

LETTER FROM LONG KESH

Widgery: Shock to Believers in Fair Play

By Des O'Hagan

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There are times when I am almost totally inclined to the view that the English do not really believe in justice, honour, decency, the principles of democracy, fair play and the other virtues which they know too well are unfortunately absent in most, if not all, foreigners. Widgery is an example which must sadly confuse everyone who retains any affection for British standards of justice. In fact it is nearly impossible to accept that a distinguished, senior judge wrote the report and arrived at the conclusions he did in the light of the evidence presented.

Personally, I was educated to respect the empirical tradition. I was convinced that in general it permeated all the British social and political institutions: this led me to the undignified corollary that the Irish were emotional, partisan, subjective, well-nigh incapable of arriving at a reasonable judgment. I may have been singularly naive here, but there are many in exalted political positions who are uncomfortably close to this position.

The shock of Widgery, I think, should have brought home to us not only the foolishness trusting in national stereotypes but also the need to review Anglo-Irish relationships from an entirely different perspective. Last week some of us began this difficult exercise starting with the present "spontaneous" demands for peace, honestly trying to relate them to the Heath initiative.

One member of our group stated that he was reminded at this time of a comment by his mother during a radio broadcast of the Rinty Monaghan-Jackie Patterson world title fight. The bout was interrupted by the announcer apologising for a short break in transmission due to technical problems. Reporting from the King's Hall, Belfast would be resumed as soon as possible.

The good woman not being too well informed of the nature of such broadcasts proclaimed warmly that she was sure that the two fellas would be glad of the break, God help them. This is just about how the present situation seems to us now.

DESIRE FOR PEACE

I doubt very much if there is one man in Long Kesh who does not genuinely desire peace. The cynical may interject that this is a belated conversion, a baptism to be welcomed as long as the converts are not allowed to preach their gospel. One cannot possibly convince anyone holding such a view, as in all probability they believe that the violence done to internees was justified: if internment camps are necessary to prevent desirable social change then by all means have them. Anyhow our commitment to peace is not simplistic. I have been surprised by the heightened political awareness shown not by the members of our discussion group but by all the men to whom I have access. Naturally enough we are anxious that this camp should be available as soon as possible (immediately) to lovers in parked cars, that the tinkers should be seen scavenging eagerly among the deserted Nissen huts.

At the same time no-one is happy that his freedom should be threatened continually by the Special Powers Acts. Alarming stories of heavily armed soldiers paying a friendly visit to released internees to ensure that they keep their noses clean are commonplace. Such courtesies one can understand taking place in the East End of London, where it is simply a matter of a benign "evening-all" bobby keeping a humane eye on a returned tearaway.

Undoubtedly the fact that the Six County Executive of Republican Clubs recently held a public convention in Belfast attended by Tomás Mac Giolla, president of Sinn Féin without interference from the security forces would seem to indicate that our scepticism as to the future may be groundless. What would reassure more than the phasing out of internment would be the introduction of a bill of rights guaranteeing unimpeded access to the political space.

THIRD REICH

Last week, talking to delegates from the World Peace Council, who visited the camp about the present repressive legislation, internment and the denial of the rule of law, I found myself presenting the democratic case, describing the antipolitical character of our society as it [recte si] I did not expect to be believed. One becomes almost apologetic as the description of events and practices seems to belong more to the early days of the Third Reich than to part of the present United Kingdom. Mr. Krishna Menon intervened to point out, quietly, sincerely, that once courts were corrupted by the executive then it was only a matter of time until all human freedoms were denied. Democracy cannot be administered like medicine, one apparently either kills the patient or cures him.

Our present state of suspended animation, he was surprised to learn, did not include a total ban on what is usually described as subversive literature. When I returned to Cage 2 I thought it might be of interest to examine the books we have in the hut. The list makes ironic reading and is an index of the extent to which the law has become a matter of taste in Northern Ireland, for possession of many of the books now in Long Kesh is an offence under the Special Powers Acts. On the other hand, it is probably more fruitful to see this as a chink in the grey clouds of political censorship which for so long have hung over the North.

Here it must be admitted we could learn from the English not only in Belfast but also in Dublin.

Historical Footnote:

Three into one does go after all. Sunday last saw the transfer of the Magilligan men, 78, to Long Kesh. Cage 10 houses the new arrivals. Cage 9 the men transferred from the Maidstone a few weeks ago. This seems to complete phase three of the Long Kesh expansion programme. As far as I can gather, it means in fact that we will have a holy trinity of camps under one supreme authority, Mr. Truesdale. There are rumours though that numbers 11 and 12 are in the course of construction but I doubt if it will be possible to confirm this as the sites are so far removed from this end of the complex that I understand small electric buggies will be used to ferry meals to the internees expected there.

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**LETTER FROM
LONG KESH**

Widgery: shock to believers in fair play

By Des O'Hagan

THERE ARE times when I am almost totally inclined to the view that the Widgery Report is believe in justice, because, obviously, the principles of democracy fail other times when I know that they know too well all unfortunate and tragic events of the last five years. Widgery is an example which must sadly confirm everyone who has been an advocate for British standards of justice. In fact it is a case which shows that he was a senior, disengaged judge who wrote the report and arrived at the conclusion that it was right in the light of the evidence presented.

The final report failed to respect the empirical tradition. He was convinced that he had gained a position of objectivity by his removal from political institutions. This led me to the unfortunate belief that those who were otherwise partisan, subjective, well-nigh incapable of arriving at a just decision, may have been singularly naive here, having been influenced by political positions who are diametrically close to this position.

The final report failed to respect the empirical tradition. It should have brought home to us, not only the need for change in national structures but also the need to review Anglo-Irish relationships. The final report gave no clear message. Last week some of us in the different camps, starting with the most uncompromising demands for peace, hopefully came together in the Belfast Inn.

One of the first things stated that he was remarkable in his time of a comment by his mother during today's debate in the House of Commons. Mrs. Maughan-Lutterer, Princess of Wales, said: "The boy was engrossed by the news of the peace accord. After a short break in transmission due to technical difficulties, Princess Diana, in her room at the Ritz Hotel, London, asked him if he would be returned as soon as possible."

The good woman not being particularly interested in politics, she nevertheless proclaimed world-wide that she was sure that the boy felt as though he had been abandoned and left alone. This is, at any rate, the present situation seems to us now.

DESIRE FOR PEACE

I doubt very much if there is one man in Long Kesh who does not desire peace. The majority of the camp may believe that this will be achieved through negotiations, but as long as the security forces are allowed to march through our gates, our people will continue to wage battle with a view to the establishment of a new society. If the negotiations do not succeed, if the internment camps are not disbanded, if the community continues to feel that its voice cannot be heard, then there will be all means to achieve what we can. Community based peace is not enough. I have been surprised by the holdout of the Ulster Unionists, who seem to be the hawks of our occasion. They are all for peace, but I have access. Not nearly enough. We are told that they camp daily, but as far as possible, to break up parades, to burn flags, to burn houses, to burn schools, to burn the deserted Seven Hills.

At the moment, however, I am happy that the freedom should be maintained, especially by the British. Some days ago, I received stories of friendly armed soldiers, probably from the Royal Ulster Constabulary or Dafad, attending the Sunday Mass, without references from the security forces, would seem to indicate that they keep their noses clean and communicate. Possibly the most significant thing place in the last few days of Lent was the annual Easter Parade, a benign "re-enactment" of the Resurrection, taking place on a rather damp day.

Undoubtedly, the fact that the Sunday Mass, Lenten Vigil of Reconciliation, was held in both cathedrals, Londonderry and Belfast attended by Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and Mr. Trimble, without references from the security forces, would seem to indicate that the future may be optimistic. What would be the effect of the decommissioning of Internment? Would be the introduction of a bill of rights, again, to be opposed to access to the political space.

THIRD REICH

Last week, talking in defence from the World Peace Council who were invited to speak on the present repressive legislation, internment and the trend of rule of law, Mr. Trimble, in his speech, declared that "we do not deserve the name of a free democratic society as it did not expect to be meted out". The Secretary, unfortunately, in the speech on events and practices seems to be basing his argument on the Nazi Third Reich. But to part of the speech of Mr. Trimble, to point to Mr. Kennedy, Minister for Justice, to point out, quietly, sincerely, that once again, he was not being provocative, when it was over a matter of time until a human freedom was destroyed, that he was not and must never like measure, such as potential killer bills, be satisfied or even be.

Our present state of suspended animation, where the Republicans, the IRA, did not include a total ban on what is usually described as "soft targets", has been referred to, turned to Cage 2. I think if anyone has seen the book, the books we have in the library, the last ones, twice reader, it is not too difficult to think that the law has become a matter of time until a human freedom was destroyed. But to point out, and must never like measure, such as potential killer bills, the natural outcome.

Here it must be admitted we could learn from the English not only about the law, but also about the Human Rights.

Three into our dogs go after all. We have the return of the Magdalene girls, to Long Kesh. Cage 10 houses, the new addition to the complex, arrived from the Magdalene a few weeks ago. There are now three more three of the Long Kesh expansion programme. As far as I can gather, it may be that there will be now a hole bunch of camps under one management unit. Mr. Trimble, however, claims that numbers 11 and 12 are on the way. I am not sure about that. If it will be possible to confirm this, I will do so. I am informed that I understand what pleased bigger will be used to ferry each to the premises expected there.