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# POINTS OF VIEW ON IRELAND

February, 1976

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opinion on issues raised by  
the violence in Ireland.

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THE DEATH OF FRANCIS STAGG

*Francis Stagg, "Commanding Officer of the Coventry IRA", born in the Irish Republic but resident in England since 1959, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in November, 1973, for conspiracy to commit arson and criminal damage. He died in prison on February 12, 1976, after his fourth hunger strike, demanding "repatriation" to Northern Ireland. Following threats by Provisional IRA supporters, bomb attacks and other incidents occurred in Northern Ireland after his death. There were also explosions in London and Dublin.*

Comment by Public Figures

There never was any possibility that the Home Secretary would agree to send to Northern Ireland someone who had no connections here and whose family live in England. That is why he was chosen by the Provos for their blood sacrifice.

*Mr Bob Cooper, deputy leader of the (non-sectarian) Alliance Party in Northern Ireland, Irish News, Belfast, February 3, 1976.*

One can only sympathise with his widow and the members of his family who tried, without success, to persuade him to give up his strike. The question is asked: "Is hunger striking suicide even when the one concerned is convinced he is unjustly treated?" Majority opinion says "Yes". Because the hunger striker is deliberately causing his own death in order to put pressure on the authorities. It is therefore wrong. Life is in the hands of God and no one has the right, directly, to take his own.

*Mgr Gerald Moverley, Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Leeds (who had pastoral care of Stagg in prison), Daily Telegraph, London, February 13, 1976.*

There is a lot of indignation among the people here about all this. Provisionals, and "wild men" from the North, took over the town for Michael Gaughan's funeral [an IRA hunger striker who died in May, 1974]. They threw their weight about, and their general attitude was toughness and truculence. They weren't very welcome, and they can expect a far cooler reception than the last time ... But the people who were here were all virtually imported. They were like an unruly soccer crowd, and most of the pubs, cafes and hotels shut down. ... Nobody here even knows Stagg, apart from possibly a few Provisional sympathisers in the town. There wouldn't be any more than 200 in the entire area.

*Mr Kevin Loftus, solicitor in Ballina, Co. Mayo, where Stagg's body was to be buried, Belfast Telegraph, February 13, 1976.*

The life of that young man could have been saved by a word from those who claim to be his leaders. These men, wherever they are, are only too willing to sacrifice the lives of their young subordinates, just as they order the indiscriminate taking of many innocent lives in the pursuit of an objective which, by their evil deeds, they desecrate. They disgrace the name of Ireland: their actions are a massive deterrent to any form of understanding, cooperation or dialogue between the Northern communities.

*Mr Jack Lynch, leader of Fianna Fail (the main Opposition party), addressing his party's annual convention in Dublin, Irish Times, February 16, 1976.*

It is quite clear that the protests mounted by the Provisionals against the death of Frank Stagg are being used as a camouflage for increasing attacks on the SDLP membership and property in spite of the party leadership's efforts to prevent his death.

*Mr Paddy Devlin, a leading member of the (mainly Catholic) Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), The Times, London, February 18, 1976.*

Press Comment

No public figure of any standing except the Bishop of Derry, Dr Daly, who later retracted, has argued that the government should have given in to the demand for transfer. He was on his own, apart from Provisional Sinn Fein. These "friends" showed their regard for him when they declined to order him, as they had done before, to break his strike. They sentenced him to death, in fact, because he was more use to them dead than alive. They badly need a cause, now that detention is gone, to keep the funds flowing, and Stagg, they felt, was as good as any.

Belfast Telegraph, *February 12, 1976.*

And so the IRA have had their way. Frank Stagg has been slaughtered to suit their brutish schemes. There was no reason in the world why this unfortunate man should have died by hunger strike. His so called friends could have halted his march towards death with a single word. There is no mercy in the IRA, when it comes to using a human being to provide fodder for their murderous ambitions. We will hear soon the usual tirade against the British. All must ignore this. The British Government could not bow the knee to blackmail - no more than Mr de Valera did during the war under similar circumstances.

Evening Herald, *Dublin, February 12, 1976.*

From this country's point of view it is not possible to claim that the British Government in this matter has done anything our own would not have agreed with. The present Irish Government and previous governments stretching back over the past 30 years have had to resist blackmail, and may have to do so again.

Irish Independent, *Dublin, February 13, 1976.*

In the final analysis, it was the organisation with which he himself was connected, the IRA, that killed Frank Stagg.

Irish Times, *Dublin, February 13, 1976.*

The hunger-strike as a protest weapon once had a particular significance in this country and men who died by this means are part of the lore and the emotionalism of modern history. However, there is little evidence to show that it still retains any semblance of its original effectiveness. Its edge has been blunted because of the modern campaign of violence by the organisation of which Mr Stagg was a member. The Provos have forfeited almost all of its public support, which they attracted in the earlier stages of their campaign, because of the mindless bombings and assassinations in which the innocent and the non-committed were so often the tragic victims.

Cork Examiner, *February 13, 1976.*