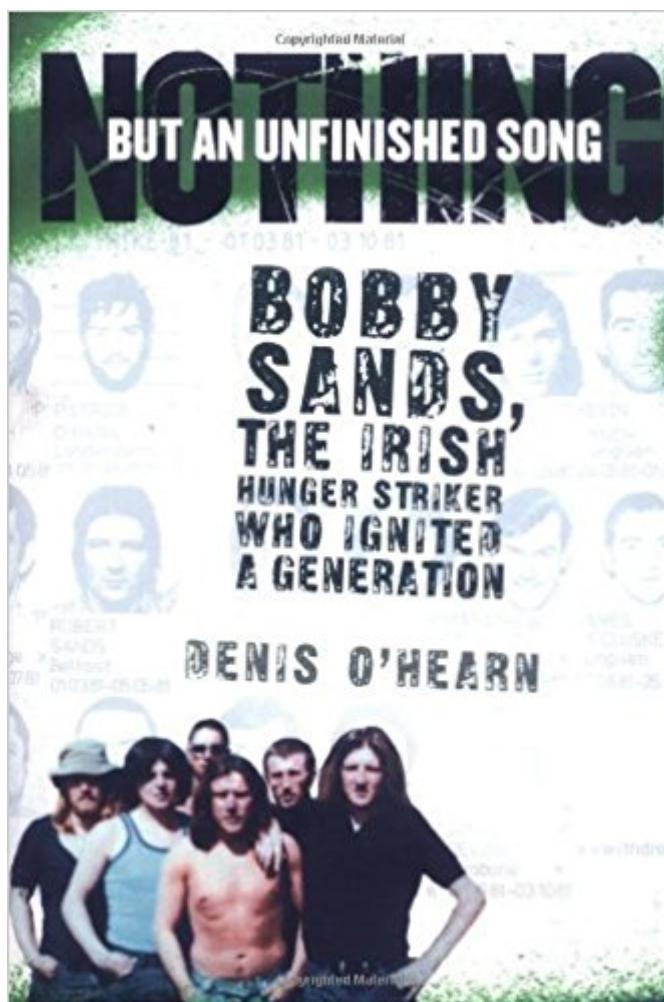


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Nothing But An Unfinished Song: Bobby Sands, The Irish Hunger Striker Who Ignited A Generation



Synopsis

Bobby Sands was twenty seven years old when he died. He spent almost nine years of his life in prison because of his activities as a member of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). When he died on 5 May 1981, on the sixty-sixth day of his hunger strike against repressive prison conditions in Northern Ireland's H Block prisons, parliaments across the world stopped for a minute silence in his honor. Nelson Mandela followed Sands's example and led a similar hunger strike in South Africa, and Fidel Castro compared his suffering to that of Jesus. Bobby Sands's remarkable life and death have made him an "Irish Che Guevara." He is an enduring figure of resistance whose life has been an inspiration to millions around the world. In Hollywood, actors like Sean Penn, Mickey Rourke and Brad Pitt have flirted with a biopic of his life. But until the publication of *Nothing But an Unfinished Song*, no book has adequately explored the motivation of the hunger strikers, nor recreated this period of history from within the prison cell. Denis O'Hearn's powerful biography, with new material based on primary research and interviews, illuminates for the first time this enigmatic, controversial and heroic figure.

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Customer Reviews

Irish nationalist and British MP Bobby Sands died in 1981, 66 days into a hunger strike. Sands's story is different from those of other Fenian heroes because most of his exploits were not in the field but rather in prison, where he spent almost all his adult life. Originally arrested by the British in 1972 for a string of armed stickups that apparently had little to do with the IRA, Sands gradually educated

himself in prison and became fluent in the Gaelic language. Released for a short time, he found himself again behind bars after the bombing of a furniture showroom went awry. IRA men were being treated as criminals, not political prisoners, and in protest, they went "on the blanket," naked. It eventually became a test of wills between Sands and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who declared she would "never talk to terrorists." O'Hearn chronicles Sands's excruciating death and its aftermath. It galvanized the Catholics of Northern Ireland and, according to O'Hearn, a professor at Queen's College in Belfast, "helped bring Republicans in from the cold," that is, into the political process that culminated in the Good Friday accords in 1998. This extensive and depressing biography adds valuable insight into the political evolution of Irish nationalism from the 1960s through today. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Bobby Sands spent nearly nine years in a repressive Northern Ireland prison, eventually dying in 1981 after a hunger strike that garnered respect from disparate areas--from the British parliament to South Africa's Nelson Mandela--for Sands' willingness to die for a cause. Sands was 17 when his budding interest in Irish politics drew him into the Irish Republican Army. In the infamous H-Block prisons, Sands met IRA leader Gerry Adams and studied Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, as well as Irish socialists James Connolly and Liam Mellows, to develop a broader understanding of colonial oppression. Sands developed into a republican propagandist, using his poetry, prose, songs, and essays to resist what the IRA saw as colonial occupation by the British. O'Hearn depicts the clash of cultures as the IRA old guard and the provisional members argued over tactics, both fighting British efforts to criminalize their resistance, as well as the forces and conditions that led to the 66-day hunger strike that cost Sands his life. This is a revealing look at the IRA politics and resistance tactics that made Sands an iconic figure. Vanessa BushCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Best account yet of the courageous men who gave their lives in the struggle for a just world. Beautifully written with much of the narrative told in the prisoners' own words.

This book offers a glimpse into the atrocious conditions the blanket men lived in order to prove their status as political prisoners. The sacrifices made by all involved are explained in great detail. The 2 hunger strikes are also described with an intensity that grips throughout. From the mistakes made on the first Hunger strike to the determination of Sands to give up his life for that of his

comrades despite the outside leadership's arguments against this. The sacrifice these men made should never be forgotten by the people of Ireland. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." RIP Bobby

This is terribly upsetting at points, tears ran down my cheeks a few times. That being said, it is truly heroic story on par with of great martyrs of Ireland's struggles to be united and free from oppression.

Amazing story. The heart, dedication, and love these men had for their country was truly inspiring. It's too bad they were commies, they should have just stuck to the Nationalism part. They could have done so much more with better ideologies. Either way, you can't take anything away from these gentlemen regardless. True soldiers, in every sense of the word. Again proving they were not common criminals, but POW's. RIP Bobby Sands.

My mother is the one who got me interested in Northern Ireland and the "Troubles" We are American and Catholic and I found it hard to understand that someone could be persecuted for their religious faith, much less be murdered because of it. An entire island is divided because of this. Reading this book gave me more information than I'd ever read, an insider's view of the abuse Bobby and his family suffered at the hands of his own fellow countrymen, events that "eventually pushed Bobby into the hands of the IRA". A people divided only by their loyalty to an ideology-whether you're a loyalist, faithful to a British master or a Republican, praying for a whole Ireland, together as one people. I cannot fathom the depravity Bobby and his fellow prisoners were subject to by British prison guards-I don't think my mind can allow it. His death is described in graphic detail, horrible and excruciating, and I cried, knowing all his friends followed that road, without a second thought. Where does that strength come from? Is it born into a person, or burned into a person's soul from years of abuse and mistreatment, until the only option can be death. 100,000 or more attended Bobby's funeral; I wonder what he would think of events that still go on today in Norn Iron?

All of us have a story to tell. There's few though whose life, cut short at 27 years of age, can be said to have impacted so dramatically on the course of Irish politics and to have become such an internationally recognised icon as Bobby Sands. Guerrilla fighter in the Irish Republican Army, he was elected a member of the British parliament shortly before his death on hunger strike in the H Blocks of Long Kesh/Maze Prison on 5 May 1981. I shared a prison wing with Bobby for nine months

in 1979. Later I joined the hunger strike that he had just died on. I approached Denis O'Hearn's biography of Bobby therefore with a little trepidation. I should not have been concerned. It is an excellent book. It tells not just the story of Bobby, the prison protest and hunger strikes but accurately captures the atmosphere of the prison - the good times and bad, the hopes and despair, the pain, the joy and the totally selfless love that is rarely witnessed between a group of males. The strength of the book is that O'Hearn does not attempt to tell what he thinks happened behind prison walls (as other academics have) or to interpret events within his own ideological paradigm. Instead he facilitates others - friends, associates and comrades of Bobby - to tell of the person they knew and allows that person to become alive and vibrant on every page. Most importantly, the book traces the development of a very ordinary, young, politically naive, high-spirited boy from a working class background on the outskirts of Belfast to the highly politicised, articulate, prolific, competent revolutionary that he became in later years. In this way O'Hearn informs a new generation of political activists in Ireland and elsewhere that they too can become a 'Bobby Sands' but hopefully never have to make the life and death decisions that he was faced with. This year, the 25th anniversary of the hunger strike, it is timely for this biography to appear. It demonstrates the global interest that is retained in events that happened over a period of 217 days in 1981 when ten men died one after the other in prison cells in a struggle to be treated as the political prisoners they were. No wonder that states tremble before the power of such an idea that cannot be conquered, quenched, bought off or tortured into submission. No wonder that from the lips of oppressed peoples around the world the name, Bobby Sands, is uttered with such fondness and admiration. Dr Laurence McKeown, former hunger striker and co-author of 'Nor Meekly Serve My Time: the H-Block Struggle 1976-1981. Nor Meekly Serve My Time: The H-Block Struggle, 1976-1981

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