

Hunger-Strikes

The Search for Solutions

1. We believe Hunger-Strike to be a highly principled form of passive protest which a man can engage in to draw attention to grievances which might be neglected or overlooked by government. If a group of persons or even one man is suffering in silence and isolation and efforts to draw attention to their plight have failed, they have a sufficient reason for going on hunger strike.

It is noticable how rich and powerful nations condemn the Hunger Strikes of the poor and the suffering in small and helpless communities. "Morals" as they interpret them, with the help of the bought lackeys of the media, are a privilege of rich, powerful and corrupt nations who have a history of bullying small nations. The poor have to put their lives in danger (and maybe die) to draw attention to their torture and ill treatment.

2. Bobby Sands need not have died; the British government could have granted his five demands in many forms without sacrifice of any principle; four of his demands could be granted without changing a prison rule.

It is important now to save the lives of his fellow prisoners, Joe McDonnell, Raymond McCreesh and Patsy Patsy O'Hara. We do not wish for needless bitterness between the Irish people and the English people who should be good Christian neighbours. We hope the British Government by unprincipled action will not bring about hatred and ill will needlessly; we do not wish to see Britain achieve Leper Status, the status of the Leper. "Unclean, Unclean..." among the nations of the world by the baying to death by Westminster of four and more Irish youths looking for what amounts to decent humane prison conditions.

3. Some persons think the five demands... their own clothes, choice of work, free association, education, parcels letters, full remission restored are too slight to go on hunger strikes; the whole corrupt system of nonlaw and disorder by the RUC and the Courts, including torture and manufactured evidence on a grand scale, should be the object of the protest.

4. Hunger strikes should not be encouraged - not because Cardinal Hume and Archbishop Armstrong say they are suicides which is false, but because they cause great distress to the relatives and they heighten community tension and can lead to violence outside the prison. A proportionate cause can outweigh these two factors but it has to be a weighty one.

5. The Taoiseach, Cardinal O' Fiaich, Bishop Edward Daly and others have stated that the prisoners demands could be met with relaxation of prison rules and more or less within the framework of the present rules. We agree with this.

6. The prisoners might not agree as they expect to be tricked as before. They would have to get an agreement in writing, containing the 5 demands concretely with guarantors and machinery to implement the changes day by day in the prison.

7. The five demands constitute the Optimum condition for prisoners. According to the *Guardian* December 15, there was an absence of trouble in Hull prison during the Prison Officers strike of Winter 1980, when the prisoners had a choice of activity and free association in their own wing. This situation ended all trouble in this notorious prison because it gave scope to human personality and human dignity and did not crush or degrade them.

8. All human institutions should improve persons and make them better men. If they degrade or crush people by harsh rules harshly applied, by political bias and fundamental "Old Testament" anti Catholic religious bigotry, like prevails among some staff in the N.Ireland prison service, then that is immoral and must be opposed.

9. Clothes define a man's personality. We are sick of looking at adults walking around the many prisons of Northern Ireland (£300 million pounds since 1971 to lock up unemployed Catholics) with shoes many sizes too big and clothes many sizes too large. Every effort is made in British prisons to reverse the process of maturity and return people to the condition of totally dependent infants. Bobby Sands died to prevent this corruption of the human personality and to assert the dignity of man.

10. Work in Northern Ireland prisons consists in prisoners carrying bins and buckets being shouted at by prison officers; it is boring, crushing, degrading and is used as an expression of political and religious bigotry. It is a reasonable claim for human dignity and human personality to demand a choice of work with the emphasis on arts and crafts and education.

11. Free Association is good for the personality. From the front gate of Long Kesh to a prison cell one passes through 19 steel gates (similarly in Armagh). If the cell door in the wing is left open, there are still 18 other doors for the men to pass.

12. Visits, letters, parcels and restoration of full remission are perfectly easy and reasonable conditions.

13. The Gardiner report was wrong about the Special Category Compounds being "universities of terrorism". Statistics show that they are the opposite; very few, less than 10% are reinolved in violence; the Special Category Status has a splendid rehabilitative effect.

14. Over 80% of the young men and women in prison in the Six Counties at the moment come from families that never had any criminal record by any member of the family. The prison population has gone from 712 in 1968 to almost 2000 in 1981. This is a special situation brought about by political oppression of a defenceless Catholic minority, deprivation of jobs and houses, double standards of law, torture and assassination by British government.

15. We must inform the world that the solutions are easy and that the British Government provoked and caused Sands death for political purposes to mount a confrontation with the Provos and their supporters. They

have made a colossal mistake. Imagine the effect on the youth of Sands heroic death defying the British Government. The tragedy from the point of view of the parents and the Church is that the British Government have proved to youth that only violence pays, not passive resistance and attempts to negotiate. How can this disastrous state of affairs be reversed except by a speedy and generous solution? Let's face the magnitude of Britain's mistake . . . if the Provos created a Bobby Sands Brigade, they would recruit hundreds or more in the first week; that is Britain's fault, their miscalculation.

And there are 70 others in the Kesh ready to hunger strike.

16. A decent Governor with freedom to recruit a decent non political staff and with a flexible approach backed up by humane administrators could give the prisoners the five demands with no loss of rule or principle. All controlled institutions have rules—schools, convents, armies, seminaries, prisons . . . the rules are not very important, it is the human personalities and decent and considerate manner of applying the rules that counts. Occasionally one has to turn a blind eye to infringements of rule, to allow for the eccentric, the stubborn and the quirky. Kindness and generosity can lubricate the whole system, especially when one has the products of excellent Catholic families and well educated and disciplined young men under one's charge.

17. The new prison in Magaberry (200 million £) invites a new regime with decent civilised non bigoted approach. Or the Portlaoise solution, give changes quietly while not admitting it. Or just turn a blind eye while giving two sets of clothes and a choice of work.

18. The solutions are easy. The British were told by us in 1976 that removal of Special Category Status (which the Loyalists also enjoy and want) would not succeed. We tell the poor unfortunate British again in 1981, "You are going to lose this one, please settle gracefully before you have to go on your knees and sign the five demands. World opinion and the Irish especially through out the world will not stand a procession of coffins of young men out of a British prison for young Irish nationalists. Do not achieve Leper status for yourselves. We like and respect you in your own country; do not disgrace yourselves in ours. Honour our common humanity and christianity by settling the problem. If you don't you will encourage violence as the only means of settling problems between nationalist Ireland and the British government, who should not be in Ireland anyway. Time to settle and time to go".

Fr. Raymond Murray, Fr. Denis Faul

"Greater Love . . ."

The Death of Bobby Sands, M.P. Not Suicide as the British and The Protestants Protest

On May 1, 1981, in the **Irish Times**, Page 1, Cardinal Hume, The Archbishop of Westminster, was reported as saying, "My own view, speaking for myself alone, the Fermanagh South Tyrone M.P. intended to die, if necessary, and that his death therefore would be suicide."

He reiterated the statement he had made last Sunday in a letter to the Bishop of Derry, Dr. Daly, in which he described the Hunger Strike to death as a form of violence which cannot be condoned by the Church as being in accordance with God's will for man. This in British Theology and is not accepted in Ireland. God is not an Englishman.

Cardinal Hume's opinion was followed by Archbishop Runcie of Canterbury, Mrs Thatcher, Michael Foot, M.P. Archbishop Armstrong of Armagh, Ronald Craig, Moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Church, Robin Day of B.B.C. and many British journalists and politicians.

All this comment was an interesting example of the British closing ranks to attempt to defend the indefensible cruelty of their Government in their treatment of Mr. Robert Sands, M.P. for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Cardinal Hume has told us in letters about prisoners in Northern Ireland that he does not comment on affairs in another country. Why did he break his silence on this occasion?

Bobby Sands did not commit suicide. He did not intend his death. He said to his mother, Rosaleen Sands, that he would stretch out his arm for the injection if the five demands of the prisoners were met. His direct intention in undertaking his fast was to win better conditions for his comrades in prison.

To put one's life in danger one needs a proportionate cause or reason. Bobby Sands had this in the five years of suffering and cruelty that he experienced in Long Kesh H Blocks, being ill treated himself in listening to the cries of his fellows being beaten and ill treated obscenely. He felt that he must draw world wide attention to the cruelty of the British Government, and who was going to listen to an unknown Catholic Youth from Belfast? The Hunger Strike changed all that the endorsement of his brave and sincere action made in good faith and for unselfish motives by 30,000 electors in Fermanagh - South Tyrone. He gained world wide publicity for his complaints about ill-treatment of prisoners in the Maze, Long Kesh and Armagh Women's prison. We tried for many years to interest bishops in Ireland, England and USA, cardinals all over the world, politicians, journalists, human rights organisations with no success; now they show interest. Bobby Sands has achieved a great victory at the cost of his life like a soldier in war or a fireman rescuing people from a fire or a doctor in a leper colony.

He certainly was in good faith. A week before he went on strike he said to Fr. Faul who was trying to dissuade him, "Greater love than this no man hath than a man lay down his life for his friends."

The message from the Long Kesh H Blocks where these supreme sacrifices of passive protest are being made on behalf of 500 men and 30 women, is "Put up thy sword in thy scabbard." It demonstrates to the men of violence that suffering can achieve more than acts of violence against one's neighbour. In the words of Terence McSweeney, Lord Mayor of Cork who was another victim of stupid British stubbornness in their colonial policies in a foreign country and who died in Brixton Jail in London after 74 days on hunger strike "It is not they who inflict the most, but they who suffer the most who have the victory."



BOBBY SANDS

1954
Born Rathcoole, Belfast.

1972:
Sands family moved to Twinbrook, Belfast, after being forced out of their home by Loyalists.

1973:
Sentenced to 5 years imprisonment on an arms charge. Special Category prisoner. Released April 1976.

1976:
Arrested in October with three others; weapon found in their car. Ill-treated in Castlereagh Interrogation Centre.

1977:
Sentenced to 14 years imprisonment in September. On protest in H. Blocks. During the first Hunger Strike became leader of the H Block prisoners.

1981:
1st March went on Hunger Strike.
10th April, elected MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone.
5th May died in the Maze Prison, Long Kesh, on the 66th Day of his Hunger-Strike.

2,092 Tragic Deaths

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Mr Merlyn Rees former Secretary of State for N. Ireland have recently publicly referred to the 2000 deaths caused by the Provisional IRA. In the interest of accuracy and truth a statistical breakdown of the sad and tragic deaths of the past 12 years might be useful. All human life is sacred, each human life is precious in the eyes of God; each death diminishes us all. Every human life must be protected at every stage from conception to the grave. In order to protect life it may help to study the following breakdown:-

TOTAL TRAGIC DEATHS - 2,092

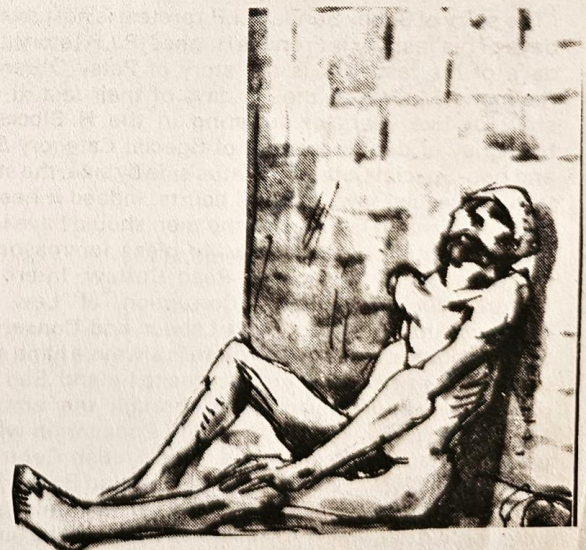
1. "Security Forces" killed by IRA, INLA etc.	571
2. IRA etc killed by "Security Forces"	79
3. Civilian victims of IRA etc explosions	135
4. Crossfire and accidents due to IRA activity	48
5. Civilian assassinations by IRA etc.	298
6. IRA killed by premature explosions	95
7. People killed by "nationalist" side in early 'riots'	12

Total: 1,238

1. "Security Forces" killed by Loyalists	13
2. Civilian victims of Loyalist explosions	111
3. Crossfire and accidents due to UDA, UVF	10
4. Innocent people killed by "Security Forces"	116
5. Assassinations by UDA, UVF etc.	496
6. Loyalists killed fighting "Security Forces"	13
7. Loyalists killed by their own bombs	25
8. People killed by "unionists" in early riots	34

Total: 818

Others killed in uncertain circumstances - 36



British Government Has Leper Status

FRANCIS HUGHES IS DEAD. He died at 5.43 p.m. on 12th May 1931

BOBBY SANDS IS DEAD. 1.17 a.m. 5th May 1981 Bobby Sands died. He died a peaceful holy death, answering the prayers right up to the moment he went into a coma, clutching the crucifix sent to him by Pope John Paul II. The announcement of his death sent waves of shock and anger throughout the world.

Sadness hangs over Ireland. Deep down there was a hope that the British Government would pull back from the brink. Nobody thought that the intransigence and inflexibility of the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins, and the Minister for Prisons Michael Alison would allow his death. One waited with bated breath as the procession went into Long Kesh offering mediatorship, giving the British a chance, picking up from the year long patient advice and help of Cardinal Tomas OFiaich and Bishop Edward Daly. Three Dail deputies, also members of the European Parliament, visited Bobby Sands on 20th April. Mrs. Thatcher refused to meet them. On 25th April Professor Carlaage Norgaard and Professor Torkel Opsahl of the European Commission for Human Rights visited the Maze Prison. On 28 April Monsignor JOhn Magee, special emissary from Pope John Paul II visited Bobby. Church leaders and statesmen appealed to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. All was in vain. The Conservative Party entirely agreed with his death. The Conservative Press, notably editorials in the **Daily Mail**, and the **Daily Mail** columnist Andrew Alexander, and John Junior, current events columnist in the **Sunday Express**, gave vent to anti-Irish and anti-Catholic vehemence.

The story of Bobby Sands (R.I.P.) protest is not just the 66 days of his fast nor is Frances Hughes (R.I.P.) story, the 59 days of his fast. Nor is the story of Patsy O'Hara and Raymond McCreesh the 55 days of their fast. It is the story of five years of suffering in the H Blocks, the hypocrisy of dual standards of Special Category Status and non-Special Category Status side by side, the story of torture, special laws, special courts. Indeed it has been often said that it is amnesty the men should have looked for. The British did not listen to pleas for reason. The mistakes stand out - Falls Road Curfew, Internment, Torture, Bloody Sunday, Corruption of Law, SAS Murders, the H Blocks. Both Labour and Conservative Governments are to blame. There is always a blind spot in British Government when it comes to Ireland. Sad that it was the Labour Government through the architects Merlyn Rees, Roy Mason, and Don Concannon who set up the notorious Castlereagh Interrogation Centre and built the H Blocks. Of all those who visited Bobby Sands on his deathbed Don Concannon's was the only ignoble intervention. He was the Minister of Prisons who built the H Block hell holes.

Bobby Sands death not only shocked Ireland. It shocked good people in Britain like the 12 MPs who in sympathy for dead MP Bobby Sands tabled a motion condemning the intransigence of Mrs. Thatcher and her Government. Mr. Patrick Duffy MP spoke in noble fashion and in just anger in the House of Commons. Demonstrators in Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Paris, Lisbon, Brussels, Milan, Athens, Zurich and other cities throughout the world protested at his death. The press in India, France, Russia criticised Britain and there was other wide reaction in the world press. The European Parliament decided to debate the tragedy of his death.

Bobby Sands and Frances Hughes showed great love for their fellow prisoners. So have the other hunger strikers drawn from the other areas of the North. Will Prime Minister Thatcher and the Secretary of State, Mr. Atkins let Patsy O'Hara, Raymond McCreesh and Joe McDonnell die?

The Irish family are coming together more than any period in history. The strong feeling in Irish Americans from President Reagan to the citizens of the Bronx, the Longshoremens' boycott of the British ships, the statements of sympathy from Irish American leaders and Congressmen, are indications of that.

International feeling is summed up by the leading French newspaper *Le Monde* - "His memory and recognition of the meaning of his sacrifice are heavy with an emotion that several times this century has aroused the passions of the world against Great Britain."

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IS AN INTERNATIONAL LEPER.

Walesa pays Tribute to Bobby Sands

Poland's independent trade union leader Lech Walesa, paid tribute yesterday to Bobby Sands as a "great man who sacrificed his life for his struggle". There were moments and situations when hunger strikes were the only way to fight, he said.

The Polish union leader has been jailed frequently in his effort to create free trade unions. "I have also undertaken hunger strikes. That is why I grieve for Mr. Sands," he told a press conference yesterday in Gdansk, Poland's main Baltic port.

"I am very sorry that his strike ended tragically, but if one is going to achieve results, one has to fight," Mr. Walesa said. If Mr. Sands had calculated correctly as an activist when he chose to go on hunger strike, then he had certainly won a victory, Walesa said.