

VICTORIAN P.A.G.

I am writing on behalf of the Prisoners' Action Group to inform you of a recent decision we made concerning the plight of Pentridge prisoner, William John O'Meally.

O'Meally was convicted of the murder of Constable Howell in 1952. He is serving the term-of-his-natural-life. He has served 23 years and six months and is therefore the longest serving inmate in the history of Victorian prisons.

During this time he has earned the dubious distinction of being one of the most punished prisoners.

O'Meally has suffered the following instances of ill-treatment, brutality, and degradation at the hands of the prison authorities.

—He has served 13 years and three months in 'H' Division. 'H' Division is the maximum security division where prisoners receive the harshest treatment, including regular bashings. Prisoners lose all privileges and engage in breaking blue-stone rocks with a sledge-hammer. Usually a prisoner can expect to be placed in 'H' for no longer than a few weeks or months. We believe that O'Meally holds the record as the longest sentence ever served in 'H' Division. Whilst in 'H' O'Meally suffered ruptures, broken hands, broken arms, a broken knee, a busted head, many minor lesions, and his finger was nearly torn off on one occasion. As a result of the continual ill-treatment O'Meally is deaf in his right ear and his right arm is not much good to him any more. The 'H' in 'H' Division is said to stand for 'Hell'.

—O'Meally has served five years and three months in solitary confinement. Whilst in solitary confinement O'Meally was subjected to dietary deprivation, as a result of which he contracted scurvy. As a consequence of scurvy his teeth and hair began to fall out and he still suffers from an ulcerated stomach. Whilst undergoing bread and water diet, O'Meally ate weeds in order to try and ward off the scurvy. Great boils, carbuncles, swellings of the knees, elbows, fingers, gums, and great blue spots appeared all over his body. He was reduced to a mere five stone in weight.

—O'Meally was the last man in Australia to be flogged with the cat-o'-nine-tails. He received twelve lashes which opened his rib cage on his right side. He was denied medical attention.

—O'Meally suffered medical deprivation. After one bashing he received 17 stitches to the head. These stitches were not removed but were left to rot out. Further, after being flogged with a chain upon which there was affixed a heavy Chubb lock, he was put in an observation cell for four days before being granted medical attention. The Prison Doctor Bartholomew ordered O'Meally to be taken up the back steps of the Royal Melbourne Hospital where the only doctor allowed to examine him was Birell of the Police Department. O'Meally was repeatedly refused permission to see a doctor or nurse from the Hospital. When returned to 'H' Division he remained in an observation cell for three months without seeing light of day and received no medical attention for his injuries. (After this bashing, O'Meally was himself charged with assaulting six prison officers and received six weeks bread and water.)

—O'Meally is being victimised because he knows too much about the real nature of the prison system. Since his incarceration 23 years and six months ago, O'Meally has seen 35 other convicted murderers released. Of that 35, two were also convicted murderers of policemen. Terrence Stapleton served a total of seven years and Norman Searle served fifteen years. We also believe that twenty-seven others who have been tried for murder but who were deemed to be unfit to plead on the grounds of insanity but who were to be kept in strict custody until the Governor's Pleasure have now been released. Why then is O'Meally still being denied his freedom?

—We believe that O'Meally is being victimised because he knows too much about what really goes on at Pentridge and particularly 'H' Division. The prison authorities and the State Government fear that



he may expose the archaic and brutal nature of the penal system.

We feel there is a need for public action on this matter for the following additional reasons:

—O'Meally still maintains his legal innocence of the charger of murder.

—The one man who could order the release of O'Meally, Sir Henry Winnecke, (the Governor of Victoria who acts on the advice of Cabinet Ministers) is the same man who acted as Crown Prosecutor against O'Meally.

—O'Meally would be capable of adjusting into society. He has become a good hairdresser, a lathe-operator, a wood-turner, a poet and playwright. His efforts to be released have been supported by the State Opposition Leader, by the Pentridge Prison Chaplain, by his son, John, and many others.

In our opinion the issue of Bill O'Meally raises for consideration the whole question of crime and punishment in society. It raises for consideration the question "Who are the real criminals?" and "Justice — who does it serve?"

B. York
(on behalf of the Prisoners'
Action Group, Victoria.)

Ed's Note: The Vic P.A.G. has badges inscribed "Free O'Meally" for sale at 10c each and can be obtained by writing to Box 114, East Brunswick, Vic 3057. Also any Victorian subscribers might like to contact the Group direct: Phone is 479-2977, Barry York, Monday-Friday, 9.30-4.30.

ANXIETY

by Bob Temple

*I see my freedom drawing near.
Or might it not? My dreaded fear.
I think of now, I relive the past.
I hope this life it will not last.*

*I lie awake this silent night,
I see the world a ray of light
Shining through my window small —
Three steel bars shadowed on the wall.*