Before I let myself go completely a reality check was required. Was there someone else in her life? I hoped not. Had she any interest in me? I hoped so. Would she find killing our feathers objectionable? There was only one way to find out. Ask! Yes,

Illustrations by Artie Forbes

ask. A small word. It was even easy to spell, but right now the thought terrified me. What if she said no? What if she said yes! Thinking of her again put a smile on my face and before reality could invade I had dialled the number. We said our goodbyes. The line went dead. I stood there, analysing her tone, dissecting every word to see if it betrayed her real intent. No matter how often I tried, "Yes I would love to go", meant just that.

The door of the house closed behind me. Running toward the fully loaded Shogun, I felt like a 13-year-old going to their first disco without their parents' permission. Not even the daily deluge of rain, which on date had managed to drown most people's expectations of summer, could have brought me back to earth as I drove the short distance to Jacqueline's house. Leaving the distractions of the town behind us, the conversation quickly turned to what we could expect from the day. The long climb into the mountains, the low cloud line

peat-bog. We marched on, barely a word passing between us. I sensed Jacqueline's growing unease as we approached the beginning of the grouse moor which, according to the map consisted of twelve acres, flanked by dense forest on either side. We moved quickly over the rough water-logged terrain, eyes straining for the slightest movement, our scent carrying back down the mountain.

Nothing can prepare you for an unexpected volley from a twelve-bore shotgun. The surprise was made worse by the fact that Jacqueline was focused on a bird that was dancing its way across the heather. The deafening retort left her frozen to the spot, her face contorted by a look of terror that quickly changed to one of disgust. Dropping the gun she ran to where the fox was lying, the scene made all the more poignant by the shallow breathing of the vixen as her life poured freely from the hole in her side. Breaking the gun sent the empty cartridges spinning into the air. I quickly reloaded in the hope



and misty conditions just added to the sense of adventure. Powering past cars whose occupants were reduced to envious stares, a sense of invincibility enveloped us, reinforced by the pulsating rhythmic beat that was emanating from the Shogun's upgraded stereo system.

We arrived at our destination ready to discover America. We donned the specialist clothing and equipment which for the most part of the year is locked away; the ritual being completed in what seemed like slow motion as the grey steel of the gun-barrels were awakened from their slumber. The contrast of the menacing shape of the gun thrust into the milky white softness of Jacqueline's hand was almost poetic. She struggled to conceal her true feelings about the weapon and in a way this made her even more attractive. Making our way along the rough path towards the heather-covered upper reaches, the beautiful tranquillity of the mountain screamed at us. The moment was broken by the sound of a diesel engine revving into life as further down the mountain a tractor and men were working hard to salvage the winter fuel from a watery

that this nightmare would end with the final dispatch of the fox. The look on Jacqueline's face gutted me as I again pulled the trigger.

Walking back down the mountain in silence, my brain frantically searched for a panacea but one evaded me, and by the time we had again reached the bright lights of the city the silence had degenerated into trivial small talk. We said our goodbyes. Jacqueline thanked me and promised to phone. The short drive home took forever as regret consumed me.

The screaming of the phone, as I put the key in the lock, catapulted me back into the real work. My heart began to race, it was Jacqueline phoning to say she understood. I snatched the instrument from its cradle full of expectation.

"Yes, I do know what time it is. No, I have not forgotten."

I slowly replaced the receiver. Damn, Monday morning. Late again. Trying to catch the 9.00am bus is going to be a real nightmare.

■ By Michael Rogan

Vótáil Sinn Féin

Mobilise for Unprecedented Vote

SPEAKING at an election launch in County Tyrone Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams urged republicans to lobby their neighbours, workmates and family to ensure an "unprecedented vote" for Sinn Féin.

He said: "A vote for Sinn Féin in the forthcoming Westminster election would be a vote against British government intransigence over the peace process."

■ Creating conditions for peace

For many years now Sinn Féin have been striving to create the necessary conditions for reaching a democratic political solution to the centuries' old conflict between Ireland and Britain. Sinn Féin's determination in this regard — to build a genuine peace process — proved to be instrumental in the creation and development of the Irish Peace Initiative.

■ Lost opportunity

This initiative was hailed world-wide as the best opportunity for peace in Ireland in 75 years. Unfortunately for the people of Ireland and Britain this opportunity was squandered. The British Prime Minister, John Major, decided in his wisdom that the survival of his government was paramount over the democratic rights of the Irish people. His decision to placate the rabid right-wing elements within the Tory party and his refusal to face down unionist intransigence destroyed the attempts by Irish nationalists to seek a just and lasting solution to the conflict.

■ Successful Sinn Féin strategy

However, while the British may have succeeded in destroying the peace process they have been unsuccessful in destroying Sinn Féin's peace strategy. This strategy (as outlined in the 1992

policy document *Towards A Lasting Peace*) has been successful in many areas, not least of which has been the re-awakening of public consciousness on the national question in the 26 Counties and the international exposure of the sectarian nature of the Six County state.

■ United Ireland

In opening up the whole question of partition and of the true nature of the Six County state Irish nationalists were re-invigorated with a belief in their ability to realise their aspirations. This debate, which had for decades been censored and silenced in the 26 Counties, created a platform for the expression of the democratic right of the Irish people to decide their own destiny; and created for many the hope that a united Ireland could really be established in their lifetime.

■ Formidable spokespersons

Britain's refusal to embrace the peace process and to become seriously involved in the debate about establishing democracy in Ireland exposed not only their intransigence when dealing with Irish matters but their fear of genuine democratic debate. The republican message, as articulated by people like Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Mitchel McLaughlin, Pat Doherty and others, has never been stronger. The present Sinn Féin leadership have proved to be formidable opponents in debate.

■ Exposing the myth

The British government-backed decision by the RUC to march over the rights of nationalists on the Garvaghy and Lower Ormeau Roads and the continuing refusal of the British Secretary of State, Patrick Mayhew, to acknowledge the breaking of the loyalist ceasefires expose the myth of the British government's "neutrality" in the conflict. In addition events have exposed the relationship between the loyalist death

squads and so-called constitutional unionist politicians — in particular the UVF's meeting at Drumcree with David Trimble; and the Portadown rally with arch-bigot Willie McCrea whose tenure as MP for Mid-Ulster, a constituency with a clear nationalist majority, is an indictment of those nationalists who refuse to enter into electoral pacts to ensure fair nationalist representation.

■ Maximising the nationalist vote

In this regard Sinn Féin have been instrumental in trying to achieve an electoral pact with the other main nationalist party, the SDLP, to ensure that nationalist representation is maximised in all areas, in particular where there is a clear nationalist majority. This would send a clear message to the leaders of unionism that nationalists will not accept second-class citizenship.

■ Unprecedented vote

Sinn Féin is a strong and determined party with a shrewd and articulate leadership. Let us ensure that this is reflected in our showing in this election. Let us send a clear message to the British government that our demand for peace with justice cannot be ignored. Let us all work hard to achieve the "unprecedented vote".

Beir Bua
Vótáil Sinn Féin
H-Blocks Sinn Féin Cumann,
Long Kesh.

NB: Since this article was written Sinn Féin has transformed the political landscape of the Six Counties with historic victories in the Mid-Ulster and West Belfast constituencies.

Lá lascaireachta



Beidh lá breá ann, arsa an fear leis féin. Bhí a shúile leathdhruidthe faoi spalpadh na gréine a bhí ag éirí ón taobh thall den sliabh, cúpla míle i bhfad uaidh. Shnigh sé an gluasteán ar an shocairshuaimhneas i measc fáлта arda an bhóthair chuing thuaithe. Ba chóir dom an turas seo a shocrú na blianta ó shin. Aimsir ghalánta, aer glan folláin, radharcanna áille agus an spórt is fearr ar domhan. Agus ar ndóigh an gasúr — sin brí an turais.

Chaith sé súil ar a mhac sa suíochán lena thaobh. Beidh dúil mhór aige ann. Go díreach mar a bhí agamsa ag an aois sin. Cá haois anois é — a deich? Ní hea, a haon déag — ag toiseacht ar an scoil úr ag deireadh an tsamhraidh. Ní fhaca muid mórán dá chéile le tamall de bhlianta anuas, ó fuair mé an post úr, is dócha. Agus bíonn sé ag fálróid thart fán bhaile i gcuideachta na mbodach drochmhúinte úd. Leoga, cad é mar a dtig liom comhrá a dhéanamh le hábhar “punk rocker”? Ní hamhlaidh a bhí an scéal nuair a bhí sé níos óige — an rancás, na barróga, ag cur ungha ar a chuid gearrthacha agus gránuithe, an t-am a chaill sé a chéad fhiacail diúil agus a d’inis mé scéal na síóg dó ... Tháinig miongháire ar bhéal an fhuir. Cuirfidh mé aithne air arís, beidh comhchosúlachtaí againn lena chéile i ndiaidh an lae inniu. Eireoimid iontach mór le chéile.

An ghealt d’athair atá agamsa! Tá seachrán beag tagtha air — amharc ar an mhiongháire amaideach sin ar a bhéal. Stán

an gasúr go dúranta amach ar an fhuinneog. Bhí codladh air go fóill agus bhí an diuilíur rí-ghlas ag cur isteach air. Bhí sé brean den turas cheana féin. Tháinig mothú ferige air nuair a smaoinigh sé ar an spórt a bhí sé a chrothnú. Bhí an cluiche ceannais den chomórtas “pool” ar siúl inniu san Ionad Siamsa agus cé gur leagadh as an chomórtas sa dara babhta é — agus é dhá bhliain níos óige ná a chéile imeartha — bhainfeadh sé sult mór as an chrac agus an fhonóid i measc a chuid cairde. Ach ina áit sin, tarraingíodh amach as a leaba é le bhreacadh an lae chun taisteal chuig dúiche fhíáin iargúlta i gcuideanta fir mheán-aosta ab é, mar bharr ar an iomlán, an t-athair s’áigeasean é.

I ndiaidh taistil fhada leadránaigh ar bhóithre garbha sléibhe, stadadh an gluasteán ar leadhb chaol screabáin, crua cothrom le húsáid. Chruinnigh siad a gcuid trealamh le chéile agus anonn leo trasna an chanaigh agus suas le fána. Bhí an gasúr ag sracadh leis mála mór ceapairí agus fleascaí. Chun tosaigh, ar rástáil roimhe, d’iompair an fear dhá slat iascaigh úra snasta agus buicéad de chruimheanna bána lúbarnaíola.

Ar bhaint amach an mullach dóibh, i dtoibinne nochtadh os a gcomhair loch glasghorm muileatach, ag crithlonnú sa ró samh. Baineadh ar anáil den ghasúr, radharc an locha á mhúscaill mar a mhúsclódh steallógd’fhíoruise fuar é. Cuireadh faoi dhraíocht é ag craiceann an uisce a bhí ag drithliú mar a bheadh linn de liaga lómhara ann. Ar an taobh thall den loch, ag síneadh le bun na spéire, bhí dromchla íseal fraoigh ag timpeallú an locha, an ghasúr agus a athar agus á gcuaichadh go teann leis. Ní raibh le cluistín sa chúinas

sollúnta ach gliográn an uisce agus giolcadh na riabhóg beag. Tharraing an fear anáil mhór isteach, choinnigh istigh bomaite í agus ansin lig sé amach le hosna í. Anuas leis go dtí ardán beag a bhí mar mhionschlasa agus chuaigh sé i gceann oibre, a chur bhala ar na slata go fadálach foirfe. Tháinig an gasúr anuas agus chaith sé an mála in aice le tom aitinn. Shuigh sé síos ar laftán.

"Déanfaidh an méid sin gnó dúinn," arsa an fear agus aobh air. "Anois, tabhair thusa aird don cheann sin agus abair liom má tharlaonn rud ar bith."

Bhí na slata fiche troigh ar shiúl óna chéile, a dtaca le craobhacha gabhlánacha. Chuaigh an fear ar a leaslú in aice lena slat féin, ag corraí agus ag gnúasachtach leis go dtí go raibh sé ar a sháimhín só. I gceann tamaillín, d'fsligh a mhalaf agus ní raibh cuach ann ach a anáil fhadálach rialta. Stán an gasúr go dian ar an slat faoina chúramsa, chóir a bheith ag dréim le go dtarraingeofaí isteach san uisce ag cineál d'ollpheist reamhstairiúil í. Ach níor tharla a dhath. Agus ansin níor tharla a dhath. Chuaigh na nóiméid thart agus ansin uair a chloig ach níor tharla a dhath go fóill. Níor thuig sé brí an chaitheamh aimsire seo. Bhreathnaigh a shúile an tír go géar agus chuir sé sé cluas le héisteacht air.

Ach níor athraigh an timpeallacht seo leis na cianta agus ní raibh sé le hathrú anois chun siamsa a dhéanamh do ghlas-stócach cathrach. D'fhan an loch socair agus an fraoch corcra agus níor scaoil an dromchla a chuach daingean.

Bhí an mhaidin ag sraoilleadh léi agus tháinig goin ocrais ar an ghasúr. Níor ith sé aon ghreim sular fhág sé an teach. Bhí a chosa ag broidearnac agus ag bualadh ciceanna dá neamhthoil. I

dála d'éirigh sé
ina sheasamh, a
ghéaga craptha, agus
shiúil anonn agus anall.
B'annamh a d'amharc sé ar
án tslat faoina chúram anois —
bhí amhras air nach raibh
iasc ar bith sa loch. Ní
raibh

Léaraid le Nollaig Mac Aoidh



sa turas seo ach tóraíocht an ghadhair gan fios a dhatha. Tháinig fuath leis ar an duine sona sásta ina leaslú agus a thaca leis an laftán.

Mhúscail an fear, mar a chluinfeadh sé cuid smaointe an ghasúir.

"Cad é fá ghreim bia, a mhic? Caithfidh go bhfuil do ghoile agat fán am seo. A!..."

Tharraing sé bolgam de ghaoth na spéire isteach ina shrón. "Seo an rud atá de dhíth ort — neart d'aer folláin tuaithe chun do scamhóga a ghlanadh."

D'aon phlímp amháin, chaith sé a raibh ann sa mhála lóin ar an talamh agus bhí craos déanta aige ar a sciar féin de na ceapairí sular bhain an gasúr a chéad ghreim. D'ainneoin go ceapairí sular bhain an gasúr a chéad ghreim, d'éirigh an bia do-ite raibh an gasúr ag siúl ar an fhéar ghorta, d'éirigh an bia do-ite ina bhéal. bhí fuarbhlas ar an arán agus bhí an t-im léaithe leis an teas. D'ól sé bolgam tae chun an bia a shlogadh siar ach an leacht bogtha bainniúil, truaillithe le plasiteach na chuir an leacht bogtha bainniúil, truaillithe le plasiteach na ffeisce, urla air. Smaoinigh sé ar na "cheeseburgers" agus ffeisce, urla air. Smaoinigh sé ar na "cheeseburgers" agus ffeisce, urla air. Smaoinigh sé ar na "cheeseburgers" agus ffeisce, urla air.

gceapairí ar an uisce agus shuigh sé síos go hainniseach. "Is mór an intleacht é sin, a mhic. B'fhéidir go dtarraingeodh an t-arán na héisc chugainn."

Bhí an tráthnóna á chaitheamh go fadálach. Bhreathnaigh an gasúr an scroblach a bhí caite aige ar an uisce agus é ag éirí ina ghlae iodartha. Ní bheidh dúil dá laghad ag iasc cóir sa bhruscar úd — is dócha go bhfuil sé á gcuruainn. Nochtann sé a laghad eolais is atá aige-sean ar an iascaireacht!

Chaithe an fear seal ina leath-shuan, seal i gceann oibre, ag scrúdú ruaiméanna agus ag caitheamh súile taitneamhaí ar an radharcanna aobhne. Ba é an ola ar an chroí aige an áille thuaithe seo mar ba léir óna chuid smeach teanga agus onsaí móra. Chuir an méid seo isteach go mór ar an ghasúr áfach agus chuaigh sé chun stuaiice duibhe dóite.

Faoi lár an tráthnóna bhí an ghrian ag scalladh anuas agus bhí na mioltóga ag eitil ina scaotha thart orthu. Bhí an gasúr ag siustráil agus ag fústráil leis. Shuigh sé síos, d'éirigh anois, shuigh arís. Bhris sé craobhóga agus bhuaíl sé ciceanna ar chlocha. I ndeireadh an dála gan fiú an fear nár thug fá deara a mhíshuaimeas agus mhol sé go rachadh an gasúr fá choinne siúlóide. Cé go mbeadh sé amhrasach faoi mholadh ar bith de chuid a athar, rug sé ar an fhail seo mar a bheirfeadh cime ar eochair a chillín.

Ar shiúl leis, ag abhógaí go lúfar thar na carraigeacha agus na geadáin bhogaigh thart fán loch. Shnigh an fuinneamh isteach sna géaga aige arís agus shín sé go pléisiúrtha sna featha fásaigh iad. Ar feadh bomaite níor aithin sé soir thar siar agus é ag amharc síos, ag tabhairt iomlán a airde ar imeacht sciobtha a chos ar an talamh garbh. I ndiaidh na chéad rúide seo, mhaolaigh sé luas agus bhreathnaigh sé an dúiche máguaird.

Thosaigh an loch a nochtadh a chuid áiteanna folaithe dó, a ligint a chuid rún leis. Bhí plandaí corra ag fás thart fá ghoilíní agus srutháin bheaga, plandaí de dhathanna eagsúla — glas, buí, corcra, bánderg. Bhí cineáil eagsúla éan ann fosta — cearcanna uisce, riabhóga móna, naoscacha agus éin nárbh iad — a gcothú agus a gcluimhriú féin go deasghnáchach. Bhí siasarnach agus gluaiseacht sa ghiolcach mar a bheadh saol folaithe ag mairceachtáil leis. Rinne an gasúr iontas mór den domhan rúnda seo

agus ní riabh a fhios aige an tuige nár thug sé fá dara roimhe é.

Ansin, leath bhealaigh thart, ar an taobh thall den loch a raibh a athair míogarnach ann, thug an gasúr aghaidh i dtreo mhullach an dromchla. Bhí an fraoch iontach lingeach anseo, ag lúbadh faoina chosa agus ag preabadh arais chun meallta tanáí a chos a ghránú. Chaith sé léimeanna móra chun é féin a scaoileadh ón scrobarnach tiubh seo, ach níor éirigh leis ach néal de phiotail chorra a thógáil agus slogadh sa chumhracht mhílis cheasúil é. Bhí tuirse ag teacht air de thairbhe an stró seo agus bhí drúchtíní allais ag sileadh anuas a leicne dearga. Leann sé de, áfach, go dtí gur bhain sé an mullach amach agus an anáil i mbarra a ghoib aige.

Thit an sliabh síos le fána ghéar charraigeach, ansin rith sé ina chluainte mine méithe. Shín na páirceanna amach frí mhachaire ollmhór mar a bheadh paistí beaga ann agus ag an taobh thall bhí stríoc de dhú-ghrom ab í, mar a thuig an gasúr le hiontas, an fharraige mhór corradh agus tríocha míle i bhfad uaidh. Tharraing sé isteach anáil den fheothán fhionnuair, ag baint suilt mhóir as an difear leis an aer trom cumhrachtach thart fán loch. I bhfad thíos os a comhair mhothaigh sé loinnir de fhlandearg, á mhearú go dtí gur thug sé fá deara an líne tanáí cam a lean an mionghluaisteán. Mhothaigh sé mar a bheadh fathach ann le taobh an tsaoil thíos faoi agus dar leis go raibh sé ar snamh san atmaisféar meadránach seo go hard os cionn an domhain.

Thíos cois an locha arís bhí an gasúr tite i dtroimdubhach. Bhí an chuid seo den dúiche leamh leadránach i gcomparáid leis na hiontais a d'aimsigh sé ar a shiúlóid. D'fhill sé, bhí cúpla uair a chloig ó shin. Bhí an ghriain ina luí gan bhrí ag bun na spéire anois agus bhí bearradh fuar ag teacht ar an aimsir. Ach dar leis an ghasúr go raibh an lá gan deireadh. Smaoinigh sé ar an chomórtas "pool" — bheadh air leithscéal a thabhairt faoin tuige nach raibh sé ann. Ba mhaire d'óg nach raibh báisteach air. Chuir sé ceist chaolchúiseach ar a athair faoi aghaidh a thabhairt ar an bhaile ach theip go hiomlán air.

"Nearth ama fágtha go fóill, a mhic, ná bí buartha. Seans go maróimid iasc anois — meallann an aimsir fhuar chun craiceann an uisce iad, bíodh a fhios agat."

Léigh sé leabhar faoin ábhar agus é ag ullmhú don turas seo. Mhúscaíl fuacht an tráthnóna an fear as a mhíogarnach. Anois bhí sé ina shuí go caol díreach, ag cuimilt a lámha mar a bheadh gliondar ar a chroí, agus ag stánadh amach ar an áit ar imigh na ruaimeanna isteach san uisce dorcha. Chuir an gasúr na lámha s'áige-sean faoina ascaillí agus dreach duairc air. Bhí geonáil sa bholg aige agus é silte leis an ocras, ach ba chuma sa tsoic leis anois de thairbhe an tuairse agus an mheadhráin a bhí air. Bhí an t-am imithe a raibh toil aige do rud ar bith agus d'fhan sé ina shuí, ar aghaidh na gaoithe, mar a bheadh grágán ann.

Ar chur cheannsoilse an gluasteáin ar siúl don fhear, thit an oíche lom láithreach agus d'éirigh siad dall ar an tír máguaird. Mhúscaíl an fear an t-inneall augs thosaigh a thomáint go faichilleach idir na linnreoga. Bhí an gasúr ina luí anuas i só an suícháin agus ag ligint do thonnchrith an ghluaisteáin codladh a chur air.

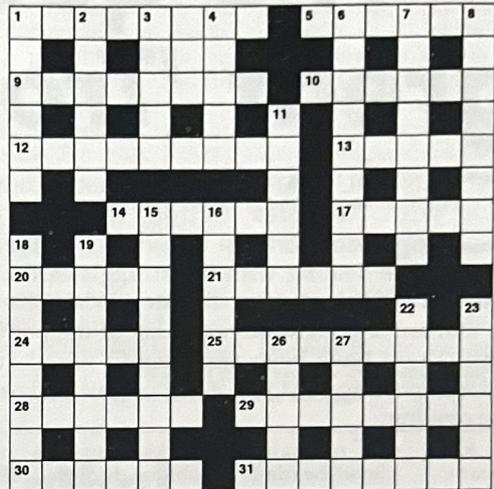
Ba bhreá an lá é sin, arsa an fear leis féin. Ní raibh bualadh ar bith ar an iasc ach bhí an aimsir galánta go dtí an tráthnóna. Agus b'iontach na radharcanna tuaithe siúd. Lón blasta fosta. Bhí an gasúr sách ciúin. Ach sílim gur thaitin sé leis — tá mé ag déanamh nach raibh sé ag dúil le dhul 'na bhaile ar chor ar bith. Tá cuma thraochta air anois — beidh codladh sámh aige anocht. Beidh sé sona sásta fosta nuair a deirimse leis mo chuid beartanna don chéad turas eile.

"Déanamais arís é sin, a mhic — Dé Sathairm seo chugainn, b'fhéidir?"

D'oscail an gasúr a shúile agus stán sé ar a athar go fuar glinniúnach idir an dá shúil.

■ Le Micheál Mac Giolla Ghunna

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1. Acrobatic drinking glasses (8)
5. Exempt, free from danger (6)
9. Outline in detail (8)
10. Beverage container (6)
12. To go away quickly (slang) (9)
13. Push forward like a wave (5)
14. Overlap and join together to do this (8)
17. Must this line of direction be traditional? (5)
20. Bequeath or abandon (5)
21. Hallucinates and fantasies with Dr Seam (6)
24. Stanza (5)
25. Put oneself forward, or be chosen, to become one (9)
28. Fashion fads etc (6)
29. Depraved sinner (8)
30. Go back (6)
31. This Parish Church has become synonymous with loyalist domination and intransigence (8)

DOWN

1. From dawn (2, 4)
2. Longed for but was off target (6)
3. Caterpillar, maggot etc. (5)
4. Hydrophobic, like dog (5)
6. A great whirlpool (9)
7. A classic boxing blow (8)
8. Maximums, limits (8)
11. Harsh (6)
15. Impostor (9)
16. Persuade, instigate (6)
18. Staircase that moves (8)
19. Most hirsute (8)
22. Curry or return this if you prefer it (6)
23. Liberate the insect perhaps (2, 4)
26. Ian Paisley's favourite word (5)
27. Mohammed's religion (5)

ANSWERS

ACROSS: 1. Tumblers; 5. Immune; 9. Describe; 10. Teapot; 12. Skedaddle; 13. Surge; 14. Splice; 17. Route; 20. Leave; 21. Dream; 24. Verse; 25. Candidate; 28. Trends; 29. Evidently; 30. Return; 31. Elevator; 19. Hairiest; 22. Favort; 23. Be Free; 26. Never; 27. Islam. DOWN: 1. To Dusk; 2. Missed; 3. Larva; 4. Rabbit; 6. Maelstrom; 7. Uppercut; 8. Extremes; 11. Severe; 15. Pretender; 16. Induce; 18. Persuade.

The quest for the great 'Troubles' novel

CAN YOU REMEMBER your first encounter with 'Troubles' fiction; that is, your impressions on first reading one of the 400 or so novels dealing with the struggle in the Six Counties published since the late 1960s? Chances are that anyone knowledgeable about the political conflict will have been appreciably vexed at its fictional portrayal. Much of the output makes for dire reading.

I know one normally tolerant, level-headed comrade who in exasperation flung an example of the genre from his car while caught in a traffic tail-back at the Newry permanent checkpoint a few years ago, possibly provoking curiosity from squaddies hunkered down nearby. His reaction was due not to fear that its contents might be considered subversive, if found during a search, but to the paperback in question, Andrew Lane's *The Ulsterman* (1979). To anyone familiar with this novel's rabidly anti-republican, pro-unionist slant his action may seem not altogether unreasonable. *The Ulsterman* is capable of turning the most forbearing and ecologically-conscious into a censorious litter-lout.

Who hasn't felt the urge to bin the latest bloated account of weaselly Provo bloodlust by, say, Gerald Seymour or Shaun Herron, responsible respectively for *Field Of Blood* (1986) and *The Whore-Mother* (1973) Nevertheless, the popularity of *Troubles'* Fiction outside of a readership familiar with the realities of British rule amounts to a publishing phenomenon and, if for no other reason, merits our attention. We read in them how the world is primed to perceive Republicans and our struggle.

My own first brush with the genre was Jack Higgins' *The Savage Day* (1972). While interned in Cage Two in 1974

I picked up the novel, doubtless discarded, curious about how the Movement was represented in contemporary fiction, hoping for an awareness and perspective beyond the habitual tabloid outrage often fostered from Thiepval Barracks.

It is embarrassing now to reveal that then I believed novelists, all novelists, possessed acute insight into the human condition; and if ever a situation merited imaginative engagement it was that pertaining in the North. However, as Oscar Wilde said, "Books are well written or badly written. That is all." It is certainly true that the conflict would tax the most creative and articulate person. So, turning to a work whose blurb promised that Ireland's fate would hang on the outcome of the plot, I expected considerably more than Higgin's war comic misrepresentation of a conflict that since the northern statelet's inception had wrought discrimination, torture, internment, Special Powers, murder gangs and Bloody Sunday.

Higgin's depiction of the IRA Volunteer, Binnie Gallagher, though not unsympathetic, was a cartoon cliché, an archetypal throwback to the 1940s or '50s gunman, revamped, it seemed, to take advantage of a gullible though lucrative thriller market. With hindsight, image counter for

more at that age, and it was Binnie's dress-sense that initially struck a false note. Most of the lads in the Cages were teenagers or, like myself, into their early '20s. Doc Martins, Wranglers and bomber jackets were the prized look that season, though on parade the odd die-hard Glam Rock victim might be witnessed teetering pluckily on his platform soles. Binnie, sporting a "dark blue double-breasted Melton overcoat of a kind much favoured by undertakers", would have been immediately suspect. More than the ludicrous Oirish-speak, inaccuracies in the description of location and period, and the ill-researched caricature of our beliefs and values, this admittedly superficial detail was palpably out of sync with watchtower and tin-hut reality.

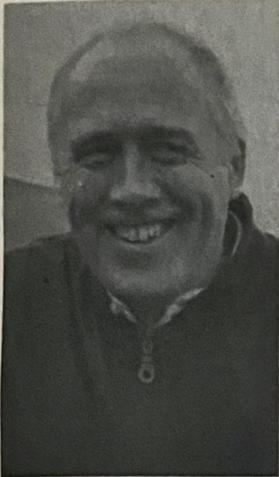
Particularly irksome was the episode in which Binnie scared the shite out of a gang of youths, "dressed exactly alike in leather boots, jeans and donkey jackets", masquerading, we are supposed to accept, as Republicans in order to extort money from a local bar. And how was this accomplished? With not a Branchman in sight to beat it out of him, it took Binnie merely to declare that he was "a lieutenant in the North Tyrone brigade". Would the tactic work with your average Belfast hood? The manufacture of baseball hats would plummet! In the back-street real world, such a declaration would have marked Binnie down as a header. While I may not have hurled this rubbish at the timbers, I don't recollect reading much further at that time. And this was how the world was supposed to see us?

I've since read far worse. To single out two which scrape the barrel: Chapman Pincher's *Eye Of The Tornado* (1976), and Eddie Shah's *Fallen Angel* (1994). I refer you to Pincher's "Forward" to his novel:

"In making this work of fiction as true to life as possible the author is greatly indebted to senior officials, present and past, in the Defence Ministry, the Royal Navy, the Secret Intelligence Service, Scotland Yard, the Atomic Energy Authority, the US Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon".

The paltry pay-off from this lofty insider access was a plot in which the IRA, with KGB help, hijack a shipload of nuclear weapons in an otherwise laudable intent to destabilise the UK. Truly wacko ravings. Shah's offering, published prior to the '94 cessation peddles the line that the IRA was undermining the efforts of London and Dublin to achieve a just settlement. We are served up yet again the threadbare sectarian tagging: in Belfast "manhood was barmitzvahed when you kicked your first Prod unconscious".

Are all novels dealing with the *Troubles* irredeemably dreadful? Can the reason remain detached from what he or she knows to be a flagrant distortion? The answer, I would suggest, is a qualified yes but probably only when the novel compensates with exceptionally redeeming figurative or narrative qualities. We may object to the characterisations and politics of, for example, Francis Stuart's *A Hole In The Head* (1977), or Paul Theroux's *The Family Arsenal* (1976), while at the same time



DANNY MORRISON

acknowledge the skill and adroitness of the pacy plot development or of the authors' imaginative seizure of the Troubles' theme.

Mercifully there are exceptions — novelists who have attempted to probe deeper to uncover the realities of conflict, to unveil some of the underlying motivations and grievances — Edna O'Brien's *A House Of Splendid Isolation* (1994), Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* (1994), Danny Morrison's *West Belfast* (1989), Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* (1987), Patrick McCabe's *The Dead School* (1995).

I am not trying to persuade you to read these authors because their work expresses a sympathy with or even understanding of republicans and of republicanism. Indeed, some examples of the works cited above are highly critical. They stand out, in my estimation, because they have tried to grapple, to varying degrees of success, perhaps even failure, with the tortuous complexities of the conflict, refusing to buy at face value the comfortable pro-British government line. For example, the reader is in no doubt from reading Mary Beckett's *Give Them Stones* that she is writing from within the experience of an actual nationalist community; of rounded, flesh-and-bone individuals with their cares and dreams, courage and failings, keeping faith with an

historical sense of outrage learned on granny's lap, and driven to build a better future — all in all, a welcome antidote to the walk-on roles and grocers cum Godfathers usually served up for the undiscerning. Part of her underlying purpose in this novel, it appears, is the attempt to show why the Republican Movement maintains a considerable measure of support even when at times IRA actions may have offended people in nationalist areas. For Martha, the novel's central character, although she does not "approve of anything they did they were the only people... [she] could hear of that the English paid any heed to".

If, however, the sensibilities and intelligence of Republicans would be alienated by the bulk of the novels churned out, and many are indeed wretched, what would satisfy? What constitutes an authentic representation?

There isn't a definitive republican perspective; there are probably as many viewpoints as there are Republicans. Are all valid, and capable of translation into plausible narrative form? Probably yes, as long as certain broadstroke criteria are inscribed. A model can be devised, I would suggest, which should include a more faithful rendering of local colour, idiom and mood; a sense of community solidarity, of that inextricable, organic relation between nationalist communities and the Movement; an historical awareness of continuity, of the unfinished business of partition. However, in subscribing to this model there is the danger of tokenism; of striving to say too much, and instead lapsing into banal generalities. Instead, by focusing on the specific, whether by teasing out a particular incident, or set of relationships, the writer may connect with the wider context.

Perhaps no single work of fiction could possibly embrace the essence of a people so

diverse and divided culturally, politically or economically. No one can say, know, or see it all. Only the total corpus of such works could possibly begin to encapsulate an adequate representation. We may search, therefore, in vain for the Great Troubles' Novel, just as it is a vain exercise to hunt for those other holy grails, the Great Irish Novel or the Great "Ulster" Novel.

The quest is for a successful fleshing-out of the complexities involved in the struggle; of the dilemmas and choices facing ordinary people contending against a

powerful state. Perhaps only those close to, or with the gumption to discover, the realities can contribute a credible reflection. Regrettably, few authors have fulfilled this need. More republicans, with their commitment, experience and unique insight, should square up to the task of writing their own account in fiction.

■ By Pat Magee

Pat Magee (H7 C) is doing a post-graduate study of Troubles Fiction, and would welcome correspondence on the subject.

Cathal An Iascaire

In the beginning there was nothing
and God was bored.
He stretched his hand into the emptiness,
lit a spark and it erupted,

racing cosmically
against the nothingness,
coagulating into gases,
galaxies and stars.

And there was space and time,
the heavens and the planets
and he was pleased.
He pondered for a while.

Picking one he added clouds and seas,
plants and parasites, but still
he was depressed. He moulded molecules
to fish dinosaurs and flying reptiles.

Lying back, hands joined across his belly
like a seal bob in the white-lap grey
beside an emptied net, he surveyed
his handy-work, and dozed and missed

the comet plough into his theme park.
He'd to start again.
Paradise would be flowers and tress,
hillside streams and seas,

reds yellows blues,
moon and stars,
birds animals
and man.

■ By Tarlac O Conghalaigh

In recent times conditions endured by Irish prisoners in jail in England have deteriorated drastically. An Glór Gafa asked some of the prisoners on remand in Belmarsh Jail to explain their conditions.

SPECIAL SECURE UNITS THE FACTS

AS IRISH nationals in very unique circumstances we would like to articulate the following arguments: that the closed-visit regime is superfluous to prison security; is generated by an institutional paranoia; and is used as a form of punishment.

On remand, unconvicted, hundreds of miles from our families, confined by financial restraints regarding visits, unable to communicate our love and affection to our loved ones, we find ourselves to a high degree, severed from the outside world. We further feel that Michael Howard (Home Secretary) and the prison service are taking a jaundiced view of prisoners' mental health, the psychological impact on our families (in particular our children), the right of prisoners to have reasonable access to a lawyer and the ability to prepare adequately for our impending trial.

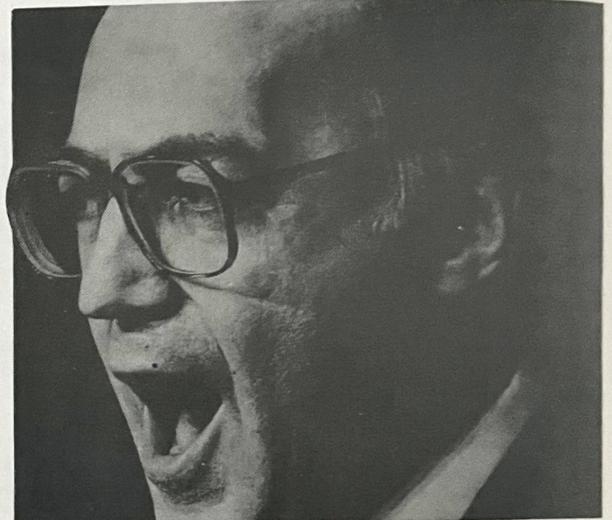
We do not seek special treatment. All we ask is to be treated in the same way as thousands of other prisoners in that we be afforded the same visitation rights. We are solidly of the view that human rights, normal visits with our next of kin and children, and reasonable access to a lawyer are inextricably linked.

Our legal position is precarious in that our lawyers, from a professional stand-point, have withdrawn from closed visits. Hence the possibility of conducting a legal defence is made impossible. Our domestic

situation is such that all our next of kin do not again wish to be dehumanised or insulted by further closed visits.

To understand our position it is imperative that you have some appreciation of what "Special Secure Units" are and how the closed regime came about. An SSU is the term given to a second jail separate from the main jail, within the same prison complex. It is a walled off self-contained unit which, once prisoners enter it, they do not leave except for court appearances; and even then they are brought to court via a specially built tunnel from the prison to the court and back.

If a prisoner housed in the SSU has reason to see the governor, censor, mail officer, doctor, optician, chaplain, lawyer or take a visit, he does so within the SSU. Inside the Belmarsh SSU there are four wings or "spurs" holding a maximum of twelve prisoners each. Contact between prisoners other than those on the spur in which you are housed is forbidden. Inside each spur there is a small communal area, TV, shower and washing machine. There is a minimum of three prison officers, CCTV cameras and a glass-partitioned area housing



Former British Home Secretary Michael Howard

more prison officers. If for any reason a prisoner or prisoners leave the spur (for example to go to the yard or to collect food) all movement of other prisoners is stopped.

No education of a formal nature is allowed to us; no musical instruments are permitted. All mail and all of the brief telephone calls are censored and monitored. Access to normal church service is denied; instead a priest has access to a prisoner's cell if that prisoner wishes to take the sacraments. Weekly remand hearings entail four full strip-searches and two changes of clothes.

In September 1994 there was an attempted escape from Whitemoor Prison with all six

prisoners involved being immediately recaptured. As a result of this Sir John Woodcock was asked by the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, to conduct an investigation into the prison service in general and to make recommendations for improvement.

Prior to Woodcock's report open visits had existed, i.e. there was physical contact between prisoner and wife/children, within sight of a prison officer. Woodcock did not condemn open visits and in the conclusion of his report he states:

"Providing the series of measures outlined in the manual on security and reinforced by the

recommendations of this inquiry are strictly adhered to then it is contended that open visits could continue." [1]

Woodcock published his report in May 1995 and in a debate in the House of Commons that followed, the Home Secretary announced that he had asked General Sir John Larmont to look at the issue of closed visits as part of his review of security across the prison service. Larmont, a former senior member of the British military, conscious of the fact that Woodcock had stated that "open visits could continue", devised a report which qualified Woodcock's recommendations so as not to be seen to undermine or contradict them. It was to categorise prisoner within an SSU into "High-Risk Prisoners" and "Exceptional High-Risk Prisoners". High risk were to be allowed open visits while Exceptional High Risk were to be confined to closed visits.

However there were and are no criteria or guide-lines established as to what constitutes "High Risk" and "Exceptional High Risk" categories for the prisoners within an SSU. Because there are no criteria a prisoner cannot appeal his categorisation as he does not know on what grounds to appeal. Since it is an arbitrary decision it lends itself to abuse as a form of punishment with no underlying security motive. This policy of categorisation and mandatory closed visits that go along with it is applicable to both remand and sentenced prisoners within an SSU.

With the recommendations of Woodcock and the associated security upgrading having been in place for a year, in May 1996, the Prison Service Director of Security asked Sir Donald Acheson to conduct a review into whether the regimes in the SSUs were having a significant adverse effect on the health of the prisoners being held there, as a result of complaints made by prisoners' legal representatives. Acheson stated in his conclusion:

"At all times in the course of the review we have been aware



GARETH PEIRCE

of the need to balance health issues against the demands of security." [2]

In the light of this he next went on to conclude:

"It is the unanimous view of the group that in the interests of health, prisoners in the SSUs should have access to open visits with members of immediate family." [3]

Since neither Woodcock nor Acheson advocate closed visits and Larmont does not establish the criteria for such visits, (i.e. what makes an individual, especially one on remand "exceptional High Risk" and hence subject to closed visits) we cannot see the justification in imposing closed visits upon our immediate families, lawyers and ourselves and can only conclude that it is being used as a form of punishment.

All visitors, including next of kin and children, have to be security cleared, which entails a prisoner sending out an application detailing the name, address and nature of the relationship of the person he wishes to visit him. The prison authorities in turn send the application to the prospective visitor who then must supply photographs of themselves and submit to an interview by local police. This process can take between two and six months before completion and even then it is at the discretion of the Home Office to grant or refuse visiting rights. The actual visit

itself entails the following procedure, described by Solicitor Gareth Peirce.

"After arriving at the prison a visitor is required to enter a hand imprint into a hand geography machine, as a result of which a photographic image of the visitor is accessed by bar code. The visitor then enters the main gate of the prison and must produce evidence of identity and the bar code. The hand print is once again taken — at this stage the visitor goes through a metal detecting gate and the visitor's few accompanying possessions are put through an airport x-ray scanner. The visitor is then subjected to a rub down search and a metal-detecting wand is passed over the visitor's entire body. The visitor now enters an inner section of the prison where again the hand imprint is taken. The visitor is then escorted through two doors and into a bus which proceeds to the SSU visiting area.

The SSU is entered through electronic doors, inside of which is another airport x-ray machine. The visitor is again required to undergo a body search, the hand imprint identification is again checked and the visitor's hand print is again taken. The visitor then walks through another gate which carries a detection mechanism and again is subject to a further rub down search and an electronic metal detecting wand is again passed

over the visitor's body." [4]

From a prisoner's perspective the procedure before and after a visit are as follows. Upon being called for a visit the prisoner is given a body rub-down search prior to leaving the spur in which he is housed. He is then escorted by a minimum of two prison staff through seven remotely controlled gates and a step-through metal body detector. He is then fully stripped and either must change into a complete set of new clothes he had no control over prior to the visit or his clothes are x-rayed. He is taken to the visiting room which is small and divided into two separate rooms via a wooden bench and reinforced glass. A prison officer accompanies the prisoner into the visiting room where he sits beside him for the duration of the visit and listens to the entire contents of the conversation between the prisoner and the visitor. Upon the termination of the visit the prisoner goes through the reversed steps he took going to the visit including the strip search. At no time from leaving his spur does a prisoner leave the sight or be out of hearing of the prison staff.

As remand and hence unconvicted prisoners our position is further complicated by the fact that the practice of closed visits also extends to our legal visits. None of the aforementioned three reports, by Woodcock, Larmont or Acheson, were asked to deal with remand prisoners specifically and their entitlement to unimpeded legal advice. Rule 37(1) of the British Prison Rules states:

"The legal advisor of a prisoner in any legal proceedings civil or criminal to which the prisoner is a party shall be afforded reasonable facilities for interviewing him in connection with those proceedings and may do so out of hearing but in the sight of a prison officer." [5]

The fact that our legal advisors and ourselves are subjected to a closed visit regime raises a number of important points.

1. The implied inference that our legal representatives would

knowingly assist us in some illegal manner (a point not lost upon our legal advisors and which they are pursuing within their own legal profession).

2. The ability for us individually and collectively to prepare adequately for our court case. Bearing in mind that if found guilty a sentence of life imprisonment with recommendations to be held in custody for 40 or more years can be imposed upon us. We find it grossly unfair and unjust that our lawyers have been forced into a position where they have stated in open court that they simply will not be able to defend us under a regime of closed visits.

We now wish to turn to the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of the prison system which holds us. Rule 2(1) of the British Prison Rules states:

"Order and discipline shall be maintained with firmness but with no more restriction than is necessary." [6]

We fully believe that any reasonably minded person after reading of the security procedures that we, our families and lawyers are subjected to should come to the objective conclusion that at the end of such in-depth security before and after a visit, a closed visit with no physical contact is clearly an unnecessary restriction.

Rule 2(3) of the British Prison Rules states:

"At all times treatment of prisoners shall be as to encourage their self-respect and a sense of their responsibility." [7]

Our view is clear. When our partners and families have told us after a visit has taken place that they felt totally dehumanised we are not being treated, nor are our families, with even a semblance of respect. When we are being denied the possibility of comforting our families and children with even an embrace we cannot begin to look towards our respective familial and parental responsibilities.

Rule 3(1) of the British Prison Rules states:

"Special attention shall be paid to the maintenance of such relations between a prisoner and his family as are desirable

in the best interests of both." [8]

Obviously it is in the best interests of ourselves as prisoners and our respective next of kin and children to have the opportunity to maintain our familial bonds. The closed visit regime stops us in one blow from having the best possible circumstances for the maintenance of relationships.

In Sir Donal Acheson's report he states:

"Our view is that the release of pressure provided in open visits with family members and their affect in maintaining a line with the outside world, is highly desirable in the interests of health." [9]

Our lawyers state:

"Any real understanding of the position of each of our clients and their respective families would lead to an appreciation that they are particularly disadvantaged, far from home and likely to enjoy far fewer visits (and these obtained at considerable hardship to each family involved) than any other remand prisoner. The immediate family of each of our clients consists of young children and/or elderly parents, both of these categories needing special consideration rather than the imposition of additional difficulties." [10]

It is our view at the moment that no attention, never mind special attention, is being paid by the prison service to the maintenance of our respective familial relationships. The complete opposite of Rule 3(1) holds true in that the severest pressure is being applied, through deplorable closed visits, upon our relationships. We have been advised on medical grounds that our children should not be subjected to seeing their fathers under closed conditions because it would be upsetting and potentially damaging psychologically to our children. We have further been told by our respective partners and families that they could not foresee a situation where they could partake in a further closed visit only to be humiliated and de-humanised.

Our conclusions at this stage are that we are being punished in a blanket fashion

and although 75 per cent of prisoners subjected to a closed visit regime are Irish (which in itself raises the question of ethnic discrimination) we firmly approach this issue on a non-partisan basis. We feel that it is wrong to have such a system where a child cannot be hugged by his/her father regardless of nationality or charge. We feel it is a gross injustice that out of an English prison population of over 56,000 prisoners we as a small group (21 in total) are singled out for a closed visit regime. We can testify that our families are being made to suffer and that the prison service is breaching in principle their own rules on the treatment of prisoners. We, along with our lawyers, feel that it is impossible to conduct a legal defence in a closed (legal) visit regime. We feel, as does Sir Donald Acheson and our lawyers, that in the long term we and our families will suffer psychological and physical damage due to the SSU and closed visit regime. Finally we would hope to see an end to such a regime of closed visits on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

We would like to conclude with a poignant quote, directing it towards those that have a belief in the democratic nature of the British Prison System which enforces close visits.

"In effect, the visiting area composed two separate rooms; one for the prisoner, the other for visitors. On the prisoner's side they would stare through inch-thick glass, which distorted any view on the side — it was like seeing life through a 1950s black-and-white television screen. In the

early days there was a hole in the cement wall which allowed each side to speak to one another; it was pretty useless and led to people spending most of their time straining to hear one another. Eventually this unsatisfactory system was replaced by a three-way phone — one for the visitor, one for the prisoner and the third for the warders listening in just behind the prisoner. Visits were always emotional times. It was, to my mind, one of the cruellest aspects that loved ones who had not seen one another for months were given thirty minutes in less than satisfactory conditions to speak to their family.

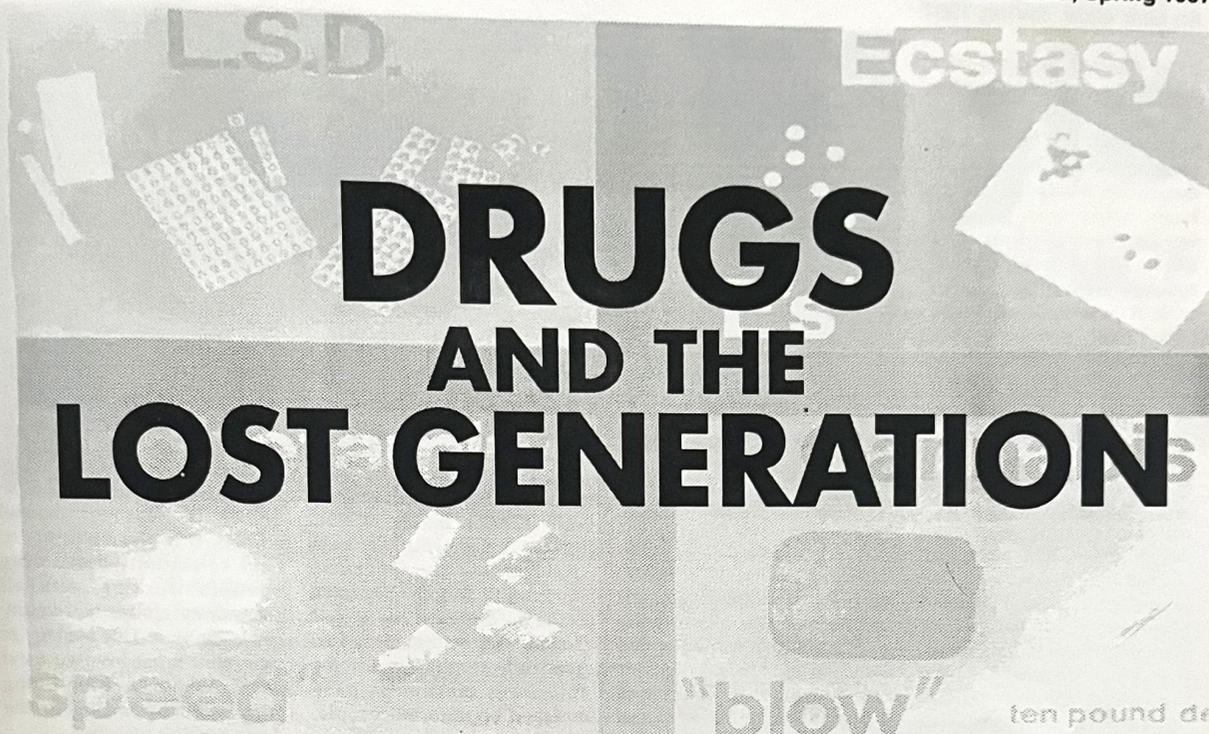
"It was inhuman to expect two people to conduct their family lives in such confined space and time. Often it was in an atmosphere of extreme emotion, with tears and sadness." [11]

After reading our views and those of our lawyers and families you could be forgiven if you think the above quote came from someone in Belmarsh. In fact the quote is from a prison guard in South Africa. His words were about the closed visits regime on Robben Island Prison in the 1960s where Nelson Mandela and other political activists were held. The irony is that, while Robben Island is now a museum, Irish prisoners in British jails still endure such conditions.

■ By Gerry Hanratty, Eoin Morrow, Martin Murphy, John Crawley, Donal Gannon, Frankie Rafferty, Brian McHugh, Jimmy Murphy, Paddy Kelly, Mick Phillips.

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DRUGS AND THE LOST GENERATION

Suddenly politicians and the media are discussing the drugs issue again with a pompous outrage perfect for soundbites. Yet the drugs situation in this country did not happen overnight. It wasn't a case of someone waking up one morning and recognising that we have a drug abuse problem today which wasn't there yesterday. The whole area of drugs and drug abuse was neglected for years. People in high places just took the view that since it mostly affected working-class areas there was nothing to worry about.

In the 1970s, cannabis and "acid" (LSD) were without doubt the most common drugs available but by the early 1980s heroin became more and more prevalent throughout Dublin. The results of this are there for all to see: the North-Inner-City and South-Inner-City have lost a whole generation to the heroin epidemic and are in danger of losing another generation. The same warning signs that were evident in the 1980s are there again in the 1990s. And still the politicians and the policy-makers do nothing more than make pious statements.

In the 1980s the ordinary people took positive action to face their problem head-on. They organised themselves as Concerned Parents Against Drugs (CPAD). It was only then

that the authorities began to take notice — but their interest lay not in tackling the drugs barons but in undermining the vitality and growing number of CPAD. It was not the drugs problem that worried the state, but the people's response to it — local communities beginning to take control of their own areas. The State engaged in a campaign of harassment and demonisation accusing the anti-drugs groups of having a hidden agenda, of being a front for the Republican Movement and all the usual nonsense. Tremendous pressure was placed on activists and this took its toll. The CPAD filtered away.

However it became evident that in some inner-city areas a few of the old CPAD activists were still working very hard

and very effectively in their own smaller groups. Probably the best example of this would be School Street (a flats complex in the South-Inner-City). With the help of Dublin Corporation's Housing Department, they have had a major impact through the allocation of flats which had become vacant. After a couple of years and constant pressure on drug-pushers, the flats complex is now free of pushers and drugs.

In recent years the drugs epidemic has taken a different route to infect those most at risk. In the late 1980s and early 1990s most of Dublin's hardened criminals were in prison, leaving the way clear for the young drug pushers to infiltrate groups of youths. They sought out the most vulnerable and most easily frightened — targeting any venue where there were large numbers of young people, concerns, discos and, most of all, raves. They forced their frightened runners to peddle the goods for them. It was at this stage that Ecstasy or "E" was introduced. While Dublin's history of drugs problems is well known and documented it is now being recognised that drug dealers are targeting most major towns

throughout the country. Because of the sheer amount of people going to night clubs in big towns it was almost impossible to know everyone. There was also a degree of ignorance among the general public. In addition the authorities were denying that the problem even existed. People in these towns thought that everything was normal. But when there was a large increase in anti-social crime, people started to ask why. People wanted answers, they did not want their streets to become like the streets of so many cities, especially Dublin. Everyday in the media they were hearing the stories from victims in Dublin — all the stories that are now a regular occurrence: the young lad whose bicycle is taken from him outside his own house; the boy who has his face slashed for a pair of runners, or jacket or anything the junkie can sell to get his next fix. People were beginning to see that the drugs epidemic doesn't just affect addicts.

In particular it affects whole families. For all the drug users there are drug users' families: the father and mother who for months thought that their son or daughter was just going through a phase. I know of one

father who was the last to know that his 14-year-old daughter was using heroin. He went through hell and back. At one stage he suffered a breakdown due to the worry: he did not know what was going to happen, or what to do or who to talk to. When this is thrust onto someone the fear that it brings with it is unbelievable. Put yourself into the position of the parent just for a few moments: you've just found out that your teenager daughter is taking drugs; what are you going to do? Go to the local pushers and threaten them? Maybe that is everyone's first reaction. But if you live in Dublin — and not just the inner-city but any part of Dublin — this would prove to be a very difficult thing to do. Most areas would have a large number of pushers, and maybe twenty times more users. And don't forget, for every three or four known pushers there is one who isn't known. You are backed into a corner, the pressure is awful, sometimes driving families apart.

Instead you must seek out anti-drugs activists who can and will help — people who have seen it all through the 1980s and have fought the epidemic with concrete results; and who are now seeing it all again. They could see that the small-time pushers were being left alone by the Gardaí. And anyone who did anything positive found themselves being harassed or having their homes raided by the same police that were turning a blind eye to the pushers. The priority of the forces of "law and order" was to maintain the *status quo*, not protect ordinary people. This sort of experience had a major effect on the people of Dublin. This was when the people of Summerhill (in the North-Inner-City) said: if nobody in authority is going to do anything about it then it is up to the local community to do something.

When the local people did set about identifying the pushers who lived amongst them, they quickly found out that the numbers were very high.

About this time the murder of journalist Veronica Guerin took place, generating much



media attention because the drugs epidemic was now affecting them. This media attention forced the government into taking action. However this may well turn out to be too little, too late. These politicians came out with their usual *clichés* along the lines of "we won't rest until ..." and so on. Still nothing was happening on the streets — no change.

At the junction of Killarney Street/Buckingham Street and Seán McDermott Street in the North-Inner-City, the number of pushers increased so much that the local people decided: "Enough!" They called a public meeting and took the decision to march on flats in their area which had been previously identified as the residences of drugs pushers. When they took to the streets the Gardaí took a very heavy-handed approach including baton-charging the marchers. This infuriated the local people. It was yet another example of Garda priorities — to cover up rather than tackle the real problem. Support for the activities poured in from all parts of Dublin. Other areas followed suit and organised themselves into committees to fight for the right to live and bring up their children in a drug-free environment.

After just a short time a new anti-drugs movement was formed. The mistakes made by CPAD were known to the activists and they had also learned over the years which were the most effective means of handling each situation. With all this information at hand, they set about their work in a very professional way. But as

with CPAD in the 1980s, sections of the media have been all too ready to sensationalise community actions. We have heard on different radio chat shows, and we have read in some daily newspapers, that the anti-drugs movement have marched on innocent people, falsely accusing them of being involved in the supply of drugs. Yet the anti-drugs movement does not march on anyone's home unless they can justify their actions. In every case they can and have shown evidence to support all of their claims. These activities are confronting the drugs barons and pushers alike and have to be commended for their fight against drugs.

However the anti-drugs movement realises that a concerted campaign against drugs requires more than the confrontation of pushers. It also requires education of the public and treatment of addicts. Treatment is a very important issue. It is widely agreed that if any addict wishes to come off drugs there must be full programmes available. Remember that someone who is using drugs needs help and attention. One of the aims of the anti-drugs activists is to get that help for the users in their ears. In terms of this aspect of the drugs problem, the authorities have also proven to be woefully inadequate. For example there are only 30 beds available for drugs treatment, yet in Dublin alone there are 7,000 addicts. The anti-drugs activists are campaigning for radical change in this situation. Their demand is very simple: Each area should

be able to treat and counsel addicts. It is also necessary to have community-based drug advisers working with all community groups within any particular area. This strategy of treatment must involve local people who have been living with and responding to the drugs problem for years.

Treatment programmes must be parallel with education. Young people must be educated about the real nature of drugs and addiction. They must be given the information to make an informed choice about how they will live their lives and confront the dangers of drugs. Parents also need information. Parents should realise that 75% of young people who try any drug are introduced to it by a friend. They must get to know the warning signs and be able to act quickly on them. Do not be afraid to contact your local committee — these people can and will give you all the advice and help possible.

For anyone to say that the drugs problem in this country could be solved in a short period of time, I would personally have to disagree with them. I do think that if we work together within our communities with all groups and maintain the good work being done by the anti-drug movement (albeit without the help of the government and some of their departments) we can contain the drug situation. If only we had the help and support of local Gardaí, health departments, clergy and others, we could do a much better job.

■ By Derek Sweetman

Jail Struggle

— A UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE

IN 1994 Nelson Mandela published his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*. The book is a history of the South African anti-apartheid struggle, told through Mandela's own life story. In a section of the book he writes of his 27 years of imprisonment, most of which were spent on Robben Island, which he described as the "dark years". It was whilst reading these pages that I was struck by the universal experience of people imprisoned for their political beliefs, particularly that of the Republican prisoners' historic struggle in the H-Blocks, Long Kesh, and that of Mandela and ANC prisoners.

The struggles in the H-Blocks and Robben Island cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider struggle in which the prisoners were involved before their arrest. Mandela regarded the struggle in prison as a microcosm of the struggle as a whole:

"We would fight inside as we had fought outside." Both the South African and British governments had implemented a policy of criminalisation as a component in their overall political and military strategy to defeat the struggle for freedom, justice and equality in both countries. They both believed that they could remove all political elements from the prisons and that this would remove all political overtones from the Republican and ANC liberation struggles. After all there could hardly be a political struggle if there were no political prisoners.

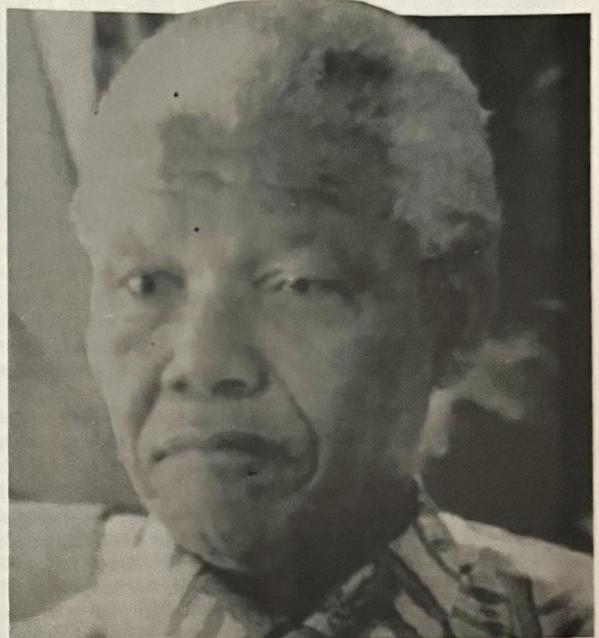
In Ireland the process began with the building of the H-Blocks to replace the Cages of Long Kesh, where republican prisoners had been held since political status was achieved in 1972. Robben Island prison was utilised for the same purpose by the South African authorities. Both Bobby Sands and Nelson Mandela were aware of this strategy. Mandela explains:

"Prison not only robs you of your freedom, it also attempts to take away your identity and smash one's spirit and resolve."

Bobby Sands articulated similar sentiments:

"Jails are engineered to crush the political identity of the captured republican prisoner, to crush his/her spirit and transform him/her into a systemised answering machine with a large criminal tag stamped by oppression upon his/her back, to be duly released onto the street, politically cured, politically barren and permanently broken in spirit."

An integral part of these criminalisation strategies was the use of the courts and the media. When Nelson Mandela and fourteen other leading ANC members were sentenced to life in 1963, the South African government portrayed them as part of a criminal conspiracy, sentenced through the due process of law. The British took a similar position, replacing internment with quasi-judicial Diplock trials and using the media to represent the republican struggle as a criminal conspiracy, led by mafia-type "godfathers". They declared that from 1 March 1976 all those convicted as a result of the conflict in the Six Counties



NELSON MANDELA

would be treated as common criminals and would serve their sentences in the newly constructed H-Blocks. The prisoners' command structure would no longer be recognised, and prisoners would have to wear prison uniforms and perform prison work. This criminalisation process was also to affect the republican women prisoners in Armagh Jail.

However, both governments underestimated the determination and resolve of both the ANC and Republican prisoners to confront criminalisation in defence of their political identity and beliefs. Mandela states:

"Any man or institution that tries to rob my dignity will lose because I will not part with it at any price or under any pressure."

Both governments' strategies inevitably created conditions of conflict in both prisons that would be fought out for many

years between prisoners defending their status as political prisoners and human beings and governments equally determined to criminalise and depersonalise them.

The immediate response of the prisoners in the H-Blocks was to refuse to wear the uniform and as a result they were left in a cell naked with only a blanket to cover them. Initially the British government didn't see the situation facing them as a major problem. However, as more and more men refused to wear the uniform, the prison regime resorted to more oppressive tactics to break them. Beatings, mirror searches and forced hair cuts became a daily occurrence in the H-Blocks. All reading material and access to the media was banned (the prisoners' prized possession was a secret crystal radio set). Initially there were no visits or contact with

the outside world. The prisoners continued to resist all these oppressive actions by escalating their protest, using the only means available. As a result of beatings and intimidation when they left their cells to slop out or wash, the prisoners refused to leave their cells. Thus began the phase known as the No-Wash Protest.

On Robben Island the ANC prisoners were forced to wear the uniform and do long hours of hard labour breaking stones and working in the lime quarries. Conditions were primitive, they had nothing in their cells but a sanitary bucket, no access to education or reading material and a total ban on any type of media. Very little communication was allowed with the outside world (one letter every six months and one visit per year). However, the prisoners on Robben Island, like those in the H-Blocks, were equally committed to defeating the symbols and conditions of criminalisation. Mandela states:

"It was always unacceptable to live in degrading conditions and that political prisoners throughout history had considered it part of their duty to fight to improve them. The warders were demanding that we jog to work. I turned to a comrade and under my breath said that we must set an

example, if we give in now, we will be at their mercy. We had to show them that we were no everyday criminals but political prisoners being punished for our beliefs."

The oppressive conditions in both jails demanded enormous human will power, determination and commitment to survive. Stripped of every material possession, cut off completely from the outside world and locked into brutal regimes, the prisoners' battle was one for survival. Throughout the dark years in both prisons unbreakable bonds of comradeship were forged in defence of their beliefs. Mandela explains:

"I have found that one can bear the unbearable if one can keep one's spirit strong, even when one's body is being tested, strong convictions are the secret of surviving deprivation."

Morale and spirits were maintained through the prisoners own activities and entertainment. In the H-Blocks, after the screws had departed for the night, concerts, quizzes and debates were frequently organised. Another favourite was the telling of yarns and stories out the doors at night. Some men re-told from memory a book they had read — for instance Bobby Sands told the novel *Trinity* (by Leon Uris) out

the door. On Robben Island the prisoners sang songs of resistance while in the lime quarries. They also held debates and discussions while they laboured throughout the long hours. Mandela says that some debates went on for years and were not always of a political nature. He describes one subject which was discussed again and again about whether tigers were a native species of Africa or Asia. It was also a period when both the Republican and ANC prisoners re-learned their native languages.

Hunger strike as a method of jail struggle has been a weapon employed by Irish Republican prisoners for many generations. After four years of protest in the H-Blocks the republican prisoners believed they had reached the physical limits of what they could do and once again in Irish history the tactic of hunger-strike became a reality in 1980 and 1981. It claimed the lives of ten Republican prisoners. Their sacrifice and the culmination of many years of protest not only destroyed Britain's criminalisation policy but played a significant role in undermining their overall political and military strategy to defeat the republican struggle. In 1976 the British had put into operation a plan to criminalise the republican prisoners; five years

later the republican had prisoners criminalised the British government in the eyes of the international community.

Whilst the tactic of hunger-strike was employed by the ANC prisoners to a limited degree, Mandela didn't see it as an appropriate weapon in their circumstances.

"Hunger strike was altogether too passive, in order for a hunger strike to succeed, the world must learn of it. Otherwise, prisoners will simply starve themselves to death and no one will know."

However, the basic tactic of each set of prisoners was the same: to endure pain for longer than the enemy could inflict it. In other words the resolve and resistance of the prisoners, derived from their political beliefs proved stronger than the repression of the state.

But jail struggle takes the form of long-term incremental changes, requiring resolve and imagination. The Five Demands of the republican prisoners were not all achieved in 1981. However the Hunger Strike not only inflicted psychological defeat on the British at the time, but also laid foundations for further successful jail struggle. Rather than a sense of defeat in the H-Blocks after the death of ten of their comrades, the prisoners committed themselves to struggle on in different forms to achieve what they had died for — conditions which reflected what they had proved in principle: that they were political prisoners.

However, while the British government had simply wished that the image of the H-Blocks would fade from public and international attention, the NIO and the prison administration remained determined to prevent change and maintain the maximum control over the prisoners' lives. Having won the right to wear their own clothes and to free association, republican prisoners set about ending the remaining aspects of criminalisation. Their most significant victory was the successful escape of 38 republican prisoners in 1983. Enraged at this, allied to the improvement in conditions won by republicans, Britain and its prison administration went on

Ready or Not

Liath nosed for sweets,
Her tongue-fleck moist
the corners of his pockets,
head and plaited forelock
gently in his side as round and round
the staring ring she followed.

Coming home the child wept
that he had sold his friend,
and it was too late.

He was Vietcong, a Navy Seal,
Storm Trooper, Resistance Fighter,
Paratrooper, Volunteer,

an English Volunteer
from a disloyal house
of anti-manipulators.

He had followed orders,
fought the fight,
turned thugs and politicians

into kings and billionaires
until the words collapsed upon
themselves
and there was truth.

He shot the generals
blue up the politicians,
kings and queens.

"Don't fuck with me!" he said
I've had post-traumatic stress
and I survived.

the offensive, trying to reclaim the lost ground.

Armed with an array of security measures, backed up with a well-equipped riot team and numerous petty rules and regulations, they were once again determined to win the battle of the H-Blocks. As a result of this offensive strategy, protest and confrontation became an everyday occurrence throughout the H-Blocks for the next five years as the prisoners defended their previously hard won gains. Finally, the prisoners' unity and collective strategy wore the administration down to a point where they could no longer justify the lack of improvements merely by citing some silly prison rule.

The key to this progress lay in forcing the jail administration to engage in dialogue and negotiation about the issues which were giving rise to conflict. This had long been the republican position. However, the question of dialogue with prisoners' representatives presented major difficulties for the South African and NIO prison authorities. To embark upon this road would contradict their previous policies and would thus be an acknowledgement that their strategy of criminalisation had totally failed.

In addition prisons are not designed to take account of human feelings and needs, least of all when the prisoners are people involved in challenging the state. They are, in the main, excessively strict and authoritarian. The entire process is designed to depersonalise and individualise its population. Mandela comments:

"Prison is designed to break one's spirit and destroy one's resolve. To do this the authorities attempt to exploit every weakness, demolish every initiative, negate all signs of individuality, all with the idea of stamping out that spark that makes each of us human and each of us who we are."

Humiliation is part of the process, the prisoner is addressed by his personal number, the one clear label of depersonalisation by which the regime wants him/her to be

known. "You are 1066, I am Sir," says the screw in one of Bobby Sands poems and it clearly expressed the power relationship which prisons seek to maintain.

On both Robben Island and in the H-Blocks the prison regimes' tactics were to individualise, isolate and weaken the prisoners in their efforts to gain greater control. Mandela says:

"That in the early days on the Island, representatives of prisoners by more than one was explicitly refused. The prison authorities insisted that each prisoner had to air his own grievances, no other prisoner's grievances. No ANC or PAC here was the usual reply from prison officials. We rejected this rule and argued for many years that they meet with us to discuss issues but made little headway. But when the authorities needed one person to speak on behalf of others, that individual would be me."

Thus when it proved necessary for the authorities to seek the co-operation of prisoners, they would negotiate informally with prison leaders. In the H-Blocks men experienced a similar attitude. Personally whilst out arguing with a governor on a particular issue he informed me, after I had used the word "we", that I was there speaking on behalf of myself and no one else. They refused to recognise wing, Block and BCmp OCs, stating that each prisoner was an individual and only individual

complaints and grievances would be considered.

The ANC and republican prisoners combated this tactic by organising their collective strength in a unified and disciplined programme of action and it was this power which finally forced the administrations in both prisons to consider dialogue. One of the tactics the republican prisoners employed to undermine this policy was to get everyone to protest individually — thereby showing the administration that they could not run the jail without our co-operation. In 1988 the prison regime in the H-Blocks took its first tentative steps in the process of dialogue with the then Camp OC. Again on Robben Island, after many years of protest, the authorities began to allow a section of prisoners to present their grievances. Mandela explains:

"Since they were not turned back or reprimanded for acting the role of spokesperson, the practice developed into tradition and replaced the former misguided official policy."

The opening up of dialogue by the prison administrations was an important victory by the prisoners in their struggle. The authorities were not only forced to recognise the prisoners representatives, but the primary obstacle to progress had been removed and the climate and conditions were created in which issues could be resolved through consultation not conflict.

But again this was a matter of incremental change coming from long years of struggle, not over-night victories. As Mandela describes it:

"An advancement might take years to win, and then be rescinded in a day. But conditions did improve. We had won a host of small battles that added up to a change in the atmosphere of the Island. Whilst we did not run it, the authorities could not run it without us."

After a two-year go-slow strike at the quarry, demanding a complete end to all manual labour, the prisoners on Robben Island achieved their objective after thirteen years of consistent protest. Republican prisoners also used similar tactics. After winning segregation in the H-Blocks, republican prisoners made themselves available for work in order ultimately to end the policy. From the outset they adopted the tactic of "go-slow" and informed those in charge of work that they were in the workshops simply to fulfil the "legal" requirement to do prison work. However, they had no intention of making the place productive. A work force of eighty men produced approximately a dozen shirts weekly, and most of these were ripped by the time they were packaged. Another tactic employed was the sabotaging of machines. After a number of months these tactics rendered the work issue meaningless and unproductive. However the administration was not



prepared to concede on the issue until it was to be suddenly resolved by the dramatic escape of 38 republican prisoners in 1983, after which, for security reason, work was abolished.

Throughout the years of struggle on both Robben Island and the H-Blocks to dismantle the oppressive apparatus and the control of the prison administration and their policies the prisoners in both places established their own organisational structures in which they created their own cultural and social environment, their own disciplinary procedures, prison committees, political education and cultural programmes and recreational activities. In the H-Blocks the gains won through the Hunger Strike had created the foundation and opportunity for the prisoners to take the struggle to a new level and achieve practical improvements not only in conditions but in terms of developing politically, intellectually and culturally. This sort of activity both strengthened the unity and organisational power of prisoners within both jails and also meant they could develop their politics in relation to the overall struggle. Great importance was placed on education and training of political activists. Mandela states:

"As freedom fighters and political prisoners, we had an obligation to improve and strengthen ourselves and study was one of the few opportunities to do so."

He explains:

"Robben Island was known as the university, this was not only because prisoners studied a host of academic subjects or because so many of our men earned multiple degrees. Robben Island was known as the university because of what we learned from each other. We became our own faculty, with our own professors, our own curriculum, our own courses. We made a distinction between academic studies, which were official, and political studies, which were not."

The same words could equally describe the wings throughout the H-Blocks today. Similarly we place great

importance on political education and advancing the conditions and facilities conducive to, and developing as political activists. The republican prisoners have implemented their own informal political education programme, which includes such subjects as Irish history, politics, economics, socialism, capitalism and foreign struggles. Thus the conditions fought and died for over the years are not simply about better living conditions but about creating the space and opportunity to develop personally and politically, intellectually and culturally.

The South African and British governments' offensives against the ANC and republican struggles had created new battlegrounds on which they believed they could defeat the political prisoners. The South African battlefield was Robben Island and the British one was the H-Blocks, Long Kesh. The weapons at their disposal were brutality, deprivation and degradation — their objective, the criminalisation of political prisoners and, by extension, their struggle.

In 1963 the South African government sentenced Nelson Mandela and the other ANC leaders as conspirators and criminals. However, after a long and arduous prison struggle, Mandela and his comrades broke down their criminalisation policy, finally gaining international support for their release. The success for this struggle was due to the strength of the prisoners' political beliefs, their relationship to the overall liberation struggle and the nature of political prisons with their dynamics for both conflict and dialogue. At the same time the South African government was forced, as a result of the ANC struggle, to open up dialogue with Mandela in an effort to seek ways of bringing the overall struggle to an end. He went on to play a significant role in bringing about a negotiated settlement to the 40-year conflict and replacing those in government who had imprisoned him some thirty years earlier as a criminal.

Today in the H-Blocks we

have made considerable achievements in our own prison struggle. We have won the right to control our own lives and live in an environment free from brutality, intimidation and threats, conditions befitting political prisoners. After a bitter struggle the prison administration and NIO were forced to accept that dialogue and co-operation were the only methods of administering the jail. As Mandela remarks:

"Whilst the authorities (administrated) the prison, they had come to recognise that the prison could not be run without our co-operation."

The same is true in relation to our own context in the H-Blocks. The qualitative conditions we live in today would not exist but for the commitment, dedication and sacrifice of all those who took part in that struggle since 1976, often against considerable odds. Their comradeship, unity of purpose, strategies and the ability to adopt new approaches, to employ tactics applicable to changing circumstances, were the keys which ultimately defeated Britain's policy of criminalisation. The success of the prison struggles on both Robben Island and in the H-Blocks was a triumph of the human will over tyranny.

It is important to acknowledge that we don't

have these qualitative conditions as courtesy of the British government or prison authorities, or that they have become more humane in their approach to prisoners and prison issues. We only need to look at the present treatment of the republican prisoners in England, particularly Róisín McAliskey, and the discriminatory treatment in relation to women republican prisoners in Maghaberry. Everything that we have achieved, whether it be from the colour of socks that we can wear to the ending of lock-ups, was achieved through a prolonged struggle.

Paddy Mayhew and John Major may stand up as often as they like and declare that "there are no political prisoners in our jails." The reality is clearly otherwise. The South African authorities were equally strenuous in their denials on the same issue. Nelson Mandela finally emerged from twenty-seven years of imprisonment and exposed who the real criminals were. The struggle in the H-Blocks will continue until the British government accepts that the Irish people have a right to govern themselves and until the H-Blocks, like Robben Island, becomes a museum.

■ By Seán Lynch

Permeations

Night fell
on a sore back
lost for words
between desperation
and a smile.

He had taken pictures in long stares
of her toes and eyes, her hair
and would have taped her laugh
for the hermit-life ahead.
He shave the grey.

Home would be the vindication
of his dreams and sacrifice
in nothingness.
All was softness warm and wet.
Her laugh-soothe in his chest.

Testimony of a golfer

GOLF: a rich man's pastime with country clubs and G&Ts in the members' lounge at noon. Not the activity any self-respecting socialist should be associated with! Well I'm sick of such ignorance; sick of the snide remarks from groups huddled in a corner, pointing fingers and whispering: "He's a golfer, you know?" It's time to come out, to stand up and declare that "I, Paul Edward, am an avid golfer and am on a par with any man (or woman)!" Let's now see if I can provide you with an alternative outlook from an everyday run-of-the-mill working-class player.

There's no argument that for the greater part of this century golf was solely the preserve of the ruling classes. However the arrival of a young Mexican, raised in little more than a shack by his mother and grandmother, changed this. Lee Trevino, using a Coke bottle as his first club and a local beach as a practice course, went on to strike the golf world, standing shoulder to shoulder with the greats of the sport. He would subsequently inspire other gifted youngsters from humble backgrounds to become world-beaters, most notably Seve Ballesteros and José-Maria Olazabal.

This trend led its way to other humble abodes including my own home situated in West Belfast. The fact that Coke bottles were required for engaging a more ominous threat didn't put people off and, although sacrilegious, one's trusted hurley was adopted for this new sport. Then it was off to the nearest bit of grass not inhabited by neighbourly Travellers or the not-so-neighbourly forces of occupation, and so a hurl, ball, grass, hole equals golf. As the years passed and the aforementioned forces occupied more of the grass, it became necessary to join one of the local golfing societies.

Around this time I acquired another sociable pastime that required little more than a strong right arm and an open mouth and as

luck would have it the social club I frequented had an already well-established golfing society. It was never stated but this society must've had shares in a local brewery as we bought a lot of their merchandise and wanting the society to prosper I put my heart and soul into the equally well-established drinking society. (I should point out that the only drink problem we had in our group was that each member only had one mouth!)

At the first full meeting I attended I was to learn that our golfing society played under a bogus name when playing away, not wanting the host clubs to be overawed by such a famous club from West Belfast, named after an Irish patriot. (To avoid embarrassment, many of our members were also required to anglicise their names in case some of our opponents were unable to pronounce Seán, Séamus etc.) Naturally when we travelled to the 26 Counties this problem didn't exist as they weren't as overawed with our club's real title or the pro-nunciations of Irish Christian names!

One Sunday each month was our designated day for our outings and a coach would take us to our destination. The coach was the chosen mode of transport due to the fact that our own members' black taxis would only cause confusion to the members of the host club. It wouldn't do to have them

flagging down our members, thinking it was their local taxi firm coming to take them home!

It is a tradition to meet the night before the outing to discuss tactics for the next day, although this always seemed to last late into the night, such was our dedication to the sport (hic). As a group we had a lot in common. Take the Sunday morning of the outing for example: an aversion to early morning sunlight meant the migraine headache was a collective one. The journey to the course usually takes its toll on several of our members who suffer from travel sickness but there are always plenty of liquids on board which is apparently just what the doctor recommends to re-hydrate the body system.

On arrival at the course, the first tee is a sight to behold. Twenty-five to 30 men dressed to kill, a real advertisement for Pringle! (Incidentally, I meant to write to Pringle to highlight an inherent problem in their clothing products, the labels keep falling off.)

The preparations our members put in never seem to come to fruition on the first tee box. Poor Seán, I mean John, I distinctly heard him say the night before that he was going to take a 3 wood with a slight fade, using an open stance for added accuracy. It wasn't his fault that his wife didn't crease his "Reno Unos" at a 90 degree angle to his left shoulder! Or Joe, twice I'd heard him say that he preferred mayonnaise to salad cream on his sandwiches. This must've affected him psychologically! Typical wives! Sure isn't that why Faldo became a world-beater, him and Fanny work as a team. No such luck for our members! The irony of it all is that we're out there playing for our women, and the prizes normally include steam irons, woks, kettles and

assorted bedroom linen.

Another thing. Get the idea out of your head that the sun always splits the trees on golf courses and remember this is Ireland. The weather can be really atrocious at times which is why most of our club members carry their own hip flask of whiskey. (Spare a thought for those who can't afford a good hip flask, they have to make do with a warm tin of beer.)

Like most sports it's not the winning but the participation that counts among our society's members; the sheer pleasure of toasting your fellow competitors as they collect their prizes, raising a glass to each noteworthy speech — a drink to the memory of a club broken in pursuit of that illustrious first prize. These gestures fill the body with giggles and a floating feeling. Indeed, it can be so intense at times that it's hard to remember the day's events when you get up next morning.

Thus you can see the magnitude with which the sport affects one's day-to-day life, or in my case, did affect! A slight turn of fate led me to my present little sojourn and contrary to popular belief, I wasn't questioned about hitting practice balls into the nearby RUC barracks. They knew what society I belonged to and had an alternative line of enquiry.

Meanwhile, in my present abode when questioned about the affinity between golf and the Republican Movement, I simply relay the story of the incident in South Armagh, renowned among golfing societies throughout the Six Counties, when an avid golfer achieved the historical feat of bringing down a British Army helicopter. (Yes, they were playing golf at the time!) What out for the signs "Golfer at Work".

■ By Paul Edwards

A brief history of extradition

THE inhuman treatment of a pregnant Róisín McAliskey, held in an English prison at the behest of a German extradition warrant, follows the extradition of Jimmy Smith from the United States to Belfast last June. Both cases show again not only the blatant disregard for the human rights of Irish nationalists but also the undermining of international law.

The past decade or so has seen various attempts to utilise international extradition law to violate the rights of Irish republicans. This has involved several jurisdictions. The British government has been the obvious instigator in circumventing international law by seeking to have Irish republicans extradited back to British prisons, or in the case of Róisín McAliskey, extradited to Germany. Governments and courts, at the expense of diluting their own constitutional laws, have conspired to undermine the standards of judicial protection for political dissidents and victims of foreign regimes. This protection has been a time-honoured international legal principle to safeguard political activists from unjust regime and court systems.

After Britain's failed attempt to criminalise republicans in the H-Blocks and Armagh Jail Britain embarked upon a campaign to use extradition treaties in an attempt to criminalise republicans internationally. The British government began its campaign in the early 1980s, when it sought the extradition from the United States of Belfast republican Dessie Mackin. The US courts had refused Mackin's extradition when Mackin evoked the political exemption clause in the

US/UK extradition treaty. Mackin had petitioned the US courts on the grounds that his offences, were political in nature. It should be noted that Pete "the Para" McMullan, recently released by the British courts as reward for his collaboration, also prevailed under the US/UK extradition political exemption clause. The two cases set strong precedents in reinforcing the political exemption clause. The legal precedent was to give protection to Irish republicans seeking refuge in the United States. It also represented an indictment of Britain's role in occupied Ireland. The judgements contradicted British propaganda in portraying the republican struggle as some kind of criminal conspiracy. They also highlighted and made observation on the repressive nature of British involvement in the North. Needless to say, the British were not amused.

The author of this article was arrested in June 1983 in New York city and, following legal precedent, succeeded in having the US courts refuse extradition. After many years of frivolous and failed appeals, Margaret Thatcher, through her close relationship with Reagan and George Bush, succeeded in having the time-honoured 160 year American extradition treaty amended and replaced with the US/UK Supplement



ROISIN McALISKEY

Treaty. The new Treaty was to omit the internationally renowned political exemption clause protecting political dissidents. The United States (as with most other countries) has extradition treaties with over 60 other nations, all having the political exemption clause. The political exemption clause is a celebrated part of international law, established to give an objective judicial review of a foreign government's request for extradition, rather than a subjective political view from a government keen to satisfy inter-governmental relationships. The British government pursued and succeeded in undermining international law in taking away from the judiciary the right to examine extensively the political, civil and human rights record of the requesting government.

Not wanting to re-arrest me under the Supplementary Treaty, in fear of defeat for the new treaty, the British had, via the US immigration courts, opted instead to have me deported. They had however decided to press for the extradition of other Irish republicans. The new treaty was then used to restrict the rights of four republicans arrested in San Francisco in the early 1990s. Jimmy Smith, in his extradition last June, became the first victim of the new Anglo-American treaty. Smith, not having the political exemption clause to protect him, had to depend upon a restricted provision within the new treaty. The other three men, Kevin Barry Artt, Paul Brennan and Terry Kirby presently await a decision from the US courts.

While the British have succeeded in having republicans extradited the



battle for the hearts and minds of American public opinion has been won by Irish republicans. This past decade or so has brought the British occupation in Ireland to the fore in not only American public opinion but also in other countries. The highlighting of human rights abuses, from Bloody Sunday to the Stalker Affair, has enlightened many who would not have acknowledged or even known that such abuses could be perpetrated by such a close ally. The attempt of Britain to criminalise Irish republicans has failed. Other extradition cases, too, such as that of Brendan McFarlane and Gerry Kelly from Holland and Gerry Hanratty from Germany, brought the British role in Ireland to a European audience. Despite the actual extraditions going ahead, it was Britain which was criminalised:

The history of extradition in Ireland itself has been a

haphazard but deceitful affair by the Dublin government, especially when undermining its own constitutional provisions for the protection of Irish nationalists. The Owen Carron walk to freedom in April 1990, after he succeeded in having an extradition warrant thrown out by the Irish Supreme Court, highlighted the importance of preserving the political exemption clause. This case followed that of Dermot Finucane and James Clarke, two H-Blocks escapees who not only beat extradition on the grounds that the offences were political but also that the two men were in danger of ill-treatment following the mass beatings and torture meted out to republican prisoners after the 1983 escape. The Irish Supreme Court reinforced the political exemption clause in the 1965 Extradition Act.

These decisions have to be

viewed in light of the debacle of the Shannon, McGlinchey and Russell extraditions to the North and Dessie Ellis to England.

Shannon, McGlinchey and Russell were later to have their cases thrown out by Belfast courts. Ellis, too, after a protracted campaign, was to have his case thrown out. These cases highlighted the duplicity and weakness of the Dublin administration in preserving its political exemption clauses and the protection of political dissidents. The Dublin administration, without completely doing away with its constitutional provision on extradition will, in the meantime, go to any lengths to appease and accommodate British requests. Even those who could not be extradited were arrested and imprisoned at the behest of British requests under the extra-territorial (the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act, 1979).

The latest case — that of

Róisín McAliskey — must be viewed in the light of these other cases. Not only do we see the inhuman treatment of Róisín, held in such adverse and dangerous conditions while pregnant, but also the civil rights violations concerning the weakness of the case. The British and German authorities have, to this date, not yet supplied *prima facie* evidence in relation to the charges. With such a dubious extradition request, the question must be asked: is there a political motivation to the whole extradition case orchestrated by the British government, as was clearly seen in the Ellis case? The ongoing political situation shows that the British government are in a tight spot to recover prestige given their stalling in the peace process. In addition why should Róisín be held in such punitive conditions? Her harsh imprisonment has created strong emotional feelings and outbursts from many quarters. It is apparent that the British are using the detention of Irish nationalists, particularly those held abroad, as a black-mailing ploy. The lack of movement in transferring republicans from English jails back to Ireland and now the on-going imprisonment of Róisín McAliskey have a duplicitous nature.

Human and civil rights organisations, governments and individuals, should rally around these extradition cases in both the United States and England, or anywhere else. The history of Britain's judicial record in regard to Irish people points to the need for concern and protest. International law on extradition dictates that proper judicial scrutiny should be taken in all extradition cases. Any diluting of one's constitutional provisions to appease Britain is a gross violation of human and civil rights. The ill-treatment and false imprisonment of Irish nationalists over the years underlines only too well this injustice.

■ By Joe Doherty

QUOTES

"It doesn't take intelligence to realise that if the parade is not allowed there would be a violent response from the crowds... They (loyalist bands) would not regard a Catholic Church as a place of worship and would continue playing as loudly as possible. They would not feel they had to give it respect."

Ex-RUC man and loyalist killer Billy McCaughey, revealing details of the planned loyalist parade in Ballymena. Irish News, 6th February 1997.

"The case of the loyalist terrorists is slightly different. They bomb, shoot and murder people in order to see democracy restored."

Patrick Crozier, Private Secretary to David Trimble, highlighting unionist ambiguity to sectarian killings, in a letter to a correspondent in Glasgow. November 1996.

"There would be no need for the UVF or the UDA if the RUC had been allowed to do their job."

Jim Rodgers, Ulster Unionist Party Councillor, revealing the same ambiguity. BBC Radio Ulster, 8 January 1997.

"Sectarianism arises as a distortion of natural positive human needs of belonging, identity and the free expression of difference ... it is expressed in destructive patterns of relating. These include a negative reinforcing of the boundaries between the individual or community and others, by overlooking other people or groups, be belittling or demonising them and by justifying or collaborating in their domination."

Irish School of Ecumenics research project on sectarianism by Cecilla Clegg and Dr Joe Leichty. Irish Times, 27 January 1997.

"Day after day, week after week, month after month, the British government refused to build on the opportunity for peace, and that refusal was a grave and profound mistake. Instead of a historic opportunity for peace, the 17-month ceasefire became a historic missed opportunity."

Senator Edward Kennedy, speaking at the National Committee on Foreign Policy's award presentation to Bill Flynn. 16 January 1997.

"A European superstate, with its single currency, common army and common police force to accompany a single EU flag, anthem and passport, is a political nightmare, not an ideal. All present trends suggest that it would be centralised, undemocratic, and many of its key organs would be unaccountable."

Patricia McKenna, MEP. Irish Times, 27 January 1997.

The nature and extent of these discrepancies are such that they not only render the soldiers' evidence unreliable, but they also given ground for charges of murder and attempted murder against some of the soldiers concerned."

Professor Dermot Walsh, legal expert, commenting on the new evidence about the Bloody Sunday killings. Irish News, 30 January 1997.

"It was one of a number of shocking atrocities against people which showed that no one from the minority community can expect justice from the British government. What they can expect is military repercussions."

Séamas Deane, academic and novelist. Irish News, 30 January 1997.

"We want peace for David Trimble's children; we want peace for Ian Paisley's children; we want peace for Gary McMichael's children; we want peace for David Ervine's children; and we want peace for our children in the nationalist community."

Martin McGuinness, Bloody Sunday rally, 3 February 1997.

"People have an image of the Irish prisoner, assisted by the British and Irish media, as thugs and psychopaths. I visited these prisoners, highly intelligent young people who would never have been engaged in violence if it had not been for the oppression of their people."

Sister Sarah Clarke, No Faith In The System, p 50.

"I just wish the politicians would sit down and get it all out and finished so that nobody else would have to go to Northern Ireland and get shot or bombed. All parties have got to talk, there's no good excluding anybody."

John Restorick, father of Lance-Bombardier Stephen Restorick, shot dead in South Armagh in February. BBC TV News, 13 February 1997.

"We, the relatives of those killed, believe that even a simple checkpoint around the area of Loughgall would have alerted the IRA men and prevented them from driving into the area. In doing so they could also have prevented the death of one civilian and the serious wounding of another. Our belief is that the British government sanctioned a 'Shoot-to-kill' policy for Loughgall on 8th May 1987. We assert the belief that all the above grievances point to a case of premeditated murder and that those responsible should be held accountable for the nine deaths and one seriously wounded at Loughgall."

Excerpt from Loughgall, A Case To Be Answered, issued by The Loughgall Truth and Justice Campaign, January 1997.

"I believe that the fight for Irish freedom being waged by the Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army today in the Six northeastern Counties of my country is the same war as started by the men and women of 1916. I believe it is also the same war for independence engaged in by my father George 'The Dodger' Gleeson when he was a member, and subsequently quarter-master, of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade of the Irish Republican Army... I also wish to state that I hold the same principles and beliefs as I held during my internment. I wish success to our freedom fighters of today."

Dublin republican Paul Gleeson who joined Fianna Éireann when he was nine-years-old and remained a committed republican until his untimely death at the age of 57 on 6 January 1997.

"You came with the Bible in your hand; we had the land; today you have the land and we are left with the Bible."
Marc Ferro's description of the missionary effort in his book, Colonisation: A Global History (Routledge 1997).

'Versatile' prisoners, Red Cross Women and Chocolate Biscuits

There's an old saying among republicans:

"Remember who you are and what you represent."

It is part of a moral code so-to-speak and not only keeps us on our best behaviour but ensures we dress properly and look after our personal hygiene. We also operate a rota system to keep the wings clean and are in constant battle with the administration for proper cleaning equipment, scouring powder, industrial soap, disinfectant etc.

A few months ago we received a new blue substance. It is without doubt the strongest disinfectant we've ever seen — it really is the business. It even has a nice smell and since its introduction the wings are really sparkling and fresh.

After Christmas the lads were doing a general clean-out, scrubbing the wings from top to bottom. Wee Joe McCall was enthusiastic in his endeavours to make his wing the shiniest one on the block and worked up quite a sweat. So after admiring his handiwork, confident that all-known germs had been disposed off, he goes off to have a shower.

Within a minute there was a mighty roar from Joe's shower:

"Jesus Christ, this blue shampoo is burning the eyes out of me."

C Wing won first prize for having the cleanest wing that day but Joe's wing (D Wing) got the prize for the shiniest prisoner!

Who said that republicans weren't "versatile"?

Handicrafts have been a tradition with republican prisoners right back to the time of Frongoch Internment Camp in 1916. Many of our readers will be the proud owners of a Long Kesh harp or a Celtic cross, or harps a replica of a thatched cottage which doubles as a jewellery box. Some of our comrades have become quite skilled in these matters and slave away all day in a cloud of sawdust to produce these republican "object d'art".

And then there are those who slave away all day but don't make much headway — not even to the sawdust stage. Blute has just been repatriated to the H-Blocks after nine years in jails in England where obviously they don't produce Whitemoor Harps or Full Sutton Crosses. (Well, maybe they do, but why spoil a good yarn.) But Blute is an enthusiastic sort of chap and his comrades keep him right. And so after sawing at a lump of mahogany for two hours one morning, he turns to Nuff beside him:

"At the rate I'm going, I'll never get this harp finished by Wednesday."

Nuff, an experienced handicrafter, examines his comrade's work for a moment before offering some expert advice.

"It might help if you took the protective cover off the saw."

Croapy hasn't been feeling too well recently. Of course in that great republican tradition, he gets loads of tea and sympathy from his comrades (well, sort of). Unfortunately this hasn't been enough for Croapy (the ingrate!) and he has made a few trips to the City Hospital to try out their tea and sympathy. Apparently it is a very hospitable place.

So it came as no surprise to Croapy, as he lay in his hospital bed, that two nice women with English accents popped in to see him. They all got along swimmingly and Croapy entertained high hopes that they might produce some chocolate biscuits. After a while one of the women asked casually:

"And how was your recent spell in Musgrave Park Hospital?"

Now Croapy hasn't been in Musgrave for years, and never really felt comfortable there, given its proximity to the military hospital in the same grounds. But not wishing to ruin his chance of a Chocolate Homewheat, he replied evenly:

"It was sound enough."

The other woman chipped in:

"And what regiment does one belong to?"

"Well..." said Croapy, seeing the biscuits crumbling out of his grasp, "it's not really a regiment — more of a block-type thing..."

The two Military Red Cross women didn't even close the door after them.

Ned Flynn and Johnny Gilmour have featured in his column so often, I'm thinking of charging them rent. Still, you can't keep a bad man up.

Ned likes a game of Scrabble. Or rather, he likes making up words and arguing about the rules. One winter's evening the lads were gathered around a table in the canteen waiting for Ned to put down some letters. After twenty minutes of tutting, rattling his tobacco tin and passing wind, he finally takes a chance.

R-O-V-E-N

"Roven? That's not a word!"

"Course it is. I've heard it loads of times."

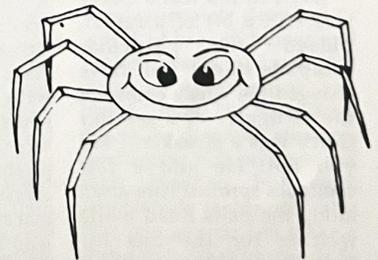
"Give us an example then."

"Like ... like ... like when you say some one's got a 'roven eye'!"

Meanwhile there was some discussion at a wing "cruinniú" about men smoking in the telephone booth and leaving a stale smell behind. Johnny had a bright idea.

"What we need is one of them distractors."

After all, you wouldn't think of lighting up if some one was standing outside the booth pulling faces at you.



■ By the Red Spider

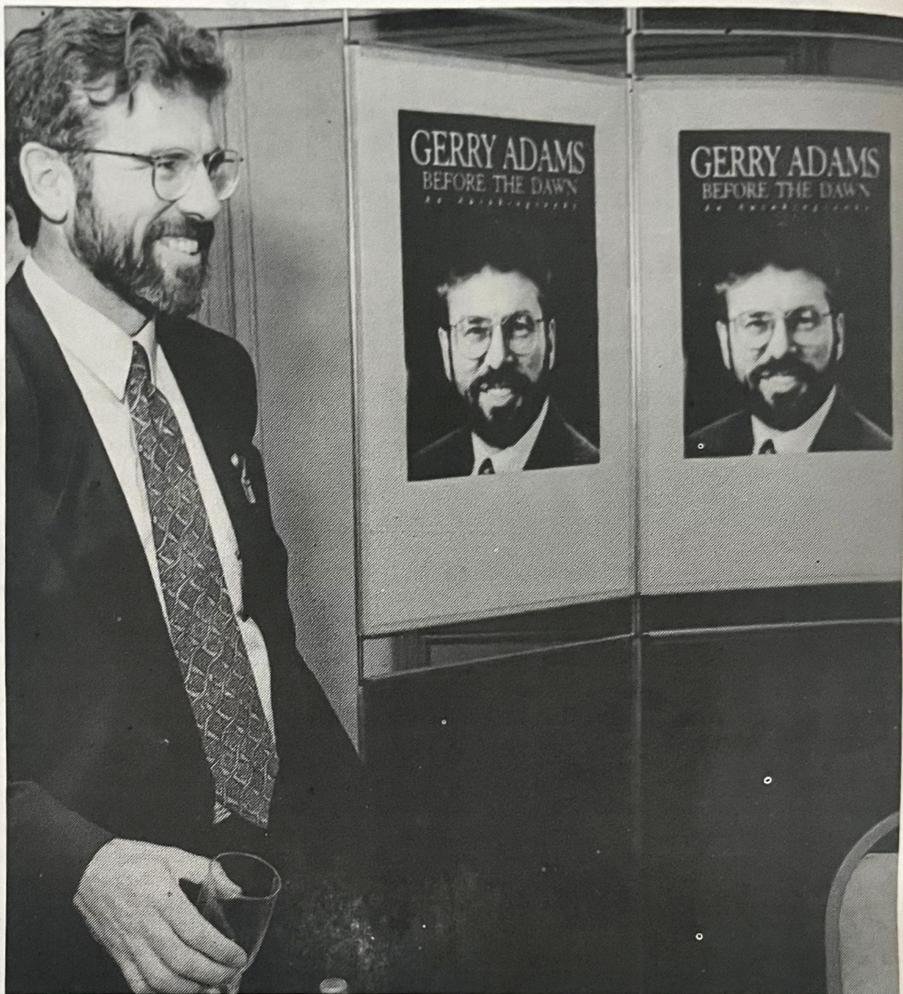
Before the Dawn by Gerry Adams, Published by Brandon Press. Review by Pat Sheehan

I didn't exactly jump at the chance to review Gerry Adams' autobiography, *Before the Dawn*. Not that I have anything against Gerry, but if I give it a good review I'll be accused of being sycophantic — almost a capital offence in my eyes. On the other hand, if I give it a bad review I risk the ridicule that is usually reserved for the likes of Conor Cruise O'Brien, Ruth Dudley Edwards and Eoghan Harris.

In any event, *Before the Dawn* is Gerry's own account of his life up until the 1981 hunger-strike. In terms of the struggle it is no surprise that it covers a lot of well-trodden ground, but that is to be expected given that Gerry's life and the struggle have been so inextricably intertwined. The fact is that the story of one cannot be told without reference to the other. Nevertheless, *Before the Dawn* is more than a mere potted history of the conflict.

Gerry takes us on a journey back to the Falls and Ballymurphy of the '50s and '60s, to the days of an innocent childhood spent roaming the Black Mountain, hunting rats, playing football, hurling and generally doing what the kids of the day in West Belfast did. The only blot on young Adams' character was that he cheated at marleys. But as he confessed that transgression at his first confession we also should forgive him.

Even in his teens Gerry was still a bit of a rascal. Indeed one particular escapade might well have changed the whole course of the struggle. You see our Gerry was a streaker. I kid you not. He and a few comrades sprinted bare-arsed along the Falls Road while waiting for the bus for Bodinstown. Now I don't know what Wolfe Tone would have thought, but does



anyone believe Brownie would have risen to the heights he has done if photographic evidence of his bare-faced cheek existed? However, there is a positive aspect to this incident. According to Gerry it occurred in 1965 when 'streaking was much in the news'. But I checked this date with several authoritative sources and all agree that streaking was a seventies phenomenon. So the only conclusion we can arrive at is that even at an early age Gerry was a mould-breaker and leader of men.

The idyllic carefree days of youth contrast sharply with

after events. The civil rights campaign had begun followed by the pogroms of '69 and the re-emergence of the IRA. Gun-battles, bombs, deaths, arrests, imprisonment, torture and house raids became the order of the day and Gerry was organising resistance and providing leadership in his own area. Eventually interned, but later released in 1972 to attend talks with the British government in London, Gerry recounts how Willie Whitelaw told the republican leaders:

"I hope that in me you will see a British Minister you can trust".

But of course the war

resumed and the Adams family faced more than its fair share of suffering. Gerry's brother-in-law, Paddy Mulvenna, was killed by the British, a cousin, by the loyalists. Gerry, his father and brother have been shot and wounded. The family home has been vandalised and destroyed by British troops. I lost count of how many in the extended family have been tortured, interned or imprisoned, including Gerry himself who has spent periods in the Crum, the Kesh and the Maidstone. So when he says Republicans have also suffered he has a pretty strong case.

BOOK REVIEWS

For me the most poignant and moving part of *Before The Dawn* is the chapter on the Hunger Strikes. Big Doc summed up the mood shortly before his death when he said to Gerry in the prison hospital:

"They think they can break us. Well they can't."

Nor did they break us. We did not get all five demands at the time but we have them now. The Hunger Strike may have ended but the prison struggle continued by other means. Gerry says he cannot yet think with any intensity about Bobby's death without crying. I think there must be many who feel exactly the same.

I have one criticism of *Before The Dawn*. Gerry tells us that when writing his "Brownie" column for *Republican News* in the mid-'70s some of his criticisms of aspects of the struggle were "so subtle that they weren't picked up on". After finishing *Before The Dawn* I felt a tinge of disappointment that a clear message had not jumped out of the pages and I wondered if Gerry had again been too subtle.

In spite of that, *Before The Dawn* is an excellent book, much more than a crude piece of propaganda. It is well written in a style accessible to everyone and exudes warmth and humour while at the same time providing a cogent argument for an end to British involvement in Ireland. Roll on Volume Two.

No Faith In The System, By Sister Sarah Clarke, Published by Mercier Press, Price £9.99. Reviewed by Damien McComb

When I was asked to review a book by Sr Sarah Clarke, I jumped at the opportunity, not

because I'm good at reviews (on the contrary) but knowing how much Sr Sarah has helped me and my family in the past, and continues to do so through her friendship. I saw this as an opportunity to express my gratitude to Sr Sarah publicly. I have often written to Sr Sarah expressing my thanks for all the help she gave to my family especially when I was on remand in Brixton. My family, in particular, my mother could not speak highly enough about Sr Sarah, and I know how much my mother admired and loved her. She not only arranged for places to stay, transport to and from the prison, but she also often accompanied my family to the prison and waited outside in all types of weather while the visit took place.

No Faith in the System is one of those rare books which, once you pick it up, you don't want to put down; and once you have finished it you feel disappointed that there's not more. The book's main theme covers the work done on behalf of the families of Republican POWs in England over the last 26 years by Sr Sarah. She describes her struggle against repressive legislation such as the PTA, which is used to terrorise prisoners' families and the entire Irish community living in Britain. Sr Sarah not only highlights the oppressive measures used, such as strip-searching, exclusion orders, arrests and the continuous harassment, but also reveals the effects of these measures on our families, friends and Irish people in general. In 1982 she described the situation thus:

"Eleven years of contact with families coming from Ireland to visit their relatives in British jails, eleven years queuing with and witnessing the hardships, the harassments, the escalating expenses, the fears and frustrations of these families have highlighted two aspects of the situation: the heroism, faith and self-sacrifice of these wives and mothers and the stunning silence and seemingly total lack of concern of the Irish state and people for

their plight." (p.114)

She also poignantly describes the situation of the families by using their own words, which she has meticulously collected over the years from thousands of letters written to her by all she helped.

Sr Sarah's involvement in numerous campaigns has of course brought her to the attention of the establishment, especially in England. As a result she has suffered similar abuse to the prisoners' families. But she has also had to suffer the wrath of some sections of the Catholic Church, with many priests accusing her of bringing the Church into disrepute because of her actions.

"The problem I experienced with prison chaplains and the Irish Chaplaincy are much harder to understand than the obstructiveness of the state authorities... I could not work out whether I represented a threat to their control of all matters religious within the jails or whether the difficulties they caused me stemmed from the Catholic tradition of male authority and female subservience." (p.190)

This moral blackmail has caused Sr Sarah a lot of anguish, much to the eternal shame of the Church and the individuals involved. However when Sr Sarah has encountered this ignorance and hypocrisy she has always turned to her faith:

"Do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practice what they preach... (they) have neglected the weightier matters of the law — justice, mercy, good faith." (p.166)

This book is not only a testament to Sr Sarah's faith and belief in herself and humanity; it is also an indictment of figures in the British and Irish legal, political and clerical establishments, who have, and continue, to ignore the flouting of the law, even when it has been glaringly obvious than injustices have been done, as in the cases of the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and the Maguire family.

The accounts in this book

clearly demonstrate the enormous uphill struggle that our families along with Sr Sarah have had to fight over the last 26 years. Frank Stagg and Michael Gaughan both died on hunger strike trying to get transferred to a prison near their families; marriages have broken up and children have grown up not knowing what it is like to be with their fathers without screws watching.

Sr Sarah has not only witnessed this pain, but she has shared in this suffering. This can be clearly seen from the many events that she shares with us in this book, but for me two accounts stand out. One is the heartbreaking torment of a dying man, Guiseppe Conlon fighting until his death to clear his name and that of other innocent people in jail:

"Nothing could have prepared me for the sight of him as he came in — an emaciated old man gasping for air.

"I'm an innocent man' he said to me."

Some years later,

"Guiseppe clasped my hand and said, 'Sister, I'm dying, will you clear my name and my family's? We are innocent. We are all innocent.'" (p.130)

The other account is the plea of an ageing parent asking Sr Sarah to help arrange just once more a visit to their imprisoned son/daughter before they die.

"His mother was determined to see him before she died... the visit was conducted behind glass... two months later she died."

No Faith in the System is a book that every one should read. Sr Sarah vividly and compassionately describes "a world of broken homes and broken hearts, of anger and despair, of injustice and racism." (p.80) Her book shows clearly the draconian measures used against Irish prisoners and their families, but more importantly it demonstrates that one person can make a difference. That person is Sr Sarah, a truly remarkable woman. I feel privileged to know her personally.

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