

The Long Kesh University

by Red Hand Commando Student, Cage 19, Long Kesh

SINCE our arrival at Long Kesh in December 1972 great play has been made by the Camp authorities in relation to the facilities that would be made available to anyone wishing to participate in University studies and the like. Members of Parliament and the various visitors to the Camp were told that new study centres within the camp were now available and fully equipped with all the modern facilities including tape-recorder, video-tape recording machine, television and radio.

However, it was not until late 1973 that anyone actually saw inside these 'study centres' and they were not made accessible for studying purposes until early 1974. University degree courses were applied for by over twenty Long Kesh political Prisoners and Detainees and these were given the go-ahead. It seemed that finally someone had realised the importance of permitting men the right to further education and studying.

All seemed well until the time came for the studies to begin. The students were informed that all studying would have to be done within their various Cages instead of having access to the study centre. It was explained to the Camp Governor that to do so would be practically impossible for several reasons. Firstly, to study, it would be necessary to have silence during the study periods and this would be most difficult taking into consideration that in the Cages it would be unfair to ask and expect 89 men to keep perfectly quiet for one man. Secondly, as television and radio programmes accompany the University studies, it would again be unfair to ask 89 men to give the one man choice of viewing.

T.V. TIME

It would be ideal if the students were permitted to study at the agreed periods in the study centres and to make T.V. and Radios available. But no, this was not on, and the Camp authorities bluntly refused to see reason. "What were these study centres to be used for if not studying?", asked the students but no explanation was forthcoming. The bright prospects of breaking through the barriers of Long Kesh intransigence were growing dimmer as time went by. In the Loyalist Cage 19 the five potential students decided to make the best of what they had within the Cage in the way of using the quietest spot possible. This, in effect was the drying room where it could be possible to study but at a risk of catching pneumonia due to the damp clothes.

Once the Assistant Governor was informed of this action he seemed anxious that publicity to this effect would be made in a further effort to gain access to the study centre. It is believed that he realised that their request was reasonable and that adverse publicity would be forthcoming failing the granting of this reasonable request. The study centres were then made available.

However, all was not well. It transpired that the Camp authorities were making great efforts to play both ends against the middle as it were. They said that the various factions (Official I.R.A., Provo I.R.A., Loyalists) would have to be kept entirely separate and that this would cut the studying time by half. This was regarded as being uncalled for by both the Loyalists and the Republicans. It was agreed that no objections would be made to the factions studying in the one hut so that the study time could be extended.

Eventually the Official I.R.A. students numbering 8, would study with the 5 Loyalists in one hut while the Provo I.R.A.'s 14 students would make use of the other study hut.

EIGHT WEEKS BEHIND SCHEDULE

Almost eight weeks behind schedule the study centres were finally opened for all and the much publicised facilities could not be seen anywhere. There was no TV, no radio, no video-tape recording machine and no tape recorder. There was only two tables and a few chairs plus an empty bookcase — nothing else! This was the great Long Kesh study centre. After much complaining and several more important weeks of valuable studying time these facilities were made available. But more complications were to follow. There was no video-tapes for the machine and no tapes for the recorder. The machines were there but could not be used. A request to be permitted to watch the University TV programmes was refused therefore the TV was merely an ornament. A similar request to listen to the radio programmes was refused therefore the radio was also an ornament. It seemed evident that the Long Kesh authorities wanted to tell everyone that great studying opportunities existed but they were not willing to let the students carry these opportunities through to their logical conclusion.

The students had to study without the benefit of accompanying TV and radio programmes. It was not simply because they were being deprived of these programmes that led to their anger. It was because the Long Kesh authorities still used these unusable facilities as a means to coin M.P.s and visitors etc. into believing that all was well in this respect.

Tutors are permitted entrance to the Camp one night in every three weeks and it is now common practice for the Army to turn away the tutors at the gate without any reason being given. Applications to be allowed small pocket diaries with which students can plan ahead for their assignments and exams were refused as being security risks. We fail to see where this request can be a danger to security.

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A NEW HURDLE

Notwithstanding the difficulties and hurdles the students proved their determination to carry on with their studies as best they could. However, in recent months a new hurdle has been thrown up by the Camp authorities. They prevent students from being taken over to the study huts on the times agreed and say this is due to a shortage of staff. It is approximately three mornings per week that no Prison Officer is available to take the students to the study centre therefore the studying time is cut in half. Is this the fault of the students? It is they who suffer from the Staff shortage. It has been pointed out to the Assistant Governors that one remedy to the

situation would be to provide one Prisoner Officer as a permanent Study Hut Officer. This has been accepted but as yet no action has been taken and it has reached a stage where at least 6 students have finally given up the whole idea of studying because of the stupid blocks being thrown up by the Long Kesh Authorities.

Some other students who were transferred from one cage to another were not permitted to carry on with their studies and this we feel, is wrong. Surely, any Prisoner who wishes to pursue some form of educational studies should be given every encouragement rather than the discouragement that has prevailed.

The time for lending credibility to the farcial Long Kesh education set up is long gone.

What we want now is some changes for the good and welfare of all students in Long Kesh.

GUIDE TO FAMILY BENEFITS and PENSIONS

Often those who are most deserving of the help which can be given are for one reason or another not aware of benefits to which they may be entitled.

The information contained in this weekly series of articles is taken from an official handbook published by the Department of Health and Social Services.

4. PRESCRIPTION CHARGES

Prescriptions for the following people can be obtained without charge by completing the declaration on the back of the prescription form:

(a) Children under 16 years and adults aged over 65 (60 for women)

(b) People holding exemption certificates

Exemption certificates are issued to the following persons —

(a) Expectant mothers and a mother whose child is less than one year old.

(b) People suffering from certain specified medical conditions.

(c) War or Service disablement pensioners (for prescriptions required for their accepted disabilities).

(d) People and their dependants receiving supplementary benefit or family income supplement.

The arrangements for issue of exemption certificates are described in Leaflet HS 150, available from post offices and local or social security offices.

Anyone aged 18 or over who is not covered by the above exemptions but whose income is below a certain

level is entitled to exemption, or a refund if the charge has already been paid. Leaflet PC 11, available from Post Offices explains the arrangements and includes a claim form to send to the social security office. If the charge has already been paid the chemist's receipt form PS 7 should be attached to the claim form.

The person's requirements and income are assessed in the same way as for a claim to supplementary benefit except that £2.00 of any earnings are always disregarded (together with £2.00 of a wife's earnings) and a broader approach is adopted in respect of special expenses. If income is less than requirements, including the prescription charge for one item plus a margin of 30p, an exemption certificate is issued which entitles the holder and his dependants to obtain their prescriptions without charge for up to 12 months. If the charge has already been paid, a refund is also given. Where income is just too high to qualify for an exemption certificate, a person may still be entitled to refunds in weeks in which he incurs a number of charges.

Anyone who has to pay the charge but needs frequent prescriptions can limit the amount he has to pay by making a single payment in advance to the Central Services Agency, 27 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8FD. In return he receives a certificate which entitles him to have his health service prescriptions dispensed without charge for a fixed period. Pre-payment certificates cost—

(a) Six month certificate costs £2.00

(b) Twelve month certificate costs £3.50.

A pre-payment certificate is worthwhile for anyone who needs to have more than 10 items dispensed in 6 months, or more than 17 items in twelve months. Further details and an application form are on Form HS 154 available from Post Offices, and local or social security offices.

CAMERA FOUND — on Isle of Man Boat.

OWNER can have it back. Call at —

STUDIO 10, ABERDEEN STREET, SHANKILL RD.