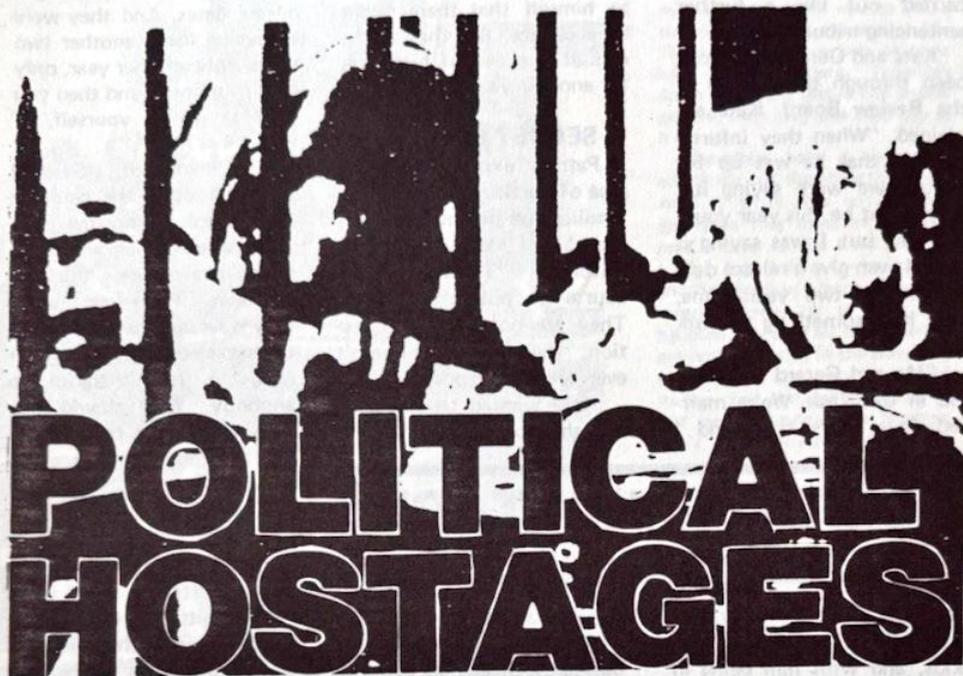




A WOMAN'S VOICE

September 1988

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AT PRESENT there are some 447 political Life and SOSP (detained at the Secretary of State's Pleasure) prisoners in the Six Counties. Of these, 170 are republicans. These prisoners have between them something in the region of 1,000 close relatives, the vast majority of them women, who are also "serving time" while their loved-ones remain locked away on indeterminate sentences.

Altogether, the 205 republican Life and SOSP prisoners in England and Ireland have served between them almost 3,000 years in prison, with the vast majority having served over ten years, and with some now entering their seventeenth year in prison.

In theory, of course, a Life or SOSP prisoner can hope to be released on merit through the Life Sentence Review Board. In practice though, these Boards can be nothing more than fronts for political manipulation by the British government, through the Northern Ireland Office. At the present rate of releases (approx. 15 to 20 per year) it will take approximately an-

other 25 years before those now serving Life or SOSP sentences will be released. All of these prisoners, along with the women who have supported and cared for them, have already undergone the physical and psychological torture of years of injustice and intolerable conditions. All of them, men and women, prisoner and relative alike, are being held as political hostages.

Belfast Sinn Féin Women's Department talked to two members of the Campaign for Lifers and SOSP prisoners in Belfast. The Campaign is putting forward six proposed changes to the sentencing and Review Board procedures.

Patricia McCartney explained that the campaign had come about following discussion with Lifers and SOSP prisoners in Long Kesh and Magherry.

"The whole initiation and direction of the campaign comes from inside the jails. The Review Board system in England is different from ours, as is the one in the 26 Counties, but what we are saying is that wherever they are being held they are political prisoners. When the climate is right they'll release a few here and release a few there when it suits them. It's just all shrouded in political manipulation."

The Campaign has already begun to gain ground. "At the minute we have seven committees spread out throughout the Six Counties."

Patricia pointed out that the campaign makes no distinction between Life and SOSP prisoners "The only difference is that an SOSP prisoner when sentenced was

under 18 and a Lifer was over eighteen. But they face exactly the same Review Board, the same injustices and everything else. Neither Lifer nor SOSP has a release date — they are both serving indeterminate sentences.

For instance the media talks about "young prisoners" but what's the difference between a seventeen year old fella and an eighteen year old man? They are treated in the same way, there is no more clemency shown to a Lifer or an SOSP. We have SOSP's who have served fifteen years already and it's going upwards from here on in."

DIPLOCK COURTS ARE "UNSAFE" COURTS

"You have to remember that these men and women went through the Diplock court system so we say that their very conviction is in question because it was all very "unsafe". They went through seven days brutalisation in Castlereagh, particularly between 1976 and 1979 there was a lot of harassment, brutality and everything. Eighty-five percent of the men and women who were convicted were found guilty solely on the basis of forced signed statements. We question their very convictions."

Kate Clarke took up this point. Her husband Gerard has served twelve years of a life sentence. The two were married four years ago inside the jail. "His trial lasted three weeks and two days. Most of the evidence that was up against him was nearly all thrown out of court. You know, one coming in with a hood over his head saying he was a witness and all this rubbish. Then a girl who was in the taxi, the main witness, she stood up and said she

• (continued on next page)

couldn't identify the two in the dock as being in the taxi with her. The whole trial was a farce."

In spite of what appeared initially to be a favourable summing-up by the judge, and in spite of the lack of evidence, Gerard was sentenced to life imprisonment. Kate said, simply, "The whole three weeks were really nerve-racking."

"Then when he got sentenced he went on the blanket. The years he was on the blanket were bad because you were only seeing him once a month and you never knew what to expect when you went up to see him because there were a lot of beatings going on at that time. I remember him coming out one time and he had got one of those forced washes, and they had cut all his hair off and had left like wee tufts of hair here and there and God, he was like something out of Belsen. See that, leaving him on that visit, it was really heartbreaking."

After the hunger-strike and the end of the blanket protest, things changed a little. "It sort of eased off you know. The visits were great, if you could say that! You got a bit of privacy. But then after the escape in 1983 it all started all over again. There were times you went up there and there were about five screws standing outside your box. They were all up in arms over the escape."

Turning to the Campaign itself, Kate said, "I would say a lot of the families would be really relieved at this campaign starting up because you feel very solitary, you're saying 'Who cares? Their names are never mentioned.' What are you supposed to do, you know? With this campaign going it gives you that bit of hope that something will come out of it, because it will bring it into the limelight."

REVIEW BOARD

"The actual Review is all shrouded in secrecy. The prisoner only gets to see the governor, he can only hand his own report in. All the other

reports are secret. The governor then makes a recommendation. Once the Review Board makes a decision about this prisoner, he or she can't question it. They can come along and say you're knocked back one year, two years, right up to five years, which is the equivalent of a ten-year sentence. It's being carried out like a further sentencing tribunal."

Kate and Gerard have both been through the trauma of the Review Board. Kate explained, "When they informed him that he was up for review, we were saying it'll maybe not be this year you'll get out, but I was saying if they'll even give a release date for maybe two years time, he'll have something to work on."

"Me and Gerard got married in the Kesh. We're married four years now, and I

saying to him "don't you be getting your hopes up", but at the same time it's hard not to. You're saying to yourself it'll be this time, but he sort of knew what he was up against when he went to the Review if you know what I mean, and he didn't put much hope on it. But at the same time he was saying to himself that there might be a chance. But then at the end of it they put him back for another year."

SECRET REPORTS

Patricia explained that an area of particular concern for families and prisoners alike is the use of secret reports on prisoners. "These can of course be politically biased. They are not open to question, the prisoners doesn't even see these reports."

Kate wanted to elaborate on this point, saying, "If

POLITICAL HOSTAGES

(continued from page one)

would really love a baby, and so would he, because he loves kids, and with him being in there, you know, you say to yourself you're getting awful old and you might be too old to have kids and all. I would really love it if they would even say to him, you know, at his next review, he's up in November, if they would say to him, 'Well, another two years from now, you'll have a release day or only another year to do' instead of every time he would go up putting him back till the review the following year because that could be going on ten years from now you know. It's no help for you."

"And I'm trying to get a home together for when he does get out, I have a house and I'm trying to get things done to it. I mean sometimes you lose heart because you're saying to yourself what are you working for?"

Kate described how the two of them had tried to mentally prepare themselves before the Review. "He was saying to me "don't get your hopes built up," and I was

someone had've been a friend of the prison officer who died during the escape, he could've said 'Well, Gerard's brother got out in that escape, I'll do my best that he'll not get out.'

"Then Gerard was out last year his mommy was very bad, she had a bad heart attack and he was out for four hours with his mommy. That nearly killed him, going back in after seeing her. They told me to be up for five o'clock, and when I got up, they didn't let him out till half five. Then when they do go back they get strip searched and all that."

Kate explained what it is like to be one of so many women whose loved-ones are in jail. "I mean, I travel up on Fridays, and I sit with girls from County Derry and all over. One thing is that you're never on your own because there's always people up there far worse off than yourself. You know what they're going through. It's great going up and having someone to sit and talk to, if you know what I mean."

I remember going up just before I got married and there was about nine of us all sat together, like a wee clique. You'd be sitting in the waiting rooms and one of them would come in and you'd get talking. But see, most of them are out now because all their husbands were all doing sentences and they all got release dates. And they were all saying, only another two years, only another year, only a lot of months, and then you were saying to yourself, 'I wish I was them'."

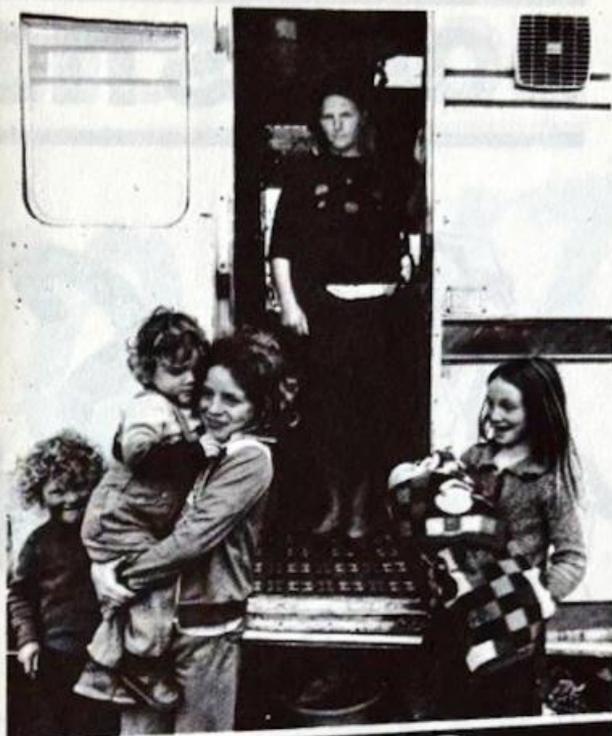
She continued, "Even if they did open the gates of Long Kesh tomorrow, and they released men who have served twelve years, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years, when they walk out they're entitled to that release. They shouldn't have to feel thankful to anybody. Why should any man or woman be thankful for spending those amounts of years in jail when Private Thain can be released after two years and two months? When Kevin McGrady can be released after six years, when he'd admitted to killing three people? Even if they did open the gates, the justice still doesn't add up."

YOU COULDN'T FORGET

Kate summed up her feelings, "If he got out I would be over the moon. But I don't think you could forget everyone else that's in there, and I don't think he could either. Because with living in there twelve years, he's made a lot of friends and there's a lot of them under SOSP. I don't think he could honestly come out and just forget about them. At the end of the day, it's got to be release for everyone."

What you can do:

- Support the six proposals of the campaign.
- Contact your local Lifer/SOSP Committee.
- Send offers of help or a donation to Campaign for Lifers, c/o Conway Mill, 5-7 Conway Street, Belfast 12.
- Write to MPs, TDs, MEPs, the British Secretary of State etc.



YOUNG TRAVELLING WOMEN

BY KATHLEEN CAWLEY AND MARGARET MAUGHAN

WE ARE a small group of young travelling women, based in Beresford Place, Dublin. We would like to tell all those reading this article what it is like to be a young travelling woman in Ireland today.

Firstly, there are only 23,000 travellers in the country and the majority of them are very young (80 per cent are under the age of 25). We are different from the settled population but a lot of settled people don't even see us as human beings. We are different of course, but the way we are different is that we have our own history, culture, language, beliefs, values and way of life.

The majority of young travelling women get married at the age of 16 or 17. For the men it's mostly the same. Some girls in the travelling community get married to have their freedom. By that we mean that they are not allowed out at night to discos or to any entertainment. They aren't allowed have boyfriends. But there are a lot who do those things on the sly.

The parents are very strict on young travelling women when they are single. They are afraid that something might happen if

they let them do those things and then everybody would be talking about the family. If any scandal breaks out then it is better to be a boy in the travelling family than a girl. Boys have their freedom. They have no work to do like looking after the kids or cleaning, or cooking or doing the washing. If they are seen doing it it's supposed to be wrong. Matches are made for a lot of travelling girls by their parents and so they have to get married. Some girls have a choice as to who they marry, some don't. But we feel that it is changing in the last twenty years and more and more young girls now pick their own husbands.

LARGE FAMILIES

The travelling mother tends to have a very large family. Some have 16 or 17 children but the average is about nine. All travellers are Catholics. They don't use contraceptives and it is their

belief that they should have large families. We have very strong beliefs in cures, miracles and a lot of superstitions. We also show a lot of respect for the dead. If anybody dies in our community their relatives burn their caravans and start life over again. The relations don't play music, watch television or listen to the radio. No member of the family will get married until 12 months are up.

Nearly every traveller gets married. It is very rare to see a traveller single at the age of 25. There aren't any priests or nuns who are travellers. Travellers don't plan their future like settled people, they just take each day as it comes.

Travellers have a very bad education and therefore they can't read or write. It's not through ignorance that most of us can't read and write. We have gone to school but for some reason or another we didn't learn. There are several reasons as to why this happens. It could be that teachers are not interested in the travelling kids or they are looked down on in the class and called names or just ignored because the teachers don't know anything about the kids and won't put themselves in the position to talk about the travelling people. What this causes and has caused is that the kids have a bad experience of school and leave.

There are two main reasons why travellers go to school - for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. They feel that those two things are the most important things in school, and when they are finished their Confirmation they tend to leave. Maybe parents feel that the girls are wanted at home to look after the kids, for example.

Most of the travelling men have the power in the family. Whatever they say goes. They make decisions on where they move to without consulting the wives and it is often the case that they move into a mucky field where there are no facilities whatsoever. So it is even harder on the women, particularly when they have to look after a big family and do all the work in the caravans (and there isn't much space in there).

CLEANING

It's even worse in the winter time when you have to cook, clean, serve and have to wash clothes by hand. It isn't easy. A lot of travelling women aren't allowed into laundrettes with their clothes. A lot of settled women may object to us saying this and say that they have a lot of cleaning and washing to do as well. But our point about it is that they have the space and the machines.

Another question that settled women might come up with, is why don't travellers give up travelling around and settle down

in a house and forget about the caravans on the side of the road. They see travellers as drop-outs who have to be rehabilitated back into society and the problem is solved. We would say that's not true. There is evidence that travellers were there long before the Famine, and their language proves that.

Some travellers have moved into houses and found that they can't settle down in them. In some cases it has worked and in others it hasn't. There are four types of accommodation for travellers. Standard housing with the settled people - the problem is that travellers might not be accepted there so they move back out. Another is group housing which has travellers living together e.g. uncles, aunts and relations. The other two are halting sites where you have toilets, lights in the site and rubbish collection; or transient sites, just moving on the side of the road where there might be a strip and stones to pull your caravan on. We would also say that a lot of working class people put up with similar problems in the home as traveller women do.

BEGGING

Begging is a problem for travelling women. Whenever you see begging it is mostly women. It isn't by choice they are begging we can tell you. They have problems just like the settled women with broken marriages or families.

It is very often seen by people that travellers are a problem, not a people with a problem. Travellers are denied their human rights. There are special times and places for travellers to get their social welfare. Travellers don't just get discriminated against in the social welfare, but in all institutions in Ireland. Barred from pubs, discos, buses, restaurants and hairdressers and a lot of other places if they know you are a traveller.

We feel there are a lot of young travellers going around hiding their identity, trying to be accepted. We feel it is a rotten thing for people to have to change themselves to be wanted in their own country.

A lot of travelling women suffer miscarriages and deaths. The infant mortality rate is three times higher than the settled population, which goes back to the mother and how she is treated when she is pregnant, working at home, and not receiving the medical attention she is entitled to.

Travellers also die at a very young age. Only 5% live to over 55, but it has improved a little in the last 20 years. We would ask any woman who is reading this to try and put herself in the situation of the travelling woman, and think what her life is really like.

● First published in *Council News*, the quarterly newsletter of the Council for the Status of Women.

DOMESTIC

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE has not been acknowledged until recently in Ireland. The first refuge in this country was set up in 1974. There are at present refuges in Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Cork, Galway, Navan, Bray, Athlone, Belfast, Derry, Coleraine and Newry.

It is difficult to ascertain the extent of the problem. While the demand for refuges increases it does not necessarily suggest that domestic violence is on the increase. More and more women are becoming increasingly aware of their rights and the fact that nobody is entitled to inflict this violence on them. They now have somewhere to go which is safe and where caring people can assist them.

Many battered women put up with the violence for various reasons some of which are:

- That she can save him from the source of his problem e.g. alcohol.

- Justifying this abuse because of factors beyond their control i.e. unemployment.

- Blaming herself - for not being a good wife, mother etc.

- Believing she could not survive financially without his support.

In studies, the most common link throughout battering shows three stages of the cycle of violence - tension, outburst, then calm.

In the tension phase the wife will appease in the hope of preventing the anger from escalating. When the violence gets out of control the wife will blame herself. After all, if she had managed to please him this would not have happened. In the third phase the husband may cry and apologise and make all sorts of promises, pleading with the wife not to leave or tell anyone what happened.

If you are being battered or you know of someone who is at risk, there is help available.

Some women go straight to a refuge for safety and start legal proceedings from there. Other women stay at home and try to get barring orders and then start legal proceedings.

You may be considering legal help and in a situation where you are being battered or under threat there are practical things you can do now.

Find out if you are entitled to free legal aid and apply for a solicitor now. The waiting list is long in the 26-counties and although you might not need a

solicitor at present you might need one in the near future. This is the most important step you take. GET A SOLICITOR!

- When you have your solicitor you will need proof of battering, injuries etc.

- Make a record of all injuries, dates and times. Visits to doctors, social workers. Ask doctors for a note to confirm visit and injuries sustained.

- Have photographs taken of your injuries, making sure to include your face even if it is an injury to arm, foot or leg. If the face is not photographed it is difficult to use as evidence in court.

- If guards are called, get something in writing to prove their visit, why they were requested and by whom. Get the names of the guards. If necessary they can be subpoena'd to court

- Record a history of who you contacted, where you have gone for help. This will assist you for your visit to solicitor, as naturally it can be very traumatic for someone to speak about what has been happening. At least you will have it all written down.

- Bring birth certificates with you on solicitors visit. Write down dates of children's births.

If you have difficulty in writing, confide in a friend. These records will assist you greatly in a court case.

Some legal procedures which you might consider taking in the case of violent assault:

- The husband can be charged with one of several possible offences under the 'Offences Against the Person Act,' the charges laid depending on the severity of the injuries received.

- He can be charged with 'common assault' under Section 42 of the 1861 Act, or with the more serious 'assault occasioning actual bodily harm' under Section 47 of the same act.

The wife may issue a summons against her husband or else the gardai can do it.

- Section 22 of the Family Law (Maintenance of Spouses and Children) Act 1976. Under this section a husband may be banned from the residence he



shares with his spouse and it may prohibit him from entering the place where his wife or dependent child resides, for up to 12 months by the district court, or for an unlimited time span by the circuit court.

- The Family Law (Protection of Spouses and Children) Act 1981. This provides protection for spouses and children. Under this act, protection orders may be granted to prohibit a violent man from using violence or the threat of violence against his wife.

Many women go through all the levels of legal procedures open to them before taking the final step of a legal separation.

- Legal Separation. This is only granted on three grounds, cruelty, adultery, unnatural practices.

THE REFUGE

Many women who arrive at a women's refuge have very little with them. Some just have the

clothes on their backs. According to the refuge administration in Dublin they are struggling financially and would gladly accept any donation either financial or clothing, toiletries, nappies etc. They would also appreciate sincere volunteers who would help in going to court, talking to some of the women, even taking them out for a cup of coffee or helping to mind the children.

The refuge is not an ideal place for so many women and children, but many of

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VIOLENCE

STOP IT



NOW!

women support each other. The workers at Dublin's Women's Aid are available all 24 hours and no woman is turned away. Each woman pays £11 per week and assists in the running and decision-making of the centre. It is based on self-help and communal help. The women can stay until they have an alternative safe place to go to. For some women it means relocating to another area or another county if necessary.

Security is a major issue to any woman's refuge and the Dublin Women's Aid have a set policy on security. If a woman decides that she would like to meet her partner it must be her own decision and she must meet him off the grounds of the refuge.

SIX COUNTIES

As in the 26-counties domestic violence plays a large part in the breakdown of marriages in the Six Counties. However women in nationalist areas have the additional burden of life in a British colony which means that they are less likely to turn to or get help from the institutions of a sectarian statelet. Their support and help comes from inside their own communities: from women's support groups, the Sinn Fein advice centre and from voluntary agencies such as the Falls Women's Centre in Belfast.

Some women suffer for years and put up with beatings until it comes to the point where they can not take anymore. When a woman reaches this stage the first step she must take is to visit a solicitor and file for a separation. If there has been recent violence she can get into court the next day for an emergency protection and exclusion order which lasts for five or six weeks depending on the date of the separation hearing. The police are supposed to act on the woman's behalf once she has these orders but they rarely do in nationalist areas. Anyway the majority of nationalist women in working class areas will not turn for help to a sectarian police force who harass and abuse their people on a daily basis.

DIVORCE

Unlike the 26 Counties, after two years separation and if both parties are agreeable, a divorce

can be granted. If one party disagrees it then takes five years and one of the five following points must be proven:

- Adultery.
- Unreasonable behaviour.
- Desertion.
- Separation with consent.
- Separation without consent.

In some cases after a few months of separation the woman finds that she just can not cope on her own and may go back to her husband. That is entirely her own choice and no one will condemn her for it, and in other cases the woman will actually realise what normal life is like and be stronger after having suffered sometimes for years a life of abuse and violence.

If you need help or advice contact

- Your local Sinn Fein advice centre
- Women's centre or refuge in your area (see the back page)
- The Rape Crisis Centre in your area.

SINN FEIN POLICY ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The prevention of violence against women must be the responsibility of the whole community with the main emphasis at local or district level. Facilities for the victims of abuse, whether physical, mental or sexual, must be provided as a priority.

Recognising that domestic violence, including incest and rape, occurs on a wide scale, Sinn Fein has prioritised the education of its members to ensure that such violence is not seen as solely the responsibility of the people involved but the concern of the whole community.

Furthermore, any member of our organisation who indulges in physically abusing their partners within marriage or personal relationships will be dismissed from and ostracised by Sinn Fein. We believe there is no place in a revolutionary, disciplined movement for such people.

We believe that co-habitants should have access to barring orders. There should be an extension of time for existing orders and provision should be made for immediate application for barring orders and immediate action where a barring order is breached. The grounds should include mental cruelty.



A visit to Maghaberry Prison

As part of this year's visit to Belfast by members of the Troops Out Movement in Britain, a group of women went out to Maghaberry Prison to visit republican prisoners during International Women's Week. Here is an account of one woman's visit to POW Pauline Quinn.

ON THE SATURDAY of the delegation's stay I went on a prison visit to see Pauline Quinn, Maghaberry Prison. The place seemed to be in the middle of nowhere — reached by small country roads and surrounded by fields on all sides. The prison itself looked very alien and inhuman, like it has nothing to do with people; bleak windowless concrete walls surrounded at some distance by huge fences. I was reminded of the nuclear bases here in England. We waited for the gates to open electronically — accompanied by sirens and flashing lights — and walked a short distance through another similar gate which let us into the compound which was the entrance to the prison. We walked across to some portacabins where we showed our passes and IDs, and signed in gifts for the prisoners.

Thus began an hour and a half of sitting and waiting in various locked rooms. Waiting for all the visitors to be searched, waiting for our personal possessions to be sealed into envelopes to be collected on our departure, waiting and more waiting. I felt anxious that something would go wrong at the last minute and we wouldn't be able to see Pauline after the weeks of anticipation. I also felt impatient and frustrated at being locked in waiting rooms and at having to obey the prison warders as if they had all the power in the situation and the only person who'd lose if I questioned their authority would be myself or the prisoner.

The tedium of waiting, the anxiety and the knowledge that the warders knew full well they were in control. What did they think of us, coming from England to support the nationalist prisoners in their struggle? This was only my first visit, but there were those for whom this is a persistent routine, with many prisoners having served sentences of 16 years or longer, and many prisoners serving life sentences with no determined date for their release.

There were two young girls amongst the visitors, one, I was later to learn, born just before her mother was imprisoned three years ago. Three years of seeing her mum for at most half an hour a week. She seemed so fully aware of the situation and sure of herself and I remember thinking — there's no way that she's not going to become involved in the struggle when she grows older.

Finally, after being transported inside a van which we couldn't see out of, and more waiting, Pauline's name was called and the two other women from the del-

egation and I got up and walked into the visiting room. There were tables set out, a screw seated on a raised platform overlooking the room and two women without visitors. I asked the woman nearest if she was Pauline, but she motioned me to a woman at the far end of the room, and we went and introduced ourselves. At first we were all nervous but Pauline made us tea and coffee and chatted easily to us.

DAILY ROUTINE

Throughout the visit I was aware of the time, aware that it was ticking away and that there were three of us to ask Pauline questions and she in her turn wanted to know of us, our work and our lives. We talked about her daily routine in the prison, the compulsory work she is obliged to do, due to her enforced status as a non-political prisoner; the one hour of exercise in the yard — six foot by six foot; the lack of cour-

ses and training — at most once a week and even that under threat of being cut; of the male doctor refusing to give any of the women smear tests — (the reason stated that there was a backlog of tests to process); about the increase in strip-searching — (45 last month); about one woman who had had problems with her ovaries and had collapsed and was strip-searched on the way out of prison; the four remand prisoners kept isolated from the other prisoners and searched constantly in and out of court; of the woman who had been put in single cell furnished only with a mattress and a bucket for three days at a whim of a screw.

Pauline wanted to know how many women were on the delegation, what support we had in England and whether there were solidarity groups working around Nicaragua and South Africa — she keeps in touch with the news via her radio. I told her about the national campaign against strip-searching and the picket outside Durham Prison and we talked of the need to convince people in England that there is a war going on in Ireland. She told us that the prisoners had their own organisation within the prison and would sometimes refuse to obey the prison warders.

Pauline is serving a five-year sentence and is due to be released in September — "Not long now" she said. She talked of her family from Tyrone and how it was sometimes difficult for them to visit her and how they often get stopped and searched when travelling to see her. She talked of Armagh Jail and how the women had previously been able to hear and see the picket outside but they couldn't hear it last year as the outside gate to Maghaberry was far away from their cells and any-

how the warders had turned the sirens on.

THE STRUGGLE

Towards the end of the visit I became aware of the time running out and began to feel even more nervous. All three of us from the delegation had been primed with questions to ask and I was anxious not to forget anything really crucial so I asked how being in prison had affected how she viewed the struggle and she said she now felt even more determined and committed to it.

Eventually our time had run out and the warders indicated that the visit was at an end by placing our pass on the table. We ignored this however and continued talking. A few minutes later one warder said, "Right then Pauline", but again we continued talking, until Pauline said, "Well then it looks like its time for you to go". I realised that it was important for her to determine when her visit was at an end; for it to be up to her and not the warders as to when to say goodbye.

We hugged goodbye and as we walked out of the visiting room I turned and looked back to see Pauline picking up her thermos flask and biscuits and I remember thinking now she had to return to the daily routine of prison and the petty harassment of the warders. We had touched on her life for half an hour. I wondered how long the impression would last, but I know that the thought of Pauline in prison with the other nationalist prisoners will stay with me for a long, long time.

Walking back with the other visitors, all of us subdued and not talking as much as when we arrived, I began to feel overwhelmed and on the point of tears, but I thought of the people for whom this was a way of life, their only contact with friends, lovers and family. I sat on the bus and wrote down all I could remember of the visit.

● Maghaberry Prison "alien and inhuman, like it had nothing to do with people; bleak windowless concrete walls surrounded by huge fences."



NATIONAL TRIBUNAL ON WOMEN'S POVERTY

OCTOBER 1st this year is going to be some day! For the first time in recent history, women from all over Ireland who are directly affected by poverty will come together to speak for themselves about their lives and about their experiences of inequality, oppression and struggle.

October 1st is the day that has been set for the National Tribunal on Women's Poverty in Ireland. It is an event aimed at bringing women together who are affected by poverty in all its different forms to talk about their experiences and to give evidence on the existence, extent, nature and causes and consequences for women, of growing poverty in Ireland today. It will also be an opportunity to share women's experience and skills of ways to combat poverty and fight for change and to exchange ideas about what needs to be done by the policy-makers to bring about the changes that women want.

The Irish Tribunal is only one of many events which will be happening in every EEC country in preparation for a European Tribunal on Women's Poverty due to be held this coming Nov. 10th/11th in Brussels. The aim

of the European Tribunal is to highlight the existence of women's poverty and its consequences for women's lives and to bring pressure to bear on EEC policy-makers to take into account the experience of women when making future decisions regarding action to combat poverty and to assist in the development of communities.

The European Tribunal is being organised by the European Network of Women (ENOW). ENOW is an EEC-wide network of women's groups who organise work on women's issues in all the EEC countries and lobby the EEC Parliament to ensure that legislation benefits or at least takes account of women's lives. The Irish section of ENOW is the council for the Status of Women (CSW). The CSW has taken on to facilitate the organisation of the

Irish Tribunal by the women and the groups who have a real experience of poverty.

It is central to the whole idea of the Tribunal that women who are directly affected by poverty are the ones who organise and participate in the event, so that it is their voices and not the voices of those who claim to speak on their behalf, which are heard on the day. To this end it is hoped that there will be many local events held around the country before Oct. 1st which will bring women together in their own areas to discuss the issues and share their ideas and information. The outcome of these events can then be fed into the Tribunal as evidence presented in the form of personal witnesses, photos exhibits, reports, dramas, etc. In this way the Tribunal will be truly national and participative.

INFORMATION

One aim, therefore, of the tribunal is to gather and present information on the situation of women living in poverty in Ireland and to paint as accurate a picture as possible of the extent, nature and causes of that poverty. This information will then be taken by a number of women to Brussels. More importantly though, this Tribunal aims to empower as many as possible women with direct experience of poverty to come together and make their voices heard. As such, it is not an end in itself, but rather a beginning a process whereby women in Ireland begin to unite and to organise around the issues which are truly relevant to them.

It is essential therefore that as many women as possible take part and that October is followed by further national meetings which will turn what we learn into demands and into campaigns which we can use to bring about the changes we want.

Since a Planning Meeting was held on July 2nd an Organising Group has been meeting once a week to co-ordinate the enormous amount of work that needs to be done if this Tribunal is to be the success it can be.

They have decided to hold a National March on Sept. 30th and to hold a day-long open Tribunal on Women's Poverty on Sat. Oct. 1st. The Tribunal will be accompanied by other fringe events such as an exhibition and workshops focussing on what women are already themselves doing to combat poverty and to bring about change; videos; slideshows; dramas etc. At the moment the Organising Group are working to contact as many women as possible around the country to encourage their active participation. There is particular concern to contact rural women i.e. women living in rural areas and small farms as the experience of such women is vitally important to the Tribunal. Any help with making such contacts would be most welcome as we are having difficulty in doing it.

It is important that women understand that this is their Tribunal and that they can participate in whatever way and to whatever extent they wish. They are welcome to be involved in any or all of the following ways:

- - Contributing ideas and suggestions.
- - Contributing time, energy and resources.
- - Interviewing women in their locality.
- - Writing or speaking on tape their own stories/experience. (women's names and addresses can be kept secret)
- - Organising a local conference/meeting.
- - Joining in the march
- - Holding a stall/exhibition.
- - Giving a talk/workshop.
- - Attending the Tribunal.
- - Presenting evidence at the Tribunal.

Any woman or group who would like to have her experience included or who would like to be involved should contact the co-ordinate as soon as possible at the address below or phone (01) 783355 collect and ask for Cris.

Cris Mulvey, Co-ordinator, c/o 8 Charlemont Street Dublin 2. (01) 783355.

IRISH WOMEN'S HOUSING ACTION GROUP

THE IRISH WOMEN'S Housing Action Group was established at the London Irish Women's Conference in April this year. Over 300 women attended this Conference and our group was established at the housing workshop. We came together out of concern for the growing problems of homelessness amongst Irish women and also in recognition that these problems would be worsened as a result of central government legislation.

Our group has met twice since the Conference and we have drawn up a plan of campaigning priorities for the forthcoming months. Our immediate concern

is the Housing Bill which is due to become law at the end of the year. We are compiling a leaflet exposing the horrendous problems this legislation will cause

Irish women and we intend to distribute this at the lobbies and demonstrations which Housing Groups are organising for the autumn. We have also written to Tory/Labour MPs and to the Irish Embassy about the implications of the Housing Bill for the homeless and tenanted Irish population in this country.

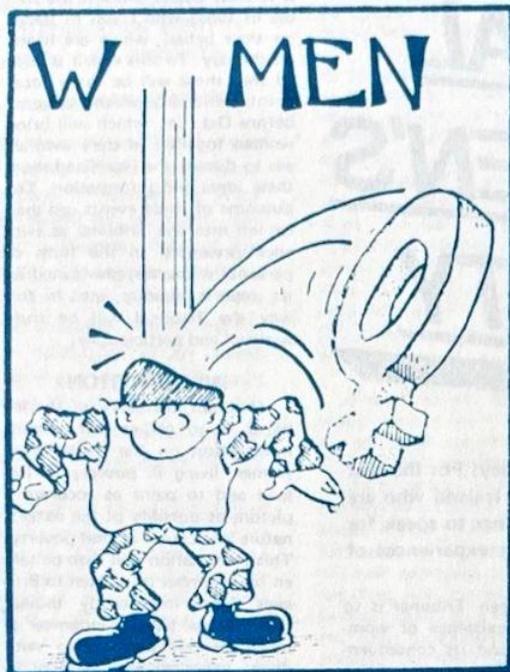
The recent ALA Report into the discriminatory homeless policies and practises of Local Authorities is another crucial issue we are taking up. Our next meeting in July will receive a report on the Higgins' case against Islington

Council and the responses of individual Local Authorities to the ALA recommendations.

Irish Women wanting to become involved in this Group should contact the address below.

Meetings are held on Mondays between 7.30pm and 9.30pm at Wesley House, 3rd Floor, 4 Wild Court, Holborn, WC2 5 AU; September 19th, October 17th, November 7th, December 6th. The Irish Women's Housing Action Group can be contacted c/o 59, Church Street, Stoke Newington, London N16. Phone (London) 2497318

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