

## More than 'Fear and Loathing' – the pilgrim's progress



This is a response to Ciaron O'Reilly's Orwellian epiphany on the road to St. Brigid's well in Ireland.

Ciaron describes the demons and monsters which "the pilgrim" must overcome to reach the celestial well at St Brigid's.

By demons and monsters I mean the special branch, the Irish Secret police. St Brigid's well is a place in Kildare where a festival was being held. The special branch accuse O'Reilly, the pilgrim, of being an 'eco-terrorist' - whatever that is.

[['Pilgrim' is an interested word, it smacks of "The Pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyan, the American minister jailed because he would not desist from preaching Puritanism](#)].

Apparently Ciaron was called an eco-terrorist because he was rumoured to have threatened harm to Queensland's most important living creature – the cow.

You see, Ciaron once lived in a house in Brisbane with two guys from the local Prisoners Action Group. Someone - the finger was pointed falsely at Ciaron - was threatening to spread 'foot and mouth disease' in the Queensland cattle population after a riot in the local Boggo Road jail. How this would improve prison squalor was never made clear.

This was a time of fear and loathing in Queensland, street marches were banned by the National Party, Bjelke Petersen government and Ciaron had been involved as a young student in the longest sustained revolt against a government in Australian history, 1977 - 1979.

[[See the front page story of the Sydney Morning Herald depicted above showing the arrest of MPs Senator George Geroges and Tom Uren on 30 October 1978 along with 280 other people during a street march in Brisbane against Uranium mining and export.](#)]

Ciaron thus became the victim of 'guilt by association' and hence the term 'eco-terrorist'.

His thought provoking essay titled "[Counter Terrorist Cops, Special Branch and Paradigm Shifts on the Road to St. Brigid's Well!](#)" was published originally on Sydney Indymedia and now on BushTelegraph.

The logical consequence of the "paradigm shift" - to the police state - as described by Ciaron O'Reilly is that more aborigines, political activists, trade unionists, workers, muslims - the list is endless - may find themselves in jail.

Of course, under 'democratic' governments, this has happened before, for example in the 1970s when the capitalists decided to get their hands on yellowcake, jump the Uranium express, mine and export uranium from Queensland and the Northern Territory.

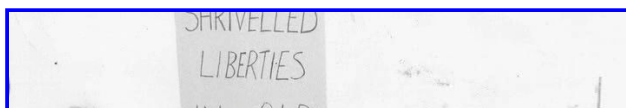
The following is an account of the risks associated with being an anti-uranium activist and the inevitable arrest and detention in a 'democratic' state.

Aboriginal people here in Queensland know all about the dangers of being in police custody.

See <http://bushtelegraph.wordpress.com/whats-on/mulrunji-letter>

Ciaron's essay describes the Queensland Special Branch in the 1970s in the following terms:

"They were mostly corrupt Irish Catholics servicing a corrupt Calvinist Premier Bjelke-Petersen. The deal was the cops could run, or get a take on, the drug, brothel, illegal casino action if the cops were



willing to be used on the streets to deal with dissent.

The politicians took their take from a more elevated trough, in terms of bribes and shares from Japanese & US. transnational corporations devouring the raw materials and carving up the real estate." — Ciaron O'Reilly in [Counter Terrorist Cops, Special Branch and Paradigm Shifts on the Road to St. Brigid's Well!](#)

During the ban on street marches in Queensland in 1977-1979, I was taken into custody at the behest of the Queensland Special Branch on several occasions.

### **The Uranium Express: live to fight, fight to live**

On 30 October 1978, I was arrested at an anti-uranium demonstration of about 3,000 people in King George Square in Brisbane .

Members of the Queensland police Task Force, along with Constables Allan Cameron Todd and Michael Egan, arrested me under a warrant signed by then acting-magistrate, William Joseph Mackay. This was the same magistrate who convicted the young Ciaron of assaulting a huge copper (was his name Johnson?) when it was the young high school student who had been badly beaten (broken nose?) by the very same cop in the midst of a street march. Perhaps Ciaron can summon up the details from his memory but I remember sitting in a court room and watching sound witnesses backed up by a litany of character witnesses like teachers, nuns and priests. You'd think such people singing their praises of the young Ciaron - especially in the Irish catholic dominated judiciary of Queensland - would find a sympathetic ear in the magistrate. But the ears of Magistrate Mackay remained deaf - as if his worship lived in a permanent alcoholic haze - as he come down resoundingly in favour of the police and convicted the assaulted student of the very crime to which he had fallen victim.

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This did not surprise me because I had seen the magistrate at his worst in the same courtroom when I stood accused of disobeying a police direction and resisting arrest while walking down a footpath in Brisbane's aptly named main street, the street of her royal highness - Queen Street.

You see I spent 4 days showing film of my arrest, all the while cross-examining the arresting officer who lied through his teeth only to hear Magistrate Mackay come down on the side of law and justice and convict me also. The same erstwhile magistrate went on to have an impeccable career slotting the working class in all their guilty forms. His worship rose to serve for a time as the chief stipendiary magistrate at a time when the state of Queensland was supposed to have become a better place with the Labor party in charge - a ALP attorney general, Matt Foley, himself had been arrested on 11 November 1977 in a street march with 196 others. Foley answer was to replace (slowly) the old guard, National Party magistrates with Labor women, at least they could analyse a set of facts. But I diverge here from the main story.

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My arrest warrant, signed by Mackay, was for \$50 - a case of 'the money or the body'- and was issued as a result of charges laid against me in an earlier street march against the Bjelke-Petersen government.

When Todd and Egan approached I did not have \$50 on me. An old man, who was standing behind me on the steps of the square, tried to pay the fine on my behalf, but Constable Todd refused, taking me into custody with the help of Egan, and two or three other cops. I have film of this encounter.

As I was arrested, the Queensland Police Task Force used a flying wedge to arrest several others around me.

I ended up in a crowded paddy wagon with about 10 - 15 other people.

The police van was parked in the middle of the street. A plain clothes special branch officer stood nearby. Uniformed police came to the van, opened the door and dragged me out onto the road. A uniformed cop known as 'Blackie' held me in a throat hold.

As I lost consciousness I could see a journalist, Dennis Reinhardt, whom I knew as the station co-

ordinator of Radio 4ZZZ, standing on the street nearby. I called out to Reinhardt for assistance. He held a notebook in his hand but did nothing. I passed out on the asphalt. As a result I had a splitting headache for the next three days.

In an article titled "700 Police face Qld marchers: 280 in street protest held", the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) reported the arrest in its usual sensationalist fashion:

“In one incident police dragged Ian Curr, a demonstrator, from a police waggon (sic) and threw him into the back seat of a police sedan.

Curr, who has been arrested several times since anti-street march law was introduced in September last year, struggled violently before being overcome by seven policemen.

A senior police spokesman said later Curr was wanted on a warrant for another offence.” – SMH 31 October 1978.

I woke up in the back of a police car. The cops had placed me in handcuffs and I was pushed down on my back with my hands cuffed behind, awkwardly over the centre rise of the rear floor of the police car. As a result of the handcuffing, I would not regain feeling on the skin of my left hand for about 3 months. My shirt was ripped and had blood on it.

Egan drove the car and Todd sat in the front on his left. 'Blackie' and another sat in the back.

By law, under the warrant, I was supposed to be taken to the nearest jail, Boggo Road. Instead I was taken to police HQ in Herschel Street where I was flung into a lift and taken up several floors where, upon alighting from the lift, I was paraded in front of police currently on duty in the building.

I was taken to a small room in the middle of the office floor where Todd, Blackie and another cop forced me to undress down to my underpants.

Todd said: You're not very fit, Curr.

I replied that I was fitter than he would be when he got to my age (I was 27 and he was about 21). Todd claimed to be a state karate champion of some kind.

As Todd and Blackie intimidated me, I could hear Egan outside saying that we had to go (to Boggo Road jail). Todd locked the door. Egan pressed his shoulder against the door and the partition beside it moved. Todd did not respond. Egan then rammed the door with his shoulder and the door came open.

I was taken to Boggo Road, my head shaved, and later placed in a yard full of murderers and rapists.

Yet I was to survive this and other stints in jail.

However, sent to one jail, Stuart Creek in Townsville, in 1980, on the order of a magistrate for contempt of court, could easily have resulted in my death.

But that is another story.

I was charged with 'resisting arrest' and taken to trial before a magistrate.

Special Branch officers attended throughout the 4 day trial. One special branch officer flashed his ankle holster showing a pistol while I gave evidence in the dock. I was acquitted of resisting arrest and received costs for my ripped shirt.

Soon after, in March 1979, Constable Egan resigned from the police force while on duty at an international women's day rally and was harassed mercilessly by his former fellow officers for a long time after. See picture of Constable Egan leaving the rally in the custody of police.

Allan Cameron Todd went on to take over his father's successful Hi Fi business on Brisbane's southside.



## The moral of the story?

The power of the state, when confronted, can result in great personal cost to those who oppose it.

Or as a friend said, killing people can put to rest a lot of problems.

In democracies like Australia and Ireland, the occasional death in custody may be counterproductive to some, but it may be considered a small inconvenience for the magistrates, police, media and politicians to cover up in the interest of big capitalists who want to get on with business.

Transnational Miners are once again pressing ahead with plans to mine and export uranium in Queensland despite the marches, the mass arrests, the personal cost to anti-uranium activists like Ciaron O'Reilly when he was a high school student aged only 17. To Ciaron, I say, let us appraise what you have done, from where you have come, what allegory can be drawn from your journey on the train of peace.

We should remember that the costs we are made to pay by the 'demons and monsters' of the special branch are small in comparison to those in the deserts of Iraq who bear the legacy of the depleted uranium that have been used and discarded by the US led 'coalition of the willing'.

In 2001 the British Medical Journal reported that Iraqi health officials say 'depleted uranium weapons--used by the American and British military during the Gulf war--may be to blame for a substantial increase in the number of cancer cases in the southern part of the country.' Iraqi doctors wanted testing to be carried out. See BMJ report [here](#).

Yet the economic rationalists are still making the same old arguments for uranium, despite the deaths caused by Maralinga, despite Three Mile Island, despite the deaths during and after Chernobyl.

I ask BushTelegraph readers this question: **what does lead to change in a world of superficiality—as seen on many blogs and comments on the internet?**

Ian Curr  
30 January 2008

See also [No Uranium Mines in Queensland](#)