

FEEDBAG

Northern Ireland

An Alternative View

7 Dec 80

Dear Editor,

Sojourning in Scotland, I came across the attached article in today's "Sunday Express". I recall you published the text of an address by Mr. Crane on this subject a few weeks ago. He had been brought over, especially for this purpose, from Northern Ireland.

In asking you to publish Mr. Gardiner's article, I do not wish to make political capital: indeed, I do not necessarily agree with Mr. Gardiner either. What I do wish to show is how very differently "the truth" (so called) may seem to different people; and how it behoves us in the university to consider, as in a court of law, all as-

pects of a case before making a decision.

May I also renew my plea, made consistently over the years, for a strong university debating society. For me, this is one of the hallmarks of any good university. St. Dunstan's had the tradition. For seventeen

Editor's Note:

The following is taken from "The Sunday Express" December 7, 1980. It was written by George Gardiner, Tory MP for Reigate in Britain. When reading the article bear in mind that the hunger strike is over and that Mrs. Thatcher has been to and returned from Northern Ireland.

THE first of the IRA's pre-Christmas bombs have exploded in London, and we are warned to expect more elsewhere.

In Brussels an attempt has been made to assassinate one of our EEC commissioners.

And in the hospital block of Northern Ireland's Maze prison seven men are starving themselves to death in a bid to win "special status" for convicted terrorists.

Will this prove a sustained new surge of terror by the IRA? Or is the hunger strike a last desperate bid to restore passion and hatred to a cause of which the vast majority of Ulster's citizens, regardless of creed, are utterly sick?

It is important to ask these questions, on the eve of Margaret Thatcher's expected visit to Dublin for talks with the Irish Prime Minister, Charles Haughey.

For if it is the second of these questions that puts a finger on the truth, then the two premiers have a real chance to pull what is possibly the last prop from under the IRA, and turn its retreat into a rout.

That terrorism has been pushed back in Northern Ireland there can be no doubt. The number of bombings and killings are down. Troops are steadily being withdrawn from the streets, and replaced by

consecutive years, I understand, they carried off trophies at provincial and national levels. May I urge all students and faculty to support the efforts now being made to re-build this worthy tradition.

Yours sincerely,
Edward Edmonds

police. There is much closer co-operation between police forces across the Border.

Of course, atrocities still occur. But they are fewer and the chances of detection greater. Terrorists are spurned where once they were sheltered. They are on the run.

It is in this context that we must understand the gruesome happenings in the Maze.

HUMANE

For two - and - a - half years some IRA prisoners have refused to wear clothes, spread their excrement over cell walls, and urinated through ventilators, presenting to the world a picture of men imprisoned in vile conditions for their political beliefs.

In fact, the Maze is the most modern and humane high security jail in the United Kingdom. There are hundreds of men awaiting trial in Brixton who would dearly love just a small share of the comforts available to convicted terrorists there.

Now we have the morbid ritual of the hunger strike. If the Government yields and accords "special status" this will be taken to confer respect on the IRA's crimes in the eyes of the world.

And if it does not, and a hunger striker dies, this will be used to stoke up sectarian hatred throughout Ireland and in our mainland

cities.

But just what kind of martyrs would these men be? Take Thomas McKearney, serving a minimum sentence of 20 years for murder.

He and another man set a trap for a postman, family man and part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, at a remote farmhouse. As he arrived to deliver a letter they themselves had posted, they riddled his van with bullets.

Not content with this, they took a shotgun from the house and fired it in his face at point-blank range.

So far as I am concerned, there is only one kind of "special status" deserved by such a crime, and that is a place in a plain wooden coffin six feet under the ground.

If Mrs. Thatcher were to yield so much as an inch to such men then her Government's will to exterminate terrorism would be put in doubt and IRA morale would surge.

As the Pope said in Ireland last year, murder is murder and should not be called any other name.

Already responsible Roman Catholic leaders on all sides, bishops and politicians, have appealed to the seven to end their hunger strike.

But there is one notable exception and he is the one who could have the greatest influence of all—the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, Mr. Haughey.

The leaders of both the Republic's Opposition parties have disowned the hunger strikers and their demand for "special status" and have challenged him to do the same.

But throughout last week he refused to do so, ducking and dodging behind talk of compromise and changes to prison rules in the Maze.

By such behaviour, Mr. Haughey is providing Ireland's men of violence with the strongest support and encouragement they still have.

For so long as they can claim tacit support from the Irish Prime Minister they are able to be presented to the world as fighters for a just cause.

Now it is not in Mr. Haughey's interest that the IRA should thrive. He knows this organisation is a threat to law and order in the South only slightly less than in the North.

Yet still he equivocates, giving strength to the notion that in Northern Ireland murder need not be murder, but can be dignified as legitimate political protest.

When she visits Dublin, Mrs. Thatcher must lay it on the line that the regime in the Maze is humane and will remain so—but that there is not the remotest chance of "special status" being conceded to those who murder and maim.

Will Mr. Haughey respond by adding his voice to those denouncing the hunger strike, thus robbing the IRA of the last real propaganda weapon it has?

If not, then assuredly his hands will bear the stain of any blood shed in consequence and the stench surrounding him will be as foul as in any H-block cell.

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