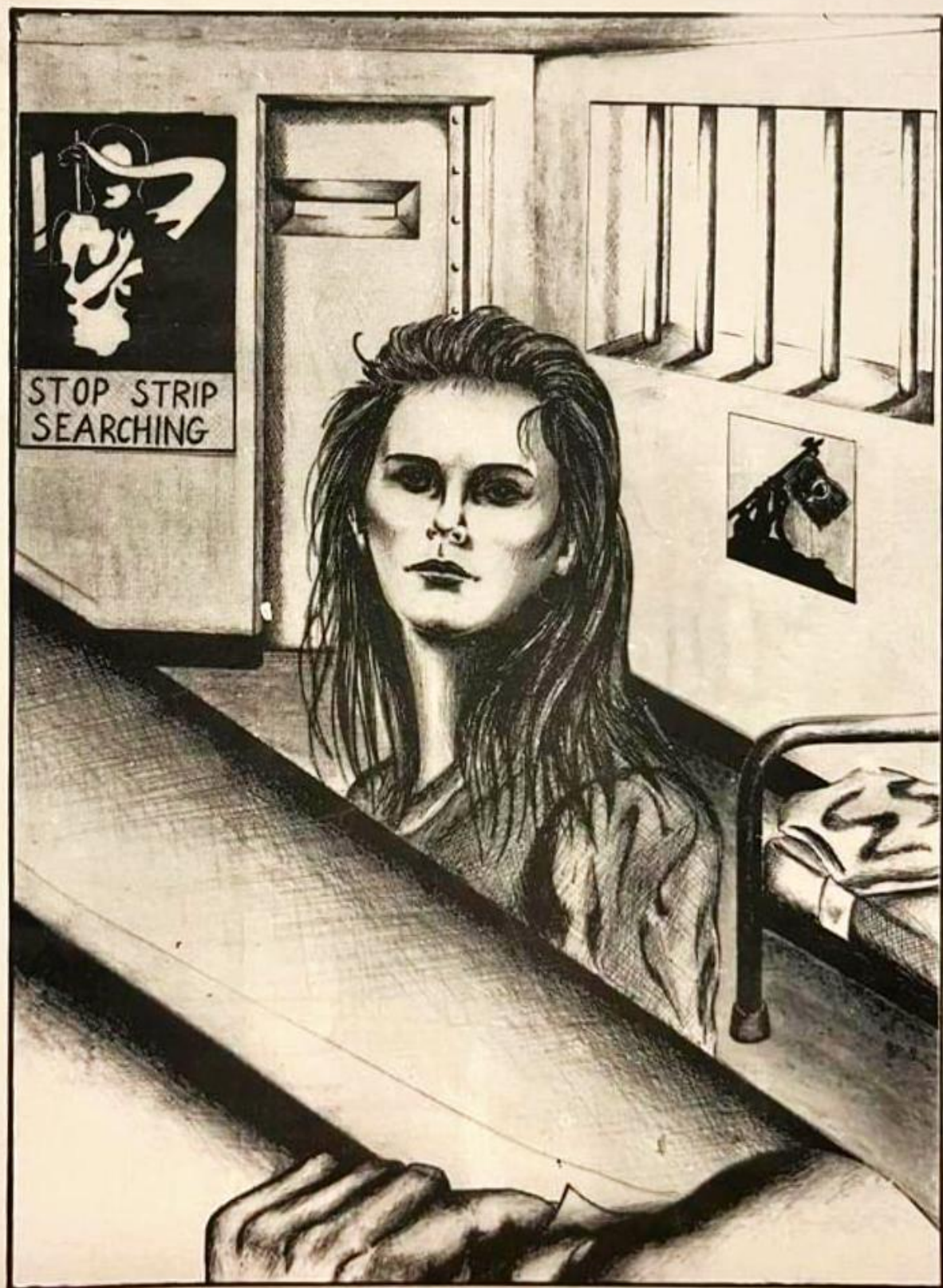


MAGHABERRY FACT FILE



MAGHABERRY FACT FILE

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to further highlight the plight of women Republican prisoners being held at present in Maghaberry prison.

It is hoped that by publishing this booklet people will be made aware of the difficulties and hardships suffered by the prisoners their families and the issues which face women P.O.W. in Maghaberry prison. At present date there are twenty-two women Republican prisoners, eleven on remand and eleven sentenced. Among those sentenced are mothers of young children and the sentences range from three years to twenty-four years and life.

In the last six months in Maghaberry a total of 210 strip-searches were carried out on a small number of women. Women prisoners from the age of 12, pregnant women, menstruating women, grandmothers, women returning from hospital and women being released from prison have all been subjected to the humiliating treatment. Women on remand could be strip-searched twice a week for a period of four or five years.

A recent example is the case of Heather Quinn who is on remand and was strip-searched twice a week for a period of four or five years. She was brought into the prison due to the death of her grandfather. She was brought into the prison on the grounds that she had to collect clothes and was not allowed to see her mother who was in hospital. She was strip-searched twice a week for a period of four or five years. Heather Quinn was strip-searched twice a week for a period of four or five years.

The P.O. have gone to great lengths to ensure that the strip-searching of female prisoners is done in the most humiliating way possible. We hope that the public will be made aware of this and that a campaign will be launched to put an end to this practice. We would like to see the P.O. strip-searching stopped and the women prisoners treated with the same respect and dignity as men.

STRIP-SEARCHING

One of the main issues in Maghaberry at the moment is the use of strip-searching. This is a concerted effort on the part of the prison regime to humiliate and degrade the women prisoners. Strip-searching was introduced in Armagh's women's prison in November 1982 on the pretext of "security" and the "safe custody of inmates".

On March 18th 1986 the women prisoners were moved to a top security prison at Maghaberry at a cost of £30 million with a further £5 million spent on security equipment. Given that so much money has been spent on security it was hoped that the N.I.O. would take the opportunity to abandon the practice. Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich made a public statement calling for an end to this "objectionable" practice. His call went unheeded by the British government when Nicholas Scott announced in April 1986 that strip-searching would continue.

In the first six months in Maghaberry a total of 210 strip-searches were carried out on a small number of women. Women prisoners from the age of 15, pregnant women, menstruating women, grandmothers, women returning from hospital and women being released from prison have all been subjected to this degrading treatment. Women on remand could be strip-searched twice a week for a period as long as two years.

A recent example is the case of Pauline Quinn who is on remand and was strip-searched while returning from a compassionate visit with her family due to the death of her grandfather. She was brought into the reception area on the pretence that she had to collect clothes left into her by her visitors; when she reached reception she was forcibly strip-searched by up to eight prison officers who held her down and forcibly removed her clothing. They then subjected Pauline to a degrading internal body search which consisted of a female M.O. (who is in fact an ordinary prison officer attached to hospital duties) opening Pauline's legs and searching between them and then turning her over to search.

The N.I.O. have gone to great lengths to convince people that the strip-searching of female prisoners has decreased over the years. Are we to take it that the policy has now changed and that a similar situation to that in Armagh prison 1982-83, when women prisoners were held down and strip-searched, now exists in Maghaberry in 1991?

In 1987 the London based 'Stop the Strip Searches Campaign' convened an enquiry by senior psychiatrists into the psychological effects of strip-searching; all seven psychiatrists categorically condemned the practice:

"As members of professions concerned with mental pain we must object most strongly to sexually degrading treatment which we found to evoke reactions specific to rape being inflicted on women in custody who are powerless to resist. Such an insult to humane dignity, with its attendant risks of long term damage, cannot be justified on security grounds."

The campaign believes the findings of this pilot study indicate the need for a full-scale research project. In the meantime, the findings of the current report gave further authority and urgency to the call for an immediate end to all strip-searching.

VISITS

Many of the women in Maghaberry are mothers of young children, some have partners who are in gaol also, with one visit per week it is difficult to maintain family relationships, without privacy it is next to impossible. The visiting area is impersonal and totally lacking in privacy - visits take place in a room with ten tables placed so close together it is hard to speak without being overheard by other visitors and of course several screws.

The screws overseeing the visits are in the middle of the room at a raised table and directly facing a large security mirror which takes in all of the tables! Lately the room has been "redecorated" but this is a meaningless change when the real problem, i.e. lack of privacy, has not been resolved. The artificial surrounding and presence of other visitors and screws are obstacles to natural behaviour and conversation is often kept light-hearted and false because of the reluctance to display any emotions so publicly. It is especially hard in times of illness or bereavement, on couples and mothers of younger children who simply do not understand why they are separated from their parent. As a result relationships can become strained and break down, because normal communication is practically impossible

EDUCATION FACILITIES: MAGHABERRY WOMEN'S PRISON

Education facilities in Maghaberry Women's Prison are abysmal. The focus of prison education is on the male prisoners who have chosen to leave the segregated H-Blocks. This is a politically motivated decision by the N.I.O. and reinforced by the Education Department.

It is obvious to us that the Education Department are uninterested in a gaol full of Republican women, who, for valid reasons, prefer the security of Republican only wings. The head of the Education Department has told the women within the gaol that it would all be so much better in terms of conditions if we would "mix", i.e. integrate, with Loyalist prisoners.

We regard this as a form of blackmail and failure to mix with Loyalists, for quite legitimate reasons, should not be held against us. We were also asked in a quite patronising manner why we wanted all this education anyway! Hardly an attitude one would expect from the "head of the Education Department". Teachers beginning classes are advised "not to order books just in case the class folds".

In fact this advice to teachers is quite astounding when one looks at the level of participation in education and while achievement cannot be measured solely in terms of academic qualifications these have been significant. A few examples to illustrate these include:

1. Women studying for Open University degrees.
2. Women gaining their university certificates in a range of subjects.
3. 'O' and 'A' Level passes in Irish, Sociology, Art, English and History.
4. Women have obtained various levels in typing and cookery examinations.

Added to these, women attend any other classes available at interest level, e.g. handicrafts. However, recently all focus has been shifted to the male side of the prison and women's education has been run down.

Despite the enthusiasm of the women to participate in education, little has been gained in this area. The blame lies with the head of the Education Department.

Other classes have been shelved, a full-time senior teacher attached to the prison has been "put in charge" of the women's education by the head of the department, i.e. to take it out of his hands.

This person's attitude is appalling, as a result of the current situation within the prison the women are extremely dissatisfied.

Recently all evening classes were "suspended" due to "staff shortages". These classes took place between 6 pm and 8 pm and there was a varied programme.

After continuous complaints by the P.O.W.s it was finally stated that evening classes would no longer be available. This meant that approximately 50% of the education facilities had been cancelled and women who had been following courses were left without teachers mid-course.

The P.O.W.s immediately began to make representations to the administration, Education Department and the N.I.O., this went on for several months with the N.I.O. refusing to provide staff that would enable the education building to open in the evenings. Eventually it was decided to open the building in the afternoons and transfer the evening classes to these slots.

However, this was insufficient as most of the teachers had other day-time commitments and the new arrangements did not suit, so these teachers were lost. It then took several months to recruit new teachers to take their place and have them "cleared by security". At the end of this process the range of subjects on offer has again expanded but classes have been cut by half an hour officially; and by a further 15-20 minutes, i.e. the time women spend on the wing waiting for a screw to escort them to classes is taken into account.

Any advances made in the area of education have not been made easily. The women have faced opposition from the Education Department within the gaol as well as constraints imposed by the N.I.O.

Despite these obstacles the P.O.W.s are as innovative as ever and conduct their own education on a more informal level.

The P.O.W.s organise ranganas (classes) during association time on the wings. These are in the form of discussion groups which most people participate in. On set nights Irish classes, which are immensely popular, take place with the resident muinteior (teacher) who, using as much conversation and as few books as possible, endeavours to turn out as many Irish speakers as she can!

Another ranganna loosely titled "Politics" takes place on topical issues as well as current affairs. Another regular get-together provides a forum for discussion among the P.O.W.s about happenings within the gaol and gives everyone an opportunity to discuss ideas. We believe that discussions and the pooling of ideas and knowledge in this way is an excellent way to educate and raise awareness among P.O.W.s.

CENSORSHIP

Within the last couple of years censorship has greatly increased with all items of political and feminist content subject to special scrutiny. Long delays occur and often it is a year or more before literature is allowed or forbidden. The clearance procedure is slow and material passes through several departments as no-one appears capable of making a simple decision. Local newspapers are frequently held back in an attempt to cut us off from the issues affecting our communities. This contrasts sharply with pornographic magazines which flow unhindered through the censors to some male prisoners.

Apparently the N.I.O. object to politicised women while approving and even encouraging the sub-ordination and degradation of women through pornography and strip-searching.

THE ISSUE OF LIFE SENTENCES

In theory, a life/S.O.S.P. prisoner is released "on merit" through the "Life Sentence Review Board" (L.S.R.B.).

In practice, however, these boards have become nothing more than fronts for the political manipulations of the "Northern Ireland Office" (N.I.O.).

All life and S.O.S.P. prisoners, whether Republican or Loyalist, can suffer at the hands of these boards, but because of the political nature of this "statelet".

At present there are some 365 political life and S.O.S.P. prisoners in the North of Ireland and England. Of these 150 are Republican P.O.W.s, inclusive are five women - Mary McArdle, Pat and Anna Moore; Ella O'Dwyer and Martina Anderson are in Durham Jail, England.

All were subjected to "special" laws, "special" interrogation procedures and techniques, and "special" courts.

Altogether the 150 Republican life and S.O.S.P. prisoners in England and Ireland, have between them served almost 2,000 years in prison.

The vast majority have served over ten years, with some now into their 19th year of imprisonment.

Since Christmas 1988 the N.I.O. has initiated a series of twice yearly paroles in a cosmetic effort to defuse mounting public and political criticism of the review board system.

Some life/S.O.S.P. prisoners have been released six times on parole, yet without any prospect of securing a permanent release date. This begs the question, if these prisoners are not deemed to be a "danger to society" while out on parole, why then can they not be released permanently?

At the present rate of releases (approximately 15-20 per year) it will take approximately another 25 years before those now serving life or S.O.S.P. will be released.

In stark contrast to the above is the fact that the only member of the British Army here to be sentenced to life (Pte Ian Thain), served only two years.

These facts, particularly the manner of the release of Pte Ian Thain, show clearly the degree of political manipulation involved in the release of continued imprisonment of life S.O.S.P. prisoners.

This will end only with the implementation of the six proposals put forward by the Campaign for Lifers:

- (1) The scrapping of "indeterminate sentences".
- (2) All prisoners should have the right to legal representation at a Review Board hearing.
- (3) If a life S.O.S.P. prisoner is put "back" she or he should be informed of the reasons why he or she was put back.
- (4) An objective criteria for release should be made known to all life S.O.S.P. prisoners.
- (5) All "reports" should be open to challenge by the prisoner involved.
- (6) A prisoner should be informed of the names of the people sitting on the "review" of his/her case.

CHANGE IN REMISSION

In April 1989, remission on sentences changed from 50% to two thirds meaning, for example, anyone sentenced to 10 years instead of serving 5 years would now serve 7 years.

In January and February 1991, Marie Wright was sentenced to 24 years and Rosaleen McCorley to 22 years. Marie will serve 16 years, Rosie 14 years and 8 months. In effect these two women will probably spend more time in prison serving a fixed determinate sentence than they would if they had been sentenced to an indeterminate life sentence.

The N.I.O. have consistently denied such prisoners serving long sentences adequate time on parole to be with dying relatives, or in cases where it is granted the time given to spend with dying relatives is inadequate. The most a prisoner can expect is a 6 hour parole to attend a loved one's funeral. The courts also practice an equally inhuman procedure of compassionate bail for remand prisoners as was evident in the case of Marie Wright. Marie's father died just before she was sentenced, she was refused "compassionate" bail to see her dying father but was granted "compassionate" bail for his funeral. Many prisoners have lost one or both parents while serving long sentences.

MEDICAL FACILITIES IN MAGHABERRY

On the 11th of July 1991, Louise Docherty, a Republican prisoner in Maghaberry jail took severe stomach pains. An M.O. (Medical Officer) was sent for and this person gave Louise pain-killers. As they had no effect on the pain, she asked for a doctor. An M.O. arrived again and examined her stomach, she left stating that she did not think that a doctor was needed. After further attacks of severe pain Louise again asked for a doctor. This time he was sent for; he arrived at approximately 7.30 pm (3 hours after she had sent for him). His first examination revealed a tender area and he feared that the problem might be gall-stones. The doctor told the M.O. that she should have discovered it sooner, at his request Louise was transferred to the R.V.H.

On arrival she was examined by a doctor there. She told him about the fact that she had been to see the prison doctor a few days previous complaining of nausea and he had put it down to menstrual problems.

Her treatment by the medical staff at the R.V.H. was excellent. However, during her two night stay in the hospital while under guard by prison warders and R.U.C. men she suffered constant harassment and intimidation from the R.U.C. They seemed determined to make her stay as uncomfortable and as unpleasant as possible despite her illness.

They amused themselves by keeping their T.V. turned up full volume to make sleep almost impossible. They banged on the outside of the wall and when Louise wanted to take a bath they made comments about wanting to use the toilet, which made her feel that they would walk in while she was in the bath. The R.U.C. persisted in making humiliating and degrading remarks throughout her stay. At one point an R.U.C. man pointed his loaded rifle at Louise's head calling her a "Provie bastard".

Before returning to Maghaberry, Louise was taken to Grosvenor Road Police Station in a jeep and further verbally abused. She may have to return to hospital - a daunting prospect considering her treatment at the hands of the R.U.C.

ISSUED BY
THE SINN FEIN P.O.W.
DEPT.