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Mountjoy Time-Bomb

UNLESS the government begins comprehensive reform of Ireland's penal system, there is real danger of an outbreak in Irish prisons, similar to the violence seen in Strangeways Prison in Britain this week.

There are worrying similarities between Strangeways and the biggest prison in this country, Mountjoy. Both are prisons built in the Victorian era, and both have suffered from appalling overcrowding and totally inadequate sanitary facilities. One former inmate described Mountjoy as "a powder keg waiting to explode".

Successive reports of the Prison Visiting Committee have drawn attention to the appalling conditions and lack of facilities in Mountjoy, but little or nothing has been done to deal with these problems. Despite the opening of Wheatfield Prison in Clondalkin, overcrowding remains a serious problem, with prisoners, on occasion, having to sleep on cell and office floors.

Hopefully the shocking violence seen in Strangeways will shake the Minister and Department of Justice out of their complacent attitude to problems in our prisons. The grave tension which exists has manifested itself already, as this week's suicide in Mountjoy became the fourth in Mountjoy within six weeks. Workers' Party spokesperson on Justice, Pat McCartan TD, has accused the Minister for Justice, Deputy Ray Burke, of ignoring the need for fundamental prison reform and dithering while prisoners continued to die. "The decision of the Minister to abolish the death penalty for capital murder is welcome, but the reality is that prison conditions are so bad that for many, a prison sentence is now a death sentence."

There is also need for the Minister to explain why this particular prisoner, who was serving a life sentence, was being held in Mountjoy where conditions are so bad, when prisoners serving long sentences are normally held in the more modern Arbour Hill Prison.

This latest death has emphasised once again the need for new measures to identify and monitor potential suicide risks in our prisons. The Minister should say when the position of Medical Director for Prisons, recommended five years ago and which was recently re-advertised, will now be filled.

THE Whitaker Committee undertook what was probably the most thorough and detailed examination of our prison system ever conducted, and in their Report, published in August 1985, produced a comprehensive range of proposals for reforms and improvements in Irish prisons.

Unfortunately the Report was virtually ignored by the then Fine Gael/Labour Coalition and subsequent Fianna Fail governments. Are we going to have to wait for a Strangeways-type riot before the government takes action?

What is the report found:

"The older buildings - Mountjoy (men and women), St. Patrick's, Portlaoise and Limerick (men and women) - were designed for a style of imprisonment far removed from modern concepts. They are deficient in various ways, particularly in washing and sanitary facilities and in space for prisoner activities.

"The available washing and toilet facilities in many places were in an appalling condition. Non-subversive prisoners in Portlaoise endure particularly poor conditions. Pressure of committals to prison has resulted in an increasing enclosure on the principle of one prisoner to each cell. Since some if not all of these prisons must be retained for a long time before they can be replaced, extensive modernisation and up-grading are urgent requiring.

Arbour Hill and Cork prisons have already been modernised and are fair examples of what can be achieved. "Standards of maintenance in general have been poor, even in new and modernised prisons, and the open centres showed lack of care. The low standard of accommodation provided for women and juveniles is indefensible. Conditions at the Bridewell in Dublin, through which hundreds of as yet unconvicted persons pass every year, are far below acceptable standards.

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CSW demands Mountjoy closure

THE IRISH PEOPLE Friday 6th April 1990

Privilege and protocol

The decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions not to offer any evidence in the case involving a member of Seán Earsman, Dr Seán McCarthy, is disturbing and unsatisfactory and will do nothing to quiet many members of the public.

In the absence of any explanatory statement from the DPP, it is reasonable to assume that Dr McCarthy's claim of privilege under Article 15.13 of the Constitution had been accepted by him.

Members of the public, who quite properly do not enjoy this privilege, have every right to be angry that a person holding public office is not prepared to avoid having to answer to a court for his action.

It was never envisaged that the limited immunity provided for in Article 15.13 would apply to motoring or drink related offences. In all cases where a claim of privilege is made by a member of the Oireachtas, the correct course is to allow the Court itself to decide on the validity of the claim.

Unless action is taken to prevent such claims of privilege recurring in the future, public cynicism about the Oireachtas and the whole political system will be increased. The Committee on Procedure and Privilege should consider drawing up a voluntary code of practice in relation to the use of privilege under the Constitution.

Failing agreement on this the government should consider the possibility of amending Article 15.13 to clarify more precisely the circumstances under which a member may claim privilege from arrest.

Call for Wexford Child Unit

THE NEED for a Paediatric Unit in Wexford was highlighted this week by local Workers' Party representative Virginia Fraigne.

According to the figures provided for the party by the Minister for Health, the case for a Paediatric Unit in Wexford is unanswerable.

A massive 743 children from County Wexford were treated at the Antrim Paediatric Unit in Waterford in 1989. Of that total, 143 were detected for more than six days, and 17 were referred as emergency cases by Wexford County Hospital.

The travel involved in order to bring the children from Wexford to the Waterford Unit is 115,000 miles last year. The fact that over 20% of the children were treated for more than six days is evidence of further inconvenience and expense incurred by Wexford parents, many of whom wouldn't be able to afford the 80 mile round trip to Waterford to visit their children according to the Wexford representative.
The Red Baron

"GOOD evening all you folks out there in television land! Welcome to tonight's main presentation. CHARLIE! BERTIE! ALBERT! COME ON DOWN! And fresh from his starring role in the Late Late Show and latest Broadway hit 'RTE LICKED MY BOOTS', Mr Brian Lenihan. TO BRIAN! "Oh yes, and MR SPRINGE gratulations on the success of your latest film "My Left Hook", and erm, Mr Shatter ... well better luck next time, eh? Camera pans across the Dáil benches ... "Oh yes Bertie, good evening! How about a cheque glass for the lady(s). Thanks Bert, you're a star. Mr O'Kennedy -- glad to see you Mick. And while we're on the subject, let's hear it for your campaign to have a heart by-pass at birth CHARLIE! Camera pans further ... "DESSIE! Don't try hiding that double-chin, We love you just the way you are!"

OK, maybe this is a slight exaggeration -- but who knows what it will be like when the Dáil is finally televised? The camera focuses on our great parliamentarians. It's about time the general public got to see what goes on in the bastion of this wonderful democracy, especially when you consider the ever-decreasing media coverage Dáil affairs have been receiving.

I mean when RTE set up their radio broadcasting unit in the Oireachtas one would have thought coverage would have improved. They set it up (using a considerable amount of dosh I might add), sent good staff to cover affairs there. And what do they show it into a 10.40pm slot -- nice thinking lads.

Coverage of political affairs has not been the May West for a while. Only this year, having reached the 5% electoral support necessary to qualify for live broadcasting of their Ard Feis, the Workers' Party had to fight RTE plans to reduce the half the time they would receive.

Let's hope that when the Dáil is televised, things will improve and the political affairs of our state are discussed as all parties participating in democratic debate, receive proper coverage.

The WORKERS' Party is fully in favour of the principle of televiewing Dáil proceedings, but, argues Pat McCartan TD, the contract should be given to the national broadcasting service, RTE, rather than to a commercial organisation which, certainly in this area, has no proven track record.

Dáil proceedings have been done for several years without creating any damage to the Oireachtas, and it is extraordinary that it should have taken so long for a proposition for televising of Dáil business to come. Dáil Eireann must be one of the few parliaments in the world which has, up to now, refused to allow the voters to see what goes on in the legislature.

Some of the suggestions that have been made are quite ludicrous -- suggestions that officials of the House, or stenographers or ushers should not be seen during broadcasts. Similarly with regard to the proposals which would prohibit the showing of any element of disorder in the House. No doubt when television comes in, some people will create a commotion to try and get publicity. But why not let the people decide for themselves? Surely they will be well able to distinguish between a dispute over an important matter of policy or procedure and a cheap publicity stunt.

Rather than seek to hide from the public the difficulties created by the arcane intricacies, which we inherited from Westminster and which have remained largely unaltered for nearly 70 years, we should set about modernising our methods of work and removing those elements which can lead to disorder. When the Dáil is finally televised the public will be amazed to see the Ceann Comhairle tell members, as happens each day, that there is no way that the Dáil can discuss urgent matters which have emerged at short notice, and which are probably being discussed in every house in the country.

The vast majority of members see the televising of the Dáil as a progressive and welcome development. Where there is real division however, is on the question of who should get the contract for the televising of the proceedings. The Workers' Party believes that there are strong economic and broadcasting grounds on which the contract should be given to RTE. There is a suggestion that the Dáil is not giving the contract to a broadcasting company, but giving the right to record proceedings to an independent operator, who will then sell the material on to any television station. This is not the full picture. While Windmill Lane Pictures Ltd is nominally an independent company, in reality it is closely tied to TV3, the independent station due to come on air the next year. The real alternative we are talking about is either giving the contract to RTE or giving it to TV3.

"The fact that the Dáil is dragging itself into what is left of the 20th century is welcome indeed"

Environmental agenda needed

SPEAKING at a public meeting in Galway last week, Workers' Party President Proinsias De Rossa, called for the laying down of an environmental agenda for economic and social activity, adding we can no longer confine environmental issues to one department of government.

While almost everyone now professed to be in favour of environmental protection there is still a lack of clarity among many people on what constitutes the environment, what exactly it is, under the name, from whom it needs to be protected, and the measures needed to safeguard it.

The 'environment' cannot be defined in any narrow way -- it is essentially what we live. People are an essential part of this environment as are issues such as rural depopulation, emigration and the general social environment.

We cannot hope to solve environmental issues with our reference to social and economic considerations. As all forms of human activity impact on the environment to some extent, there is need for a policy which promotes sustainable development, rather than viewing people and human activity as part of the problem. This in turn must be linked to a policy which sees people as part of one eco-system on this planet.

We now know that even the seas and oceans are not unlimited and previous notions of pollution could be 'disposed and dispersed' in the oceans are now clearly rubbish themselves. Yet

Whatsoever its shortcomings, RTE has a proven record in television coverage of political matters. It has been broadcasting current affairs programmes for 30 years and covering election campaigns and party conferences for almost as long. TV3 has yet to produce a single programme.

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We can be fairly sure that RTE will not make a total mess of it, if they are given the job. We have no way of measuring the likely performance of TV3, other than a written submission that deals with the matter in theory only.

All in all, the safest and most sensible course for the Dáil to adopt is to agree to the principle of televising of the Dáil but to re-place Windmill Lane Pictures Ltd by RTE.

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Another day another lift broken

RESIDENTS of Ballymun are fed up with the inconvenience caused by lifts which are out of service more often than not. Denis Looney of Balcarrus lives in a fifth floor flat. The lift which Mr Looney uses to gain access to his flat is, he says, out of order every second day. This causes great dif­fi­culty for Mr Looney, who suffers from a heart condition and has difficulty climbing the stairs.

He has spoken to local TDs about the lift but to date nothing has been done to prevent it from breaking down. The Corporation claim to have the lifts serviced regularly, but Mr Looney says he has never seen evidence of this.

The lift in question was re­paired a couple of weeks ago, but as a certain part is needed, residents were told that it would operate only as far as the fifth floor until the part was available. On Sunday last the lift reached the seventh floor and got stuck. As a result, three young children who were in the lift at the time had to be rescued by the Fire Brigade.

Mr Looney said that the lifts are damaged as a result of neglect and old age. "There is very little vandalism in the area, so that can’t be the reason,” Mr Looney said, adding that the lift has been going up and down ‘‘one thousand times a day for the last twenty years’’ and is bound to be worn out if not looked after properly.

FROM Ruth Riddick former
director of Open Line Counselling:  "I’ve been very happy that the term ‘I don’t like the laws’ why don’t you leave”... ‘It’s an extraordinary position to hold in a society that is so undemocratic. This is my home and I’m entitled to live and work here and try to change things.

FROM Alex Higgins on missing a shot during Ireland’s bitter quarter­final loss to Hell: “It wasn’t hard luck — your woman (Nell McCafferty) with the only hair was coming in and out and jumping up and down.”

FROM Fine Gael on RTE’s decision to feature a Late Late Show devoted to Brian Leinster: “We think most people saw it for what it was — a Banna Fail love-in for their Presidential candidate with the assistance of RTE.”

FROM Ian Paisley speaking about his childhood: “You will not believe this but I never spoke until I was two.”

FROM Giant TV Screen manu­facturers Videpro on the enormous increase in sales leading up to Ireland’s participation in the World Cup: “All the big pubs are buying them or leasing them. Some are putting in second or third screens. We are getting letters from all over the area about the Irish teams — we’re scoring already.”

FROM Noel Pearson following My Left Foot’s Oscar success: “The notion that I’m great at getting money is a myth. The secret is you are in costume. I’m terrible at getting money.”

AND on politicians: “Some politicians from Ireland would have been very welcome out here — but only if they’re FF.”

### Dynamic Editor required

**THE IRISH PEOPLE** newspaper of the Workers’ Party, requires a dynamic expanded person to edit a new-look expanded paper. The person appointed will ideally have experience in Journalism or Public Relations, and should have a good knowledge of the Irish political scene, and the Workers’ Party in particular.

This is an exciting opportunity to develop news and coverage from a socialist perspective. The ideal applicant will have initiative, fresh ideas on design and layout, and some experience of sub­editing. S/he will have an ability to work to tight deadlines, and be available for evening and weekend work when required.

Salary will be commensurate with experience and will be by negotiation. Applications with CV and examples of previous journalistic or public relations work should be addressed, BEFORE APRIL 12th, to the Administrator, The Workers’ Party, 30 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1.

**V O I C E**

by John Bowen

*improve trade in the North Main Street, whose traders have been lobbying for the building of the car park.

However, despite the report and continued opposition from local residents, Cork Corporation have dug their heels in as regards the building of the car park is concerned. Chief City Engineer Liam Fitzgerald said that the car park would go ahead as this had been the decision of the City Council.

However, in 1985 Cork Corporation wanted to zone the Grattan St. area for local authority housing and already over half the area has houses built on it, so where is the logic of putting a car park in the middle of an inner city housing development.*