

IRIS

the republican magazine

THE H-BLOCK HUNGER STRIKE

*They cannot or never will break our
spirit...Tiocfaidh ár la — Bobby Sands*

● (Left to right) *Bobby Sands* pictured in the cages of Long Kesh in 1975 with *Gerald Rooney* (who recently completed a 15-year sentence in Portlaoise Prison) and *Tomboy Louden*, presently serving a life sentence in the H-Blocks



THE RHYTHM OF TIME

There's an inner thing in every man,
Do you know this thing my friend?
It has withstood the blows of a million years,
And will do so to the end.

It was born when time did not exist,
And it grew up out of life,
It cut down evil's strangling vines,
Like a slashing searing knife.

It lit fires when fires were not,
And burnt the mind of man,
Tempering leadened hearts to steel,
From the time that time began.

It wept by the waters of Babylon,
And when all men were a loss,
It screeched in writhing agony,
And it hung bleeding from the Cross.

It died in Rome by lion and sword,
And in defiant cruel array,
When the deathly word was 'Spartacus',
Along the Appian Way.

It marched with Wat the Tyler's poor,
And frightened lord and king,
And it was emblazoned in their deathly stare,
As e'er a living thing.

It smiled in holy innocence,
Before conquistadors of old,
So meek and tame and unaware,
Of the deathly power of gold.



It burst forth through pitiful Paris streets,
And stormed the old Bastille,
And marched upon the serpent's head,
And crushed it 'neath its heel.

It died in blood on Buffalo Plains,
And starved by moons of rain,
Its heart was buried in Wounded Knee,
But it will come to rise again.

It screamed aloud by Kerry lakes,
As it was knelt upon the ground,
And it died in great defiance,
As they coldly shot it down.

It is found in every light of hope,
It knows no bounds nor space,
It has risen in red and black and white,
It is there in every race.

It lies in the hearts of heroes dead,
It screams in tyrants' eyes,
It has reached the peak of mountains high,
It comes searing 'cross the skies.

It lights the dark of this prison cell,
It thunders forth its might,
It is 'the undaunted thought', my friend,
That thought that says 'I'm right!'

— **BOBBY SANDS**

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May 1991 *Number 16*

Introduction2

By Danny Morrison

Battle-hardened2

By William Madden

Four Years on the Blanket.....4

**Euro- Commission —
an exercise in deceit.....7**

**Irish Commission
for Justice and Peace11**

**Why We Ended
the Hunger-Strike.....17**

**The Hunger-Strike
in Focus22**

Bobby Sands45

Francis Hughes47

Raymond McCreesh.....49

Patsy O'Hara.....51

Joe McDonnell53

Martin Hurson55

Kevin Lynch.....57

Kieran Doherty59

Thomas McElwee61

Micky Devine.....63



IN 1981, when the families and friends of the hunger-strikers, together with millions of people in Ireland and abroad, were still living through the agony of the deaths of ten prisoners in the H-Blocks, this *IRIS* was first produced. It reflected the feelings of people at that time and recorded the long struggle of the prisoners for political status. The edition sold out quickly, and has been sought after ever since. To mark the 10th anniversary of the 1981 hunger-strike we are reprinting the *IRIS* of that time as it first appeared. Apart from a new introduction written by Danny Morrison and a poem written by William Madden in the 10th anniversary year of the hunger-strike, we have not rewritten or updated the contents except where necessary for accuracy.

FRONT COVER PHOTO: IRA Volunteers firing the final salute to Joe McDonnell on Belfast's Andersonstown Road

REMEMBERED WITH PRIDE AND WITH AWE

FEW REPUBLICANS WOULD DISAGREE about the impact of the H-Block hunger-strike. It was our 1916 and the British may as well have shot Bobby Sands tied to a post or Patsy O'Hara strapped to his wheelchair such were the great feelings of outrage and offence. To this day the emotion is still with us even though the issue has long been resolved and the British government has conceded political status in all but name to republican prisoners.

The roots of the hunger-strike lay in the introduction by a British Labour government of the policy of Criminalisation, beginning in 1976. The struggle against that policy culminated, in 1981, when ten men of unrivalled courage and will-power symbolised through their deaths the strength of their political convictions and the legitimacy of the demands for peace and freedom. British intransigence was epitomised by the premiership of Margaret Thatcher with whose rule we were crucified for 11 years in all before, sweetly, we witnessed her ignominious ousting from office by her own party.

Thatcher had said that the blanket men and Armagh women were common criminals and that the hunger-strike was *"the IRA's last card"*. But in an unguarded comment after the IRA seriously wounded Sir Peter Terry, the former governor of Gibraltar, in September 1990 she revealed how she truly thought of the IRA when she said: *"They (the IRA) are acting under what they regard as the rules of war...The number of things that are happening now makes it important that we look once again to see if there is anything further we can do to step up our security and defence against this guerrilla warfare."*

For *"guerrilla"* read *"freedom fighter"*.

In the ten years that have elapsed since the H-Block hunger-strikes there have been a number of developments, many of which stemmed from that period. Struggling against a repressive background of censorship and censure Sinn Féin has failed to hold the bridgehead it established in the 26 Counties in the aftermath of those traumatic seven months during which hunger-striker Kieran Doherty and blanketman Paddy Agnew were elected to Leinster House. On the one hand Sinn Féin has been marginalised whilst, ironically, on the other, the issues of sovereignty and an independent Ireland which it campaigns for, have been the focus of public life. The objectives of the establishment in the South has been to rewrite their history and give the people what they glibly refer to as a

'European' identity. And, surprise, surprise, the unionists can have the North.

In the Six Counties, little has changed. Yet, without the crisis of a hunger-strike and imminent death it is impossible to conceive of any other circumstances in which the Republican Movement in the North could have contested the fortuitous by-election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and thus entered the election arena. From that day on April 9th, 1981, when the nationalist people made Bobby Sands an MP all was changed utterly. Of course, there could be a healthier combination of armalite and ballot box. Still, it has presented the British, more than Sinn Féin and the IRA, with major difficulties in explaining the nature of the conflict and in militarily defeating the IRA.

What Britain was trying to crush in that H-Block jail was the fighting spirit of the Irish Republican Movement. Trust Britain to pick on the softest targets of all — defenceless prisoners under secure lock and key. Prisoners who wanted clothes, who wanted visits, who wanted to see their families and to sustain relationships, who didn't want to be beaten if it could be avoided, but who couldn't repudiate the justness of their cause by accepting criminal status. It was a cruel choice Britain gave them. And it is a choice which Britain, despite admitting it cannot militarily defeat the IRA, in many ways still places before the people: lay down your arms or we will crush you.

Ten years after the hunger-strike, images of those prisoners' faces, of Bobby, Frank, Raymond, Patsy, Joe, Martin, Kevin, Kieran, Tom and Mickey, remain fresh. The agony of their slow deaths still shatters us. But their courage, and their conviction that justice will ultimately prevail, continue to inspire us. They are remembered with pride and with awe.

Battle-Hardened

Battlehardened the next generation
Waits under the rain-cloud.
Their memories etched in fresh wounds
From the last onslaught.

What words can we cut
To make safe the future,
To unlock the tight-fisted clichés
Of blame and blame?

Each tilted sentence
Creates its own response
Its own profusion of fury
From the excluded.

Layer upon layer
The counter-charges mount
Obscuring the bright glare
Of the original pristine bullet.

But will the real truth survive
Abandoned with the onset of winter
A stranded migratory bird
Caught in a predatory grip?

By William Madden



● "What do we want? — **POLITICAL STATUS!**
When do we want it? — **NOW!**"



● Two blanket men pictured during the no-wash protest — over 300 prisoners were in conditions approaching "living in sewer pipes in the slums of Calcutta"

Four years on the blanket

A HUNGER-STRIKE which IRA prisoners commenced in Belfast Prison in May 1972 ended 35 days later when British Direct-Ruler William Whitelaw gave in and granted 'special category status', that is political status to the political prisoners. From then, until 1976, many thousands of Irish men and women served their prison sentences under this special category régime. In the cages of Long Kesh, and in a wing of Armagh women's prison, political prisoners continue to serve their sentences under this régime. Between the years 1971 and 1975 thousands of additional prisoners, interned without trial, 'enjoyed' a similar status in Armagh, Magilligan, Belfast Prison, the prison-ship Maidstone, and Long Kesh.

The existence of thousands of prisoners, interned and sentenced under a régime which recognised them as political prisoners coupled with the popular support they enjoyed, the intensity of the armed struggle plus popular dissatisfaction with British policies, and in some quarters with the British presence itself, forced the British government, after some earlier political and military miscalculations, to instigate a number of classical counter-insurgency measures. Primarily, the objective was to isolate those engaged in the resistance struggle from their support and to 'normalise' life in the Six-County state.

This attempted 'isolation and normalisation' policy took on a number of forms, all interlocked. For example, there were various attempts at political normalisation, the so-called 'primacy of the police', the gradual withdrawal of British army units and the Ulsterisation of British military forces plus the 'criminalisation' of the prison population. This criminalisation attempt was part of the overall effort to project the resistance struggle as a criminal conspiracy and ran parallel, during a confused period of the armed struggle, with a propaganda thrust which saw the use of such terminology as 'paramilitaries, Godfather, mafia' etc, etc, by British government spokespersons.

A major obstacle to this criminalisation policy was the fact that almost 2,000 prisoners, recognised by the British government as political prisoners, were held under a British prison régime which directly contradicted the British government's propaganda claims. Long Kesh, by name, internal régime and appearance was known world-wide as a concentration camp and the large number of political prisoners drawn from all over the Six Counties enjoyed, through family, community and local connections, maximum support.

In January 1975, a British commission (The Gardiner Commission) made a number of important recommendations. These included the phasing-out of political status and the ending of internment. Long Kesh had already been re-named HMP The Maze. A 50% remission scheme was introduced to accommodate the release of

sentenced prisoners and to add to an already confused situation the internees, in an exercise thinly disguised as a humanitarian gesture, were released.

An arbitrary date, March 1st, was set and the British declared that anyone arrested after that date would not be treated as political prisoners and would serve their sentences in new cellular accommodation. The H-Blocks, designed to maximise the control of prisoners in four small wings of 25 single cells instead of the traditional large wings, were born. In British terms, the strategy was simple. Linked with other counter-insurgency measures, against the background of a de-escalating and politically confused resistance struggle, the prison population was to be decreased to a small number of 'ordinary' prisoners accommodated in HMP Maze.

Outside the prison however, the situation started to change, resistance recommenced and without the benefit of internment orders the British employed new 'legal' methods to intern their opponents and to demoralise an uncompromising population. Castlereagh torture centre came into its own, rules of evidence were changed, extra Diplock (non-jury) courts were brought in, judges were appointed and the H-Block conveyor-belt went into full gear. Now instead of internment the British had a legal-looking process of arrest, charge, remand, trial and sentence. That the arrests were arbitrary, the charges based on forced confessions, the remands lengthy, the trials farcical and the sentences totally unjust was incidental. The propaganda machine adequately covered all that. At least in the beginning.

It failed however, to take account, as did all the policy makers, of the new generation of political prisoners. Instinctively they refused to accept the new status quo, refusing to co-operate with the prison régime or to accept prison discipline. Refused their own clothes, the political prisoners were clad only in a blanket, and as their numbers increased and the Blanket Protest strengthened, news of beatings, deprivations and maltreatment began to leak out of the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and the women's prison in Armagh.

In March 1978, 18 months after the start of the blanket protest, with over 300 protesting prisoners the prison administration stepped up its harassment and forced the blanket men on to the no-wash, no slop out protest. This was to last for a full three years and arose essentially because the men were refused washing or toilet facilities. The same thing was to happen later in Armagh in February 1980 when the prison administration attacked the women political prisoners, assaulting them and withdrawing toilet facilities.

The majority of protesting prisoners, both men and women, were in their late teens or 20s and over 80% were imprisoned solely on the strength of forced confessions. They were refused from the beginning of their sentences all exercise facilities, reading or writing material, and access to radio or newspapers. Kept in cells on a punishment diet, with loss of all remission and without furniture, they were constantly beaten and harassed. A protest campaign, mostly confined to the Six-County ghettos, was conducted on their behalf by Sinn Féin and Relatives' Action Groups.

It was not until cardinal, then archbishop, O Fiaich, visited the prisoners on July 31st, 1978, and condemned the conditions under which the prisoners were being held, that greater public interest increased. He said: *"Having spent the whole of Sunday in the prison, I was shocked at the inhuman conditions prevailing in H-Blocks 3, 4 and 5 where over 300 prisoners were incarcerated. One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being. The nearest approach to it that I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer pipes in the slums of Calcutta. The stench and filth in some cells, with the remains of rotten food and human excreta scattered around the walls, was almost unbelievable. In two of them I was unable to speak for fear of vomiting*

"The prisoners' cells are without beds, chairs or tables. They sleep on mattresses on the floor, and in some cases I noticed they were quite wet. They have no covering except a towel or blanket, no books, newspapers or reading material except the Bible (even

religious magazines have been banned since my last visit), no pens or writing material, or TV, or radio, no hobbies or handicrafts, no exercise or reception. They are locked in their cells for almost the whole of every day and some of them have been in this condition for more than a year and a half."

Public interest had also been aroused by the Amnesty International report of June 1978 which stated categorically that: *"Maltreatment of suspected terrorists by the RUC, has taken place with sufficient frequency to warrant establishment of a public inquiry to investigate it."*

However, the plight of the H-Block and Armagh prisoners again faded to some degree from the public view, until the establishment of the National H-Block/Armagh Committee in October 1979. This committee, elected from a broad-based campaign, advocated, with endorsement of the prisoners, five basic demands whose implementation would resolve prison deadlock:

The five demands are:

- (1) **No prison uniform;**
- (2) **No prison work;**
- (3) **Free association;**
- (4) **Full remission;**
- (5) **Visits, parcels, and recreational/educational facilities.**

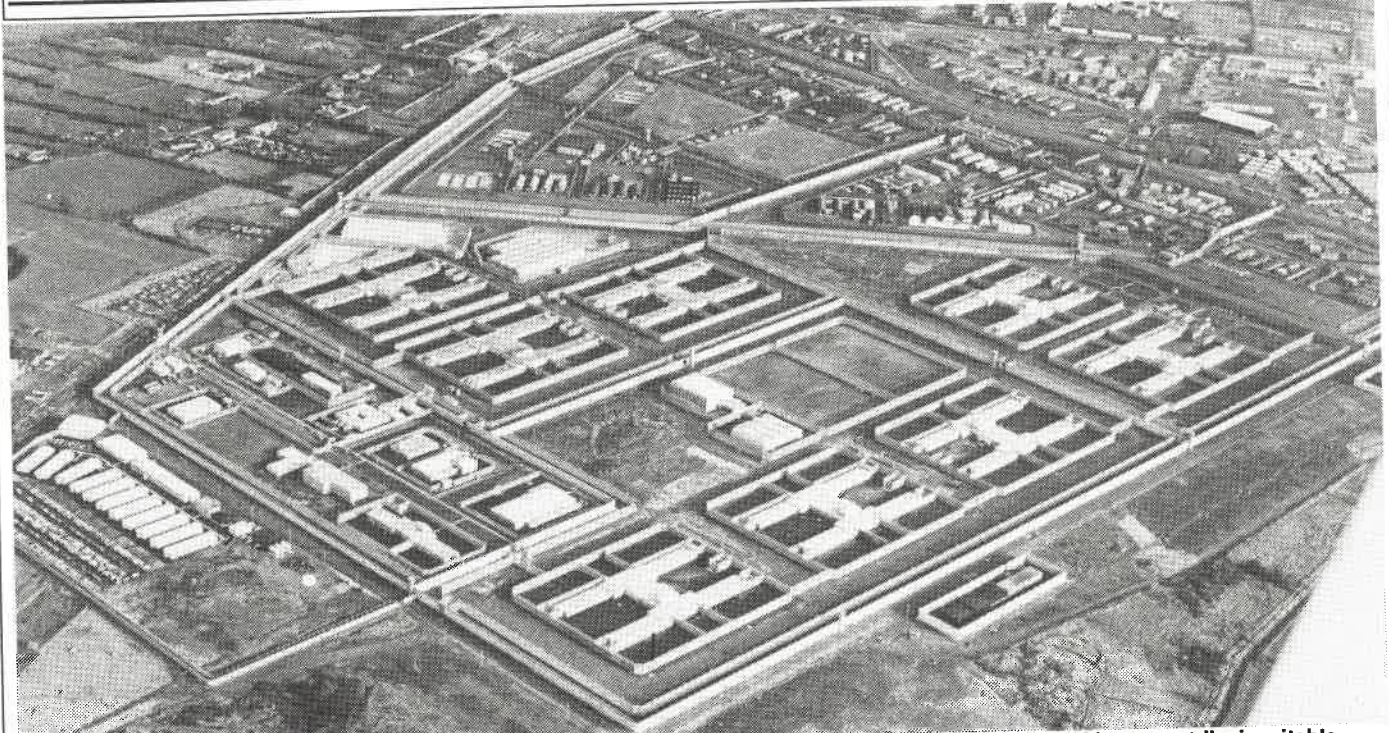
In March 1980 Cardinal O Fiaich again visited the prison and the following day he and Bishop Edward Daly met Direct-Ruler Humphrey Atkins for talks to attempt to settle the crisis, especially since the blanket men were now advocating hunger-strike as a way out of the deadlock.

In an attempt to create an atmosphere conducive to a settlement and to take pressure off the British administration, the IRA quietly ceased its attacks on prison officials. These talks dragged on for over six months before Cardinal O Fiaich and Bishop Daly had to admit they were getting nowhere. The blanket men and protesting women prisoners, totally exasperated, finally commenced hunger-strike on October 27th, 1980. The first H-Block hunger-strike which was to last 53 days saw the greatest nationalist mobilisation in Ireland since the early days of the civil rights/anti-internment campaign. That peaceful and disciplined campaign, organised by the National H-Block/Armagh Committee, attracted on a single issue scores of thousands of people and united people of different political persuasions. The campaign itself came under attack from British and pro-British elements and campaign leaders John Turnley, Miriam Daly, Noel Little and Ronnie Bunting were murdered and Bernadette and Michael McAliskey were wounded.

The hunger-strike ended on December 18th last year when the British government presented to the seven men who had fasted 53 days two documents. The three women hunger-strikers ended their hunger-strike the following day. On Thursday afternoon of December 18th, as the condition of hunger-striker Sean McKenna rapidly deteriorated, the British minister in charge of the Six Counties, Direct-Ruler Humphrey Atkins, suddenly and without public explanation postponed a statement he had been due to make to the British parliament and ensured that it was delivered to the seven hunger-strikers in the prison hospital along with a 34-page document entitled *Régimes in Northern Ireland Prisons, Prisoners day to day life with special emphasis on Maze*, that is the H-Blocks, and Armagh.

This document was new to the men and to the general public and was a major elaboration of how far the British government had gone in meeting the political prisoners' five demands. *"If they choose to live, the conditions available to them meet in a practical and humane way the kind of things they have been asking for,"* said Atkins.

The fact that a British cabinet minister postponed a parliamentary statement to send it to protesting republican prisoners in order to seek a settlement to the 53-day-old hunger-strike, was a unique act of political recognition in itself and the delivery of the 34-page document reinforced this political recognition for up until then there had been bending from



● **The H-Blocks — The renegal by Humphrey Atkins on his statement of December 18th made the second hunger-strike inevitable**

the British government apart from one incident on Wednesday, December 10th, when a senior member of the colonial Northern Ireland Office, a Mr Blellock, met the seven H-Block hunger-strikers in the prison hospital and read out to them the prison reforms that were then available but refused to answer questions or negotiate with Brendan Hughes, former O/C of the blanket men.

The delivery of the document and the ending of the hunger-strike ushered in a new atmosphere and Bobby Sands, the blanket men's O/C, was given freedom to liaise and meet with the hunger-strikers in the prison hospital, and each of the blanket Block O/Cs, and it was with him that the jail governor met directly, thus conferring recognition of the republican command structure. This recognition was reinforced when on Friday, December 19th, all of the H-Block O/Cs were brought out of their blocks for a further meeting with Bobby Sands in H-Block 3. Bobby Sands himself publicly expressed satisfaction at the new era of co-operation inside the jail, unprecedented since the British government embarked upon its policy of criminalisation in March 1976.

However, to the dismay of the prisoners, within days the atmosphere in the prison changed as soon as the spotlight shifted away from the jails. All the document's phrases about the situation not being static, work not being interpreted narrowly and the prison régime being progressive, humane and flexible were soon shown not to be worth the paper they were written on.

The blanket men had hoped to move about 30 men off the blanket and no-wash protest before Christmas Day but were stopped by Governor Hilditch who told Bobby Sands that nobody would be moving anywhere until they put on prison-issue clothing and conformed. In Armagh Jail, where women are allowed to wear their own clothes, George Scott the governor refused even to discuss with them the question of self-education classes as outlined in the document.

On January 9th, in the British Parliament, Humphrey Atkins publicly reneged on his December 18th statement by reversing the order in which the men received their own clothes.

The prison administration tried to force the men to unconditionaly end their protest but at a further meeting between all the H-Block O/Cs on January 11th it was decided to attempt in a step-by-step process the de-escalation of the protests in a principled fashion. Thus, following a period in which the prisoners co-operated to their utmost with a stubborn régime, on January 27th 96 prisoners smashed up cell furniture in a fit of frustration. The reaction from the

prison administration was swift and brutal. Over 80 prisoners were assaulted, beaten in wing shifts, left overnight without bedding or blankets or drinking water, refused toilet facilities and had meals interfered with or withdrawn altogether.

It was back to square one. Despite calls from the blanket men to those who had appealed to them to abandon their hunger-strike, no one, from bishop to politician, spoke out. Then on March 1st, Bobby Sands commenced hunger-strike. In a statement announcing the commencement of the hunger-strike the political prisoners said:

"We the republican POWs in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, and our comrades in Armagh Prison, are entitled to and hereby demand political status, and we reject today as we have consistently rejected every day since September 14th, 1976, when the blanket protest began, the British government's attempted criminalisation of ourselves and our struggle.

"Five years ago this day, the British government declared that anyone arrested and convicted after March 1st, 1976, was to be treated as a criminal and no longer as a political prisoner. Five years later we are still able to declare that that criminalisation policy, which we have resisted and suffered, has failed.

"If a British government experienced such a long and persistent resistance to a domestic policy in England then that policy would almost certainly be changed. But not so in Ireland where its traditional racist attitude blinds its judgement to reason and persuasion.

"Only the loud voice of the Irish people and world opinion can bring them to their senses and only a hunger-strike, where lives are laid down as proof of the strength of our political convictions, can rally such opinion and present the British with the problem that, far from criminalising the cause of Ireland, their intransigence is actually bringing popular attention to that cause.

"We have asserted that we are political prisoners and everything about our country, our arrests, interrogations, trials and prison conditions, show that we are politically motivated and not motivated by selfish reasons or for selfish ends. As further demonstration of our selflessness and the justness of our cause a number of our comrades, beginning today with Bobby Sands, will hunger-strike to the death unless the British government abandons its criminalisation policy and meets our demand for political status."

Euro-commission — exercise in deceit

THE FIRST serious attempt to bring an end — rather than a resolution — to the hunger-strike took place in April. The vehicle towards that end was the European Commission on Human Rights (ECHR). The prime mover was the then Free State premier, Charles Haughey, and the attempt, in a somewhat uncharacteristic manner, was abetted by Humphrey Atkins, the then Brit direct-ruler in the Six Counties.

This, of course, was not the ECHR's first involvement in the H-Block situation. In August 1978 four H-Block prisoners — including Tom McFeely, who was one of the initial seven blanket men to go on hunger-strike that year — lodged complaints against the British

government with the commission. In its first partial ruling the commission, while slating the British government for its 'intransigence', ruled also that there was no case for 'political status' for the protesting prisoners.

SUSPICIONS

For very good reasons, this ruling made the prisoners suspicious and cautious of any future involvement with the commission. In the first place the commission's ruling on political status was gratuitous. The prisoners' complaint to the commission concerned only the actual physical conditions of their imprisonment under Articles 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 18 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Secondly, the commission does not have the competence to rule for or against political status in any case brought

before it. Such a ruling is completely outside its terms of reference. The net result was that — totally outside its declared brief — the commission had presented the British government with a major propaganda weapon — no political status for republican prisoners — which it duly flaunted throughout every capital and media outlet in the world.

The prisoners, understandably, were determined not to be bitten by the same dog twice.

FACTORS

The climate for the introduction of the ECHR was set by three factors. Foremost of these was, of course, the need of Irish nationalist politicians to bring a conclusion to the hunger-strike. In the short as well as the long term the political fall-out of the ongoing hunger-strike was affecting them more adversely than their Westminster counterparts.

Secondly, there was the need to be doing something, however ineffective, by the Irish people, who were rapidly — and for possibly the first time since partition — uniting in a common view of both active and passive hostility to the British government, itself a dangerous development for constitutional politicians whose power base and survival depends on the maintenance of partition.

And, thirdly, there was the advanced stage on hunger-strike of foremost hunger-striker, Bobby Sands, who, by the time the ECHR's delegation set foot in Belfast on April 25th, had been 56 days without food — four days longer than Sean McKenna, who, on the 52nd day of his fast the previous year, lapsed into a coma.

In the preceding fortnight there had already been calls from John Hume of the SDLP, and three Euro MPs, for an ECHR intervention.

One indication of the amount of pressure which the SDLP was coming under at that time came in a statement issued on Friday, April 17th, in the wake of a meeting which the party had held the previous day, with a delegation from the National H-Block/Armagh Committee. They said that the present crisis was the most serious to date and was derived directly from the inflexible and vindictive attitude towards punishment in the prisons of



● Lawyer Michael O'Boyle (left) with European Commissioner Carlaage Norgaard

HUNGER-STRIKE

the previous Roy Mason régime in the North. The responsibility for resolving the crisis rested, they said, with the British government who should "act immediately".

VISIT

Within days of this, on Monday, April 20th, three Irish Euro MPs — independents Neil Blaney and Dr John O'Connell, and Fianna Fáil's Síle de Valera — were, on the request of Bobby Sands, permitted to visit him in the prison hospital. It is significant that de Valera had sought and received



● THATCHER

buff, in which the ECHR eventually became reinolved in the H-Block situation, must surely rank amongst the most dishonourable, exploitative and — in the end — most inept pieces of political chicanery ever perpetrated in any such similar or comparable situation. The move to reintroduce the commission was executed by Charles



● HAUGHEY

Haughey's 'express permission and approval' for her visit, although the significance lies only in the fact that even Haughey himself felt the need, in the full glare of the Irish people, to be seen to be doing something.

The British government readily afforded visiting facilities in the hope that the three would attempt to talk Sands off the hunger-strike. In the event, only one, Dr John O'Connell, did so — but to no avail. The visit — or more precisely its epilogue — contrary to Brit hopes, created rather than solved problems for them — even if only minor and transient.

THATCHER

After the visit the three MPs requested a meeting with British premier Thatcher — then in retreat in Saudi Arabia, a sojourn which was designed to be as much personally beneficial to Thatcher — removing her from the flak — as to psychologically undermine the hunger-strikers — posing her, the head of the British government, as being so totally unconcerned by the hunger-strike that she absented herself at a critical stage — by inculcating a sense of hopelessness.

Characteristically, Thatcher rebuffed the request with well practiced arrogance. Speaking at a press conference in Saudi Arabia, she said: "It is not my habit or custom to meet MPs from a foreign country about a citizen of the United Kingdom, resident in the United Kingdom. If they wish to make representations they should do it through their own government in the customary way and it would come to our government in the customary way."

HAUGHEY

Even Haughey could not publicly and passively brook such a snub to his proxy — de Valera — and in a face-saving exercise called in the British ambassador to Dublin. But, naturally, the matter went no further. No public statement of dissatisfaction ever manifested itself.

The circumstances, within days of this re-

On Wednesday, April 22nd, on the same day Haughey called in Leonard Figg, the British ambassador, in a supposed response to Thatcher's rebuff of the three Euro MP's request for a meeting, Haughey himself refused a similar request from the relatives of the then current hunger-strikers — Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreesh and Patsy O'Hara.

The premise for that refusal is quite simple. With his own party colleagues, and other Free State ideologues, it is quite normal to discuss and expound on the political reasons why nothing should be said or done to prevent the deaths of Irish hunger-strikers in a British prison camp, if such were to mean supporting the reasonable demands of the prisoners.

It is, indeed, quite normal in those circles to pose such deaths as being politically preferable to giving public support to those demands. But at a meeting with relatives of the hunger-strikers, whose motivation was



● The three Irish Euro MPs (from left) Neil Blaney, Síle de Valera and Dr John O'Connell, who were allowed by the British to visit Bobby Sands in the prison hospital in the vain hope that he could be talked off his hunger-strike

not political, but deeply and understandably personal and of the best of human motives — they went to save the lives of their loved ones — such political considerations could not possibly be mooted because of the resulting public exposure — the over-riding concern.

Alternatively, such a meeting can take place with evasion, prevarication and private expressions of concern — for media consumption — being the order of the day. But implicit in evasion and prevarication is the reality of opposition, which can also be dangerous for public exposure. And, of course, inherent in any such meeting is a stark personal confrontation with the reality and practice of partition — which Free State politicians fully co-operate with — with its subsequent conscience pricking. Not pleasant. And thirdly there is the straight rebuff — a refusal to meet — couched in practical terms — 'serve no useful purpose at this juncture' etc. The latter was the course which Haughey opted for on this occasion.

INVESTIGATION

As stated earlier, the profile of the ECHR as a possible vehicle towards a solution had already been raised by John Hume who said "that the informal methods of intervention would eliminate a lot of procedural red tape, and so speed up the whole process".

The climate was further enhanced by Humphrey Atkins who, in an unusually astute statement, said that the British government would welcome "a formal or informal" investigation by the commission which, he said, would be provided with "every facility"; a statement which most media speculators interpreted as indicating a willingness on the part of the Brits to move towards a resolution, but which, conversely, hardened the prisoners already serious suspicions in relation to the commission.

Given this background, Haughey made his bid on the evening of Thursday, April 23rd. A phonecall from Haughey's office to the Sands' household that day, requesting an urgent meeting, resulted in a meeting taking place at Haughey's home late that evening between Haughey and members of Bobby Sands' distraught family, including his sister Marcella.

DECEIT

Using a combination of deceit and emotional exploitation, Haughey bulldozed Marcella into making an application on Bobby's 'behalf' which was immediately telexed to the commission's headquarters in Strasbourg. He

told the family that the intervention was merely a formality, that the British government wanted 'off the hook' and that it would accept the recommendations of the commission — which would satisfy the prisoners — and thus end the hunger-strike. The family's only other alternative, he told them, was to go home and prepare for Bobby's funeral.

Haughey's initiative, however despicable his tactics, was politically a very clever, if totally dishonest, device.

Overtly, in the public arena, it posed him as active in attempting to bring about a resolution of the hunger-strike on terms favourable to the prisoners and was lauded, by the media, as somewhat of a coup in that context. Unnoticed or ignored were the facts that, on at least two counters, it put him firmly in the Brit camp in relation to his attitude to the hunger-strike.

BRINKMANSHIP

Firstly, he was lending himself to the Brit tactic of brinkmanship — raising a red herring at a critical point for one of the hunger-strikers, where uncertainty as to motivation and the ensuing confusion could lead to the hunger-strikers ceasing their fast. The Brits had employed this tactic in December 1980 when Sean McKenna, then 52 days on hunger-strike, lapsed into a coma and were to use it again in July of that year before Joe McDonnell died.

Secondly, the prisoners were fully aware of the ramifications of the commission's gratuitous ruling on 'political status'. An overruling of that decision by the commission would not only be unprecedented but totally unlikely as it would place the commission's credibility and competence at stake. On that basis they feared that the commission's role would be no more than to further bolster the intransigence of the British government. A reaffirmation by the commission of its existing attitude of opposition to the prisoners' demands would set their struggle back indeterminately.

This was further complicated for the prisoners by the fact that a refusal on their part to co-operate with the commission would reverse the generally acknowledged inflexibility and intransigence of the British government and pose the prisoners as the intransigent party.

SANDS

Moreover, having given due consideration to this nuance in circumstances and having stated his reservations, Bobby Sands made known his attitude to meeting the commission. He said: "I am prepared to meet formally or informally a European commissioner or commissioners provided I have with me Brendan McFarlane of H-(Block) 3 (O/C of the protesting prisoners) and two external nominees — Gerry Adams and Danny Morri-



● **BRENDAN McFARLANE**



● **GERRY ADAMS**

son" (joint vice-president and National Director of Publicity for Sinn Féin, respectively).

Sands' attitude was both reasonable and understandable. Firstly, the hunger-strikers were representing not just themselves but all the protesting prisoners on whose behalf they had embarked on the hunger-strike in the first place and whose agreement was required before an end could be brought to all the prison protests. The presence of Brendan McFarlane, the prisoners' representative, was therefore required at any meeting which supposedly would discuss conditions which would bring those protests to an end.

Secondly, by the time the commission arrived at Long Kesh, on April 25th, Sands had been on hunger-strike for 56 days and was in



● **DANNY MORRISON**

a very weak condition. It was therefore reasonable that he request the presence of external advisers and that the request be accepted.

However, as events were to prove, the deceitful basis of the Haughey inspired intervention by the commission precluded the necessity for the presence of even Bobby Sands at a meeting with the commissioners.

DELEGATION

The delegation for the commission — comprising two commissioners, Professor Torkel Opsahl (Norway) and Professor Carlaage Norgaara (Denmark), commission secretary, Hans Christion Kruger and Michael O'Boyle of the commission's secretariat — first flew to London on Friday, April 24th, where they had a 90-minute meeting with officials from the British Foreign Office and the Northern Ireland Office before coming to Belfast the following day. After meeting Marcella Sands and Bobby's solicitor Pat Finucane, the delegation went into Long Kesh where they were informed of Sands reasonable pre-conditions to any meeting, that is, that he would only see them in the presence of McFarlane and his external nominees.

McFARLANE

Stormont officials raised 'serious objections' to the presence of the latter, but, on request, the commission was afforded access to McFarlane. McFarlane recounted what happened at that meeting. The delegation outlined the purpose of its visit and stated that they were seeing McFarlane to see if, in view of Sands' pre-conditions to any meeting, "there could be any way forward by which they could see him to confirm his application".



● Professor Torkel Opsahl (left) and Dr Hans Christian of the European Commission on Human Rights — the bogus basis of the commission's intervention was exposed when they declined to ask for the prisoners' external nominees to be present at any meeting

"They," (the commission) said McFarlane, "said that they had certain rules of practice and could not really see how Danny Morrison and Gerry Adams could be brought in.

"O'Boyle said that this, of course, did not preclude their being brought in at some later stage if for instance mediation was in progress. But he pointed out that this was looking pretty far ahead of what we were talking about at present.

"The Norwegian said they wanted to ascertain if Bobby wished to continue the application. I asked who was blocking the outside witnesses and the Norwegian commissioner answered 'the government'. I asked was the British government actually blocking them from getting in and he said that this was correct.

"But immediately Dr Kruger cut in and said 'They would prevent the two advisers...' I stopped him and pointed out that this was merely an assumption on his part and what he was now actually saying was that they had not asked the British government to allow them in. He said this was correct and they could not really ask for them."

A subsequent meeting between Sands and McFarlane re-affirmed the preconditions, and upon this being relayed to the commission by McFarlane, they left the prison having seen no one else.

EXPOSED

What is apparent from McFarlane's uncontested account of that meeting is that neither the commission itself or the British government wanted the external nominees present, perhaps confirming the prisoners' suspicions about the commission.

But more importantly, the entire bogus basis for the commission's intervention in the first place was exposed. Firstly, the commission could not go ahead with its investigation, taken out on Sands' 'behalf' by his sister Marcella as a result of Haughey's persuasive cajoling and his portrayal of the grim alternative; a totally needless alternative, in fact, if what Haughey was saying with so much conviction was true, Sands would have to adopt Marcella's application himself before any enquiry could begin.

Secondly, Sands would have to come off

the hunger-strike for there to be any point in the "mere formality" of this enquiry taking place because the commission could not make a ruling on this "mere formality" before May 14th, 18 days hence. As the whole world now knows, Bobby Sands died on May 5th to be followed seven days later by Francis Hughes on May 12th.

HOSTILE

The political attitude of John Hume, who proposed the commission's intervention, but more particularly of Charles Haughey who brought it about, was clearly one which was hostile to the granting of the prisoners' five demands. Haughey's attempt to undermine — by subterfuge and deceit — what he had not the courage to oppose publicly — because of the political consequences — floundered on the determined and principled stand of Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreech and Patsy O'Hara.

So conditioned are Haughey and his ilk to the rules of partition politics — opportunism and chicanery — that they would not recognise a principle if it crept up and bit them.

IRISH COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE



● The political naivety of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (above) was clearly exploited by the British in creating an illusion of movement on the H-Block crisis

Attempt to impose end to hunger-strike fails

ONE OF the most serious attempts aimed at bringing an end to the hunger-strike, came in June and July with the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP) imposing itself on the situation.

If not actually politically inspired — in the same sense as was the case with the European Commission for Human Rights — the ICJP's general political outlook, as well as the particular political outlook of those of its members involved in this intervention, could hardly be construed as sympathetic to the prisoners' political concept which is the basis of the prison struggle.

Of its five members involved in this particular initiative, two, Bishop Dermot O'Maloney and Fr. Oliver Crilly, were Catholic clergymen, one, Jerome Connolly, an academic, one, Brian Gallagher, a solicitor and one, Hugh Logue, quite incredibly, a member of the

SDLP which is totally opposed to the objectives of the organisations to which the prisoners belong.

BACKGROUND

As stated, while not directly politically inspired — vis-a-vis Haughey and the ECHR — the political, social and economic background of the ICJP's members cannot have failed to influence its objectives in imposing itself on the situation in the first place and in drafting the proposals, for a settlement of the hunger-strike, which it eventually agreed with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

Before and after the period of intense activity in which they were involved in late June-early July, the commission kept in regular contact with the Dublin government and with the other Free State parties. It is no stretch of the imagination either to assume that Hugh Logue kept in regular contact on developments with his own party the SDLP. It is also

not unreasonable to presume that the political attitudes of all those parties, to the hunger-strike and the prisoners' demands — though not necessarily in those terms — was brought to bear at those meetings and conceivably had some influence on the members of the ICJP whose own political attitudes generally concurred.

FAMILIES

Learning nothing from the earlier Haughey-inspired adventure with the ECHR the ICJP adopted a similar tactic in attempting to use the hunger-strikers' families as a vehicle towards the commission's objective of an imposed settlement. Vincent Browne, for instance, in the August edition of *Magill* reports "The commission realised that the families could become a pressure group of their own to force a settlement, if necessary over the heads of the Provisionals and the IRSP.

"At a meeting with the leaders of all three



● **MICHAEL ALISON** — Minister for prisons in the North

main political parties in Dublin on June 19, the commission stated that new possibilities had arisen with the possible emergence of the families as a force in their own right, although, the commission emphasised, the families didn't want a dishonourable settlement."

By this stage, four hunger-strikers — Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreech and Patsy O'Hara — were dead. Six other prisoners — Joe McDonnell, Kieran Doherty, Kevin Lynch, Martin Hurson, Thomas McElwee and Paddy Quinn were already on hunger-strike, to be joined within three days of that meeting, on June 22nd by a seventh man, Micky Devine.

ASSUMPTION

The commission's assumption, like that of Haughey, — inferring as both did — that outside manipulation of the prisoners was the barrier to a settlement, set about attempting to use the families to their own ends. In the event — predictably, given the recent history of the Haughey debacle — the commission was proved wrong, but not before they put the families through the same emotional hoop. The ICJP were to see — though never to acknowledge — that no outside force — Irish Republican Movement, IRSP, families, Pope's emissary or commission of whatever kind — could impose on the prisoners any settlement or cessation of their protests which they themselves did not agree to.

The commission's involvement began tentatively, with a statement issued on June 3rd, recommending concessions on prison clothes, prison work and association (which it did not define). It also asked for a response

from the British government and from the prisoners. The Brits ignored it. The prisoners made a considered response on Wednesday, June 17th. In their statement they said, "We appreciate the efforts of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace in seeking a solution to the present hunger-strike.

"While disagreeing with the entire political slant of their statement, they... have realised that until British intransigence is breached, no effective dialogue can take place..."

"With this in mind we feel that the commission must realise that their recommendations are so diluted and so far removed from our five demands, for which four of our comrades have already died, that we could not accept these proposals as the substance of a solution."

IGNORED

The commission, however, chose to ignore the prisoners' response to their proposals, just as the British government had ignored the proposals themselves, and forged ahead. An excuse to do so was provided by an enquiry, on June 18th, from Laurence Quinn — brother of hunger-striker Paddy Quinn — to the commission, asking if the Brits had made any response to their proposals.

On June 19th, the commission met with the leaders of the three main Free State parties (for consultation?). On June 22nd Fr. Oliver Crilly visited hunger-striker Thomas McElwee — his second cousin — to whom he stated that the commission was pleased with the prisoners' response of June 17th and agreed that the prisoners, "were genuinely pursuing a settlement of the hunger-strike".

This was a prologue to a series of meet-

ings between the commission and various people including the hunger-strikers' families, the NIO, the National H-Block/Armagh Committee (NHB/AC), Free State politicians, and reluctantly, on a couple of occasions, members of the Republican Movement. Eventually they even met the hunger-strikers.

On Tuesday, June 23rd, the five members of the commission met the Minister in charge of prisons in the North, Michael Alison, at Stormont. No statement was issued but it has been reported that the issue of clothing was the main subject discussed. Contrary to any public statement from the Brits at that time, or since, Alison, at that meeting, said that allowing the prisoners to wear their own clothes would present no problems.

Coincidentally, that night, a delegation from the NHB/AC also met the commission to press it to support the prisoners five demands. That was not forthcoming. Jim Gibney, who was on that delegation later reported that he "was frightened at their lack of knowledge of the situation". He need not have been. They or at least some of them knew exactly what they were doing.

A second meeting with Alison took place on Thursday of the same week. The commission said they were seeking "clarification" of points raised at the meeting earlier in the week. Reportedly, what was discussed was an elaboration on an enlarged number of prisoners who could take part in the 'limited association' already given to conforming prisoners; that is, on what structural requirements were needed in the H-Blocks to allow the inmates of two wings of the H-shaped cell blocks to associate together during the three hours daily and week-ends which are the normal periods of association for conforming prisoners. Numbers, of course, had never been publicly in contention with the prisoners — as was to become evident the following week — but the hours of association were. The prisoners want free association between the hours of lock-up, that is, from when the cells are opened in the morning until they are locked again in the evening.

DANGEROUS

So, as far as the prisoners were concerned, this meeting was a dangerously futile exercise and while they were not privy to the contents of the discussions they nevertheless raised their fears of what seemed to be emerging. At a hunger-strike rally in Belfast, three days later, on Sunday, June 28th, in a statement read out by Kieran Nugent, the first blanket man, the prisoners reiterated their position of June 17th, referring to the commission's proposals again as "a major dilution" of their demands which "must be recognised as such.

The commission met the families of the hunger-strikers in a Belfast hotel immediately

after that rally and again two days later in Dublin, but no details of their discussions with Alison were disclosed. Deliberately or otherwise a donkey and carrot situation had evolved, with the people most directly affected by the protest — the hunger-strikers and their families — being kept in the dark. Judicious press leaks, however, ensured that a public perception of progress on the commission's part prevailed.

ATKINS

The first public fruition of the commission's activities in terms of a response from the British government, came, in what was billed as a major statement, from Humphrey Atkins on Tuesday, June 30th — one day after Laurence McKeown had embarked on the hunger-strike bringing the number of hunger-strikers to eight. The statement, a six-page document, was sent to the hunger-strikers, their families, and to all protesting prisoners.

In a patronising introduction Atkins gratifyingly refers to the 'concern' shown over the hunger-strike by Haughey and the ICJP. He goes on in vague and undefined terms "...the government is committed to... further improving an enlightened and humane regime with flexibility in its administration". Not a single issue is defined but its general tone was such that the media adjudicated it as 'conciliatory' and indicative of a change in British attitudes, while ICJP member Hugh Logue's political party, the SDLP, welcomed it.

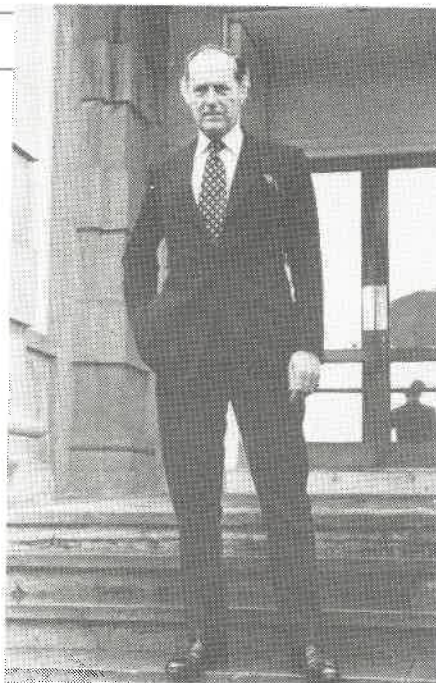
Reporting the statement at the time *An Phoblacht/Republican News* said "...the language in the document is aimed at impressing the Irish commission (ICJP) and at raising hopes which when shattered would lead to demoralisation". Of the ICJP and its response to Atkins document it said, "...the commission helped create a climate of unwarranted relaxation by stating that Atkins' statement 'together with clarifications received over a number of days' had encouraged them to continue..."

BLANKET MEN

Republicans, in deference to the wishes of the hunger-strikers' families declined to comment. But on the afternoon of the following day, Wednesday, July 1st, the blanket men dismissed Atkins statement as "arrogant, misleading, and callous".

They said: "The purpose of this statement is to buy the silence of various genuinely concerned bodies — such as the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace... — by vaguely guaranteeing unspecified further developments of the prison regime at some unspecified time in the future.

"The Atkins' statement cannot be taken as a sincere attempt — based on the need to find a solution and avoid any further tragedy — to end the hunger-strike, for no one with even the most basic grasp of the situation



● HUMPHREY ATKINS

can expect us to submit to such an ambiguous and distorted statement.

"To do so would be an insult to ourselves, our comrades who died, our steadfast relatives and supporters.

"It is becoming blatantly obvious that the British are intent on creating a worsening situation..."

"Even as one of our comrades lingers on death's doorstep we call on the British... to act in a responsible manner by initiating meaningful dialogue with we prisoners to find the solution."

Even at this stage, having already been told twice by the prisoners in unequivocal terms (June 12th and June 17th) that their proposals were unacceptable and now, in their statement to Atkins seeking direct talks to find a solution, the commission persisted in imposing itself on the situation.

Obviously the cause for Gibney's fright —



● Sinn Féin's Jim Gibney was "frightened" at the lack of knowledge about the hunger-strike shown by the ICJP

HUNGER-STRIKE

commission's ignorance of what exactly was at stake for the prisoners — was turning their involvement into a laughing and ineffectual adventure through their inability to grasp the prisoners' exact and precise understanding of prison régimes gained at bitter first-hand experience.

Or, more sinisterly, political forces inside and outside the commission were determined to create a climate where a settlement could be imposed which would not necessarily meet the prisoners' demands. Or perhaps, as is most likely, it was a combination of both factors.

FORTUITOUS

The British government was also finding the commission's self-imposition fortuitous stringing it along, allowing the climate for a settlement — on its terms of course — to build up by allowing press leaks on the commission's progress to go unchallenged directly. They were also dictating the pace of the proceedings. By the time they permitted the commission to have its third meeting with NIO officials, on Friday, July 3rd, Joe McDonnell, the foremost hunger-strike at that time, had been without food for 56 days — the exact same stage at which the ECHR had arrived in Belfast during Bobby Sands' hunger-strike.

The British government was, again, — for the third time — cynically employing brinkmanship as an added lever on the hunger-strikers in an attempt to get them to accept, what in more normal circumstances — if such exists at any stage during a hunger-strike — they would reject out of hand.

REMARKABLE

Indicative also of the commission's attitudes — as well as possibly of its motives — is the remarkable fact that, until the following day, Saturday July 4th — with the exception of Fr. Oliver Crilly's visit to Thomas McElwee — it had never consulted either the hunger-strikers themselves or the prisoners' representative, Brendan McFarlane, to solicit their view of what would constitute a settlement. And this despite having been strongly prompted to do just that as far back as its first meeting with the NHB/AC.

It was in this vein that Friday's meeting with Alison — lasting several hours — was conducted.

Without ever having consulted the prisoners the commission with Alison agreed on a settlement formula on:

Work — which was merely redefined;

Association/segregation — the enlargement (in terms of numbers only) of the already existing 'limited association' was agreed as well as an unlikely position on segregation (in practice but not in principle); all of which were totally unacceptable dilutions of



● Francis Hurson, brother of hunger-striker Martin, leaves the Free State premier's office with other disappointed relatives on July 3rd following a fruitless meeting with Garret FitzGerald

the prisoners' demands.

At the Friday meeting, inexplicably, Alison also retracted his 'no problem' stance on the question of granting the prisoners their own clothes; a position which had been agreed at their first meeting and reconfirmed at their second. Equally inexplicably Alison reversed that situation again the following morning.

INTERESTING

One interesting feature of Friday, July 3rd, was the meeting in Dublin between the hunger-strikers' families and Garret FitzGerald — by then the new premier of the Dublin government which illustrates to what degree the Dublin politicians were tied in with the commission.

The families had gone to Dublin for pre-arranged meetings with FitzGerald and the British ambassador, Leonard Figg. They never made the second appointment. They were detained for several hours by FitzGerald, who, awaiting the green light from the commission (after presumably successful discussions with Alison) had on the account of one of the hunger-striker's relatives, 'a fleet of Mercedes on standby,' to take them to Long Kesh.

It never happened. Alison's strange, but temporary — even stranger — reversal of the British government's position on the clothes issue obviated the need for the well prepared arrangements.

HUNGER-STRIKERS

After Alison's second volte-face on the

clothes issue, at their meeting on the morning of Saturday, July 4th, the commission decided, at last, to involve the prisoners. They went to Long Kesh where they met the eight hunger-strikers in the prison hospital but were not permitted to meet McFarlane, the prisoners' representative. Only the insistence of McFarlane and the hunger-strikers led to their being able to meet each other that evening after the commission had left the prison camp. A similar insistence led to a meeting between McFarlane and three members of the commission the following day, Sunday, July 5th.

At no stage during any of their discussions did any of the hunger-strikers or McFarlane indicate that the commission's proposals would constitute an acceptable settlement to the prisoners' protests.

INDICATIVE

Even the matter of the commission's visit to Long Kesh on Saturday is indicative of the attitudes of both the British government and the ICJP. The refusal of the British government to permit a joint meeting between McFarlane, the hunger-strikers and the commission clearly illustrates that the British government was still only concerned with trying to break the hunger-strike rather than attempting to resolve the whole prison problem. This they hoped to do by working on the hunger-strikers whom they assumed to be a weak link. Likewise, the commission's singular lack of real protest when they were presented with this situation must indicate either

a total acceptance of authority on their part or, more likely, an inarticulated preference on this part to deal solely with the hunger-strikers whom they would also have viewed as the weaker party.

STATEMENT

On that Saturday also, an important statement from the prisoners, elaborating on their position was issued. The statement had actually been smuggled out of the prison the previous day but had not been delivered to the H-Block Information Centre until Saturday morning. In this statement of some 21,000 words the prisoners spelt out their position. On the main areas of their five demands they said:

On prison work: "What the British government recognises as 'prison work' we do not. Besides self-education which would be the main prop in any agreement, we are prepared to maintain our cells, wings and blocks and engage in any activity which we define as self-maintenance."

On free association/segregation: "Free association means that there would be freedom of movement within the wings. Supervision need not be restricted. There would be no interference with prison officers..."

"It is unrealistic to expect loyalists and republicans to integrate satisfactorily together. Forced integration... is wrong and can only lead to trouble."

On prison clothes: "Prison clothes are prison clothes. The women in Armagh wear their own clothes, and there is no objection-

able reason why all prisoners should not be allowed to wear their own clothes."

On remission: "Lost remission is as a result of the protest and is not connected with the cause of it. This should not be an area of disagreement, for it does not directly affect the running of the system. But it is of mutual benefit to all whom it affects that full remission is given back to we prisoners."

WELCOMED

The statement was generally welcomed by the media as 'conciliatory' and further enhanced the just and reasonable nature of the prisoners' demands.

But it made no difference to the intransigence of the British government or to the ICJP's attempt to impose its agreed proposals with the NIO, which encompassed only one of the major demands — clothes — as a settlement.

On Sunday night, July 5th, at 10.00pm one final meeting took place between the commission and the hunger-strikers, or rather, with seven of them — Joe McDonnell, then 58 days on hunger-strike, was too weak to attend. The meeting lasted two and a half hours and again the hunger-strikers did not indicate at any stage throughout the meeting that the commission's proposals were acceptable as a settlement to the prison protests.

Yet, on the basis of those discussions and the proposals agreed between the commission and Alison — which fell far short of even



● JOE McDONNELL

the prisoners', July 4th, statement, in the major areas of work, association/segregation — the ICJP by the evening of Monday, July 6th, was proposing a visit to the prison by an NIO official, to finalise a deal with the prisoners, as the only barrier to a settlement.

COMMITMENT

That the NIO had given the commission a

commitment to send an official into the prison to talk to the prisoners is incontrovertible. But it is difficult to conceive of why they had given that commitment or, indeed, to what purpose, in view of the fact that the prisoners had not given their assent to the commission/Alison proposals as an agreed settlement to their protests.

McDONNELL

However, having once given it, the commission was intent that the NIO should fulfil their commitment. In due course, throughout Tuesday July 7th, and into the early hours of the following morning, they hurried Alison and his minions in that direction, actually threatening to expose the entirety of their agreement — which was common knowledge anyhow, through press leaks — at a press conference on Tuesday afternoon. The only effect this had was in getting Alison to reaffirm his commitment to send an official into Long Kesh.

At 5.12am on Wednesday, July 8th, Joe McDonnell died on the 61st day of his hunger-strike.

At 10.00am on the same day a prison official named Jackson, accompanied by the governor of Long Kesh, Stanley Hilditch, did eventually go into the prison to see the hunger-strikers but only to read out a five-page document issued by Humphrey Atkins which did no more than reiterate previous public positions of the British government on



● (From left to right) Joseph and Goretti McDonnell (wife and son of hunger-striker Joe McDonnell) Margaret and Brendan Doherty (mother and brother of hunger-striker Kieran Doherty TD) protest outside Leinster House, Dublin, June '81



● **Goretti McDonnell going into Long Kesh on Sunday, July 5th, 1981 — the ICJP's role ended in the acrimony which followed Joe McDonnell's death**

the hunger-strike. The commission/Alison proposals were not mentioned.

ACRIMONY

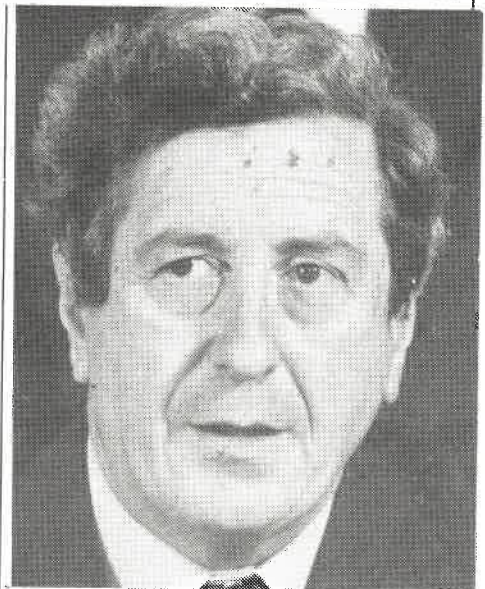
The affable relationship which had developed between the commission and the NIO broke down in bitter acrimony with claim and counter-claim being made on the contents of their limited agreement.

Within a short time it was publicly evident and generally agreed that the commission's version of that limited agreement was the correct one and that the NIO had been guilty of both lies and 'duplicity'.

But in the commission/media-created euphoria which preceeded Joe McDonnell's death and the acrimony which followed in its wake, the fact that what had been agreed be-

tween Alison and the commission was not sufficient to effect a settlement was ignored. A situation which was not reversed until the prisoners sent out a statement which was issued on Saturday, July 11th, confirming the commission's version of the agreement as related to them, and pointing out its inadequacies.

The prisoners said, that the proposals, which were totally unsatisfactory in the major areas of work, association/segregation, were "an unacceptable dilution" of their demands. They felt that the commission had been used against them by the British government and that in order to prevent that happening again they asked the commission "to forfeit their role" and to publicly support their five demands. The failure, as yet, of that support to



● **GARRET FITZGERALD — obvious involvement**

manifest itself can only be construed as opposition.

The ICJP's role was covertly political with the full backing of the Free State political parties and the Irish Catholic hierarchy. SDLP interests were represented by Hugh Logue. Its objectives too — seeking to impose a solution far short of the prisoners' demands — were also clearly political. Irish nationalist constitutionalist politicians obviously do not want the prisoners to be granted those demands.

FITZGERALD

Garret FitzGerald's deep involvement throughout is obvious. Firstly, in his regular consultations with the commission throughout the period of their involvement. Secondly, in his failed attempt to have the commission's July 3rd meeting brought forward. Thirdly, in his stupid and baseless attempt to whisk the hunger-strikers' families from his Dublin office to the Long Kesh prison hospital, on the evening of July 3rd to assist — hopefully — in the attempted imposition on the hunger-strikers of any agreement which the commission/Alison discussions of that day reached. And finally, after Joe McDonnell died, he sent John Kelly and Professor James Dooge (acting Foreign Minister and Foreign Minister designate, respectively) to London, for talks with Sir Ian Gilmour of the Foreign Office and Northern Direct-Ruler Atkins, in an attempt to retrieve what was not a tenable position in the first place.

But in the end, all the forces ranged on the commission's side — the British government, the Free State government and political parties and the SDLP — could not match the prisoners' commitment, determination and political astuteness.

The attempted imposition of an unsatisfactory end to the hunger-strike failed.

THE FULL TEXT OF THE H-BLOCK BLANKET MEN'S STATEMENT ANNOUNCING THE END OF THE HUNGER-STRIKE

Why we ended the hunger-strike

We, the protesting republican prisoners in the H-Blocks, being faced with the reality of sustained family intervention, are forced by this circumstance, over which we have little control at the moment, to end the hunger-strike.

After four years of continual protest, and after the failure of the Cardinal O Fiach/Humphrey Atkins talks, and having exhausted all other means of protest to bring about a settlement, we embarked on hunger-strike on October 27th, 1980.

That hunger-strike ended on December 18th, 1980, when the British government intimated to the hunger-strikers that they would implement a workable and just solution which was forwarded to the hunger-strikers on December 18th, 1980.

In the course of the immediate post-hunger-strike period it became increasingly clear that the British government had reneged on their commitment to implement that solution and so we were back in a pre-hunger-strike predicament and thus forced to go back on hunger-strike.

EMBARKED

On March 1st, 1981, Bobby Sands embarked on hunger-strike.

On April 9th, 1981, 30,492 people in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency elected him as their MP. By doing so they recognised him as a political prisoner and demanded that the British government respect the mandate given by them and by the entire nationalist community on the streets by implementing the five demands.

The British government, caught in the hypocrisy of their own 'democracy jargon', ignored the people's wishes and mandate.

On April 23rd, 1981, Charles Haughey, then Dublin premier, met relatives of

Bobby Sands and by playing on their distress convinced them that the intervention of the ECHR (European Commission on Human Rights) could, and would, solve the issue. Bobby's sister, Marcella, acted on Haughey's advice and signed an intervention document.

The ECHR delegation came to Long Kesh and Bobby Sands said he would meet them providing Brendan McFarlane, O/C of the prisoners, Mr. Gerry Adams, and Mr. Danny Morrison were present. This reasonable proviso was refused and the ECHR left Long Kesh. Bobby released a statement that night attacking Haughey for unscrupulously



exploiting his family's anxiety to cover his own inactivity.

On May 5th, 1981, Bobby Sands died on hunger-strike, murdered by British callousness and vindictiveness.

Frank Hughes, Raymond McCreesh, and Patsy O'Hara were soon to follow Bobby to the grave, and still the British government remained steadfastly and inhumanely inflexible.

ELECTION

On June 11th, nine prisoners stood in the Southern general election.

Of these, Paddy Agnew topped the poll in Louth, and Kieran Doherty was elected for the Cavan/Monaghan constituency. In the other seven areas the prisoners polled exceedingly well considering the lack of organisation and the short period of time there was to organise the election campaign.

The ordinary people of the South cast their votes in thousands. In Cavan/Monaghan, Kieran Doherty polled first preference 9,121 (15%); Paddy Agnew, Louth, 8,368 (18%); Joe McDonnell, Sligo/Leitrim, 5,634; Martin Hurson, Longford/Westmeath, 4,573 (10%); Sean McKenna, Kerry North, 3,860; Kevin Lynch, Waterford 3,337; Tony O'Hara, Dublin West, 3,034; Mairead Farrell, Cork North Central, 2,751, and Tom McAllister, Clare, 2,120.

On July 4th, 1981, we issued a major policy statement outlining our five demands, and emphasising the fact that we wanted our five demands to be available for all prisoners (rejecting an assertion to the contrary, made by the British, which we regarded as nonsense and a red herring to justify the barbarity of the British government). This statement was almost universally accepted as 'remarkably conciliatory'.

COMMISSION

On the same day, the ICJP (Irish Commission for Justice and Peace) entered



● **BOBBY SANDS**
aged 27, Belfast
commenced fast March 1st
died May 5th
after 66 days



● **FRANCIS HUGHES**
aged 25, South Derry
commenced fast March 15th
died May 12th
after 59 days



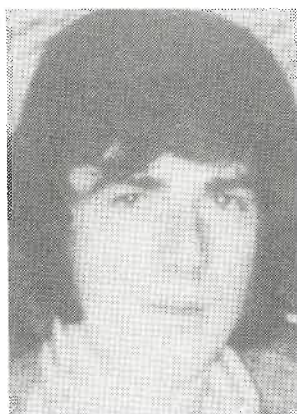
● **RAYMOND McCREESH**
aged 24, South Armagh
commenced fast March 22nd
died May 21st
after 61 days



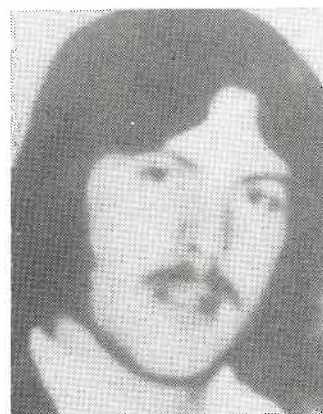
● **PATSY O'HARA**
aged 24, Derry city
commenced fast March 22nd
died May 21st
after 61 days



● **JOE McDONNELL**
aged 30, Belfast
commenced fast May 9th
died July 8th
after 61 days



● **BRENDAN McLAUGHLIN**
aged 29, North Derry
commenced fast May 14th
ended fast May 27th
after 14 days



● **KIERAN DOHERTY**
aged 25, Belfast
commenced fast May 22nd
died August 2nd
after 73 days



● **KEVIN LYNCH**
aged 25, North Derry
commenced fast May 23rd
died August 1st
after 71 days

the prison and put proposals to the hunger-strikers. They put the same proposals to Brendan McFarlane the next day.

On July 8th, Joe McDonnell died and the British government issued their policy statement.

We released a statement rejecting the government's statement and ambiguous proposals as even less than what we were originally led to believe was offered via the ICJP. We also rejected the ICJP's proposals which totally evaded the crux of the issue and we expressed our belief that the government had used the ICJP to foster the impression that a settlement was imminent.

The government's reneging on their own commitment to the ICJP compounded our belief that the ICJP was being used, and the ICJP dismissed the government's proposals as not a genuine attempt at a settlement.

SHOCKED

On July 13th we were shocked and dismayed to hear that Martin Hurson had been violently ill and had died unexpect-

edly and prematurely.

The next significant development was the British government-sponsored intervention of the IRC (International Red Cross). The IRC tried to initiate direct dialogue between the Brits and ourselves, but the British rejected this and suggested mediation based on their July 8th statement, which was aimed at defeating us and we rejected this as futile and unproductive.

We pointed out to the IRC, that, as the Brits were not interested in an honourable settlement, their interest in the IRC must logically be to use them. A Red Cross delegate asked for a further breakdown of our July 4th statement and was initially refused. However, after discussion, we compiled and issued the August 6th statement and asked the British government, the Dublin government, the SDLP and the Catholic church to respond to our statement.

Soon Kieran Doherty, Kevin Lynch and Thomas McElwee were to be murdered by Britain.

The British government, having been exposed for the hypocrites they are at

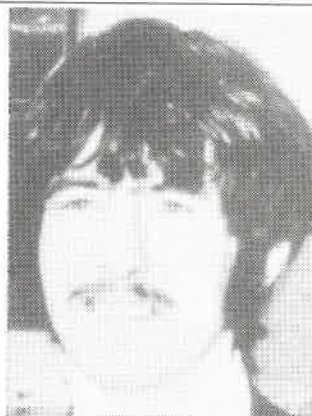
the first Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election, had instigated and passed legislation which erased our right to participate in elections and, this done, they fixed the by-election for Bobby Sands' seat for August 20th.

TREACHEROUS

By this time, a new, active, treacherous, and vigorous campaign was under way to break the strike. This campaign was orchestrated by clerics who received approval from the Catholic church. On occasion other individuals were involved also.

Attempts were made to discredit us prisoners and the National H-Block/Armagh Committee. More damaging was the promotion of the 'hopeless' syndrome. The projection of this 'hopeless' syndrome plus the private lobbying of relatives to effect intervention when strikers were going into a coma was proving to be a serious threat to the continuation of the hunger-strike.

On August 20th, 1981, Owen Carron was elected with an increased majority as proxy political prisoner MP for Fer-



● **MARTIN HURSON**
aged 24, East Tyrone
commenced fast May 29th
died July 13th
after 46 days

● **THOMAS McELWEE**
aged 23, South Derry
commenced fast June 8th
died August 8th
after 62 days

● **PADDY QUINN**
aged 28, South Armagh
commenced fast June 15th
ended fast July 31st
after 47 days

● **MICKY DEVINE**
aged 27, Derry city
commenced fast June 22nd
died August 20th
after 60 days



● **LAURENCE McKEOWN**
aged 24, County Antrim
commenced fast June 29th
ended fast September 6th
after 70 days

● **PAT McGEOWN**
aged 24, Belfast
commenced fast July 10th
ended fast August 20th
after 42 days

● **MATT DEVLIN**
aged 31, East Tyrone
commenced fast July 15th
ended fast September 4th
after 52 days

● **LIAM McCLOSKEY**
aged 25, North Derry
commenced fast August 3rd
ended fast September 26th
after 55 days

managh and South Tyrone. Even so, the British premier, Thatcher, again spurned this mandate for us prisoners and with encouragement from Dr FitzGerald she went further, by refusing even to meet with him to discuss the continuing spiral, and gruesome spectre, of death.

On August 20th, Micky Devine was the tenth hunger-striker to die.

Mounting pressure and cleric-inspired demoralisation led to further intervention and at present five strikers have been taken off their fast. We accept that it is almost a physical and psychological impossibility to recommence hunger-strike after intervention. Also, two men ended their fast to avoid a premature, non-hunger-striking death.

The situation exists at present that a considerable majority of present hunger-strikers' families have indicated that they will intervene and under these circumstances we feel that the hunger-strike must, for tactical reasons, be suspended.

We feel that it is of paramount importance that the political revelations, lessons and consequences of the

hunger-strike are recognised and perpetuated in the minds, the hearts and demeanour of the nationalist population of Ireland.

One of the primary lessons to emerge from this second hunger-strike is that the nationalist community is politically inconsequential and impotent in the context of the Six-County statelet.

Despite the electoral successes, despite the hundreds of thousands at hunger-strikers' funerals, despite massive and unprecedented displays of community support and solidarity, the British government adhered rigidly to the precept that 'might is right' and set about hammering home the point that nothing has really changed since the fall of Stormont or from the inception of this state. That is, that nationalist Ireland must always be subjected to the British and loyalist veto.

On the same theme, the lesson of Fermanagh and South Tyrone is that the self-exalted 'British democracy' is an expediency manufactured — again from the setting up of the border (the 'first and biggest gerrymander') — to preserve

a continued British presence in Ireland.

When defeated by their own rules at the polls the British government's concept of democracy altered and the rules were changed to suit them. When they are defeated even by their new rules, they ignore the democratically expressed voice of the electorate and thus undermine the entire principle and purpose of using their 'democratic' processes to effect social or political change.

The logical conclusion of this analysis is that nationalist pacifism in the Northern Ireland context dooms the nationalist population to subservience, perpetuates partition, and thwarts the quest for a just and lasting peace in Ireland.

CHURCH

Another facet of this hunger-strike was to expertly expose the true face of the present Irish establishment, consisting of the Catholic church, the Dublin government, and the SDLP.

From the outset the Catholic hierarchy opposed the hunger-strike even though they offered no alternative course of action.



● **PAT SHEEHAN**
aged 23, Belfast
commenced fast August 10th
ended fast October 3rd
after 55 days



● **JACKIE McMULLAN**
aged 25, Belfast
commenced fast August 17th
ended fast October 3rd
after 48 days



● **BERNARD FOX**
aged 30, Belfast
commenced fast August 24th
ended fast September 25th
after 33 days



● **GERRY CARVILLE**
aged 25, South Down
commenced fast August 31st
ended fast October 3rd
after 34 days



● **JOHN PICKERING**
aged 25, Belfast
commenced fast September 7th
ended fast October 3rd
after 27 days



● **GERARD HODGINS**
aged 21, Belfast
commenced fast September 14th
ended fast October 3rd
after 20 days



● **JIM DEVINE**
aged 24, Strabane
commenced fast September 21st
ended fast October 3rd
after 13 days

We contend that their position has at all times been established by political consideration rather than the Christian values of truth and justice. Therefore, their stance has been extremely immoral and misleading.

At no time did the church publicly support the five demands or for that matter reject them. Equally when specifically asked to respond to our August 6th statement, they kept silent — even though hunger-strikers were dying virtually on a weekly basis.

We contend very strongly that the reason why the British didn't respond to our August 6th statement is that the prisoner régime we proposed was inarguably superior and better than the present Victorian régime and that the church accepted this, but to support our demands would be to oppose the British government.

And the logical conclusion, again, would be to consciously incite the Irish Catholic population to oppose the British policy. Therefore, they remained ambiguous on the entire issue and the reason, as we stated, is that they are in-

tricately immersed in the field of politics and deceit.

It was the Catholic clerics, more than anyone, who were involved in the back door and public pressuring of families to get them to intervene.

BLOC

We believe that the Dublin bloc of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Labour are accessories to the legalised murder of ten true and committed Irishmen who died heroically in the long tradition of republican resistance to British occupation, oppression and injustice in Ireland. They are accessories to murder by virtue of the fact that they sat idly by and thus encouraged the British to continue with the death policy.

The sheer hypocrisy of their position is that at no time did any of these three parties unequivocally or even tacitly support our demands, even though our five demands are implemented in their entirety (even more than we were looking for) in jails in Southern Ireland.

Well may they hang their heads in shame, for they are a pathetic reflection

of republicanism and the spirit that traditionally earmarked the Irish patriot's pursuit of nationhood and justice. By their cowardly collaborationist and quisling stand on the H-Block issue they have debased the memory of generations of Irish freedom fighters who fought for a separatist Ireland.

If John Bull doesn't actually rule the 26 Counties physically, he still rules in spirit.

And it must not be forgotten that Garret FitzGerald's concept of democracy parallels with Maggie Thatcher's.

LICKSPITTLE

There was only one positively injurious action available to the SDLP which would help to save lives in the H-Blocks and that was to isolate the British administration by withdrawing from the council chambers. This they consistently refused to do, preferring instead to cling tenaciously to their role of imperialist lickspittle.

Rather than take action to secure an honourable solution and save lives, they occupied their time trying to make politi-

cal gain by attacking those who did genuinely endeavour to end the issue honourably, namely the National H-Block/Armagh Committee and those councillors who answered our call to withdraw from the councils.

This party should now be recognised for what it is, an amalgamation of middle-class Redmonites, devoid of principle, direction and courage. This party is spineless and weak and is very capable of selling-out to unionist intimidators for imperialist perks. Their whole leadership combined do not possess a fraction of the moral fibre demonstrated so valiantly by our comrades.

ADVANCE

There were several reasons given by our comrades for going on hunger-strike. One was because we had no choice and no other means of securing a principled solution to the four-year protest.

Another, and of fundamental importance, was to advance the Irish people's right to liberty. We believe that the age-old struggle for Irish self-determination and freedom has been immeasurably advanced by this hunger-strike and therefore we claim a massive political victory. The hunger-strikers, by their selflessness, have politicised a very substantial section of the Irish nation and exposed the shallow, unprincipled nature of the Irish partitionist bloc.

Our comrades have lit with their very lives an eternal beacon which will inspire this nation and people to rise and crush oppression forever and this nation can be proud that it produced such a quality of manhood.

We pay a special tribute to the families of our dead comrades. You have suffered greatly and with immense dignity. Your loved ones, our comrades and friends, were and would be very proud of

HUNGER-STRIKE

you for standing by them. No tribute is too great.

Also, we give a special mention to those families who could not bear to watch their loved ones die in pain and agony. We prisoners understand the pressure you were under and stand by you.

We thank the National H-Block/Armagh Committee, the H-Block movement, the nationalist people of Ireland, and all those who championed our cause abroad, we are indebted to you and ask you to continue your good work on our behalf.

Lastly we reaffirm our commitment to the achievement of the five demands by whatever means we believe necessary and expedient. We rule nothing out.

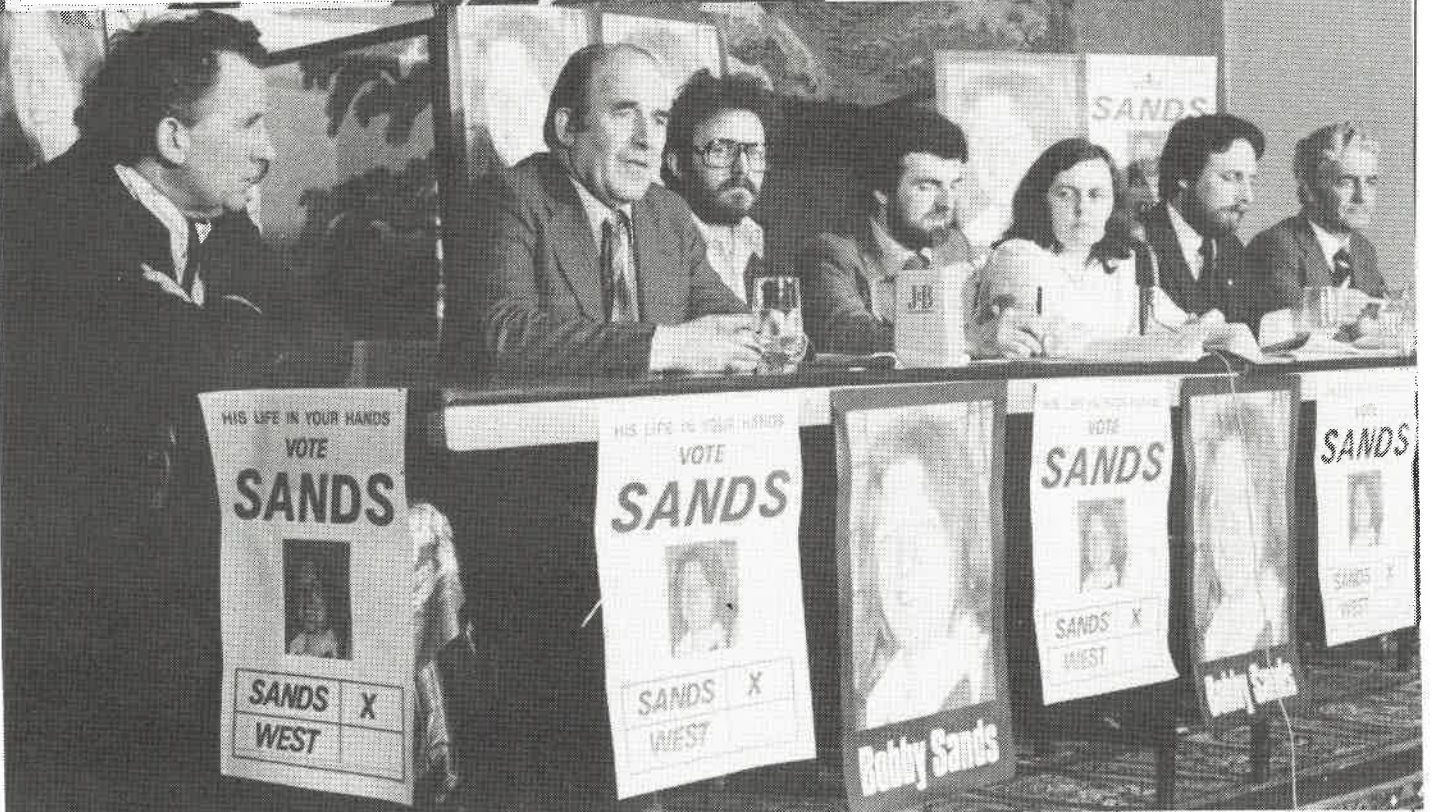
Under no circumstances are we going to devalue the memory of our dead comrades by submitting ourselves to a dehumanising and degrading régime.



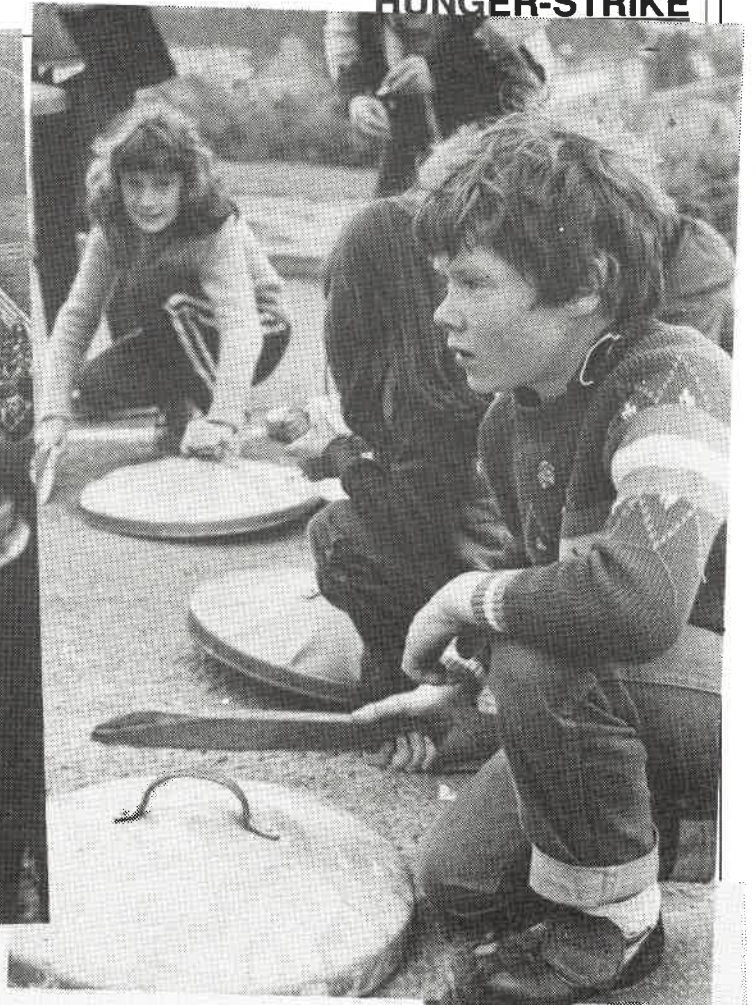
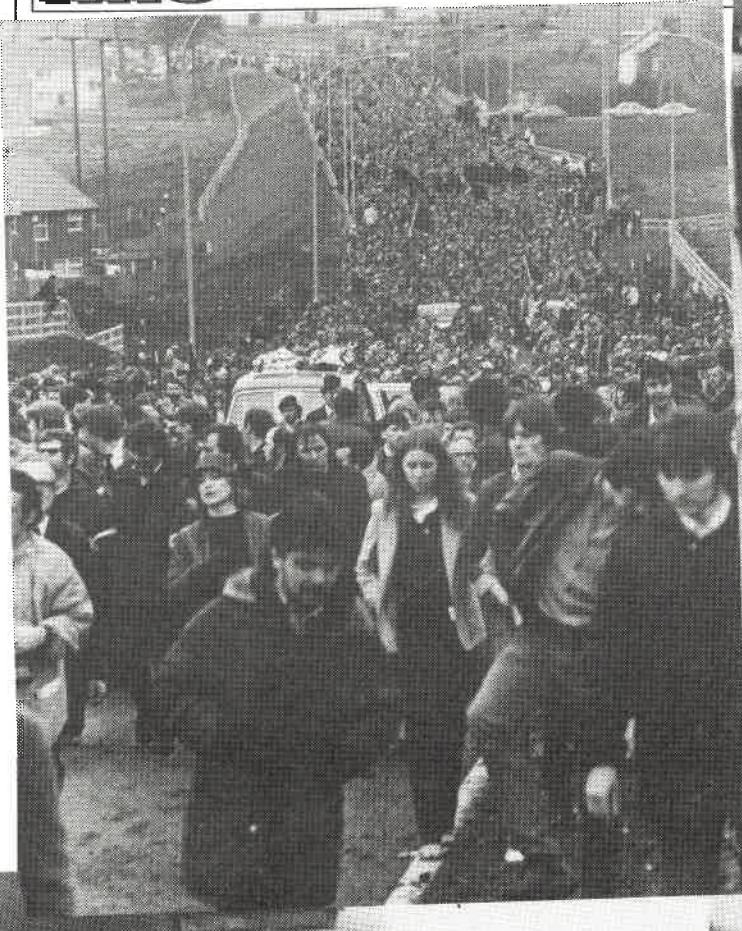
● "We believe that the age-old struggle for Irish self-determination has been advanced by this hunger-strike and therefore we claim a massive political victory"



● The first National anti-H-Block/Armagh rally of the hunger-strike to be held in Dublin on Saturday, April 18th, 1981, pictured are Bobby Sands' two sisters, Bernadette (left) and Marcella along with Owen Carron of Sinn Féin



● The platform party at a pre-election press conference for Bobby Sands included (from second from left) Euro MP Neil Blaney; Jim Gibney, Sinn Féin; Owen Carron, Bobby's election agent (later to succeed him as MP); Bernadette McAliskey, H-Block activist; and Pat McCaffrey, Irish Independence Party councillor



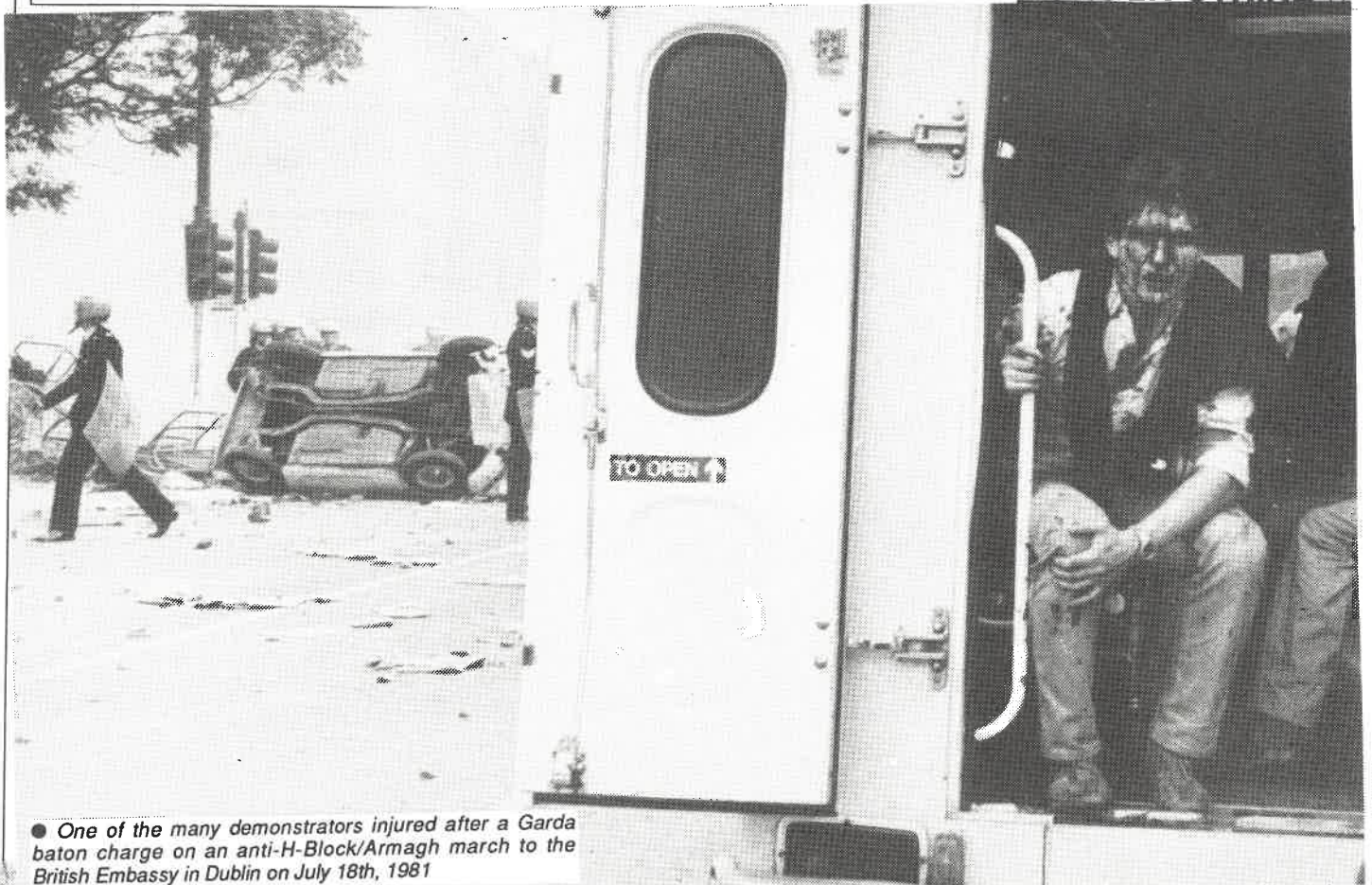
● (Clockwise) The funeral cortège of Volunteer Bobby Sands, — Dungannon children react to the news of the death of hunger-striker Mickey Devine on August 20th, — Falls Road, Belfast, on the day Bobby Sands died



● IRA Volunteers prepare to fire the final salute to Volunteer Francis Hughes



● A black flag march on Belfast's Falls Road on Saturday, May 9th, after the death on hunger-strike of Volunteer Bobby Sands



● One of the many demonstrators injured after a Garda baton charge on an anti-H-Block/Armagh march to the British Embassy in Dublin on July 18th, 1981



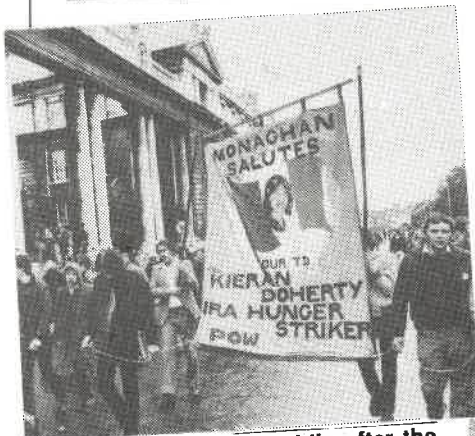
● IRA Volunteers flank the coffin of hunger-striker Martin Hurson in Galbally, County Tyrone, on July 15th, 1981



● Marchers passing the US embassy in Dublin



● Time to rest sore feet for this H-Block marcher



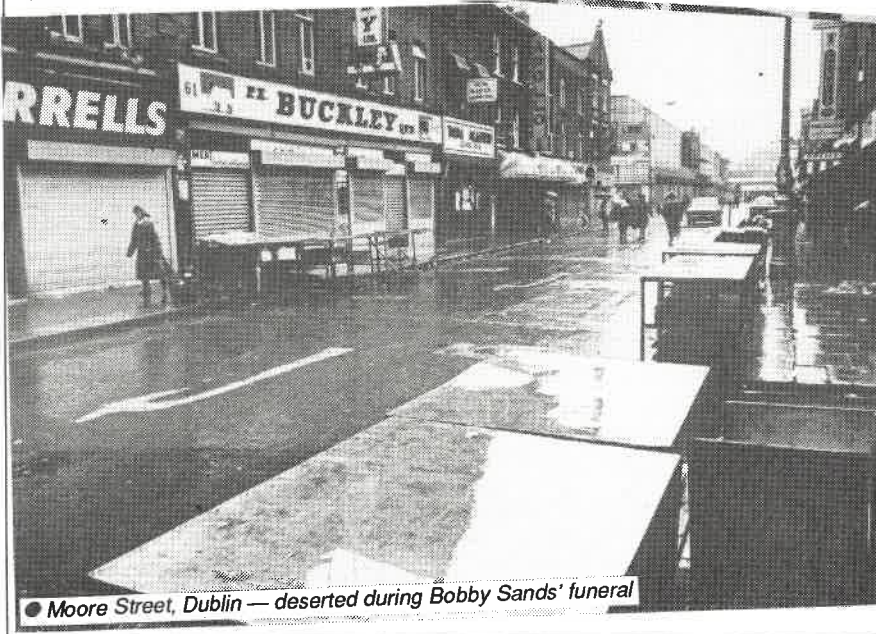
● On the march in Dublin after the election of Kieran Doherty



● Alfie and Margaret Doherty, parents of Kieran Doherty TD, picketing Leinster House



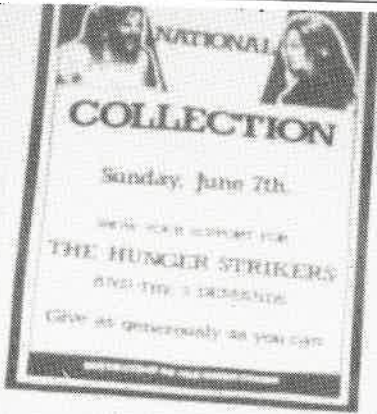
● Scenes of joy as Sinn Féin's Owen Carron wins the Fermanagh/South Tyrone by-election



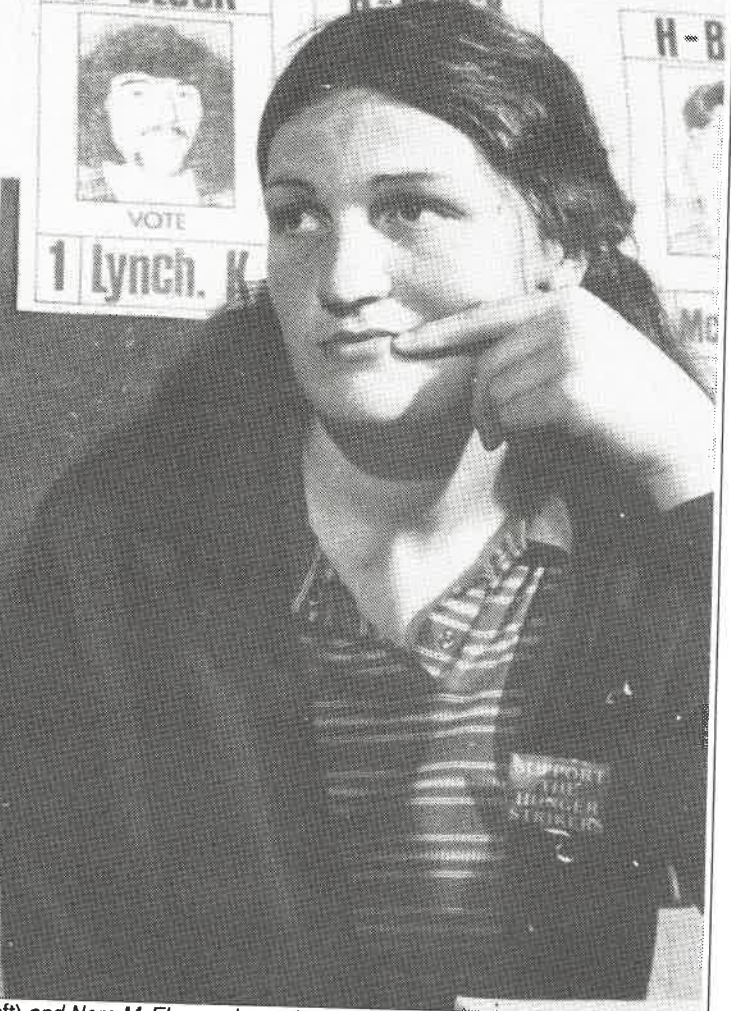
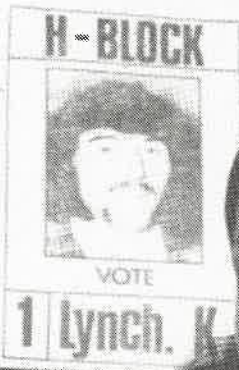
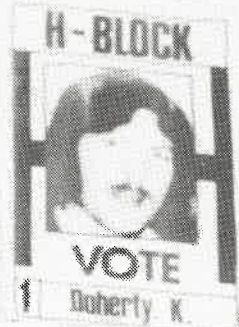
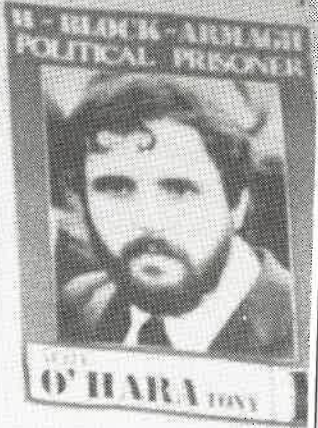
● Moore Street, Dublin — deserted during Bobby Sands' funeral



● Bobby Sands' sister Marcella and his mother in Enniskillen following his election victory



MASS YOUTH MARCH
G.P.O. BUIE
SHOW YOURS



● Pauline McGeown (left) and Nora McElwee, pictured at a press conference on July 31st, 1981



● The coffin of hunger-striker Joe McDonnell followed by his wife Goretti and their two children Joseph and Bernadette



● Mourners at the funeral of Martin Hurson in Galbally, County Tyrone



● The message is clear in Dungiven, the home town of Volunteer Kevin Lynch on the day he died on hunger-strike



● In support of the five demands in Dublin



● RUC and British soldiers during the attack on the funeral of Joe McDonnell in Belfast (below) gardai ordering the press to move during the baton charge on the H-Block march of July 18th

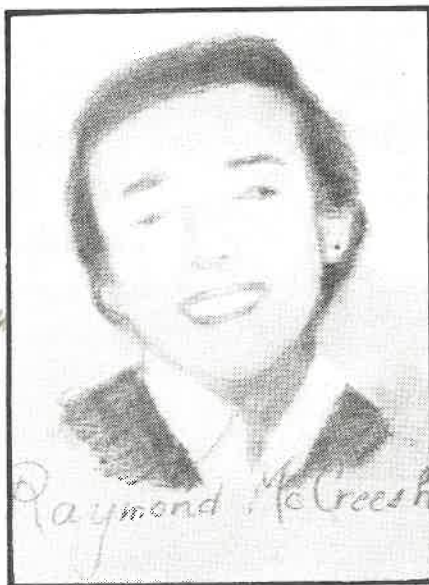
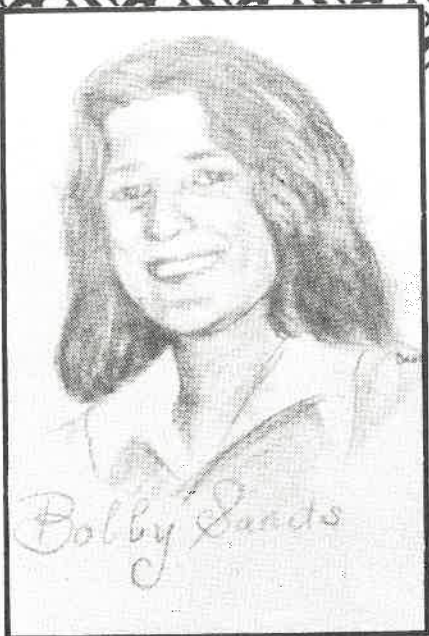




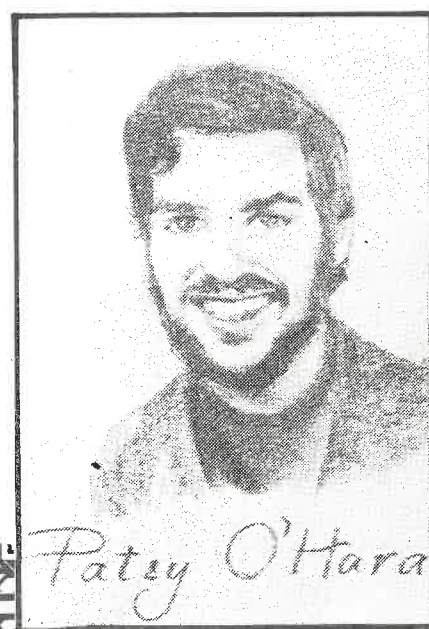
● Jubilation as blanket man Paddy Agnew is elected TD for Louth in the 26-County General Election of June '81



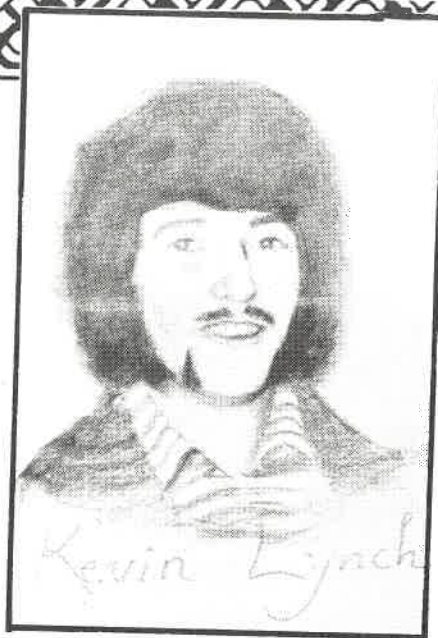
● Anti-H-Block/Armagh vigil at a Belfast polling station during the May '81 local government elections



H-BL MART

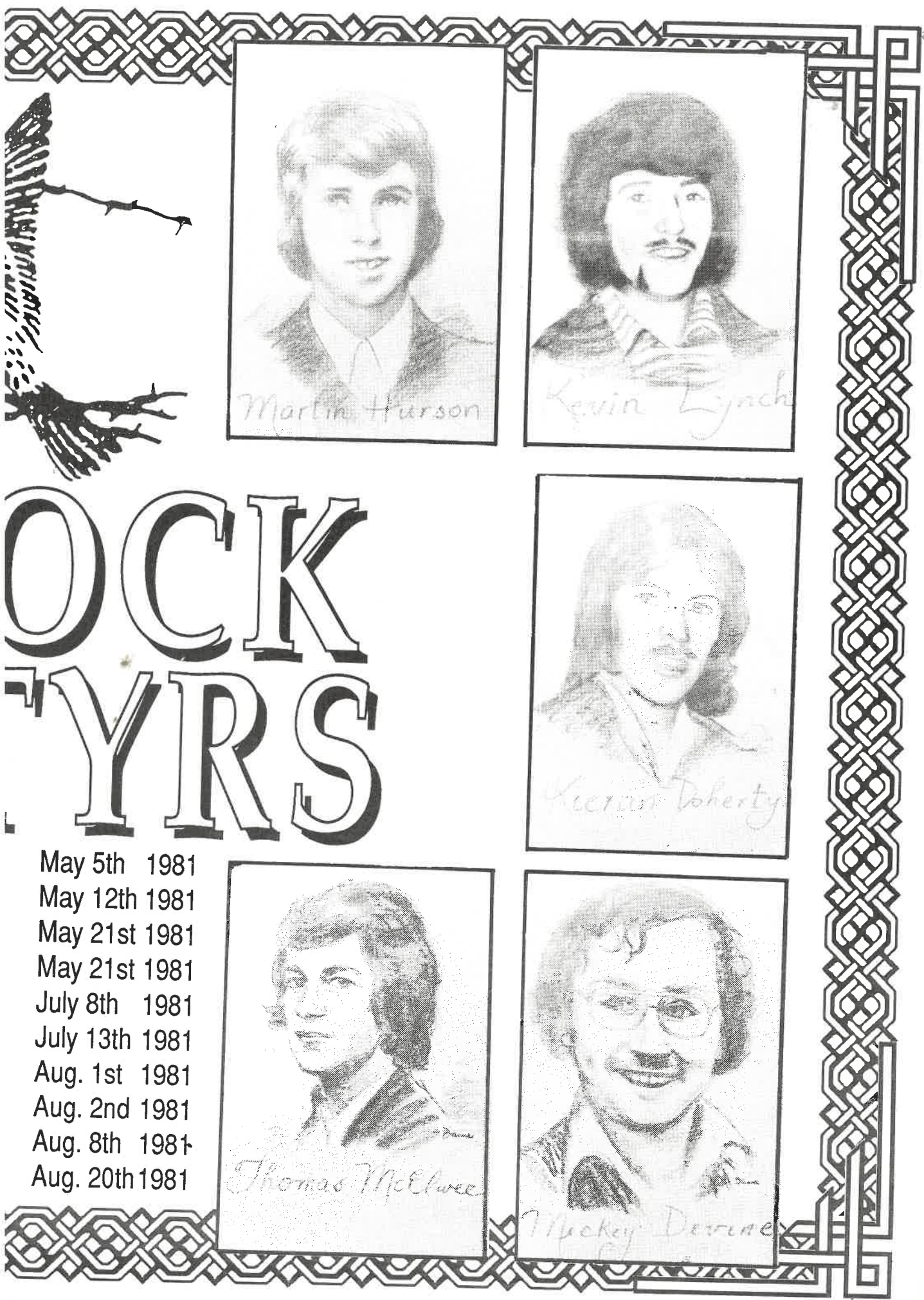


- Vol Bobby Sands
- Vol Francis Hughes
- Vol Raymond McCreech
- Vol Patsy O'Hara(INLA)
- Vol Joe McDonnell
- Vol Martin Hurson
- Vol Kevin Lynch(INLA)
- Vol Kieran Doherty
- Vol Thomas McElwee
- Vol Mickey Devine(INLA)



ROCK YRS

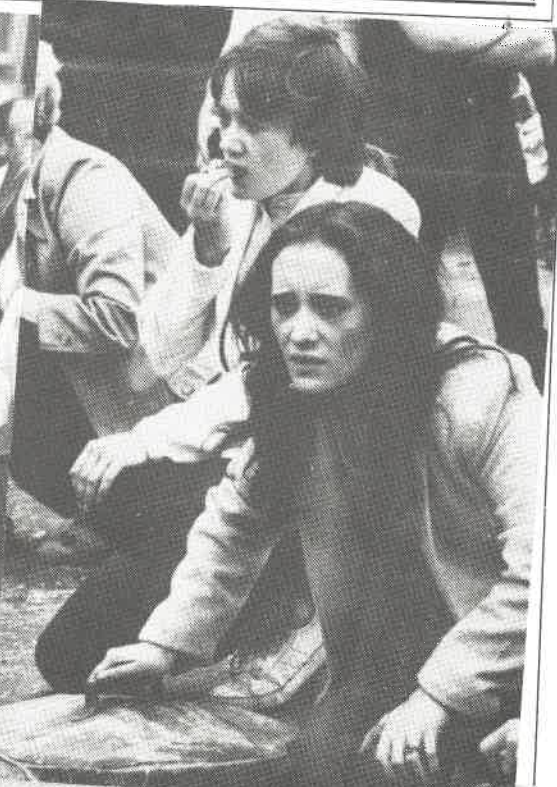
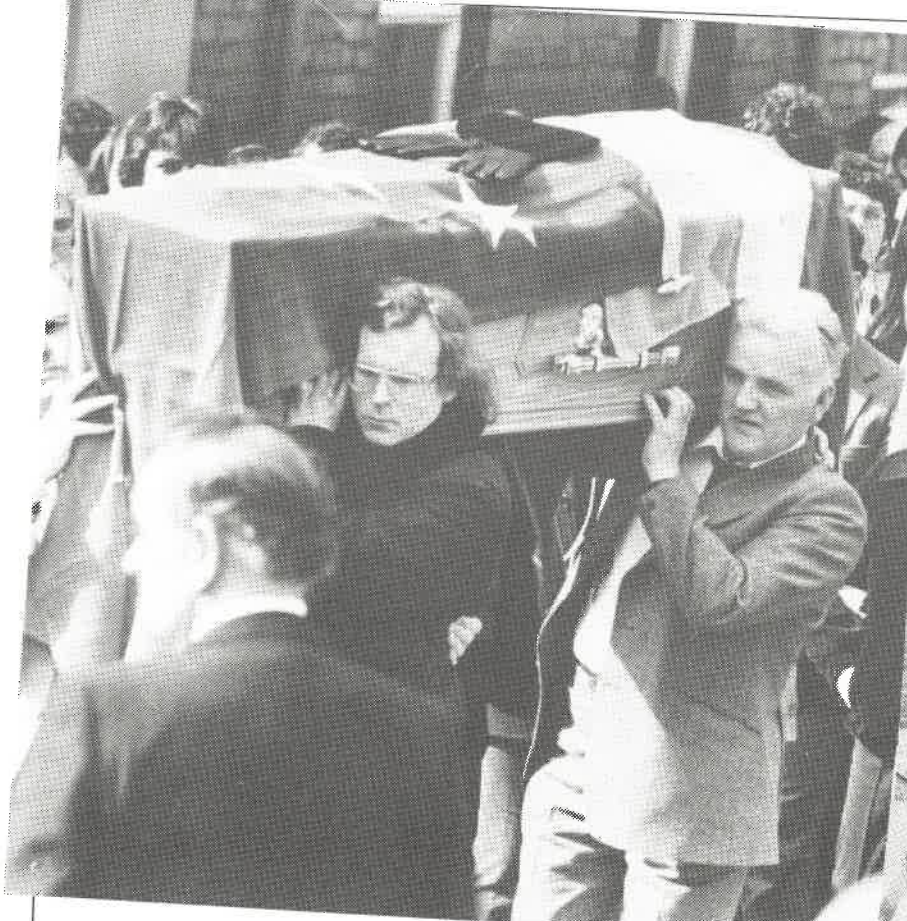
- May 5th 1981
- May 12th 1981
- May 21st 1981
- May 21st 1981
- July 8th 1981
- July 13th 1981
- Aug. 1st 1981
- Aug. 2nd 1981
- Aug. 8th 1981
- Aug. 20th 1981



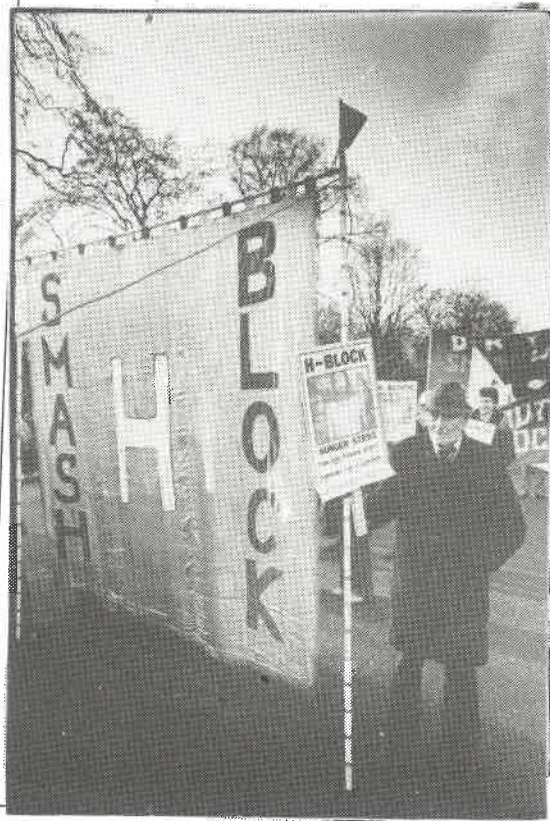


● (Top left) Derry anti-H-Block/Armagh march (top right) mourners sign a book of condolences after the death of Bobby Sands at Dublin's GPO (centre) protestors in Toomebridge, County Antrim, on Sunday, May 3rd (bottom left) one protestor's suggestion of how to tackle Thatcher's intransigence (bottom right) Mrs Margaret Hughes pictured in centre of photograph at the funeral of her son Francis





● (Top left) The O'Hara family accompany the body of Patsy (top right) Belfast women banging out the news of the death of one of the hunger-strikers (centre) Toomebridge marchers (bottom left) Dublin (bottom right) Hunger-strike rally in Kilburn, London, on April 26th, 1981 — marchers sat on the road after a wave of arrests

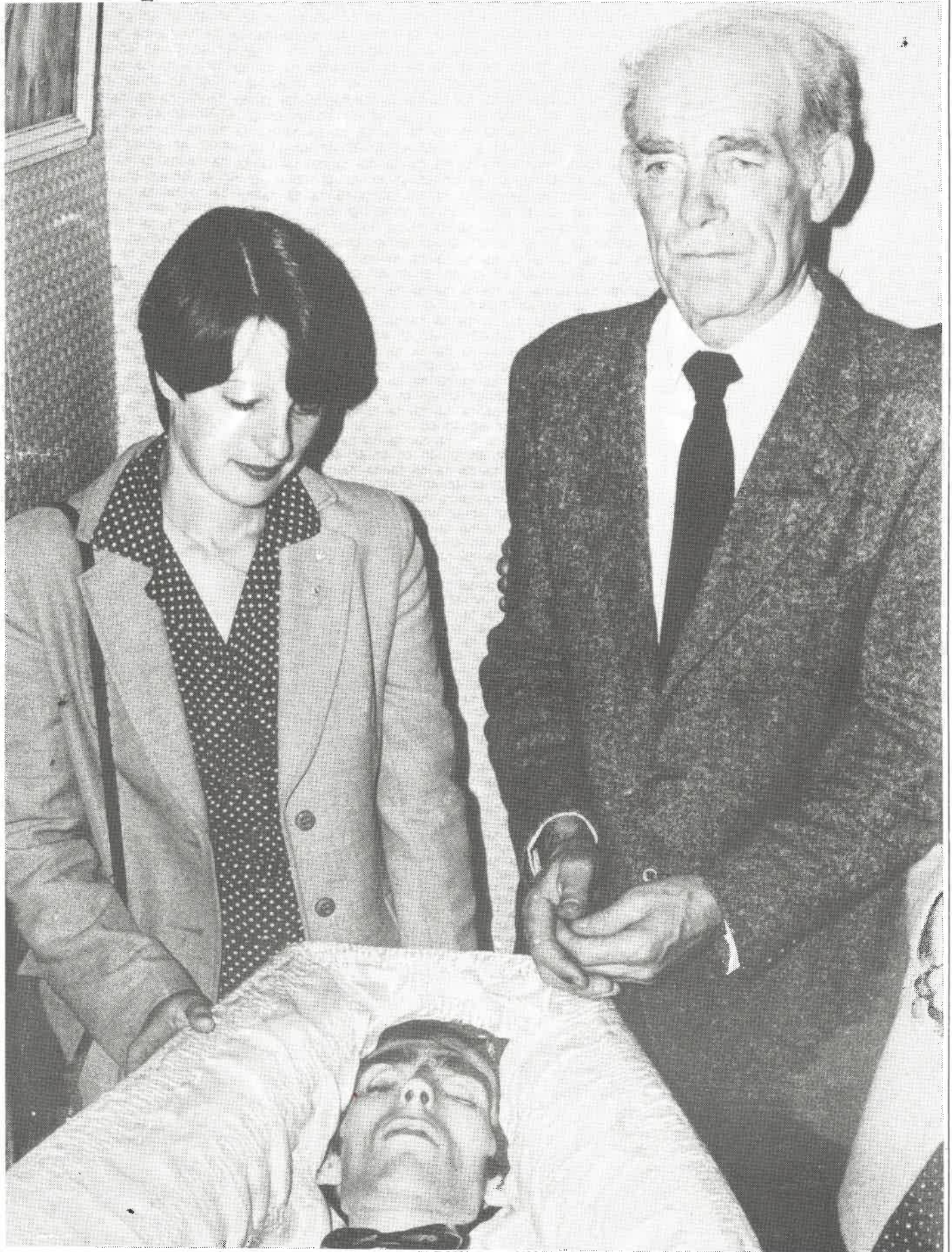




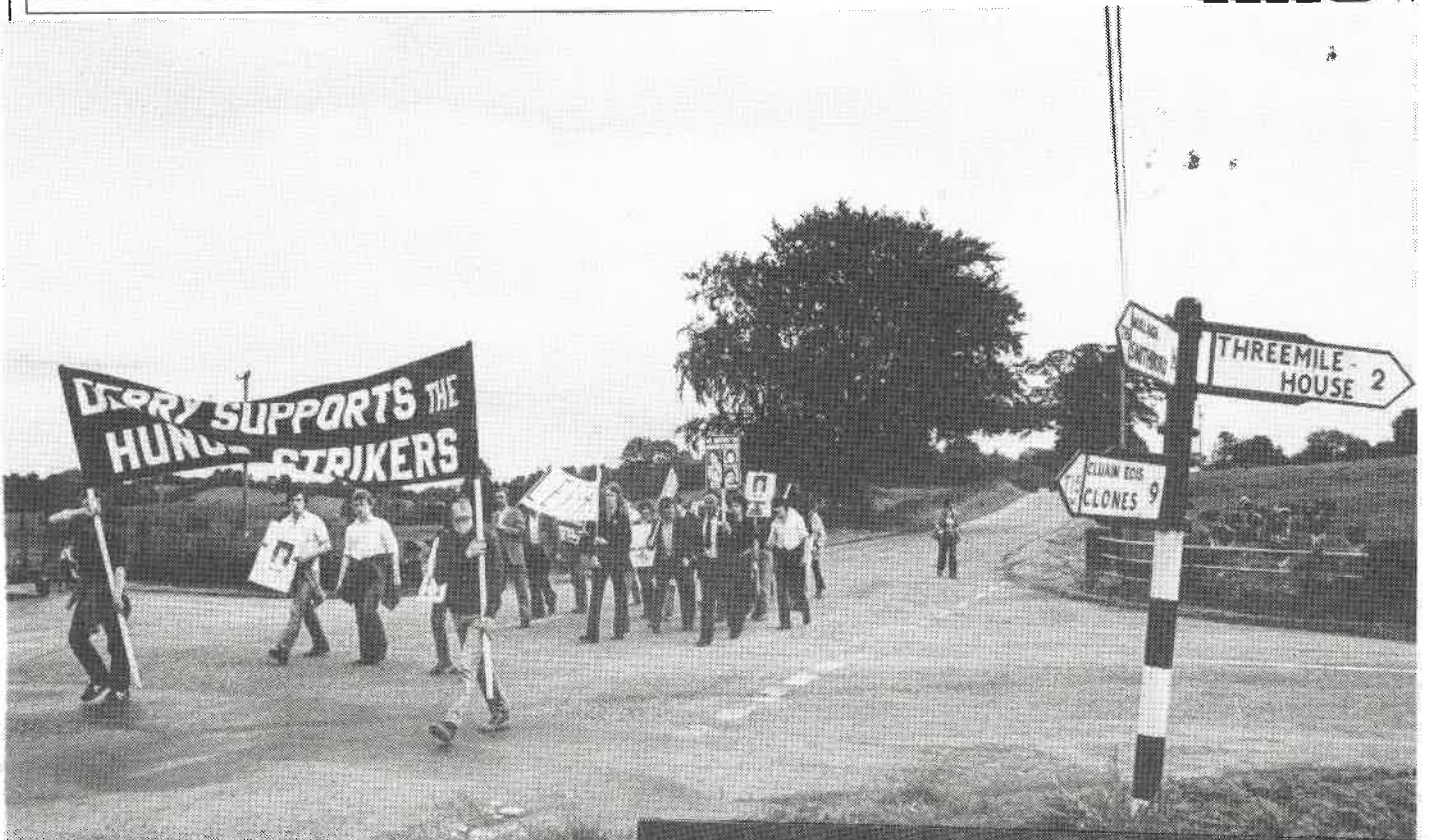
● Peaceful Dublin marchers pass Garda riot-squads at the GPO



● A vigil in Kilburn, London, after the death of Kieran Doherty TD



● Thomas McElwee's eldest sister Kathleen, and his father, with love and grief, look on at the gaunt remains of a courageous republican and hunger-striker



● From London to Dublin, from the cities to the countryside, the message is the same — Smash H-Block/Armagh





● White line picket on Belfast's Grosvenor Road

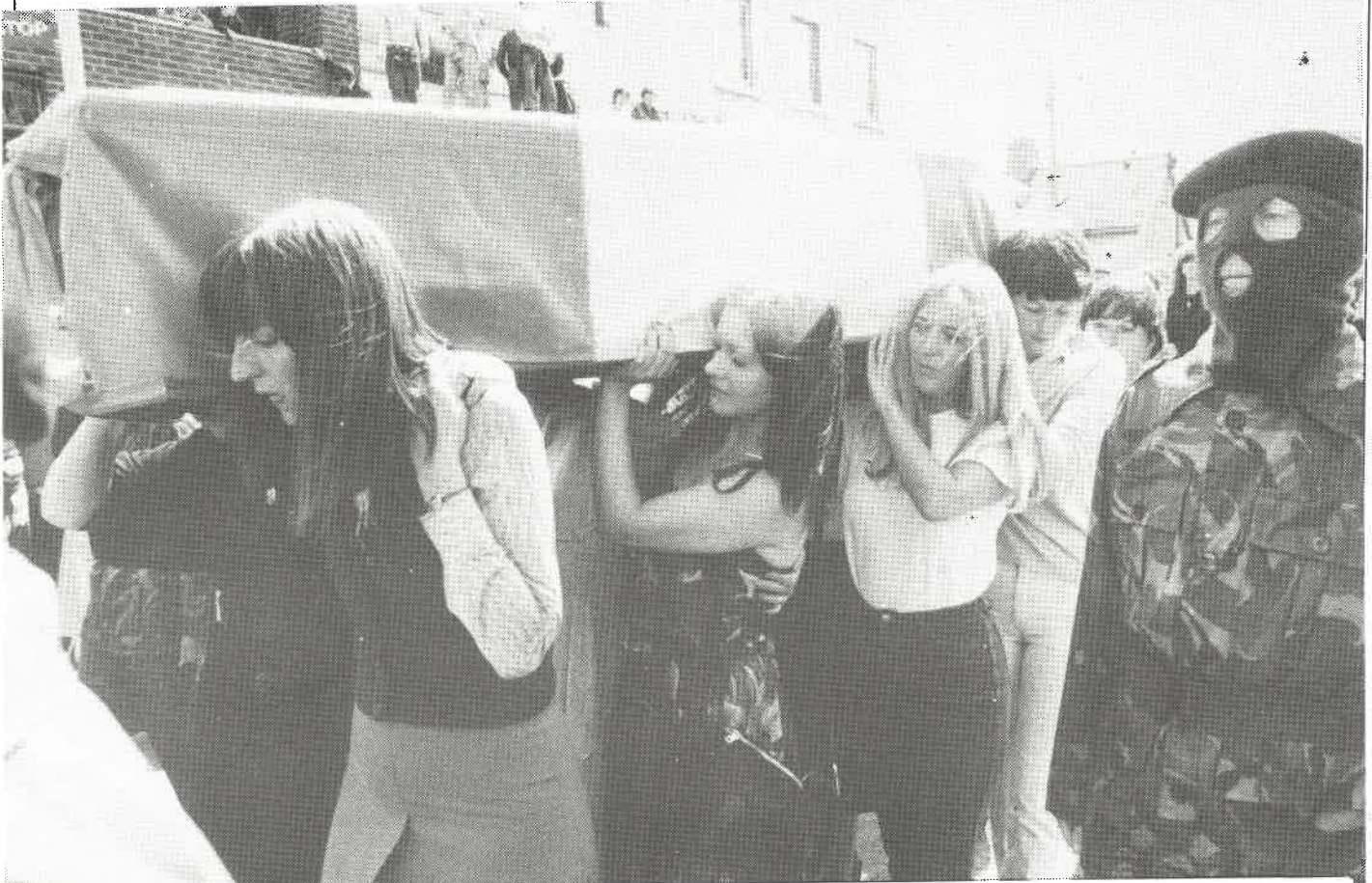


● Cavan town Sinn Féin Councillor Charlie Boylan gives hunger-striker Kieran Doherty's election acceptance speech, as Fianna Fáil Minister for Education John Wilson looks on with ill-concealed annoyance



● Owen Carron MP at Thatcher's Downing Street residence on Friday, September 18th, with Michael McCloskey (left), brother of hunger-striker Liam; Gerard Fox, brother of hunger-striker Bernard; and Francis Hurson (right) brother of one of the dead hunger-strikers, Martin — being informed by Thatcher's former aide Ian Gow (since executed by the IRA) that the British premier refuses to see them





● The coffin of Kieran Doherty, TD, being carried Christina Carney, National H-Block Committee, Elizabeth O'Hara, sister of Patsy O'Hara, Goretti McDonnell, wife of Joe McDonnell and Pauline McElwee, sister of Thomas McElwee



● (left) Bobby Sands' memorial, Twinbrook, vandalised by British soldiers



● The people of Derry pay their final respects to hunger-striker Micky Devine



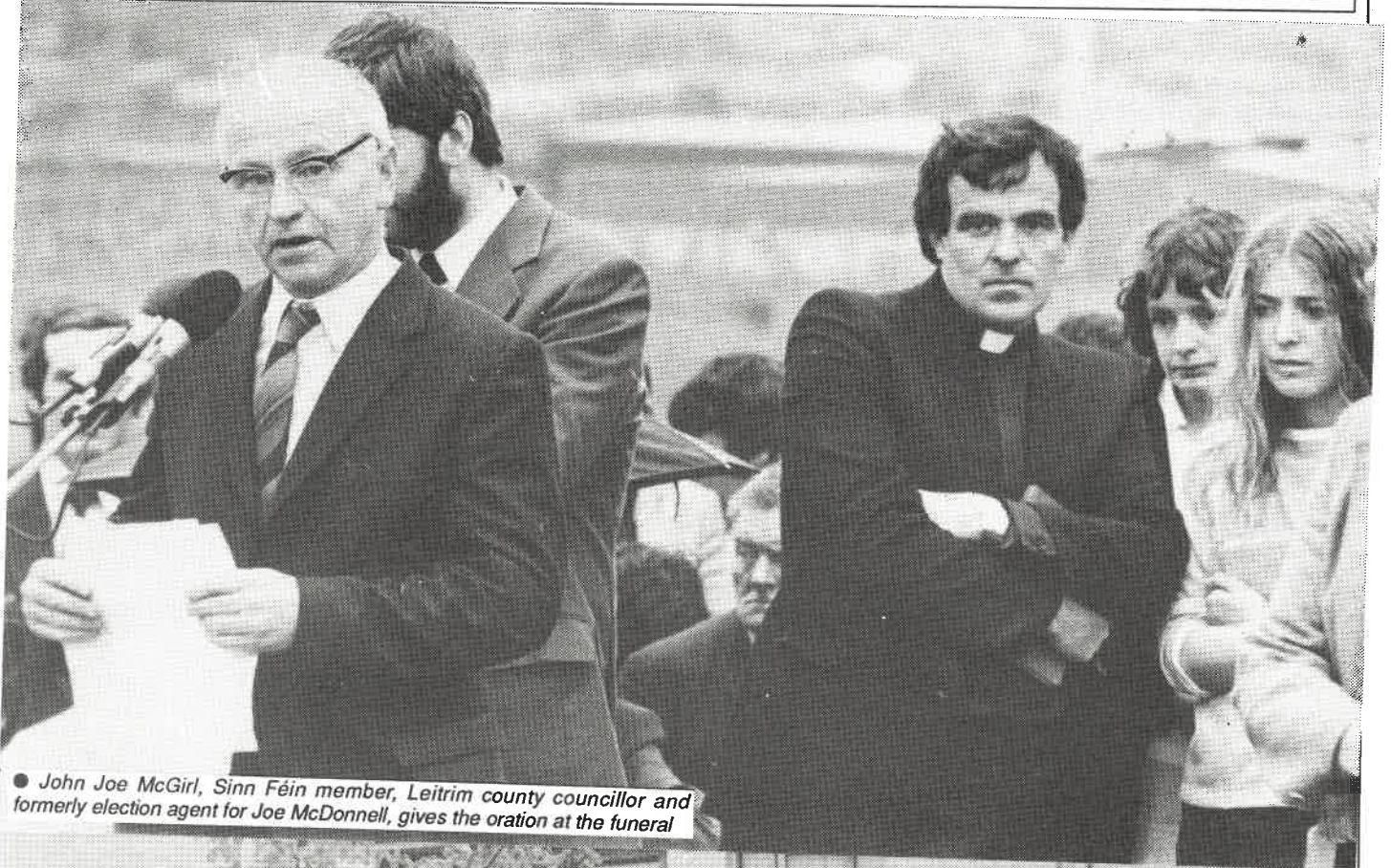
● Cork tribute to the hunger-strike



● *Resistance on the streets of Belfast*



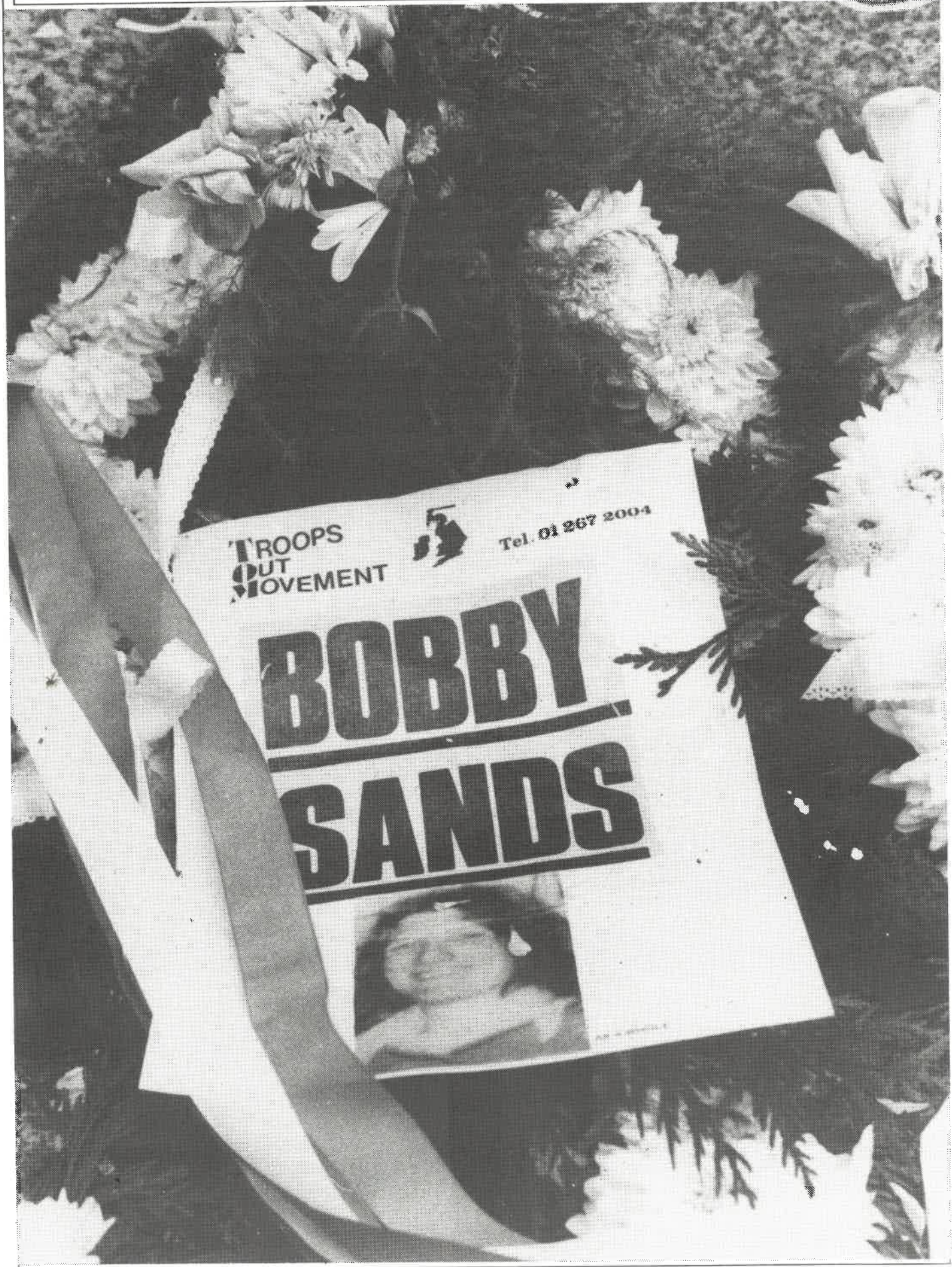
● Fr Brian McCreesh (brother of hunger-striker Raymond) addressing an Anti-H-Block/Armagh rally. Sinn Féin Councillor John Davey (murdered by loyalists in 1989) on the extreme right of picture



● John Joe McGill, Sinn Féin member, Leitrim county councillor and formerly election agent for Joe McDonnell, gives the oration at the funeral



● Mourners queue to pay their respects at the home of Kevin Lynch



BOBBY SANDS

The revolutionary spirit of freedom

BOBBY SANDS was born in 1954 in Rathcoole, a predominantly loyalist district of north Belfast. His 27th birthday fell on the ninth day of his 66-day hunger-strike. His sisters Marcella, one year younger, and Bernadette, were born in April 1955 and November 1958, respectively. All three lived their early years at Abbots Cross in the Newtownabbey area of north Belfast. A second son, John, was born to their parents John and Rosaleen, now both aged 57, in June 1962.

The sectarian realities of ghetto life materialised early in Bobby's life. At the age of seven his family were forced to move home owing to loyalist intimidation even as early as 1962. Bobby recalled his mother speaking of the troubled times which occurred during her childhood; "Although I never really understood what internment was or who the 'Specials' were, I grew to regard them as symbols of evil".

Of this time Bobby himself later wrote: "I was only a working-class boy from a Nationalist ghetto, but it is repression that creates the revolutionary spirit of freedom. I shall not settle until I achieve liberation of my country, until Ireland becomes a sovereign independent socialist republic."

When Bobby was sixteen years old he started work as an apprentice coach builder and joined the National Union of Vehicle Builders and the ATGWU. In an article printed in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* on April 4th, 1981, Bobby recalled: "Starting work, although frightening at first became all right, especially with the reward at the end of the week. Dances and clothes, girls and a few shillings to spend, opened up a whole new world to me."*

Bobby's background, experiences and ambitions did not differ greatly from that of the average ghetto youth. Then came 1968 and the events which were to change his life. Bobby had served two years of his apprenticeship when he was intimidated out of his job. His sister Bernadette recalls: "Bobby went to work one morning and these fellows were standing there cleaning guns. One fellow said to him, 'Do you see these here. Well if you don't go you'll get this', then Bobby also found a note in his lunch-box telling him to get out."

In June 1972, the family were intimidated out of their home in Doonbeg Drive, Rathcoole, and moved into the newly built Twinbrook estate on the fringe of nationalist West Belfast. Bernadette again recalled: "We had suffered intimidation for about 18 months before we were actually put out. We had always been used to having Protestant friends. Bobby had gone around with Catholics and Protestants, but it ended up when everything erupted, that the friends he went about with for years were the same ones who helped to put his family out of

* THIS article was first published anonymously in *Republican News*, December 16th, 1978. The smuggled out article recalls how the spirit of republican defiance grew within him, and is a semi-autobiographical account.



BOBBY SANDS

Aged 27, from Belfast. Commenced hunger-strike March 1st, died May 5th after 66 days.

their home."

As well as being intimidated out of his job, and his home being under threat, Bobby also suffered personal attacks from the loyalists.

At 18, Bobby joined the Republican Movement. Bernadette says: "...he was just at the age when he was beginning to become aware of things happening around him. He more or less just said, right, this is where I'm going to take up. A couple of his cousins had been arrested and interned. Bobby felt that he should get involved and start doing something."

Bobby himself wrote: "My life now centred around sleepless nights and stand-bys dodging the Brits and calming nerves to go out on operations. But the people stood by us. The people not only opened the doors of their homes to lend us a hand but they opened their hearts to us. I learned that without the people we could not survive and I knew that I owed them everything."

In October 1972, he was arrested. Four hand-guns were found in a house he was staying in and he was charged with possession. He spent the next three years in the cages of Long Kesh, where he had political prisoner status. During this time Bobby read widely and taught himself Irish, which he was later to teach the other blanket men in the H-Blocks.

Released in 1976, Bobby returned to his family in Twinbrook. He reported back to his local unit and straight back into the continuing struggle: "Quite a lot of things had changed, some parts of the ghettos had completely disappeared and others were in the process of being removed. The war was still forging ahead although tactics and strategy had

changed. The British government was now seeking to 'Ulsterise' the war, which included the attempted criminalisation of the IRA and attempted normalisation of the war situation."

Bobby set himself to work tackling the social issues which affected the Twinbrook area. Here he became a community activist. According to Bernadette: "When he got out of jail that first time our estate had no Green Cross, no Sinn Féin, nor anything like that. He was involved in the Tenants' Association... He got the black taxis to run to Twinbrook because the bus service at that time was inadequate. It got to the stage where people were coming to the door looking for Bobby to put up ramps on the roads in case cars were going too fast and would knock the children down."

Within six months Bobby was arrested again. There had been a bomb attack on the Balmoral Furniture Company at Dunmurry, followed by a gun-battle in which two men were wounded. Bobby was in a car near the scene with three other young men. The RUC captured them and found a revolver in the car.

The six men were taken to Castlereagh and were subjected to brutal interrogations for six days. Bobby refused to answer any questions during his interrogation, except his name, age and address.

In a 96 verse poem written in 1980, entitled *The Crime of Castlereagh*, Bobby tells of his experiences in Castlereagh and his fears and thoughts at the time.

*They came and came their job the same
In relays n'er they stopped.
Just sign the line! they shrieked each time
And beat me 'till I dropped.
They tortured me quite viciously
They threw me through the air.
It got so bad it seemed I had
Been beat beyond repair.*

*The days expired and no one tired,
Except of course the prey,
And knew they well that time would tell
If I had words to say,
Each dirty trick they laid on thick
For no one heard or saw,
Who dares to say in Castlereagh
The 'police' would break the law!*

He was held on remand for 11 months until his trial in September 1977. As at his previous trial, he refused to recognise the court.

The judge admitted there was no evidence to link Bobby, or the other three young men with him, to the bombing. So the four of them were sentenced to 14 years each for possession of the one revolver.

Bobby spent the first 22 days of his sentence in solitary confinement, 'on the boards' in Crumlin Road jail. For 15 of those days he was completely naked. He was moved to the H-Blocks and joined the blanket protest. He began to write for *Republican News* and then after February 1979 for the



● An IRA guard of honour accompany the coffin of their comrade Bobby Sands in Twinbrook. The coffin is borne by Bobby's father and brother John and by the Westminster MP's election agent Owen Carron, who delivered the graveside oration

newly-merged *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, under the pen-name, 'Marcella', his sister's name. His articles and letters, in minute handwriting, like all communications from the H-Blocks, were smuggled out on tiny pieces of toilet paper.

He wrote: *"The days were long and lonely. The sudden and total deprivation of such basic human necessities as exercise and fresh air, association with other people, my own clothes and things like newspapers, radio, cigarettes, books and a host of other things, made my life very hard."*

Bobby became PRO for the blanket men and was in constant confrontation with the prison authorities, which resulted in several spells of solitary confinement. In the H-Blocks, beatings, long periods in the punishment cells, starvation diets and torture were commonplace as the prison authorities, with the full knowledge and consent of the British administration, imposed a harsh and brutal regime on the prisoners in their attempts to break the prisoners' resistance to criminalisation.

The H-Blocks became the battlefield in which the republican spirit of resistance met head-on all the inhumanities that the British could perpetrate. The republican spirit prevailed and in April 1978, in protest against systematic ill-treatment when they went to the toilets or got showered, the H-Block prisoners refused to wash or slop-out. They were joined in this no-wash protest by the women in Armagh jail in February 1980 when they were subjected to similar harassment.

On October 27th, 1980, following the breakdown of talks between British direct ruler in the North, Humphrey Atkins, and Cardinal O Fiaich, the Irish Catholic primate, seven prisoners in the H-Blocks began a hunger-strike. Bobby volunteered for the fast but instead he succeeded, as O/C, Brendan Hughes, who went on hunger-strike.

During the hunger-strike he was given political recognition by the prison authorities. The day after a senior British official visited the hunger-strikers

Bobby was brought half-a-mile in a prison van from H3 to the prison hospital to visit them. Subsequently he was allowed several meetings with Brendan Hughes. He was not involved in the decision to end the hunger-strike, which was taken by the seven men alone. But later that night he was taken to meet them and was allowed to visit republican prison leaders in H-Blocks 4, 5 and 6.

On December 19th, 1980, Bobby issued a statement that the prisoners would not wear prison-issue clothing nor do prison work. He then began negotiations with the prison governor, Stanley Hilditch, for a step-by-step de-escalation of the protest.

But the prisoners' efforts were rebuffed by the authorities: *"We discovered that our good-will and flexibility were in vain", wrote Bobby. "It was made abundantly clear during one of my 'co-operation' meetings with prison officials that strict conformity was required, which in essence meant acceptance of criminal status."*

In the H-Blocks the British saw the opportunity to defeat the IRA by criminalising Irish freedom fighters, but the blanket men, perhaps more than those on the outside, appreciated before anyone else the grave repercussions, and so they fought.

Bobby volunteered to lead the new hunger-strike. He saw it as a microcosm of the way the Brits were treating Ireland historically and presently. Bobby realised that someone would have to die to win political status.

He insisted on starting two weeks in front of the others so that perhaps his death could secure the five demands and save their lives. For the first 17 days of the hunger-strike, Bobby kept a secret diary in which he wrote his thoughts and views, mostly in English but occasionally breaking into *Gaeilge*. He had no fear of death and saw the hunger-strike as something much larger than the five demands and as having major repercussions for British rule in Ireland. The diary was written on

toilet paper in biro pen and had to be hidden, mostly carried inside Bobby's own body. During those first 17 days Bobby lost a total of 16 pounds weight and on Monday, March 23rd, he was moved to the prison hospital.

On March 30th, he was nominated as candidate for the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election, caused by the sudden death of Frank Maguire, an independent MP who supported the prisoners' cause.

The next morning, day 31 of his hunger-strike, he was visited by Owen Carron, who acted as his election agent. Owen told of that first visit *"Instead of meeting that young man of the poster with long hair and a fresh face, even at that time when Bobby wasn't too bad he was radically changed. He was very thin and bony and his hair was cut short"*.

Bobby had no illusions with regard to his election victory. His reaction was not one of over-optimism. After the result was announced Owen visited Bobby. *"He had already heard the result on the radio. He was in good form alright but he always used to keep saying, 'In my position you can't afford to be optimistic.' In other words, he didn't take it that because he'd won an election that his life would be saved. He thought that the Brits would need their pound of flesh. I think he was always working on the premise that he would have to die."*

At 1.17am on Tuesday, May 5th, having completed 65 days on hunger-strike, Bobby Sands MP, died in the H-Block prison hospital at Long Kesh. Bobby was a truly unique person whose loss is great and immeasurable. He never gave himself a moment to spare. He lived his life energetically, dedicated to his people and to the republican cause, eventually offering up his life in a conscious effort to further that cause and the cause of those with whom he had shared almost eight years of his adult life. In his own words: *"Of course I can be murdered but I remain what I am a political POW and no-one, not even the British, can change that."*

FRANCIS HUGHES

'A determined and totally fearless soldier'

THE SECOND republican to join the H-Block hunger-strike for political status — a fortnight after Bobby Sands — was 25-year-old Francis Hughes, from Bellaghy in South Derry: a determined, committed and totally fearless IRA Volunteer who organised a spectacularly successful series of military operations before his capture, and was once described by the RUC as their 'most wanted man' in the North.

Eluding, for several years, the relentless efforts of the British army, UDR and RUC to track him down, Francis operated boldly throughout parts of Tyrone and north and south Antrim, but particularly in his native South Derry, with a combination of brilliant organisation and extreme daring — until his capture after a shoot-out with the SAS — which earned him widespread popular renown, and won general support for the republican cause, as well as giving him an undisputed reputation as a natural-born soldier and leader.

ROOTED

Francis Hughes was born on February 28th, 1956, the youngest son amongst ten children, into a staunchly republican family which has been solidly rooted, for most of this century, in the townland of Tamlaghtduff, or Scribe Road, as it is otherwise called.

His parents who married in 1939, are Patrick Joseph Hughes, aged 72, a retired small cattle farmer, born in the neighbouring townland of Ballymacpeake, and Margaret, aged 68, whose maiden name is McElwee, and who was born in Tamlaghtduff.

A quarter-of-a-mile away from the Hughes' bungalow, on the other side of the Scribe Road, is the home of Thomas and Benedict McElwee — first cousins of Francis. Benedict is currently serving a sentence in the H-Blocks, Thomas — the eldest — embarked on hunger-strike on June 8th, 1981, and died 62 days later on August 8th.

In Tamlaghtduff, as throughout the rest of Bellaghy, sympathy as well as active support for the republican cause runs at a very high level, a fact testified to by the large numbers of prisoners-of-war from around Bellaghy.

Francis was an extremely popular person, both with his family and with his republican colleagues and supporters.

His father recalls that as a boy he was always whistling, joking and singing, a trait which he carried over into his arduous and perilous days as a republican, when he was able to transmit his enthusiasm and optimism both to Volunteers under his command and to sympathisers who offered them — at great personal risk — food and shelter.

It was qualities like these, of uncomplaining tirelessness, of consideration for the morale of those around him, and his ruling wish to lead by example, that have made Francis Hughes one of the most outstanding Irish revolutionary soldiers this



FRANCIS HUGHES

Aged 25, from South Derry. Commenced hunger-strike March 15th, 1981, died May 12th, 1981, after 59 days.

war has produced, and a man who was enormously respected in his native country-side.

BOY

As a boy, Francis went first to St. Mary's primary school in Bellaghy, and from there to Clady intermediate school three miles away.

He enjoyed school and was a fairly good student whose favourite subjects were history and woodwork. He was not particularly interested in sport, but was very much a lively, outdoor person, who enjoyed messing around on bikes, and later on, in cars.

He enjoyed dancing and regularly went to *ceilidh* as a young man, even while 'on the run', although after 'wanted' posters of him appeared his opportunities became less frequent.

His parents recall that Francis was always extremely helpful around the house, and that he was a "good tractor man".

DECORATOR

Leaving school at 16, Francis got a job with his sister Vera's husband, as an apprentice painter and decorator, completing his apprenticeship shortly before 'going on the run'.

In later days, Francis would often do a spot of decorating for the people whose house he was staying in.

On one occasion, shortly after the 'wanted' posters of him had been posted up all over South Derry, Francis was painting window frames at the front of the house he was staying in when two jeeps full of British soldiers drove past. While the other occupants of the house froze in apprehension,

Francis waved and smiled at the curious Brits as they passed by, and continued painting.

It was such utter fearlessness, and the ability to brazen his way through, that saved him time and time again during his relatively long career as an active service Volunteer.

On one such occasion, when stopped along with two other Volunteers as they crossed a field, Francis told a Brit patrol that they didn't feel safe walking the roads, as the IRA were so active in the area. The Brits allowed the trio to walk on, but after a few yards Francis ran back to the enemy patrol to scrounge a cigarette and a match from one of the British soldiers.

A turning point for Francis, in terms of his personal involvement in the struggle, occurred at the age of 17, when he and a friend were stopped by British soldiers at Ardboe, in County Tyrone, as they returned from a dance one night.

The pair were taken out of their car and so badly kicked that Francis was bed-ridden for several days. Rejecting advice to make a complaint to the RUC, Francis said it would be a waste of time, but pledged 'instead to get even with those who had done it, "or with their friends."'

Notwithstanding such a bitter personal experience of British thuggery, and the mental and physical scars it left, Francis' subsequent involvement in the Irish Republican Army was not based on a motive of revenge but on a clear and abiding belief in his country's right to national freedom.

INVOLVEMENT

During the early part of 'the troubles', the 'Officials' were relatively strong in the South Derry area and Francis' first involvement was with them.

However, disillusioned, as were many others, with the 'Sticks' unilateral ceasefire in 1972, he left to set up and command an 'independent' military unit in the Bellaghy area. About the end of 1973 the entire unit — including Francis — was formally recruited into the IRA.

Francis' involvement brought him increasingly to the attention of the British army and RUC, and he was regularly held for a few hours in Magherafelt barracks and stopped on the road by British patrols; and on one occasion he was held for two days at Ballykelly camp.

As the 1975 IRA/British army truce came to an end, Francis, fearing his imminent arrest, went 'on the run'. From that time on, he led a life perpetually on the move, often moving on foot up to 20 miles during one night, then sleeping during the day — either in fields and ditches or in safe houses; a soldierly sight in his black beret and combat uniform, and openly carrying his rifle, a handgun and several grenades as well as food rations.

The enemy reacted with up to 50 early morning raids on Francis' home, and raids on the houses of those suspected of harbouring him. Often, houses would be staked out for days on end in the hope of capturing Francis. Often, it was only his sheer nerve and courage which saved him.

away on a stretcher he yelled defiantly, through his considerable pain: "Up the Provinces".

His comrade, though also slightly wounded, managed to evade the dragnet and to escape.

SURVIVED

How he survived the night of the shooting, possibly the coldest night of that year, bears eloquent testimony to Francis' grim determination to evade capture. After being shot, he dragged himself — unable to walk — across the Ronaghan road and across two fields without a sound, before burying himself in a thick clump of gorse bushes.

At one point, en-route, Francis fell down a sharp drop between fields, and his left leg — the muscle and bone completely disintegrated — came up over his shoulder; but Francis worked it carefully down before continuing to crawl on his way. In his hiding place, he lay through the night, motionless and soundless, till his capture.

When he was found, unable to move through the cold, pain and stiffness, Francis, knowing that both Brits and RUC were on instructions to shoot him on sight, gave his name as Eamonn Laverty and his address as Letterkenny County Hospital.

Francis was taken to Magherafelt hospital and from there to Musgrave Park military hospital in Belfast, and it was only then that his true identity was revealed. He spent ten months in Musgrave Park where his leg was operated on, reducing his thigh bone by an inch-and-a-half and leaving him dependent on a crutch to walk.

CASTLEREAGH

On Wednesday, January 24th, 1979, Francis was taken from Musgrave Park hospital to Castlereagh interrogation centre, where he spent six days before being charged on January 29th. For more than four days Francis refused food and drink, fearing that it might have been drugged to make him talk.

His behaviour in Castlereagh was typical of the fiercely determined and courageous republican Volunteer that he was. His frustrated interrogators later described him as "totally unco-operative".

Nevertheless, at his trial in Belfast in February 1980, after a year on remand in Crumlin Road jail, Francis was found 'guilty' on all charges.

He received a life sentence for killing the SAS soldier, and 14 years for attempting to kill the other SAS man. He also received 55 years on three other charges.

H-BLOCK

In the H-Blocks, Francis immediately went on the protest for political status and, despite the severe disability of his wounded leg, displayed the same courage and determination that had been his hallmark before his capture.

And, just as always wanting to be in the thick of things and wanting to shoulder responsibility for other political prisoners as he had earlier looked after the morale of fellow Volunteers, Francis was one of those to volunteer for the hunger-strike which began on October 27th, 1980. He was not one of the first seven hunger-strikers selected but was among the 30 men who joined the hunger-strike in its closing stages as Sean McKenna's condition became critical.

That utter selflessness and courage came to its tragic conclusion on Tuesday, May 12th, when Francis died at 5.43pm after 59 days on hunger-strike.



●The body of Francis Hughes, once the North's 'most wanted man', flanked by some of his former comrades

One night, Francis was followed to a 'safe house' and looked out to see the Brits surrounding the place and closing in. Without hesitating, the uniformed Francis stepped outside the door, clutching his rifle, and in the darkness crept gradually through their lines, occasionally mumbling a few short words to British soldiers as he passed, who, on seeing the shadowy uniformed figure, mistook him for one of themselves.

On numerous occasions, Francis and his comrades were stopped at checkpoints along the country roads while moving weapons from one locality to another but always calmly talked their way through. Once, a UDR soldier actually recognised Francis and his fellow Volunteers in a car but, fully aware that Francis would not be taken without a shoot-out, he waved their car on.

ACTIVE

The years before Francis' capture were extremely active ones in the South Derry and surrounding areas, with the commercial centres of towns and villages like Bellaghy, Maghera, Toome, Magherafelt and Castledawson being blitzed by car bombs on several occasions, and numerous shooting attacks being carried out as well.

Among the Volunteers under his command, Francis had a reputation of being a strict disciplinarian and perfectionist who could not tolerate people taking their republican duties less seriously, and selflessly, than was necessary. He also, however, inspired fellow Volunteers by his example and by always being in the thick of things, and he thrived on pressure.

During one night-time operation, a weapon was missing and Francis gave away his own weapon to another Volunteer, taking only a torch himself which he used to its maximum effect by shining it at an on-coming enemy vehicle, which had its headlights off, to enable the other Volunteers to direct their fire.

Francis' good-humoured audacity also showed itself in his republican activity. At the height of his 'notoriety' he would set up road-blocks, hoping to lure the Brits into an ambush (which by experience they had learned to avoid), or he would ring up the Brits and give them his whereabouts!

Such joking, however, did not extend only to the enemy. One day, lying out in the fields, he spied one of his uncles cycling down a country road. Taking careful aim with his rifle he shot away the bike's rear wheel. His uncle ran, alarmed, into a nearby house shouting that loyalists had just tried to assassinate him!

The determination of the British army and RUC to capture Francis Hughes came to a head in April 1977. In that month, on Good Friday, a car containing three IRA Volunteers was overtaken and flagged down on the Moneymore Road at Dunroan, in County Derry, by a carload of RUC men.

The Volunteers attempted to make a U-turn but their car got stuck in a ditch as the armed RUC men approached. Jumping from the car, the Volunteers opened fire, killing two RUC men and injuring another before driving off. A hundred yards further up the road a second gun battle ensued but the Volunteers escaped safely.

Subsequently, the RUC issued a 'wanted' poster of Francis Hughes and two fellow republicans, Dominic McGlinchey and Ian Milne, in which Francis was named as the 'most wanted man' in the North.

When his eventual capture came, it was just as he had always said it would be: "I'll get a few of them before they get me."

STAKE-OUT

At 8.00pm on March 16th, 1978, two SAS soldiers took up a stake-out position opposite a farm, on the south side of the Ronaghan Road, about two miles west of Maghera, in the townland of Ballyknock.

At 9.15pm, they saw two men in military uniform and carrying rifles, walking in single file along the hedgeline of the field towards them. Using their 'night sights' in the darkness, the SAS men observed the military behaviour of the two on-comers and having challenged them, heard the men mumble a few words to each other in Irish accents and assumed that the pair were UDR soldiers.

One of the pair, in fact, was Francis Hughes, the other a fellow Volunteer, and with only a second's hesitation both Volunteers cocked their rifles and opened fire. One SAS man fell fatally wounded but the other — though shot in the stomach — managed to fire a long burst from his Sterling sub-machine gun at the retreating figures and to make radio contact with his base.

Within three minutes, nearby Brit patrols were on the scene and the area was entirely sealed off. The following morning hundreds of Brits took part in a massive search operation.

Fifteen hours after the shooting, at around 12.15pm the next day, they found Francis Hughes sitting in the middle of a gorse bush in a field 300 yards away, bleeding profusely from a bullet wound which had shattered his left thigh. As he was taken

RAYMOND McCREESH

'A quiet, good-natured and discreet republican'

THE THIRD of the resolutely determined IRA Volunteers to join the H-Block hunger-strike for political status was 24-year-old Raymond McCreesh, from Camlough in South Armagh: a quiet, shy and good-humoured republican who, although captured at the early age of 19 along with two other Volunteers in a British army ambush, had already almost three years active republican involvement behind him.

During those years, he had established himself as one of the most dedicated and invaluable republican activists in that part of the Six Counties to which the Brits themselves have — half-fearfully, half-respectfully — given the name 'bandit country' and which has become a living legend in republican circles, during the present war, for the courage and resourcefulness of its Volunteers: the border land of South Armagh.

Raymond's resolve to hunger-strike to the death to secure the prisoners' five demands was indicated in a smuggled-out letter written by Paddy Quinn, an H-Block blanket man — who was later to embark on hunger-strike himself — who was captured along with Raymond and who received the same 14-year sentence: *"I wrote Raymie a couple of letters before he went to the prison hospital. He wrote back and according to the letter he was in great spirits and very determined. A sign of that determination was the way he finished off by saying: 'Tá seans ann go mbeidh mé abhaile romhat a chara' which means: There is a chance that I'll be home before you, my friend!"*

Captured in June 1976 and sentenced in March 1977, when he refused to recognise the court, Raymond would have been due for release in about two years' time had he not embarked on his principled protest for political status, which led him ultimately, to hunger-strike.

FAMILY

Raymond Peter McCreesh, the seventh in a family of eight children, was born in a small semi-detached house at St. Malachy's Park, Camlough — where the family still live — on February 25th, 1957.

The McCreeshes, a nationalist family in a staunchly nationalist area, have been rooted in South Armagh for seven generations, and both Raymond's parents — James, aged 65, a retired local council worker, and Susan, aged 60, (whose maiden name is Quigley), — come from the nearby townland of Dorsey.

Raymond was a quiet but very lively person, very good-natured and — like other members of his family — extremely witty. Not the sort of person who would push himself forward if he was in a crowd, and indeed often rather a shy person in his personal relationships until he got to know a person



RAYMOND McCREESH

Aged 24, from South Armagh. Commenced hunger-strike March 22nd, 1981, died May 21st, 1981 after 61 days.

well. Nevertheless, in his republican capacity he was known as a capable, dedicated and totally committed Volunteer who could show leadership and aggression where necessary.

Among both his family and his republican associates, Raymond was renowned for his laughter and for *"always having a wee smile on him"*. His sense of humour remained even during his four-year incarceration in the H-Blocks, as well as during his hunger-strike when he continued to insist that he was *"just fine"*.

SCHOOL

Raymond went first to Camlough primary school and then to St. Coleman's college in Newry. It was at St. Coleman's that Raymond met Danny McGuinness, also from Camlough, and the two became steadfast friends. They later became republican comrades, and Danny, then a 19-year-old student who had just completed his 'A' levels, was captured along with Raymond and Paddy Quinn and he too was imprisoned in the H-Blocks.

At school, Raymond's strongest interest was in Irish language and Irish history, and he read widely in those subjects. His understanding of Irish history led him to a fervently nationalist outlook, and he was regarded as a 'hot-head' in his history classes, and as being generally *"very conscious of his Irishness"*.

He was also a sportsman, and played under-16 and Minor football for Carrickcruppin Gaelic football

club as well as taking a keen interest in the local youth club, where he played basketball and pool, and was regarded as a good snooker player.

When he was 14 years old, Raymond got a weekend job working on a milk round through the South Armagh border area, around Mullaghbawn and Dromintee. Later on, after leaving his job in Lisburn, he worked full-time on the milk round, where he would always stop and chat to customers. He became a great favourite amongst them and many enquired about him long after he left the round.

RESISTANCE

During the early '70's, the South Armagh border area was the stamping ground of the British army's Parachute Regiment, operating out of Bessbrook camp less than two miles from Raymond's home. Stories of their widespread brutality and harassment of local people abound and built up then a degree of resentment and resistance amongst most of the nationalist population that is seen to this day.

The SAS terror regiment began operating in this area in large numbers too, in a vain attempt to counter republican successes, and the high level of assassinations of local people on both sides of the South Armagh border, notably three members of the Reavey family in 1975, was believed locally to have been the work both of the SAS and of UDR and RUC members holding dual membership with 'illegal' loyalist paramilitary organisations. Given this scenario and Raymond's understanding of Irish history, it is small wonder that he became involved in the republican struggle.

JOINED

He first of all joined Fianna Eireann early in 1973 and towards the end of that year joined the Irish Republican Army's 1st Battalion, South Armagh.

Even before joining the IRA, and despite his very young age, Raymond — with remarkable awareness and maturity — became one of the first Volunteers in the South Armagh area to adopt a very low, security-conscious, republican profile.

He rarely drank, but if occasionally in a pub he would not discuss either politics or his own activities, and he rarely attended demonstrations or indeed anything which would have brought him to the attention of the enemy.

It was because of this remarkable self-discipline and discretion that during his years of intense republican involvement Raymond was never once arrested or even held for screening in the North, and only twice held briefly in the South.

Consequently, Raymond was never obliged to go 'on the run', continuing to live at home until the evening of his capture, and always careful not to cause his family any concern or alarm.

Fitted in with his republican activities, Raymond would relax by going to dances or by going to watch football matches at weekends.

WORK

After leaving school he spent a year at Newry technical college studying fabrication engineering and afterwards got a job at Gamble Simms (Steel) Ltd. in Lisburn. He had a conscientious approach to his craft but was obliged to leave after a year because of a fear of assassination.

Each day, he travelled to work from Newry in a bus along with four or five mates from the technical college who had got jobs there too. However, the prevailing high level of sectarian assassinations, and the suspicion justifiably felt of the predominantly loyalist work-force at Gamble Simms, made Raymond and many other nationalist workers decide that travelling such a regular route through loyalist countryside was simply too risky.

So, after leaving the Lisburn factory, Raymond began to work full-time as a milk roundsman, an occupation which would greatly have increased his knowledge of the surrounding countryside, as well as enabling him to observe the movements of British army patrols and any other untoward activity in the area.

ACTIVITY

Republican activity in South Armagh during those years consisted largely of landmine attacks and ambushes on enemy patrols.

Raymond had the reputation of a republican who was very keen to suggest and take part in operations. He worked almost invariably in his own, extremely tight, active service unit, though occasionally, when requested — as he frequently was — assisting other units in neighbouring areas with specific operations. He would always carefully consider the pros and cons of any operation, and would never panic or lose his nerve.

In undertaking the hunger-strike, Raymond gave the matter the same careful consideration he would have expended on a military operation. He undertook nothing either in a rush or for bluff.

CAPTURE

The operation which led to the capture of Raymond, his boyhood friend, Danny McGuinness and Patrick Quinn, took place on June 25th, 1976.

An active service unit comprising these three and a fourth Volunteer arrived in a commandeered car at a farmyard in the townland of Sturgan a mile from Camlough — at about 9.25pm.

Their objective was to ambush a covert British observation post which they had located opposite the Mountain House Inn, on the main Newry-Newtownhamilton Road, half-a-mile away. They were not aware, however, that another covert British observation post, on a steep hillside half-a-mile away, had already spotted the four masked, uniformed and armed Volunteers, clearly visible below them, and that radioed helicopter reinforcements were already closing in.

As the fourth Volunteer drove the commandeered car down the road to the agreed ambush point, to act as a lure for the Brits, the other three moved down the hedgeline of the fields into position. The fourth Volunteer, however, as he returned, as arranged, to rejoin his comrades, spotted the British paratroopers on the hillside closing on his unsuspecting friends and, although armed only with a short range Sten gun, opened fire to warn the others.

Immediately, the Brits opened fire with SLRs and light machine-guns, churning up the ground around the Volunteers with hundreds of rounds, firing indiscriminately into the nearby farmhouse and



● Raymond McCreesh — told his close friend Paddy Quinn "tá seans ann go mbeidh mé abhaile romhat" when he embarked on hunger strike

two vehicles parked outside and killing a grazing cow!

The fourth Volunteer was struck by three bullets, in the leg, arm and chest, but managed to crawl away and to elude the massive follow-up search, escaping safely — though seriously injured — the following day.

Raymond and Paddy Quinn ran zig-zag across open fields to a nearby house, under fire all this time, intending to commandeer a car. Unfortunately, the car belonging to the occupants of the house was parked at a neighbour's house several hundred yards away. Even then the pair might have escaped but that they delayed several minutes waiting for their comrade, Danny McGuinness who, however, had got separated from them and had taken cover in a disused quarry outhouse (where he was captured in a follow-up operation the next day).

The house in which Raymond and Paddy took cover was immediately besieged by berserk paratroopers who riddled the house with bullets. Even when the two Volunteers surrendered, after the arrival of a local priest, and came out though the front door with their hands up, the paras opened fire again and the pair were forced to retreat back into the house.

On the arrival of the RUC, the two Volunteers again surrendered and were taken to Bessbrook barracks where they were questioned and beaten for three days before being charged.

REMARKABLE

One remarkable aspect of the British ambush concerns the role of Lance-Corporal David Jones, a member of the 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment. According to Brit statements at the trial, it was he who first opened up on the IRA active service unit from the hillside.

Nine months later, on March 16th, 1978, two IRA Volunteers encountered two paratroopers (at the time seconded to the SAS) in a field outside Maghera in South Derry. In the ensuing gun battle, one SAS man was shot dead, and one IRA Volunteer was captured. The Volunteer's name was Francis Hughes, the dead Brit was Lance-Corporal

David Jones of the Parachute Regiment.

In the 18 months before going on hunger-strike together, neither Raymond McCreesh or Francis Hughes were aware of what would seem to have been an ironic but supremely fitting example of republican solidarity!

After nine months remand in Crumlin Road jail, Raymond was tried and convicted, in March 1977, of attempting to kill Brits, possession of a Garand rifle and ammunition, and IRA membership. He received a 14-year sentence, and lesser concurrent sentences, after refusing to recognise the court.

In the H-Blocks he immediately joined the blanket protest. So determined was his resistance to criminalisation that he refused to take his monthly visits for four years, right up until he informed his family of his decision to go on hunger-strike on February 15th, this year. He also refused to send out monthly letters, writing only smuggled 'communications' to his family and friends.

The only member of his family to see him at all during those four years in Long Kesh, two or three times — was his brother Fr. Brian McCreesh, who occasionally says Mass in the H-Blocks.

HUNGER-STRIKE

Like Francis Hughes, Raymond volunteered for the earlier hunger-strike and, when he was not chosen among the first seven, took part in the four-day hunger-strike by 30 republicans until the hunger-strike ended on December 18th, last year.

Speaking to his brother Malachy shortly after Bobby Sands' death, Raymond said what a great loss had been felt by the other hunger-strikers, but it had made them more determined than ever.

And still managing to keep his spirits up, when told of his brother Fr. Brian campaigning for him on rally platforms, Raymond joked: "He'll probably get excommunicated for it."

To Britain's eternal shame, the sombre half-prediction made by Raymond to his friend Paddy Quinn, "Tá seans ann go mbeidh mé abhaile romhat", became a grim reality. Raymond died at 2.11am on Thursday May 21st, 1981, after 61 days on hunger-strike.

PATSY O'HARA

'A determined and courageous Derryman'

TWENTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD Patsy O'Hara from Derry city, was the former leader of the Irish National Liberation Army prisoners in the H-Blocks, and joined IRA Volunteer Raymond McCreesh on hunger-strike on March 22nd, 1981, three weeks after Bobby Sands and one week after Francis Hughes.

Patsy O'Hara was born on July 11th, 1957 at Bishop Street in Derry City.

His parents owned a small public house and grocery shop above which the family lived. His eldest brother, Seán Séamus, was interned in Long Kesh for almost four years. The second eldest in the family, Tony, was imprisoned in the H-Blocks — throughout Patsy's hunger-strike — for five years before being released in August 1981, having served his full five-year sentence with no remission.

The youngest in the O'Hara family is 21-year-old Elizabeth.

Before 'the troubles' destroyed the family life of the O'Haras, and the overwhelming influence of being an oppressed youth concerned about his country drove Patsy to militant republicanism, there is the interesting history of his near antecedents which must have produced delight in Patsy's young heart.

GRANDFATHER

Patsy's maternal grandfather, James McCluskey, joined the British army as a young man and went off to fight in the First World War. He received nine shrapnel wounds at Ypres and was retired on a full pension.

However, on returning to Ireland his patriotism was set alight by Irish resistance and the terror of British rule. He duly threw out his pension book, did not draw any more money and joined the Republican Movement. He transported men and weapons along the Foyle into Derry in the '20's.

He inherited a public house and bookmakers, in Foyle Street, and was a great friend of Derry republican Seán Keenan's father, also named Seán.

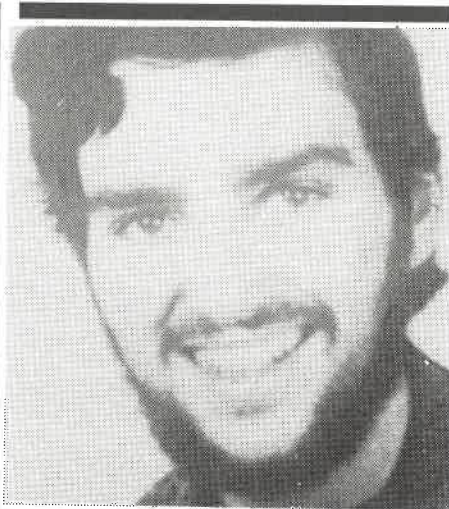
Mrs Peggy O'Hara can recall 'old' Seán Keenan being arrested just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Her father's serious illness resulted in him escaping internment, and he died shortly afterwards in 1939.

Mrs O'Hara's aunt was married to John Mulhern, a Roscommon man, who was in the RIC up until its disbandment in 1921.

"When my father died in 1939" — says Mrs O'Hara, — "John Mulhern, who was living in Bishop Street, and owned a bar and a grocery shop, took us in to look after us. I remember him telling us that he didn't just go and join the RIC, but it was because there were so many in the family and times were hard.

"My father was a known IRA man and my uncle reared me, and I was often slagged about this. Patsy used to hear this as a child, but Patsy was a very, very straight young fellow and he was a wee bit bigoted about my uncle being a policeman.

"But a number of years ago Patsy came in to me after speaking to an old republican from Corrigans in Donegal, and Patsy says to me, 'You've



PATSY O'HARA

Aged 24, from Derry City. Commenced hunger-strike March 22nd, 1981, died May 21st, 1981, after 61 days.

nothing to be ashamed of, your uncle being a policeman, because that man was telling me that even though he was an RIC man, he was very, very helpful to the IRA!

The trait of courage which Patsy was to show in later years was in him from the start, says Mr. O'Hara. "No matter who got into trouble in the street outside, Patsy was the boy to go out and do all the fighting for him. He was the fighting man about the area and didn't care how big they were; he would tackle them. I even saw him fighting men, and in no way could they stop him. He would keep at them. He was like a wee bull terrier!"

Apparently, up until he was about twelve years of age, Patsy was fat and small, "a wee barrel" says his mother. Then suddenly he shot up to grow to over six feet two inches.

Elizabeth, his sister, recalls Patsy: "He was a mad hatter. When we were young he used to always play tricks on me, mother and father. He used to play a game of cards and whoever lost had to do all the things that everybody told them.

"We all won a card game once and made Patsy crawl up the stairs and 'miaow' like a cat at my mother's bedroom door. She woke up the next day and said, 'Am I going mad? I think I heard a cat last night', and we all started to laugh."

The O'Haras' house was open to all their children's friends, and again to scores of the volunteers who descended on Derry from all corners of Ireland when the RUC invaded in 1969. But before that transformation in people's politics came, Mrs O'Hara still lived for her family alone.

She was especially proud of her eldest son, Seán Séamus, who had passed his 11-plus and went to college.

PROTESTS

When Seán was in his early teens he joined the housing action group, around 1967 Mrs O'Hara's

conception of which was Seán helping to get people homes.

"But one day, someone came into me when I was working in the bar, and said, 'Your son is down in the Guildhall marching up and down with a placard!'"

"I went down and stood and looked and Finbarr O'Doherty was standing at the side and wee fellows were going up and down. I went over to Seán and said, 'Who gave you that? He said, 'Finbarr!' I took the placard off Seán and went over to Finbarr, put it in his hand, and hit him with my umbrella."

Mrs O'Hara laughs when she recalls this incident, as shortly afterwards she was to have her eyes opened.

"After that, I went to protests wherever Seán was, thinking that I could protect him! I remember the October 1968 march, because my husband's brother, Seán, had just been buried.

"We went to the peaceful march over at the Waterside station and saw the people being beaten into the ground. That was the first time that I ever saw water cannons. They were like something from outer space.

"We thought we had to watch Seán, but to my astonishment Patsy and Tony had slipped away, and Patsy was astonished and startled by what he saw."

INCIDENT

Later, Patsy was to write about this incident: "The mood of the crowd was one of solidarity. People believed they were right and that a great injustice had been done to them. The crowds came in their thousands from every part of the city, and as they moved down Duke Street chanting slogans, 'One man, one vote' and singing 'We shall overcome' I had the feeling that a people united and on the move were unstoppable."

Patsy witnessed the baton charges and said: "The people were sandwiched in another street and with the Specials coming from both sides, swinging their truncheons at anything that moved. It was a terrifying experience and one which I shall always remember."

Mr and Mrs O'Hara believe that it was this incident when Patsy was aged 11 followed by the riots in January 1969 and the 'Battle of the Bogside' in August 1969 that aroused passionate feelings of nationalism, and then republicanism, in their son. "Every day he saw something different happening," says his father. "People getting beaten up, raids and coffins coming out. This was his environment."

JOINED

In 1970, Patsy joined Fianna Eireann, drilled and trained in Celtic Park.

Early in 1971, and though he was very young, he joined the Patrick Pearse Sinn Féin cumann in the Bogside, selling Easter lilies and newspapers. Internment, introduced in August 1971, hit the O'Hara family particularly severely with the arrest of Seán Séamus in October. "We never had a proper Christmas since then", says Elizabeth. "When Seán Séamus was interned we never put up decorations and our family has been split-up ever since then."

Shortly after Seán's arrest, Patsy one night went over to a friend's house in Southway where there were barricades. But coming out of the house, British soldiers opened fire, for no apparent reason, and shot Patsy in the leg. He was only 14 years of age and spent several weeks in hospital and then several more weeks on crutches.

BLOODY SUNDAY

On January 30th, 1972, his father took him to watch the big anti-internment march as it wound its way down from the Creggan. "I struggled across a banking but was unable to go any further. I watched the march go up into the Brandywell. I could see that it was massive. The rest of my friends went to meet it but I could only go back to my mother's house and listen to it on the radio," said Patsy.

Asked about her feelings over Patsy becoming involved in the struggle, Mrs O'Hara said: "After October 1968, I thought that that was the right thing to do. I am proud of him, proud of them all".

Mr O'Hara said: "Personally speaking, I knew he would get involved. It was in his nature. He hated bullies all his life, and he saw big bullies in uniform and he would tackle them as well."

Shortly after Bloody Sunday, Patsy joined the 'Republican Clubs' and was active until 1973, "When it became apparent that they were firmly on the path to reformism and had abandoned the national question".

INTERNEED

From this time onwards he was continually harassed, taken in for interrogation and assaulted.

One day, he and a friend were arrested on the Briemoor Road. Two Saracens screeched to a halt beside them. Patsy later described this arrest: "We were thrown onto the floor and as they were bringing us to the arrest centre, we were given a beating with their batons and rifles. When we arrived and were getting out of the vehicles we were tripped and fell on our faces".

Three months later, after his 17th birthday, he was taken to the notorious interrogation centre at Ballykelly. He was interrogated for three days and then interned with three others who had been held for nine days.

"Long Kesh had been burned the week previously", said Patsy, "and as we flew above the camp in a British army helicopter we could see the complete devastation. When we arrived, we were given two blankets and mattresses and put into one of the cages.

"For the next two months we were on a starvation diet, no facilities of any kind, and most men lying out open to the elements..."

"That December a ceasefire was announced, then internment was phased out. Merlyn Rees also announced at the same time that special category status would be withdrawn on March 1st, 1976. I did not know then how much that change of policy would effect me in less than three years".

IRSP

Shortly after his release in April 1975, Patsy joined the ranks of the fledging Irish Republican Socialist Party, which the 'Sticks', using murder, had attempted to strangle at birth. He was free only about two months when he was stopped at the permanent checkpoint on the Letterkenny Road whilst driving his father's car from Bunrana in County Donegal.

The Brits planted a stick of gelignite in the car (such practice was commonplace) and he was charged with possession of explosives. He was remanded in custody for six months, the first trial being stopped due to unusual RUC ineptitude at framing



● Patsy O'Hara — "The real criminals are the British imperialists who have thrived on the blood and sweat of generations of Irish people"

him. At the end of the second trial he was acquitted and released after spending six months in jail.

In 1976, Patsy had to stay out of the house for fear of constant arrest. That year, also, his brother Tony was charged with an armed raid, and on the sole evidence of an alleged verbal statement was sentenced to five years in the H-Blocks.

Despite being 'on the run' Patsy was still fond of his creature comforts!

His father recalls: "Seán Séamus came in late one night and though the whole place was in darkness he didn't put the lights on. He went to sit down and fell on the floor. He ran up the stairs and said: 'I went to sit down and there was nothing there'."

"Patsy had taken the sofa on top of a red Rover down to his billet in the Brandywell. Then before we would get up in the morning he would have it back up again. When we saw it sitting there in the morning we said to Seán: 'Are you going off your head or what?' and he was really puzzled."

IMPRISONED

In September 1976, he was again arrested in the North and along with four others charged with possession of a weapon. During the remand hearings he protested against the withdrawal of political status.

The charge was withdrawn after four months, indicating how the law is twisted to intern people by remanding them in custody and dropping the charges before the case comes to trial.

In June 1977, he was imprisoned for the fourth time. On this occasion, after a seven-day detention in Dublin's Bridewell, he was charged with holding a garda at gunpoint. He was released on bail six weeks later and was eventually acquitted in January 1978.

Whilst living in the Free State, Patsy was elected to the ard chomhairle of the IRSP. He was active in the Bray area, and campaigned against the special courts.

In January 1979, he moved back to Derry but was arrested on May 14th, 1979, and was charged with possessing a hand grenade.

In January 1980, he was sentenced to eight years in jail and went on the blanket.

HUNGER-STRIKE

What were Mrs O'Hara's feelings when Patsy told her he was going on hunger-strike?

"My feelings at the start, when he went on hunger-strike, were that I thought that they would get their just demands, because it is not very much that they are asking for. There is no use in saying that I was very vexed and all the rest of it. There is no use me sitting back in the wings and letting someone else's son go. Someone's sons have to go on it, and I just happen to be the mother of that son."

PRINCIPLES

Writing shortly before the hunger-strike began, Patsy O'Hara grimly declared: "We stand for the freedom of the Irish nation so that future generations will enjoy the prosperity they rightly deserve, free from foreign interference, oppression and exploitation. The real criminals are the British imperialists who have thrived on the blood and sweat of generations of Irish men.

"They have maintained control of Ireland through force of arms and there is only one way to end it. I would rather die than rot in this concrete tomb for years to come."

Patsy O'Hara died at 11.29pm on Thursday, May 21st, 1981, on the same day as Raymond McCreech with whom he had embarked on the hunger-strike 61 days earlier.

Even in death his torturers would not let him rest. When the O'Hara family received his remains in the early hours of the following morning, his nose had been broken and his corpse bore several burn marks inflicted after his death.

JOE McDONNELL

'A deep-thinking republican with a great sense of humour'

THE FOURTH IRA Volunteer to join the hunger-strike for political status was Joe McDonnell, a 30-year-old married man with two children, from the Lenadoon housing estate in West Belfast.

A well-known and very popular man in the Greater Andersonstown Area he grew up, married and fought for the republican cause in that area. Joe had a reputation as a quiet and deep-thinking individual. He had, nevertheless, a great sense of humour, was always laughing and playing practical jokes and although withdrawn at times, had the ability to make friends easily.

As an active republican before his capture in October 1976, Joe was regarded by his comrades as a cool and efficient Volunteer who did what he had to do and never talked about it afterwards.

Something of a rarity within the Republican Movement, in that outside of military briefings and operational duty he was never seen around with other known or suspected Volunteers. He was nevertheless a good friend of the late Bobby Sands, with whom he was captured while on active service duty.

Not among those who volunteered for the earlier hunger-strike last year, it was the intense disappointment brought about the Brits duplicity following the end of that hunger-strike, and the bitterness and anger that that duplicity produced among all the blanket men, that prompted Joe to put forward his name the next time round.

And it was predictable, as well as fitting, when his friend and comrade Bobby Sands met with death on the 66th day of his hunger-strike, that Joe McDonnell should volunteer to take Bobby's place and continue that fight.

RESOLVE

His determination and resolve in that course of action can be gauged by the fact that never once, following his sentencing to 14 years imprisonment in 1977, did he put on the prison uniform to take a visit, seeing his wife and family only after he commenced his hunger-strike.

The story of Joe McDonnell is of a highly aware republican soldier whose involvement stemmed initially from the personal repression and harassment he and his family suffered at the hands of the British occupation forces, but which then deepened — through continuing repression — to a mature commitment to oppose an occupation that denied his country freedom and attempted to criminalise its people.

It was that commitment which he held more dear than his own life.

FAMILY

Joe McDonnell was born on September 14th, 1951, the fifth of eight children, into the family home in Slate Street in Belfast's Lower Falls.

His father, Robert, aged 59, a steel erector, and his mother, Eileen (whose maiden name is Straney), aged 58, both came from the Lower Falls



JOE McDONNELL

Aged 30, from Belfast. Commenced hunger-strike May 9th, 1981, died July 8th, 1981, after 61 days.

themselves.

They married in St Peter's church there, in 1941, living first with Robert's sister and her husband in Colinward Street, off the Springfield Road, before moving into their own home in Slate Street, where the family were all born.

These are: Eilish, aged 38, married with five children; Robert, aged 36, married with two children; Hugh, aged 34, married with three children; Patsy, aged 32, married with two children, and now living in Canada since 1969; Joe, Maura, aged 28 and single; Paul, aged 26, married with two children; and Frankie, aged 24 and single.

Frankie is currently serving a five-year sentence on the blanket protest in H6-Block on an IRA membership charge, following his arrest in December 1976, and is due for release this December.

A ninth child, Bernadette, was a particular favourite of Joe's, before her death from a kidney illness at the early age of three.

"Joseph practically reared Bernadette", recalls his mother, "he was always with the child, carrying her around. He was about ten at the time. He even used to play marleys with her on his shoulders."

Bernadette's death, a sad blow to the family, was deeply felt by her young brother Joe.

DATING

One of his friends at that time was his future brother-in-law, Michael, and he began dating Goretti from around the time he was seventeen.

Joe and Goretti, who also comes from Andersonstown, married in St. Agnes' chapel in 1970, and moved in to live with Goretti's sister and her family in Horn Drive in Lower Lenadoon.

At that time, however, they were one of only

two nationalist households in what was then a predominantly loyalist street and, after repeated instances of verbal intimidation, in the middle of the night, a loyalist mob — in full view of a nearby Brit post, and with the blessing of the raving Reverend Robert Bradford, who stood by — broke down the doors and wrecked the houses, forcing the two families to leave.

INTERMENT

The McDonnells went to live with Goretti's mother for a while, but eventually got the chance to squat in a house being vacated in Lenadoon Avenue.

Internment had been introduced shortly before, and in 1972 the British army struck with a 4.00am raid.

Joe was dragged from the house, hit in the eye with a rifle butt and bundled into a jeep. Their house was searched and wrecked. Joe was taken to the prison ship Maidstone and later on to Long Kesh internment camp, where he was held for several months.

Goretti recalls that early morning as a "horrific" experience which altered both their lives. One minute they had everything, the next minute nothing.

On his release Joe joined the IRA's Belfast Brigade, operating at first in the First Battalion's 'A' Company which covered the Rosnareen end of Andersonstown, and later being absorbed into the 'cell' structure increasingly adopted by the IRA.

RAIDS

Both during his first period of internment, and his second, longer, internment in 1973, as well as the periods when he was free, the McDonnells' home in Lenadoon was a constant target for British army raids.

During these raids the house would often be torn apart, photos torn up and confiscated, letters from Joe (previously read by the prison censor) re-read by infantile British soldiers, and Goretti herself arrested.

In between periods of internment, and before his capture, Joe resumed his trade as an upholsterer, which he had followed since leaving school at the age of 15. He loved the job, never missing a day through illness, and made both the furniture for his own home as well as for many of the bars and clubs in the surrounding area. His job enabled him to take the family for regular holidays, but Joe was a real 'homer' and always longed to be back in his native Belfast.

BOMBS

Part of that attraction stemmed obviously from his responsibility to his republican involvement. An active Volunteer throughout the Greater Andersonstown Area, Joe was considered a first-class operator who didn't show much fear. Generally quiet and serious while on an operation, whether an ambush or a bombing mission, Joe's humour occa-



● Goretta McDonnell pays her last respects to her husband Joe who once said before going on hunger-strike, "I have too much live for"

sionally shone through.

Driving one time to an intended target in the Lenadoon area with a carload of Volunteers, smoke began to appear in the car. Not realising that it was simply escaping exhaust fumes, and thinking it came from the bags containing a number of bombs, a degree of alarm began to break out in the car, but Joe only advised his comrades, drily, not to bother about it: "They'll go off soon enough."

Outside of active service, Joe mixed mostly with people he knew from work, never flaunting his republican beliefs or his involvement, to such an extent that it led some republicans to believe he had not reported back to the IRA on his second release from internment.

The Brits, however, persecuted him and his family continually, with frequent house raids, and street arrests. He could rarely leave the house without being stopped for P-checking, or held up for an hour at a roadblock if he had somewhere to go. A few months before his capture, irate Brits at a roadblock warned him that they would 'get' him.

Outside of his republican activity Joe took a strong interest in his children — Bernadette, aged ten and Joseph, aged nine — teaching them both to swim, and forever playing football with young Joseph on the small green outside their home.

CAPTURE

His capture took place in October 1976 following a firebomb attack on the Balmoral Furniture Company in Upper Dunmurray Lane, near the Twinbrook estate in West Belfast.

The IRA had reconnoitred the store, noting the extravagantly priced furniture it sold, and had selected it as an economic target. The plan was to petrol bomb the premises and then to lay explosive

charges to spread the flames.

The Twinbrook active service unit, led by Bobby Sands, was at that time in the process of being built up, and were assisted consequently in this operation by experienced republican Volunteers from the adjoining Andersonstown area, including Joe McDonnell.

Unfortunately, following the attack, which successfully destroyed the furnishing company, the escape route of some of the Volunteers involved was blocked by a car placed across the road.

During an ensuing shoot-out with Brits and RUC, two republicans, Seamus Martin and Gabriel Corbett were wounded; and four others, Bobby Sands, Joe McDonnell, Seamus Finucane and Sean Lavery, were arrested in a car not far away.

Three IRA Volunteers managed to escape safely from the area.

A single revolver was found in the car, and at the men's subsequent trial in September 1977 all four received 14-year sentences for possession when they refused to recognise the court.

Rough treatment during their interrogation in Castlereagh failed to make any of the four sign a statement, and the RUC were thus unable to charge the men with involvement in the attack on the furnishing company despite their proximity to it at the time of their arrest.

ADAMANT

From the day he was sentenced, Joe refused to put on the prison uniform to take a visit, so adamant was he that he would not be criminalised. He kept in touch instead, with his wife and family, by means of daily smuggled 'communications', written with smuggled-in biro refills on prison issue toilet paper and smuggled out via other blanket men

who were taking visits.

Incarcerated in H5-Block, Joe acted as 'scorcher' (an anglicised form of the Irish word, *scairt*, to shout) shouting the *scéal*, or news from his block to the adjoining one about a hundred yards away. Frequently this was the only way that news from outside can be communicated from one H-Block to the blanket men in another H-Block.

It illustrates well the feeling of bitter determination prevailing in the H-Blocks that Joe McDonnell who did not volunteer for the hunger-strike last year because, he said, "I have too much to live for", should have become so frustrated and angered by British perfidy as to embark on hunger-strike on Sunday, May 9th, 1981.

IMPACT

In June, Joe was a candidate during the Free State general election, in the Sligo/Leitrim constituency, in which he narrowly missed election by 315 votes.

All the family were actively involved in campaigning for him, and despite the disappointment at the result, both they and Joe himself were pleased at the impact which the H-Block issue had on the election and in Sligo/Leitrim itself.

Adults cried when the video film on the hunger-strike was shown, his family recall, and they cried again when Joe was eliminated from the electoral count.

MARTYR

At 5.11am on July 8th, Joe McDonnell who — believably for those who know his wife Goretta, his children Bernadette and Joseph and his family — "had too much to live for" died after 61 days of agonising hunger-strike, rather than be criminalised.

MARTIN HURSON

'A hard-working and extremely likeable republican'

IN THE early hours of Tuesday morning, November 9th, 1976, a series of British army and RUC swoops in the Cappagh district of Dungannon in East Tyrone led to the arrest from their homes, under Section Ten of the Emergency Provisions Act, of three young local men: Pat Joe O'Neill, Dermot Boyle and Peter Kane. Two days later, November 11th, in similar dawn swoops in the area, four other men, James Joseph Rafferty, Peter Nugent, Kevin O'Brien and Martin Hurson, were arrested from their homes.

Over the next few days all seven men were held in Omagh RUC barracks, interrogated about IRA operations in East Tyrone since 1972, and systematically tortured by detectives from the newly established Regional Crime Squad.

The men had their hair pulled, their ears slapped, they were made to stand for prolonged periods against a wall in the 'search position'. They were also kicked and punched, and forced to do exercises for lengthy periods.

INJURIES

Finally, two men, Peter Nugent and James Rafferty, were released without charge, Rafferty to Tyrone County Hospital in Omagh where he spent four days recovering from his injuries. The remaining five were charged (and subsequently convicted) on the sole basis of statements made during that interrogation.

One of the five was imprisoned in the cages of Long Kesh; the other four became blanket men in the H-Blocks.

Four-and-a-half years later, with revealing ironic insight into the nature of the British judicial system in Ireland, while four RUC detectives involved in those Omagh interrogations were awaiting trial on charges of assaulting James Rafferty during interrogation, in the prison hospital of Long Kesh, one of those convicted on the basis of a tortured 'confession' — Martin Hurson — lay dying on hunger-strike for political status.

CAPPAGH

Edward Martin Hurson was born on September 13th, 1956, in the townland of Aughnaskea, Cappagh, near Dungannon, the eighth of nine children: six girls and three boys.

Both of his parents, John, aged 74, a small hill farmer, and Mary Ann (whose maiden name was Gillespie) who died in April 1970 after a short illness, came from the Cappagh district, and the whole of their family — including Martin — were born into the white-washed farmhouse perched precariously on top of the 30 hilly acres of rough land that make up the Hurson farm.

The Cappagh district is a wholly nationalist area of County Tyrone, composed mainly of farmers and comprising between 200 and 300 closely knit families. The land is infertile, lowland hills,



MARTIN HURSON

Aged 24, from East Tyrone. Commenced hunger-strike May 29th, 1981, died July 13th, 1981, after 46 days.

good only for grazing cattle and rearing a few pigs, yet the roots of families like the Hursons stretch back maybe two or three hundred years. The land may not be much but it is theirs.

Over by Donaghmore, a few miles away, where the fields are bigger and the grass more lush, most of the farmers are loyalists.

Martin was close to the land as he grew up. Although he went first to Crosscavanagh school in Galbally, and then to St. Patrick's intermediate in Dungannon, when he was not at school he was more often than not helping out about the farm, driving a tractor, helping to rear 'croppy pigs' or looking after cattle.

A 'typical' country lad in many ways, part of a very close and good-humoured family, Martin was a quiet, very religious, and easy-going young man. Nevertheless, before his arrest, he enjoyed social pursuits such as dancing and going to the cinema, and enjoyed the company of other people, among whom he had a well-earned reputation for being a practical joker and a bit of a comedian.

Like many others, he was capable of being very outgoing and talkative on occasions, while remaining essentially a rather shy and quiet personality.

Perhaps because he was one of the youngest of the family, Martin was particularly close to his mother, whose premature death in 1970 when he was only 13, came as a deep shock to him.

It was Martin who returned home one day to find his mother taken seriously ill and who ran to a neighbouring farm to ring a doctor. That day, a Saturday, Mrs. Hurson was taken to Omagh hospital,

and from there to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast where she died the following Thursday, April 30th.

Martin was so shocked by the tragedy that he lost his memory completely for a week. He regained it only when a tractor he was driving up a steep slope with his father overturned, throwing the pair to the ground. This fresh shock dramatically restored his memory.

That period of his life was also the time when 'the troubles' began to have an impact.

Although the family did not discuss politics, and internment did not affect anyone from the Cappagh area, it was impossible not to be keenly aware of British oppression so close to Dungannon which — spearheading the civil rights campaign through the late '60s — had fostered such a strong current of republicanism in the process.

However, Martin's personal resistance to that British repression and his subsequent intense suffering at the hands of it were not to occur for several years. In his teens his great delight was to play practical jokes on his family and neighbours, particularly on April Fool's Day and on Hallowe'en.

JOKE

"He liked a joke and a laugh", remembers a long-time friend of Martin's. "Him and Peter Kane were a comical match". Or, as his brother Francis remembers with a laugh, "If he thought it would make you mad he would do it".

Like the time he ran breathless to Paddy Donnelly's to tell him that Sylvie Kane's cows had toppled his milkchurns and the milk was going everywhere. And as Paddy dashed down to save his milk, Martin called out, "Hey Paddy, April Fool!" before disappearing through a gap in the hedge.

Leaving school, Martin started work as an apprentice fitter welder at Findlay's. After a stint there he went across to England for a while, living in Manchester with his brother Francis and his wife and working for McAlpine's. But not long after, Francis and his wife returned to Tyrone. Martin too returned, when the particular job he was working on had finished at Christmas in 1974, rather than move to another job.

He had spent almost a year-and-a-half in England but wasn't particular about it, a view confirmed early on after his arrival, when he was forced to spend two weeks in hospital, having been struck by one of McAlpine's mechanical diggers!

Back in the farmhouse at Cappagh, Martin bought himself a car on hire purchase and got himself a job in Dungannon at Powerscreen International. He paid for the car within a year, having always had a gift for scraping money together.

As a child, whenever he managed to get hold of a penny or a shilling, here or there, instead of spending it he would take it to a nearby farmer and family friend who put it into a box for him until he had enough to buy, once, a white cob, or a pig to rear. He was "old fashioned" in that way, his brother Francis recalled.

He also loved to work and was a "great riser" in the morning, his father said, never missing a day's work until his arrest.

BERNADETTE

Late in 1975, he met and started going out with Bernadette Donnelly, at the wedding of her sister Mary Rose to a cousin of Martin's, at which he was best man.

Bernadette, aged 23, comes from Pomeroy: she was extremely active in the hunger-strike campaign, along with members of Martin's family, appearing on rally platforms and taking part in marches and pickets all over the country.

Before his arrest, Martin and Bernadette were often both behind the practical jokes he loved playing. His brother Francis was often the victim.

On one occasion, Francis, his wife, and their two children were asleep in a caravan in the Donegal resort of Bundoran. They awoke however, to find themselves not on the caravan site but on an adjacent road, Martin and Bernadette having towed it off-site during the night.

On another occasion the pair borrowed Francis' almost new cine-camera to film the wedding of a friend, Séamus McGuire, in Donegal. Somewhere along the route back from Donegal they found out they'd lost the camera and lost it remained.

Afraid to tell Francis, they kept quiet about the camera for several weeks, before Francis remembered to ask for it back. Instead of owning up, Martin gave Francis an almost identical replacement, hoping he wouldn't notice. But when he did, Martin, not lost for words, just explained: "I left it into a shop for fixing, but they said it wasn't worth fixing."

RUC

But those relatively light-hearted and easy-going days were coming to an end.

East Tyrone, like many other areas in the North, was a centre of highly proficient republican operations against the enemy forces.

To combat the level of republican military activity, deputy chief constable of the RUC, Kenneth Newman (shortly to be promoted to chief constable) was one of those behind the restructuring of the RUC in early 1976, which led to the setting up of what were called Regional Crime Squads.

Their primary function was to ensure convictions of all 'unsolved' republican activity by extracting signed statements, in effect to 'clear the books' of an embarrassing list of unattributable republican operations.

Under the torturer Newman, and the then direct-ruler Roy Mason, the Regional Crime Squads' only responsibility was to 'get results' (a guarantee of promotion) without undue regard to the methods they employed. One method they did employ was torture.

TORTURE

Martin was arrested and taken to Omagh RUC barracks on November 11th, 1976, along with the six others arrested that day and two days previously.

He was badly, and professionally, tortured in Omagh for two days, beaten about the head, back and testicles, spread-eagled against a wall and across a table, slapped, punched and kicked. He heard Rafferty's screams as he was tortured in the adjoining room.

To escape the torture, Martin signed statements admitting involvement in republican activity.

He was then transferred to Cookstown barracks, but as soon as he arrived he made a formal complaint of ill-treatment. Back in Omagh barracks, chief inspector Farr, realising this could prejudice the admissibility of Martin's statements at his trial,



● The final salute for Martin Hurson

got the Cookstown detectives to re-interrogate Martin and extract the same statements, which they did by threatening to 'send him back to Omagh'.

On Saturday night, November 13th, Martin was charged, along with Kevin O'Brien and Peter Kane. Dermot Boyle and Pat Joe O'Neill had been charged the day before.

Martin was charged with a landmine explosion at Galbally in November 1975. This charge was later dropped, but he was then further charged with IRA membership, possession of the Galbally landmine, conspiracy to kill members of the enemy forces, causing an explosion at Cappagh in September 1975, and possession of a landmine at Reclain in February 1976 which exploded near a passing UDR Landrover.

STATEMENTS

Even though the alleged specialty of the East Tyrone active service unit operating around Cappagh was explosives, the RUC offered not one shred of forensic evidence against any of the five men, merely signed statements extracted by torture.

These statements, however, were good enough for Judge Rowland at the trial of the five men in November 1977, after a year on remand in Crumlin Road and in the remand H-Block of Long Kesh.

Admitting as evidence the statements Martin made in Omagh, and dismissing doctor's evidence about the extent of Martin's injuries, Judge Rowland sentenced Martin to 20 years for possession of landmines and conspiracy, as well as two other sentences of 15 and five years respectively, the sentences to run concurrently.

The other four men received sentences ranging from 15 to 20 years.

Martin appealed his conviction on the grounds that the judge had ignored medical evidence about his ill-treatment. The appeal was dismissed but he was granted a retrial.

At the four-day trial in September 1979, before Judge Murray, the Omagh statements were ruled inadmissible, but instead of Martin walking free the judge went on to accept the admissibility of the Cookstown statements, themselves extracted under threat of renewed torture.

One of the consequences of the retrial was the further postponement of the enquiry into James Rafferty's allegations of brutality in Omagh, on the grounds that it might prejudice the retrial (to the RUC's detriment).

The enquiry had been reluctantly acceded to by the RUC Police Authority following the persistent endeavours of Authority member, independent Dungannon councillor, Jack Hassard. He, however, later resigned from the Authority, describing it as being "as independent as a sausage without a skin" when the tribunal which was set up failed to begin its enquiries. The tribunal finally collapsed during 1981 when the RUC detectives from Omagh refused to give evidence to it on the grounds that they might incriminate themselves!

Subsequently, four of the detectives who tortured James Rafferty, Martin Hurson and the others at Omagh that November: chief inspector Harold Colgan, and constables Michael O'Neil, Kenneth Hassan and Robert McArdorey, were charged with assaulting Rafferty.

Those four torturers, however, were only convenient scape-goats representing the tip of the iceberg in what was an orchestrated and widespread attempt during the Roy Mason era to jail republicans on the flimsiest of pretexts by means of torture-extracted statements. Such men make up a substantial proportion of those political prisoners in Britain's Northern and English jails today.

Martin Hurson went straight on the blanket after his first trial, and following his retrial he appealed once again against conviction, challenging the admissibility of the Cookstown statements, but his appeal was disallowed in June 1980.

HUNGER-STRIKE

On May 29th, 1981, Martin joined the hunger-strike, replacing South Derryman Brendan McLoughlin, forced to drop out because of a burst stomach ulcer.

In the Free State general election, in June 1981, Martin was a candidate in Longford/Westmeath and, although missing election, obtained almost 4,500 first preference votes, and over 1,000 transfers, before being eliminated at the end of the sixth count, outlasting two Labour candidates and a Fine Gael contender.

Barely one month after the election, the Free State government's bolstering of Britain's barbaric intransigence led to the death of Martin Hurson, at that stage the sixth hunger-striker to die.

Having seriously deteriorated after 40 days on hunger-strike, he was unable to hold down water and died a horrifically agonising death after only 44 days on hunger-strike, at 4.30am on Monday, July 13th.

KEVIN LYNCH

'A loyal, determined republican with a great love of life'

THE EIGHTH republican to join the hunger-strike for political status, on May 23rd, following the death of Patsy O'Hara, was 25-year-old fellow INLA Volunteer Kevin Lynch from the small North Derry town of Dungiven who had been imprisoned since his arrest in 1976.

A well-known and well-liked young man in the closely knit community of his home town, Kevin was remembered chiefly for his outstanding ability as a sportsman, and for qualities of loyalty, determination and will to win which distinguished him on the sports field and which, in heavier times and circumstances, were his hallmarks as an H-Block blanket man on hunger-strike to the death.

Kevin Lynch was a happy-go-lucky, principled young Derry man with an enthusiastic love of life, who was, as one friend of his remarked — a former schoolteacher of Kevin's and an active H-Block campaigner: *"the last person, back in 1969, you would have dreamed would be spending a length of time in prison."*

The story of Kevin Lynch is of a light-hearted, hard-working and lively young man. Barely out of his teens when the hard knock came early one December morning in 1976, he had been forced by the British occupation of his country to spend almost five years in heroic refusal to accept the British brand of 'criminal' and in the tortured assertion of what he really was — a political prisoner.

PARK

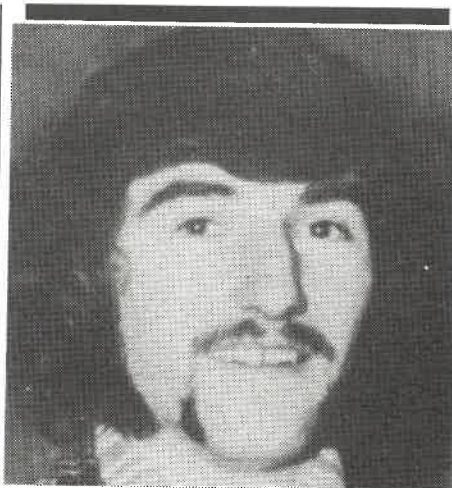
Kevin Lynch was born on May 25th, 1956, the youngest of a family of eight, in the tiny village of Park, aged 66, eight miles outside Dungiven. His father, Paddy, and his mother, Bridie, aged 65, whose maiden name is Cassidy, were born in Park too, Paddy Lynch's family being established there for at least three generations, but they moved to Dungiven 20 years ago, after the births of their children.

Paddy Lynch was a builder by trade, like his father and grandfather before him — a trade which he handed down to his five sons: Michael, aged 39, Patsy, aged 37, Francis, aged 33, Gerard, aged 27 and Kevin himself, who was an apprenticed bricklayer. There are also three daughters in the family: Jean, aged 35, Mary, aged 30, and Bridie, aged 29.

Though still only a small town of a few thousand, Dungiven has been growing over the past 30 years due to the influx of families like the Lynchs from the outlying rural areas. It is an almost exclusively nationalist town, garrisoned by a large and belligerent force of RUC and Brits. In civil rights days, however, nationalists were barred from marching in the town centre.

Nowadays, militant nationalists have enforced their right to march, but the RUC still attempt to break up protests, and the flying of the tricolour (not in itself 'illegal' in the Six Counties) is considered taboo by the loyalist bigots of the RUC.

Support in the town was relatively strong, Dun-



KEVIN LYNCH

Aged 25, from North Derry. Commenced hunger-strike May 23rd, 1981, died August 1st, 1981, after 71 days.

given having first-hand experience of the hunger-strike of 1980 when local man Tom McFeeley went 53 days without food before the fast ended on December 18th. Apart from Tom McFeeley and Kevin Lynch, other blanket men from the town were Kevin's boyhood friend and later comrade Liam McCloskey — himself later to embark on hunger-strike — and former blanket man Eunan Brolly, who was released from the H-Blocks in December, 1980.

SCHOOL

Kevin went to St. Canice's primary school and then on to St. Patrick's intermediate, both in Dungiven. Although not academically minded — always looking forward to taking his place in the family building business — he was well-liked by his teachers, respected for his sporting prowess and for his well-meant sense of humour. *"Whatever devilment was going on in the school, you could lay your bottom dollar Kevin was behind it,"* remembers his former schoolteacher, recalling that he took great delight in getting one of his classmates, his cousin Hugh ("the biggest boy in the class — six feet one") *"into trouble"*. But it was all in fun — Kevin was no troublemaker, and whenever reprimanded at school, like any other lively lad would never bear a grudge.

Above all, Kevin was an outdoor person, who loved to go fishing for sticklebacks in the river near his home, or off with a bunch of friends playing Gaelic football (outdoor disposition which must have made his H-Block confinement even harder to bear).

GAMES

His great passion was Gaelic games, playing

Gaelic football from very early on, and then taking up hurling when he was at St. Patrick's.

He excelled at both.

Playing right half-back for St. Patrick's hurling club, which was representing County Derry at the inaugural Féile na nGael held in Thurles, County Tipperary, in 1971, Kevin's performance — coming only ten days after an appendix operation — was considered a key factor in the team's victory in the four-match competition played over two days.

The following season Kevin was appointed captain of both St. Patrick's hurling team and the County Derry under-16 team which went on in that season to beat Armagh in the All-Ireland under-16 final at Croke Park in Dublin.

Later on, while working in England, he was a reserve for the Dungiven senior football team in the 1976 County Derry final.

Kevin's team, St. Canice's was beaten 0-9 to 0-3 by Sarsfields of Ballerin, and he is described in the match programme as, *"a strong player and a useful hurler"*. Within a short space of time after this final, Kevin would be in jail, as would two of his team mates on that day, Eunan Brolly and Seán Coyle.

QUALITIES

The qualities Kevin is remembered for as a sportsman were his courage and determination, his will to win, and his loyalty to his team mates. Not surprisingly, the local hurling and football clubs were fully behind Kevin and his comrades in their struggle for the five demands, pointing out that Kevin had displayed those same qualities in the H-Blocks and on hunger-strike.

He was also a boxer with the St. Canice's club, once reaching the County Derry final as a schoolboy, but not always managing as easily as he achieved victory in his first fight!

Just before the match was due to start his opponent asked how many previous fights he'd had. With suppressed humour, Kevin answered "33" so convincingly that his opponent, overcome with nervous horror, couldn't be persuaded into the ring.

At the age of 15, Kevin left school and began to work alongside his father. Although lively, going to dances, and enjoying good crack, he was basically a quiet, determined young fellow, who stuck to his principles and couldn't easily be swayed.

Like any other family in Dungiven, the Lynchs are nationally minded, and young Kevin would have been just as aware as any other lad of his age of the basic injustices in his country, and would have equally resented the petty stop-and-search harassment which people of his age continually suffered at the hands of Brits and RUC.

The Lynchs were also, typically, a close family and in 1973, at the age of 16, Kevin went to England to join his three brothers, Michael, Patsy and Gerard, who were already working in Bedford.

Both Bedford and its surrounding towns, stretching from Hertfordshire to Buckinghamshire



● INLA Volunteers fire a volley of shots over the coffin of Kevin Lynch — "a man that wouldn't lie back"

and down to the north London suburbs, contain large Irish populations, and the Lynchs mixed socially within that, Kevin going a couple of times a week to train with St. Dymphna's in Luton or to Catholic clubs in Bedford or Luton for a quiet drink and a game of snooker. He even played an odd game of rugby while over there.

But Kevin never intended settling in England and on one of his occasional visits home (*"he just used to turn up"*), in August 1976, he decided to stay in Dungiven.

INLA

Shortly after his return home, coming away from a local dance, he and nine other young lads were put up against a wall by British soldiers and given a bad kicking, two of the lads being brought to the barracks.

Kevin joined the INLA around this time, maybe because of this incident in part, but almost certainly because his national awareness, coming from his cultural love of Irish sport, as well as his courage and integrity, made him determined to stand up both for himself and his friends.

"He wouldn't ever allow himself to be walked on", recalls his brother, Michael. And he had always been known for his loyalty by his family, his friends, his team mates, and eventually his H-Block comrades.

However, within the short space of little more than three months, Kevin's active republican involvement came to an end almost before it had begun. Following an ambush outside Dungiven, in November '76, in which an RUC man was slightly injured, the RUC moved against those it suspected to be INLA activists in the town.

On December 2nd, 1976, at 5.40am Brits and RUC came to the Lynch's home for Kevin. *"We said he wasn't going anywhere before he'd had a cup of tea"*, remembered Mr. Lynch, *"but they refused to let him have even a glass of water. The RUC said he'd be well looked after by them."*

Also arrested that day in Dungiven were Seán

Coyle, Séamus McGrandles and Kevin's schoolboy friend, Liam McCloskey, with whom he was later to share an H-Block cell.

Kevin was taken straight to Castlereagh and, after three days' questioning, on Saturday, December 4th, he was charged and taken to Limavady to be remanded in custody by a special court. The string of charges included conspiracy to disarm members of the enemy forces, taking part in a punishment shooting, and the taking of 'legally held' shotguns.

Following a year on remand in Crumlin Road jail, Belfast, he was tried and sentenced to ten years in December 1977. Kevin immediately joined the blanket men in H3, and eventually found himself sharing a cell with his Dungiven friend and comrade, Liam McCloskey, continuing to do so until he took part in the 30-man four-day fast which coincided with the end of the original seven-man hunger-strike in December, 1980.

LONG KESH

After they were sentenced in 1977, both Dungiven men suffered their share of brutality from Crumlin Road and Long Kesh prison warders, Kevin being 'put on the boards' for periods of up to a fortnight, three or four times.

On Wednesday, April 26th, 1978, six warders, one carrying a hammer, came in to search their cell. Kevin's bare foot, slipping on the urine-drenched cell floor, happened to splash the trouser leg of one of the warders, who first verbally abused him and then kicked urine at him.

When Kevin responded in like manner, he was set upon by two warders who punched and kicked him, while another swung a hammer at him but fortunately missed. The punching and kicking continued till Kevin collapsed on the urine-soaked floor with a bruised and swollen face.

In another assault by prison warders, Kevin's cellmate, Liam McCloskey, suffered a burst eardrum during a particularly bad beating, and is now permanently hard of hearing.

Even as long ago as April 1978, just after the

'no wash' protest had begun, Kevin was reported, in a bulletin issued by the Dungiven Relatives Action Committee, to *"have lost a lot of weight, his face is a sickly white and he is underfed"*.

His determination, and his sense of loyalty to his blanket comrades saw him through even the hardest times.

His former H-Block comrade, Eunan Brolly, who was also in H3 before his release, remembers how Kevin once put up with raging toothache for three weeks rather than come off the protest to get dental treatment. It was the sort of thing which forced some blanket men off the protest, at least temporarily, but not Kevin.

Eunan, who recalls how Kevin used to get a terrible slagging from other blanket men because the GAA, of which of course he was a member, did not give enough support to the fight for political status, also says he was not surprised by Kevin's decision to join the hunger-strike. Like other blanket men, Eunan says, Kevin used to discuss a hunger-strike as a possibility, a long time ago, *"and he was game enough for it"*.

Neither were his family, who supported him in his decision, surprised. *"Kevin's the type of man"*, said his father, when Kevin was on the hunger-strike, *"that wouldn't lie back. He'd want to do his share."*

In the Free State elections in June 1981, Kevin stood as a candidate in the Waterford constituency, collecting 3,337 first preferences before being eliminated — after Labour Party and Fianna Fáil candidates — on the fifth count, with 3,753 votes.

But the obvious popular support which the hunger-strikers and their cause enjoyed nationally was not sufficient to elicit support from the Free State government, who share the common, futile hope of the British government — the criminalisation of captured freedom fighters.

The direct consequence of that was Kevin's death — the seventh at that stage — in the Long Kesh hospital at 1.00am on Saturday, August 1st, 1981, after 71 days on hunger-strike.

KIERAN DOHERTY

'A dedicated republican and an outstanding soldier'

WHEN the family, friends and former comrades of 25-year-old Belfast IRA Volunteer Kieran Doherty learnt that he was joining the H-Block hunger-strike, as a replacement for Raymond McCreesh, it came as no surprise to them.

Although Kieran had spent seven of the last ten years imprisoned, his complete selflessness and his relentless dedication to the liberation struggle left no-one in any doubt that Kieran would volunteer for this terrible and lonely confrontation with British rule inside the H-Blocks of Long Kesh. In December 1980, he was amongst those 30 prisoners who were on hunger-strike for four days prior to the ending of the original seven-strong strike.

Kieran was born on October 16th, 1955, in Andersonstown, the third son in a family of six children. His two elder brothers, Michael, aged 28, and Terence, aged 27, were interned between 1972 and 1974.

Kieran had two younger sisters, Roisin and Mairead; and his younger brother, Brendan, aged 12, is still at school.

BACKGROUND

Kieran's mother, Margaret, is a Catholic convert from a Protestant background. His father, Alfie Doherty, a floor-tiler by trade, is a well-known figure in Andersonstown.

Kieran's paternal grandfather came from Lismavady, County Derry, and after his people moved to a house in North Belfast in the '20s they were threatened that the house was going to be burnt.

This was during the loyalist-initiated pogroms which followed partition.

They had to flee to West Belfast, enacting a tragedy which was to repeat itself in front of Kieran's eyes in the early '70s and stir him to take action.

Alfie's uncle, Ned Maguire, took part in the famous IRA roof-top escape from Belfast's Crumlin Road jail on January 15th, 1943.

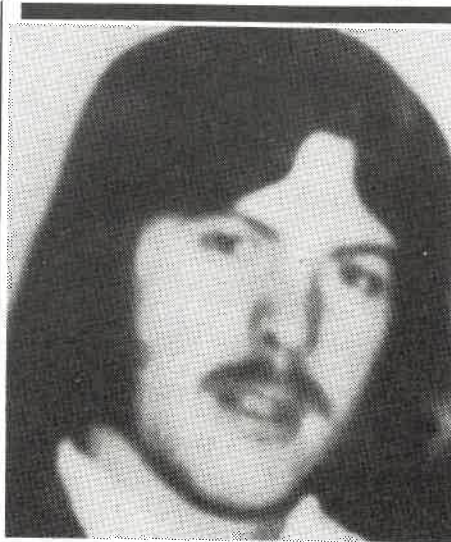
Ned Maguire's son, also called Ned, and a second cousin of Kieran, was an internee in Cage 5 of Long Kesh in 1974, when he took part in the mass escape from the camp during which Hugh Coney was shot dead by the British army. Young Ned Maguire was one of the three who managed to reach Twinbrook before being recaptured.

Ned's sisters (and Kieran's second cousins), Dorothy Maguire, aged 19, and Maura Meehan, aged 30, were shot dead by the British army on October 23rd, 1971, in a car in the Lower Falls area of Belfast. Both were members of Cumann na mBan.

Another relative of Kieran's, his uncle, Gerry Fox, was part of the famous Crumlin Road jail 'football team', who escaped from the jail by climbing over the wall in 1972.

CHILDHOOD

However, Kieran's childhood was relatively or-



KIERAN DOHERTY

Aged 25, from Belfast. Commenced hunger-strike May 22nd, 1981, died August 2nd, 1981, after 73 days.

dinary. He loved sport more than anything else, and was always out playing Gaelic football, hurling or soccer.

Kieran went to St. Theresa's primary school, then moved to the Christian Brothers secondary school on the Glen Road, where he studied until the age of 16.

A keen Gaelic footballer, he won an Antrim Minor medal in 1971 for St. Theresa's GAC.

Kieran took up cycling for a while, following his brother, Michael, in St. Thomas' cycling club. His mother recalls him taking part in a race with a faulty bicycle: *"Although the chain came off at least 20 times through the race, he was so stubborn that he finished with a bronze medal."*

St. Thomas' cycling club was later decimated by internment. Kieran, his brothers, and many other Andersonstown boys were to end up behind the wire, to such an extent, that Kieran's young brother, Brendan, asked his mother one day in 1975 when it would be his turn to go where all the 'big boys' were kept. Brendan was then six.

In the summer of 1971, Kieran got a job as an apprentice in heating engineering but was laid-off when the firm closed down a few months later. He worked for a while at floor-tiling with his father.

JOINED

In the meantime, however, internment had burst open the lives of many Andersonstown families. Kieran had never been interested in politics until then, nor had his family ever discussed the political situation in front of him.

Like hundreds of other boys and girls of his

age, he was moved by the sight of uprooted families leaving a home in cinders behind them. As all of the evacuees were being catered for in local schools, Kieran and his brothers begged their parents to allow them to go and help. Kieran saw the British army on the streets, his friends and their families harassed. He joined Fianna Eireann in the autumn of '71.

Kieran proved himself to be an outstanding member of the Fianna. Reliable, quick on the job, he was obviously giving the best of himself to every task assigned him with the aim of being noticed and recruited for the IRA as quickly as was possible.

Even at this early stage of his involvement, he is remembered for his initiative and his discreet ways. Unlike some boys of his age, he never boasted about his activities.

But the British army soon noticed him too and Kieran, his family, and his home, became a target for frequent British army harassment.

On October 6th, 1972, the British army came to arrest Kieran, despite his father's objection that Kieran was under 17. The Brits had checked up, they said, and after a heavy house raid they took Kieran away in the middle of the night. His father got him released eventually after waking up the sexton of St. Agnes' chapel and obtaining Kieran's birth certificate.

The Brits were ten days too early.

True to form, on October 16th, the British army were back in force and swamped Kieran's district, waiting for his return from work. But relatives managed to warn him and he was driven over the border to an uncle in Limerick.

He did not much enjoy his enforced exile and, bursting to get back into action, he made his way back to Belfast at the beginning of '73.

INTERNEED

A week or so later, he was arrested, taken to Castlereagh, and then interned in Long Kesh where he spent over two years from February '73 to November '75. He was among the last internees released.

Always even-tempered and quiet-spoken, he used his time developing his military skills.

In a letter to his mother he wrote, *"They might intern all of us, but we will come out fighting."*

He made a lot of handicrafts during his two-and-a-half years in captivity.

His parents' home displays much of his work, in particular a hand carved wooden plaque commemorating Dorothy Maguire and Maura Meehan.

On the eve of his birthday in October '74, Long Kesh prison camp was burned. When visits were eventually resumed, he did not complain to his parents of brutality but just remarked jokingly on the *"birthday party"* he had been given.

He was released from Long Kesh in November '75, as undaunted as he sounded in his letters, and reported back to the IRA immediately. Always eager to operate, he was included in a team of Volun-

teers from around Rosnareen which gave the British army in Andersonstown many sleepless nights until a wave of arrests in the summer of '76.

As the IRA/British army truce petered out at the beginning of '76, 'Big Doc', as he was known by all, soon had to move out of his parents' house. Raids were at least a fortnightly occurrence, with furniture wrecked and floorboards lifted.

Mrs. Doherty was tidying up a first-floor bedroom after such a raid when she fell through the carpet, the floor, and partly through the sitting-room ceiling. The Brits had omitted to replace the floorboards. The scar on the ceiling can still be seen.

Many friends who met Kieran after his internment period found him extremely mature for a lad of 20. He obviously, by then, had thought things out, made a definite choice, and assessed the dangers.

As an operator he was a perfectionist and his comrades recall feeling extremely safe with him. Even in the eventuality of things going wrong they knew Kieran would not give anything away.

ESCAPES

He had many narrow escapes.

One night, as he was shifting 'gear' in Andersonstown, he was chased up and down the side streets for over five minutes by two Brit landrovers.

Another time, as he was driving to a night job as security man for a firm, armed, as he often was, he drove into a British army roadblock.

He calmly took his tie out of his pocket, put it on, tidied himself up, and, winding down the window shouted: "What's up lads? Let me through, please, I'm going to my work, over there, security staff."

And the British soldiers opened the way for him. 'Big Doc' was welcome in many Andersonstown homes and highly respected by all who knew him.

Families with whom he billeted remember how security conscious he was, staying away for days, using billets in no regular pattern.

ENJOYED

Through those months of intense involvement Kieran had little chance to unwind. He mostly liked to go to local clubs for a quiet pint with a few friends.

He also had a reputation as a practical joker. One day he rang a friend from a pub and told him they were wrecking the place, simply to have his friend rush over in his car to pick him up.

In July '76, a few weeks before his arrest, Kieran enjoyed one of the rare holidays he ever had since the arrival of British troops on his local streets. With a few close friends he drove to the South and was able to indulge in his love for outdoor activities, exhausting his friends with long walks and swims.

By that time he had met his girlfriend, Geraldine, the only steady relationship he ever formed during his short period of freedom.

They did not get much of a chance, as Kieran's heavy republican involvement often interfered with their dating and after August '76 they only met for a few minutes once in a while under the gaze of prison warders.

SEAN McDERMOTT

Kieran's comrades-in-arms recall one particular operation, of the many he was involved in, when one Andersonstown Volunteer — Seán McDermott — was shot dead.

Kieran got away and was told to lie low for a few days, but nevertheless he appeared at his comrade's funeral.

Seán McDermott's mother has a photograph of

the funeral cortège in which Kieran can be seen, standing on the footpath, sombre, alone, looking on as the coffin is carried to Milltown cemetery.

Seán's death, and the arrest of other comrades involved hit Kieran very hard.

BOMBING

In August '76, as Kieran and his unit were on a bombing mission, the van in which they were travelling was chased by the RUC near Balmoral Avenue in Belfast.

Kieran got out of the van and commandeered a car, which he left some streets away and walked off.

Meanwhile, the others in the van were cornered, Liam White being captured immediately, and the others, Chris Moran, Terry Kirby and John 'Pickles' Pickering — himself later to embark on hunger-strike — finally giving themselves up when surrounded in a house they had taken over.

The RUC picked Kieran up one-and-a-half miles away from the scene, unarmed.

He was later charged with possession of firearms and explosives and commandeering the car. Forensic tests could not link Kieran to the first two charges, and although it was impossible for the RUC to have spotted him escaping, 17 months later, at his trial, RUC Constable Bryons perjured himself twice in order to see Kieran locked up.

On remand in Crumlin Road jail he met Francis Hughes and developed a great admiration for him. Friends often speak of the similarities between the two, always defiant, always fighting, born free.

In Crumlin Road, Kieran was often 'on the boards' as punishment for his refusal to acknowledge the warders in any way. He carried this attitude into the H-Blocks after he was sentenced, in January 1978, to 18 years imprisonment for possession, and four years for commandeering the car.

BLANKET

Kieran joined the blanket protest immediately as did his comrades sentenced with him. He spent all but two weeks of his three years and almost eight months in the H-Blocks, in H4-Block (the temporary spell was in H6), before being moved to the prison hospital during his hunger-strike.

Recollections of Kieran's experiences in the H-Blocks give an impression of relentless conflict between himself and the warders, who made him a target both because of his height and because of his stubborn defiance of the prison regime.

On 'appeal' visits he always had to be dragged away, ignoring all calls to end the visit. He never looked a warder in the face when one addressed him and never replied to their orders. He always refused to submit to the anal searches over the mirror before and after visits and was beaten for this.

The worst incident occurred in July '78 when Kieran refused a mirror search before a legal visit. Eight warders jumped on him, one squeezing his testicles until he became unconscious. He received blows to every part of his body and was taken to the prison hospital.

Although people who visited him recall how often he arrived pale or with grazes on his arms or bloodshot eyes, he never complained, brushing their questions off with a shrug: "I'm OK. What's the scéal?"

Although Kieran had not been taught Irish at



● Kieran (right) is seen here enjoying his short period of freedom with John 'Pickles' Pickering, a close friend and comrade who was also to go on hunger-strike in the struggle for the restoration of political status

school, and had no time to learn it, he later became a fluent speaker in the H-Blocks, like hundreds of his imprisoned comrades.

Another skill mastered by Kieran whilst in the H-Blocks, was playing chess — crude chessmen were made from scraps of paper and the game was played on a mock board scratched out on the cell floors.

Displayed proudly in his parents' sitting-room is an engraved plaque bearing a stunning yet heart-breaking story in eight words: 'Kieran Doherty, 1980 Champion, Claran Nugent Chess Shield'.

And, next to it, another shield, again engraved 'Claran Nugent Chess Shield', but this time with 12 metal tags, the top of which bears Kieran Doherty's name and '1980', the other eleven still blank. A clue to Kieran's patience and ability, a clue to the blanket men's grim determination to outlast the H-Blocks.

CAVAN/MONAGHAN

In June 1981, in the Free State general election, Kieran was elected a member of the Leinster House parliament for the Cavan/Monaghan constituency with 9,121 first preference votes — only 303 votes behind the then sitting Free State Minister of Education.

HUNGER-STRIKE

To a friend who visited him after the first hunger-strike, which ended in December '80, Kieran said: "They (the warders) are really rubbing our noses in it. By God, they will not rub mine!"

Asked whether he would not settle down — after all, with five years done and remission, another six years would soon be over. He replied: "Remission had nothing to do with it. There is much more than that involved."

So he went on hunger-strike on Friday, May 22nd, 1981, having put his name forward for it long ago, as undaunted and full of fighting spirit as when he roamed free on the streets of Andersonstown.

A child, like hundreds of others a product of British brutality and stupidity in the North, who revealed himself to be an outstanding soldier of the republic.

Kieran was a shy, reserved, easily embarrassed young man who was single-minded and determined enough to have become, in himself, a condensed history of the liberation of a people.

THOMAS McELWEE

'Sincere, easy-going and full of fun'

THE TENTH republican to join the hunger-strike was 23-year-old IRA Volunteer Thomas McElwee, from Bellaghy in South Derry. He had been imprisoned since December 1976, following a premature explosion in which he lost an eye.

He was a first cousin of Francis Hughes, who died after 59 days on hunger-strike, on May 12th, 1981.

One of the most tragic and saddening aspects of the hunger-strike was the close relationships between some of the hunger-strikers.

Joe McDonnell followed his friend and comrade Bobby Sands on hunger-strike and then into death, both having been captured on the same IRA operation in 1976.

Elsewhere, similar close ties, parallels, between one hunger-striker and another: the same schools; the same streets; the same experiences of repression and discrimination.

And for those families, relatives and friends most acutely conscious of the parallels, there is of course an even more intense personal sadness than for most, in the bitter tragedy of the hunger-strike.

But of all those relationships, none was surely as poignant as that between Thomas McElwee and his cousin, Francis Hughes: two dedicated republicans from the small South Derry village of Bellaghy, their family homes less than half-a-mile apart in the townland of Tamlaghtduff, who were close friends in their boyhood years and who later fought side by side in the towns and fields of South Derry for the freedom of their country.

It came then as no surprise to those who knew them, when Thomas and Francis stood side by side again in the H-Blocks (along with Thomas' younger brother, Benedict) in taking part in the 30-strong four-day fast at the end of the original seven-man hunger-strike in December 1980.

And when the deaths of Bobby Sands and Francis Hughes, on the subsequent hunger-strike, only months later, failed to break the Brits' intransigence, the McElwee family were already certain that either Thomas or Benedict, both of whom had volunteered, would soon be joining the hunger-strike as well.

QUALITIES

What are the qualities that make a 23-year-old South Derry man ready to die a painful death on hunger-strike, in defence of his political principles and to end, for himself and for his comrades, the horrors of the H-Blocks in which he had already spent almost four years?

The story of Thomas McElwee is not of a uniquely courageous or uniquely principled young man, any more than were any of the hunger-strikers unique in some way.

But it is the story of a fairly typical young Derry-



THOMAS McELWEE

Aged 23, from South Derry. Commenced hunger-strike June 8th, 1981, died August 8th, 1981, after 63 days.

man, kind and good-natured, full of life, and with a craze for cars and stock-car racing who is also filled with a love of his country and its way of life, who (like many others) had watched that country overrun by foreign and hostile troops, torn by sectarianism and discrimination, and who had spent over half of his young life striving to achieve the liberation of his country.

Within those few years he had become part of a tradition of the resistance of ordinary Irish people that will never be criminalised.

CHILDREN

Thomas McElwee, the fifth of twelve children, was born on November 30th, 1957, into the small, whitewashed home built by his father, along the Tamlaghtduff Road in the parish of Bellaghy.

His father, Jim, aged 65, a retired builder, had lived in Tamlaghtduff all his life, coming from a family of farmers which settled in the area at the turn of the century. One of his sisters, Margaret, married into the Hughes family, and is the mother of the late Francis Hughes. Thomas' mother, Alice, aged 56, lived in Philadelphia until she was seven years old, her family having moved there from County Derry but later returning, and she has lived in Bellaghy for most of her life.

Jim and Alice married in 1950 and had 12 children, the oldest 30, the youngest 14. They are: Kathleen, the eldest, Mary, Bernadette, Annie, Enda, Thomas, Benedict, Joseph, Nora, Pauline, Majella, and the youngest, James.

Even within the Irish countryside, where strong family bonds are the rule, the McElwee family are considered to be particularly close and considerate to one another, and there are strong ties, too, between them and the Hughes family.

As children, Thomas and Benedict and Francis Hughes, along with other neighbours' children, used to walk together each day to the bottom of the Tamlaghtduff road to catch the bus to school, returning home again each evening. They went to St. Mary's primary in Bellaghy, and then to Clady intermediate, three miles away.

Thomas got on pretty well at school. His favourite subjects were English and maths, and he was also good at geography and history.

At home he was quiet, very good natured and sincere, helping out around the house and with jobs like cutting the hedge and putting up fencing.

He was also, however, very much an outdoor person, and although more serious than Benedict (who would usually have started off the devilment the pair got involved in), he was full of fun, with a strong sense of humour and adventure.

One of the pranks they sometimes got up to along with other local lads, earning them the temporary wrath of neighbours, was climbing on to the roof of a house, blocking the chimney, and then watching as the smoke began to appear in the kitchens. "They weren't too popular when that happened", remembers one of their sisters, laughing.

NEIGHBOURS

But frequently too, Thomas was out — at weekends and during school holidays — helping neighbours, including Protestant farmers, with their crops and machinery. He also used to go to work, picking gooseberries, at the monastery in Portlengone, staying there for maybe ten days at a time, during school holidays.

He had always been a determined person, arguing his point of view with his sisters and brothers, and if he wanted something, often a present for a member of his family, he would work hard to earn enough for it.

From the time he was 11, Thomas had an intense interest in working with cars and all types of machinery. On one occasion his mother bought a lawn mower which Thomas immediately dismantled, to see how it worked. When he reassembled it, it worked, but perhaps not just quite as well as before!

As he grew older, his fascination for engines grew stronger. He got his driving licence as soon as he was old enough, and got his own car. He used to travel all over the place to watch stock-car



● Thomas McElwee — "determined to stand up for his rights"

racing, particularly at Aghadowey near Coleraine, in North Derry, and once he even got his own stock-car for a while.

At weekends, he used to go to local dances in neighbouring towns and villages such as Ardboe and Clady. Usually, if it was *ceilidh* dancing, he had to be dragged along, but he enjoyed it once he was there.

REPUBLICAN

Yet, though full of life, there was a serious, reflective side to Thomas, too.

He enjoyed playing records, often of traditional music, sometimes of republican ballads, at a time when the 'troubles' had barely begun. Even before 1969, the McElwees, including Thomas, would sometimes go to folk concerts in the village where many of the ballads recalled the tradition of resistance to British misrule.

Given that background and Thomas' personal qualities of courage and concern for his neighbours it was not surprising that he joined Fianna Eireann when he was only 14. He subsequently joined the independent unit led by his cousin, Francis Hughes, which concentrated on defence of the local area and ambushes of British forces, before it was recruited in its entirety, after a period of time, into the IRA.

The following few years, before Thomas' capture in October '76, were active ones in the South Derry area, with a succession of successful bomb blitzes of the commercial centres of towns like Magherafelt, Bellaghy, Castledawson, and Maghera, and a high level of ambushes and booby-traps which made the British forces reluctant to wander into the country lanes surrounding Bellaghy.

Thomas had a reputation of a dedicated and principled republican who knew what he was about, and knew moreover what he was fighting to ultimately achieve. He was particularly interested in local republican history and knew what had happened in Bellaghy and the surrounding areas over the past 50 years.

COLLEGE

Because of his discretion as a republican, and, doubtless, good luck as well, Thomas — unlike Francis Hughes — was not forced to go 'on the run' and continued to live at home.

After leaving school, he had gone to Magherafelt technical college for a while, but later changed his mind and went to Ballymena training centre to

begin an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. Harassment from loyalist workers there forced him to leave, and he then went to work with a local mechanic.

Although not 'on the run' Thomas was still subject to the extreme harassment at the hands of the Brits and the RUC that began to be felt in the area in the mid-'70s, even before the IRA's military campaign in the South Derry countryside, led by Francis Hughes, began to bite deep against the occupation forces.

Like many young men, whenever Thomas went out he was liable to be stopped for lengthy periods of time along empty country roads, searched, maybe threatened, and abused.

RAIDS

There were also house raids.

The McElwees' home was first raided in 1974, and Thomas was arrested under Section Ten, for three days. That time, it was over 24 hours later before the family learned that Thomas was being held in Ballykelly interrogation centre. On another occasion, both he and Benedict were arrested, and taken to Coleraine barracks, after a raid on their home.

The last time that the family would be together, however, was on the evening of October 8th, 1976. That evening the 'Stations' took place in the McElwees' home, a country tradition of saying Mass in one house in every townland during Lent and during the month of October. That month in Tamlaghtduff it was taking place in the McElwees' and most of the neighbours were there as well. After the Mass there was a social evening, with food and music.

The following afternoon — Bernadette's birthday — at 1.30pm on October 9th, Kathleen answered the phone, to be told that both their brothers Thomas and Benedict were in the Wavery hospital in Ballymena following a premature bomb explosion in a car in the town, shortly beforehand.

EXPLOSION

In the explosion, Thomas lost his right eye, while two other Bellaghy men were also injured: Colm Scullion losing several toes and Seán McPeake losing a leg.

Benedict McElwee, fortunately, suffered only from shock and superficial burns. Following the explosion, several other republicans in the town were arrested, later to be charged. These included Do-

lores O'Neill, from Portglenone, Thomas' girlfriend, and Ann Bateson, both of whom joined the protest in Armagh women's jail.

Thomas was transferred from the Ballymena hospital to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast for emergency surgery, to save his remaining eye. It was three weeks, however, before he was able to see at all.

After six weeks he was transferred again, this time to the military wing of the Musgrave Park hospital, where Benedict also was. One week before Christmas, both brothers were charged and sent to Crumlin Road jail.

At their subsequent trial in September 1977, having spent over eight months on remand in Crumlin Road, Thomas was convicted, although he made no statements, not only of possession of explosives but also for the killing of a woman who accidentally died in a bomb attack elsewhere in Ballymena that day and with which other republicans were also charged.

That 'murder' conviction was, on appeal, reduced to manslaughter. However, a 20-year sentence remained, and Thomas returned to the blanket protest he had joined immediately after his trial, in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh.

BRUTALITY

Their imprisonment was particularly harsh for the McElwee brothers, who were frequently singled out for brutality by prison warders, outraged at the stubborn refusal of the two to accept any form of criminal status.

For a while they were able to keep in touch with each other as they were both in H6 Block, but they were split up and had hardly any opportunity to see each other at all for over two years.

Both Thomas and Benedict were frequently mentioned in smuggled communications detailing beatings meted out to blanket men. On one occasion, Thomas was put on the boards for 14 days for refusing to call a prison warden 'sir.' In a letter smuggled out to his sister Mary, one time, Benedict wrote of the imprint of a warden's boot on his back and arms after a typical assault.

Throughout, though, the brutality and degradation they had to endure served only to deepen yet further and harden their resistance to criminalisation.

The McElwee family weren't surprised in December 1980 when they discovered that both Thomas and Benedict had joined the 30 strong hunger-strike, as Sean McKenna neared death. Even then, however, the partial breakdown in communications between H-Blocks at that critical time meant that the family learnt first that Benedict was going on hunger-strike, only to be informed an hour-and-a-half later that Thomas was going to fast too.

HUNGER-STRIKE

Speaking of the hunger-strike and her sons and their comrades during Thomas' strike, Mrs McElwee said: "I know Thomas and Benedict would be determined to stand up for their rights. In the Blocks one will stand for another. If this hunger-strike isn't settled one way or another they'll all go the same way. There'll never be peace in this country".

Thomas McElwee died at 11.30am on Saturday, August 8th, 1981. Indicative of the callousness of the British government towards prisoners and their families alike, neither had the comfort of each other's presence at that tragic moment. He died after 62 days of slow, agonising hunger-strike with no company other than prison warders, colleagues of those who had brutalised, degraded and tortured him for three-and-a-half years.

MICKY DEVINE

'A typical Derry lad'

TWENTY-seven-year-old Micky Devine, from the Creggan in Derry city, was the third INLA Volunteer to join the H-Block hunger-strike to the death.

Micky Devine took over as O/C of the INLA blanket men in March 1981, when the then O/C, Patsy O'Hara, joined the hunger-strike. He retained this leadership post when he joined the hunger-strike himself.

Known as 'Red Micky', his nickname stemmed from his ginger hair rather than his political complexion, although he was most definitely a republican socialist.

The story of Micky Devine is not one of a republican 'super-hero' but of a typical Derry lad whose family suffered all of the ills of sectarian and class discrimination inflicted upon the Catholic working-class of that city: poor housing, unemployment and lack of opportunity.

Micky himself had a rough life.

His father died when Micky was a young lad; he found his mother dead when he was only a teenager; married young, his marriage ended in separation; he underwent four years of suffering 'on the blanket' in the H-Blocks; and finally, the torture of hunger-strike.

Unusually for a young Derry nationalist, because of his family's tragic history (unconnected with 'the troubles'), Micky was not part of an extended family, and his only close relatives were his sister Margaret, seven years his elder, and her husband, Frank McCauley.

CAMP

Michael James Devine was born on May 26th, 1954, in the Springtown camp, on the outskirts of Derry City, a former American army base from the Second World War, which Micky himself described as "the slum to end all slums".

Hundreds of families — 99% (unemployed) Catholics, because of Derry corporation's sectarian housing policy — lived, or rather existed, in huts, which were not kept in any decent state of repair by the corporation.

One of Micky's earliest memories was of lying in a bed covered in old coats to keep the rain off the bed. His sister, Margaret, recalls that the huts were "okay" during the summer, but they leaked, and the rest of the year they were cold and damp.

Micky's parents, Patrick and Elizabeth, both from Derry City, had got married in late 1945, shortly after the end of the Second World War, during which Patrick had served in the British merchant navy. He was a coalman by trade, but was unemployed for years.

At first, Patrick and Elizabeth lived with the latter's mother in Ardmore, a village near Derry, where Margaret was born in 1947. In early 1948 the family moved to Springtown, where Micky was born in May 1954.

Although Springtown was meant to provide only temporary accommodation, official lethargy



MICKY DEVINE

Aged 27, from Derry City. Commenced hunger-strike June 22nd, 1981, died August 20th, 1981 after 60 days.

and sectarianism dictated that such inadequate housing was good enough for Catholics and it was not until the early '60s that the camp was closed.

BLOW

During the '50s, the Creggan was built as a new Catholic ghetto, but it was 1960 before the Devines got their new home in Creggan, on the Circular Road. Micky had an unremarkable but reasonably happy childhood. He went to Holy Child primary school in Creggan.

At the age of 11 Micky started at St Joseph's secondary school in Creggan, which he was to attend until he was fifteen.

But soon the first sad blow befell him. On Christmas Eve 1965, when Micky was aged only 11, his father fell ill; and six weeks later, in February 1966, his father, who was only in his forties, died of leukaemia.

Micky had been very close to his father, and his premature death left Micky heartbroken.

Five months later, in July 1966, his sister Margaret left home to get married, whilst Micky remained in the Devines' Circular Road home with his mother and granny.

At school Micky was an average pupil, and had no notable interests.

STONING

The first civil rights march in Derry took place on October 5th, 1968, when the sectarian RUC bated several hundred protesters at Duke Street. Recalling that day, Micky, who was then only 14, wrote:

"Like every other young person in Derry my whole way of thinking was tossed upside down by

the events of October 5th, 1968. I didn't even know there was a civil rights march. I saw it on television.

"But that night I was down the town smashing shop windows and stoning the RUC. Overnight, I developed an intense hatred of the RUC. As a child I had always known not to talk to them or to have anything to do with them, but this was different.

"Within a month everyone was a political activist. I had never had a political thought in my life, but now we talked of nothing else. I was by no means politically aware, but the speed of events gave me a quick education."

TENSION

After the infamous loyalist attack on civil rights marchers in nearby Burntollet in January 1969, tension mounted in Derry through 1969 until the August 12th riots, when Orangemen — Apprentice Boys and the RUC — attacked the Bogside, meeting effective resistance, in the 'Battle of the Bogside'. On two occasions in 1969, Micky ended up at the wrong end of an RUC baton, and consequently in hospital.

That summer Micky left school. Always keen to improve himself, he got a job as a shop assistant and over the next three years worked his way up the local ladder: from Hill's furniture store on the Strand Road, to Sloan's store in Shipquay Street, and finally to Austin's furniture store in the Diamond (and one can get no higher in Derry, as a shop assistant).

British troops had arrived in August 1969, in the wake of the 'Battle of the Bogside'. 'Free Derry' was maintained more by agreement with the British army than by physical force, but of course there were barricades, and Micky was one of the volunteers manning them with a hurley.

INVOLVED

At that time, and during 1970 and 1971, Micky became involved in the civil rights movement, and with the local (uniquely militant) Labour Party and the Young Socialists.

The already strained relationship between British troops and the nationalist people of Derry steadily deteriorated — reinforced by news from elsewhere, especially Belfast — culminating with the shooting dead by the British army of two unarmed civilians, Seamus Cusack and Desmond Beattie, in July 1971, and with internment in August.

Micky, by this time 17 years of age, and also politically maturing, had joined the 'Officials', also known as the 'Sticks'.

He became a member of the James Connolly 'Republican Club', and then, shortly after internment, a member of the Derry Brigade of the 'Official IRA'.

'Free Derry' had become known by that name after the successful defence of the Bogside in August 1969, but it really became 'Free Derry', in the form of concrete barricades, etc., from internment

day. Micky was amongst those armed volunteers who manned the barricades.

Typical of his selfless nature (another common characteristic for the hunger-strikers), no task was too small for him.

He was 'game' to do any job, such as tidying up the office. Young men, naturally enough, wanted to stand out on the barricades with rifles: he did that too, but nothing was too menial for him, and he was always looking for jobs.

Bloody Sunday, January 30th, 1972, when British paratroopers shot dead 13 unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry (a 14th died later from wounds received), was a turning point for Micky. From then there was no turning back on his republican commitment. He gradually lost interest in his work, and he was to become a full-time political and military activist.

TRAUMA

Micky experienced the trauma of Bloody Sunday at first hand. He was on that fateful march with his brother-in-law, Frank, who recalls: *"When the shooting started we ran, like everybody else, and when it was over we saw all the bodies being lifted."*

The slaughter confirmed to Micky that it was more than time to start shooting back. *"How"* he would ask, *"can you sit back and watch while your own Derry men are shot down like dogs?"*

Micky had written: *"I will never forget standing in the Creggan chapel staring at the brown wooden boxes. We mourned, and Ireland mourned with us."*

"That sight more than anything convinced me that there will never be peace in Ireland while Britain remains. When I looked at those coffins I developed a commitment to the republican cause that I have never lost."

From around this time, until May when the 'Official IRA' leadership declared a unilateral ceasefire (unpopular with their Derry Volunteers), Micky was involved not only in defensive operations but in various gun attacks against British troops.

Micky's commitment and courage had shone through, but no more so than in the case of scores of other Derry youths, flung into adulthood and warfare by a British army of occupation.

TRAGIC

In September, 1972, came the second tragic loss in Micky's family life. He came home one day to find his mother dead on the settee, with his granny unsuccessfully trying to revive her.

His mother had died of a brain tumour, totally unexpectedly, at the age of 45. Doctors said it had taken her just three minutes to die. Micky, then aged 18, suffered a tremendous shock from this blow, and it took him many months to come to terms with his grief.

Through 1973, Micky remained connected with the 'Sticks', although increasingly disillusioned by their openly reformist path. He came to refer to the 'Sticks' as *"fireside republicans"*, and was highly critical of them for not being active enough.

Towards the end of that year, Micky, then aged 19, got married. His wife, Margaret was only 17. They lived in Ranmore Drive in Creggan and had two children; Michael and Louise.

Micky and his wife later separated.

In late 1974, virtually all the 'Sticks' in Derry, including Micky, joined the newly formed IRSP, as did some who had dropped out over the years. And Micky necessarily became a founder member of



● Micky Devine — his life was turned upside down by the events of October 5th, 1968, on the streets of his hometown Derry

the PLA (People's Liberation Army), formed to defend the IRSP from murderous attacks by their former comrades in the 'Sticks'.

In early 1975, Micky became a founder member of the INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) formed for offensive operational purposes out of the PLA.

The months ahead were bad times for the IRSP, relatively isolated and to suffer a strength-sapping split when Bernadette McAliskey left, taking with her a number of activists who formed the ISP (Independent Socialist Party), since defunct.

They were also difficult months for the fledgling INLA, suffering from a crippling lack of weaponry and funds: weakness which led them into raids for both as their primary actions and rendered them almost unable to operate against the Brits.

Micky was eventually arrested in the Creggan on the evening of September 20th, 1976, after an arms raid earlier that day on a private weaponry, in Lifford, County Donegal, from which the INLA commandeered several rifles and shotguns and 3,000 rounds of ammunition.

ARRESTED

Micky was arrested with Desmond Walmsley from Shantallow, and John Cassidy from Rosemount. Along on the operation, though never convicted for it, was the late Patsy O'Hara, with whom Micky used to knock around as a friend and comrade.

Micky was held and interrogated for three days in Derry's Strand Road barracks, before being transported to Crumlin Road jail in Belfast, where he spent nine months on remand.

He was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment on June 20th, 1977, and immediately embarked on the blanket protest. He was in H5-Block until March

1981, when the hunger-strike began and when the 'no-wash, no-slop-out' protest ended, whereupon he was moved with others in his wing to H6-Block.

Like others incarcerated within the H-Blocks, suffering daily abuse and inhuman and degrading treatment, Micky realised — soon after he joined the blanket protest — that eventually it would come to a hunger-strike and, for him, the sooner the better. He was determined that when that ultimate step was reached, he would be among those to hunger-strike.

SEVENTH

On Sunday, June 21st, 1981, he completed his fourth year on the blanket, and the following day he joined Joe McDonnell, Kieran Doherty, Kevin Lynch, Martin Hurson, Thomas McElwee and Paddy Quinn on hunger-strike.

He became the seventh man in a weekly build-up from a four-strong hunger-strike team to eight-strong. He was moved to the prison hospital on Wednesday, July 15th, his 24th day on hunger-strike.

With the 50% remission available to conforming prisoners, Micky would have been due out of jail the next September.

As it was, because of his principled republican rejection of the criminal tag, he chose to fight and face death.

Micky died at 7.50am on Thursday, August 20th, 1981, as nationalist voters in Fermanagh/South Tyrone were beginning to make their way to the polling booths to elect Owen Carron a member of parliament for the constituency in a demonstration — for the second time in less than five months — of their support for the prisoners' demands.

FINAL SALUTE



Sands, IRA Volunteer, H-Block hunger-striker and Westminster MP

LAIID TO REST



Hughes, IRA Volunteer, H-Block hunger-striker and fearless soldier

H-BLOCK MARTYRS

Four brave Irish martyrs, who died at intransigent British hands, for their republican beliefs, in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh prison



BLOOD ON BRITISH HANDS

Hunger-striker dies, Fianna boy shot dead



Sad news



IRA VOLUNTEER MARTIN HEENAN

EIGHT DEAD



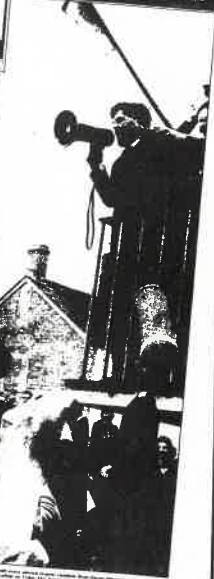
BORRY SANDS, aged 27, Belfast
FRANCIS HUGHES, aged 25, South Down
RAYMOND MACREESH, aged 24, South Down
PATSY O'HARA, aged 24, Derry City
JOE WOODRUFF, aged 20, Belfast
MARTIN HURSON, aged 24, East Tyrone
KEVIN LYNCH, aged 25, North Derry
SHEILA DONERTY, aged 22, Belfast

How many more?

The funeral of Micky Devine



ELECTION VICTORY



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