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EDITORIAL

San Patricio

Published: March 16, 2010

On this day of all days in the Irish-American calendar, when ethnic pride swells, let's raise a toast: Here's to the Irish, and here's to the rest of us. May we never forget where we came from. Nearly all of us were Mexicans once. That is: the new immigrants, poor and reviled, propelled by hope and hunger into America's prickly embrace.

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[Los Tigres Del Norte and The Chieftains performing 'Canción](#)

What brings this juxtaposition to mind is "San Patricio," a new album from Paddy Moloney of the great Irish traditionalist band the Chieftains. It commemorates a historical footnote: the San Patricio battalion of Irish-immigrant soldiers who deserted the United States Army and fought for Mexico in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. They picked the losing side, were captured, executed or branded as traitors, and then

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forgotten, except by Mexicans.

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Mr. Moloney, a musician of restless curiosity, saw it as a tale of tragedy and loss, but also a chance for creative collision. "If the Irish were there, there would most certainly have been music," he says. The same goes for the Mexicans. He invited Irish, Mexican and American musicians to play and sing, to see what would happen.

What happened was not all dolorous lamentation, though there is some of that. The rest is joy, thoroughly Mexican yet utterly Irish, carried aloft by tin whistles, skin drums, pipes, harps, guitars and stomping feet. It's a mix you've never heard, but eerily familiar. [Listen to the classic](#) "Canción Mixteca," sung in Spanish by the Mexican supergroup Los Tigres del Norte, accompanied by accordion, bajo sexto, tin whistle and uilleann pipes.

"How far I am from the land where I was born! Immense longing invades my thoughts, and when I see myself as alone and sad as a leaf in the wind, I want to cry. I want to die of sorrow."

That old song, woven into the Mexican soul, is as Irish as it gets. And it's an American song, too. We are all people who have lost our land in one sad way and found another. Whether we lament and celebrate in a pub or cantina, whether our tricolor flag has a cactus on it or not, we are closer to one another than we remember.

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A version of this article appeared in print on March 17, 2010, on page A26 of the New York edition.

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Move Across Hudson Further Isolates Immigration Detainees

By NINA BERNSTEIN

Published: March 16, 2010

When federal authorities shut down New York City's only [immigration](#) detention center last month, and sent most of its detainees to a county jail in New Jersey over protests by their advocates, Obama administration officials stressed that the jail was only a short drive from the city.

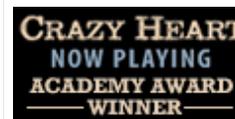
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225	1,643	1,745	Acceptable	Acceptable
582	1,470	1,600	Good	Good
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474	1,430	1,381	Acceptable	Acceptable
957	946	1,194	Deficient	
900	Interactive Graphic		Good	

[Immigrant Detention Centers](#)

But under a contract with a private telephone company, calls to detainees' families and lawyers back in New York are decidedly long distance. The result is a 800 percent increase in the cost of a call, to more than 89 cents a minute, in a phone system so cumbersome that detainees say it impedes their ability to contest deportation or contact relatives.

In protest, the detainees have sent appeals for help to the [American Bar Association](#), signed by more than 180 detainees, and have threatened a [hunger strike](#). They cite exorbitant telephone costs as their central grievance, but also complain of poor health care, confiscation of legal documents and mistreatment by guards at the jail, the [Hudson County Correctional Center](#) in Kearny.

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The isolation of many immigration detainees was underscored last week [when a Chinese New Yorker freed](#) from another New Jersey jail had no clue that he had been [pardoned by Gov. David A. Paterson](#) four days earlier.

Officials of [Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#), the federal agency that pays jails to house detainees, have said improvements are in the works. But for detainees shifted from the New York jail, the Varick Federal Detention Facility, the possibilities for communication with the outside world have shrunk.

[Brian P. Hale](#), a spokesman for the federal agency, said that a hunger strike began at the Hudson County jail on Monday, adding that it had been organized by the same detainee who started a hunger strike at Varick a few weeks before it ended detention operations. Agents in riot gear broke up that protest [after detainees refused to go to the jail cafeteria](#), officials said then.

Several detainees said the leaders were punished with isolation or were transferred to distant detention centers. Similar complaints of retaliation have been made by detainees on hunger strikes at the Port Isabel Detention Center near Los Fresnos, Tex., which houses many longtime legal residents of New York fighting deportation based on past criminal convictions.

One letter to the bar association said the Hudson County hunger strike would start March 15, but another put it a week later. Jail officials said all but a few detainees were eating on Tuesday.

“No one is unwilling to listen to these concerns and to make sure that detainees are treated with respect and dignity,” said James Kennelly, a spokesman for Hudson County and the jail. “We take the care and custody of the detainees very seriously.”

Karen T. Grisez, chairwoman of the bar association’s commission on immigration, said the association would look into the complaints and refer them to government authorities for further investigation.

“We take this very seriously,” Ms. Grisez, [a lawyer with the Washington firm of Fried Frank](#), said on Tuesday, noting that legal access, including phone calls at competitive rates,



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was part of the national detention standards adopted by the federal government in 2000. The Obama administration, however, like its predecessor, has declined to make the standards enforceable.

Mr. Hale said all immigration detainees were allowed free calls to foreign consulates and to a list of free legal services. But other calls from the New Jersey county jails are charged at rates negotiated by the state and the phone provider, [Global Tel Link](#) of Reston, Va. The rate is \$1.75 to connect a call, and 89 cents a minute, he said. But [Global Tel Link](#) will not connect a call until the recipient puts \$25 into an account with a major credit card.

Many lawyers will not accept such calls, and many family members do not have a credit card, Ms. Grisez said.

Typically, phone companies compete not to provide more reasonable rates to inmates and their families, but to provide the highest commissions to the jail. Dorothy Cukier, a spokeswoman for Global Tel Link, said it was not the company's responsibility to negotiate special rates for immigration detainees.

"To my understanding, we have never been approached by ICE about that," she said.

Mr. Kennelly said the county now got just under \$1 million annually in its commission.

One detainee who signed the petition is Orville Wayne Allen, 47, a longtime New York State resident who has spent more than 19 months in immigration custody without seeing an immigration judge, his fiancée, Desiree Williams, said. When a police officer in Mount Vernon stopped him for riding a bicycle on the wrong side of a street in 2008, she said, a database check turned up an order of deportation in absentia from the 1980s, something a lawyer had supposedly resolved years before.

Ms. Williams, who works weekdays, has not seen him since he was transferred last month, because the jail allows only weekday visits. She said she could afford to receive only three brief calls, in which Mr. Allen urged her to call his lawyer. The lawyer keeps demanding more money, she said, but he has not filed any legal papers — something she has not told Mr. Allen.

“The phone conversations out there are so expensive we can’t talk,” Ms. Williams added, describing a \$25 account that cost her hours and \$14 to set up.

In their complaints, detainees said they were not even allowed to read newspapers or watch the news. “They stop us from knowing what is going on with our own family and around us,” one letter said.

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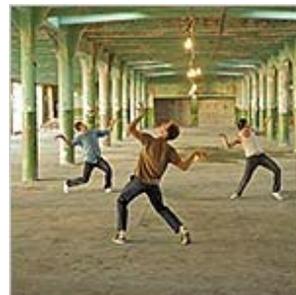
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