

does lay out a serious model for how to understand this party, and in so doing makes a welcome intervention into a sadly understudied topic.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2022.39

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IRISH POLITICAL PRISONERS, 1960–2000: BRAIDING RAGE AND SORROW. By Seán McConville. Pp. 1045. London: Routledge. 2021. £190.

Towards the end of this book, Seán McConville writes that after the mass escape of thirty-eight I.R.A. prisoners from the Maze Prison in 1983, then considered to be one of the most secure in Europe, there was ‘cognitive displacement’:

Picking up the pieces, those who ran the prisons, and the officials and politicians responsible for policy, had explicitly to acknowledge what they had long privately known: paramilitary imprisonment never had been and never could be ‘normalised’. This was a truth almost unbearably painful to confront [...] It posed inevitable questions: what of the fifteen years of financial and political expenditure, of ambitions, proclamations and sacrifices, of courses set, paid for in treasure, blood and reputation then abandoned? (p. 936)

Irish political prisoners and the questions their incarceration posed for successive penal and political administrations in Dublin, Belfast and London between 1960 and 2000 is the subject of the final volume in Seán McConville’s trilogy. It follows *Irish political prisoners, 1848–1922: theatres of war* (2003) and *Irish political prisoners, 1920–1962: pilgrimage of desolation* (2014). The twenty-five years of research for these books is evident as McConville is a scholar in command of his subject. As with his previous volumes, the reader is richly rewarded with a comprehensive (the book comprises over 1,000 pages, including bibliography and index) and elegantly written piece of narrative history.

Having published extensively on the history of punishment and penal administration, McConville deals with many aspects of doing time, highlighting distinctive elements due to the categorisation of these prisoners. The accounts are extensive, from the earliest days of internment on the prison ship, the *Maidstone* to Crumlin Road Gaol (Belfast Prison), to Long Kesh/Maze and Armagh Prison in Northern Ireland, the dispersal prisons in Britain, and the Curragh and Portlaoise prisons in the Republic of Ireland. He examines life behind bars, prison rules and punishments, the pains of imprisonment (especially acute for internees with no release date), visits (with all the difficulties for families travelling long distances to see loved ones; body and strip searches), prison food and prisoners occupying their time. There are further unique aspects of life behind bars for these prisoners: relations with staff, segregation, escapes, protests, riots and hunger strikes.

Although a book about Irish political prisoners, McConville casts his net wide. He writes about Irish and British politics, Anglo-Irish relations, the Irish community in Britain, Roman Catholic theology, and republican and loyalist communities. In a fascinating chapter, entitled ‘The Pope’s divisions’, he examines Roman Catholic theology, the organisation of the church and the attitudes of church leaders and members of the clergy, especially significant during the prison protests in the H-blocks that culminated in the 1981 hunger strike.

During the blanket and no-wash protests, prisoners in the H-blocks endured what ‘were surely some of the most extraordinary prison conditions to be found in any democratic country during the twentieth century’ (p. 829). McConville shines a light on lesser-known aspects of political and penal struggles. He deals comprehensively with protests at the Armagh Women’s Prison during the 1982 anti-strip search campaign. He explores the experiences of the republican prisoners who did not join the protests in the H-block after the withdrawal

of special category status in 1976, who have been largely neglected. He details the imprisonment of loyalists. He observes that less attention has been paid to prison staff during the conflict. Along with those who were killed, the impact of the protests on staff possibly led to approximately fifty taking their own lives. His account of the ambiguities in the post-hunger strike Maze when segregation was again achieved in 1982 makes for thought-provoking reading for scholars of prison life.

McConville's forensic analysis of specific events and certain actors in the penal, political and social struggles is intermingled with perspectives and opinions, no doubt developed after studying his subjects over a prolonged period. He is no admirer of 'campaigning priests', in particular Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray. In one of their pamphlets they 'took a broadly pro-inmate account' and both 'wrote from a Nationalist perspective' (p. 375). Sister Sarah Clarke, who was resolute in her support of innocent Irish prisoners in British jails and provided pastoral support to all Irish prisoners, was a 'committed Nationalist from her youth'. She went a step further; her 'associations in England were on the left, including the future Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn' (p. 508, note 153). Father Piaras Ó Dúill, a Capuchin priest, was chair of the National H-block/Armagh Committee in the early 1980s. His fellow clergy may be interested to learn that he was a member of an 'order with some indications of pastoral sympathy and sacramental lenity towards armed Republicans' (p. 750). The appointment of Tomás Ó Fiaich as Catholic archbishop of Armagh and primate of All Ireland in 1977 (and cardinal two years later) particularly irks McConville. Cahal Daly was overlooked for the appointment which 'would prove to be a misjudgement, rectified only thirteen years later, when the most violent and demanding phase of the Troubles had largely passed' (p. 787). Ó Fiaich, 'whose concern for prisoners arose as much from the political as from the pastoral' (p. 788), is described as the 'troublesome cardinal' (p. 790) who had 'strong Nationalist views' (p. 792). This critical eye is not exercised with the same alacrity when writing about other actors in this story, their backgrounds and political subjectivities, in particular those involved in British and unionist administrations.

Overall, Seán McConville has written a trilogy which makes a significant contribution to the literature on Irish political prisoners. His books are meticulously researched, wide-ranging and a forensic consideration of their subjects. The final volume, along with the previous two, stand out as a towering study that will be an indispensable read, and an essential resource for future students of Irish penal, social and political history.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2022.40

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GAY AND LESBIAN ACTIVISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, 1973–93. By Patrick McDonagh. Pp 219. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2022. £76.50.

Gay and lesbian activism in the Republic of Ireland, 1973–93 is a lucid, persuasive and timely book that provides a variegated and compendious rendition of the enterprises of gay and lesbian individuals and organisations in Ireland in the years preceding the decriminalisation of male homosexuality. Written after the equal marriage referendum in 2015, McDonagh sets out to decode Ireland's transformation from a predominantly Catholic society to a 'beacon of equality and liberty to the rest of the world' in the words of Leo Varadkar, the nation's first openly gay taoiseach and cabinet minister. In this effort McDonagh's account is situated within a broader scholarly assessment of clerical power, gender and sexuality in Ireland, pioneered by Tom Inglis, Diarmaid Ferriter and more recently by Diane Urquhart and Lindsey Earner-Byrne. Nevertheless, LGBT histories of Ireland have struggled for legitimacy until the last decade, and those that have tentatively examined the nation's queer past have been chiefly preoccupied with typically male 'pioneering politicians', whilst