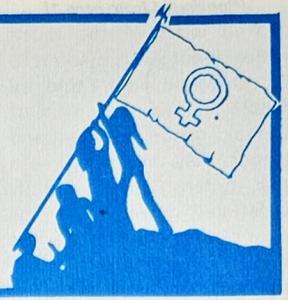




A WOMAN'S VOICE

Jan/Feb 1989

Uimhir 4



European for poverty

Extract from paper presented to the Sinn Féin Women's Conference by Ursula Barry, economist and author

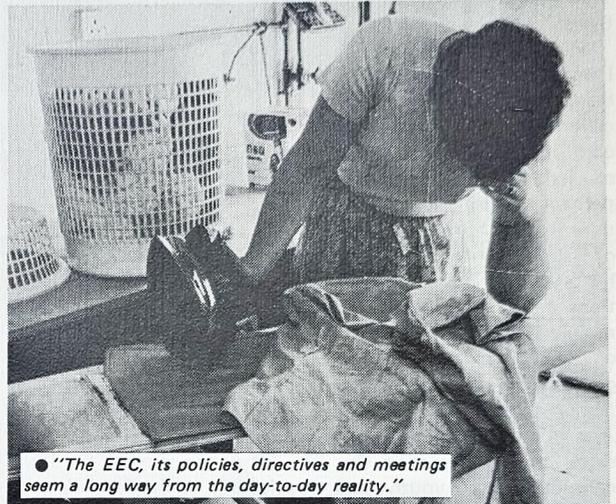
ON FIRST THOUGHT, it might appear as if membership of the EEC has been to the advantage of women in this country, given the equality legislation which came into force in the mid-Seventies. No Irish government would have been in any rush to place such reforms on the statute books.

Certainly, a minority of women workers have succeeded in improving their work situation by using this legislation and I don't think we should feel anyway contradictory in stating that fact. But it must also be pointed out that over the 15 years since the state joined the EEC the dependent economic position of women has become even more marked.

There has been less than a 2% increase in the proportions of women in paid employment while the scale of dependence on welfare, particularly among women with children, has escalated. Now tens of thousands of women are subjected to regular harassment from the constant fear of the welfare policing system. No EEC directives have or will improve the appallingly low level of payments nor can they force state welfare systems to treat women as independent claimants with an inalienable right to privacy.

Women, in traditional style, attempt to breathe life into lives and homes which suffer the consequences of economic devastation: urging children through the educational system, facing the inevitable push towards emigration, con-

stantly negotiating with state agencies, managing miserable incomes, taking on low-paid and precarious work, rebuilding morale while often on the receiving end of the pent-up anger and violence which such a society breeds. The EEC, its policies, directives, meetings and bureaucracies seem a long way from the day to day reality. And yet



● "The EEC, its policies, directives and meetings seem a long way from the day-to-day reality."

our economic and political futures are being determined, not in every way but in critical ways, by the machinations

of that powerful alliance, that Western political and economic power bloc that is the EEC.

(Continued on page 2)

Sinn Féin EEC candidate for Dublin

ANN SPEED is 38 years of age, a mother and a full time Branch Official with the No. 3 Branch of the ITGWU, and a member of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions. She has been involved in Sinn Féin for the past two years.

Anne has been a committed political activist and participated in the women's movement over the past 15 years. During that time she was involved in Irish Women United, Contraception Action Programme, the H-Block/Armagh campaign, the Anti-Amendment campaign, the campaign against the Single European Act and is currently involved in the Anti-Extradition campaign.



She is also involved in a campaign in Cabra fighting against the cutbacks, which has led to, among other things, the threatened closure of a local playground. In her trade union work she has witnessed the erosion of

indigenous Irish industry, particularly in the food and drinks sector, as a result of EEC membership, and is concerned that this will be exacerbated with the inception of the Single European Market in 1992.

Sinn Féin says:

The only long-term solution for the Irish economy is withdrawal from the EEC. This, along with the removal of the British presence in the North, will help us regain control over our own economy. Plenty can be done in the meantime however. We need public representatives who will stand up to the EEC and the government on the rulings which are especially harmful.

(Continued from page 1)

And what of the much talked about single market, to be completed, we are told, by 1992? The free movement of capital, goods, services and labour, they define it as — in that order. Capital, and its unfettered movement, is the clear priority. And the services they are concerned with are financial, not female. There is no evidence that the rulings by the courts in this state which have denied women access to information on abortion services outside the state will no longer apply in this so-called single market.

Right across the EEC, immigration controls are being strengthened systematically to ensure that each state controls the colour and class of its mobile labour. But perhaps the deepest irony for us is that we have had our fill of labour mobility through history. Were not the plantations a supreme example of mobile labour? Dispossession of the land and famine-generated mass movement of labour in the last century. And in every decade but one since then, emigration has consumed our youth and creativity.

If this single market was designed to achieve a decent minimum income or an acceptable basic wage or the right to a high standard of health,



housing, welfare and education — then perhaps we could welcome it, despite the issue of sovereignty. But it means none of these things.

It does not mean the Irish prisoners in English jails will have the right to repatriation.

It will not mean that the Brits can no longer issue exclusion orders to those it claims as its own citizens.

It will not mean that the

British will dismantle their war machine from the border.

It will not even mean that you can claim your unemployment assistance in Belgium or your deserted wives allowance in Italy or get a divorce in West Germany.

It will mean that this island becomes locked into an aggressive political and military alliance in Europe, no longer able to present itself

as 'neutral' or 'non-aligned' in the international arena.

It will mean that mobile counter-insurgency squads à la Gibraltar can operate on a routine basis.

It will mean that our currency, our tax system, our production system and our resources will be regulated in the interests of the developed economies of the EEC.

STATEMENT FROM THE POLITICAL

WOMEN PRISONERS OF MAGHABERRY

SINCE the closure of Armagh Jail in 1986 and the transfer of the women there to Maghaberry Prison little has changed. While it cannot be denied that living conditions have improved compared to those in the archaic Armagh Jail, repressive policies such as strip-searching remain.

The strip-searching of women prisoners, especially while on remand, has continued since it was introduced in 1982. It has now become widely accepted by organisations such as NCCL and various others that strip-searches have no security value, as the NIO claim, yet they continue to be used. Strip-

searching is as it has always been — a weapon used against republican women in an effort to intimidate and humiliate them.

Strip-searches are carried out when women are entering or leaving the jail to attend court or for any other reason. Women are forced to strip naked and have their bodies

visually inspected by screws and their clothes searched. Girls as young as 15 and women aged 70 have been subjected to this humiliation; no exceptions are made. Women are strip-searched while pregnant and during menstruation which adds to the embarrassment of an already traumatic experience.

One young woman was strip-searched just a few hours after suffering a miscarriage even though she was very obviously in a highly distressed state. The unnecessary use of strip-searching

highlights the attitude of the jail administration to the women in Maghaberry.

NO CONTACT

In recent years the number of republican women here has declined and now each wing holds only a few women. At present there are three awaiting trial who have no contact with the rest of the jail except once a week when at Mass. Those who are sentenced are split into a few small groups and are held on different wings. Despite the dramatic decrease in our numbers (in Armagh there were 30 on A Wing compared to four or five in Maghaberry). The administration have persistently refused inter-wing association even though there



● Participants at the Sinn Fein Women's Conference

Sinn Fein Women's Conference

LAST NOVEMBER Sinn Fein held its first women's conference, open to the public, in Dublin. The agenda for the day was divided into three sessions.

The first session dealt with the issues facing rural and urban women in Ireland and the effect partition and the unresolved national question has on women on both sides of the border. It was an opportunity for the public to hear elected councillors speak. Because of state censorship these councillors are denied access to radio and television.

In the second session women discussed the European Economic Comm-

unity and what effect membership of that community has on women in Ireland. Ursula Barry, economist and author, said in her paper 'Women and the EEC':

"In both parts of the island, partition has meant the entrenchment of a formidable alliance of right wing-forces both inside and outside the institutional churches, resisting all progressive democratic change.... Reforms which have come through the EEC are cosmetic, not because they are superficial, but because they can serve to hide the true nature of the European Community. Hardly a community of peoples — primarily a

means of increasing the efficiency and power of the capitalist system within Western Europe."

MAGHABERRY

In the third session Pauline Quinn who has recently been released from Maghaberry Jail spoke about conditions in the jail. She spoke about censorship, strip-searching and the effects of imprisonment on relatives. Sinn Fein Derry city councillor Dodie McGuinness spoke about the isolation and harassment suffered by republican women in English jails.

The conference finished with a performance by Frontline theatre of their magnificent play *Inside Out*.

This issue of *A Woman's Voice* includes some of the presentations made at the November conference.

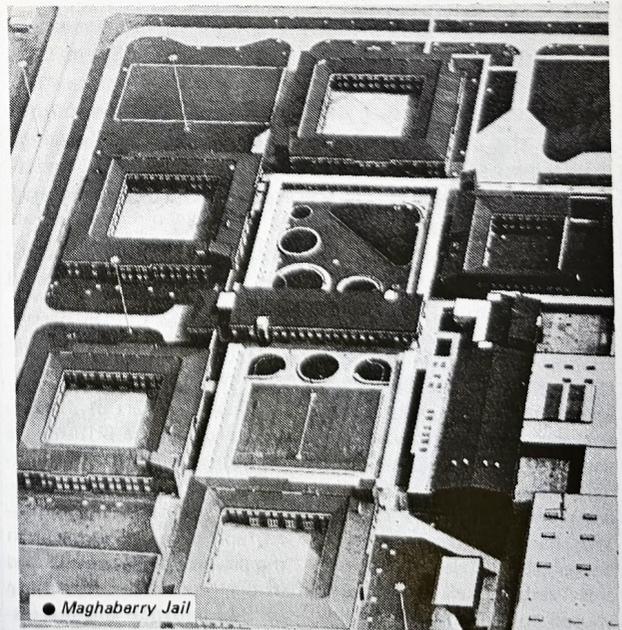
are no reasonable grounds on which to do so. It would not mean large numbers gathering together; at the most nine instead of four or five being able to associate in the evenings.

This continuous isolation of small numbers of republican women coupled with increased censorship points to the administration's determination to try and isolate and alienate us both from each other and issues which affect our people on the outside.

Lately we have seen a dramatic increase in censorship with the majority of reading material being sent to the NIO for approval as soon as it arrives in the jail. This happens even though there are a number of censors

here in Maghaberry. Repeated enquiries have failed to get answers as to why books, papers and magazines still haven't returned from the NIO several months later, while other papers are banned altogether.

The heavy censorship of reading material of an educational/political nature is in stark contrast with pornographic magazines which are allowed to flow unhindered into male prisons. Apparently the NIO, while seeing nothing wrong with the degradation of women through pornography and strip-searching, perceive a major threat from politicised women. As a direct result of the latest censorship drive we are left with reading material of a very low standard.



● Maghaberry Jail



THE ROLE OF SINN FEIN WOMEN COUNCILLORS

BY LILY FITZSIMONS & THERESA HOLLAND

AS SINN FEIN WOMEN COUNCILLORS we deal with a wide range of issues, all of which affect women to a greater or lesser degree. In our work we come across the usual day-to-day problems of bad housing, homelessness, inadequate health facilities, anti-social problems such as joy-riding, severe poverty and physical and sexual abuse.

As well as severe poverty and deprivation inflicted by successive British imposed cut-backs and social and economic neglect in the Six Counties, women living in working class nationalist areas live in a British colony and therefore are subjected to daily harassment from British army and RUC crown forces. This harassment ranges from being stopped in the street and verbally or physically abused to having your home wrecked during house searches (kitchen floor dug up,

holes knocked in walls) to being arrested and interrogated or even imprisoned.

HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

Since the start of the present struggle, the British have used their emergency legislation to prevent people protesting against British-imposed repression and injustice in the prisons, on the streets and in our homes. It was because of this injustice and repression that women from all parts of the Six Counties org-



● LILY FITZSIMMONS

anised within their local communities. There has always been a loose network of women in each area who not only had a supportive role but also were at the forefront of campaigns. During the Relatives Action Committee campaigns, many women were arrested and sub-



● THERESA HOLLAND

jected to obscene verbal and physical abuse and some of these women were even imprisoned.

In 1976 a group of women from Belfast, mostly mothers with sons or daughters in the H-Blocks or Armagh Jail, went to London and chained themselves to the railings at



the damage inflicted by crown

Downing Street and handed in a letter of protest at the ending of political status and the introduction of Merlin Rees' criminalisation policy. They were arrested and deported back to Belfast under the PTA. Women who are interrogated by the RUC are threatened and told that their children will be taken from them and placed in care.

PRISONERS' WIVES AND FAMILIES

In our role as Sinn Fein councillors we also work and give back-up support to wives or partners and families of prisoners, particularly long-term prisoners, whose lives are now arranged around visits, parcels, letters. If the woman is unemployed or has a young family to look after we help with housing and social security benefits, ensuring that she claims any benefits that she and her family are entitled to.

We also ensure that mothers with young children are aware of child-minding facilities while she visits her husband in prison. Some couples find it hard to cope when their partner is released after serving a long prison sentence, especially if the man has problems adjusting to living again within the family unit and finds it difficult

relating to his wife and children in a day-to-day situation. The wife may have been very young and fully dependent on her husband before he went into prison and he now comes home and discovers that his wife, because she had to cope on her own for so long, is no longer totally dependent on him. It is at this crucial time that the councillors have an important role in supporting the couple with help and advice relating to whatever problems develop in such a situation.

Besides confronting issues that relate to the British occupation, as Sinn Fein councillors we deal with the everyday problems of bad housing, homelessness, unemployment and other problems not only through the advice centres or the council, but by women getting together on a street-by-street basis to fight for play facilities, street lighting repairs or to challenge future plans for our areas.

ABUSE AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Violence against women is a world-wide problem and calls for community support and sympathetic and practical help. In the Six Counties there is the added problem that women face from British state repression and so it follows that these women will not turn to the same state for help. What we usually do in such a situation is advise the women to get a relative to stay with her or vice-versa and to seek legal advice. We offer as much help and support as possible.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women's health is an important issue and the British government's vicious campaign of cut-backs has had a devastating effect on women and their families' health. Wherever possible we initiate campaigns such as the cervical cancer campaign, campaigns against health service cut-backs, cuts in child benefits, call for more and better medical and hospital facilities and adequate health care to be made available to everyone.

"The real women in struggle"

A MHNA UAISLE, ta me nios compordaigh ag déanamh mo chuid obair mar chomhairleoir ná bheith anseo ag iarraidh labhairt libh ón síochán seo, ach deanfaidh mé mo dhícheall.

I speak to you from my knowledge and experience as a Sinn Fein Councillor in the border county of Monaghan. Monaghan town is a small town of approximately 7,000. A lot of these people if asked about rural women would not think of themselves in that context.

The first thing that comes to mind whenever women's issues are debated is the word "equality". From where I stand I see too much equality, equality of poverty, equality of oppression, equality of harassment.

Hardly a day passes but I find myself dealing with people — and women always seem chosen to carry the burden — who are just living from day to day and from one problem to another. They live in a continuous nightmare of helplessness. These are the people who really know all about the cut-backs. I hear the phrase — Women in Struggle — these are the real women in struggle.

Mothers of young children find there is no longer free dental treatment; long waiting lists of up to two years for any kind of medical treatment requiring hospitalisation. Only in the case of emergency are those services available. In other words only if a life is threatened will they be treated. If they somehow manage to scrape together enough money to pay for the service all these delays disappear as if by magic. **This is where the real inequality lies.**

In many areas all this poverty becomes manifest in unpaid ESB bills, unpaid rent and underfed families.

DEGRADING

Mothers are forever being confronted with the problem



by PADRAIGIN
Uí MHURCHADHA

of paying for school-books for their children plus demands for this and that extra for the school itself. It is degrading on both the mother and child to have to opt for charity, however well meaning, to support their children's education. They have to endure these things in the sure and certain knowledge that they are rearing and educating their children for the emigrant ship.

On the question of housing, young married and single parent women could tell many harrowing stories. They know and they have now come to accept that they are going to wait years for any kind of local authority house. Many purposely endure an existence in unfit hovels in order to achieve points on the housing list.

For those women who cross the border in my area, the abuse and the harassment some of these women endure is unbelievable. If they are stopped by the British army they will know that being a woman brings no privileges. They are often verbally and physically abused and might be excused for wondering if being an Irishwoman carried extra penalties.

Women & Poverty in the EEC

WOMEN from all the EEC countries, including a group of nine from Ireland, met last November in Brussels to take part in a tribunal on women's poverty. They gave remarkable evidence of the extent of poverty in their lives.

They first asserted that poverty cannot be defined as merely not having enough to live on. It has to do with the lack of proper housing, employment and childcare facilities.

One woman, from Portugal, spoke about how she and her three children live in one room in a wooden hut. Along with 20,000 other families, they have only had water in their homes for three months. They still have no electricity.

At school her children and the children of the other families are not called by their proper names but by the names of the ghetto they come from.

Portuguese women are often forced into drugs and prostitution to survive.

Women from Greece spoke

of how the equality legislation which now exists has been used against them. For example, it was agreed that women from the age of 21 could work in the public sector. Men, who have to do two years service in the army until they are 23, protested, and women cannot now work in the public sector until they are 23 years old.

TRAVELLERS

The position of minority groups throughout the EEC was highlighted. Nell McDonagh from Ireland spoke of the position of travelling women. Travellers were at the bottom of the pile when it came to poverty, she said, and travelling women have to live in a society that refuses

to accept them as human beings.

There was therefore a double discrimination against them, she pointed out: First for being a woman and second for being a travelling woman.

The death rate of babies born to travellers is seven times higher than that of babies born into a settled family. Also, 35.2% of travelling children under 15 years die each year because of the poor conditions they live in.

In Greece, Turkish women and their families live in camps. The government will not allow them to be taught the Greek language, but forces them to learn other languages so they can live somewhere else.

DIVORCE

Although women in all EEC countries except Ireland have divorce — most women who do get divorced find themselves living in poverty. They are penalised by society because they have decided to rear children alone.

In Holland the position of illegal immigrants, especially black women, was outlined. Because they are illegal they live in fear and cannot speak out against their conditions. Because they cannot claim state support they are forced to work for low wages, exploited and abused.



One elderly woman from Holland publicly exposed the myth that poverty did not exist in her country. The Dutch prime minister has often boasted this, she said, but she herself was living in dire poverty and because she could not afford her rent she



FORAM NA mBAN

(Grúpa Mná Gaeltachta)

IS GRÚPA BAN muid a bunaíodh i mí Eanáir 1986. Níl aon bhaint againn le páirtithe polaitíochta agus táimid lonnaithe i nGaeltacht Chiarraí. Tá an chuid is mó dár mbaill san aois ghrúpa 25-45, agus máithreacha a bhformhór. Daoine pósta is mó atá ag maireachtaint anseo — tá na daoine óga ar fad imithe ar imirce. Tá 25 ball againn — dream maith do áit mar an áit seo.

Thángamar le chéile chun an fadhanna

a bhaineann lenár ndúthaigh a phlé. Go dtí seo bhí dhá choiste gnó againn — ceann acu a dhein staidéar ar sheirbhí sláinte do mhná in Iarthar Chiarraí agus an ceann eile a dhein an-chuid oibre ar an slí ab fhearr do Raidió na Gaeltachta a gcuid ama breise craolacháin a chuir chun tairbhe. Tháinig an ceannaire aitiúil do Raidió na Gaeltachta, Aogán O Muircheartaigh, agus an Dochtúir T. Jackson chugainn chun ár gcuid moltaí a chlos.

Buailimid le chéile gach tré seachtain in Óstán Ghranbhéil, Baile an Fheirtéaraigh. Tá scata cainteoirí tagtha chug-

ainn go raibh suim ag ár mbaill iad a chlos. Faighimid cabhair airgid ó Udarás na Gaeltachta chun na cainteoirí seo a thabhairt go dtí an ceantar.

San am atá rómhainn tá súil againn ár cheannairí agus ár bpolaiteoirí a cheistú ar phleananna agus polasaithe a bhaineann lenár saol. Gan eagaríocht ban, tá scata mná ná cloisfí a nguth go deo.

Teagmháil le:
Frances Uí Chinnéide,
Baile Bhiocáire,
Dún Chaoin,
Contae Chiarraí.



● The single market will not improve the living conditions of women — it will, however, undermine our neutrality and 'regulate' our economy in the interests of big business

faced eviction when she returned home after the tribunal.

The common experiences of all the women were inadequate incomes — either from

the state or from low-paid employment — lack of jobs, training and childcare, and bad housing. There was also illiteracy, a lack of proper health care and the expecta-



tion that women could work as unpaid carers.

DEMANDS

The 170 women made demands on behalf of all women living in poverty throughout the EEC:

- Poverty should be made visible by data on every aspect of life in the EEC and in each member state.

- Comprehensive and strong EEC directives should be passed on temporary and part-time work to ensure employment protection legislation covers all workers regardless of hours of work.

- An EEC Charter of Social Rights to cover a wide range of legal guarantees to combat poverty, and ensure legal and social status.

MOTHER IRELAND

A 52-MINUTE video documentary produced by Derry Film & Video, 1988.

Mother Ireland explores the development and use of images and music which personify Ireland as a woman in Irish culture and nationalism.

We highlight how these cultivated and stereotyped images of Ireland as a woman influence the idealised model of womanhood demanded by Irish society e.g. the archetypal Irish colleen or the devoted mother.

Women, with very few exceptions, have been written out of the national struggle in Ireland. We talk to many women, young and old republican women who fought for Mother Ireland, an historian dealing with the role of women in the nationalist struggle in

Ireland and several Irish women who apply a strong feminist perspective to their lives and work.

With historical film, photographs, political drawings, cartoons and music we discover the unrecorded role of women in Irish history and we present realistic images of Irish women today.

Mother Ireland is available from:

Derry Film & Video,

1 Westend Park,

Derry BT48 9JF.

or

Republican Publications,

51/55 Falls Road,

Belfast.

or

44 Parnell Square,

Dublin 1.

Price £30.



"Living in Belfast was a political education in itself. Living on the Falls Road I saw internment and the British soldiers. At that time we were protesting about internment. And when the Brits came into the area we would be out banging bin lids and that in itself made you aware, that I have to do something here, that this just isn't right."

— Volunteer Mairead Farrell, executed along with her comrades Dan McCann and Sean Savage by SAS assassins in Gibraltar on March 6th 1988.

Support & Advice for Women

Women's Centres and Groups

DUBLIN

11 Sillogue Road,
Ballymun,
Coolock Law Centre,
Northside Shopping Centre,
Coolock.
Council for the Status of
Women

64 Lr. Mount Street,
(01) 611791

Dublin 2.

Finglas Writing Group
c/o Mary McCamley,
10 Glasanaon Park,
Finglas East.

Irish Council for Civil Liber-
ties

Women's Group,
4 Nassau Street,
Dublin 2.

Minceir Misli Women's Section
c/o Nan Joyce,
17 Beresford Place,
Dublin 1,
(01) 732802

Women and Aids Group
c/o Aids Action Alliance
P.O. Box 184,
Sherriff Street,
Dublin 1.

(01) 307888

Loughlinstown Women's
Group

3 Glenavan Park,
Ballybrack,
Co. Dublin

Tallaght Women's Group,
Tallaght Information Office,
Dublin County Council,
Main Road,
Dublin 24.

Women's Community Centre
47 South Richmond Street,
Dublin 2.

(01) 782848

CORK

Cork Federation of Women's
Organisations,

Winnipeg Ballea Road,
Carrigaline,
Co. Cork

(021) 372134/275918

Clonakilty Women's Group,
Ballinaglanna North,
Clonakilty,
Co. Cork.

Cork Women's Centre
24 Sullivan's Quay,
(021) 317660

GALWAY

Galway Women's Group
6 Sylvan Avenue.



Fairlands,
Galway.

(091) 24513

Women's Drop-In Centre
c/o Unemployed Centre,
19 Upper Dominick Street,
Galway.
Friday night 8-10pm.

CLARE

Ennis Women's Group
78 Cahercalla Estate,
Ennis,
Co. Clare.

(065) 24035

East Clare Women's Group
c/o Helen Browne,
Doolin,
Co. Clare.

KILKENNY

Kilkenny Women's Group
c/o SSC Waterford Road,
Kilkenny,
(056) 21685

LIMERICK

Limerick Federation of
Women's Organisations
1 Vernon Villas,
O'Connell Avenue,
Limerick.
(061) 312808

KERRY

Forum na mBan.

Baile an Fheirtearaigh,
Tra Li,
Co. Chiarrai,
(066) 56168

DERRY

Dove House,
32 Dove Garden's
Derry,
(0504) 269327

BELFAST

Falls Women's Centre
170A Falls Road,
Belfast 12.
(084) 227672

TIPPERARY

Clonmel Women's Group,
c/o Karen O'Connor,
(052) 24562

CRISIS LINES/SERVICES

Rape Crisis Centre
Belfast (084) 249696
Cork (021) 968086
Dublin (01) 614911
Galway (091) 64983
Letterkenny (074) 23067
Limerick (061) 311511
Waterford (051) 73362

REFUGES/SHELTERS

Bangor (080247) 463608
Belfast (084) 662385/662348
Coleraine (080265) 823195
Cork (021) 509800

Derry (0504) 273164/26596

Dublin (091) 63581

Limerick (061) 42345

Newry (080693) 67174

BIRTH CONTROL DUBLIN

Family Planning Centre
(01) 767852
(01) 744133

Well Woman Centre
(01) 605517

Cork Planning Clinic
(021) 502906

Galway Planning Clinic
(091) 62992

Limerick Planning Clinic
(061) 312026

Social Welfare Administrative
Offices

Gandon House,
Amiens Street,
Dublin 1.

726333/726673

Services include
Maternity Benefit

Oisín House,
212-213 Pearse Street,
Dublin 2.
711911

Services

Children's Allowance
Phibsboro Tower,
Phibsboro Road,
Dublin 7.
300922

Servies include
Deserted wives,
Unmarried mothers,
Prisoners wives
Allowances

LEGAL AID AIM

66 Lr Mount Street,
Dublin 4.

(01) 606766
Monday-Friday
10am-12 noon
Service

Support, legal information
and referrals for people with
marital breakdown problems.
No charge.

SINN FEIN WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT

44 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1
(01) 726100/726932