



WHY I WENT TO GAOL

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WHY I WENT TO GAOL

I was sentenced to 48 hours' imprisonment with hard labor by a Sydney Stipendiary Magistrate on Monday, January 14, 1957. I had been charged with carrying a sandwich board in the streets of Sydney, a board on which I had painted these words:

PLEAD WITH THE GOVERNMENT. STOP ATOMIC TESTS.

HUMANITY IS BEING CRUCIFIED.

WEEP FOR YOUR CHILDREN. ATOM TESTS AFFECT

HUMAN REPRODUCTION. ADD YOUR VOICE IN PROTEST.

The S.M. did not convict me under the charge, but ordered me to pay £2 costs. I declined, on principle, to do so, and was sentenced to gaol.

IN THE CELL

In the cell at Sydney's Long Bay Gaol I was not different from any of the other inmates. That is, so far as present material conditions were concerned. The eight by seven foot cell was sparsely furnished. The bed was terribly hard; a canvas-covered palliasso on wooden slats with hard canvas pillows, grey blankets and unbleached sheets as stiff as the canvas. Toilet conditions were rather primitive. The only water was contained in a tin-like jug on a small table. I had no toothbrush. Luckily I found a small tablet of toilet soap which had been left behind by the previous inmate. Roy pictures on the wall and Christmas cards of two Christmases told me of his religious inclinations and period of occupation.

The men's section at Long Bay is unsewered. Sewerage in my cell took the form of a small bucket in one corner. When liberated from the cell at about 8.15 a.m., the toilet bucket is carried to another section of the gaol for disposal. Mine contained a nicely packed newspaper parcel of mashed pumpkin, the vegetable accompanying the boiled potato at the evening meal. I detest boiled pumpkin.

Breakfast was of an unpalatable maize meal porridge called hominy, without sugar, and the taste indicated a lack of salt also. I never want to see another plate of that.

PRISON PANTS AND SMELLY SHIRT

I had been issued with a prison garb; grey gabardine pants and lumber jacket with a stiff cotton shirt which smelt like nobody's business. I was assured that the shirt was fresh from the laundry. My pyjamas needed another four inches round the girth to meet in my centre front. The prisoners are locked in their cells at 4 p.m. I arrived at about 5.30, after spending two hours in cell No. 4 at the Phillip Street police court. When I arrived at the Bay, I was treated well by the senior warders on duty, one of whom was anxious to pay my fine. I appreciated his gesture but pleaded with him not to do so.

In the Customline sedan on the way out, one of the guards had questioned me about the aims of the peace movement. He wondered if our ends could be accomplished. I felt that it was hardly necessary that my arms should be grasped on either side as I had no intention of escaping.

At the reception room my clothes and belongings were taken from me. I was finger-printed for the fourth or fifth time and there received my garb. The warder was evidently a churchman and allowed me to wear my own shoes. He knew a number of parsons and we exchanged acquaintances. What a change when I was returned there next morning. The new man on duty, either because he was accustomed to treating men so, or if he knew my circumstances because he wanted to make me feel my position, was somewhat officious. "Stand over there," "Sign this," "You won't sign,

eh, you're very foolish. Come with me to the superintendent." And then, "You were a fool not to sign that. Next time you come here, you will lose all benefit of remissions."

I was detailed to help in the garden. The garden in the extension block is evidently a thing of pride. Visitors to the gaol are taken to see it. This section is the show piece and only well behaved prisoners get into it.

ASSAULT AND CATTLE RUSTLING

I reported to the head gardener. He asked me where I was from, and was delighted when I mentioned Richmond. He had lived in Victoria Street and had been born in either Fitzroy or Collingwood. I gathered he was in for some years for assault of an employer, a publican's wife, at a country hotel where he kept the garden and did odd jobs. I was given a small pair of hand shears to cut the grass on the edge of the lawn where the lawnmower would not reach. My workmate there was an interesting customer and well spoken too. He had heard on the grapevine that a priest was with them and was anxious to confirm his belief that I was the man. He was in for 18 months for cattle stealing and was making the most of it by learning accountancy. He had been at Bathurst Gaol and was emphatic that in spite of the fact that tougher men were there incarcerated, it was a far happier gaol—better food and conditions.

I should have liked to have listened to him for a long time, but it was at this juncture that I was called to the office of the warden of the Extension where the gaol chaplain waited to greet me. We laughed together when I entered and after explaining that he thought I was doing no good for myself or the Church, he said he was paying my fine. Well there it is—in half an hour I was on the outside of the grim grey walls of Sydney's Long Bay Gaol.

WHY DID I GO TO LONG BAY?

I went to Long Bay deliberately to draw the public's attention to the menace of the preparations for atomic war.

I am a pacifist, believing that it would be impossible for me to condone war under any circumstances and retain my discipleship of the Prince of Peace. Resist not evil, overcome evil with good, love your enemies, negotiate with your adversaries, pray for your persecutors—the gospel of love has no part with the beastly diabolical doctrines of war, malice, hatred and murder. The very best in man will be brought to the surface with love and kindness; but distrust, strife, greed, lust and vengeance breed in wartime, and magnify all that is low and brutal in the human being. The devotion of the ministering surgeon and nurse who treat friend and foe alike is a sad commentary on the tragic foolishness of war.

And atom bomb tests mean war. Jesus said: "Men do not gather figs of thistles or grapes of thorns." The harvest of peace is not to be gathered from the sowing of the seeds of war.

To-day, the arms race which keeps the cold war at its height is represented at the zenith by the urge to build bigger and bigger, more frightful and more frightening nuclear bombs and better ways to drop them. The most unintelligent observer would question the rightness of the much repeated deviation from the truth, "to have peace you must prepare for war," which implies that the hopes of peace depend upon policies based upon the heresy that right can only be established by capacity to kill. I believe that the civilisation which depends upon slaughter and carnage for its survival is not worth preserving. This doctrine needs even bigger explosives to browbeat people into the belief in its necessity, therefore the prevention of the bigger explosions must be the first objectives if the cold war is to be finally overthrown. This end is being achieved. Thousands of scientists and myriads of ordinary folk have been shocked into activity of protest by the reported effects of atomic dust fall-out and the increase of cosmic radiation.

MORE ABNORMAL BIRTHS

Every biologist knows that any increase in the background radiation means an increase in abnormal births. There is no threshold beneath which reproduction is not affected; every increase no matter how small has its effect.

There may be very few imperfect births, few additional imbeciles, not a great number of cripples resulting from a particular hydrogen bomb explosion. But there must be some. Every one who allows that tests must go on for any purpose must bear some part of the responsibility for the misery of those lives, the anguish of soul and the heartrending tears of the mothers, who through no fault of their own, bring afflicted babies to a life of suffering.

If you thought it would be your own child you would protest; and are they not **all** our children?

Biologists call the birth-damage through increased radiation a "genetical hazard," and some assure us that the bombs are worth the hazards. But other scientists point out that there is no accurate way of measuring, for instance, what the situation will be in ten or twenty years' time, when radio-active particles from atom tests **that have already taken place will still be descending from the upper air.**

The fall-out of this radio-active dust also presents an immediate threat to the world's food supplies. Many scientists and agronomists claim that the world's food supply is being affected by radio-activity. Doctors say that diseases such as cancer (the dreaded outcome of overdoses of the radio-active element strontium 90) and leukemia are bound to increase.

FACTS ARE SUPPRESSED

The full picture is not being taken to the people of Australia. The alarming facts contained in the official reports of British and American scientists, released during 1956, are not being put into words that ordinary people can understand.

In addition, the amount of radio-active fall out in the rain over Melbourne and Sydney after recent atomic tests in Australia has been hidden from the people. Government organisations like C.S.I.R.O., who have measured the fall-out, refuse to disclose their information. Private firms, who have been forced to take special action to combat increased radio-activity, have been made to keep their mouths shut in case the public is alarmed.

The life of ordinary people everywhere is being steadily and dangerously affected by the continuance of tests, for there is not only the direct effects of the tests to be taken into account, but also the whole vicious spiral of the atomic and guided missiles arms race on an international scale.

This arms race has impoverished mankind and wasted enormous human efforts. In Australia alone, if, by international agreement, we could afford to cut our arms budget by 50 per cent., every town of over 5000 population could have, with the money saved, a new High School (£150,000), a new hospital (£150,000), a new swimming pool (£100,000), one hundred homes at £3000 each, and £100,000 to spend on public works.

This gives some idea of the world-wide waste on war preparations.

I believe we cannot afford the bill for more nuclear tests! I believe that, in every country, men and women must stand together against greater war budgets! The truth on these matters must be taken to the people! That is why I took my sandwich boards into the streets of Sydney, and that is the principle for which I went to gaol.