

linked to Michael Flannery (p. 113), it seemed to this reader a ripe moment for a wider introspection of whether Noraid's financial reporting mandated under the Foreign Aliens Registration Act was entirely the whole story.

The book ends in something of a rush. In 1989, Denis Donaldson — by then an MI5 agent inside Sinn Féin — began work for I.N.A. in an undetermined capacity for an indeterminate amount of time (p. 184). It would have been interesting to have explored Donaldson's work. So too, despite earlier discussions of visa problems for Sinn Féin speakers, there is no discussion of how this impasse came to be resolved prior to Gerry Adams's visit in the autumn of 1993. The conclusion summarises but offers little in the way of further insight or analysis as to I.N.A.'s activities and it would have been interesting had Collins chosen to evaluate his findings at this point. The book remains a dutiful history and certainly a useful work and reliable reference of interest to scholars of Irish America at these important moments.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.39

TONY CRAIG

School of Justice, Security and Sustainability, Staffordshire University
t.craig@staffs.ac.uk

LEARNING BEHIND BARS: HOW I.R.A. PRISONERS SHAPED THE PEACE PROCESS IN IRELAND. By Dieter Reinisch. Pp 240. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 2022. US\$70.

The central focus of this work by Dieter Reinisch is the examination of the role played by Irish political prisoners on both sides of the border during the conflict in Northern Ireland. More specifically, Reinisch concentrates on their impact on the trajectory of the outside republican movement through political education and command structures. An important contribution to the existing historiography of the conflict, Reinisch's decision to discuss both the similarities and differences of Irish republican prisoners on both sides of the border makes for a compelling narrative. The book, which is predominantly the product of a dissertation, is extensively supported by secondary literature but its biggest strength lies in the interviews with former activists and volunteers, of which forty-one are cited throughout. In addition, many of the interviewees formed the nexus of prison leadership in Portlaoise Prison and Long Kesh Detention Centre (later Maze Prison), which certainly enhances the level of detail and analysis.

In introducing the research, Reinisch points out that according to some studies, roughly 50 per cent of prisoners in Belfast surveyed had no educational qualification when incarcerated, whereas another study showed that 53 per cent of republican prisoners got some academic qualification whilst imprisoned (p. 26). Despite a limited dataset, it is a telling marker of the emphasis placed on education, formal or informal, throughout the conflict. Moreover, prisoners in Long Kesh were often unemployed owing to discriminatory practices in employment and education, and were, therefore, usually radicalised by conditions on the streets of Belfast or Derry, as opposed to southern republicans who were more likely to join for reasons of ideology or family.

Reinisch continues by discussing the prisoner experience in Portlaoise Prison, which took over from Mountjoy as the hub for republican prisoners in 1973. The focus has rarely been on this cohort of prisoners, given their usurpation by the prison protests and hunger strikes in Maze Prison. Reinisch refers in chapter 2 to a feeling amongst prisoners in Portlaoise of a lesser importance compared to their northern counterparts. Nonetheless, the waves of protest against conditions, including a hunger strike in 1976–7, were important precursors to the later protests, as well as objections to strip searching following the 1980–81 hunger strikes.

Interestingly, Reinisch highlights the introduction of a Sinn Féin *cumann* in Portlaoise that took charge of the formal education for the prisoners. Through the correspondence and statements by interviewees, Reinisch draws two conclusions regarding this, the first of which is that 'only those who had experience with Sinn Féin activity outside the prison joined this *Cumann*' (p. 80). Furthermore, it appeared that more prisoners joined the *gaeltacht* than the *cumann* itself, which he asserts 'can be interpreted as revealing a greater interest in

maintaining Irish culture than advancing the political understanding of the conflict in prison' (p. 82). The aforementioned contrast in socio-economic backgrounds of southern prisoners likely impacted the focus on more cultural teachings within the prison walls in Portlaoise, although the Irish republican fixation on the Irish language often had a concurrent practical benefit alongside an ideological one.

To that end, the focus of the book then shifts across the border to Long Kesh/Maze. The so-called Brownie papers, a series of articles written by Gerry Adams whilst imprisoned in Long Kesh, features prominently in chapter 5, although this is mainly done to demonstrate the prominent role prisoners played in shaping the direction of the republican movement, especially those such as Adams who were released in the late 1970s. In the aftermath of the hunger strike period and the armalite and ballot box strategy pushed by the increasingly influential northern leadership of the republican movement, educating prisoners was a critical cog in attaining support for later policies, such as the dropping of abstentionism at the 1986 Sinn Féin ard fheis or for the negotiations that culminated in the peace process. Although Reinisch's interviews feature several activists who were vocal critics of this strategy, he acknowledges the importance in the outside leadership cultivating support within the Maze Prison for the shift towards nonviolent conflict resolutions.

Additionally, there are valuable insights into the writings and content of the education system within the prisons. Two examples from John Nixon and Seanna Walsh illustrate this. Nixon, the officer commanding of the Irish National Liberation Army (I.N.L.A.) within the prison and participant in the first hunger strike in 1980, spoke of the different teachings between the I.N.L.A. and the Official I.R.A., the former having split from the latter by 1974. He described it as 'much more radical, more revolutionary' (p. 107). Walsh described the critical texts consumed by the prisoners, which included seminal works by both Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire on the concept of oppression and resistance, with the latter's book, *The pedagogy of the oppressed*, particularly impactful. From this, Reinisch draws the interesting conclusion that 'this internalization was an essential step in the political subjectification of Irish republicans because it contradicted the then-dominant notion among Irish nationalists of the Irish as the 'most oppressed people ever' (p. 110).

Overall, this book is a well-researched, insightful account on an important aspect of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Although Reinisch acknowledges in the conclusion the limitations of focusing the research on the prisoner experience in Ireland (p. 162), Ruan O'Donnell's seminal works on republican prisoners in Britain, written in a similar, empirical manner and featuring extensive interviews with activists, is surprisingly missing from the bibliography. In particular, the key discussion surrounding the deaths of Michael Gaughan and Frank Stagg on hunger strike in 1974 and 1976 respectively in Britain merited further analysis as a precursor to later protests. Nonetheless, the book's overall conclusion on the potential role of political prisoners as 'leaders of conflict transformation processes' and 'leaders of political change outside the prison walls' (p. 161) adds an intriguing perspective to the extensive historiography of both the Northern Ireland conflict and the education of political prisoners.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.40

ROBERT COLLINS
Department of History, University of Limerick
Robert.Collins@ul.ie