



Abraham Reed, honored POIC graduate, meets national director of OIC. Reverend Dr. Leon H. Sullivan, founder and (Photo: Richard Brown)

Ireland and the politics of starvation

By Frank Viviano

(Editor's Note: Unlike the violent self-sacrificial acts of many other political dissidents, the example of Irish hunger striker Bobby Sands has commanded the world's admiration, demonstrating that the militant non-violence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King still holds great power. Moreover, writes Pacific News Service Editor Frank Viviano, it places Sands in an Irish history full of such conscience-driven individual challenges to state oppression.)

In a world preoccupied with super-state violence and terrorism, it often seems that the individual conscience counts for nothing.

Although profound self-sacrifice is a central element in the Sands' tale, it is by no means the whole story. The world has seen many examples of lethal self-sacrifice by political dissenters without being demonstrably moved. But unlike countless others who have raced to certain death in a hail of gunfire -- members of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Japanese Red Army comes to mind -- Sands opted for a non-violent, tortuously slow walk to the end.

And the extent to which his choice has captured global admiration speaks volumes about the galvanizing force of conscience and

militant passive resistance. In a little more than two months, Bobby Sands may have done more for the cause of Ulster's Catholic minority than six decades of killing and sabotage by the Irish Republican Army.

In the longer sweep of Irish experience, neither Sands' tactic nor its possible effects are new, however. At critical junctures in the bloody history of Ireland's relationship with England, in fact, starvation has played a peculiarly significant moral and political role, with repercussions reaching far beyond the United Kingdom.

Bobby Sands' most obvious ancestor was Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, who starved himself to death in London's Brixton prison in 1920. MacSwiney had been arrested 73 days earlier at an illegal meeting in Cork, and immediately commenced a prison hunger strike to protest British rule.

It was not the first hunger strike faced by the British government in those years. In 1918, Mohandas Gandhi had made some use of the tactic in an unsuccessful labor protest at Ahmedabad, India, although he then regarded it largely as a religious exercise. There were also hunger strikes by other I.R.A. prisoners in 1919 and 1920, which were ended by government

concessions to the strikers.

But no concessions were offered to MacSwiney, and over ten long weeks much of the world watched as a solitary Irishman confronted the vast power of the British crown with the example of his voluntary suffering. On October 24, 1920, MacSwiney died.

The effect on public opinion especially in Britain, was enormous. Huge, absolutely silent crowds lined the London streets down which MacSwiney's coffin passed for shipment to Cork. They marked the measure of a nation's shame and the ability of one individual to become the symbol of opposition to many economic, social and political abuses. Fourteen months later, the Irish Free State was a reality.

Some 25 years after that, India joined the ranks of liberated British possessions, largely on the strength of a persistent campaign of passive resistance in which Gandhi expanded the concept of the political hunger strike to a full-fledged ideology of rebellion. Like MacSwiney, Gandhi understood that the very power of an oppressive state could be its own undoing so long as world opinion and moral sanctions meant anything -- as they would not in the case of Nazi Germany.

In a sense, of course, starvation on a massive scale had set the stage for Terence MacSwiney. Between 1845 and 1850 more than one million Irishmen died in a terrible famine which resulted from a parasitic blight on the potato crop, Ireland's staple food. An additional three million people left the Island, most of them for the United States.

Among the repercussions were three developments which would profoundly affect the British empire. At home, remorse at the role of England's Corn Laws, which forbade the import or export of grain and added to the death toll, led to their repeal and the rise of the Liberal Party. Abroad, Irish immigrants acted as Irish patriots; they helped spread critical views of the British role in their homeland and contributed large sums of money to the cause of independence. And in Ireland itself, the famine brought great new influence to Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation Movement, and precipitated the establishment of the I.R.A.

As in the case of MacSwiney three-quarters of a century later, the famine raised distinctly moral questions for the British and for the world, whose opinion mattered to them. It also produced political results which would significantly affect Britain's behavior as an imperial power, even if the end of the empire -- and independence for Ireland -- remained in the distant future.

Budget cuts hurt poor families

The Reagan Administration's proposed budget would compel more than half of the nation's low income families to reduce their living standards, according to a study by the Congressional Budget Office.

About 51 percent of all low-income households, or about 20 to 25 million people, will have less to live on as a result of cuts in ten major assistance and employment programs.

This estimate does not include cuts that will be accomplished by consolidating federal programs into block grants to the states. While the total amount available will be reduced, the impact cannot be measured without knowing how the states will allocate the money they receive.

Among the programs cuts that were not measured by CBO were low-income energy and housing assistance, medical, unemployment insurance, trade adjustment assistance, and social security changes. Also excluded were the effects of reductions in education and health, which affect families financial resources.

With about two-thirds of the funding cuts excluded from the computation, the CBO said most income losses for the poor will be less than 5 percent, but 649,000 families will suffer an average income decrease of 19 percent.

Families headed by non white women will be most likely to be af-

ected. Reagan's budget manager, David Stockman, said the CBO study is evidence that the President's "safety net" works since most low-income families would not suffer what he called "a serious reduction in their spendable income."

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Castillo heads political group

Gale Castillo, a marketing account executive for Pacific Northwest Bell, was elected president of the Hispanic Political Action Committee, a statewide organization formed to represent Hispanic political interests.

Portland attorney Raul Soto-Seelig was elected treasurer. Elected secretary was Luz Bazan Gutierrez,

Salem, an active community member working with the Oregon Commission of Hispanic Affairs, assisting in lobbying efforts.

The new president has served as an officer for Image, a national organization concerned with employment for Hispanics and with the Committee of Spanish-Speaking People of Oregon.

Defendent found not guilty

(Continued from page 1 col. 6) the incident, and said he was carrying the gas can because he had been trying to start his girlfriend's car, and came back into the bar to get the keys to her (girlfriend) car. Morrison and his girlfriend were the only witnesses to testify they saw Harmon kick at Morrison. Other witnesses, all acquaintances of Morrison's, said they did not clearly see the incident, which some said

was preceded by racial slurs. Michael Brown, of the Marion County district attorney's office, said he was "surprised and deeply disappointed" at the verdict, and believes it will heighten the mistrust of the judicial system felt by the Black community.

Maurice Harmon summed up his feelings: "White people might as well put signs up saying 'For white only.'"

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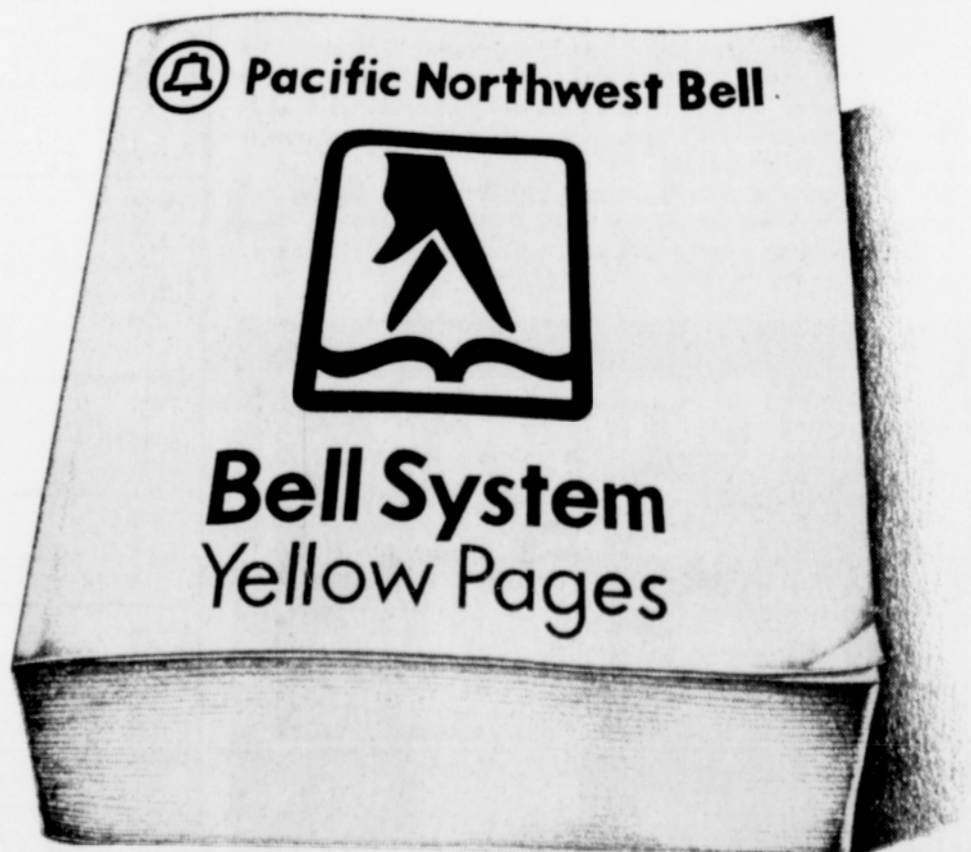
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