

CONCERNED

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF FERMANAGH CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE COMMITTEE

"IRELAND UNFREE SHALL NEVER BE AT PEACE"

PAY
NO
RENT
PAY
NO
RATES

No. 177

Saturday, 22nd March (De Sathairn, 22 Márta), 1975

Cooney The Vampire:

Not a physical description but a mortal judgement

"ONE prisoner was shot dead and two others wounded during an escape-bid from Portlaoise Prison." That dispassionate announcement was made to millions of Irish people on St. Patrick's night. Irish people everywhere must have gasped with horror for the killing was done by Free State soldiers, not by members of the British occupation army. Even the sustained ritiness of the announcement concerning the dastardly authority abuse did little to conceal the announcer's feelings.

Later we were told that Mr. Cooney, the Minister for Justice, had been informed. Personally, I could not help seeing a similarity between this ritual informing and the old barbaric ritual notice-posting upon prison gates that the job of hanging had been done. No doubt Mr. Cooney has ears and would have heard the announcement with the rest of us. I can only assume that the ritual informing was necessary to sate the Minister's vampire appetite. At last he had got the fresh red blood of a young Irishman, and red blood which had been spilled in that very place which had so many times given him the proverbial red face.

No doubt the Minister slept soundly that night, but scarcely dreamlessly. He had said that Republican prisoners had no rights and one must see in the light of the wanton killing of Thomas Smith that that no rights decree includes the right to life, even in chains. That makes it difficult to think of Minister Cooney at this moment except with feelings of unadulterated loathing. His irresponsible statement that Republican prisoners have no rights makes him more responsible for the murder of Thomas Smith than the unfortunate who fired the fatal shot. He can only be seen as from now as institutional terrorist number one. And that, even if he were willing or capable of redressing this latest brutality and all his other brutalities against the helpless victims of institutional violence.

Even disencumbering us of his very being would not absolve him from the evil he has done and there is less than nothing Republicans can think of as good, to inter with his bones. The cold-blooded murder of a young man whose crime was a duty, and a duty internationally recognised as such, can only be looked upon by civilised people as barbaric.



True, the good old morality of expediency, i.e. bribes, lies and the distortion of the truth, may save his political face, but unless he is utterly conscienceless he must always see the mark of Cain upon his forehead in that truthful mirror of self-analysis.

It is well nigh impossible to see any good springing from his evil deeds, unless it should be a broader awakening of those who may be partially apathetic to the horrible awareness that they have as Minister for Justice a proxy-murderer, a pathological anti-Republican, and a rabid Anglophile. If even that atom of good results from his foul deed it could make Irish people everywhere question the political sanity of his superior's keeping him in his present office or indeed in any office. It is an earnest hope that the raised voice of so many Irish people, wounded in the murder of Thomas Smith, will force Mr. Cosgrave to at least dismiss this man from his Cabinet.

'Yield as did Oisín' says Ó Dálaigh

THE President of the Irish Free State, C. Uas. O Dálaigh, in his St. Patrick's Day message to the Irish at home and in exile, said that they must yield as did Oisín "to the gentle creed of peace". He told the Irish that they must do so if they are to recapture what the historians have rightly called the Golden Age. He indicated that prior to yielding, Oisín, the Irish poet, never tired of lauding the warlike virtues of the Fianna.

There you have the guts of C.O.D.'s St. Patrick's Day message. I am sure it makes more or less a like depth of impression upon you as it makes upon me. Lest you did not bother your head reading it in the Irish Times of 17th March because of harassment due to the wee ones having the day off from school or the extra-family unabating harassment of the British Crown forces, I thought it would be nice to give it to you if only for the laugh.

But I am glad that C.O.D. did bring Oisín in from the cold. He is an Irish poet who has been neglected as part of the plan of those who hold that tradition should be destroyed the moment it becomes unprofitable. It shows that C.O.D. is not in the job for the money?

Now you may well ask why the question mark, so I had better tell you. I have heard it said that the Devil often quotes Scripture for his own purpose, and somehow I cannot help feeling that C.O.D. dragged in Oisín thinking that you, Mam, knew nothing about Oisín and that it would serve his purpose to drag him in. Pearse would be a dangerous fellow to drag in since he is not as remote, so to speak, as is Oisín. While well aware that you don't give a damn, Mam, why he dragged him in at all; indeed whether he dragged anything in at all, I do. I do because I do not like to see a very good man, dead so long, being misrepresented by C.O.D. The way I see it is this. Take Fionn, Fionn whose boys kept the foreign invaders in check on the shores of Ventry until he had rallied the Fianna. What would he not say if he saw what C.O.D. dished out to the Irish people on St. Patrick's Day in his "Presidential" message? I shudder to think. I am sure you do, if you are following me at all. Are you?

C.O.D.'s portrayal of Oisín as a creep is undeniable. The truth is that Oisín and St. Patrick got on like a house on fire. As a saint, Patrick could have had nothing but the very highest admiration for Oisín and the Fianna whom he lauded. Lesser men that Patrick would have been most impressed by the words Oisín addressed to him one evening they were together. Oisín said: "We, the Fianna, never told a lie; falsehood was never imputed to us." I wonder how many of C.O.D.'s Irish Free State politicians could say the likes of that after nearly 55 years of C.O.D.'s "gentle creed of peace".

Then remember how thrilled St. Patrick must have been by the answer given to him by Caoilte Mac Rónáin when one morning Patrick asked him how it came that the Fianna won all their battles. You remember Caoilte's famous answer? In case you may have forgotten I shall give it. Caoilte

(Continued on page 4)

News and Views From

POLITICAL PRISONERS

A Chara,

Wherever you may journey—from one end of the country to the other—wherever people may gather, whether it be in their clubs, pubs, homes or at work, and discuss the current troubled situation, your conversation will inevitably touch on the place I write to you from—Long Kesh. A hastily erected batch of nissen-type huts, Long Kesh Internment Camp, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, has now become synonymous with the Irish Resistance struggle. Now in its fourth year of existence, there are few families in these six north-eastern counties whose lives have not been affected by it. Like a cancer, its name has spread throughout the community. There are few people who cannot "boast" of having had a relation or friend spend at least a couple of months "behind the wire". It represents all that is evil in our society and until its last resident is freed there will never be peace on this island. But what of those at present held here or those that have come and gone? What influence, if any, has Long Kesh had on their lives? What do you envisage when you think of this "special category status" banded about so much in the British Government's latest non-event—the Gardiner Report? Do we spend all our time running around the cages, devising new methods to kill people or chanting the "thoughts of Chairman Mao"—as the British press would have us think—is this in fact the "terrorists" equivalent to Eton or Harrow?

To even attempt to answer the issues raised in the Gardiner Report on Special Category Status, it is absolutely essential to understand and remember that those held in Long Kesh, or the other similar detention centres, are here solely out of political conviction; they are here because they resisted the British war machine; they are here because they do not recognise or acknowledge the right of the British to be on Irish soil; they are here because they refused to bow the knee.

There is no longer the need to highlight the appalling conditions in which we are forced to "live". Everybody knows about the overcrowding, about the leaking huts, about the degrading searches, about the inadequate food supplies, about the meagre or sometimes non-existent medical, dental, recreational, educational facilities—about the attempts to deprive us of our very personalities. The list is endless.

But what would happen if our political status was removed—if the Gardiner Report's recommendations were implemented. The plain and simple truth is that Long Kesh would collapse. We would refuse to co-operate with the prison administration and without our co-operation the system would be unable to function and chaos would reign. And those who would bear the unimaginable suffering of such a move would be us, the prisoners. The prison administration, the prison officers ("screws") come in the main from Britain. They are inadequately trained and insufficient in numbers to meet the needs of the thousand-odd men here. It is only because we ourselves organise the everyday running of the camp, it is because of our self-imposed discipline, that we manage to exist at all. As political prisoners, as people who are here not for personal gain, but because we tried to correct the wrongs in our society, our discipline is a trade-mark of our character. We appoint our own staff from within the men themselves and they ensure that our lives are made as tolerable as possible. Without this liaison between the camp staff and the prison administration our conditions would be so much worsened. If you want evidence to substantiate that fact, ask the Camp Commandant, Robert Truesdale. He tried to erode our status, he tried to undermine our camp staff and the result

was the burning to the ground of Long Kesh. Any future attempts to remove our rights as prisoners of war will be met with the same vigour, the same determination that has earned 15th October, 1974, a place in the annals of Irish history.

In Long Kesh today the Gaelic language flourishes, our culture is explored and an awareness of the problems facing the Irish people is created. Our time is not spent as Gardiner would have you believe, lying around the huts doing nothing. Thanks to our own Education Programme, a better understanding of the social, economic, environmental divisions entrenching modern society is possible. If one was to depend on the prison authorities for the creation of such an awareness, then, alas, our time would be spent "lying around the cages doing nothing".

But even apart from these considerations, our right to be treated as political prisoners is indefensible. As I stated previously, we are here out of political conviction alone and, judged in that light, be you Socialist or Tory, you cannot but conclude that to class those who "enjoy" Special Category status as "criminals" would be failing to recognise the special circumstances that brought about their imprisonment. For anybody to term us "criminals" is to slight all those who have fought against the British presence in Ireland from the moment they landed here.

We are all members of the one and same Republican movement and have not deviated from the principles our forefathers willingly sacrificed their lives for and those which are held and cherished by the Irish people.

Long Kesh.

17/2/75.

FULL SUPPORT FOR IRPWC

A Chara,

Over the past few days letters have appeared in the daily papers relating to the welfare of prisoners. The first of these letters was from the newly formed "Cabhair" and the second from the long established "Irish Republican Prisoners' Welfare Committee". The latter (IRPWC) finished off its letter by leaving the issue to be resolved by the prisoners themselves and the general public as a whole. Bearing this in mind it is vital that we, the sentenced Republican prisoners in Long Kesh, make known our views on the matter. Firstly I would like to say that the work of the IRPWC has been faultless and each and every man here is deeply indebted to them. They have, through their tireless efforts, done a vast amount to alleviate the hardship of the men in here and their families outside. In the wake of the fire in Long Kesh their prompt and very effective actions undoubtedly saved the health of hundreds of men who were living outdoors in the vilest conditions.

All these activities were carried out with one thing in mind—the welfare of the prisoners—and at no time was any effort made to extract political capital. We would also take this opportunity to express our disgust at these latest attempts to introduce division and discontent and the attempts to use the long-suffering prisoners as political stepping stones. Our support will be given totally and unequivocally to the Irish Republican Prisoners' Welfare Committee, and we wish once again to extend our heartfelt thanks to them for all their efforts on our behalf.

Is mise,

P.R.O.

Sentenced Republican Prisoners,

Long Kesh.

26/2/75.

LIES - ENGLAND'S TRUSTED WEAPON

A Chara,

British Government statements have long ago lost any shred of credibility they may have once possessed. People have over the years grown accustomed to the Whitehall lies, the Lisburn half-truths and the mumbled, half-apologetic utterances of a Taffy in Stormont. In fact, according to an award-winning British journalist—Robert Fisk of the English "Times"—all their "clarifying statements" must be "thoroughly vetted for discrepancies!" And as always, recognising the futility of hoping their outbursts will be believed, the British Government has resorted to the use of their "legal personnel" in an attempt to give credence to their horrifying and blundering record in Ireland. The latest in their "impartial inquiries" was, of course, the Gardiner Report—headed by "a leading English jurist whose impartiality is recognised by all... Blah! Blah!"

"Impartial"—If Adolf Hitler had attached the same importance to propaganda as Merlyn has done, he, too, could have set up an "impartial inquiry" into the work of the SS or the treatment of the Jews in his prison camps and I'm sure could have relied on a "favourable outcome" similar to the one Rees obtained from Lord Gardiner. How can you expect British legal experts to be impartial when they are investigating complaints made against the British Government—their own Government. Surely their "verdict" is bound to be influenced by the fact that an unfavourable (in other words truthful) account of the "Northern Ireland legal system" will also cast a shadow on themselves, not alone as upholders of the British Government, but as members of the same "British legal system". Developing Merlyn Rees's "limited" line of thought further—the advantages of having such an investigating system are innumerable. For instance, there need not be a third party involved in football matches, i.e. the referee. The referee could also be one of the players!!!

British based inquiries must be seen in their proper light and for what they are—purely and simply exercises in propaganda. Look what Gardiner wrote about Long Kesh and particularly the sentenced prisoners held here:

"Wasters. Lying about all day long doing nothing but twiddling their thumbs and devising schemes for the establishment of the 4th Reich. An undisciplined bunch of terrorists who won't do what the nice prison officers tell them. The poor Governor, only trying to do his best for queen and country, unlistened to."

If I ever met this "impartial Lord Gardiner" the dialogue might run thus:

"How long or how many days did you spend within the confines of Long Kesh? How many of these 'criminals' and 'terrorists' did you speak with, eat with, live with?"

And if Gardiner was to answer truthfully—and it would be a gigantic IF—his answer could only be: "I have never spent any time in Long Kesh, nor did I speak with, eat with or live with any of the people I labelled as wasters and layabouts."

And I would reply: "Oh, so that was the reason you were unable to write about the Education Programme we ourselves devised and are pursuing. That was why you didn't state that now the people held in Long Kesh have a wider understanding, will be more able to deal with the problems facing the Irish people when they are finally liberated. You probably wouldn't have understood the language we spoke in anyway—now that so many of us have learned our native tongue. No wonder you were unable to mention about the various handicrafts made in Long Kesh—necessary to support our families' existence on the

From Behind The Wire

outside. I suppose that was also why you didn't comment on the leaking huts, the inedible food, the lack of medical, dental, recreational facilities. Maybe that was why you omitted to comment on the fact that SEVEN men, both Protestant and Catholic, died within the confines of Long Kesh."

"Yes, Lord Gardiner, I can now understand how it was that you came to pen such despicable lies. Yes, now that 'the damage is done' it is painfully obvious and clear where you went wrong."

"But, Lord Gardiner, in a distorted way your description of us as 'wasters' was right. Men did 'waste' and they did lie on their beds all day long—that was in June, 1972, when our right to be treated as political prisoners, superficially eased by calling us 'special category prisoners' was only granted after 30 odd days of hunger strike."

And there, my friends, our conversation would end.

Judgment would be up to you.

Cage 9,
Long Kesh.
28/2/75.

EDUCATION FACILITIES NON-EXISTENT

A Chara,

A press statement recently released to the news media by the Northern Ireland Office portrayed a comprehensive education system here in Long Kesh, where, it was stated, almost 200 men are working for "O" and "A" level exams and over 30 others are studying Open University courses. This glossary may have led viewers to believe that the camp is a veritable college, on a par with any in the country. Anyone who has any knowledge of the system at Long Kesh will realise that this is an extreme distortion of the facts, and yet another attempt by the Establishment to make cheap political capital by the misrepresentation of these facts.

Insofar as we, the Provisional Republican prisoners, are concerned the facts are thus: of 143 applications for Educational Courses, mainly "O" and "A" levels, 67 have received literature pertaining to their course, but in many cases even these have been incomplete. The remainder are "awaiting ratification or waiting for their course material to arrive". It is important to note that all these men are being dealt with through correspondence courses, including 11 Open University students, and that no teachers or teaching facilities are provided to the cages. Over the past three weeks we have had visiting teachers; these, however, dealt only with general topics and were not involved in the teaching of exam students. Even the visits from these teachers had to be discontinued due to the insistence of the Camp Administration on the presence of security officers. What is therefore required of the prison authorities in regard to education courses is that they send off all "pending" applications, co-ordinate the delivery of study material and provide studying space. The first two of these requirements are progressing fairly reasonably, but no provision at all has been made on the point of study facilities, which are the direct responsibility of the prison authorities. The administration may justifiably say that study facilities are provided in the rebuilt cages, but we do not occupy these cages and there is little prospect of us so doing in the immediate future. The provision of study huts is, however, a mere triviality in comparison to the need for adequate living conditions which, even five months after the burning of the camp, are of a very primitive nature. The Ministry statement, which surprised even their own representative in

the camp, adds that "movie slide projectors are available as they were before the burning" when the education service was in top gear. This equipment was never available to us and we have never had the benefit of it—if it ever existed! Even if we are returning to the "top gear position, as before the fire", then the service will fall very short of the minimum requirements for a reasonable educational system.

The Republican prisoners in Long Kesh struggled hard for two years to have even an educational programme instituted, and it was not until the Spring of 1974, after a great deal of embarrassment to the administration caused by our pressure and also by the pressure from the general public, that the education programme got under way at all. This was a mere six months before the camp burned and neither that six month period nor the period since the fire would be sufficient to build up an education system anywhere, least of all in Long Kesh. Anyone who would state otherwise must be extremely stupid with little or no idea of what is involved or else be prepared to arrange the "facts" to suit himself.

We make no apologies for the burning of Long Kesh and the destruction of all its "amenities"—we do not expect sterling service—what we do expect is that the public be aware of what is happening in their name, and they should not be subjected to gross misrepresentation of the facts concerning Long Kesh in an attempt by the authorities to vindicate their wire jungle.

Is mise,
Education Officer.

Sentenced Republican Prisoners,
Long Kesh.
20/2/75.

RUC WILL NEVER BE ACCEPTABLE

A Chara,

Amid the present futile efforts, from the usual lobby, to talk the RUC back into areas from which they had been rejected by the Nationalist population, incidents still occur on a daily basis to highlight the unacceptability of this partisan force. The RUC was spurned by the people not alone for their obvious political loyalties but because of their partiality, one-sided arrests, and callous brutality towards the Catholic population. That this situation remains unchanged has been made evident on a number of occasions lately. To us in Long Kesh, who have had first hand experience while at the mercy of this sectarian force, no amount of words from any quarter could convince us otherwise. Our belief, however, has been reinforced by a very recent example here in Long Kesh itself. In view of the fact that a number of men here intend to take criminal injury action for the brutal treatment meted out to them by the British Army on 16/10/74, a team of RUC men were sent to Long Kesh to conduct an informal inquiry. The inquiry commenced yesterday (11/2/75) and a number of prison warders were first to be interviewed. No effort was made, however, to interview British Army personnel, against whom the complaints are being levelled. The internees and sentenced men then presented themselves to this informal inquiry and immediately the entire tone of the proceedings changed from that of interview to interrogation. The RUC completely forgot the purpose of the inquiry and embarked on a line of questioning which had nothing whatsoever to do with the criminal injury action being brought. During the course of this questioning the RUC sought the identities behind the command structure in the camp. They also sought the identity of who had "ordered the burning of the internee and sentenced ends of the camp". Due to these crude efforts by the RUC to

obtain self-incriminating statements from the prisoners and their refusal to investigate their complaints, all Republican prisoners immediately withdrew and refused to participate further in the farce. This must certainly show to everyone how completely unchanged and partial are the forces of the RUC. Surely not even their advocates would attempt to treat this as an isolated incident?

Is mise,
P.R.O.

Sentenced Republican Prisoners,
Long Kesh.
13/2/75

DONEGAL SINN FEIN NEWS

NEW CUMANN

At a venue in Annagry on Saturday, 8th March a new cumann was formed, with the Chairman of the Donegal Comhairle Ceanntair, Anthony O'Malley Daly, T.C., presiding. Mr. Hugh Duffy was elected Chairman. Vice-Chairman is Mr. James Sharkey, Secretary Mr. Dan Boyle, and Joint Treasurers are Messrs. Patrick Sharkey and Danny Rogers. Mrs. Hugh Duffy agreed to assist in secretarial work.

DRAW RESULTS

At a successful Northern Aid function in Buncrana on 7th March the Third Annual Northern Aid (Tirconail Branch) draw took place. The first prize of a Belleek china set was won by Neil Gallagher, Ballintra, Arranmore Island, Co. Donegal; 2nd prizes of a choice of wallet or handbag went to Thomas Caldwell, Donegal and F. Cairns, Strabane, Co. Tyrone. Anthony O'Malley Daly, Chairman of the Donegal Comhairle Ceanntair, thanked all who had contributed to the continuing success of this yearly draw at home and overseas.

COUNTY FERMANAGH EASTER COMMEMORATION

EASTER Commemoration ceremonies will be held at Donagh on Easter Sunday at the grave of Louis Leonard. Assembly will be in the local GAA field. Further particulars in next issue.

Honour Ireland's Patriot Dead by wearing an Easter Lily.

DANCING FOR YOUNG & OLD PARISH HALL, NEWTOWNBUTLER

on

SUNDAY, 23rd MARCH, 1975

Music by THE THREE COUNTIES

Proceeds in aid of P.D.F.

Dancing 10—1.30

Adm. 50p

Raffle postponed from 17th March will be held.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The People,
Ireland.

Patriots of Ireland; champions of liberty in all lands; be strong in hope. Your cause is identical with mine. You are calumniated in your day. I was misrepresented by the loyalists of my day.

Had I failed, the scaffold would have been my doom. But NOW my enemies do me honour. I stood true to my cause even when victory had fled. In that I merited success. You do LIKEWISE.

—George Washington, 1788.

The above is a transcript excerpt from George Washington's letter and message sent to the National Irish Fraternal Association. Washington's written message to our forbears is even more relevant to the Irish people of today than it was when the great American quill penned it so long ago. In our forbears' day the loyalists to foreign domination were unmasked, naked indeed, and as such discernible. Today, if we exclude the minority in the North-East of our country, the loyalists are masked, un-naked, and not so easily discernible. Only the perceptive can see through the mask of sham and the clothes of shame worn by Freestate loyalists and their fellow-travellers.

Perceptiveness grows with enlightenment and Young Irelanders, now more enlightened than ever before, are consequently more perceptive than ever before. This constitutes a threatening development which none of the Freestate loyalists underestimate for they correctly view it as much more than a manageable interruption of their foul play. Neither do they underestimate the smallness of the worth to Britain of her native lackeys should they fail in their role as Britain's strangling hand. Experience has shown that Britain secretly despises the "tools" she uses to do her dirty work and will abuse them only for as long as there is prestige and money for her in dirt.

Young Irelanders' developed perceptiveness is inimical to the Freestate loyalists and some of them have already dropped the mask of sham and the clothes of shame and are already indulging themselves in insane orgies of vindictiveness equalling that of the unmasked and naked loyalists of the North-East. Names come to mind, but your perceptiveness spares me from defiling paper through writing the names upon it. Their names stink in the nostrils of Republicans and are written upon the scarred minds and bodies of many.

George Washington told our forbears of how he had stood true to his cause even when victory had fled. We have victory in sight and so have greater reason for standing true to our cause. Should we fail to do so, then we will justly merit failure and the condemnation of the children of our day. If we fail to do so and "merit" ought, it will be the profane ridicule and mockery of the Freestate loyalist political poltroons.

While there is money in dirt for Britain the Freestate loyalists will claw at it. In the meantime all who seek the God-given right to do what is their very own may expect defamation, calumination, distortion of truth and even the basest tyranny—tyranny in the name of God. Desperate and dangerous men who have made merry for so long in slavery without any aspiration higher than their pockets are capable of very low things indeed. But do you have to be told that? I hope your perceptiveness is as keen as I believe it is. Assure the many victims of Freestate loyalists' torture chambers that you stand true to the cause for which they are suffering. It is the cause to which we are all called upon to stand true. If we do so, then the promise made in the words of our National Anthem, "No more our ancient Sireland . . ." will very soon become meaningful, for the promise will be seen to be kept.

Mount Vernon,
New York.

Internee Release Rate Condemned By Sinn Féin

THE release of three more Republican internees from Long Kesh on 5th March was described as an insult by Provisional Sinn Féin spokesman Jimmy Drumm. Mr. Drumm said that at the present rate of one release per day it would be a year and a half before internment in the North had ended.

"The British Secretary for the North, Mr. Rees, had promised that if the right climate was created he would respond", he said. That climate had been created and if this was his response nobody can be impressed. Mr. Drumm said he did not know how Mr. Rees could now justify internment and he said that it was now clear that the internees were being callously used as political hostages.

Since the Secretary of State made his announcement in response to the IRA ceasefire, 24 people had been released from detention. A total of 470 are still held without trial, 184 being held under interim custody orders and 286 held on detention orders; four of these are Loyalists. Of those held, 16 were women Republicans in Armagh Jail. These include 54-year-old grandmother Mrs. Madge McConville, who was arrested more than a month ago and is still held without trial despite the fact that she suffers from a serious heart ailment.

SECRECY

In a letter to the Southern press this week, Rev. Piaras O Duill, OFM Cap., an executive member of the Irish Civil Rights Association, said that despite repeated assurances by the Dublin Ministry of Justice that wide ranging prison reforms are on the way, a public inquiry into prison conditions would give much needed credibility to the Minister's works.

We give below the full text of Fr. O Duill's letter:

"In November, 1973, following what was then termed 'a satisfactory settlement' of the Mountjoy Prison hunger strike, the press were treated to what the Minister for Justice called 'a full and comprehensive briefing on radical changes to be made in the prison system'. On 16th February last political prisoners in Portlaoise Prison ended a 45-day hunger protest against conditions in the prison after a satisfactory settlement was reached. Again we read in the papers the text of an announcement by Mr. Cooney—this time in Blarney, to a branch of the Prison Officers' Association. In it he stated that 'imaginative and far-reaching penal reforms are under consideration'.

"In 1973 the Minister invited some papers (but not all) to partake in a tour of the prisons. But those pressmen, at least some of them, alarmed at what they saw, wrote about the appalling conditions and the outmoded system witnessed by them. In the recent issue at Portlaoise the Ministry solicited no pressmen, ruled out a public inquiry into an alleged prison riot and refused a number of distinguished citizens permission to visit the prison to examine conditions there.

"While one does not expect radical changes in a mediaeval penal system to be instantaneous, one would nevertheless hope that in the meantime efforts would be made to meet certain immediate necessities of prisoners without their having to resort to what is to them the only method of protest available to them, namely hunger strike. Is it not a sad comment on contemporary Irish life that men imprisoned because of the special charged circumstances prevailing in our country today should have to go to the brink of the grave in order to focus attention on the erosion of their rights. (Equally sad that the Minister should be so complacent as to state, seemingly without fear of correction, that 'prisoners have no rights'.) Yet at the core of the Portlaoise hunger strike was the gradual paring down by the authorities of the measure of sanctions won by the tenacity of the prisoners in the 1973 protest.

"One would expect that the officers of the Department of Justice referred to by Mr. Cooney as 'the only fully informed body of opinion on mod-

ern penology in this country' would see to it that anything that would impinge on the moral, physical or psychological good of prisoners should not be withdrawn from them for any reason whatsoever. The penologists, if indeed their opinion is of consequence at the level of the individual prisoner, must have overlooked this principle on 29th December last, if the factual accounts of a number of prisoners interviewed by me are correct. I have endeavoured to cross-check all the information thoroughly and am prepared to accept as true the pattern running through the statements: confiscation and almost total destruction by a police riot squad (working systematically through the cells) of prisoners' clothing, handicraft, radios, books, writing materials, family photographs and even religious items. This rampage began after a peaceful protest by the prisoners had ended.

"An example, particularly sad because of the circumstances, is that of Eamonn Mac Thomais, author of best seller 'Me Jewel and Darlin' Dublin', whose manuscript of the first eight chapters of a new work were confiscated and destroyed before his eyes, as were a number of rare papers on loan to him from literary societies. How reminiscent of the treatment of the late Máirtín Ó Cadhain by Free State authorities in the Curragh Internment Camp during the '40s when much of the poetry and prose of this genius of Irish literature perished in a similar fashion.

"A number of men are now freed from Portlaoise Prison, having completed their sentences. One perhaps cannot blame them if they bear resentment or some bitterness with the way authority, in the name of society, has treated them. Some were imprisoned on very meagre evidence, some of no evidence at all. They would, however, be willing, I am sure, to make themselves available to a public investigator into all that has happened inside Portlaoise Prison. Mr. Cooney says 'there is nothing secret about our prisoners'. To avoid another crisis in the future he should now act to give his words credibility they need and permit a public inquiry."

(Continued from page 1)

said: "The strength that was in our hands, the truth that was on our lips, and purity that was in our hearts."

If you have been following me, by now you'll be saying "What's C.O.D. talking about then?" Sure Patrick would never ask men like Oisín or Caoilte to yield? What's the ould cod on about? More or less my own sentiments and indeed the very sentiments which prompted me to say that bit about the Devil quoting Scripture for his own purpose and about C.O.D. dragging in Oisín for his own purpose.

Perhaps the fact that C.O.D. had just returned from a bit of a spree in gay Paris and an en route back meal of prawns, chicken with broccoli, "Parisian potatoes", followed by soufflé grand marnier and cheese, could in part answer your and my Whats and Whys.

No, he never mentioned Portlaoise, The Curragh, Armagh, Limerick, Long Kesh, Magilligan or any other concentration camp. No, the ones in those places don't count in C.O.D.'s book. I reckon it is because of the strength that is in their hands, the truth that is on their lips and the purity that is in their hearts and because falsehood has never been imputed to them. They are too like the REAL Oisín, the poet of the Fianna. He reckoned that it would be foolish to ask their likes to yield to his "gentle creed of peace".

News has just come to me that C.O.D.'s "gentle creed of peace" people have shot dead a young Irishman and wounded others while they were trying to effect an escape from his Irish Free State concentration camp on St. Patrick's night. So much for C.O.D.'s "gentle creed of peace". Let's say, so much for NOW.

—S. Mac Eiréann