

The

# CAPTIVE VOICE



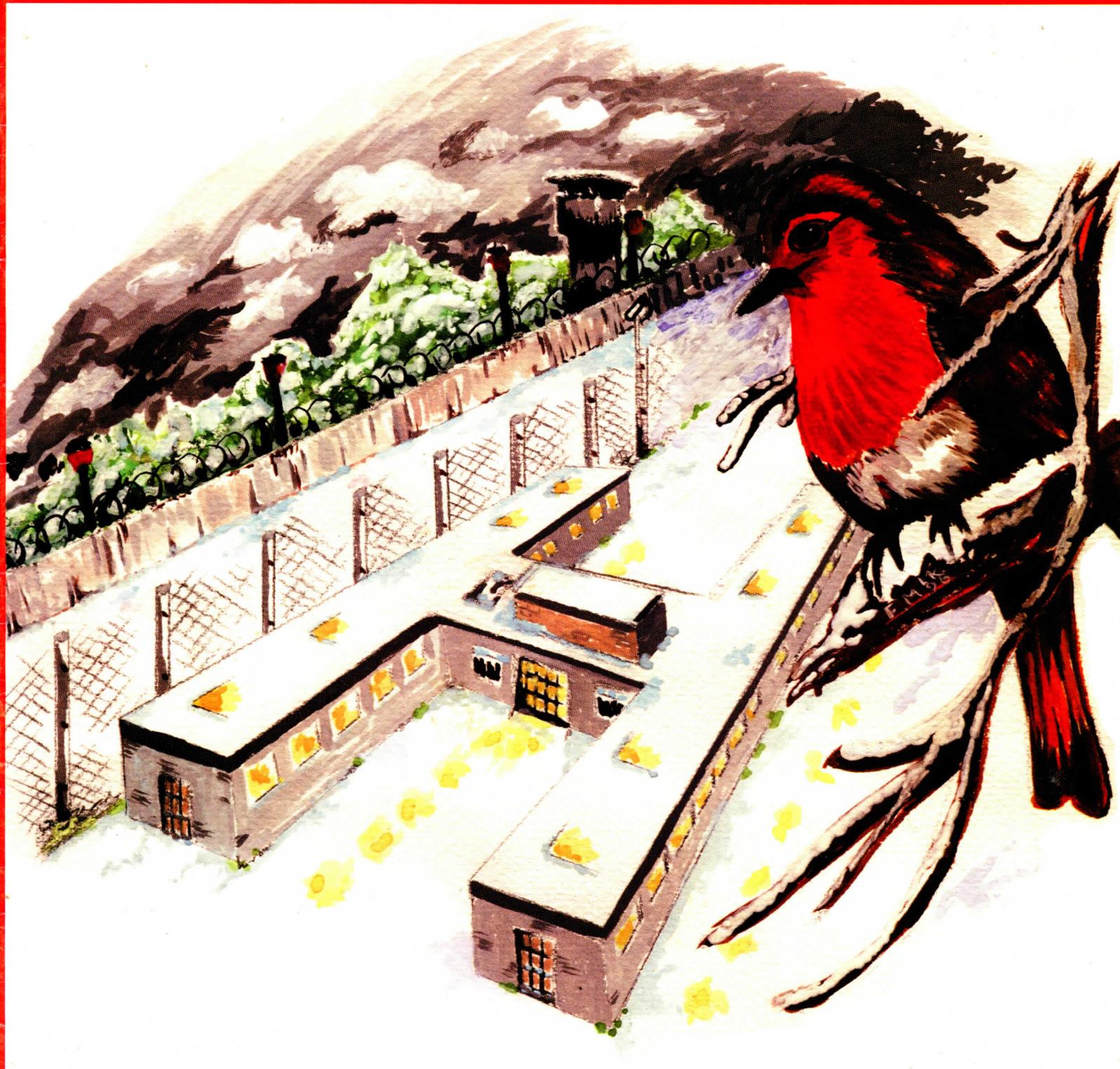
An Glór Gafa

Vol. 8 No. 3

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The Voice of Irish Republican Prisoners of War



# The CAPTIVE VOICE

An Glór Gafa

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

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

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

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

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

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

— The Irish Republican Prisoners of War. ■

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By Fra Maher (Long Kesh)

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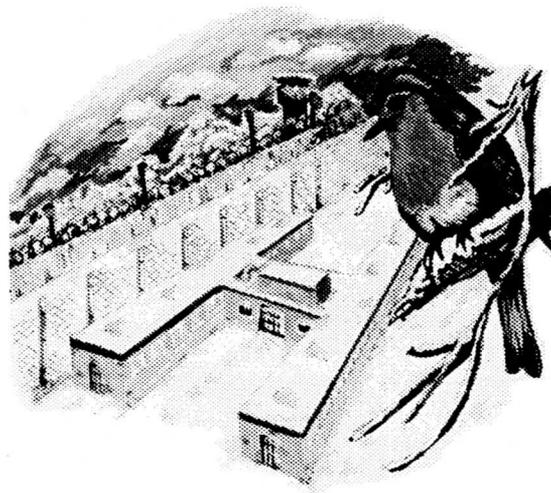
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# CAPTIVE VOICE



## An Glór Gafa

CHRISTMAS is a time when many in the Six Counties and elsewhere turn their thoughts towards the political prisoners of the on-going conflict in our country. Many activities are organised in support of prisoners — to raise money for us and our families; and to campaign for our release. We receive Christmas cards and letters of support from all over the world. It is heartening to know that we are in the thoughts of so many; and it is humbling to hear of the tireless work on our behalf. We take this opportunity, on behalf of all republicans POWs, to offer our sincere thanks to you all.

And yet it would be a mistake to think that all prisoners face a bleak Christmas. Certainly our comrades in English jails — those in the Special Units, those on protest and those on remand who have been beaten up recently — will endure harsh conditions. In addition, as we describe in this issue, parents in prison face particular difficulties — for example, they won't be there to see their children open their presents, making the pain of separation all the more acute.

However, republican prisoners have never let their circumstances get them down. Just as a parents' group has been formed in the H-Blocks as a form of collective self-help, so our community spirit makes Christmas in jail an enjoyable and memorable occasion. The craic always flows freely wherever a group of republican POWs are gathered. We will decorate the wings with whatever bits and pieces come to hand. We will pool our Christmas parcels to have a week-long party. We will form a surrogate family to substitute for the one from whom we are separated. We will have a good time.

This comradeship and indomitable spirit have sustained our struggle in the jails for generations, in times of trouble and in times of celebration. This Christmas will be no different. We will have a merry one, and we wish the same to all our readers and supporters, wherever you may be.

Nollaig faoi shéan agus faoi mhaise daoibh. Agus athbliain faoi rath agus faoi shaoirse!

**C**HRISTMAS AND JAIL don't mix. That would be the general perception of the public at large. Comments like: "Ah, wee such-and-such will be spending another Christmas inside, sure we'll send him/her a wee card." This type of sentiment would give you a flavour of peoples' thoughts on prisoners at Christmas. The separation from parents, partners and children would be the universal burden around this time. All year round people miss a family member who has been incarcerated but the absence is accentuated at this special time when parents and grandparents can't be there on Christmas morning to see the glow in their children's eyes as they open their presents. That empty chair at the family dinner table moves families to pine for their absent loved ones.

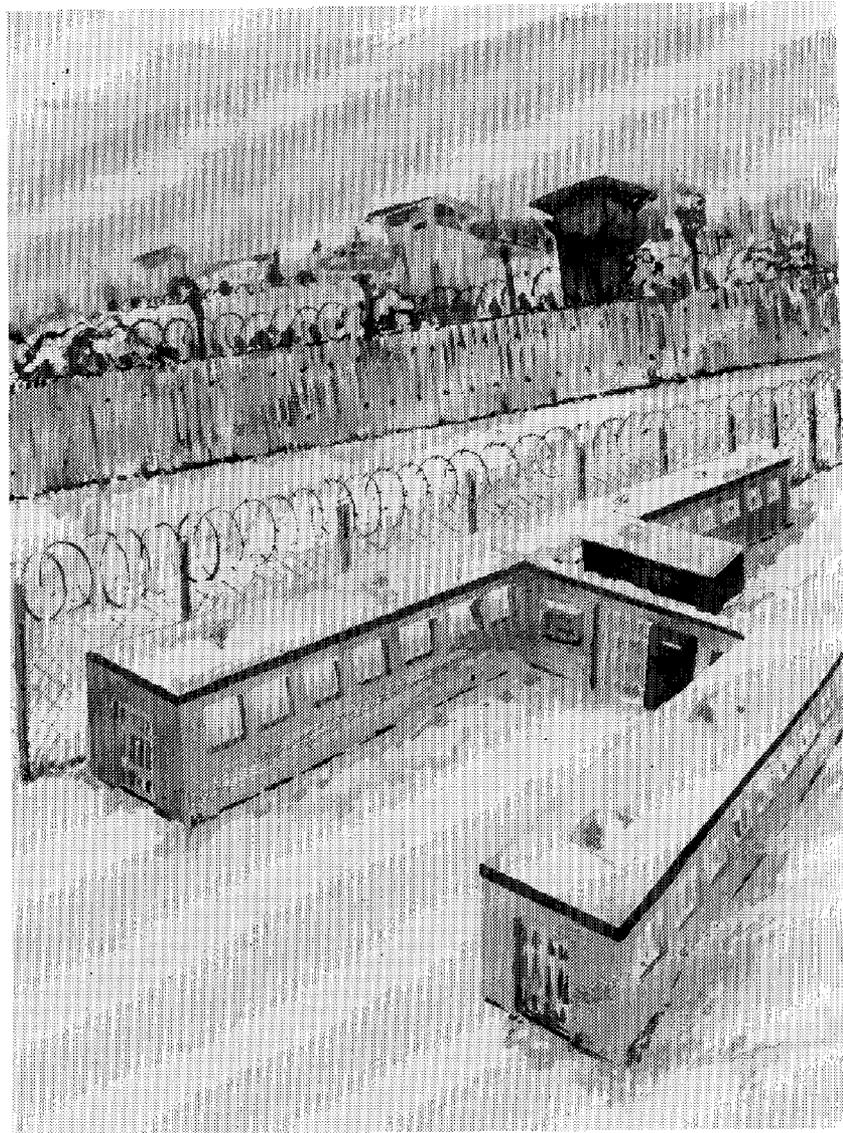
Within the confines of the prison walls, however, all is not stark and bleak. The preparation for Christmas starts around the end of October with the handicraft rush. The rip of the saw; the crunch of sandpaper on wood and the constant tapping of the hammer are the dominant noises on the wings at this time. Harps, crosses, cottages and windmills are churned out with assembly line efficiency; a token of appreciation from a prisoner to his/her family, friends and wider community.

While everyone wishes to be home at Christmas, our jail community generally digs in and makes the best of the festive season. Our spirits are not dented; they even seem to soar in the run-up to Christmas. There is an air of expectancy about the wing as decorations are made from toilet roll tubes, coloured paper, cotton wool and anything else that would look decorative around the place. The more artistic among us paint pictures of Christmas scenes and even build a cardboard fireplace to make the wing canteen more homely. Any of the trappings left over from the Christmases before are dug out and if repairs need to be done they are seen to. (There are always about ten experts with ten different explanations of why the tree lights don't work!) All this is done with the attention of a craftsman.

The Christmas tree brings a melancholic smile to our faces as we remember Christmases past; at home. This is when the real buzz starts in the run-up to Christmas Day. The decorations add a touch of sparkle and warmth to the otherwise drab magnolia walls.

December is Prisoners' Month and the

# Christmas



■ Illustration by Fra Maher (Long Kesh)

mail in-coming and out-going is always hectic. Hundreds of cards and letters arrive into each wing every day. A lot of the cards that are sent to us come from our supporters in America, Australia, Europe and Britain. Our comrades in English jails are in our thoughts around this time and we try to ensure that we send cards to them all. Indeed, the number of Christmas cards we purchase from the prison tuck-shop is phenomenal. It is not unusual for a prisoner to send an average of seventy Christmas cards to family, friends and supporters. We also purchase selection boxes and keep them in the cell until the family visit, but they can make a tasty temptation on a cold winter's night. The feeling that some family member or friend has been overlooked is a prevalent

worry. The sending of a Christmas card by a prisoner is a token of appreciation for the support given all year round.

In recent years there have been a number of additions to our environment that have greatly enhanced the bonding of families and relationships, especially at this special time. The most important of these is the children's party, held in the prison gym. This is a fantastic occasion, for parent and child alike. Although this get-together is held within the confines of the prison, we put in a lot of effort to make it as natural and as enjoyable as possible for the children. Santa Claus, played by one of the prisoners, is the biggest attraction for the children. Games, music, face-painting and the general melée of fun are the order of the day. Even to spend those

# Spirit



couple of hours chattering and pattering about is a great lift for the fathers, mothers and grandparents. The event is also recorded on video so that we can watch it after Christmas and relive the happy occasion.

A few days before Christmas some prisoners are released on parole. These are men in the last year of their sentence or those who have done over eleven years. This marks the real start of Christmas for us. Once the parolees have left the wing on their road homewards for a few days, the lads staying behind are able to settle down and make the best of their Christmas. The wings usually feel more intimate with a few men gone — and a lot quieter (maybe only the noisy ones are give parole!).

For the lads not eligible for Christmas parole the last visit before Christmas is always special. This visit is usually reserved for a partner or mum and dad and children. Even the administration makes an effort to decorate the visiting area and see that visits run as smoothly as possible. It is almost a ritual that a large box of chocolates is presented to the partner or mum on the visit. Dad usually receives a warm handshake and a kindred hug. At the end of the visit hearty Christmas greetings can be heard exchanged across the visiting room but there are also a few tears shed at the parting. As the prisoner leaves to return to the block the last wave goodbye to his people going out the door can be a cutting moment.

The Christmas parcel is another of the things that generate the buzz around Christmas time for us prisoners. Our usual weekly parcel consists of soap, fruit, tissues and cigarette papers. Therefore this special little booty, which contains chocolate, cake, biscuits, cheese, nuts, cigarettes and fine cigars, are a lavish addition to our bland diet. Only on special dates such as Easter, Halloween and Christmas do the prison authorities permit these types of foodstuffs into the prison. The health-conscious comrades amongst us are torn between pleasure and abstinence with these fine morsels. There is an unusual abundance of food when the contents of our parcels are pooled to make a bumper Christmas orgy of food. For the two or so weeks of Christmas we treat ourselves every night. The only problem is that we get used to this good life and then come sharply down to earth in the New Year when it's watery mince for the dinner and there is no cheese or biscuits left to substitute for the meal.

The focus of Christmas Day is the meal itself. This is one of the only times of the year when we have a communal meal. But the day usually begins with an early morning run in the prison yard which is becoming a tradition with us. The more sedentary make do with a brisk walk later on. This helps to work up an appetite before dinner. At this time of year, when the frost and snow cling to the steel and concrete fences that surround us, the yards can be transformed and the fences become beautiful sheets of white. The ground is sometimes carpeted with a layer of fine snow. This change makes a pleasant contrast from the sharp, coarse shades of grey that usually greet us.

The wing itself is a hive of activity as everyone lends a hand with last minute preparations. We play a selection of music tapes to create a party atmosphere. A number of clean bed sheets are used as sparking white table cloths. We then set

the tables with our plastic cutlery, various condiments and a few bottles of Coke and orange.

The food arrives around 11.30 or midday but we wait until everyone is ready before sitting down together. That half-hour wait can be agony as we are tortured by the delicious smells emanating from the food containers. Finally everyone is ready, freshly washed and dressed in their best visiting clothes. The meal is served by a couple of obliging comrades. The turkey is actually those processed slices normally used in sandwiches and salads but, along with ham, roast potatoes and stuffing, it makes a welcome change from the usual drab prison fare.

After this hearty meal, and with painfully bulging stomachs, most of us lounge in front of the television. There is a homely atmosphere as we settle down to watch the Christmas edition of Top of The Pops followed by an old Christmas classic; puffing that fine cigar while dozing in front of the television with the surrogate family.

One by one we will nip out to the landing for our turn on the phone. The introduction of the phones just over a year ago makes a big difference for both families and prisoners when that phone call can be made on Christmas Day. That fifteen minute interaction is a much welcomed development to the bonding process.

Last year two wings consisting of almost fifty men shared one phone. Our Christmas phone call last year was more like a stumbled greeting to family members than a meaningful conversation. This year we have a phone in each wing which means we will be able to have a longer conversation with our families. Thus in a small way we can get a taste of celebrating Christmas with them even in our removed position.

The rest of Christmas week is spent munching cheese and ham sandwiches along with sweets and biscuits. If we're really unlucky someone will decide to torture us with a party game - a quiz, bingo or something similar. Occasionally there is a foray into a frosty yard for a refreshing stroll. But mostly we lounge in front of the cardboard fireplace in the canteen, watching the TV.

When the parolees land back after their week at home and full of yarns about their antics and of what's new in the outside world, they find a wing full of plump, semi-comatose men around the TV. Reluctantly, we will get up and begin to clear up the canteen, knowing that Christmas is over for another year. It's back to porridge and mince!

■ By Kieran Ferry

# Extradition battle in the USA

BILL CLINTON, in the 1992 Presidential race, promised that there would be "no more Joe Dohertys". The mistake I made was in not changing my name to Joe Doherty — one more alias would not have mattered that much. But there was a "Jimmy Smyth", so take heed Kevin Artt, Terry Kirby and Pól Brennan, there is still time for a change of name.

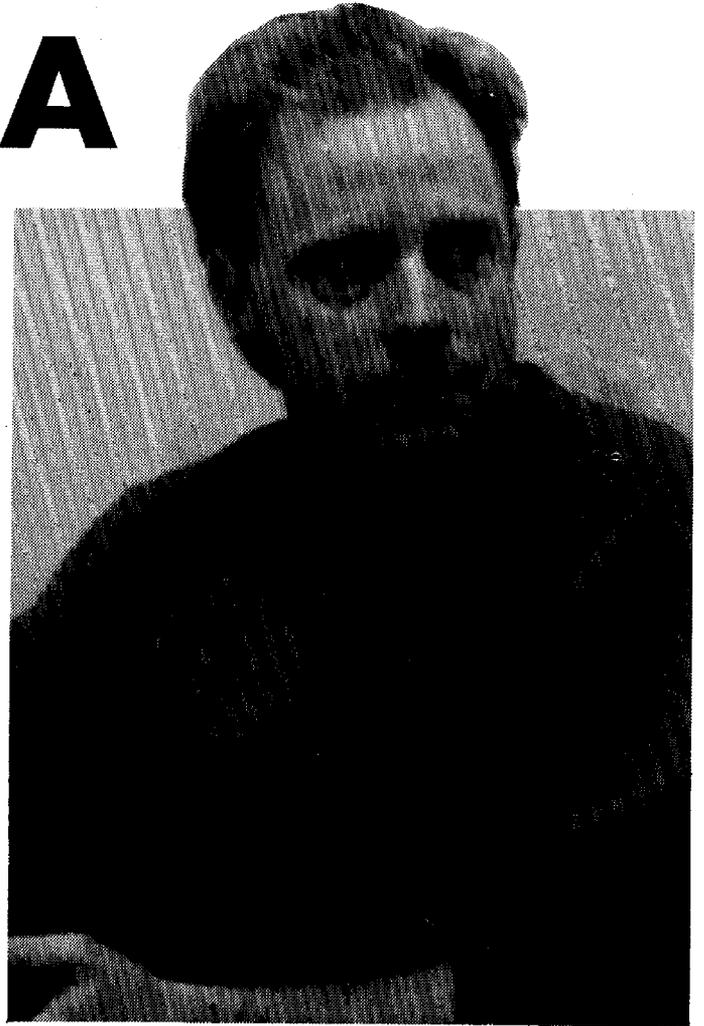
Some people may say that Clinton kept his promise and did not interfere in my court hearings. Maybe so, not directly. But his State Department did. Evidence of this can be found in a letter sent to the Irish American Unity Conference in reply to their letter about my bail situation, after the Appeal Court overturned Judge Barbara Caulfield's refusal to extradite me. The State Department said that I was a member of the IRA, basing this on a note found in my cell in Crumlin Road Jail in 1978. The decision of the panel of judges in the Appeal Court used the same language. The funny thing about the Appeal Court's decision was that in my extradition hearing and also in the Appeal Court that day, the issue of IRA membership was never brought up. So who whispered innuendos in the ears of the Appeal Court judges? Obviously the same people who did it in the case of Joe Doherty. That "special relationship" with Britain under Bill Clinton is alive and kicking.

Now the other question that must be asked about this promise of Bill Clinton's is: does it go further than non-interference in court? For instance, what of the nine years Joe Doherty spent in US jails, and my own two and a half years? Is the most powerful man in the western

world to sit in his White House and yield to British pressure to punish us by refusing to grant us our time spent in his jails - just because we dared to use the US courts to defend ourselves? Does Clinton accept that when it comes to Irish political prisoners in US jails the British government will dictate policy, just as in colonial days?

Since my arrest for extradition in the USA during George Bush's presidency and then into the Clinton years, I managed to secure bail twice, only to have it revoked because of British interference. Judge Caulfield then started releasing me because of medical problems and the lack of interest in my kidney complaint shown by the medical staff in the prison.

Throughout the four years of my extradition battle I was released fifteen times. At one stage I thought the prison was going to install a revolving door for me. Regardless of all these times that I returned myself voluntarily to custody, the story was always the same in court: the US Attorney, on behalf of the British government, insisted that I was a "flight risk". The judge would look at him and then at me — you could tell what was going on in her head. She did release me fifteen times. One of the times I had my bail revoked, the judge knew nothing about it. She read



● JIMMY SMYTH

about it the next day at her breakfast table. The story was about a dangerous IRA terrorist turning himself in to Federal agents, only to be told to go home and come back in the morning. This was witnessed by reporters from UTV. I wish they had told me to go home and come back when the State Department was ready to extradite me! That's how clear cut I saw my case.

Even though my extradition was won by five furlongs, the confidence of the British side was apparent to everyone at the hearing. They were being asked questions about the Stalker-Sampson Report concerning a shoot-to-kill policy against Irish Republicans and the Stevens Report on collusion between

British intelligence and loyalist death squads. The representatives of British "democracy" on the witness stand answered:

"On the grounds of national security I am not permitted to answer that question."

One of the British representatives answered in that way fourteen times. When the hearing was over, the US Attorney said to my attorney, Karen Snell: you won this round but we will get you in a higher court. Now that's what I call confidence — the closer you get to government the less concern there is for human rights.

It was clear to everyone in the court, including Judge Caulfield, that one of the

British government witnesses, a detective from Lurgan, had been involved in the murder of a republican released on bail who had to report to an RUC station every day. He admitted being on the same street at the time of the murder and hearing the shooting, but claimed he did not know who was being shot at. They say that if you tell a lie your nose grows longer — in that case the witness would have had to be backed out of the courtroom.

I waited about ten months for Judge Caulfield's ruling and I lost about fourteen pounds in weight while in custody awaiting the decision. The afternoon that decision came I was doing my usual phone call to my attorney after the four o'clock count in the jail. I could not make out a word she said at first, she was screaming something that turned out to be "We won!" After getting her calmed down, she told me that we had won the case and that it was a very strong decision. So now it was my turn to start screaming: "Get me the \*\*\*\* outa here!" I was in my cell talking to Kevin Artt when the screw came in and said:

"Jimmy, if you can have your stuff packed in ten minutes, I'll have you out of here in fifteen."

I just looked at Kevin and said: "Everything's yours. See ya!"

That evening there were — I thought — a few reporters who wanted to interview me about my extradition win. I was to meet them at an "Irish establishment", better known as a pub. I pulled up outside in a taxi and when I saw what was outside I very nearly stayed in the taxi and drove off. There were three large vans with TV cameras, radio reporters and newspapers journalists. The night went off well. But at the back of my mind the thought was there: "The Brits are not going to take this lying down." This was not a bad thought because it kept me on my toes and ready to expect the worst.

Over the next couple of weeks we were hearing



● Bill Clinton — broken election promises

reports of meetings within the US Justice Department to decide whether they would be part of an appeal against the decision. Some people within that department were saying that it would constitute government involvement if they were to pursue an appeal on behalf of the British. We were hoping that the Americans would withdraw from the case — that would have been the icing on the cake. The British government would have been left to fend for themselves and hire a prosecutor to pursue their appeal. It was not to be.

The Justice Department took up the appeal and went after me with the blessing of President Clinton's administration. This was taking place shortly after the IRA called a ceasefire, at a time when everyone was hoping that the British government would engage positively in the peace process and introduce confidence-building measures such as the decommissioning of their jails in Ireland. It is of course no surprise to me or anyone involved in Irish politics that British actions did not match their rhetoric. Rather than demonstrating their much-hyped "imaginative response" in the event of an IRA ceasefire, Britain along

with the US State and Justice Departments vindictively pursued my extradition six thousand miles away from Irish shores. What hope did that give to Irish political prisoners in Ireland and England, or for that matter the peace process?

My appeal hearing was set for 10 April 1995. It was a back and forth hearing. Afterwards everyone said that I would win. Time would tell, and it did — I lost. The US Attorney then applied to the lower court to have my bail revoked again. Judge Caulfield had retired by this stage, so it went in front of Judge Smith (no relation) who refused to lock me up. So the government went back to the Appeal Court and asked for the same panel to place me back in custody. They also refused. My attorney was of course keeping me up to date with this "looney tune" show. The next and final step I had left was the Supreme Court of the USA. The rest is history — the Statue of Liberty jumped off her pedestal and went for a swim back to France.

2 July 1996 and it was back to jail for poor wee Jimmy. I spent the next six weeks in the same Federal Prison I'd been released from eighteen months before. I knew that Clinton (who was the only

one able to stop my extradition) would not step in, so it was a waiting game for the British to come and get me.

17 August came and so did the British. It was out of the jail and straight to San Francisco Airport, onto a British Airways passenger plane and straight to London. I waited in London for about two hours before being put on a flight to Belfast. I was held in Maghaberry Jail overnight and then brought back to H-Block 7 where thirteen years ago... Jesus, that's another story, isn't it?

#### ■ By Jim Smyth

POSTSCRIPT: My flight from the US to London was uneventful. The two RUC guards were friendly enough and made small talk, mentioning the changes in the H-Blocks since my last time there. One of them, a woman, made an interesting comment. She asked me if I knew Sid Walsh and I told her I knew him from the Blanket Protest. She told me she'd met him while working on our extradition cases and then said: "he's gorgeous." I just sat there looking at her and thought to myself: Sid Walsh, gorgeous? Things must have really changed in the H-Blocks!

PETER wasted no time alighting from the tractor and bounding down the slope at a gallop. Peadar Ned made heavy work of it. He chose his footing carefully, leading with his left foot and wedging the bill hook against tufts of grass before easing his trailing leg further down the incline. Both men had come prepared in their own way for the day's work. But only when Peadar Ned had found his footing at the bottom of the descent did he realise how unprepared he was for the sight ahead. He stared in at the hellish black charred devastation. He choked on the acid-like stench before covering his mouth with a large white handkerchief.

Peter had marched ahead, indifferent it seemed to the rough terrain or the burning smell.

"There's a job to be done," he scornfully thought, glancing over his shoulder at the white fluster pin-pointing the old man amidst the blackened forest, and losing neither speed or step as he did so.

There was little point in calling back or even waiting for the old man to catch up. It would evoke little response and less haste, he contemplated. And so he tramped on.

Peadar Ned made steady progress now. He was a good thirty to forty paces behind the younger man but even at that he found himself wading through the storm of flaking black ash which billowed in Peter's wake. He wondered if some young entrepreneur wouldn't come up with an idea to market the stuff - "Confetti Ash, the latest in funeral fashion".

The figure ahead cut a strange shape as it swathed onward. The bright red chainsaw swung from side to side, giving the appearance that he was slashing his way through the forest's undergrowth. Except there was no undergrowth worth mentioning. What was left of it crumbled into black powder at the slightest touch, making the presence of a chainsaw seem ridiculous for the task in hand. The contrast between the yellowing barley field at home and this desolate place sent a cold shiver through him as he passed the rows of naked black skeletons one after the other. "What in God's name possessed anyone to do the like of this?" he was thinking when the scream of the engine cut across his line of thought.

Peter sent frail, charred, brittle branches flying in all directions. The chainsaw roared again. Within seconds he had stripped the remaining branches

# PALING



■ Illustration by Noel McHugh (Long Kesh)

from the trunk. The old man, only a short distance away now, looked at the lonely naked figure with its torn white flesh. But it was gone with one final scream, the cold steel ripping through the base of what had been a healthy young sapling. Another and another and another fell before the

younger man looked around.

"Strip that lot tay yer left."

Peter nodded and turned back into his work. Peadar Ned

removed his hat and large overcoat and carefully laid

them on a high dry spot, concealing beneath them a canvas shoulder bag. He licked his thumb and ran it over the gleaming bright edge of the bill hook. Satisfied, he made his way towards a group of prematurely balding young fir trees. He swung the hook over his left shoulder and cleaved off the

# POSTS

highest branches with one clean swipe. As he went lower down the impact jarred his wrists and shoulder. That was only to be expected, since the lower branches are thicker and I'm not yet warmed to the task, he thought. He soon moved into a smooth methodical rhythm that wouldn't over-tax him in the day ahead. He had only taken a few short breaks in the two hours or so, just to catch his breath and mop the sweat and dirt from his brow. But now that the younger man was speedily working up behind him he felt he had to push on, regardless of the tiredness and pain he was feeling in his left arm.

"You may start piling those posts while I shoot down and get the tractor to bring a load out," Peter shouted, the chainsaw not yet having time to fall silent. The old man turned to speak but looked into a black cloud of charred bark, resembling a swarm of flies, into which the younger man had just vanished.

Peter practically raced across the bog. He knew there was a small fortune to be made, if only he could get the job done before the authorities sealed the place off. Peadar Ned obeyed the instructions and set about piling all the posts in a convenient spot for loading on to the tractor. He began by tossing the logs a short distance into the clearing, but as he moved along the row his throw was falling short of the pile. It was extra work to have to lift the logs a second time in order to stack them properly. So he resigned himself to carrying them all the way.

Two weren't so heavy, he

felt, to begin with. If only his damned arm wasn't so painful. But he would take a rest and a bite of lunch soon after he finished the remainder on this side. He carried a few more, single logs this time, on his right shoulder only. A bite to eat would replenish his strength, he thought. He

spread his coat on the heap of logs, to sit as he opened his bag. He put the bread to his mouth but felt no urge to eat it. Strange, he thought. The country air usually gives a body a good appetite. He caught the burnt smell in his nostrils again and replaced the bread in its wrapping. Maybe a drop of tae will revive me, he thought, pulling a tea-filled HP sauce bottle out of a thick woolen sock which kept it warm. He put it to his lips. Too warm, it's too warm to drink. He felt uptight and

ill at ease, as if his shirt was too tight on him, but he could find nothing wrong. He decided to rest himself, hoping the discomfort would pass.

As he lay back he recalled the day's events: the dispute he had with Peter when he said he hoped the culprit that set fire to the forest would be caught, and that no good would come of anyone who'd profit from that sort of behaviour.

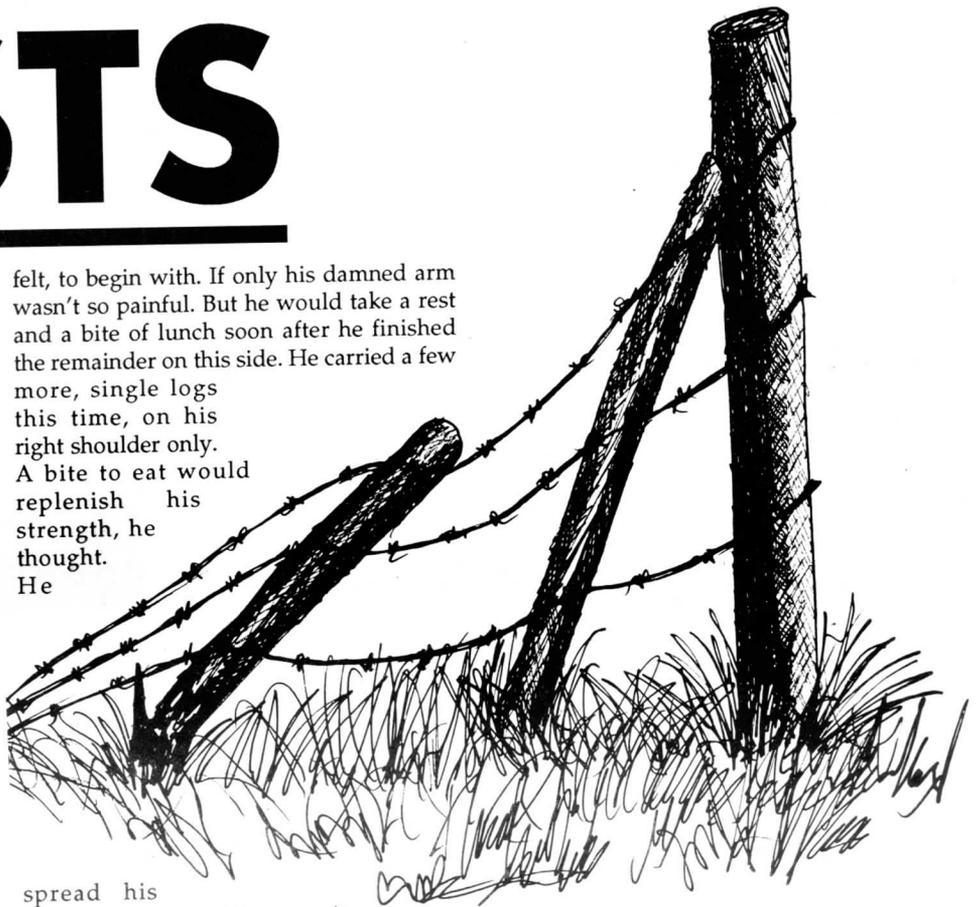
"Well! I'm not one for looking a gift horse in the mouth," Peter had quipped, "an' sure, isn't it an ill wind that blows no good and I may as well have the posts before somebody else gets their hands on them," he hurriedly added, in a bid, albeit in vain, to better his argument.

"There'll be wooden posts when we're dead and buried," the old man concluded. All around the forest lay silent, not a bird nor even a breeze stirred. The place was deathly quiet and lifeless.

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Peter stood rigid and cold as his grieving mother and family, clad in black, comforted one another. The bereaved watched on — the burning scent of candle wax still in their nostrils — as the priest blessed the coffin being supported over the open grave by two freshly-cut palling posts.

■ By Martin Molloy



**T**HEIR CALLS ECHO FROM CELL TO CELL, the primitive living conditions, monotonous diet and lack of regular exercise having an obvious effect on their health. As they circle the cell warily the sounds and smells of the real world mock their harsh environment. Where is this? Long Kesh of course. Contemporary Long Kesh. You didn't read about this in the Rep. News, did you? And little wonder, because the jailed have turned jailers. POWs in the Blocks are responsible for cruelty of Special Branch proportions. And the recipients of this desperate treatment? Little caged birds.

It was late summer when the NIO finally confirmed that we could receive a canary, budgie or finch. Only one out of

t-shirts and a regular supply of Six-County beef burgers on the menu.

Naturally a split quickly emerged between the 'must haves' and the 'how could yous?' with a number perched on the fence content to watch the developing arguments. A discussion was quickly organised. As the wing I'm on is Irish-speaking the matter for debate was: An ceart é go gcuireann cimí Ein i ngeibheann? (Is it right for prisoners to keep birds in captivity?).

We tried a fundamentalist approach to start with. "Why keep caged birds?" we asked. "What possible function does it serve?"

For as John Hume might have put it: "You can't eat a bird cage."

"Well," they replied, "whilst you may not be able to eat a bird cage, nevertheless many's the person has gone to seed." Thus was the tone set for the debate. It soon became obvious that any appeal to morals would be futile. How

could you prick the conscience of someone who declares that it would be heartening to think that something was suffering a more miserable existence than himself? In



■ Illustration by Martin Dillon (Long Kesh)

# DOING BIRD

the three of course, this is a segregated prison after all. It was an issue that had provoked some comment throughout the year when we learned that the loyalists had a collection of birds on their wings. We even had a refugee from their wings land in our yard (no, not 'Budgie' Allen) which, after interrogation, was summarily dispatched to the USPCA for the feathered equivalent of a pre-release scheme.

The news, once confirmed, provoked the inevitable disagreement over the subject on the wings. For myself, a childhood encounter with Hitchcock's 'The Birds' (not the original I might add) left me with a deep-rooted distrust of flying animals. Remember the rooks in *The Omen*? All birds are beady-eyed bastards in my book. With claws.

And as far as the jail was concerned we certainly hadn't asked for them. In fact, in terms of priority they were somewhere between demands for 'siege (sic) of Drumcree'

the face of such immorality a more subtle political approach was required: that the issue of consent would be central to any final consideration. In light of our own experience as prisoners, we argued that no self-respecting bird would consent to its own confinement.

"Why not ask them if they would like to leave?" said a confirmed 'must have'. "They can speak after all, so simply put the question to them."

Of course the civil libertarians amongst us immediately countered that the right to silence must be fully respected in such cases. Any refusal to answer couldn't be taken to imply agreement or disagreement. In fact, it was further argued that the true test of consent, freely given, was to open the cage doors at an agreed time for an agreed period, say every Sunday at 6pm for fifteen minutes. Only in these situations could we discover how much the birds desired freedom and to what extent their institutionalised

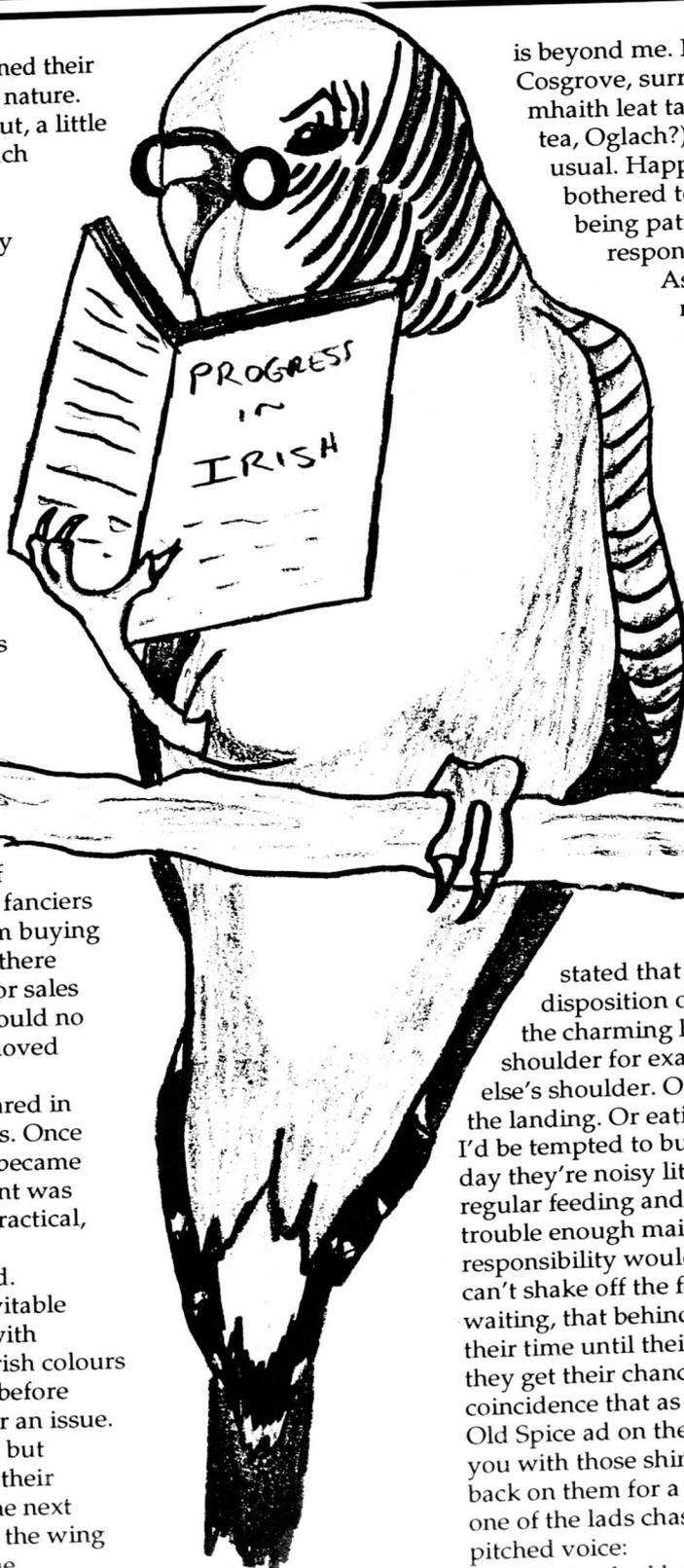
upbringing had undermined their inclination to be closer to nature.

It was then pointed out, a little triumphantly, that a much greater principle was at stake. Perhaps the bird might indeed want to fly off but surely it was hugely irresponsible to release it into the cold Irish sky where it would perish in the distinctly non-tropical climate? The question therefore was: is it better to die a free bird than to remain incarcerated in relative safety?

The cold logic of this argument — in every sense of the word — demanded a swift reply. It

was pointed out that if cruel, murderous bird fanciers would only desist from buying canaries and suchlike there would be no market for sales and therefore birds would no longer be forcibly removed from their natural environment or be reared in tiny cages in pet shops. Once order was restored it became clear that no agreement was possible; appeals to practical, moral and political sensitivities had failed. Perhaps this was inevitable given the obsession with mirrors, food and garish colours in the H-Blocks long before caged birds were ever an issue.

What could we do but begrudgingly accept their inevitable arrival? The next obscenity directed at the wing was the naming of the unfortunate creatures; in our case there's a 'Snapper' McGoldrick, an 'Oglach' Cosgrave and a 'Casper' Canning. None of your Joeys here, thanks very much. Then there's a 'bird-talk'. That strange high pitched whine designed to pressurise birds into speaking by slowly wearing down their resistance. Why it has to sound like the wee one from the Crankies



is beyond me. It's quite amazing to hear Kevin Cosgrove, surrogate father of 'Oglach', ask: "Ar mhaith leat tae, a hOglaigh?" (would you like tea, Oglach?) several octaves higher than usual. Happily, not one of the poor birds has bothered to reply yet, they clearly resent being patronised in this way and merely respond with a cool indifference to it all.

As proof that the birds are often more sensible than the owners, consider the case of Craig Bannon in H4 who told his comrades that he was going to teach his bird how to say Tíocfaidh ár lá 'in Irish'!

Of course the theory is that the lads should speak to the birds repeatedly so that they eventually learn to mimic human sounds. What happens in reality is that the birds whistle incessantly and the lads eventually begin to mimic them. It would drive you spare. There's so much whistling on

the wing you'd think there was a Mick Jagger look-alike competition organised.

But... I suppose it must be grudgingly

stated that they're not the worst. The wicked disposition of some is more than made up for by the charming habits of others. Sitting on your shoulder for example. Or sitting on somebody else's shoulder. Or divebombing you as you walk up the landing. Or eating seeds out of your hand. Not that I'd be tempted to buy one though — at the end of the day they're noisy little bastards. Plus they require regular feeding and cleaning and as someone who has trouble enough maintaining his own 12 by 8, the responsibility would be just too much. Besides, I just can't shake off the feeling that they're watching and waiting, that behind that friendly exterior they're biding their time until their numbers increase on the wing and they get their chance for revenge. It's surely no coincidence that as soon as they hear the music from the Old Spice ad on the TV they stop flying around and fix you with those shiny little eyes. You daren't turn your back on them for a moment. Just the other day I heard one of the lads chastise his bird in his usual high pitched voice:

"Who's a bad boy," he said. "Didn't I tell you to stop pecking at the men's eyes when they're sleeping."

But as he closed the cage door and walked away I'm certain I heard it quietly chirp: "Tíocfaidh ár claw."

■ By Declan Moen

# THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL STRUGGLE

LAST SEPTEMBER a group of republican POWs, on parole from the H-Blocks, performed a play in West Belfast in conjunction with Féile An Phobail (the local community festival). This play, *The Crime of Castlereagh* (based on the poetry of Bobby Sands), has been written about previously in these pages (see *An Glór Gafa*, Winter 1996) and needs little introduction. However, it is important that the play be seen in its proper context - not as the depoliticisation of republican prisoners from activists to actors, but as the cultural aspect of a broader struggle, both within the jails and outside.

Within the jail the daily struggle is material, in terms of improving living conditions; and cultural, in terms of maintaining and strengthening our political identity and skills in the face of attempts by our captors to eliminate the prisoner as a political symbol and activist. This is a universal concern of oppressive states in regard to their political prisoners but it reached a new level of sophistication in Britain's notorious criminalisation policy in the H-Blocks. Bobby Sands described the role of the H-Blocks thus:

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

Republican prisoners have always steadfastly resisted this strategy, through strength of spirit and power of mind. In part, this has taken the form of resilience against physical brutality such as in the Blanket period. But it has also taken the form of literary,

artistic, musical and educational activities. For many the experience of imprisonment itself has acted as a catalyst for their creative talents. The dominant image is of a blanket-clad Bobby Sands scribbling his poems, songs and stories on a piece of toilet paper in a freezing and filthy cell. But others were similarly engaged in this cultural struggle. After the blanket protest, republican prisoners in Long Kesh made a sustained effort to put in place a programme of communal education based on the principles of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This laid the foundation for a wide range of cultural activity: Irish language classes, poetry workshops, art and craftwork, playwriting and acting, music and so on, and of course this very magazine, *An Glór Gafa*.

It is in this context of an historical cultural struggle in the jails that the creative process leading to the play *The Crime of Castlereagh* took place. At one level the physical jail conditions in which we could engage in such activities were the result of a long battle with the British government and their prison administration, including the deaths on hunger-strike of ten POWs in



1981. The gains won through that battle created the space and opportunity for political education and culture. This became the other level of jail struggle, the development of the intellectual and artistic conditions in which a drama project could be created. In other words, the sacrifices, planning and vision of the POWs who struggled before us has now achieved both the physical conditions and the cultural framework for a new generation of republican prisoners to take the struggle a stage further — poignantly illustrated by translating the poetry of the Blanket protest into the drama of today's H-Blocks.

However, these sort of activities are important not only in jail struggle but in the wider struggle for freedom. It has been almost a defining feature of political prisoners throughout the world that they engage in cultural struggle. They write, compose poetry, sing and play music, paint and carve. They utilise every form of self-expression. They do so not merely because they are talented thoughtful individuals (one of the reasons leading to their

imprisonment), but because they wish to give voice to the pain of their people and articulate the need for radical change to end this pain. Indeed Edward Said, the Palestinian academic, has termed this the role of the "intellectual" in society. Similarly, the recently executed Ken Saro-Wiwa described his role thus:

"For a Nigerian writer in my position... literature has to be combative.... What is of interest to me is that my art should be able to alter the lives of a large number of people, of a whole community, of the entire country.... It is serious, it is politics, it is economics, it's everything. And art in that instance becomes so meaningful..."

Moreover the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, in his own *Prison Notebook*, argues that cultural struggle is central to political change, as it concerns the creation of alternative social meanings and values which challenge the dominant ideology of the ruling class. In other words, cultural struggle is about raising the political awareness of the mass of the population, exposing the apologists for injustice and inequality, and creating an alternative set of values and perspective of the world.

Therefore *The Crime of Castlereagh* is also part of what we see as the wider role of the artist in the struggle: to articulate the experiences, hopes and desires of their people. In the case of this play we wanted to tell the story of political imprisonment. It is unapologetically a republican prisoners' version of that story, focusing on the physical and psychological torture of *Castlereagh*, the farcical pseudo-legal imprimatur of a



● Performance of Bobby Sands' *The Crime of Castlereagh*

Diplock court and the brutalisation of prisoners during the Blanket protest and in the H-Blocks. It also tells of the hidden reserves of strength within an ordinary man to resist torture, corrupt courts and prison brutality; and of the comradeship which ultimately defeated the criminalisation policy of the British government. However, it is not a narrow, localised account of the experiences of a political prisoner. The story could easily be set in any part of the world, for it contains universal themes and experiences of imprisonment — fear, isolation, loss of family, physical pain as well as principled resistance, comradeship and courage. There are, of course, other stories to be told — even the screws' story and the

psychological impact of the situation on them. But that is not our concern here.

However, while the play is an integral part of our struggle, it is not a piece of crude propaganda. Rather, we hope it can make a significant contribution to a fuller understanding of this phase of the conflict in Ireland and in particular the experience of imprisonment. This is a legitimate story and must be heard — along with all the other stories of suffering and injustice — if we are to move forward into a process of conflict resolution. Therefore we reject out of hand any attempt to dismiss this play as one-sided propaganda. Such a criticism is just another way of saying that we have no right to tell this story. Certainly the play contains a

strong political message but we believe it is all the more important and legitimate because of that.

The type of theatre we chose for telling the prisoners' story is also significant. Using the poetry of Bobby Sands, we organised the play on a collective basis, creating, producing and directing as a group. In other words, rather than performing the work for someone else, we retained control and ownership of our own images, actions and meanings. The style is surreal — thus we have created our own world with its own rules and deeper truth, rather than conforming to naturalistic conventions and superficial reality "as seen on TV". For example, which image is the true one: the Diplock judge as a distinguished man in a red

cloak, or as a pig snorting contemptuously at justice?

It is also minimalist theatre — that is, we use a minimum of props. In part this was born of necessity — we had few resources in the jail. But it also means that the audience have to use their imaginations and engage actively with us, instead of being the passive receptacles for our images. In fact we are employing the principles of Augusto Boale and his "theatre of the oppressed" — principles which run parallel to those of Paulo Freire and his "pedagogy of the oppressed" which had been used by republican prisoners in the early 1980s to lay the foundations for the educational and cultural basis of our prison community. Thus the cultural struggle in the H-Blocks has come full circle — the pedagogy of the oppressed has prepared the ground for the theatre of the oppressed.

The latest drama project must therefore be seen as a continuation of the long history of cultural struggle in the jails. Indeed, it can be considered as another link in the unbroken chain of the political, cultural, educational and artistic development within the republican structures of our jail community. We are not shifting our attention from political struggle to the arts — rather we are making the arts part of that political struggle. This struggle will continue, as we attempt to take control of our own social meanings and values, express our experiences and those of our people, and articulate the need for radical change in Irish politics and society.

■ By Micheál Mac Giolla Ghunna

[The Crime of Castlereagh will be performed again in St. Agnes' Parish Hall, West Belfast on the 27th and 28th December — check with Féile An Phobail and press for details]

# A Winter's Tale in

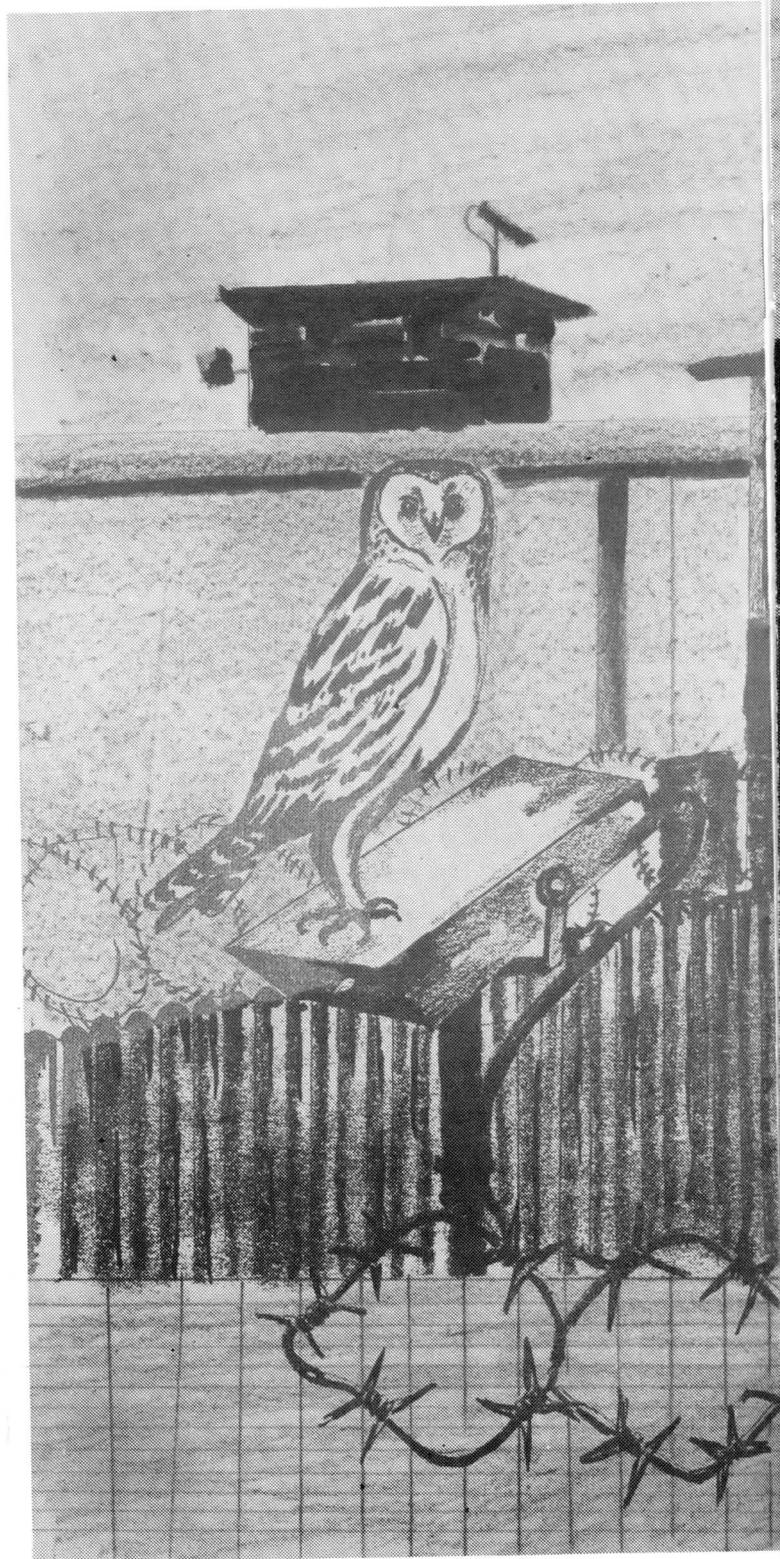
**A**LTHOUGH in our place of residence we are robbed of the pleasure of seeing the seasons change in their natural form, with splashes of green and the wonderful colours and scents of budding flowers, not all is lost. There are some things not even the "most secure jail in Europe" can keep out, much to the Northern Ireland Office's (NIO) displeasure, I'm sure. Last winter, for example, with the cold and hard frosts we had some chirpy and colourful visitors. No, not the unwelcome riot squads in H4, but some very reclusive and welcome birds.

Normally long-tailed tits are resident in the woods and pine forests far from human inhabitants, and who can blame them. But this year with the harsh weather they were forced out of their hideouts in search of food. Fortunately for us, they chose our yard to stop on their travels for some scraps. It was a lovely sight to see them mixing with greenfinches and chaffinches.

It's amazing how many different birds visit us in the winter. In most of the Blocks there is someone who will feed all our feathered friends, even the dreaded seagull. This provides a regular supply of food for hungry birds in the winter. They of course remember this location and return every year when things are tough and food is scarce. It gives those who are interested in birds a marvellous opportunity to observe them and we take full advantage of this opportunity. Last winter, for example, we are visited by a big barn owl who gave us the pleasure of resting on top of a lamp post in front of us. In full view it was a magnificent sight. This was when we were out all night, so the same owl must have this camp within its territory. When others sleep the owl takes over, preying on mice, rats, voles and so on.

There are few enough men who would know their Ps and Qs as far as birds go, but you could take a chance and inquire of the man who feeds them on a regular basis about different ones you may have spotted and are unsure of. After a period of time you can tell the difference between the more frequent birds. For example, in this Block there is a pied wagtail called "Charlo", named after the tyrant in the TV series "The Family". He feeds here all year round and brings all his young right to the feet of men in the yard for bread, nuts and some sweeter morsels.

As we come out of the winter it's noticeable how scarce the birds become. They have better things on their tiny minds. But there is still some interesting activity to observe. For as long as I have been on this Block (H4) there has been a family of starlings nesting in a very appropriate place, right on top of our new visiting area. There is one scene that leaves us in no doubt that spring is on its way: the starlings and jackdaws carrying nesting materials to their various chosen spots. I remember on one occasion walking the yard in Crumlin Road jail with Peter Bateson who, we all know, can make a cat laugh.



Anyway, across the yard flew a jackdaw with a length of toilet roll streaming from its beak. Says I: "There's a jackdaw with some nesting material."

Peter replies: "Catch yourself on, sure isn't it obvious it's going to the bogs!"

# a prison yard



■ Illustration by Seán Connolly (Long Kesh)

It wasn't the cats that were laughing that day.

In this very nesting spot on top of our visits there is a tragedy played out every year what would put Romeo and Juliet to shame. The black and white thieves appear — magpies. They search for an easy meal, attacking the

starlings' nest and trying to eat the young birds, sometimes with success. These birds of course have to live too and nature can be cruel. But sometimes I would like to interfere in nature's process. Last year they robbed a blackbird's nest. This was just over the fence out of view but I often saw the male blackbird bring food to its mate for their young. The two thieves took the young bird out of its nest, came over to the fence beside us and proceeded to eat it. The racket that the blackbirds made would have wakened the dead. I broke out of my own personal rules that day and interfered in nature's course, trying to frighten the magpies away. It didn't work. After about an hour everything returned to normal, the magpies were fed and the blackbirds appeared to accept their loss.

The most beautiful of all the birds around here I believe is the lark. When they rise into the air they sing and when they get to a height they open their wings and flare their tails and let themselves drop, singing as they fall. Contrary to common belief the lark will also sing while perched on a post. This song is said to be different from the song in the air which is used to mark out its territory. In every Block I have been throughout the camp I have seen larks. They are a small bird, not much bigger than a sparrow, with a tuft on their head and a sharp beak. Their colouring — streaky brown-grey — is perfect camouflage when nesting on the ground. The larks we see and hear are the same larks immortalised in the writings of Bobby Sands who, along with his comrades, could only have heard the rise and fall from their concrete tombs.

One bird that has been the cause of many an argument in the camp is the oyster catcher. It passes overhead, giving a sharp cry. It is black and white with an orange beak. There is a pair which nest in the "sterile" (an empty patch of ground originally kept clear for security reasons) on the stones out of harm's way. Not many oyster catchers nest this far inshore. But on occasions this does happen. I believe this pair has been nesting in this same spot for years. They return each year because it has proven to be a safe and successful nesting area.

There is another bird which frequents this place — a hunter feared by all the smaller birds and when it appears on the scene it's chaos all round. This is the kestrel hawk! It glides in, causing all the other birds to scurry for cover. Then if she isn't hunting, they get a little courage and mob her to drive her away. The majesty of the hawk and the cheekiness of the smaller birds is as entertaining as Hollywood.

On that point I shall end. It's time to feed my feathered friends and see what's happening today in the yard.

■ By Frankie Quinn

# CAPTIVE VOICES

IN FEBRUARY 1996, four Basque POWs in Brieva jail (Avila) embarked on a two week hunger strike, demanding the end of dispersion and the repatriation of all Basque prisoners to the Basque Country. This protest was part of a rotating hunger strike by Basque POWs in fifty prisons throughout the Spanish state. With the help of solidarity links established through the annual visits to Long Kesh by Basque delegations, An Glór Gafa invited the Basque POWs in Brieva to write personal accounts of their own experiences.

**A**t the present time there are around 540 Basque political prisoners, with 440 scattered around various jails in the Spanish state. Many are kept in solitary confinement for periods of up to a year or more. On weekly visits, prisoners and relatives are separated by a glass screen. Two hour open visits are available once a month. The solidarity and generosity of the Basque people to their political prisoners is very strong, with two or three hundred cars and buses transporting visitors every weekend. Some of the Spanish prisons are 700 miles away from the Basque country while others are imprisoned in Morocco and the Canary islands.

From the time of arrest, many forms of physical and psychological torture are inflicted by the Spanish police, Civil Guard and Ertzantza (Basque Autonomous Police) on those detained. The forms of torture include mock hangings and suffocation with plastic bags - which prevent physical evidence of torture being left behind. In 1993, three people, two men and a woman died under "mysterious" circumstances while under arrest.

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Karmele Urbistondo was arrested in September 1993 along with twenty others over

a four day period. These raids included the arrest of her friend Gurutze Yanci who was never to leave the barracks alive.

Hello everyone.

My name is Karmele Urbistondo, I'm 28 and I have been in jail for the past three years. Before proceeding, I wish to send all Irishmen and women, and very especially all Irish political prisoners, who struggle for the freedom of Ireland with so much dignity and for so long, a tight embrace full of revolutionary affection. I am just one of so many Basques who have always felt a very special affection for that beautiful country of yours, so significant in everything concerning human values and struggle.

I must tell you that one of the most beautiful and cherished recollections I nurse inside me goes back to August 1993, when as part of a Solidarity Brigade between Ireland and Euskal Harria (Basque Country), I had the opportunity to travel to Ireland. I don't think I'll ever forget all that I saw there, experienced, shared, learnt, felt... Preparing for this voyage, which as well as moments of leisure while there, gave us a better understanding of Ireland and helped up become better known to Irishmen and women. It filled me with satisfaction and made me feel



● Basque political prisoners — Maria, Usume, Karmele, Gloria, Gor

fortunate to have had this opportunity. I have to confess that the hospitality, friendship, solidarity, tenderness, joy, encouragement, dignity, generosity, honesty, affection, honour, respect, patriotism, work, good humour, etc., of the Irish people overwhelmed and captivated me.

I wish also to mention the two visits I was able to make, together with other members of the Brigade, to the Crumlin Road jail in Belfast and to Long Kesh where I met two prisoners. It was a very enriching experience for me, for which I am grateful.

Just twenty-one days after my return from Ireland, I was

# S FROM BRIEVA



rapol and Alexandra

arrested, and the good recollections I brought with me from Ireland helped me a lot during my detention. It was 1.00am in the morning of 20 September 1993 when, half an hour after they arrested my brother at gunpoint as he was having a coffee with some friends in a bar, they raided my parents' home where I

lived. Some thirty Civil Guards, in uniform and civilian clothes, arrested me under "anti-terrorist" law and took me to their barracks in San Sebastian. They held me incommunicado and for five long days I suffered physical and psychological torture sessions. Then they took me before the judge.

I am not going to explain in detail the tortures they applied to me as, unfortunately, they have been your "daily bread" in Ireland for many years. Thanks to my marvellous prison comrades, in a similar situation to mine, with whom I have shared my time in jail, I have been able to overcome, but not forget, all

that. It is something one cannot forget or avoid tears and nervousness when one tells about it. One cannot forget the suffering and the way they nullify your personality, their continuous pounding on your female conditions, and on rape and sex...

Never will I be able to forget that Thursday 24 September when the torments, the screams, the blows, the horror, the fear etc became more intense, if anything. After my declaration before the Police-judge I was allowed a few minutes with my lawyer (during my five days arrested I was "assisted" by one appointed by them) and when we were alone she said to me: "I have bad news for you".

The first thought that came into my mind at that moment was: "No, don't tell me I have to go back to the police station, please, have them take me to jail..."

"It's not that," she said. Aware that I didn't have to go back, I then breathed a sigh of relief, until she took my hand and said: "Gurutze has died, Karmele!"

I was unable to withhold my tears, my anger, my helplessness...everything. They had tortured Gurutze to death. They had killed my friend. She was only thirty and, they said, she had died of a heart attack. But nobody told what had happened that horrible Thursday I have mentioned, a few hours of which, as well as the previous day, I spent in an adjoining cell to that of Gurutze's husband. He was sure she was at home, unarrested, but I had recognised her particular walk looking through the "crab" (a hole in the lower part of the iron door). What is worse, I had not told him what I had seen, as I did not think I should have. We, those of us who lived through the

tortures and horrors of that night, were the only ones who denounced those happenings. But it had been useless; this case has recently been closed and the heart attack confirmed, in a healthy girl of 30. Judges, forensic doctors, all of them have confirmed the police version.

No doubt, history will charge itself with exacting responsibility from the executors and collaborators of so many crimes and murders. Meanwhile we will continue to fight for the freedom and independence of Euskal Herria, each one of us as best as he/she can and at the level he/she wishes to involve him/herself.

That is the message I send to all from Brieva (a jail 450 kilometres from my country, where I'm held at present). The day will come when Ireland is free and united. I avail of this opportunity to encourage you to keep on working on the peace process initiated in Ireland. May everything go the right way and may you be able to enjoy living in liberty, far from the imperialism, authoritarianism and oppression of England.

With my best wishes for you all and an enormous embrace full of fraternity and solidarity as well as a friendly smile, I take leave with a phrase I learned in Ireland.

Tiocfaidh ár lá  
Yours forever  
Karmele

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In December 1995, Maria Perez del Rio was sentenced twice to 18 and 9 years. Her husband, who was arrested at the same time, was sentenced to 18 and 20 years.

I don't want to miss the opportunity you offered me to salute you, so here I am. My name is Maria Perez del Rio, I'm 41 years old, from Algorta (Gexto), married with three children aged 18, 15 and 7, and I have been a Basque political prisoner for four years.

Our struggle for the liberty and independence of both our countries is a good

introduction in itself and that is the reason why I've been punished within the prison walls of the Spanish Empire. I was arrested, together with my husband and elderly mother-in-law, on 12 May 1992 under the "anti-terrorist" law. We were held in a Spanish police barracks where I was tortured, both physically and psychologically.

Four years have passed but it seems like yesterday when I recall the brutal suffering of that time. I still see it as if it were a picture, one of those typical American movies. Some 200 armed special police, most of them hooded, with helicopters included, and with unrestricted "rights", took over the whole hillside where I have my home. The search of the house took them over two hours. Our arrest was the initiation of a manhunt for two supposed members of ETA, with the subsequent harassing, searchings of houses, cars, persons, etc.

My eldest daughter, 14 at the time, witnessed everything as she just arrived home from school and she had to endure all sorts of insults and scoffings which the Police Inspectors hurled at her during those two hours. My children were abandoned on their own until they managed to contact a relative who took charge of them, as my home was sealed (it still is). They were left with nothing but what they had on them. The Judge, Mr Bueren, did not consent to sign a petition allowing them to recover their belongings until 22 months later, when their clothes and books were no longer of any use to them.

Torture? I'm not going to describe it as, unfortunately, you know all about it very well. I'll only mention that being a woman and a mother makes them gloat over these facts more cruelly. All I desired in those moments was for it all to end at once and that I be sent to jail, as a deliverance from that harassment. It had never occurred to me before that one could covet so anxiously

being sent to jail, but one cannot understand this until one has gone through all of it.

I was held in Carabanchel jail (Madrid) until 18 June 1994 when I was transferred here to Brieva (Avila). I'm classified as "FIES", that is, a very dangerous prisoner, and therefore I'm permanently under control (as my personal police file requires).

My children are growing and slowly overcoming the absence of their parents in their daily routine. I can only see them for an hour and a half each month, as we are separated by 450 kilometres. The expense of travelling, as well as the physical and emotional fatigue, don't allow us more frequent contact, especially as their father is in a different jail from mine.

Jail in itself is hard, but far more so when you are so far away from your children — this is an added punishment. They are conscious of the motives for which I am in jail and they support me in everything they can but it still resounds in my head, my youngest daughter's reaction when she was four years old and came to see me for the first time: "Why have you abandoned me and left me all alone!"

It's not easy for her to understand that working and fighting for the liberation of her country can make her pay such a high price as to grow up without the company of her parents.

From Brieva, I extend to you my solidarity and encouragement to achieve that which we Basques and you Irish long so much for. Please accept a fraternal and fond embrace from this companion of yours.

Maria

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Usune Gallastegi has been on remand since November 1994. In the Spanish state, prisoners on remand can be held up to four years without trial. Her grandfather, Eli Gallastegi, was a leader in the PNV (Basque National Party). After the Franco regime came to power he left for Ireland, rearing his family in

Gibbstown, Co. Meath. In 1952 his son Iker returned to the Basque Country and became a leading activist in the Basque National Liberation Movement. Iker's eldest daughter, Usune, was arrested in November 1994 and is currently held on remand.

My name is Usune Gallastegi Saseta, a Basque political prisoner, at the moment in a jail in the Spanish state. I'll try to explain and convey a few lines to the Irish people on what it has meant to me to be jailed for having fought for my country. You will understand me because you have a long history of struggle, suffering and jail behind you. But I better start at the beginning.

I was brought up in a patriotic family and from my early youth I was impregnated by that beautiful affection for Euskadi very deep inside me. My grandfather was a fighter, as was my father also, and the Spanish state made them pay dearly for it, obliging them to exile themselves, in Ireland among other countries, a country about which they spoke to me from childhood. From an early age I had the fortune to have known many fighters, members of ETA, a large number of whom were murdered by Spanish mercenaries and for whom I retain a very deep affection.

As I grew up, my uneasiness, my rage and my impotence grew also and I felt the need to do something, witnessing so much injustice, so much cruelty, so many deaths. I became active in organisations of the patriotic left where I learnt a lot of things, but one above all others: "We all have to give a little so that but a few will not have to do it all."

That is why I am in jail, for having tried to do a little bit more for the country that has seen me grow up, a country oppressed by two states, a worthy people that suffer a lot but also know how to smile, laugh, sing and dance.

I was arrested on 25



● Usune and Beki in Brieva Jail, February 1995

November 1994. The Basque Autonomous Police (Ertzantza) burst into my home in the early morning, knocking down the door and stamping their feet on my young brother's neck after they knocked him flat to the floor. That same police (of whom my grandfather predicted as far back as 1923 that they would execute their own compatriots) humiliated me, tortured me psychologically, threatened and tried to blackmail me in continuous interrogations over three days. Days when I never knew where I was, nor what hour or day it was. Days that are engraved in my mind... I was not tortured physically as were, and still are, many friends of mine but that psychological torture marked me, and even today, at night, I am tormented by those moments lived in the police-station.

After that, this so-called "Basque" police handed me over to the Spanish authorities for their justice,

that same "justice" that oppresses the Basque Country, the same that tortures and murders Basque political fighters. And I was imprisoned in a Spanish jail...

As far as the situation in jail is concerned, my first comment is that I am, as are all other prison comrades, very far away from my country. This is due to the damned measure called "dispersion" which the Spanish government has invented in order to try and make us submit, moving us far away from our homes, separating us and isolating us in different jails throughout the Spanish peninsula. Each jail has a different regime and that affects us directly. In some jails Basque political prisoners are very badly treated, severely and inhumanely; whereas in others they are more or less left alone, without too many problems.

This dispersion is especially hard on our families (displacements of

thousands of kilometres, heavy expenses, and even deaths due to car and bus accidents...). It is something that worries me a lot... Each weekend I cannot help thinking about the long journey that my family and friends have to make in order to bring me, in this cold Spanish prison, a bit of happiness and love.

But what is also quite clear is that this further turn of the wheel has, once again, failed to produce for the Spanish government the results they longed for. The unity of Basque political prisoners remains intact, despite the physical separation. One of the better things I have experienced in jail has been to have met and known marvellous companions, always ready to give help and protection and warmth to the new arrivals. It is a comradeship that the enemy, even with the most cruel measures they may invent, will never be able to defeat!

Prison is hard, why deny

it... Being unable to see anything but concrete and iron bars day after day; the continuous tension; being able only to see, but not embrace or touch, those friends who visit me and whom I love so much; the coldness and loneliness of the cell; the poor meals; the lack of adequate medical assistance... I'm only two years in jail and I miss so many things! The sea, the mountains, going for a walk, the joyous atmosphere of the feasts in Euskal Herria, my family, my friends, and all of the Basque people with their demonstrations, mobilisations, letters, visits... But above all, the conviction that our fight is just and the faith that, sooner or later we will, as also will the people of Ireland, achieve our goal.

From this prison let me send the Irish people a big and fraternal embrace!

Tiocfaidh ár lá!

Jo Ta Ke Irabazi Arte!  
(Keep striking until victory)

# PARENTING IN PRISON

BEING A PARENT IN PRISON can be a very difficult, emotional experience for all concerned. It is very hard knowing that your children are growing up so far and you can't be there to see their progress: birthdays, first day at school, every little thing they do, you miss.

I have two children, Declan and Laura. I have never seen my daughter outside jail as she was born when I was on remand in Crumlin Road Prison. I've missed out on her whole life so far. Although I've spent a couple of years with my son outside, I've missed most of his life also as he was just

three years old when I was arrested.

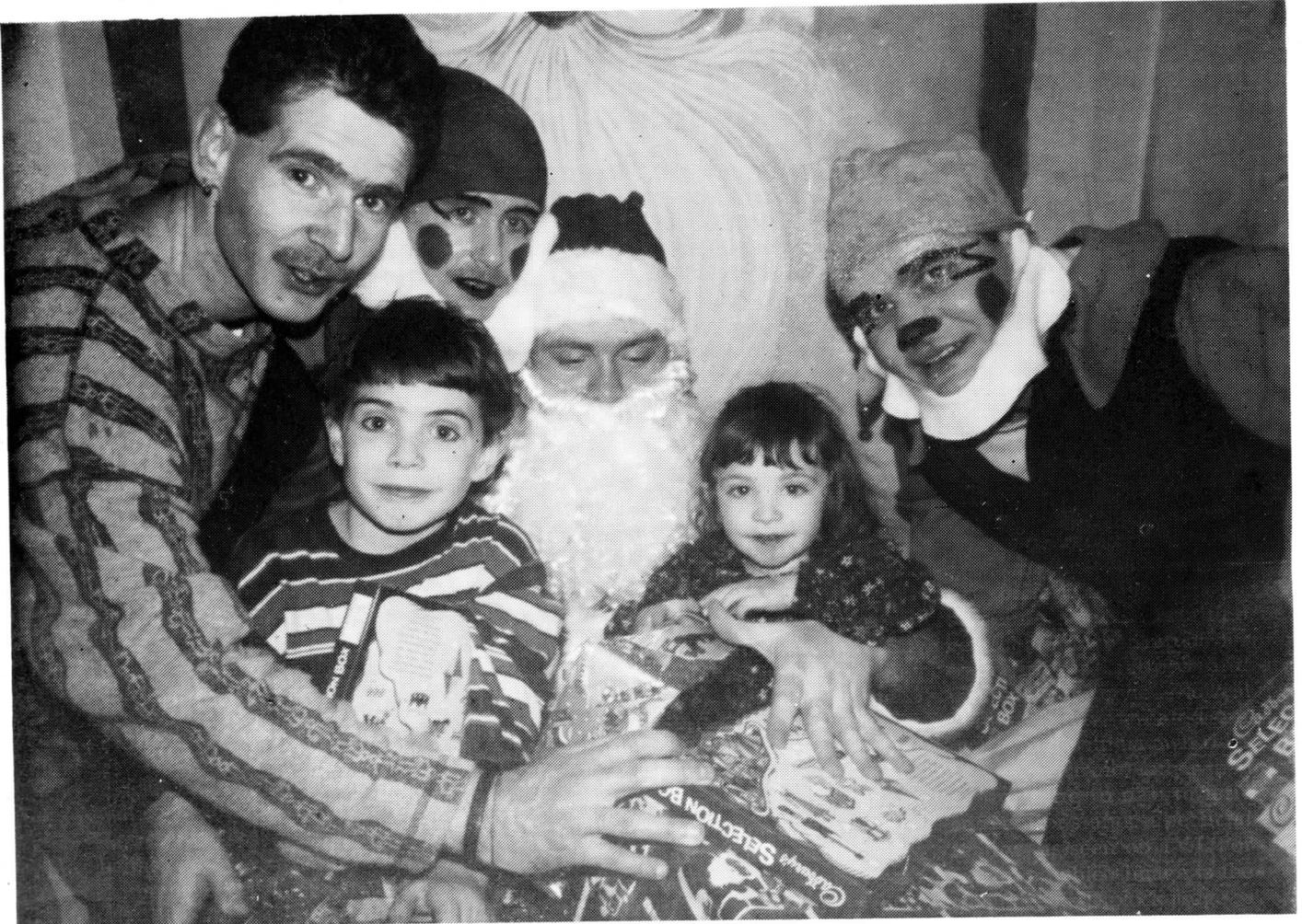
With all this on my mind, and not on the minds of the other men, a few of us got together last year and started a "parenting group". We wanted to look at ways in which we could improve the quality of our limited time with our children on visits. At

our first meeting we weren't quite sure where this group would go but we had one thing on our minds and that was our children's welfare. I remember all the nervousness and apprehension when we first met, but after a little while spent discussing the resources we had to work with and what we had already tried individually, i.e. telling stories, games that some men tried out, bringing paper and colouring-in pencils to the visits, we knew we could help each other out. Hopefully in the long run this work will also be of benefit to

the other lads who have children.

We got some books with suggestions on small things to make for and with children. For example, we made greeting cards for special occasions such as Halloween. I also made a skeleton out of thin wood, then painted it for my children — which they loved as the arms and legs could also move.

While we were trying these wee things out we were also discussing our facilities on the visits. We knew there was nothing there at all for the children and their parents to use, so we approached the administration with the idea of bringing a few reading books to the visits with us. We got the books into the camp and then it started. I remember the first time looking through the books with my children — it was sort of strange but also exciting seeing my son reading as I've missed out on



● Martin Dillon with children Declan and Laura at the Children's Christmas party in Long Kesh. (Other comrades play Santa and his helpers)

those little things in his life. From this and from talking to the other lads in the group, I found out that children could bring in their own reading books from school, which my son has done now a few times. Again, this has been a great help to my son and his school work.

Over the past eight weeks myself and ten other men have attended a course with Barnardo's (the children's charity), which covered a wide range of subjects concerning children's welfare. In Week 1 we had an introduction to the group and programme; and we gave our views on some of the things we wanted to learn. In Week 2 we looked at ways to support our children. In Week 3 we examined ages and stages of development which was very helpful as we're not there to see all the different stages in our children's lives, so we tend not to realise that our children are growing up. Week 4 concerned communication; again very helpful as we not only learned how to communicate more effectively with our children but the children also benefit by being able to communicate with us and consequently with others around them.

In Week 5 we looked at disciplining a child: we grow up with a largely negative view on discipline, i.e. smacking our children when we think they have done something wrong; we have now learned that there is a more positive alternative to this form of discipline i.e. sending the child to his/her room, denying him/her pocket money and so on, which can get the same or better results.

In Week 6 we discussed ways of making the most of our visits with the children; we talked about bringing books, pencils and paper, stories, things that have been tried and have worked for other men on the visits; again I found this interesting as I got more ideas for things to do with my children.

In the final two weeks the members of the group gave feedback on the course, what

we thought could be added or taken away, and we also touched on the child's rights. All in all the course was very worthwhile and very interesting. Listening to the feedback from the rest of the group I can safely say that we all benefited from it in our own way.

Some people have said to me in the past that you can't be taught how to be a parent, and in a way I'd tend to agree with them. But that doesn't mean you can't gain some knowledge from others along

the way as we have from our own parents, be it good or bad. Looking back now on the last year and the things I've gained from other men's experience, I can safely say that I've benefited a lot, as has my relationship with my children. I don't think that this relationship was bad before but now it is at a deeper level. I can now understand how they must be feeling. I also think that I can relate to my children a lot better when I see them, as I realise now that they need so

much love and security from me, which I didn't really understand when I first came into prison. Of course the separation caused by jail is always going to damage a parent's relationship with their children but that damage can be limited by the sort of activities I have outlined. Our parenting group is committed to helping each other to protect and develop this relationship in the future.

■ By Martin Dillon

# A simple occurrence

**27** September 1996. 5.15pm. Just back from my visit and thought I'd pen a few words about the visit and my feelings during and since it.

I'm feeling melancholic and — not unusual for me after such visits — guilty in a sort of way. I'm sure these feelings aren't peculiar to me. Many others in a similar situation to me no doubt feel the same way. But I just want to write about how I, Dave, feel.

How do I feel? I feel wrecked. My wee son whom I haven't seen in four weeks, wrecks me. He destroys me by virtue of the fact that he's my wee son. He's growing up without the influence of his Daddy; and it hurts his Daddy that he's missing all those wee things that a Daddy does and what this Daddy would like to do with his wee son, his wee Conor. I dream about taking him fishing or to football matches — Croke Park for example; and of introducing him to new experiences; simple things but ones that I could share with my son.

I suppose today my feelings have been released and fuelled by the visit and in particular by a simple occurrence that took place on the visit. A simple everyday occurrence that takes place between fathers and their sons and daughters. Yes, my son requested and received from his Daddy the telling of a ghost story! On a wet Saturday afternoon in a crowded H-Block visiting room, my son received his first ghost story

from his father. He gently placed his wee head on my lap and listened intently while Daddy concocted a story about a banshee! He liked it so much that he requested another and another and another until finally, just as my limited collection of stories was exhausted, I was rescued by the termination of the visit. And even at that, Conor was insistent that I at least tell him "a bit of a Christmas scary story".

I've never done this with my son before — tell him ghost stories. He was too young to understand them, being only three years old when I had what constituted my "freedom". But Conor's six now and at an age when his Daddy can — just like mine did with me — tell him stories. He doesn't know it but today by re-awakening his Daddy's fatherly obligations, cares, emotions, call it what you may, he has made his Daddy feel very, oh so very sad and guilty. I feel as if I'm punishing him by my absence, because of my political beliefs and principles. He longs for his father, I long for him; I love him, he loves me; an honest uncomplicated simple love free from the fetters of adult demands and duplicity. No strings attached, just pure free natural uncontaminated love between father and son.

I love you so much, Conor. God bless and take care of you. Daddy xxxxxx.

■ By Daithí Mac Adhaimh

# Return to the H-Blocks

AS I PEN THIS ARTICLE I am conscious that today is the thirteenth anniversary of "our" historic escape from the H-Blocks on 25 September 1983. When I say "our" I mean it in the widest sense, embracing all those who helped make escape possible and those at home and abroad who rejoiced in its success.

On that date I took my early release and eventually was re-arrested in Scotland, charged with conspiracy to cause explosions and given a life sentence in the Old Bailey, London. As I sat in that court I day-dreamed of those Irish men and women who had gone through the conveyer belt of anti-Irish "justice" down the long years. Many comrades remain in the British prison system even after twenty years of incarceration — still not "transferred" or repatriated to Irish soil. I am one of the more fortunate ones and after nine and a half years in the Special Units of various English jails, I was transferred to Maghaberry Prison in the Six Counties. It took another two years to get a move to Long Kesh and on 9 August 1996, two comrades and I were transferred to be with the Irish Republican community here in the H-Blocks.

Long Kesh holds many memories for me and while many are very bad memories of the brutality of the regime here — and of the loss of ten very dear comrades in 1981, I still have a sense of pilgrimage about the place. I feel that the fabric of the place is full of history and the spirit of Republican resistance.

9 August 1971 saw the birth of this concentration camp. I remember that day consoling my aunt; her husband was on the run, her sons had been taken away (one a victim of the infamous "guinea pig" torture experiments in those early arrests). I marched that Christmas Day in 1971 along the M1 motorway in an attempt to reach the camp to

protest. We were stopped by Britain's lackeys in the RUC. Little did I know but within months I would be held in Cage 6 on remand; then released and interned in cages 2, 4 and 6.

The H-Blocks had not yet been built but were under construction — ready to play their role in Britain's new counter-insurgency strategy of Ulsterisation, Normalisation and Criminalisation. In the summer of 1975 a screw in charge of the visits had threatened to stop my family visits and, in a confrontation with him, I broke his jaw. I was set upon and dragged off

to the new "boards" (ie, the punishment/solitary confinement area) located in the first H-Block to be constructed in Long Kesh. I received a bad beating — had my clothes torn off me, my boots cut off with a Stanley knife and I was held spreadeagled against a wall by screws while I was photographed nude. So this was a H-Block, I thought.

So my head was full of memories when I arrived back in the H-Blocks last summer. I didn't quite know what to expect — I had some knowledge of the general running of the Blocks from my last time here but was eager to see for myself how things had developed since.

Of the hundreds of comrades here, I would now know only a coupe of dozen at most. In ways that is reassuring — showing the struggle has generational dynamic — but I knew that

having to acquaint myself with so many new names and faces would be daunting.

The night before my move to the Kesh I found myself a little emotional. I knew what memories these Blocks held for me, especially the Hunger Strike period: a spiritual pilgrimage indeed. I remember the dynamic for learning and the hunger for information on struggle, national and international, ie the ingredients for a better understanding of our path to freedom. This political education ensured and continues to ensure that our enemies do not out-manoeuvre us or lead us into cul-de-sacs. I wondered would this culture of collectivism and political self-development be the same. I hoped so.

What I experienced was a mixture of emotions. Clearly I am very glad to be back in the ranks of comrades again.



● Gerry McDonnell and Christine in Long Kesh after their engagement



● Gerry in Full Sutton SSU, England

The emotional impact of being in these Blocks again is a bitter-sweet cocktail. Of course I arrived in H7 from which we had escaped. Upon arrival I was greeted by my old comrade Bernard Fox, and I felt a genuine flood of emotion as we greeted and embraced. We had not met since that September day in 1983, even though Bernard had been out since and back in again doing a new sentence. I met a series of old and new comrades and the greetings were genuine and warm. The degree of organisation and co-operation remained evidently good as cells were made ready for us and some men even, with great generosity and comradeship, doubled up so we could have our own cells. The Irish Republican community had indeed opened its heart to embrace us. We were "home" for now.

Another escapee would join us — Jim Smyth extradited from the USA a week later — but for now I was getting to know

comrades and the new workings of the Block. The screws, source of so much friction and confrontation in the past, were now off the wing landings but only one grille away; and with their multitude of closed circuit cameras and electronic grills they remain, security-wise, in control of the Block. It is a much more relaxed regime for the screws and ourselves although we remain every bit as much imprisoned. The lock-ups too are gone and we can organise our day better. There is no doubt that I am experiencing the practical gains from the Hunger Strike at first hand.

While I am only back a short while, I can sense a difference in the struggle atmosphere. Whereas pre-1983 we endeavoured to achieve conditions to allow for our own political education and development, we now have that freedom to organise ourselves completely. We also have the added distractions of 24-hour television, video tapes and handicrafts which, if allowed,

could dominate our lifestyle. Don't get me wrong — handicrafts are a form of political art: they make a contribution to the struggle as political statements in their own right and are a thing of beauty in any home. Other leisure activities — TV, football, gym etc — are also important in their own right. My point is that these things have their place and should not dominate our lives here as POWs.

If we are to be revolutionary in our efforts we must use our time to arm ourselves with the skills to become even more politically aware than when we entered these Blocks. Ten men died to allow us that opportunity — we must not let their sacrifice go to waste. The Brits have stolen x amount of years from each of us — let's steal them back and make full use of our time. I'm glad to see that this attitude is still as common among most men as it always was in Long Kesh.

So we continually need to remind ourselves of the importance of using our time

productively. Thankfully a continuity nucleus of men will ensure this but no one in this camp should become complacent — as I suspect a tiny trickle of men have succumbed to spending too much time in other less politically educational activities. It's just an observation, one that does not reflect the spirit in these Blocks when I last was here. The gains are there of course too. The five demands of the Hunger Strike period are realised and we have our political status even though no British government is going to admit it openly. In the end we are who we are and no foreign government will change us by name-calling or by ill-treatment. The story of these Blocks and our ongoing freedom struggle is testament to this.

It's good to be back here among comrades. Thanks to everyone for their warm welcome.

■ By Gerry "Blute"  
McDonnell

I Meitheamh na bliana seo cuireadh sciathán Gaeltachta ar bun i H7, mar chuid de Ghaeltacht na Fuiseoige ar an Cheis Fhada. Sin an dara sciathán lánGaeilge sna blocanna agus táthar ag brath ar Ghaeltacht a bhunú sa triú bloc poblachtánach. Mar sin, tá an fhuisseoig ag leathnú a sciathán! Míníodh scéal na Gealtachta ins an Glór Gafa roimhe, ach anois ba mhaith linn ligint do na fir a scéal féin a insint. Cad é mar a spreagadh iad agus cad é mar atá ag éirí leo? Cad iad a mbarúlacha ar chúrsaí anois, agus iad ar an Ghaeltacht le tamaillín anuas? Seo iad a nglórtha binne Gaeilge.

**Feilim O hAdhmaill (H7)**

**N**uair a aistríodh ó phríosún i Sasáin go Machaire Beirí mé sa tsamhradh 1995 níor shíl mé go mbeadh seans dá laghad go bhfeicfinn an taobh istigh den Cheis Fhada, gan tráchh ar Ghaeltacht na Fuiseoige. Cuireadh iontas augs (creid nó ná creid) áthas an domhain orm nuair a bogadh mise agus roinnt de mo chomrádiathe go dtí an Cheis Fhada ag díreadh na bliaina sin. Den chéad uair ó gabhadh muid bhí muid í bpriosún polaitiúil i measc cimí poblachtánacha eile. Nuair a fuair mé amach go raibh mé ag dul chuig an sciathán Gaeltachta i H6 bhí mé thar a bhetih sásta.

Bhí baint agam le gluaiseacht na Gaeilge taobh mauigh ó lár na seachtóidí. Casadh mo bhean chéile orm le linn feachtais ar son na Gaeilge i mBéal Feirste agus thóg muid ár gclann fríd an Ghaeilge. Bhí se de rún againn bunús ár saoil a chaitheamh fríd an Ghaeilge má b'fhéidir, augs sin mar a bhí, go dtí gur gabhadh i Sasain mé ag tús 1994. I bpriosún i Sasain, i measc gach ruda eile, bhí cosc ar labhairt na Gaeilge.

Tá athrú mór ar an scéal abhus ar Ghaeltacht na Fuiseoige. Labhraítear an Ghaeilge an t-am ar fad agus reáchtálar na himeachtaí uilig agus an saol i gcoitinne trí mheán na Gaeilge. Anois tá dhá bhloc

(H5 agus H7) le sciathán lánGhaeilge agus tá muid ag brath ar Ghaeltacht a bhunú ar an bhloc phoblachtánach eile (H4). Lena chois sin tá fás millteánach i líon na ndaoine atea ag freastail ar ranganna Gaeilge sa chmpa lasmuigh de na sciatháin Ghaeltachta.

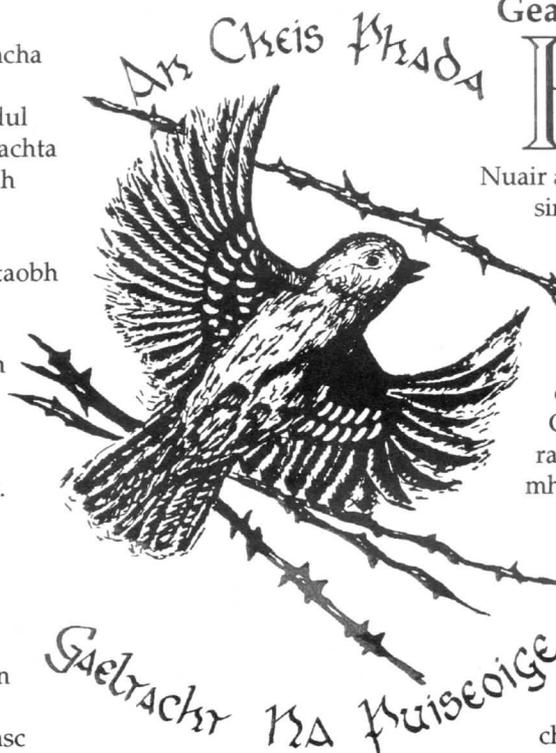
Is cinnte go bhfuil éad ar a lán gaeilgeoirí agus foghlaimeoirí taoibh amuigh fán timpeallacht atá cumtha againn istigh anseo! Ach d'ainneoin gach ruda, bheinn sásta go fóill malairt a dhéanamh mas maith libh!

**Gearóid O Breasláin (H5)**

**B**hí mise i H8 nuair a bunaíodh an chéad sciathán Gaeltachta i H6\*. Nuair a chuala mé go mbeadh na daoine sin ag aistriú go dtí H8 bhí mé faoi bhrú millteánach ag smaoineamh ar na himpleachtaí a bheadh i gceist, mar atá, ag déanamh comhrá agus ag éisteacht le daoine ag caint as Gaeige an lá ar fad. Ní gá a rá go raibh cúpla tomlú orm roimh an lá mhór.

Cibé ar bith bhí idir imní agus athas orm nuair a tháinig an dream a bhí ar an Ghaeltacht in H6 chuig an bhloc. Bhí faitíos orm go mbeadh cumas labhartha na bhfear sin i bhfad níb airde ná mo chaighdeán féin. Ach i gceann

tamaillín ag caint agus ag pleidhcíocht, thug mé fá deara go raibh mé ag ahrú gach rud as Béarla leis na fir lena raibh mé ag caint. Sean-nós a bhí agam ón ghnáthsciathán nuair ba ghnáth liom comhrá a dhéanamh leis na fir nach raibh mórán Gaeilge acu. Ach anseo bhí achan duine ábalta mé



a thuigbheáil gan stró agus mar sin nír mhair an nós ach lá nó dhó.

I dtús báire, áfach, bhí fadhb agam blas chuid de na fir a thuigbheáil — rud a tharlaíonn domh go minic — ach i gceann tamaill d'éirigh mé cleadchtaiteh leo. Ní thig leis na fir eile sin a rá faoi mo bhlas féin ar an drochuair! Ar an dea-uair thug na fir fá deara na deacrathgaí a bhí againn agus rinne siad a seacht ndícheall cuidiú linn. Roimh i bhfad bhí muinín agam asam féin agus lean mé de ghnáthimeachtaí mo shaoil anseo, ach go raibh sé trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Tá mé ar an Ghaeltacht le traidfhill le mhíonna anuas agus tá faill agam anois feidhm a bhaint as an Ghaeilge atá agamsa — rud narbh fhéidir liom a dhéanamh cúpla mí ó shin agus mo chuid Ghaeilge greamaithe i mo chloigeann gan bealach amach di. Ar ndóigh sílim go raibh 'maistriú go dtí an Ghaeltacht an-dearfach ar fad ach ní fheichfidh mé na torthaí go ceann tamaill eile go fóill.

[\*Cuireadh an chéad sciathán lánGhaeilge ar bun i H6, ach bogadh go dtí H8 é nuair a druideadh H6 fá choinne obair dheisiúcháin; agus bogadh arís é go dtí H5 nuair a druideadh H8 ar an fháth chéanna.]

## Pádaí

### O Dubhda (H7)

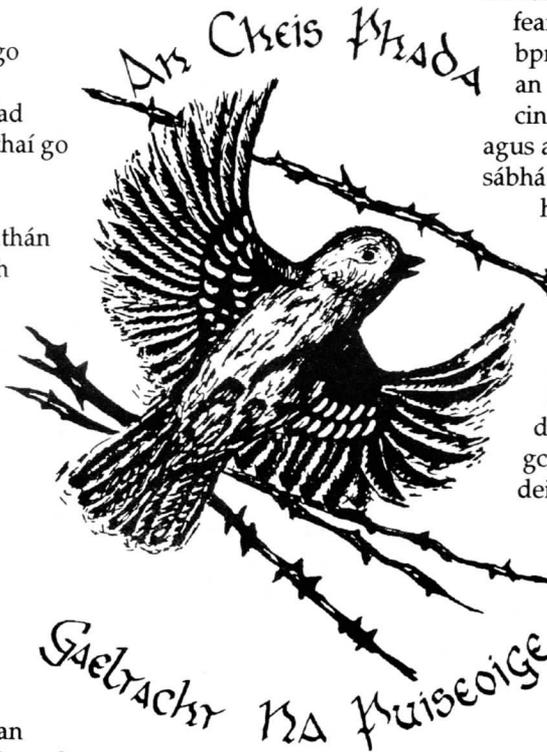
**B** hí gliondar ar mo chroí nuair a shroich mé

Gaeltacht na Fuiseoige i mí an Mheithimh. Bhain mé an Fáinne Oir amach i 1991, ach ní dhearna mé mór mórán dul chun cinn ó shin. Sna luathnóchaidí scaoileadh saor an mhór-chuid de na gaeilgeoirí a bhí anseo ó thréimhse agóid na pluide. Dá bharr sin, bhí sé deacair múinteoirí ardranga a fháil. Ní rabhamar ábalta dhul thar leibhéal áirithe — go mórmhór maidir le labhair na Gaeilge. Ach bhí suim mhóir againn sa teanga an t-am ar fad. Bhain muid triail as cúpla plean mar thabhláí Gaeilge sa seomra bia agus grúpaí comhrá taobh amuig de na ranganna. Ach ar an drochuair níor éirigh go mór leis na hiarrachtaí seo. Bhí faitíos ar dhaoine agus ba leas leo labhairt as Ghaeilge os comhair daoine nach raibh Gaeilge acu.

Mar sin, an chéad run a thug mé fá deara nuair a shroich mé an sciathán Gaeltachta ná an timpeallacht Ghaeilge. Nuair atá achan rud i do

timpeallacht á socrú as GAheilge, go tobann buaileann an smaoineamh thú nach bhfuil de ghaeilge agat ach cúpla leathanach as "Progress in Irish". B'iomaí ceist a fuair "blank stare" mar fhreagra an chéad lá sin! Má bhí fhadbanna gaam, bhí sé i bhfad ní ba deacra do lucht an bhunranga. Mar sin féin ba í an timpeallacht Ghaeilge seo a bhí de dhith orainn uilig agus rinneadh dul chun cinn as cuimse ó shin. Anois táimid uilig, lucht an bhunranga ina measc, ábalta comhrá deoas compordach a dhéanamh leis na haoíchainteoirí a thagann isteach chugainn corruair.

Le cois an timpeallachta nua seo, tá an Ghaeilge fite fuaite le stair an chmpa seo. Bhí sí an -teabhachtach i rith agóid na pluide agus bhí meas mór ag cimid mar Bobbty Sands uirthi. Sin fáth amháin ar thosaigh an oiread sin fear ag foghlaim na Gaeilge i bpríosún. Thar na blianta mhair an Ghaeilge anseo, d'ainneoin cinsireachta agus cos-ar-bolg; agus an lá atá inniu ann tá sí slán sábháilte. Ach ní fhásann sí ina haonar agus is gá le hionchur ó gach duine. Fuair muid amach go bhfuil dianstaidéar de dhíth, go háirithe ag an tús: ag freastail ar ranganna gach lá, ag socrú imeachtaí mar dhíospóireachtaí, tráthanna na gceist agus mar sin de. Ach sa deireadh thair thall aontaíonn muid uilig gur fiú go mór é.



## Antón

### O Néill (H5)

**N** uair a shroich mé an

Ghaeltacht ar dtús bhí mé buartha nach raibh mo chuid Gaeilge chomh maith sin. Mar gheall air seo d'fhan mé i mo thost an chuid is mó den am ar feadh roinnt mahith seachtainí. Ach dhuidigh timpeallacht ghaelach an sciatháin go mór liom chun teacht fríd an tréimhse sin — rudaí mar an ceol, na ranganna agus ag éisteacht leis an rteanga an t-am ar fad.

Seinnim féin an bainseo agus mar sin bhí áthas mór orm nuair a fuair mé amach go raibh a lán daoine anseo ábalta gléasanna ceoil eagsúla a sheinm. Ansin nuair a tháinig Bik McFarlane bhí borradh úr faoi chúrsaí ceoil toisc go bhfuil sé go han-mhaith ag cruinniú gach duine le ceile agus ceolchroimeacha agus a leithéid a chur ar siúl. Bhí sé seo ina chuidiú mhaith leis an timpeallacht a chothú.

# Glórtha na Gaeltachta

Nuair a tháinig an córas úr logha de chaoga faoin gcéad i bhfeidhm anuraidh agus fuair roinnt daoine ar an scaithán cead a gcinn leo, b'iomá seans a bhí againn cóisir a reeachtáil. Ag ceann de na cóisirí seo churi muid ár gcead dráma Gaeilge ar an ardán. Scéal grinn a bhí ann agus cé go ndearna muid traidhfil de mheancóga maidir le focail agus le fuaimníocht, thaispeáir see dúinn go raibh sé ar ár gcumas imeachtaí mar seo a chur i bhfeidhm agus úsáid a bhaint as ár dteanga féin i ndóigheanna eagsúla. Lena chois seo bhí rang amhránaíochta ann ach caithfidh mé a rá go raibh na bairdéirí ag cur strainceanna orthu féin ag éisteacht linn ag gabháil "ró, Sé Do Bheatha "Bhaile" in ard ár gcinn sa seomra rangal!

I ndiaidh an chéad bhliain ar an Ghaeltacht, agus muid ag foghlaim linn, is léir gur iontach na buntáistí iad an timpeallacht chuí ghaelach agus an craic a bhaineann lei.

## Gearóid Mac Aoidh (H5)

**N**uair a chéadchuala mé le linn an Earraigh 1995 faoin mholadh chun GAeltacht a chur ar bun sa chmpa dúirt mé liom féin go mbeadh sé ar fheabhas agus chuir mé m'ainm síos ar an liosta ar an bhomaite. Bhí mé ag smaoineamh ag an am go mbeadh sé antábhachtach an deis a thapú mar b'féidir nach bhfaighinn an seans arís. Níl aon rud cinnte i bpríosún!

Thosaigh mé ag foghlaim na Gaeilge le linn an tSamhraidh 1991. Ní raibh ach cúpla focal agam roimhe sin. Tosaíonn an chuid is mó de na fir sa chmpa ar an bhunchúrsa mar cuireann sé béim ar an chomhrá is coiteanta anseo sna H-Blocanna: mar shampla comhrá faoin obair ar an sciathán, faoin pheil ar an pháirc mhór, faoi aclaíocht choirp san áras aclaíochta agus faoi sceeala ar na cuairteanna.

Is é an comhrá an príomhspríoc anseo agus tá béim ar leith ar an Fháinne. De réir na múinteoirí a thagann isteach leis na cúrsaí GCSE agus ArdLeibhéil a mhúineadh, tá caighdeán an Fháinne níos airde anseo ná mar atea sé i gcuid mhór áiteanna taobh amuigh. Idir 1991 agus 1994 bhain mé amach an Fáinne Daite, an Fáinne

Airgid agus an GCSE. Ina dhiaidh sin ba é mo phríomhspríoc pearsanta ná bheith measartha líofa.

Ba ghnáth liom freastal ar chuid mhór ranganna ach ní raibh mórán seans agam comhrá a dhéanamh taobh amuigh den rang. Bíonn sé antábhachtach, agus tú ag foghlaim aon teanga, bheith i do chónaí i dtimpeallacht ina bhfuil ach an duine ag labhairt na teanga sin an t-am ar fad. Bhí gliondar ar mo chroí ar an 19ú Meitheamh 1995 nuair a bogadh chuig Gaeltacht na Fuisioige I H6 mé. Nuair a shiúil mé síos an sciathán mhothaigh mé an t-atmaisféar mar bhí ach an duine iontach tógtha agus ag scairtigh as Gaeilge in ach an treo.

Ní raibh mo mhálaí folamh nó mo chillín in eagar sular thosaigh an chéad rang. Ina dhiaidh sin d'fhreastail mee ar dhá rang sa lá, cúig lá sa tseachtain. Cé go bhfuil na ranganna teabhachtach áfach, is é an buntáiste is mó anseo bheith in ann do shaol ar fad a chaitheamh trí mheán na Gaeilge: ag déanamh comhrá, ag amharc ar an teilifís, ag airneál nó ag díospóireacht.



## Caoimhín O Cosgraigh (H7)

**T**á buíochas tuillte ag ach an duine a raibh baint acu le bunadh na Gaeltachta seo. Ciallaíonn sé sin idir dhaoine ón taobh amuigh den chmpa agus ár gcuid comrádaithe, a bhí páirteacht ar dhóigheanna eagsúla.

Gan amhras bíonn an caighdeán ag ardú an t-am ar fad de bhí go bhfuil muid in ann comhrá a dhéanamh ach an lá sa timpeallacht seo.

Táimid ag déanamh ár seacht ndíochill cur lenár gcuid Gaeilge agus an campa uilig a ghaelú. Chun an méid seo a dhéanamh bíonn orainn dianstaidéar a dhéanamh lá i ndiaidh lae. Mar chuid den obair seo tá cúrsaí a lán ranganna socraithe eadrainn féin ar an scaithán s'againne agus ar na sciatháin eile sa bhloc. Lena chois sin, reáchtálann muid cúrsaí eile, macasamhail oícheanta airneáil agus tráthann na gceist.

Is mór agus rímhór an t-athrú atá le feiceáil sa chmpa seo anois maidr leis an Ghaeilge. Tá sí ag leathnú amach go breá ar fud na mbloc uilig. Tá ré nua na Gaeilge ag fás agus dar liom ní bheidh ann ach dul chun cinn sna laethanta romhainn.

# A Tale of Skullduggery and confused signals

The things some men will do to get a girl!

The tuck-shop in Long Kesh has recently been selling a product called 'Megamass', a body-building substance. Seán (Kells) Kelly and Anthony (Ants) Deery were among the first to purchase it.

It is an off-white powder and tastes (according to Beefy) like baby food. The word is that Kells and Ants are happy with results so far and have definitely achieved weight gain, albeit around their waistlines. According to their expert advisor though, that is not unusual at this early stage and the same expert is currently working on a programme to help the two lads spread this newly gained mass.

The things some men will do to stop others from getting a girl! It has come to the attention of the Red Spider that some of the regular bodybuilders on 'A' Wing H4, including the above-mentioned expert, have been concerned about the potential of this wonder powder on the torsos of Kells and Ants and the subsequent effect on women. So they have devised an underhand scheme to undermine the muscle growth of our two comrades.

At the risk of being called a killjoy, I believe it is the duty of the Red Spider to inform young Kells and Ants that the substance they have been consuming for the past month, at the rate of three pints a day, is not the wonder powder known as Megamass. It is, in fact, ground-down porridge oats.

NB When it was realised that my spies had stumbled upon this uncomradely behaviour, an attempt was made to bribe Red Spider. Only a "Snake" would stoop so low!

The IRA are renowned throughout the world for the ingenuity of their technical officers. It's a pity they couldn't share some of this knowledge with their imprisoned comrades.

Last summer in H7 frantic efforts were made to tune in to Triple FM — the West Belfast Festival's radio station. Unfortunately the signal barely reached the H-Blocks, much to the chagrin of a few men who had heard they were getting numerous mentions on virtually

every programme. (These were the same men who were monopolising the phone but that may have been a coincidence.)

Into the breach steps Ciarán "Marconi" Morrison, who professes an intimate knowledge of technical matters. What we need, he claims, is a bigger aerial. He spends all morning collecting lengths of copper wire from all manner of places (to the extent that there isn't an electrical appliance left with a lead of more than six inches - which makes it rather difficult to use the iron!). Connecting all this wire to a radio and then to a metal fence in the yard, we do get a reception of sorts — reminiscent of a crystal set, but at least we could make out a few names.

The lads huddle around the radio in the yard all day, desperately willing the festival DJs to give them a mention. When it begins to rain, a polythene bag is wrapped around the radio, but the lads don't budge.

Finally it's ten p.m. and the yards are about to close for the night. Reluctantly, Ciarán begins to dismantle his high-tech invention. Just as he removes the wire from the radio, a voice comes across the air-waves, loud and clear. Ciarán looks puzzled - the lads look miffed.

The problem had indeed been the aerial - or all the cooper wire connecting it to a rusty fence! Ciarán is now studying English Literature - it's less technical.

When we got our new washing machines and tumble-dryers a few years ago it was a Godsend. The amount of smelly running shoes in the wings did more to break the toughest POW than the screws ever could. The machine was brilliant for washing them. However the noise of the running shoes banging off the side of the tumble dryer late in the night caused much friction until someone solved the problem. I think it was one of our regular "Chat" magazine readers who came up with the solution which involved putting the running shoes into a pillow case and fastening a knot in the top of the pillow case before tumble-drying them. It was quite a revelation, simple but effective, and led to undisturbed sleep thereafter.

"Skin" Bennett needed his runners

dried for a visit the following day and as the "washing-machine-man" was in his bed, he would have to do it himself. He knew there was a way to do it but, never having done the washing machine job himself, was a bit flummoxed. So he asked Tomás Maguire who knows a thing or two about domestic life.

"It's quite simple," says Tomás. Just use a pillow case."

"Hold on a minute," says Skin. "Explain that to me again, but this time do it like you're talking to a six-year-old." (Skin had recently watched the film Philadelphia.)

"Okay," says Tomás. "You-take-your-running-shoes-and-you-take-a-pillow-case-and-you-put-them-together-and-put-them-in-the-tumble-dryer."

Skin, following these instructions like a six-year-old, places his newly washed runners in the tumble dryer, puts an old pillow case in beside them and switches the machine on.

As has been reported previously by the Red Spider, the removal of the fence between the two yards on each side of a H-Block causes some confusion among our geographically-challenged comrades.

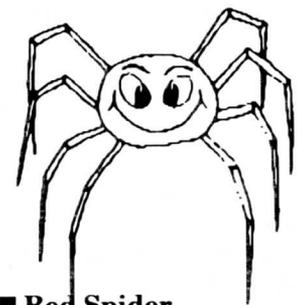
Beaky McKee is heading for the yard one damp winter's evening, when he passes a heavily wrapped-up Séamas Mullan coming in.

"Is it still raining, Séamas?" asks Beaky, reaching for his woolly hat.

"Eh... I'm not sure."

"But you were out there a minute ago."

"Aye," replies Séamas, deady seriously. "But I was walking in the other yard."



■ Red Spider  
(Long Kesh)

# QUOTES

"The decision to succumb to the threat of violence from the protesters at Drumcree, who had been allowed to replenish their numbers throughout the stand-off and bring a stolen fortified vehicle to their aid; the use of force against peaceful demonstrators on Garvaghy Road; the huge usage of plastic bullets and the difference in the numbers fired against unionist and nationalist protesters... The failure to intervene when loyalist protesters closed the international airport and major thoroughfares across Northern Ireland; the way in which the police engaged in the indiscriminate use of plastic bullets in Derry/Londonderry resulting in hundreds of injuries and the death of Dermot McShane (run over by a British army Saxon vehicle), have all contributed to significant sections of Northern Ireland society questioning whether the state and its agencies are able or willing to give concrete expression to the rule of law."

- Excerpt from *The Misrule of Law*, a 100 page report produced by the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) on the policing of protests and parades in the Six Counties. 28 October 1996.

"I support the union and I support the loyalists who want to maintain the union."

- RUC man, quoted in University of Ulster Ph.D. student Graham Ellison's study of the RUC.

"It's probably better to keep your head down."

- Catholic RUC man's survival tactics, quote in the same study.

"If you can't be neutral, try to be partisan in a balanced kind of way."

- Cartoon by Ian Knox relating to the appointment of Ronnie Flanagan as the new RUC Chief Constable. *Irish News*, 4 November 1996

"Next time you're about to pump

six bullets into somebody's face make sure they're warm and comfy... That way history will remember you fondly as caring, polite and an all round good egg... Ruth Dudley Edwards, historian, newspaper columnist and etiquette expert has lobbed a fresh revisionist hand grenade at the Michael Collins film... Contrary to Neil Jordan's Provo-loving depiction of the maltreated leaders of the 1916 Rising, she says, the imprisoned republicans were given the full five-star Kilmainham hospitality. The British hosts were sweethearts. Patrick Pearse and his chums tripped the light fantastic — electric blanket, mini-bar, videos, pizza, Sky movies, you name it, they had it. James Connolly was given a cushion for his chair. But at no stage are Ruth's readers informed that the rebels were, you know, shot."

- A response to Ruth Dudley Edwards' criticism of the film *Michael Collins* that it exaggerates British ill-treatment of the captured leaders of the 1916 Rising. Rory Carroll, *In Black and White*, *Irish News*, 7 November 1996.

"Atrocious".

- Dublin Labour TD, Joe Costello, describing the conditions endured by republican POWs in England, a number of whom were severely beaten recently. *Irish News*, 4 November 1996.

"The unionist people are hiding something from themselves. They're hiding their Irishness."

- Writer Jennifer Johnston, BBC1's *The Interview*, 6 November 1996.

"The resolution of the conflict demands an inclusive negotiated settlement. This is not possible unless and until the British government faces up to its responsibilities."

- IRA statement to the media, 8 October 1996.

"... those who contend that 'more security' is the right course have not bothered to read the lessons of the last quarter-century."

- *Church of Ireland Gazette*, October 1996.

"There were many meetings in the past, when the war was on, between paramilitarism and constitutional (sic) unionism."

- David Ervine, PUP leader and former UVF man, exposing the hypocrisy of the larger unionist parties. *Irish News*, 9 August 1996.

"There has been no condemnation of the shooting from any British politician. Tony Blair has concentrated instead on threatening Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn with expulsion for proposing to meet Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams in the House of Commons. Never mind that Gerry Adams was a Member of the Commons for ten years, elected by the people of West Belfast. Who is ignoring the democratic process there, Mr Blair? But then our rulers, whether Tory or Labour, have a selective approach to democracy and it has always been in particularly short supply in relation to Ireland."

- Sarah Bond commenting on the shooting dead of an unarmed IRA Volunteer (Diarmuid O'Neill) by British police in London and the reaction by the British Labour Party Leader to Gerry Adams proposed book launch at Westminster. *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* October/November 1996.

"What would you say if I told you Albert Reynolds was prime minister of Ireland?"

"Nah, that's Gerry Adams, innit?"  
- Joe Duffy questions a (possibly prophetic?) passer-by on the streets of London. RTE Radio's *Playback* programme, November 1996.

## DRAMA REVIEW

A Night in November  
by Marie Jones Video by  
Dubbeljoint Media  
Productions

**D**ubbeljoint's A Night in November quickly became a classic when it was first performed two years ago. It was widely acclaimed for the incisive writing of Marie Jones and the powerful performance of its sole actor, Dan Gordon. All this hype could make one a little cynical. However we in the H-Blocks were in no position to judge for ourselves, not being able to catch one of the numerous performances around Ireland.

Our frustration was compounded when we heard that the play had finished its long run and that Dan Gordon had parted company with Dubbeljoint. Meanwhile we concentrated on our own modest efforts at drama. Then out of the blue we heard that a video of the play was on its way to us and, after a week at the jail censors (obviously they enjoyed it), the video was with us and ready for viewing. Lights out, video in, press play.

We were not disappointed.

From the outset Dan Gordon's screen presence silenced the packed and darkened canteen as he introduced us to Kenneth McAllister, the failed dole clerk with middle-class pretensions and a wife paralysed with snobbery. For those not familiar with the story-line, it concerns Kenneth's disaffection with his life and growing alienation from his family and community. This culminates in a cathartic experience at the infamous soccer match at Windsor Park in November 1993 when the crowd's raw and lusty sectarianism — in particular their glorification of the Greysteele massacre — reveals to Kenneth the awful nature of the society in which he lives. He begins to question, then reject not just sectarianism but the sterility of his marriage and his daily existence; and ends up travelling to the USA to support Jack Charlton and his team.

Yet the play is not simply a pious statement against sectarianism. Essentially it is about the life of one man and covers the huge range of material which any life comprises — class, family, culture, alienation from

modern urban life. In this sense the play escapes the parochialism of so much "Troubles" drama and addresses universal themes with a local context. Thus Marie Jones' script contains a wealth of gems both about Belfast life in particular and human nature in general. The power of her writing is such that it cuts straight to the heart of the matter, eloquently expressing ideas which most of us vaguely think but can only half-explain. The characterisation and dialogue are impeccable, portraying familiar characters with a twist of originality that make them breathing human beings rather than stereotypes. The pacing is superb; and humour and tragedy are expertly intertwined to lift the play from worthiness to sparkling vitality. No punches are pulled, no discomfiting issues hedged. This is the original rollercoaster of ideas and emotions.

If the writing is flawless, what of Dan Gordon's acting? It has been described as a "tour de force" but that is an understatement. His energy is tremendous as he holds the audience spellbound for two hours, slipping effortlessly

from one character to another, bringing each to colourful life. Gordon's performance is rich in mannerisms, facial expressions and overall body language which, while familiar, are not hackneyed. His timing (particularly of the comic material) and delivery of a complex script is flawless. If there is one weakness, it might be in his portrayal of Kenneth's wife who at times comes across as a Jimmy Young character. But it is the passion and raw emotion that he puts into the main character of Kenneth McAllister that makes his performance breathtaking.

Many in our audience were amazed that one person could portray such a range of emotions with so much conviction. At one point a tear-drop appears at the corner of his eye and falls silently to the floor. This is real acting, body and soul.

By the end both our audience in H7 and the one on video were visibly shattered by the experience. But we were also stimulated by the razor-like insights into the society we live in. It would be easy to feel superior to the stupid, smug, sectarian bigots in the play, but how many of us could, like Kenneth, leap the social and cultural chasm from a comfortable if soulless existence to a new and uncertain beginning?

However, beyond all the particular insights and tremendous entertainment the importance of this play is that Maire Jones has shown it is still possible to make an original, thought-provoking statement on the divisions in Irish society without being sucked into the intellectual quagmire of the supposed need to "balance" or the stock characters of Graham Reid and the BBC.

A new standard has been set for Irish drama. Who will rise to it?

■ By Micheal  
Mac Giolla Ghunna

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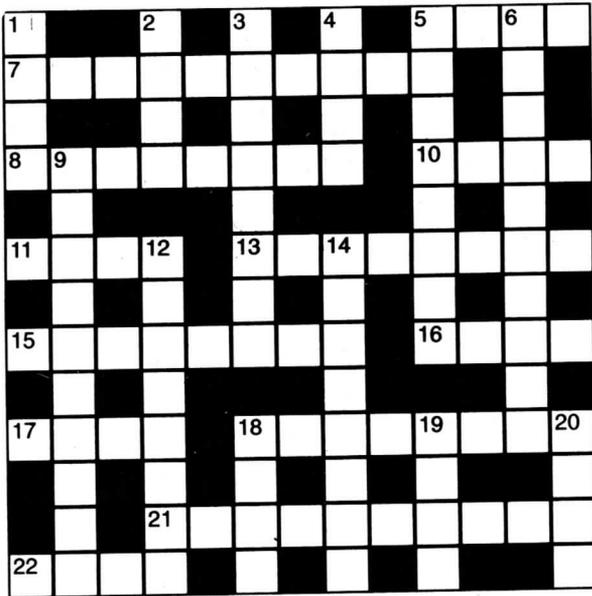
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# CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**

- 5. Friend, supporter (4)
- 7. Office seeker, public servant (10)
- 8. Victim of government-sanctioned arrest (8)
- 10. Pitch your tent and do this (4)
- 11. Inflict injury with knife (4)
- 13. Took off, like a horse (8)
- 15. Old-fashioned male received vote of confidence (8)
- 16. The Orient, where the sun rises (4)
- 17. Enticement, used to track prey (4)
- 18. Turn insect over to reveal uncaring attitude (8)
- 21. Burned to stop bleeding (10)
- 22. Learn to crawl before doing this (4)

**DOWN**

- 1. Potato (slang) (4)
- 2. This stamp permits travel (4)
- 3. 12 o'clock pm (8)
- 4. Dreadful, ghastly (4)
- 5. Tale, parable (8)
- 6. Ulster big fellow who acts the part (4, 6)
- 9. Mercy killing of someone terminally ill (10)
- 12. Poor produce or pedigree (3, 5)
- 14. 19th century machine saboteurs (8)
- 18. Smoke-duct in a chimney (4)
- 19. Fall short of one's peak by remaining demure (4)
- 20. This ebbs high and low (4)

**ANSWERS:**

ACROSS: 5. Ally; 7. Politician; 8. Detainee; 10. Camp; 11. Stab; 13. Galliped; 15. Mandated; 16. East; 17. Bait; 18. Flippancy; 21. Cauterized; 22. Walk.  
 DOWN: 1. Spud; 2. Visa; 3. Midnight; 4. Dire; 5. Anecdote; 6. Liam Neeson; 9. Euthanasia; 12. Bad Stock; 14. Luddites; 18. Fine; 19. Prim; 20. Tide.

# Holocaust Night

Life ...

Gone.

My name, my family, my home, my hope,  
my all

Gone.

Naked I stand on a carpet of snow  
speckled evil,  
longing for my riches of rags and hug my  
pathetic,  
rigor mortis-like body.

No tears do I shed from my salt-encrusted,  
staring eyes,  
emptied by my fate,  
the tears trickling inwards to drown my  
frantic heart.

Limitless petrifying thoughts cramp my  
parched throat,  
which gulps in greedily the breath of life  
like a fish in a dried-up stream.

I fear not death nor what it brings  
from these diligent, gentile taker of life,  
these guardian spirits of genocidal  
thoughts,  
brow-beaten by their own existence with  
such blindness of self-belief.

How I bleed

a tidal wave of pain for once coyish infants  
torn from parents' despairing grasp;  
their screams keep this tired ebony night  
awake;  
so pure and sweet, their minds filled with  
choking fear.

God be good

to these terrified angels;  
immortal are their smiles.

Drip not these tears of pain on this barking  
Holocaust Night.

■ By Paul McCullough

Long Kesh POWs Drama Group  
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