

H-BLOCK ARMAGH BULLETIN

Issued weekly by the
London H-Block/Armagh
Committee

No. 8

Friday July 24th

5p

THE PRISONERS' DEMANDS: THE RIGHT NOT TO WEAR PRISON UNIFORM * THE RIGHT NOT TO DO PRISON WORK * THE RIGHT OF FREE ASSOCIATION WITH OTHER PRISONERS * THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE THEIR OWN EDUCATIONAL AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND TO RECEIVE ONE VISIT, ONE LETTER AND ONE PARCEL PER WEEK * FULL REMISSION OF SENTENCE.

TERRIBLE TOLL



As we go to press, Kieran Doherty and Kevin Lynch are in an extremely weak state in Long Kesh, and liable to die at any moment. Kieran Doherty's condition is described as very very weak, and though conscious he is barely able to speak. Kevin Lynch's family have said that he is "sinking lower". Both men could slip into a coma at any time. Today (Thursday) Kieran will have been without food for 63 days and Kevin 62 days.

As they have done immediately before the deaths of previous hunger strikers, the Government is trying to deflect international pressure by making false "initiatives" to end the hunger strike. The latest was on Monday night when Alfie Doherty (father of Kieran) was told by the prison governor that two N.I.O. officials were arriving at the request of Kieran and Kevin. Mr. Doherty checked with his son, who told him that he had made no such request. The officials began talking to Mr. Doherty, who told them to

speak to the hunger strikers directly in the presence of their representative Brendan McFarlane.

Mr Doherty continued: "They (the officials) said that they would not speak to the prisoners with Brendan McFarlane there. We told them that Kieran was weak and not to disturb him. They then left and went to see the hunger-strikers. They woke them up and were told by them that unless Brendan McFarlane was there they would not speak to them.

"Myself and my family are very annoyed . . . We are not exactly sure of the intentions of the various people involved in arranging the meeting and those from the N.I.O., but we don't think it was in the prisoners' interests."

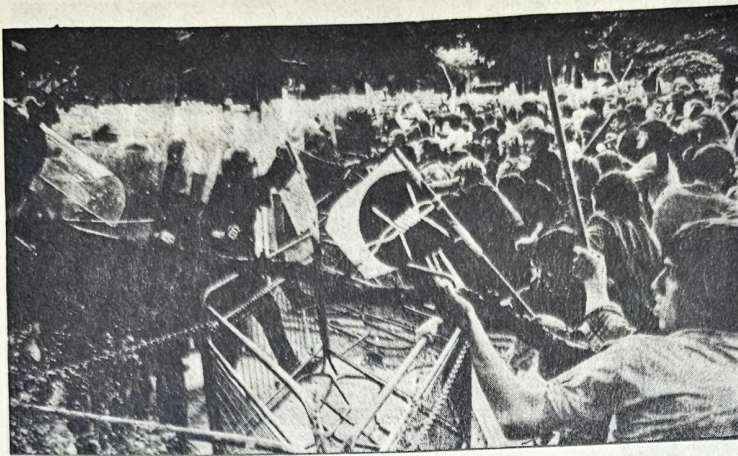
It is obvious that the government is again trying to hoodwink the prisoners. By insisting that the hunger strikers who are obviously in an extremely weak condition should be woken in the middle of the night to hear the views of the N.I.O. officials without the presence of their representative, the government clearly hopes to use the impending deaths to pressurise the prisoners into accepting another false "agreement".

Despite Garret Fitzgerald's statement that he will not involve himself further in the negotiations, the whole issue is still firmly at the centre of Irish politics. Paddy Agnew, who is the other H-Block prisoner holding a seat in the Dail, says he will resign if Kieran Doherty dies. This would bring about two bye-elections which the opposition party (Fianna Fail) would almost certainly win, giving them a majority in the Dail (Ireland's parliament) and bringing down the present government.

The hunger strike is becoming central to parliamentary politics in Britain too, with the announcement that Dafyd Thomas, Plaid Cymru MP, will move the writ for the Fermanagh/South Tyrone bye-election. This could result in Bobby Sands' election agent Owen Carron being elected MP. There have also been significant movements within the Labour Party, notably the use by Ken Livingstone of his position as Leader of the world's largest local authority to promote the prisoners' cause and the many motions at this year's Labour Party conference.

In the Irish community here in Britain there are growing signs of anger at the government. In Coventry an Irishman has begun a hunger strike in sympathy with the prisoners. However, while pressure continues to grow in Ireland, Britain and across the world, more hunger strikers are dying. The Thatcher government has shown on other issues that it is impervious to reason, and will do a U-turn only under great pressure. There is an urgent need for far more active support for the hunger strikers in this country. Sympathy alone will save no lives — but action could. Break Thatcher's intransigence. Force the government to implement the prisoners' five demands.

NATIONAL
DEMONSTRATION
IN LEEDS
for the five demands
ASSEMBLE 1pm POTTERNEWTON
PARK, HAREHILLS AVE., LEEDS 7
Wednesday 29th July
(Ring 01-267 2004 for details of buses
and more information)



DUBLIN CONFRONTATION

Over 17,000 people took part in last week's demonstration in support of the hunger strikers through the streets of Dublin. The march was led by five men wrapped in blankets, followed by members of the H-Block/Armagh Committee, carrying six wreaths and six large black flags, one for each of the dead hunger strikers. Among the people behind were Michael Mullen, President of the Irish Transport & General Workers Union, and Matt Merrigan, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union, and Neil Blaney.

The main body of the demonstrators was led by contingents from Cavan and Monaghan, the area represented by Kieran Doherty, TD. There were people and banners from all over Ireland including a large contingent from the north.

The demonstration was stopped by rows of Gardai at least ten deep at Merrion Road, which is about 300 yards from the British Embassy. Members of the H-Block Committee including Mrs. Bernadette McAliskey, Christina Corney, and Daithi O'Connell went forward with

black flags and wreaths. They passed through the Gardai lines but when they got to the embassy grounds they were bundled out again very roughly. Daithi O'Connell, who is also a vice-president of Sinn Féin, received a severe kicking, especially in the kidneys.

Meanwhile, angry at not being allowed through to the embassy, protestors surged forward and started to try and break through the lines using banner poles and stones. After 25 minutes the Gardai baton charged the crowd, wildly beating and kicking anyone they could get hold of regardless of age. The brutal charge left people lying on the streets unconscious, and many wandering around with blood streaming down their faces, as well as resulting in many people being hospitalised.

Bernadette McAliskey and other members of the H-Block/Armagh Committee sat down on the side of the road and refused to move until they were allowed to hand in a letter of protest to the British embassy. Remaining through the night, they received support from local people who brought them food and blankets. At 11am on Sunday morning an embassy official finally emerged and accepted the letter.

COMMANDO TERROR

Acute harassment of nationalist people in Belfast continues unabated. In particular, the Marine Commandos, an especially brutal regiment, regularly assault and abuse people in West Belfast.

Four men from the Dermot Hill area of West Belfast were hospitalised after being attacked and beaten by soldiers last week. Initially one was kicked, punched and beaten to the ground. As he recovered his senses he was again kicked against a neighbour's wall, which collapsed under impact. As each of the other three men individually remonstrated with the soldiers for their brutality, they were beaten, kicked and battered with rifle butts.

Later on in the week a group of soldiers came across two 11-year-old

youths painting a gable wall black in preparation for a wall mural. They managed to catch one, tied him up to his ladder and poured his black paint over him.

As well as personal assaults soldiers in West Belfast are distributing copies of an extremely abusive and racist "poem" about Bobby Sands written by a loyalist. They are also attempting to destroy the many wall murals in support of the hunger strikers by pouring acid over them. The behaviour of the soldiers of the past few months bears frightening resemblance to that of the Americans in Vietnam or the Israelis in Lebanon.

Mrs. Collette Henry, a mother of three, who was struck unconscious by a rifle butt for replying to verbal abuse from a Marine Commando.

I.T.G.W.U. MOVES

Michael Mullen, President of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) has again called on the British Government to negotiate with the prisoners, along the lines of his own union's policy (which is similar to the five demands but is somewhat vague). He has asked the TUC as well as other foreign trade union bodies to work and put pressure on the British Government to reach a solution of the H-Block crisis.

Meanwhile, the three members of the Tralee H-Block/Armagh Committee who have been on a sympathetic hunger strike for over a week, have got a motion passed through their local ITGWU branch which has gone to the union HQ for consideration. This calls for a referendum within the union, about members' feelings and the union's responsibilities towards the hunger strikers. They feel the depth of feeling amongst members is very high and the union should take a more active role, supporting the hunger strikers.

CONSULATE OCCUPATION

Fourteen women occupied the Irish consulate in San Francisco on Monday. They occupied the building because "the Irish Government has utterly abandoned their duties by openly tolerating occupation of part of their territory". The statement also demanded that the Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, support the prisoners' five demands and that diplomatic relations between Britain and Ireland be severed if any more hunger strikers die.

One protestor locked herself in the telex room, and transmitted messages of support to Belfast until the police removed all protestors.

HISTORICAL PARALLELS

Winona La Duke, an American Indian on a European anti-nuclear tour, spoke in the National Stadium in Dublin on the hunger strike last Wednesday. A Cippewa Indian by birth, she said there were strong historical parallels between the colonisation of the Indians and the Irish. "There are a lot of Indian political prisoners in American jails. There is sympathy and knowledge of the H-Block situation among American Indians. Bobby Sands T-shirts are worn on the reservations".



SINN FEIN PUBLIC MEETING

Sinn Fein held a public meeting in Conway Hall last Friday in support of the hunger strikers.

Introducing the meeting Ian Taylor remembered the last meeting he chaired in Conway Hall. It was April 10th, the day of Bobby Sands' election, and there was a mood of optimism and exhilaration. No-one there foresaw that the British Government would ignore the massive show of support for the hunger strikers, and remain so intransigent in the face of death after death in the H-Blocks. He asked people to redouble their efforts on the prisoners' behalf. The government is beginning to show signs of cracks in its obstinacy. The pressure being applied by the new Irish government on the British government was significant even if they were doing it for selfish reasons.

After a showing of the H-Blocks video, "Ireland's Hunger Strike", Maureen McGuire, of An Cumann Cabrach (the supporting organisation of Irish Republican prisoners in British jails) said that hunger strikes were a traditional part of Irish political protest, dating right back to before Britain ever invaded Ireland. It was appropriate that the video film also mentioned Frank Stagg, Michael Gaughan, and Terence McSwiney. (Frank Stagg died on hunger strike in 1976; Michael Gaughan died in 1974 from force feeding; Terence McSwiney, then Lord Mayor of Cork, died in Brixton in 1920 after 74 days on hunger strike.) They and today's hunger strikers had all been jailed for basically the same reasons, and used the same methods to make their protest. There are two Irish prisoners in English jails who have been on the blanket, one of them, Michael Hackett, for over 2 years; he is also demanding repatriation to jails in Northern Ireland.

It is important to realise that the recent "riots" here bear great similarity to events of 1968 in Northern Ireland, which eventually gave rise to the H-Blocks and Armagh. The Black and white alienated community here are similar to the "alienated" civil rights marchers in 1968. They are fighting on the same issues - civil rights, housing, jobs etc.

Kevin Colfer (Sinn Fein, Britain) stressed that the prisoners were demanding implementation of their five demands, which should not be confused by supporting organisations adding their own demands. Sinn Fein is disappointed by the amount of supporting activities on behalf of the hunger strikers by left-wing organisations in this country. Advances in working-class politics are endangered by what is happening in their name in Northern Ireland. As Marx said: "A nation that enslaves another is itself enslaved" and working-class organisations must come out and actively campaign on behalf of the H-Block and Armagh prisoners.

FOUR-PRONGED DEMONSTRATION

A series of marches in support of the hunger strikers began on Wednesday from Newry, Monaghan, Limerick and Waterford, all of which are to converge on Dublin this Saturday.

Organised by the trade union sub-committee of the National H-Block/Armagh Committee, the march is particularly aimed at mobilising grass-roots trade union support, though it is open to everyone who wishes to join in. Many factories and workplaces have agreed to stop and come out in support of this demonstration as it comes through their town.

The marches are scheduled to reach Dublin on Saturday, culminating in a mass rally outside Leinster House (Dublin's Parliament). The marches are designed to attract support from as wide an area as possible, but in particular from Monaghan and Waterford which are the two con-

stituencies in which Kieran Doherty and Kevin Lynch respectively stood in the Irish general election. There is lots of enthusiasm for the demonstration already, including support from this country.

The Labour Committee on Ireland have sent "good wishes and political support" to this march. "We are in solidarity with the prisoners and totally support them in their struggle. . . . The prison struggle in particular and the struggle in Ireland in general are greatly sharpening the crisis for the British ruling class and are a factor in the new mood of radicalisation that is appearing in the British working class, in the Labour Party, in the trade union movement and in the inner city ghettos of Brixton, Southall and Toxteth."

The demonstration will be very glad of any messages of support, especially from labour movement organisations, and these should be sent to the National H Block/Armagh Office in Dublin before Saturday (telephone Dublin (0001) 747 200).

MANCHESTER DEMONSTRATION

Two thousand people marched through the centre of Manchester last Saturday, demanding that the government immediately implement the H-Block and Armagh Jail prisoners' five demands. Led by two pipe bands from Glasgow, the march included trade union and solidarity banners. At the rally at the end, the Rev. Neil Richardson was the first speaker. He said he was a protestant with no Irish connections, and he was there because of what the Government was doing in Northern Ireland. The hunger strikers demonstrated that the popular conception of the men and women in the H-Blocks and Armagh must be reassessed by British people. He called upon his fellow English citizens to look again and ask in whose interest do we inflict such a great cost in human life. The systematic repression in the north of Ireland is a major blot on much blotted British colonial history. Then a smuggled letter from Armagh jail was read out, asking that all efforts in support of the prisoners be doubled in order to break the Thatcher government's intransigence.

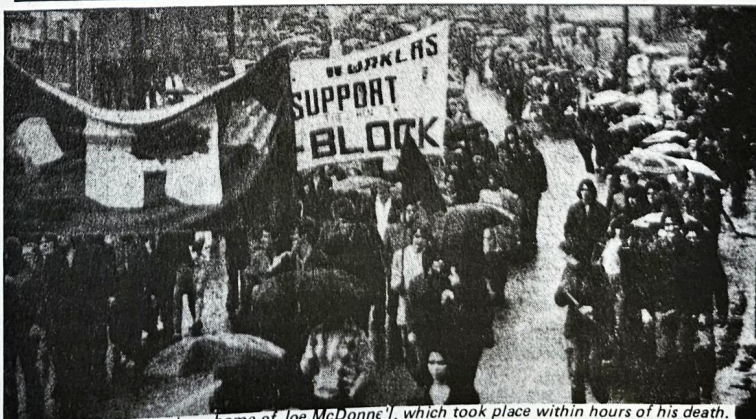
Speakers from Sinn Fein and IRSP then outlined the history of the prison struggle and asked for support for the hunger strikers.

Gus John from the Black Parents' Association said that as former British colonial subjects

with a long history of fighting oppression, West Indians find it necessary to support the Irish liberation struggle. He argued that socialists in this country must see the link, that people in Ireland and especially the hunger strikers are engaged in the same struggle as there is here, which must be supported until a free Ireland is achieved.

A speaker from the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran expressed solidarity with the hunger strikers and foretold their victory.

A speaker from the Midlands Committee on Britain's Involvement in Ireland said that while the Labour Party and trade union movement's history on Ireland is bad, we must be aware of and support recent developments within this movement, which have expressed solidarity with the prisoners. A speaker from the Armagh Women's Co-ordinating Committee (London) compared what is happening in Toxteth, Brixton, Bristol and Manchester to Northern Ireland. She also read a letter of support from the Jerusalem Palestinian Students Organisation expressing solidarity with the demonstration. Two Palestinian prisoners had recently died from force feeding while on hunger strike in Israel, and she called for victory for prisoners in the H-Blocks and Nafhe men's gaols and Armagh and Nefi Tristra women's gaols.



A march to the Lenadoon home of Joe McDonnell, which took place within hours of his death.

LONDON NEWS



Ken Livingstone greeting Mrs. McElwee.

Mrs Alice McElwee, mother of hunger striker Tom McElwee, was introduced to the GLC Labour Group at a meeting in County Hall last Tuesday. Earlier she had been met on the steps of County Hall by Ken Livingstone, GLC Leader, and Ernie Roberts MP.

Speaking at the meeting Ken Livingstone said that the H-Block hunger strike has made people aware how revolting British policy is in Northern Ireland. He described Don Concannon's visit to Bobby Sands on his deathbed as the ultimate obscenity. The prisoners in the H-Blocks and Armagh Jail were not deranged criminals but freedom fighters. What was happening in Northern Ireland was a colonial war similar to those in previous British colonies, and the prisoners are a product of this. He hoped that all the prisoners would be released by an amnesty under a future Labour administration, but in the meantime the H-Block and Armagh prisoners must be treated as prisoners of war.

The hunger strikers have stirred the consciousness of people here despite massive media censorship, he said. He had received more letters of support on this issue, than any other he had spoken out on, and he felt this was indicative of popular support for the prisoners, which is not allowed expression by the media.

Mrs McElwee said she had come to London to give support to the boys in Long Kesh. She had started campaigning when the Relatives Action Committees began in 1977. In 1978 the relatives persuaded the prisoners not to go on hunger strike. However since then, the prisoners had suffered terribly on the blanket and "dirty" protests. The relatives had done their best to help them but no-one seemed to want to help the Blanketmen.

She was in London to say that the boys in Long Kesh and the girls in Armagh are not criminals, but are only there because their country is divided.

Thomas, who will be 48 days on hunger strike this Saturday, and Benedict who is also in Long Kesh, like most of the other prisoners were only 10 or 11 when the British Army came on the streets of Northern Ireland. They had witnessed and suffered various methods of repression, which led them to join the IRA and eventually culminated in the hunger strike.

Mrs McElwee was shocked by the British government's intransigence. They don't seem to realise that the prisoners are human beings who can be reasoned with. The five demands are quite minimal and could be easily granted if the government wished. In reply to a question, she said she found it very difficult having a son on hunger strike, but that he is her son and she would go to the ends of the earth to help him.

She renewed the prisoners' call for people here to force the government to grant the prisoners' five demands without further delay or loss of life.

EMBASSY PICKET

60 people held a picket of the Irish embassy in London last Sunday. The picket, organised by Sinn Féin, called on the Irish government to support the prisoners' five demands and to demand of the British government that they immediately implement these five demands. The picketers left a symbolic coffin at the steps of the embassy until they moved off for a short demonstration at the American embassy, which demanded that Reagan condemn the British government's intransigent attitude on the prisoners in the H-Blocks and Armagh.

HACKNEY COUNCIL MOTION

Fifteen Hackney Labour Councillors have signed a motion in support of the prisoners' five demands which was put to Hackney Council on Monday night. Unfortunately it was not reached on the agenda but is a further sign of the growing support for the prisoners within the Labour Party, despite the atrocious position of the National Executive and Parliamentary Party.

IN THE EVENT OF A HUNGER STRIKER'S DEATH there will be a VIGIL at Kilburn Square every evening for three days beginning at 7.30pm. On the Sunday after the death of KEVIN LYNCH, there will be a VIGIL beginning at 10.30am outside Westminster Cathedral.

AUGUST DELEGATION TO BELFAST AND DERRY

A three-day visit to West Belfast (including an optional day in Derry) is being organised by the Troops Out Movement for the weekend 8th/9th August. Pickets of Army forts, meetings with local people active in various political areas, and participation in the Annual Internment Commemorative march is planned. The cost is about £30 return plus £5 registration. Please BOOK IMMEDIATELY. Phone 01-267 2004.

PUBLIC MEETING

Tower Hamlets Trades Council Sub-cttee on Ireland

7.30pm, Tues. July 28th

Toynbee Hall, Commercial St, E1

Video showing: "Ireland's Hunger Strike"

PUBLIC MEETING

East London Prisoners Action Group

Video: 'Ireland's Hunger Strike'

Tuesday 28th July 7.30 p.m.

Centerprise, 136 Kingsland High St., E8.

PUBLIC MEETING

on the Hunger Strike

Organised by

Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Council

"Ireland's Hunger Strike" video

Tuesday 28th July at 7.30pm

248 Lavender Hill SW11

Speakers:

Alf Dobbs MP, Tony Banks (GLC)

Lou Lewis (UCATT)

48-HOUR HUNGER FAST for the prisoners' five demands TO BE HELD ON THE STEPS OF COUNTY HALL

(nr. Westminster Bridge)

STARTING 9am TUESDAY 28th JULY

Press conference 10am in County Hall

Organised by H-Block/Armagh Cttee

VOLUNTEERS WELCOME

Thatcher Murders Irish Hunger Strikers —

Why the British Labour Movement
MUST take a Stand

Colour video "Ireland's Hunger Strike"

Speaker: ALEX FARRELL

(Islington Labour Councillor)

8pm sharp, SAT. 25th JULY, adm. 75p/50p

at the Hemingford Arms, Offord Rd, N1

Organised by Camden & Islington T.O.M.

FILM SHOWING

"Blacks Britannica" plus

"Northern Ireland: Urban Insurrection"

SUNDAY JULY 26th, 7.30pm

at London Filmmakers' Co-op,

42, Gloucester Ave., NW1 (Camden tube)

Admission 75p or 50p unwaged

Organised by Central London T.O.M.

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