

# **Jail Journal**

Published by the Prisoners Rights Organisation

## **CONTENTS:**

# **-THE WOMEN'S PRISON**

**-a prisoner looks at crime  
-abuse of  
offences against the state act**

VOL.1, NO.2

PRICE 10p

# Editorial

The newspaper exposure of the prisons lacked one important thing: an expression of the prisoners' point of view.

Jail Journal will make up for that. It is written mostly by prisoners and ex-prisoners. Some of the articles had to be smuggled out of jail at the risk of punishment.

The Journal will have to be smuggled back in, as it is banned in every prison in Ireland. So much for Civil Rights!

The Minister has hinted that we are a front for Sinn Fein. This is not so. The Prisoners Rights Organisation is non-political. We welcome members of any part or none, if they are ready to work and fight for prisoners' rights. Let Mr. Cooney answer our arguments if he can, and not try to silence us with lies.

We welcome such reforms as have been promised, though it is far from clear just what concrete measures will be taken.

Why is it that the first concert of the Minister is to silence all critics, inside and outside the prisons? The Sunday World which had printed some of the facts about prisons was not allowed on the newspaper tour. If Mr. Cooney is so keen on reform, why is he so touchy? Why is he so determined that the prisoners will not form their own Union?

He has silenced the Union for the moment by isolating the leaders, but a new leadership will arise, and a close and critical eye will be kept on future prison progress.

# FACTS AND FIGURES

One of the main obstacles operating against change in the penal system is the ignorance of the Public on this issue. Its not entirely their fault. Even the most interested person would find it difficult to get any information. The place where this information is contained is in the Dept. of Justice and they seem reluctant to part with it to journalists, researchers and ordinary citizens. The Prison Report was last published in 1970 and as yet there is no sign of the 1971 report. Their excuse is, that there are administrative problems which I'm sure there are, but would one not be presumptive in assuming that the Dept. have something to hide. Nevertheless we can see from the limited information at hand the sorry state of Irish Prisons.

Irish penal institutions are old they were built for a different age. Mountjoy was constructed in 1850, Portlaoise in the 1830's but a new wing was added in the 1900's. The first 'model' prison built in these islands was in 1812 at Millbank. Built at a time when the authorities were afraid to have conditions too good in any institution because the "humbler classes" might all want to avail of these facilities. It seems that no significant change has occurred in prison architecture since that time, Spike Island, Cork, or Arbour Hill are similar in design to all the other ancient penal institutions now existing. These institutions were built at a time when the chief purpose was to deter the 'criminal' but to-day we are told by the Dept that 'rehabilitation' is the chief purpose of the system.

The people in custody are mainly from urban working class areas. As Mr. Tommy Beirne wrote in a letter to a daily paper recently.

"His (referring to the prisoners) outlook on life will be conditioned by the environment in which he was brought up and lives in, which is one of endemic unemployment, bad housing, and poverty generally. As a result of these conditions crims such as robbery and assaults comes as naturally to him as making money to other people . . . The majority of prisoners are received into custody from the District Court. A limited survey carried out in these courts earlier this year by members of LSUA (Law Students Union for Action at UCD) found that very few people before these tribunals were legally represented. Of course we are equal before the Law or so we are led to believe. 82% of prisoners are serving short terms of sentence. In 1960 there were 460 prisoners in custody. By 1973 this figure has risen 150% to approx. 1,100 prisoners. Between 1960 and 1970 there has been a 60% rate of recidivism (people who are imprisoned more than once). Overcrowding is now a problem. It is estimated that 2 out of 3 prisoners were in prison before and that 1 out of 3 were in prison more than 5 times before.

There are roughly employed in the prison service 600 prison officers. They are subjected to military type discipline. They are bound by the Official Secrets Act. Pre-service training is non-existent although their Association (IPOA) have been demanding such for years now. The only method of assessing a potential officers suitability, is his physical prowess and his ability to keep 'Law and Order' within the prison. They are simply custodians and 'turnkeys'. In the 1947

'Statutory Rules and Orders' governing the system it states the following . . .

- '114 (1) An officer shall not have any familiarity on the part of a prisoner towards himself or any other officer or servant of the prison . . .
- (2) An officer shall not speak to a prisoner unnecessarily nor shall he by word, demeanour, or gesture do anything which may tend to irritate any prisoner

How one may ask, can harmony between inmates and officers be maintained with rules such as the above? The P.O.'s have to work compulsory overtime. Nevertheless, their pay is quite good. Especially when compared to the meagre pay a prisoner may receive i.e. 10p a day and then only if his conduct is determined good by the authorities.

Another amazing feature of the system is that of the Visiting Committee. They are appointed by the Minister for Justice. They are usually businessmen and other 'respectable members' of the community. They need not have any specialist skills in dealing with people and are supposed to be independent witnesses to keep the Minister informed of the situation in the prisons. They are governed by an Act of 1925. At a later stage in this magazine series we shall go into greater detail about their various powers and functions and some of our members will have hair-raising stories to tell about them.

Mr. O'Malley, as Minister for Justice had this to say about Visiting Committees . . .

"I do not know what would be achieved by having professionals of the type suggested on a

committee. It is far better and more effective to get people who give their time, particularly business people who, perhaps can provide employment themselves for some prisoners or can persuade their business friends to do so. This is the type of person who is particularly needed if he is prepared to sacrifice his time in this great charitable work . . ."

(Maybe all those ex-prisoners who have obtained work in this way would inform the ED. COMM. for inclusion in the next issue).

Investment in prisons would give an idea of the priority it holds in the Govt. eyes. This year it has doubled to over four million pounds or so. This is at least £3,500 per prisoner. In 1960 the expenditure was 220,000. One can guess that the recent protests in the prison had something to do with this increased expenditure but wages take up quite an amount of this. It has been estimated that the expenditure in 1922 is the same proportionally to that of the amount of the Public service expenditure in 1972.

It is quite obvious to us involved in the prison campaign that an amount of work will have to be done before a satisfactory outcome will be reached. To test the extent of the general public's ignorance on this issue, one could try a simple test, ask someone you know "How many prisoners are there in the Republic of Ireland". You will be amazed with the answers. The fight is only beginning. A quotation we should remember in struggling for a humane prison system is that of Dostoevski . . .

**"THE DEGREE OF CIVILIZATION IN A SOCIETY CAN BE JUDGED BY ENTERING ITS PRISONS".**

---

# HOW TO WIN FRIENDS

*"I am doing five years. Recently five men got out of their cells one night, only to be caught trying to get over the prison walls. Hacksaw blades were used in the attempted escape. The blades were never traces. But an interesting case arose about those blades. A man was here from Limerick. His wife was ill and he was feeling mentally upset. Naturally he wanted to be near his wife. I hid two blades and told him to tell the Governor he would get the blades for him. But he was afraid of me and what I might do to him. He told the Governor where the blades were and the same day at 8.30 p.m. he was sent to Limerick Jail. One literally has to become a stooge and informer to get any of the fringe benefits that are available to prisoners in this living hell. I, Richard Power, President of the PPU am willing to testify before any court or impartial body of members of the public, and prove that what I have said is true. Not only have I prisoners as witnesses (those who took part in the escape) and who would have been charge with it, but the Governor himself, who is the key witness."*

# PORTLAOISE PRISON

*In the last issue the writer wrote of his experiences in Dainean reformatory. The following is an account of his story in Portlaoise Prison.*

I was transferred from Mountjoy prison to Portlaoise in January 1966. I admit I was not a model prisoner, but if you are treated like a dog you react like one. But I resented this transfer very much as my wife would not have the money to travel from Dublin to Portlaoise. On my arrival I was greeted with the words "remember you are in Portlaoise and we tame lions here". The next morning we were out of our cells at 7 o'clock, myself and a coloured man from Manchester. We were told we were to go on the turf party as you had to work from 7 o'clock to 8 o'clock before you got your tea and eight ounces of bread. It was January and it was snowing when we went out to bring the turf to the broiler house. In Portlaoise there is barbed wire around the prison about three feet from the wall, and with the snow on the wire the coloured man says "we're in a concentration camp. In Portlaoise you are not allowed a mirror knife or fork. There is nothing there for a man, you only get one hours exercise a day and the yard is so small the lads would be on one another's shoulders. At recreation in the night from 6 o'clock to 7.20 in the hall you have to sit four to a table and can not move around. If you want to go to the jacks you put your hands up to ask the screws permission. You must leave your shoes outside your

cell. All you are allowed is two reading books a week and if you are caught swopping the books with another prisoner you are put on report and could be given bread and water or lose remission. If you refused to go to Mass on Sunday you received the same.

Some of the prison screws would aggravate and bully you. I started to get terrible depressed after two months and very bitter. I went to the doctor for sleeping tablets and he gave me Librium for my nerves. I had a bit of a row with another man, which resulted in me being brought in front of the governor. In the office he called me a bony and a black-guard and I was sentenced to 3 days number 1, 14 days number 2, and 8 days loss of remission and no smoking for 21 days. I would like to explain what number 1 and number 2 diet is. Number 1 is bread and water for breakfast, dinner and tea. Number 2 is water and a plate of porridge in the morning, two spuds a slice of bread and water for dinner and for tea bread and water. Well, I was brought over to the digger its a cell with a rubber table, a rubber stool and a wooden bed. The ceiling is roughly 14-15 feet high.

As I said I was very bad with my nerves and depression, which the doctor knew very well and could have stopped me being in solitary confinement. But he turned a blind eye. A man hung himself in Mountjoy prison a few weeks ago over the same blind eye tactics. Well, after my confinement was over I was twice as bad as I was going into solitary. I just wanted to be on my own away from the screws, away from their sneering, aggravating and sarcastic remarks.

One day in May 1966 I was transferred back to the hospital wing in Mountjoy prison. The

following month I was certified insane and sent to Dundrum lunatic asylum. I had six months left to go out of 21 months and I finished my sentence in Dundrum.

---

## REFORM?

A young man, who was sentenced to four years imprisonment in the Special Criminal Court last year, applied recently to the Department of Justice for permission to have a tape recorder and microphone in his cell. This conviction was his first and he should not have been sent to the maximum security prison at Portlaoise as a first offender.

However he was. His young wife and baby visited him there weekly. He is a joiner by trade but in Portlaoise he was given menial tasks and his request for the tape recorder was an attempt on his part to further his musical education and to stop him literally going round the bend. He received a curt note of refusal.

Another phase of Mr. Cooney's programme of prison reform!

Extract from Annual Report of Visiting Committee for 1970 on Mountjoy Prison — (NB: No report has been made available since 1970)

*"It was noticeable that a very large percentage of those committed during the year were previously patients in either general or mental hospitals for every conceivable complaint. Consequently the onus falls on the Medical Officer to investigate these cases, and follow up treatment as required".*

# THE WOMENS PRISON

## THE FACTS OF THE HORROR

There is rarely more than 40 women prisoners at any given time in Mountjoy and Limerick prisons. This figure is for the adult prisons but of course many girls between 14 and 18 are imprisoned in the adult female prison, whatever the Childrens Act may stipulate to the contrary. With such a small number of female prisoners to cater for it would be natural to imagine that their rehabilitation would be a comparatively easy job. This is not so for the simple reason that their rehabilitation is not even attempted. A woman is a second-class citizen in Ireland generally, in prison this discrimination is intensified. Women get no exercise at all while in prison. Quite recently they were granted the vast privilege of an hour walking up and down a gravel path but they cannot play games, have a football or

basketball or simply just run about to keep themselves warm. This cannot be termed exercise even in the sense intended in the Prisons Act 1947.

The work that women perform within the prison does not and is not intended to fit them for gainful employment on release. There is not the slightest pretence made that it does. Illiterate women prisoners get no education, at least half of all women prisoners cannot read even the peurile books provided in the library. They look at comic books or simply sit and smoke, staring at the walls and breaking out into odd crying fits to break the monotony. Recreation for women consists of playing interminable games of cards with the screws. Of course if you have relatives with enough time and money you can have handcrafts sent in but no one will show you how to do them or care if you would like to have some but have no one to send them in to you. Women spend 15¼ hours per day locked in their cells, if they have no religion they spend 17¼ hours locked up on Sundays. Since the Christian nature of our State precludes working on Sundays, this day is the most depressing of the whole week. Playing cards with screws palls at the best of times but to have to spend 7 hours at it is a particularly refined form of torture.

Women prisoners are not allowed to have pencils or pens. I suppose it must be to prevent them smuggling out incriminating notes or something, but it also effectively prevents the more literate from doing crossword puzzles, playing any game which involves scores or just writing down their thoughts. I have already referred to the abysmally low selection of books available to women. Unless you have relatives or friends with time and money to get you books you are condemned to an unvaried diet of Mills and Boon and the Bible.

At some stage in the formation of

our prison system someone came to the conclusion that the highest form of punishment was simple, uncomplicated boredom. Put people in behind walls and bars and given them nothing to do which will tire their bodies and stimulate minds, add to this a diet which is calculated to debilitate the physical condition, an atmosphere of silence and the minimum of facilities for physical cleanliness and you have the perfect torture machine. That is the Irish prison system for women.

To suggest as Mr. Cooney does, that the building of a new £2 million prison for women at Kilbarrack will solve all these problems, is to ignore the facts. Even within the restricted space available to the female prison at present, many significant improvements could be made. What is missing is not the wherewithal but the will. Basically the authorities feel that what prisoners need is punishment.

Anything that they might enjoy such as creative demanding work or pleasant exercise or educational classes must be outside the rights of prisoners. It is not coincidental that the womens prison resembles the more depressing type of convent. The Christian ethic of crime and punishment is accepted in both establishments.

People who, from the comfort of their snug homes and the security of their family relationships, assert that our organisation is looking for "Grade A hotels for criminals", should be forced to spend just one day in prison. They would then realise that what we seek for prisoners is simple humanity. We ask that they be granted that which nine tenths of them have been denied all their lives — facilities for living a decent life to the fullest extent of their capabilities. Education, medical care, gainful occupation, hygiene facilities, all these are denied to our prisoners. Rehabilitation to our prison authorities means that you are "soft on criminals". They will live to change their minds but in the meantime what lives are being destroyed?

A  
PR  
LO  
CR

Imag  
lives  
to ste  
from  
he is  
sent t  
right  
as tw  
have  
will c  
of an  
Th  
who  
huma  
from  
not h  
enoug  
which  
camp  
day, a  
day —  
In p  
batter  
he dar  
peace  
whats  
bread  
norma  
a subv  
who a  
conce

# A PRISONER LOOKS AT CRIME

Imagine, if you can, the man who lives in the slums, and who is forced to steal to keep his wife and children from actual destitution. Eventually he is arrested, charged, convicted and sent to prison. In prison he quite rightly sees himself as innocent, just as two starving men in a cage who have devoured a third to remain alive, will consider themselves innocent of any crime.

This man, the average prisoner, who must steal to have any kind of human existence, is now separated from his wife and his family. It is not his fault that he was unfortunate enough to be born into a society which is split into two irreconcilable camps. The rich who do nothing all day, and the poor who work all day — if they can get work.

In prison, like the hen on the battery farm, he has no rights. Should he dare, demand even in the most peaceful fashion, any rights whatsoever, he is beaten up, put on bread and water, refused his normal miserable concessions, called a subversive, a thug; fellow prisoners who are promised and given various concessions such as time off, will

beat him up; he is subjected to every kind of petty intimidation, and all the forces and machinery of an intractable state is geared up to destroy him, mentally and physically.

Whether he is one who demands rights or whether he is one who out of fear demands nothing, is irrelevant. Either way he is oppressed to a savage degree. He cannot have a private conversation with his wife because every word is recorded by a machine in a uniform, who sits listening beside him. If he is serving a sentence of a number of years, no personal problem which will inevitably rise concerning his marriage can be solved. If cannot be even discussed because the machine is going to hear about it and tell his friends, and the person who was able to overcome the intimidation of the listening machines is not aware that all the other machines know of his most intimate problems. Only a prisoner could imagine the fierce tempests of rage, alternating between whirlwinds of insufferable confusion and despair, which this senseless savagery generates in the fathomless void of a man's brain.

One day for instance he picks up the paper and reads a remark by Cooney saying that all the trouble in the prisons is caused by a ruthless minority of thugs who are serving long sentences, and have nothing to lose. Nothing to lose! Maybe a quarter of his miserable life. The ridiculeness of such rubbish causes an atomic explosion in the mind. He is left speechless, shocked, horrified and enraged. Perhaps temporarily insane.

Some day he is tossed out of this nightmare. If he came in illiterate, he goes out illiterate. He goes out penniless. He goes out with even less chance of getting a job than



when he came in. Now he has a prison record. His marriage is probably broken. His mind is warped; if that is the correct term for a man who seeks any kind of aimless revenge against the society which has tortured and destroyed him. He intends to put into practice all he has learned in prison. Hate and many tips in criminology. In his brain he has the vow: "I will not be back". Branded, this makes him very dangerous. Now he may even murder if it means avoiding arrest. Imagine such a person and you can imagine the average prisoner on release.

That is not beyond the realms of imagination. What is, is the kind of people who make lucrative careers out of such a nightmare.

To the prisoner these people are not beings. They are things. Bristling things, without shape, which ooze and slither from the slimiest caverns of the darkest dreams in a mind of moving confusion. Some creature which grunts, hiccups, belches and croaks in an appalling subterranean language about rules and rule and rules and rules . . .

This is how he sees these people and all they represent on release. And why should he not? Why should he not have his long awaited revenge? Why should he not go to back and rob the very same house he has robbed before? Only on the second occasion he may mangle the owner into an unrecognisable pulp with an iron bar. So what! Has he not been trained to be a savage? Would it not be a poor mark of respect to those who have given years of their lives training him, if he was to go out and act civilised? Sure as we have just explained, it would be against all nature.

This is an enlightened age. Everybody nowadays knows that all it takes to rehabilitate all

prisoners (except the mentally insane who should not be in prison) is a good job which they enjoy. Everybody knows that the only people who commit crime for kicks, as distinct from necessary crime, are rich men's sons who are bored with banquets, balls and pouring wine over each other. And it is only this kind of crime which deserves punishment. The man who steals rather than starve is not a criminal at all. He is just the product of the environment he was born in to through no fault of his own, naturally.

Instant rehabilitation can be achieved therefore by a stroke of Cooney's pen as he is well aware. It is only a simple matter of setting up a Government controlled agency which will ensure that all prisoners receive training and are subsequently employed in the kind of work they prefer best. This is the short term solution.

Most people would agree however that to eliminate crime itself, its sources must be the long term objective. Such an achievement is, of course, impossible under capitalism; the unplanned, winner take all merry-go-round of economic savagery. To eliminate crime is to eliminate capitalism for both are synonymous in any civilised person's mind.

Capitalism is a system of legalised and organised crime. Every capitalist must be nothing but an unscrupulous economic savage. He has no choice in the matter because he is determined by the external conditions, the economic laws beyond his control, and like the wolf-child conditioned by them. If he tries to break out of this conditioning, tries to change his nature, he quickly goes bankrupt and becomes something more than a capitalist.

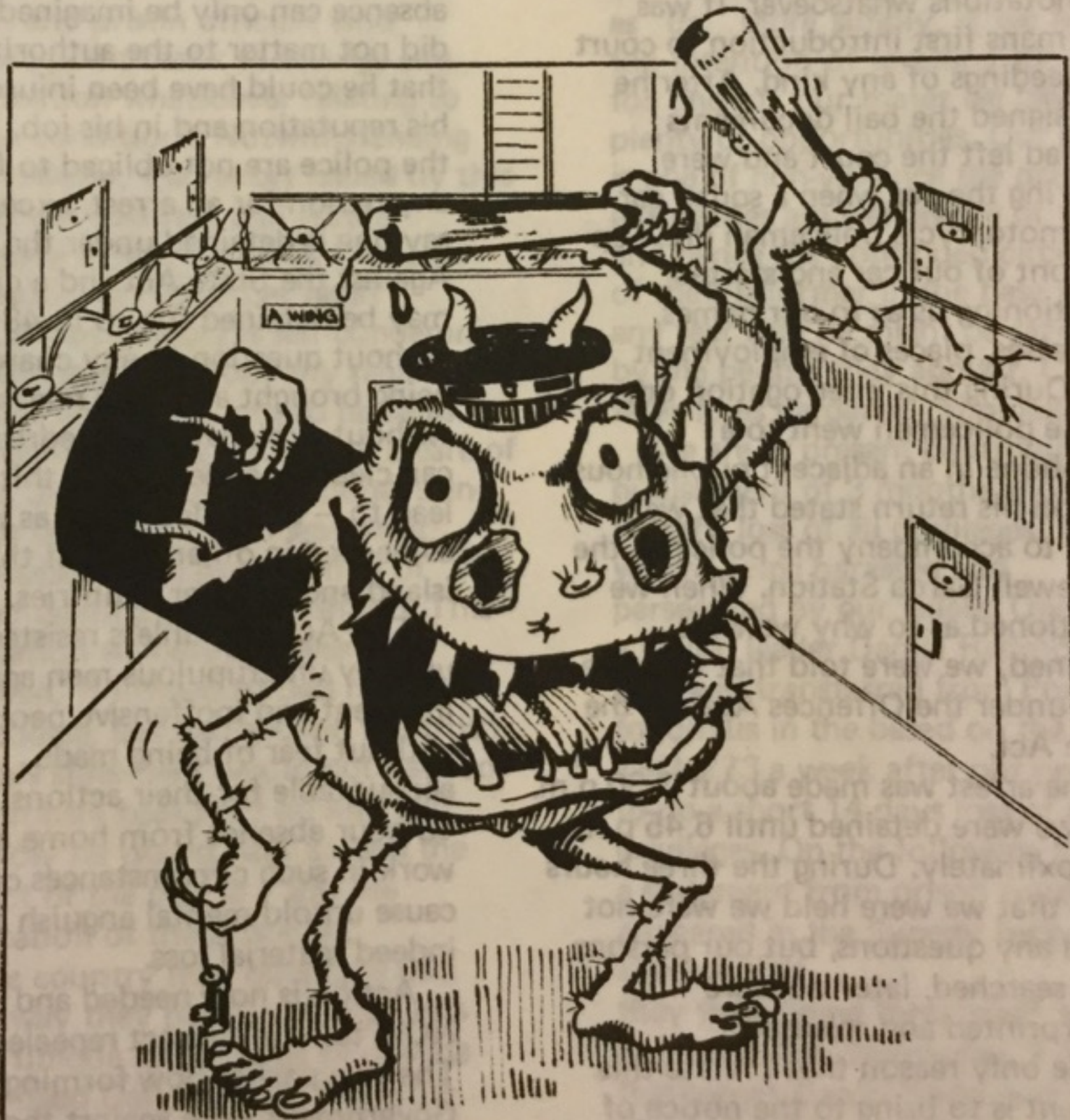
The long term solution is therefore the abolition of capitalism, the

abolition of private enterprise and the establishment of socialism. A Socialist Government which will set about as its task a carefully planned socialised economy under public control, whose main purpose of production will be to satisfy the needs of society and ensure that the fruits of the labour of society is appreciated by society and not by a clique of cut-throat idlers and parasites.

This is the first step towards a classless society in which economic crime would not only be non-existent but an impossibility, because the material conditions necessary for its existence would not themselves exist. Such a step can only be taken by a united and class conscious working class.

ALL ARTICLES AND COMMENTS  
TO THE EDITOR  
19 UPR. BEECHWOOD AVE.,  
DUBLIN 6.

MONTHLY MEETINGS OF  
THE P. R. O.  
ON THE FIRST THURSDAY  
OF EVERY MONTH  
IN LIBERTY HALL  
NEXT MEETING -  
THURSD.  
IN ROOM 408  
ALL ARE WELCOME



COME OFF THE WIRE CHAPS . WE'RE ALL HUMAN BEINGS  
THERE WILL BE NO BRUTALITY!

# ABUSE OF OFFENCES AGAINST THE STATE ACT

On Tuesday the 13th November, three friends and myself were at the District Court at the hearing of a case involving a mutual friend. One of our party was there as bailman for the defendant in the case which was for larceny, and had no political connotations whatsoever. It was this mans first introduction to court proceedings of any kind. After he had signed the bail documents we had left the court and were entering the car when a squad car and motorcycle policeman drew up in front of our car and started questioning us as to our names, addresses, places of employment etc. During this interrogation one of the policemen went to a telephone in an adjacent public house and on his return stated that we were to accompany the police to the Bridewell Garda Station. When we questioned as to why we were detained, we were told that we were held under the Offences Against the State Act.

The arrest was made about 3.30 p.m. and we were detained until 6.45 p.m. approximately. During the three hours or so that we were held we were not asked any questions, but our persons were searched, later we were fingerprinted and released.

The only reason that I relate this incident is to bring to the notice of the Irish public the way in which this unwarranted piece of legislation can be abused by the gardai. Here

were four people about their lawful and in this case legal business, none of whom have or ever did have any political affiliations whatsoever, arrested and detained for 3 hours without pretext under an Act that should never have been passed and the repeal of which is long overdue.

The action of the police in this instance was a blatant abuse of their power which cannot and should not be tolerated. No consideration was given to the feelings or circumstances of the persons involved. The plight of one of our party detained was indeed serious. He had an hours leave from work to act as bailman for a friend so his embarrassment and confusion in explaining his four hour absence can only be imagined. It did not matter to the authorities that he could have been injured in his reputation and in his job. You see the police are not obliged to give any reason for an arrest, except to say one is detained under the Offences Against the State Act and a citizen may be detained for up to 48 hours without question or any charge being brought and then released without explanation or redress. It can clearly be seen where this can lead to – unbridled abuse as is evidenced in other parts of this island and in other countries.

This Act can, unless resisted, be used by unscrupulous men against innocent and inoffensive people, without fear of being made accountable for their actions. A 48 hour absence from home and/or work in such circumstances can cause untold mental anguish and indeed material loss.

Action is now needed and I mean NOW to have this act repealed. The two parties now forming the Government were against the passing of the act in the first instance. What are they doing now about its repeal?

# PRISON UNION STATEMENT

It must be now patently clear that Mr. Cooneys investigation, conducted at first hand into conditions prevailing in all Irish jails, was a farce. This view receives corroboration from a non-involved and independent group namely the Prison Study Group. Even though this group were severely handicapped in the investigation into the penal system by department chiefs and prison officials who refused point blank to divulge any information whatsoever relating to prison conditions. Notwithstanding this however, the report issued by this group was accurate and factual summary of the Hellholes that pass as prisons. On the other hand Mr. Cooneys report is self-condemning and was made without any regard to the fact and we are not so naive as to imagine that he is not well aware of them. Shortly after Mr. Cooneys entrance to office, union leaders at Portlaoise Prison accused him of contemplating a whitewash job. This accusation we now feel was well founded. If instead he had not taken this course, but had spoken the truth, first his statement would not have so disastrously backfired on him and secondly he would have earned the respect of the country and the admiration of the prisoners.

The country may now take him what way they please, his type was never unique in the Dept of Justice nor indeed Dail Eireann. Speaking for ourselves we will regard him with the contempt he deserves. It was noted by us that he again called us bullies or to be more precise

that our method of recruiting union members was by bullying. In the past he has described us as razor gangs and desperados of every description. Perhaps he can reply to this simple question; Union leaders and shopstewards numbering thirteen are now confined in the base of Mountjoy prison. There is a prisoner in the basement with us, he is on protection for informing, the worst crime that an inmate can commit in prison and makes him fair game for all. Nevertheless the authorities at Mountjoy prison have no reservation or worries for his continued safety in that he walks and talks, in the same confined space as us. More simply, if we had ever the intention of levelling the score for one of our mates we have had plenty of opportunities. Our policy is one of non-violence the prison authorities are well aware of that and hence the continued circulation of their informer in the base without any fear that he might be razored, by the people they and Mr. Cooney refer to as hardened criminals etc.

We are at present continuing our punishment of 3 months and 2 months loss of all privileges. In reality we are being harassed and persecuted by our jailers. One man a Union leader Daniel Redmond who was transferred from Portlaoise to join us in the based on the 13/10/73 a week after our protest to do a short 14 days loss of all privileges. On the following Sunday a statement from prison warders appeared in the Sunday Independent alleging that they were being threatened with knives on the Wednesday. Following this report Daniel Redmond was charged in front of the Governor with the allegations that appeared in the Independent. The first Redmond knew of these incidents was when

he read the cutting from the paper. He remarked this to the governor and stated that he did not believe he was even in the prison when these so called offences were supposed to have happened. He also drew the governors attention to the fact that prisoners in the base were not allowed to have knives or indeed any cutlery in their cell. The long and the short of this "stick-up" resulted in him not being allowed out of the base when his punishment was finished in case he organised a demonstration.

To give the whole sordid affair the appearance of legality and for the record, the governor found him guilty on all counts and sentenced him to three months deprived of all privileges and 14 days remission. Relevant here is the fact that the prison book states that when a prisoner commits an offences he should be placed on report the next day. It is four weeks now since we had exercise. The governore refused to let us out unless we submit ourselves to handcuffs — this we will not do as we feel it is totally unnecessary.

We are still being deprives of visits, letters, radios and are locked in our cells 20 hours per day. Already some of us are suffering headaches from being exposed to artificial lighting and no fresh air. In our dungeon there is two toilets, one for slops and the other has to cater for 40 people, 18 prisoners and 22 warders. This sad state of affairs should be inspected by a health inspector. The prison doctor is not interested.

---

**JOIN THE P.R.O.  
NOW!!**

# REPLY TO PRISON OFFICERS

*The following article was sent to the Sunday Independent on November 1st but unfortunately it was not printed.*

With reference to a report which featured in the Sunday Independent on the 21/10/73 head Prison Officers Lives of Fear by Michael Brophy a staff report with Independent Newspapers, we the leaders of the Portlaoise Prisoners Union and Mountjoy Prisoners Union wish to be given equal coverage in the next edition of the said newspaper to make our reply to combat the vicious, libellous and untruthful attack levelled against us directly and by way of calculated comments by anonymous Prison warders operating at Mountjoy Prison. Firstly with regard to a paragraph headed "fear", from the text of this information it implies that it is in fact a hypothetical situation and not an alleged incident, nevertheless if as the officers allege there is this type of man living in our midst "a crazed, knife wielding hardened

criminal" it would be in the interests of all including us, if that man was afforded more specialised treatment elsewhere.

The next paragraph headed "intimidation" only serves to convict the officers when it is analysed impartially — full quote from text — "Intimidation of their wives and children from ex-cons setting out to level the score. This in itself admits that there is a score to be settled, now one should ask what score? The executive of the IPOA has always boasted about the good relationship between staff and prisoners, Jack Lynch TD at the annual conference of the IPOA at Blarney earlier this year described Prison Officers as "the hallmark of kindness" so what is this about a score to be levelled? In fact there is a score, but it will not

be levelled against women and children in the streets, nor will it be levelled against warders in the prisons, the levelling will be done in the Central Criminal Court, where we will be presenting our cases of brutality, as far as we are concerned this is the proper and correct course to adopt and the only one we intend to proceed with, bearing in mind that, two wrongs do not make a right.

The next paragraph headed "Violence" — "The unseen enemy which surrounds them daily always ready to claim a "kill". If the situation was not so serious we would view these remarks with a sense of humour, or take them with a pinch of salt. For the sake of the record we declare that whoever made the statement, is talking nonsense. When



the first prisoners Union was formed at Portlaoise Prison last January we identified our enemy as being the Dept. of Justice then led by Des O'Malley and as a consequence of this we decided that by peaceful protests we would direct our broadsides against the Department only, and cause them acute embarrassment by exposing the woeful conditions existent at Portlaoise Prison. Throughout the early months of the PPU's battle against the Dept for the implementation of our demands designed to bring us up to the standard of human beings we refrained from criticising the prison officers recognising them to a certain extent as being fellow victims of an unjust and decadent system. Certain prison officers at Portlaoise secretly sympathised with us and hoped that the demands we sought would be met. Alas, though it was not long before we realised that a flank attack was being launched against us by executives of the IPOA and we then had an attack on both fronts, one from the Dept through the media, which labelled us as subversives, anarchists and communists. On the home front Portlaoise Prison officers started a campaign of intimidation and harassment, alarmed by the support we were receiving from outsiders in our call for reform. Their aim was to try and provoke a violent reaction from us or a full scale riot which would have suited their bosses, the Dept chiefs. If we had reacted as they hoped the Dept could then have pointed the finger at us and said they are only animals and wreckers, channel your support to a worthwhile cause and don't be misguided by hardened criminals. The consequences of this would have entailed us losing the support and sympathy of the people standing with us and would have put

us back in our tombs for at least twenty years. We are well aware that we are fighting a well nigh one sided battle with nearly all the cards stacked against us and that clever men are dealing them.

Undaunted by their lack of success in failing to provoke us into abandoning our policy of peaceful protests their tactics have now entered a new dimension, embracing imagined and widespread armed attacks on unarmed prison officers cracking their heads with bars etc. Attacks with razors on fellow prisoners for not taking part in protests. These fabrications are invented solely in a blatant attempt to discredit us and if those responsible for publishing these wild accusations from the IPOA and Dept had the common decency or a sense of fairness when receiving such statements from nameless individuals to ask the simple question — How come it is that no prisoner has been taken out in recent years to court and charged with these crimes, all indictable offences, and would merit a long spell of penal servitude. That is how simple it would be to disprove the authenticity of these frame-up statements that might fool some of the general public but will never fool us. It is relatively easy matter for the Dept and its minions to sling mud at us and make it stick, in view of the fact that we are convicted criminals, which same we have never attempted to hide or deny. By virtue of this we are ideal scape goats and handicapped by the fact that when attacks are made on us by the Dept and the IPOA and now its rank and file members have joined in the verbal affray, we are severely hampered that when our reply reaches our contact outside in newspaper circles it is then old news and may not be published. This we

have to accept as one of the hazards of conducting our battles armed only with pens. Nevertheless we will continue to tear away at the tattered and shredded veil of hypocrisy that since so proudly clouded Dept officials and its prison staff already the practiced eye can see the indecency exposed.

---

**JOIN  
PRISONERS  
RIGHTS  
ORGANISATION**

**Regular Membership:**

For people who want to join in all activities of P.R.O. *Subscription 25p*

**Associate Membership:**

For people who are sympathetic but who cannot be fully involved

*Minimum Subscription £1.00*

**All subscriptions to:**

*THE SECRETARY  
19 UPR, BEECHWOOD AVE.,  
RANELAGH,  
DUBLIN 6.*

---

## STATEMENTS

**Statement received on 13th October from member of PPU after being transferred to Mountjoy Jail**

On 25th June a prisoner was working in the kitchen when he suddenly heard shouting that a cell was on fire. He ran out of the kitchen on to E1 compound and saw smoke coming from E3 landing. He ran up the stairs

to E3 and when he arrived at the cell he looked through the spy hole and saw a lot of smoke in the cell. The heat on the landing was stiffling. He ran down the stairs again to the digger cells where two prison officers were putting another prisoner into a cell. He shouted to the two officers that a man was burning to death, and was on the point of grabbing the keys when the officer ran up the stairs. The prisoner followed and went into the then opened cell to find the prisoner out cold on the floor.

If the prisoner in the kitchen had not alerted the officer the man would not have been found until much later and would have probably suffocated. The prisoner was pulled out of the cell and a handful of his skin from his shoulder came away into the other prisoner's hands. A doctor was sent for and after that night he was blacked. The burnt prisoner was sent to Dundrum Mental Hospital on 26th June where he was held until 5th July. He was then transferred to St. James Hospital (once known as St. Kevin's Hospital, James St.) for treatment to the burns he received on the 25th June. While in hospital he was given skin grafts on all his burns.

He was discharged from hospital on 12th July and returned to Dundrum Mental Hospital until 30th August when he came back to Portlaoise. I had a good talk with him and I asked him why he had done it. He replied that with all the tension and punishment in the prison he felt he just couldn't take any more.

**Statement received from member of PPU on 13th October 1973**

On 14th September in Portlaoise Prison a prisoner who at the time of this incident was in solitary confinement for 28 days — two



# UP THE UNION!

periods of 14 days for two different charges, set fire to his cell on E1 landing, known both as the digger cells and the block. There were about 9 or ten officers standing by when this incident took place. Three prisoners were working in the kitchen at the time and when they heard the commotion they went out to investigate. The officer in charge had the cell door open and the 9 or 10 prison officers were shouting for the prisoner to come out of the blazing cell. The 3 prisoners from the kitchen rushed to the cell and tried to force their way in. They managed to get into the cell, but had to retreat because of the flames and heat and smoke. While all this was going on, the officers stood by and did nothing to get the prisoners out. Again, the three prisoners tried to get into the cell and this time they succeeded in getting hold of his leg, and then pulled him out of the blazing cell. He was unconscious and it took him about twenty minutes to come round. His hands and his face were badly burnt. The doctor was called, but when he had not arrived after a while, the three prisoners continued to ask why he had not come. Their answer was that he had been phoned.

I went down to see the injured prisoner next day myself. His hands, throat and face were badly burnt. I asked him why he had set his cell on fire, and he replied that he wanted to die, he could not stand any more punishment and because he could not see his wife for their anniversary. He was not brought to the County Hospital until 17th September. He returned to Portlaoise Prison on the 20th and was immediately put back on punishment. This is completely true as I was on punishment at the time and we were put together. He told me he was fed with a tube through the nose because his throat was so badly burnt while in hospital.

At long last Mr. Cooney has been forced to issue a statement on the prisons. And what a statement! The Department of Justice must have been very busy to produce such a long excuse. All he has said is that that the prisons are bad and that he has no intention of changing them. He claimed that prison conditions were generally good. If the reporters did not believe him does he expect prisoners to believe him?

No wonder he used "jackboot" tactics on the Prison Unions. They got him into this awkward situation and he will do everything he can to ensure it won't happen again. Despite his removal of union leaders to the Curragh the Union has survived. One prisoner was heard in Mountjoy to shout "UP THE UNION". When asked to comment Mr. Cooney said "I could not interpret it". Can he not understand English?

However, he has expressed great interest in penal reform. We say Mr. Cooney that you are lying.

Why else would you refuse to allow a research work of the Prison Study Group into a prison?

Why have you no plans for open prisons? You stated that there could be none until society is free of crime, are you going to rid this society of crime? Is there no crime in England, Sweden or many other countries where there are open prisons?

Why is it that boys from well to do families are sent to open centres? It is boys from deprived backgrounds who need most help. Why are four men still locked in the "base" in Mountjoy after the peaceful demonstration on the 6th October?

Why did you not allow the Sunday World and Hibernia into the prisons? The Sunday World has constantly written of the conditions in Irish prisons.

If as you say the "prisons belong to all of us" why do you refuse to meet a deputation from the PRISONERS RIGHTS ORGANISATION?

It appears Mr. Cooney means the prisons belong to all of us as long as we show no interest in them.

The statement continued "In my discussion with prisoners I was conscious that they . . . . . were not enamoured of efforts to assert rights". But clearly there was not enough prisoners who felt that way to risk allowing free contact with the reporters. He did not hear those views from the members of the Portlaoise Prisoners Union whom he threatened and told that whenever reforms did come, they personally would be the last to benefit.

Since when does a minister in a democratic country praise those who do not want to assert their rights? THE PRISONERS RIGHTS ORGANISATION urges all prisoners to assert their rights and will continue to stand by them.

He has stated that the public had not "made any decision about whether it wanted these people rehabilitated". It is true that the public may feel that prisoners deserve everything they get. But if he wants to change that attitude he could start by not slandering the prisoners or this organisation. And if he intends to continue with this revengeful attitude, let him stop mouthing about rehabilitation. He is fooling no-one.

He urged employers to give jobs to ex-prisoners. Let him put his own house in order and allow ex-prisoners into State employment.

Psychiatric care is to be provided "if the qualified people said it was necessary". Attempted suicide is a common feature of prison life. Unfortunately some of them are successful. How many more will be necessary to convince the Minister.

# If You Are Arrested

**IF YOU FIND YOURSELF ON CHARGE IN THE DISTRICT COURT  
REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING :**

**1. ASK FOR BAIL**

You are always entitled to bail, unless you are likely to leave the country or intimidate witnesses. This must be proven by the police and it is difficult to do.

**2. PLEAD NOT GUILTY**

Unless you have a solicitor and he instructs you otherwise.

**3. MAKE NO STATEMENT WHATSOEVER**

Anything you have to say can be said in court. Statements made on the spur of the moment on arrest are nearly always incriminating.

**4. ASK FOR LEGAL AID**

You may not get it but put up a strong appeal on the grounds that it is in the interests of justice and essential in the preparation of your defence that you should be legally represented. Point out that you are unable to pay a solicitor.

**5. ASK FOR A TRIAL BY JURY**

If you feel that a certain judge may be biased against you it might be that you would get a fairer hearing before a jury, who will never have seen you before.

**6. REMEMBER YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO QUESTION ALL WITNESSES**

**7. REMEMBER THAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO MAKE AN UNSWORN STATEMENT ON WHICH YOU CANNOT BE CROSS-QUESTIONED.**

**8. IF CONVICTED, APPEAL IMMEDIATELY AND ASK FOR BAIL TO BE FIXED.** If you feel it is likely that you will be convicted, bring a bailsmen with you to court. This will prevent you having to spend the night in jail.

**REMEMBER:** If you are ill-treated by the police on arrest or whilst in custody, make a formal complaint to the OFFICER IN CHARGE. It is better made in front of a civilian witness but make it whether you have one or not. Refuse to be bullied or harassed by the police into pleading guilty or making a statement. When asked for a statement say "Nothing to say" and keep repeating it during any questioning. In court, if you are in any doubt ask the judge in a reasonable and civil way, **HE MUST HELP YOU.**

**Title:** Jail Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2

**Organisation:** Prisoners' Rights Organisation

**Date:** 1973

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit [www.leftarchive.ie](http://www.leftarchive.ie)

*The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.*