

Solidarity with Travellers

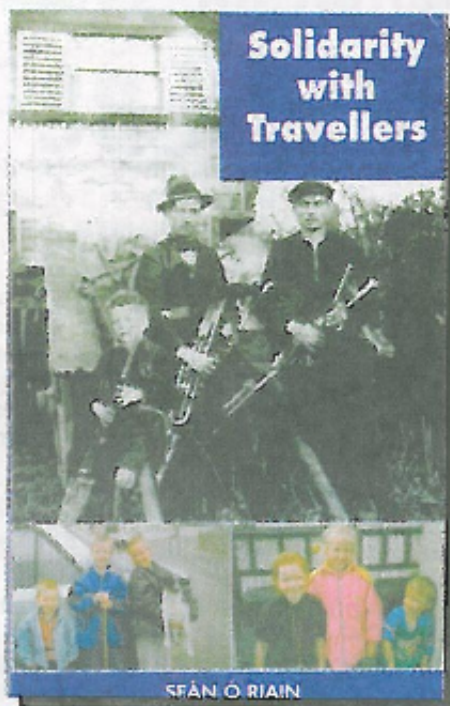
By Seán Ó Riain
(Roadside Books)

ASK AND YOU shall receive – no sooner had I complained about the lack of information regarding Travellers in Ireland in a previous review, I found in my hands a copy of *Solidarity with Travellers*. It's a slim, non-fiction work that chronicles author Seán Ó Riain's experiences over two decades of working with and for Travellers, primarily in south Co Dublin.

Well-written and easy to digest, it is a book worth reading for all of us not born and raised here, as it reveals a population more diverse than the usual monolithic presentation of Irish culture and identity would have us believe.

The central topic of Ó Riain's work is the struggle to provide Travellers in south Dublin with an authorised halting site with access to utilities such as electricity and running water. In what comes across as a very honest and reflective account of this campaign, Ó Riain often dryly touches on recurring confrontations with the nimbyism of locals, often provoked by fear, ignorance and hypocrisy.

Referring to a 1989 letter from Archbishop Desmond Connell, which specifically exhorted Catholics



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to "whole-heartedly support" the provision of halting sites, Ó Riain bitinglly muses as to why those failing to act on such messages are never dubbed "a la carte Catholics".

Finishing off with the situation as it stood in 2000, the book also contains an appendix full of statistics regarding Traveller accommodation from the 1960s through to the turn of the millennium.

Although one chapter of the book does deal with the possible origins of Travellers, if there was anything I would have liked to have seen more of it would have been a more thorough description of the Traveller lifestyle and customs.

But all in all it was a very good read, and like any truly good piece on civic life, it also included suggestions on the way forward with constructive changes to be undertaken by both the settled population and Travelling Community.

Due to his long experience, and since it is plain that he is not interested in whitewashing the destructive actions of either the settled community or Travellers, Ó Riain's suggestions perhaps deserve a greater weight.



Roslyn Fuller is the author of political thriller *ISAK*.

More information about the Canadian, her work and the

Irish writers' Exchange can be found at www.irishwriters-exchange.com