



*spoke of his vision
with comely
the crossroads. Let's hope that
... shed the romantic notions."*

inal repon-

LECTURER

University,
rights cam-
the Dublin-
Women and
e for single
mission in
Forum on
which they
en activists
is a hard-
tating com-
Northern
ned an un-
e. Family
two-thirds;
ghts to free
ing service,
ection, and
This paper
es that have
about Irish
s one way,
ives fathers
eir children,
rents have
ot have the
y home sold
by the
Act. The
cial welfare
ven by the
nefit and
gue strong-
nity should
rights end
a two-tier
North and

IS VISION

idens danc-
hat today's
rum and in
e romantic
vision and
d injustices
outlined in

Dublin City
ish Labour

ANDREW RYNNE

Abortion, The Irish Question
Ward River Press, 1982, £3.50
0 907085 21 0

IRISH ASSN. OF CIVIL LIBERTY

Your Rights as an Irish Citizen
Ward River Press, 1982, £1.50
0 907085 21 0

SEAN McBRIDE, editor

Crime and Punishment
Ward River Press, 1982, £2.50
0 907085 22 9

Reviewed by Dermot Moran

WIDESPREAD PUBLIC DEBATE and discussion are only now emerging as important elements in the functioning of democracy in Ireland. For too long politicians, civil servants and even the state-controlled television and radio have treated the Irish citizens with appalling contempt, making decisions over their heads, and denying them access to information or the right of reply. On the other hand, the Irish people are in general highly literate, as both the quality and the quantity of Irish newspapers clearly show, and they are also quietly suspicious of decisions made "on their behalf." A new demand for a say in public matters is sweeping Ireland—whether it be on the contentious question of the need for a constitutional amendment to protect the right to life of the unborn, or on questions of sentencing, penal practices and punishment, or on matters of rights in general. These three books from Ward River Press speak to this new demand and attempt to provide accurate factual information and discussion of principle in a number of important areas of human life. As such they are indeed to be welcomed.

Dr. Andrew Rynne, a medical doctor well known in Ireland for his involvement in the controversy surrounding contraception, reviews the arguments on all sides of the right-to-life debate, and provides a questionnaire to which leading spokespersons in the debate responded. He concludes with a chapter on his personal views. The whole is a clear and informative discussion of a question that is being debated internationally. As usual, however, the Irish version of the debate is "an Irish solution to an Irish problem."

The debate in Ireland has not centred around the question of whether abortions should be legalized. Abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland and the Republic under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, a British law enacted, as some are fond of telling us, by a "Protestant Parliament." Faced with a general election in 1981, the leaders of the two main parties, desperate for votes, gave rash and unthought commitments to a recently-formed Pro-life Amendment Campaign group. Their expressed aim was to prevent abortion from being legalized in Ireland by a decision of the Supreme Court by having the right to life of the unborn from the moment of conception "enshrined" in the Constitution.

Dr. Rynne's book will take the reader carefully through the maze of arguments surrounding the issue. It was published before the vote on the constitutional amendment, but it is still an essential read on the subject.

INTERESTINGLY, THE "RIGHT TO life" of all Irish citizens is protected under Article 40 of the Constitution. Part of the legal debate concerns whether the "unborn" can be classified as citizens or indeed whether the phrase "the unborn" has any legal meaning since it is an adjectival phrase leaving out the noun. But at least the rights of citizens are fairly clearly set out in the booklet issued by the Irish Association of Civil Liberties. Again, this book is most useful and has already sold out its first edition. It contains clear and concise information on, *inter alia*, constitutional rights, rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and the right to form trade unions and to strike. Many of these rights have been infringed by actual police practices or have been seriously curtailed by emergency legislation such as the Offences Against the State Acts of 1939, 1940 and 1972. For example, internment without trial, so infamous because of its use in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, can be introduced into the Republic by government proclamations—and was last done so between 1957-1962. It is also disturbing to read that "there appears at present to be no legal obligation on the Gardai to permit you to contact your family or a solicitor on arrest" (p. 36).

THIS BRINGS US TO THE THIRD book, *Crime and Punishment*, a collection of important reports and essays edited by Nobel Prize winner and founder of Amnesty International, Sean McBride. It makes for sad reading. The Irish penal system was inherited from the British administration, and since then the authorities have made no re-appraisal of the purpose and function of prisons. The system is expensive, overcrowded, dilapidated, and breeds a high rate of recidivism. There are virtually no educational facilities, no proper facilities for the treatment of drug addiction or psychiatric disturbances, and in recent days there have been an increasing number of suicides in prison. What is even more depressing is the legalistic attitude of the authorities, as conveyed in letters (presented here) which were written to the Commission of Inquiry into the Irish Prison System (chaired by McBride) by the Minister of Justice and the Commissioner of the Garda. There is a pressing need for full access to the prisons by concerned members of the public and for a full public debate on the nature and necessity of the various kinds of punishment. The commission recommended that more thought be given to non-custodial types of punishment and that rehabilitation should be foremost in the minds of those in charge of the prison system.

All three of these books are well informed and well documented windows on sides of Irish life which have not received enough attention from those interested in Irish culture and society, and all three deserve to be carefully read. ■

DERMOT MORAN teaches philosophy at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

