

# H BLOCK

Christmas  
1978



## THE CAVES OF LONG KESH

*JESUS, OUR SAVIOUR, was born in a cave at Bethlehem because there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the Inn. The cave was a stable for animals where their shepherds sheltered with them from rough weather in winter and the sun in summer. It was dark and dirty on that first Christmas night, a silent night, a holy night in a squalid cave.*

*The cells in H Block, Long Kesh, are like caves. The heavy door opens. A dark hole appears before one's eyes. Dirty floor. Filthy walls. A dark and dreary atmosphere. Figures squat on damp and foul grey mattresses. Blankets draped around their waists and towels over their shoulders. They remind one of the cave at Bethlehem which was the only place men would allow their Lord and Saviour to come into the world. There is no room for 363 young Irishmen and 33 young women at the Inn of Decency and Human Rights.*

*Maybe Bethlehem has more meaning for the prisoners on protest than for the rich rulers in their homes of luxury. We pray that God will protect the prisoners and their families and bring about a just and peaceful solution of their problems caused in the Irish community by people from outside.*

**FR. DENIS FAUL**

**FR. RAYMOND MURRAY**

# CAN THE BRITISH H-BOMB IN LONG KESH BE DEFUSED?

We would like to draw the attention of the public to a report entitled, **The Report of the Advisory Council on the Penal System on The Regime for Long-Term Prisoners in Conditions of Maximum Security**. HMSO 1968 S.O.Code 34-455.

This report was presented to James Callaghan M.P., Home Secretary from a group comprising Kenneth Younger (chairman), Lord Widgery, the Bishop of Exeter, Leo Abse M.P., Baroness Wootton and other prominent people. The principles laid down in this British document of 1968, could provide a solution for the Long Kesh H Block problem, if they were interpreted flexibly.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

The following are extracts from paragraphs:-

82. The basic principle is that prisoners, whatever their crimes, are still human beings and must be treated as such.
203. If our society is concerned, as it is and must be, with the worth of all individual men and women and if it believes that in the last resort what men have in common is more important than their differences, then it cannot treat as less than human those men it finds necessary to send to prison.

## CONTROL

162. We would suggest to those who operate the (disciplinary) procedures that a short period of cellular confinement with complete withdrawal of privileges is likely to be as effective as a deterrent to the commission of further breaches of discipline as a longer drawn out award. We think that the law of diminishing returns can operate when a longer period of removal from association is used.
- 163-4. ...for the small minority of prisoners on whom the normal sanctions of withdrawal of privileges and loss of remission have no effect . . . a small segregation unit should be established. The governor should have the power to send a man to such a unit if he thinks the interest of the prison as a whole demand it . . . the medical officer should see such men every day . . . they would receive normal food and reading matter . . . letters and visits . . . some group activity or association should be possible . . . a prisoner's continued presence there would require the authority of the Board of Visitors or of the prison department . . . who would be required to give further specific authority for further periods of detention.

## SELF RESPECT

70. A prisoner is a human being of individual worth, and the regime should preserve or increase his self respect. It follows, for example that he should not have to wear ugly and ill-fitting clothes or perform what is obviously useless work. He should have the opportunity to engage in activities, whether sport or woodwork, or the passing of an "O" level in an academic subject. He should be able to use a lavatory when he has need to do so, without being dependent on the concurrence of the authorities.

## VARIETY

72. Access to a variety of interests and of stimuli . . . a prisoner should have the use of a good library, that he should be able to choose between television programmes, that he should be able to see the changing clouds, and the trees.

## MOVEMENT

73. A degree of movement is something that a prisoner needs and this is sadly lacking in the small security units. He should have some degree of freedom of movement within the strong perimeter.

## PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

- 91.\* A prisoner should be allowed to keep certain personal possessions, books, a wireless, photographs, calendars and, if he so chooses, pin-ups in his cell, allowed to paint his cell with a colour scheme of his own choice. If a prisoner has personal possessions and letters and other things that he values in his cell he should be able to know they are not likely to be stolen or damaged.

## APPEARANCE

96. We believe a dramatic change in prison clothing would be relatively cheap, and should be made as soon as possible, and no other single change would do more to raise the self respect of prisoners. It does not seem to us necessary that all prisoners should dress alike outside working hours, there should be available in the prison several types of shirts, ties, pullovers, coats and trousers. These should reflect contemporary fashions.
97. There should not be a regulation hair cut and subject to such safeguard, a prisoner should be able to grow a beard or a moustache.

## EXERCISE

100. A period in the prison day still needs to be available for exercise . . . there should be somewhere for prisoners to gain exercise on wet days. Physical exercise is obviously important if long sentence prisoners are not physically to deteriorate.

## ASSOCIATION PERIODS

101. There must be plenty of room for association and the prison must be so designed that unobtrusive supervision is possible. There is need for small rooms in which two or three prisoners can play chess or read without the constant noise of wireless or television. In the other common rooms there should be billiards or table tennis and a choice of television programmes.

## WORK

- 103-12. The quality, rhythm and tempo of work falls very far short of the best practice overseas . . . it has been traditional for a considerable number of prisoners to be employed as cooks, cleaners and on maintenance.

## EDUCATION

113-119.

A primary need is to foster all those voluntary activities that encourage and develop a prisoner's "creativity" - woodwork, painting, pottery, music and drama, the greatest need for the long term prisoner, is for regular checking of progress and regular encouragement ... to foster a sense of achievement.

## CONTACTS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

122-123.

It would be possible to devise a regime, whereby prisoners were deliberately and ruthlessly cut off from all contact with the world outside the prison and put into a state of mental refrigeration for the duration of their sentences. (E.g. H-Blocks 3, 4, 5, Long Kesh).

There should be as much contact as possible between

the prison community and the community outside. The first way in which prisoners keep in touch with the outside world is by means of books, newspapers, radio and television. All these things help provide the variety of ideas and stimuli that are desirable.

## DETERIORATION

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It is important that prisoners serving very long sentences should be exposed to a wide variety of stimuli in order to keep interest alive, they should make as many decisions for themselves as possible, in order that they should not become totally dependent ... the prison will not contain men serving less than four years.

*(By a long term prisoner is meant a man held for four years and up to ten and over. What about Northern Ireland where the longest custodial sentences being given in the world at the present time, are being imposed on youngsters of 17, 18, 19?)*

# DO THE BRITISH WANT A SOLUTION NOW?

The necessities for physical and mental welfare are being denied to the prisoners. Their relatives are going out through days and nights of anguish and sorrow. *This has gone on for 28 months.* The British Government has made no attempt to solve it. They have displayed a blind vindictive cruel spirit unworthy of responsible and civilised men.

We are writing this pamphlet to appeal for a breaking of the ice, for some movement to be made towards a solution by the stronger party in the dispute. It is their duty to make the first move. The prisoners cannot move as they are on the ground with the hob-nail boots of the British on their neck. As Cardinal Conway said in 1967 about the Catholics of N.Ireland - "Take your two feet off my neck and I will shake your hand."

It is the solemn duty of the British Government after 28 months of violation of human rights in H Blocks to make moves towards a solution to call in mediators, be they churchmen or statesmen, to allow the prisoners more association and more contact with the outside world so that they may achieve a consensus of their own views. If the British refuse to make any move they will confirm that their attitudes towards H Blocks is part of their over-all attitude towards the Catholic community, namely to deny them their rights and keep them in a position of subservience which is the particular *raison d'etre* of N.Ireland. Everything that happens in N.Ireland has a political meaning, especially what happens in the field of law and order.

There is plenty of room for discussion and compromise about the way prisoners are treated. We personally object to the use of cupboard size cells for men and women. This is inhuman for any prisoner. There is ample room for discussion about the treatment of children of God. Families are put in jail, some of them completely innocent Catholics, others caught up in political troubles due to the very bad government of districts and country.

If some effort is not made soon, then a combination of physical weakness and mental breakdown will continue due to the excessive punishments inflicted by the British Government, which taken together, and over a long period, constitute "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" contrary to article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The results of a continuation of this inhuman punishment of prisoners, who are committing the trivial non-criminal offences of refusing to wear clothes and to do work, will be like the dirt oozing from under the locked door of the English Star Chamber. Corpses coming from Long Kesh after all the warnings that have been served on the English, would be disastrous for Anglo-Irish relations; it would produce the 1916 syndrome, the revulsion of feeling following the execution of young Irishmen by Englishmen, the inability of the British to understand the terrible power of dead bodies as magnets for anti-British political feeling.

## APPEAL TO THE 30 MILLION IRISH IN U.S.A. AND BRITAIN

*We want our friends in the U.S.A. to note that the complete refusal of the British to examine the wide possibilities of compromise in the treatment of prisoners can only be interpreted as an example of discrimination against the Irish after centuries of oppression and misgovernment. We extend this appeal to Irish people in Britain to make H Block an issue in the forthcoming British general election.*

## USE OF DRUGS ON PRISONERS

On 23rd November, 1978, the Northern Ireland Office admitted that the drug Largactil was used on a blanket prisoner in the H Block. The prisoner was Paul Creelmann from North Derry. Fionnuala O'Connor in the *Irish Times* quoted Dr Alastair McDonnell as saying that Largactil was a sedation usually given to schizophrenics. Dr McDonnell said that if it was being administered to prisoner patients without their knowledge or consent "then we have reached the same deplorable condition as that which exists in Russia, where similar drugs are given to inmates in their psychiatric prison camps."

Five prisoners in H Block, Long Kesh, had their hair cropped short and their beards shaved off and were given compulsory baths on Monday 4th December. Injuries sustained during the treatment were serious. Reports say that they were forcibly dressed in trousers, then taken before a doctor, who, after a cursory examination, told them they "could do with a wash and a haircut". It was claimed they were then held by five or six prison officers while a Loyalist orderly close-cropped their heads with electric shears. They were then

given a cold bath and scrubbed with brushes by three prison officers. The prisoners were then held on the floor while a prison officer shaved their beards off. Their heads and faces were then coated with a white medicated liquid. All five suffered bruises. Joe McNulty of Dungannon sustained a broken nose and sprained wrist. Martin Hurson suffered a broken toe. He is still in hospital. His left leg is paralysed due to severe kicking on the spine. He has bruising all over his body and cannot sleep. Tommy Loudon, Patrick Bradley and McManus also were badly bruised.



An Armagh priest, the Rev. Raymond Murray, said last it was completely untrue to assert that punishments being endured by prisoners in H Block at the Maze Prison, Long Kesh, were self-inflicted.

Father Murray was delivering a lecture on human rights entitled "Prisons and Harassment at Home and Abroad" in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. The meeting was held under the auspices of Cumann na Sagan.

Fr Murray said the punishments were inflicted by the British Government on persons who had broken trivial regulations such as not wearing clothes and refusing to work.

"The fact that in April 1978 the prisoners escalated their protest with a no-wash, no slop-out campaign is not really relevant to the real issue," said Fr. Murray. "The prisoners are merely using one of the few forms of protest left to them against an administration which has deprived them of many of the ordinary necessities of life."

Fr Murray went on: "I salute courage and sacrifice wherever I find it. Whatever the past deeds of the men in H Block may or may not have been, and whatever the justice or injustice of the sentences, one has to admire their courage, fortitude and endurance against impossible odds."

"The Athenian prisoners in the stone quarries of Syracuse could not endure their deprivations for two months. The American and British prisoners collapsed in Korea. But the

men in H Block, the vast majority of them aged 17 to 21, have already created a place for themselves in the records of human endurance. The words of Terence McSwiney ring true: "It is not they who inflict the most but those who endure the most who have the victory," Fr Murray added.

The H Block problem was a classic example of how the State could intimidate genuine Christian people into waffling about basic moral principles. H Block was an obscenity no matter what the prisoners may have been convicted of, and no matter what protest action they had taken. The State had no right to do wrong. It had no right to ill treat prisoners. It had no right to break the international covenants of human rights, nor had it any right to break the moral law.

"Leaving aside the question of political status", said Fr Murray, "the factual position is this: the prisoners refuse to wear clothes and refuse to work. These are trivial matters. In the Republic of Ireland, prisoners wear their own clothes and prison work is voluntary. The British Government has removed all remission from the prisoners on protest, and in the month of September 1976 the British Government imposed an inhuman degree of punishment on the men by a 24-hour lock-up, deprivation of physical exercise, and harassment by internal body searches and casual beatings."

(Irish Times 7/12/78)