

Irish Republican Information Service.

VOL. 3. NO.66 MARCH 3rd 1979

Kevin Barry House, 44 Parne'l Square, Dublin 1, Ireland.

CONTENTS

1. A DECEPTIVE CALM IN IRELAND
2. THE HORRORS OF H-BLOCKS
3. "EMERGENCY" LAWS IN IRELAND
4. THE NEWS FROM THE NORTH
5. SELF GOVERNMENT FOR ALL

1. A DECEPTIVE CALM IN IRELAND

"The I.R.A. has won the respect of its enemies, army and police alike." So admits the 'Politics Today' column on the British Financial Times, February 2nd. last. Under the heading "The Deceptive Calm in Ireland" the article states:

"What has happened is that the Provisional IRA has won the respect of its enemies, army and police alike. There has been a reorganisation. It is smaller, but tougher. There is even talk of potential recruits being refused admission on the grounds that they would be insufficiently reliable. It is well-financed and there is no shortage of weapons. Its methods have become more sophisticated. Such ambushes as still take place in Belfast are no longer hit and run affairs, but carefully planned campaigns with the army and police sometimes caught off guard."

INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

The article, by Malcolm Rutherford states that the IRA international contacts have also been stepped up "not out of bravado or for the publicity value. Not least, there is believed to have been an increase of the number of 'sleepers.' Sleepers are people who lie low for long periods of time and who can be called on to act when necessary. They are said to have been spreading not only in England but also on the continent, with Holland and Belgium receiving the most attention.

"Lest all that should sound unduly dramatic, it should be added that it comes not from the Provos themselves, but from senior army and police officers in Ulster. If anything, it is an understatement," the article said.

In another edition of the Financial Times an article by Stewart Dalby says: "officials in Belfast are convinced that numerous 'sleepers' have been placed in various European capitals, particularly Brussels and Amsterdam. Any violence in these places, the argument goes could mean that Britain's EEC partners will bring pressure on the Government to 'do' something about Ulster.

"The Provos' organisation is also tighter. The old leak-prone brigades have been broken up and replaced by four-man active service units. Often the four men know just four other people, their fellow unit members, and the man who gives them orders. The calibre of recruits has also improved. In fact, the Provisionals' command is being far more selective.

"The result is that a typical unit man in Britain would be in his late twenties with little or no record, capable of withstanding the loneliness and other psychological pressures involved in a long stint in a foreign place.

"The Provisionals have all the arms and explosives they need and with a total of £1.8m taken in bank robberies in Ireland last year, are not short of cash.

"The IRA has also tightened up its anti-interrogation techniques and it is noticeably harder to get suspects to talk. Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, people can be held for seven days. Most suspects nowadays appear to be able to hold out that long."

A NEW ASSESSMENT

Malcolm Rutherford in his article states that the British have now reached a new assessment of the situation in Ireland:

"It is that the IRA can be at best contained, and that even that can only be done if the security forces prepare for a long, long haul and that, even then, the relatively low level of violence of the past year or so will probably turn out to have been exceptional.

"There is a certain amount of nervousness, too, about the campaign to draw worldwide attention to the prisoners in the H Block at Long Kesh who are demanding political status. In the background there is continued resignation about the difficulties of getting convictions in the courts.

"The Provos are making better use of propaganda. The "H" Block cam-

paign, where more than 330 almost exclusively Provos prisoners are refusing to wash or clean their cells, is a case in point.

"In the U.S., because of skilful publicity, the "H" Blocks have gone across as a bad human rights abuse by the British authorities.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Mr Rutherford notes that "however much Britain may try to forget, such a state of affairs cannot go on without political consequences. One of the consequences is the decline of the S.D.L.P., the party which - very broadly - represents northern Catholics.

It has ceased to have any very obvious reason for existence and its visible presence has much diminished. Mr Mason is exceedingly irritated by this development. He believes that he is trying to help the Catholics, but that the Catholic party will not accept anything that is offered."

And we might add, we will not accept anything offered by him short of full freedom from Britain to plan our own destiny.

2 THE HORRORS OF H-BLOCK

(Translated from the original in Irish by Rev. Reamonn O Muiri)

The problem of the prisoners is the problem of peace in the North. That has been said by Fr Denis Faul and me on many occasions. Every ugly thing that happens in the prison is echoed on the outside. Wherever a government lacks scruples in matters of Law and Justice there is no peace. Repression (coercion) cannot be equated with victory. For ten years the Govt authorities in Northern Ireland have been trying to hide their evil deeds. The maltreatment of prisoners during the period of Internment is but one example. The barracks of Girdwood, Hollywood, Ballykinlar, Ballykelly and Castleagh stand for brutality, torture and the punishment of prisoners. The violence of the paramilitaries has been condemned even if I remained silent. Any person who fails to make a distinction and refuses to understand that

institutional violence is a problem in itself, is not furthering peace.

INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

H-Block is part of the Institutional violence and a matter of live concern to the public following television programmes on BBC, UTV and RTE as well as many articles and letters in journals and newspapers. There are almost 3,000 imprisoned in Northern Ireland on charges of political offences. Over 2,000 of these are Republicans and 800 of them are Loyalists. That is from a total populace of one and a half million, a very high figure by international statistics and there is reason for it. The British do not want to admit that there is an emergency in Northern Ireland. They want to hide the problem from their own people and from the world. That is one of the reasons why political status was removed in 1976, a status attained by Republicans following a hunger strike in 1972.

At the present time 363 men in H-Block 3, 4 and 5 and 37 young women in Armagh Prison are once again on strike. Allowing an average of 20 persons as family, relatives and friends of each prisoner, that leaves at a minimum, 60,000 people in a state of worry and anxiety. With that aggregate of concern it would be impossible to keep prison matters a secret, particularly in so far as it relates to the H-Block relatives. The truth must out.

These prisoners come from impoverished areas, impoverished by war and the demoralising effects that follow it. They come from the old quarters of Belfast, South Derry and West Tyrone. The people of those areas understand the problem of the prisoners and weep for the men of H-Blocks. They have no loyalty whatsoever to the Govt of Northern Ireland. Cruel punishments have been meted out to 363 men in H-Block and 37 girls in Armagh Prison. Imagine the outlook of the younger generation in these areas, those who have grown up in a world of violence. They will themselves extend that violence if the horror of H-Block continues. The problem must be solved and better today than tomorrow.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROTESTS

H-Block is the most recent structure in Long Kesh Camp, built and prepared in readiness for the time when political status would be removed from prisoners. The British Government announced the end of Special Status after March 1976 and offered part remission of sentences in lieu as an enticement. Those who had been already granted political

status could retain it.

Despite the dissatisfaction of the paramilitaries, no strike was initiated until September 1976 when Ciaran Nugent was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment. He and his comrades who followed refused to wear prison clothes, to do prison work, the symbols of criminality.

The British Government moved quickly to break the strike. Those initially on strike were few and prisoners are free to decide for or against strike action. The Government failed. The men were locked up 24 hours each day. They lost all remission of their sentences. They were denied newspapers, radios, television, books, journals — denied every mental stimulus except the Bible. Parcels, cigarettes were forbidden. They could have one visit per month but must wear prison clothes for that visit. They were denied association with one another — excepting attendance at Mass each Sunday when Mass is said in each Block. Outdoor exercise was forbidden and they became too weak to continue the physical exercises which they had begun in their cells.

A VISIT TO H-BLOCK

On the 16th September 1978 I visited H Block to hear confessions in Section C of Block 5. On entering I was startled by a tumult, the reason for which transpired to be a celebration and congratulations to Ciaran Nugent. He had completed two years in total nakedness, in solitary confinement for 24 hours of each day, within his cell.

Entering that prison block is like going underground, the dark passageways, the large iron gates, the constant artificial lighting, the white painted rough brick walls. There are 25 cells on either side, two prisoners to each cell (though built as single cells). The cell door reminded me of the door of a safe, massive in size and weight. The door is opened by two prison officers. The foul-smelling air of the cells escapes. Two men rise from their grey bunks, their frightened appearance changing to smiles of welcome when they recognise the priest. The men are desperately thin, skin yellowed, bearded and long haired. They wrap themselves in a towel or a blanket. Here is an opportunity to talk, to hear news. All of these prisoners are extraordinarily friendly. One young man from Armagh, who was once a pupil of mine in an Irish class, I did not recognise, he had grown so thin and he had lost most of his hair. Another Armagh man that I sought had been transferred to hospital — he had suffered a skin disease for months.

I find these new cells in H Block loathsome. The low ceilings, the cold concrete floors, the brick-walls that

had been painted white now covered with fried faeces and food refuse and impossible to clean even by powerful pressure-hosing.

The men are on strike since April. They refused to go to the toilets because of the derision of prison warders, the jeering at their nakedness, the obscene comments about their womenfolk, the indecent observations and remarks while the prisoners were at toilet, the beatings, the anal probings and rectal searches performed on the prisoners before and after visits. When the warders began to empty the toilet pots on the bunk beds, the prisoners resorted to smearing the walls with faeces and emptying the urine under the door into the passageway outside. Many of the cell windows are broken, by prisoners and warders. But the cold and rain prove preferable to the overpowering stench of the cell atmosphere.

RELATIVES COMPLAINTS

The harrassment of the prisoners is of routine occurrence — forced scrubbing and hosing of the men, forced barbering, inadequate supply of food, meals are left inside the door down on the floor as if to animals. Deliberate disturbance of night sleep, constant, excessively glaring, electric light, total denial of personal necessities, even a comb or toothbrush, no reading material even of a religious kind and prisoners are sent to the special punishment cells for the most trifling reasons.

There are 28 special punishment cells. They are frequently in use. Poorly heated, these cells are windowless, air being piped in. They are devoid of any furnishings — a mattress and blanket being supplied only at night-time. The usual punishment period is three days but it is often extended to fifteen days. To that harrassment and punishment can be added the use of drugs. The Northern Ireland Office was forced to admit that drugs had been used (psychiatric type drug) in the case of Paul Creelman. The physical force used has resulted in frequent and some very serious injuries.

THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM

One question must be asked. Do the British want to solve the problem. The answer is No. From them we hear only the harsh, cruel words. Is the responsibility not theirs to take the first step. They have deprived these prisoners of the basic necessities of body and mind. They have brought great sorrow to their families. Why do the British not ask for independent help. This state of affairs has been

going on for 30 months. Let them lift these punishments immediately and afterwards there is plentiful opportunity to talk.

I have stated before my great admiration for these boys and girls for their courage and long-suffering. Is there anyone who can say that Northern Ireland is not in a terrible state at present. Is there anyone can say that injustice has not been going on this past fifty years. Have the poor people of Derry and Belfast, of South Derry, South Armagh and other places, have they not been supremely patient. Yet now, there are those, clerical and lay, who would condemn these poor, the same poor people who suffered internment, burning-out, torture and assassination. Is their impoverishment to be wondered at.

A special law in a special court following special interrogation. They have earned special status, political status. Everything that happens in Northern Ireland is political.

(Published in Feasts, February 1979)

3 "EMERGENCY" LAWS IN IRELAND

An almost universal agreement regarding the Irish political upheaval and revolution of the past decade is that the legal and political repression affecting citizens throughout the country is directly caused by the continued British presence in Ireland, and that this will continue as long as that presence remains.

In the British occupied six counties of the North-east of the country the blind reaction by the state to guerilla offensive takes the form of repressive laws, community harassment of the poorer nationalist areas, brutal interrogation methods in police stations and the attempt to "criminalise" Republican prisoners which has culminated in the degradation of H Block prisoners of war.

Regarding the Southern part of the country where native "puppet" politicians rule similar repression by way of the law and harassment exists. Many allegations are made of police brutality and torture in the police barracks and prisons. Cruel, inhumane interrogation methods take place and at certain periods these are known to be "given the go-ahead at top level." Similarly, the conditions in the Prisons, particularly Portlaoise prison become vindictive.

In England the plight of Irish political prisoners is most disturbing. Besides being given special harsh penal treatment they are discriminated against in a racist fashion. Beatings and solitary confinement are the usual punitive measures. Repressive legislation is the means of preserving the

status quo in these islands and the purpose of the "Prevention of Terrorism Act" in Britain is to depoliticise the Irish in Britain.

EMERGENCY LEGISLATION

The European Court of Human Rights delivered its final report in January 1978, on the treatment of internees in 1971. Britain was found guilty of breaches of Article 3 in the European Convention of Human Rights which states: 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.'

In its judgement the Strasbourg Court commented: 'The techniques were applied in combination with premeditation, and for hours at a stretch. They caused, if not actual bodily injury, at least intense physical and mental suffering to the person subjected thereto and also acute psychiatric disturbances before interrogation.'

The legislation provided for arrest and imprisonment without trial of men and women suspected of having sympathy with anti-imperialist organisations. In practice this was mainly interpreted as organisations based on the nationalist community in the six counties of the North.

When Amnesty International conducted its investigations, internment had ended but the 'emergency legislation' referred to by Amnesty had by no means returned the "usual standards of British legal safeguards" to the citizens of the six counties.

The following are aspects of the legislation that impinge the Nationalist community at present:

NO JURY (DIPLOCK) COURTS.

The jury system - a fundamental principle of British law for serious offences - has been abolished. People charged with political offences are tried by judges alone.

HEARSAY EVIDENCE. A written statement can be accepted as evidence without the appearance in court of the person making it; neither the accused nor his or her lawyer can cross-examine an individual who may be making serious allegations against him or her. Statements obtained during interrogation of arrested suspects can provide sufficient evidence for conviction.

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT. Special rules apply in the north in cases of possession of weapons. Normal British law will not consider a person guilty of possession if the person concerned is unaware that the weapon is in his or her house. It is up to the prosecution to prove the accused had knowledge of the weapon. In Ireland the reverse applies. It is up to the householder to prove he/she knew nothing of the weapon in ques-

tion. Guilt rather than innocence is assumed.

STOP AND SEARCH. A member of the British army operating in the six counties has unlimited powers of stop and search - powers which do not apply in England, Scotland or Wales.

RIGHT OF SILENCE. In common law, a person need not give his/her name and address to a police officer. This does not apply in Northern Ireland where a person can be jailed for six months for refusing to give such details to the police or army. The fundamental right to silence no longer exists here.

INTERMENT BY REMAND. Suspects have frequently been held in custody for very long periods. Refusal of bail has in a number of cases resulted in a form of internment, without trial, in some cases lasting as long as 22 months.

THE REST OF IRELAND

Because of the amount of publicity that the more physical type violence receives in the world media, and the fact that British domination is being more directly challenged in the North-east of Ireland than in the South, less attention is focused on the situation under the Dublin government.

Because of this visitors are reminded, in their own interests, that the Dublin government declared an official "State of Emergency" on October 16th, 1976.

Your attention is drawn to the following legislation which is extensively used by the state: the Offences Against the State Acts, 1939, 1940, and 1972; the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act, 1976; the Emergency Powers Act, 1976; and the Criminal Law Act, 1976.

Under these laws visitors to Ireland are liable to:

- * Be searched without warrant at point of entry and departure and at any time during their stay.
- * Be held for interrogation without charge for up to SEVEN DAYS. Records show that only 10% of those taken in for interrogation are ever charged in court.
- * Have their personal property confiscated without compensation. The law specifically mentions photographs, discs, tapes, films, microfilm, negatives or other devices.
- * Be arrested by a member of the Defence Forces i.e., a soldier.
- * Be charged before a Special Criminal Court which operates WITHOUT A JURY and was specifically set up to deny trial by jury.
- * Be convicted on the hearsay evidence of a police officer who says he "believes" you are a member of an illegal organisation and claims privil-

ege for his source of information. Under the law this is sufficient evidence to secure conviction, carrying a maximum of SEVEN YEARS IMPRISONMENT.

* Be arrested at any time and compelled to give a full account of your "movements and actions during any specified period." If you fail to give satisfactory answers (even answers which may incriminate you), or give what the police consider a misleading account, you are liable to imprisonment for six months. For failure to give an account of your "recent movements" the sentence is twelve months.
* Be sent to a MILITARY DETENTION CAMP instead of a civil prison.

Political prisoners are held in large numbers in different prisons, including the Curragh Military Detention Camp and Portlaoise Prison.

Foreign journalists, students and other visitors have been openly accosted and interrogated by the Special Branch (armed political police).

The DEATH SENTENCE can still be carried out for murder and Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act, 1976, specifies the sentence for "robbery or assault with intent to rob" as IMPRISONMENT FOR LIFE. These are indications of the enormous sentences which can be imposed under Irish law.

Complaints of inhuman and degrading treatment of suspects and prisoners in police barracks and prisons are being investigated by Amnesty International and other organisations.

In Northern Ireland (six north-eastern counties) there is a state of war between the Republican people and the English Crown Forces, with whom the forces of the Dublin Government co-operate closely.

If you wish to check the legal provisions outlined above you can buy copies of the Acts of Parliament referred to from the Government Publications Sale Office, G.P.O. Arcade, Dublin 1 or through any Irish Embassy, Consular Mission or Tourist Office.

4 THE NEWS FROM THE NORTH

Sunday 25th February

An IRA active service unit ambushed a UDR man in the Donaghmore area of County Tyrone. In a supplied statement claiming responsibility for the attack the IRA pointed out that the UDR are an integral part of the British war machine.

Earlier in the week on Tuesday in Toomebridge, Co. Antrim a 3 man RUC patrol was ambushed whilst travelling in an unmarked car. In a

supplied statement the IRA claimed responsibility for the attack.

Thursday 1st March

What, according to published IRA reports, was to be the main operation of the week was foiled last Thursday night when a British helicopter spotted several men moving equipment and a tipper lorry into position for a mortar bomb attack on the Brit/RUC barracks at Crossmaglen. About a dozen IRA Volunteers were involved in the preparations for the mortar attack.

The IRA Volunteers had been rigging up the launching pad in the back of a tarpaulin covered lorry when the Brits discovered them.

The IRA quickly aborted their plan when they came under fire from the British army but all volunteers escaped safely to base.

YEOVIL BOMBINGS DENIED

Contrary to a reported claim of involvement which we published last week, the IRA have denied responsibility for the bombing of the English town of Yeovil in Somerset. A supplied statement from the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau pointed out that "The IRA had no involvement whatsoever in the bombing of Yeovil."

5 SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR ALL

In the British occupied North-east of Ireland, old moulds are at last being broken, outmoded ideas are being disregarded and a new awareness is dawning on the Ulster people as regards a common identity and future. Much of this change has come about by the revolution that has been taking place there in the last decade. The connection with England no longer has the relevance of former years even for the loyalist people. Local history, folklore and culture is once again claiming the interest of the young and a revival in these areas is imminent. In short the people of the North are beginning to appreciate that their's is an historic province and a return to their roots can demolish barriers.

In many ways the trend of things happening in the North is more healthy and progressive than in the South in the new imperialism of Brussels. Most people would now accept that the future of Ireland depends upon the future of the North - how the situation develops there will influence greatly the course of events in the country as a whole.

POLITICAL VACUUM

However, it is obvious that there exists in the North a political vacuum. No one knows quite what to do next or what is going to happen. The Unionists are split into many factions, the S.D.L.P. are devoid of any coherent policy, the British are about to leave and the politicians are confused and frightened. One by one, the so-called political initiatives have failed. The political parties of the North, the Southern government and the British government are devoid of ideas, having nothing to offer the Irish people but a constant tirade designed to perpetuate themselves in the paltry politics of a divided Ireland. For a number of years the Republican Movement, through its political wing Sinn Fein, has offered a vision of a New Ireland embodying a recognition of the positive aspects of the diverse elements which make up our nation. A public trend towards this vision is slowly becoming evident within the communities in the North.

According to Sinn Fein policy the New Ireland will be one of self-governing communities in which the people control their own affairs; their own employment, their own natural resources, their own schools, their own wages and prices, their own housing and environment. It means a nine-county parliament of Ulster people united in the common and immense task of creating a way that will be meaningful, rewarding and satisfying for all the inhabitants of that historic province. A New Ulster can indeed be a prelude to a New Ireland . . . a Federal Ireland of four historic provinces and an extension of our central demand for a British withdrawal.

If Britain's future lies with Europe, then Ulster's future is with Ireland - not the Ireland of the past, strife torn, riddled with dissention and a prey to a now forgotten Empire - but an Ireland of self-governing communities with guaranteed rights for all.

Irish Republican
Information Service

Kevin Barry House,
44 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1, Ireland