

Join the Army; travel to exotic,  
distant lands; meet exciting, unusual  
people and kill them.

The obscenity of the H Blocks

SPECIAL PATROL GROUP



60 years of partition:  
11 years of war

The UDR:

Warnings from Northern Ireland

# ARMAGH WOMEN'S PRISON



Armagh prison was built in the 19th Century and is the only women's prison in the 6 counties. In the past eleven years the number of women prisoners has increased dramatically. Before 1969 there were eight prisoners in Armagh, and this fell at one time to six. At one period during 1972-73 there were 120 prisoners, 32 of these being held without trial.

At the time this pamphlet was first published, in April of 1980, there were 68 women prisoners and 15 short-term male prisoners. Of these 32 women were on protest for political status, four had special category status – i.e., political status, 10 were young offenders, 6 were remand prisoners, four of them charged with political offences, while seven were sentenced women prisoners not on the protest (most of whom had come off for health and personal reasons). Six of the women prisoners were sentenced for non-political offences, and three were loyalist prisoners, none of whom were fighting for political status.

Since April 1980, one of the three Republican prisoners with political status has been released on health grounds (she was reportedly near death), and two of those on protest have finished their sentences. We do not have current figures for remand prisoners, but at the time of writing there are thirty women on the protest.

Hundreds of men and women have been imprisoned in the 6 counties over the last eleven years. Before March 1st 1976 those arrested for 'political' offences were granted political status. This has been the case since 1972 when a Conservative Government granted 'Special Category Status' after a hunger strike led by Bill McKee and other sentenced republican prisoners held in Crumlin Road jail.

On March 1st 1976, the British Labour Government chose to end 'Special Category Status' for all those prisoners sentenced for offences committed after this date. They thus created two categories of prisoners sentenced for political offences – those with and those denied political status. Someone sentenced for an offence committed on or before February 28th 1976 would have been granted the facilities of 'Special Category Status' and someone sentenced for the same offence committed on or after March 1st 1976 would have been denied them.

A further change was announced by N.I. Secretary Humphrey Atkins on Budget Day, Wednesday 26th March 1980: 'From April 1st 1980 no prisoners will be given special status, regardless when he committed his offence.'

NB: Throughout the report we refer to the term 'political' in the following sense: 'persons charged with offences relating to the struggle against the occupation of Ireland by British Imperialism'.  
[Women Against Imperialism]



## YOUNG GIRL

Patricia Moore. Dunmurry. Age 18.

'On Wednesday 30th August 1977 I was coming up Castle Street between 3.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. I was stopped by a Military Policewoman and she asked me to open my bag. I had a tape recorder in my bag which was switched on by mistake; she also found a letter in my bag which I had found in a telephone box a few minutes beforehand.

'I was then arrested and taken to Grand Central Army Post. I was put into a cubicle and then taken out and searched in the toilets. After about two hours I was taken in again and asked if I had anything in my pockets. I emptied my pockets and there was a dead match and a piece of tissue in them; I also had a bracelet on my arm which the policewoman dragged off me. She was shouting and yelling at me and saying I was a "suspicious bitch". I did not say a word while this was going on.

'I was taken to a room which I took to be a medical room. A young soldier was in the room when I went in; I think he said he represented the Medical Officer; he asked me about previous illnesses and did I have any scars. also did I want to be medically examined. I said I had no need to be examined. He asked me to sign a form which I did. He went out but the Military Policewoman was still there. He came in again and the two of them giggled and laughed about strip-searching me; he went out again.

'Then a black soldier came in and the Military Policewoman said "I want her strip-searched." He just walked out. The young soldier came in again and the MPW said "She's going to be strip-searched and you have to leave." He said something about "his luck". He then left and the black soldier came in again.

'I was standing facing the wall. She [MPW] came over to me and said, "Right, you're going to be strip-searched," with that the black soldier left again. The MPW said "Get your clothes off." I said "No." She said, "Take them off or I'll get three or four women to take them off for you." I said, "Go and get them."

'She went out for about one minute and came in again with the black soldier. He said, "You'd be better to make it easy for yourself." I said "For what reason should I take off my clothes?" The MPW said, "Because you're a suspicious bitch."

'I said "I've been searched twice before"; she came towards me and grabbed my coat and tried to pull it off me. I resisted and she pushed me and I banged my head off the wall. She lifted her fist and I thought she was going to hit me and I slapped her face and she then hit me on the ear. With this the black soldier came in; she told him that I had hit her and that I wouldn't take off my clothes.

'She left and came back with two other women soldiers, one was a Seargent Major and she said to her about "making it easier for myself"! I said again that I would not take off my clothes. She asked me again, this time I said I would if some of them left. I took off my clothes, every stitch. I put on my shirt and anorak again quickly but the MPW said, "Who gave you permission to get dressed, you haven't been searched yet," with that she grabbed my anorak and a struggle developed. The black soldier must have heard it and came in again. I struggled and kicked like mad but eventually they managed to get me up onto the table; they put plastic-like handcuffs on my wrists and on my ankles.

'The black soldier was holding my arms and he asked one of the women to hold them so he could search me. He said he could not get at me so he took the handcuffs off my ankles and he put his finger inside me; I was crying with the pain; they turned me over and he did it again; during this they were shouting and yelling at me and when I was getting dressed this MPW kept hitting me on the back with her fist. They questioned me again and said they were going to charge me with assault. I thought I was going to be released then, but instead they took me to Castlereagh where I was kept for 24 hours; I was released on Thursday 31st August 1977 at about 1.00 p.m.'

3

Anne Bateson and her cell-mate Eileen Morgan were attacked by wardresses on Monday 4th February after Anne Bateson was prevented from leaving their cell to go to the toilet. Anne Bateson went to go out to the toilet but was told she could not. Half-a-dozen wardresses then started pushing both women into the cell whilst they punched, kicked and then tried to choke them. One wardress bit Eileen Morgan on the arm and leg, leaving teeth marks. Both women were bruised, and ironically were charged with assault.



Meanwhile through the early weeks of 1980 the standard of cleanliness in B wing was rapidly deteriorating. It is the largest wing in the prison, having three storeys and the wing, not surprisingly, became filthy (and more seriously, the toilets were worse because cleaning the wing became restricted, on the governor's order, to only one orderly. The women therefore found it difficult to maintain a high standard of cleanliness among themselves. There was one brush, and no mops, between more than thirty prisoners, which meant that the brush had to be passed around between cells each morning and evening.

Dirt from the wing was constantly walked or kicked into the cells, and the bins at the corner of each landing were often left for a fortnight before they were emptied. Maggots became commonplace. The three hours daily that the women were unlocked was supposed to be enough time for them to wash themselves and their clothes and clean their cells. As regards their personal hygiene, it became increasingly difficult to maintain even a moderate degree of cleanliness. There were only two baths between more than thirty women. There was no washing machine, and whenever they handwashed their clothes, not only was the water usually freezing, but the washroom flooded because of inadequate drainage.

The fact that the dirty conditions were increasingly becoming a health hazard was confirmed at the end of March 1980 when it was reported from the prison that two women — Marie McClenaghan and Eileen McConville — had contracted a form of scabies.

## Feb. 7th — origins of the no-wash protest

On that day, the Special Prison Officers Riot Squad deliberately and viciously attacked 32 Republican women. Below are printed statements from some of the women prisoners:

### Statement of Rosemary Callaghan

'At around 3.45 p.m. on Thursday 7th February numerous male and female screws invaded my cell in order to get me down to the governor. They charged in, in full riot gear equipped with shields.

'I sat unprotected but aware of what was going to happen as I had heard my comrades screaming in pain. I was suddenly pinned to the bed by a shield and the weight of a male screw on top of me. Then my shoes were dragged off my feet. There followed so much confusion that it is really hard to describe the full extent of my ordeal. I was just bodily assaulted — thumped, trailed and brutally kicked.

'I was then trailed out of my cell, and during the course of my being dragged and hauled from the wing, both my breasts were exposed to the jeering and mocking eyes of all the screws (male and female) — there must have been about twenty of them. While being carried, I was also abused with punches to the back of my head and stomach.

'The whole episode for me was totally embarrassing and degrading. I was eventually carried into the governor — my breasts were still exposed. While I was held by the screws the governor carried out the adjudication, and I was then trailed back and thrown into the cell.'



ROSEMARY  
CALLAGHAN

### Statement of Anne Bateson

'On Thursday evening, 7th February I was sitting in my cell when three male screws burst in with riot gear. The three of them held me on the bed, then grabbed me by the arms and legs, and dragged me out of the cell. At the same time they kept punching me.

'When they got me out to the wing, eight female screws took me from them. Helped by a male screw, they carried me spreadeagled downstairs. The male screw had his hand round my throat the whole time, and he kept pushing my head back. I thought that I was going to choke.

'I was carried into the guard room by the same screws — still spreadeagled, and I was held in this position during the adjudication. My trousers and jumper were nearly off me at this stage, but the governor, Scott, told the screws to hold me in that position and not to let me down.

'One of the screws said: "If you try to move it'll be your last time." While they were holding me they kept bending my feet and head back. When the adjudication was over I was trailed out. The male screws took me at this stage — in the same position — and threw me into an empty cell. One of the male screws kicked me as I was lying on the floor. They then stood outside the cell and banged the door and turned the light on and off.

'They nailed the spy-hole down so that I couldn't see out and I was left lying in the cell. I have bruises on my arms, legs and back.

'The nursing sister came in and saw these for herself. She told me to go to the doctor the next morning, but the screws refused to let me go.'



# PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON WOMEN PRISONERS

## INTRODUCTION

On several different occasions during the last two years, women prisoners have detailed accounts of attacks by both female and male warders. As Father Faul says, 'There was a time, even in the troubled history of the North of Ireland in the past decade, when things ran fairly smoothly in Armagh Gaol. For the past two years a policy of repression has been in vogue, control and punishment with no redress for grievances'. The incidents detailed below are an indication of the deteriorating relations between prison warders and prisoners in a well-planned and brutal attack on the prisoners on 7th February 1980. There can be no doubt that the actions of the prison authorities on that day and the subsequent 48 hours were designed to break the backbone of the ongoing protest. What in fact happened was that the women fought back with the only means left to them - a 'no wash' protest.



## Pre-Feb. 1980

Tuesday 9th May 1978

At five to one on Tuesday the 9th May, 56 prison officers mainly male, in riot gear with shields and batons, rushed with girls, beat them up, and locked them in their cells. These were girls on remand awaiting trial. During the sweltering heat of these May Days they were only allowed out 4 at a time to the yard for 10-15 minutes. For almost 24 hours a day they were locked up. This was additional punishment to loss of remission.

July 9th 1979

Anne Bateson, a protest prisoner, was physically attacked by three female warders, namely Price, Chambers and Stanford, when she refused to be strip searched. The demand for her to strip search followed a monthly visit she had with her relatives. The assault began when Ann Bateson was removed from the visiting area to the reception area. There the three warders held her down on the ground while they attempted to search her. Ann vigorously resisted and prevented them from removing any of her clothing, although by the time the struggle had ended her clothes were torn in several places.

During the scuffle one of the warders bent one of Ann's fingers back almost to breaking point. The following day Ann visited Armagh City Hospital where her badly swollen and bruised finger was x-rayed. Fortunately the finger was not broken, although a blood vessel had burst.

In January 1980 there was a marked stepping up of petty harrassment by the warders. The most annoying and degrading part of the warders behaviour was their increasing reluctance to let the women use the toilet or slop out.

Being restricted to 'once out' only during lock up times, no matter what their needs, meant that women had to relieve themselves in their cells.

The following are extracts from letters sent out from Armagh Gaol.



ANNE-MARIE QUINN

12th January 1980

On Saturday evening, 12th January 1980, Anne-Marie Quinn became ill in her cell. When she went to slop out the wardress refused to allow her access to the toilet unless the contents of her chamber pot were first examined. Naturally enough Anne-Marie Quinn refused to allow this and an argument ensued. The wardress pushed Anne-Marie spilling the contents of the chamber pot. The wardress then lifted up a used sanitary towel and threw it at Anne-Marie, who was then shoved into her cell and charged with assault.

Another prisoner, Lynn O'Connell was beaten by wardresses on Thursday 17th January as they suspected her of possessing a cigarette! A wardress grabbed Lynn and twisted her arm up her back as she was run onto the wing, whilst she was kicked and punched. An orderly who saw this attempted to intervene and both Lynn and the orderly were charged with assault.



ANNE BATESON

# HEALTH AND SANITARY FACILITIES

## Two baths and a shower for 38 women

This section gives a brief rundown of the facilities available to political prisoners before the present stage of the no-wash protest began.

There are two baths and one shower on B Wing, which meant that it was very difficult to have a bath, and a list had to be made out for this purpose. Anyone wanting a bath had to put down their name and the time they wanted a bath one day in advance. Up to 18 girls could have had baths every day, but after three girls had had baths the hot water would run out and no-one else could have one after that.

When locked up, protesting prisoners were only allowed access to the toilets once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Warders kept a list of who had been out! — after being out once, it was virtually impossible to get out to the toilet a second time.

B Wing, where the protesting prisoners were held until the 13th February 1980 is the largest wing of the prison, holding all 38 prisoners on three levels. Only one orderly (an orderly is a criminal prisoner whose task is to clean the wing) worked in this area, B Wing, in the last months. Toilets were filthy as was the wing generally. The three hours daily when the cells were unlocked was supposed to be enough time for them to wash themselves and their clothes and clean their cells. There was one brush and no mops to be passed around all the prisoners, making it impossible to maintain hygienic conditions even in the cells.

Many of the girls are suffering from consistent trouble with heavy periods. With heavy periods it is often necessary to use up to ten sanitary towels per day, not to mention the discomfort, pain and difficulty in staying clean.

The supply of sanitary towels which the girls receive varies according to the whim of the screws. They cannot go and get these themselves but must wait to be given their ration! The supply is issued to each girl on a particular date of the month. If her period occurs earlier than this date, she must borrow from one of the others. Sometimes the girls get 2 packets of towels per month, sometimes only a ration of 2 towels daily.

## FOOD

The food situation is intolerable, the quality of food is atrocious. Most meals are only half cooked. Quantity is such that the girls are always hungry. On protest the girls have to depend on this, as they do not receive parcels. Many girls have lost weight.

### Average Meals For A Day

Breakfast:	Small portion of cornflakes, quarter of a pint of milk, cup of tea
Lunch:	Stew or potatoes, fatty meat, cabbage, jelly
Tea:	1 potato bread, 1 quarter of soda bread, 2 sausages, cup of tea
Supper:	1 pancake, 1 cup of tea

There are severe restrictions on bread. 2 loaves are divided between 32 protesting prisoners and girls are lucky if they receive 2 slices per day.

### Note : (Women Against Imperialism)

It is clear that it is the continuous effect of receiving only this type of food, and not enough of it, which is most hazardous to both physical and mental health. Note that there is no fruit, practically no milk or fresh vegetables.

It would be impossible for anyone, even with sufficient fresh air and exercise, which the girls do not have, to maintain health under these circumstances. Complaints of severe loss of weight, serious menstrual problems, and hair loss, are most likely to be the direct result of such circumstances, which the medical staff are totally unconcerned by.

Also note that since February 7th, food is received on a 'one at a time' rota basis. It takes 2 hours to completely serve all the girls. For the majority the food is stone cold.

## ARMAGH STARVATION DIET

REPUBLICAN PRISONERS in Armagh women's gaol are suffering what appears to be a general gaol policy of starving prisoners in an attempt to force them to come off their protest for political status.

In a recent communication from the gaol the following breakdown was given, describing the food ration for Friday 9th November: breakfast: cornflakes and a quarter pint of milk; dinner: one ladleful of inedible stew; tea: one piece of liver; supper: one small scone and a cup of tea.

This small amount of daily sustenance is currently the routine and although numerous complaints have been made by the prisoners to the prison administration the situation remains unchanged. Because of the regime's denial of food parcels to the protesting prisoners, they are unable to supplement the prison food and are thus constantly in a state of hunger, and some are losing weight as a result.

# A DOCTOR'S COMMENT

There can be a very serious impact on women's health by the denial of toilet and washing facilities.

The most obvious stress results from the denial of adequate quantities of sanitary towels during menstruation. A ration of any sort is not only a cruel attempt at degradation which can be used only against women, but is physically inadequate. During heavy periods a single towel might require replacement after 15 minutes; 8, 10 or 12 towels per day may be necessary. Obviously, since the women have been wearing the same clothes since February 7th, and cannot change clothing which may become saturated as a result of such inadequate protection, the risk of infection rises alarmingly.

Even apart from menstruation, simply with any normal discharge, poor hygiene can quickly lead to a variety of infections, all extremely painful and many of which if left untreated can result in permanent sterility or even death.

These include:

*Oophoritis*: infection of one or both ovaries; can lead to permanent sterility.

*Salpingitis*: or inflammation of the Fallopian tubes, which is most often an ascending infection of both tubes, and one agent causing this is the highly toxic *atratoecal* bacteria. This is an extremely painful infection and often difficult to treat successfully once it is established.

*Cystitis*: inflammation of the bladder; a likely result of poor hygiene, as is ureteritis, inflammation of the ureters. These common infections can easily lead to complication involving the liver and kidneys, both of which can be serious.

In addition, abscess infections of the breasts can result from poor hygiene.

Anyone in generally poor health has a low resistance to infection, and the women in Armagh on protest, living under such conditions in their cells, and after months and years of poor nutrition, must be run down. Once any of these infections are established even in an otherwise healthy woman, the best of treatment can be lengthy before it is finally successful. In a rundown person treatment is not always successful. Kidney and liver complications affect one's entire system and often require notoriously slow treatment under the best of conditions. Proper hygiene is an immediate prerequisite for treatment.

In addition to these common infections, the possibility of rare but more serious conditions such as cancer, which can develop in any person at any time, will probably go undetected because the early warning signals are so mild. Even women outside with full confidence in their doctors often fail to report these early symptoms precisely because they do seem minor. Screening and preventive medicine are important. But in Armagh Gaol where medical attention of all sorts has been routinely denied unless women come off the protest, women may be much more reluctant to report any such problems to Dr Cole, who has done so much to earn the contempt and hatred of the Republican prisoners, with the result that any serious matters may go undetected and untreated.

# 17.

# ANTE NATAL AND MOTHER AND CHILD FACILITIES

Regulations for prisons where women prisoners are detained stipulate the provision of both ante-natal care and mother and child units, post-natal for six months.

For the protesting women prisoners in Armagh, no such regulation is being applied. The two women who have given birth to children while on protest — Jean Hamill and Brenda Murphy — have been denied the following:

- any form of ante-natal care until the last weeks of pregnancy (important to remember the appalling diet and the stress under which the women prisoners live). Even then ante-natal care for one woman amounted to iron injections. She was kept in her cell without 'privileges' until labour started.
- sufficient hospital care — only 3-5 days before being moved back to prison...
- the right to remain with their children in reasonable conditions for the six month period after the birth. Jean Hamill was specifically told she would have to take the child to her cell if she remained on protest. Both women sent their children home within a few weeks given these appalling circumstances and the strain being imposed.

The results of this brutal treatment can readily be understood from the following statements from the two women, Brenda Murphy and Jean Hamill.

## BRENDA MURPHY

Brenda Murphy was 17 years old in 1972, when she was arrested and sentenced to 4 years, 2 of which she completed before release. She was out of gaol for only just a year when she was again arrested, but was out on bail for 8 months. It was now 1977 and Brenda was in the early stages of pregnancy. She was sentenced to Armagh Prison and joined the other women 'on protest' at that time.

Brenda did not inform her mother until she was 3 months pregnant. Mrs Murphy immediately set about trying to have milk and vitamins sent in, but the Prison Authorities refused this. It wasn't until her last month of pregnancy that she was given iron injections. Previous to this she had received no ante-natal care at all. Reports from other prisoners have it that she was very distressed during her pregnancy and was heard continually crying.

When labour began she informed the Prison Wardresses, but was kept all day in her cell. It wasn't until early next day that she was taken to Craigavon-Portadown Hospital. Her mother was not informed of this until 9.00 p.m. that night, when she then went to the hospital. She arrived at 10.00 p.m. and was allowed to stay with Brenda for one hour before she was moved to the Labour Ward. There was a female wardress present with Brenda and her mother and 2 male warders stood guard outside the ward.

Brenda gave birth to a daughter at 12.55 a.m. on the 6th March 1978, and was then moved to a local hospital in Armagh that same morning. She stayed there for 3 days before being moved to the prison sick-bay, where both she and her baby stayed for a week. Brenda sent the 2 week old baby out to her mother and rejoined the other women on protest. Because Brenda had been breast feeding, she suffered problems with her breasts, which were still continuing to fill up.

She has been ill since the birth of her baby 2 years ago and has steadily lost a lot of weight. Brenda came off the protest 4 months ago for health reasons and now sees her child once a week instead of once a month.

In late February, Brenda was put 'on the Boards' i.e. solitary confinement with a bread and water diet, for 20 days. On the 10th March, just after coming off the 'boards', she was taken ill and brought to Craigavon-Portadown Hospital where she underwent a series of tests for suspected gall-stones, but she is now back in prison.

## JEAN HAMILL

Jean was arrested in June 1977 aged 18 yrs - she was 2 months pregnant at the time. She was taken to Castlereagh Interrogation Centre where she was held for 3 days incommunicado. During this time she was threatened and verbally abused by both male and female Special Branch.

At one time she was hit by a female C.I.D. who also told Jean that her child would be malformed when born. She was threatened that her child would be taken from her when born and they (Branch) would see to it that she would never get the child back. They continued along this line of harassment. Jean was then charged and brought to Armagh gaol. Bail was granted when she was seven months pregnant, and this was Jean's 2nd Application for bail, she had been refused the first time.

In June 1978, Jean was sentenced to 14 yrs. She was refused permission to have the child with her in gaol. At this time Jean was again 2 months pregnant. Even though she was pregnant Jean joined the protest for political status, therefore she was locked up and lost all her privileges like all the protestors. During her time on the protest, she had a threatened miscarriage; the prison doctor who examined her before this said there was nothing wrong with her.

The next evening she was rushed to Craigavon Hospital with a threatened miscarriage. Four days later Jean returned to the wing and was again locked up as the prison doctor declared her fit for punishment!. When 6 months pregnant she appealed her case, the appeal was thrown out of court, saying 'No grounds for Appeal!'

When Jean was 7 months pregnant she was declared unfit for punishment, so all privileges were restored. In January 1979 Jean was moved to Craigavon Hospital where she gave birth to a baby boy by caesarean section. After 4 days she was moved back to the gaol. Jean sent the child out to her home when it reached the age of 6 weeks as Jean was informed by the Deputy Governor (Miss Orr) that if Jean continued on the protest, the baby would have to be locked up in her cell full time with her on the protest.

**THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IS A SMUGGLED  
COMMUNICATION FROM THE P.R.O. OF THE BLANKETMEN  
IN THE H-BLOCKS OF LONG KESH:**

We, the Republican Prisoners of War in H-Block, Long Kesh demand as of right political recognition and that we be accorded the status of political prisoners. We claim this right as captured combatants in the continuing struggle for National liberation and self determination. We refute most strongly the tag of criminal with which the British have attempted to label us and our struggle, and we point to the divisive partitionist institutions of the Six Counties as the sole criminal aspect of the present struggle.

We declare that political status is ours of right and we declare that from Monday, 27th October, 1980 a Hunger Strike by a number of men representing H-Blocks 3, 4, and 5 will commence.

Our widely recognised resistance has carried us through four years of immense suffering and it shall carry us through to the bitter climax of death if necessary.

Signed: P.R.O.  
H-Block Blanketmen  
Long Kesh Camp.  
October 10, 1980.

## **WHAT HAS LED UP TO IT**



After four years of punishment, degradation and deprivation, Republican prisoners in the H Blocks are now using the final weapon that they have: their bodies.

Below, we show how the situation in the prisons came to this.

In 1972 the political prisoners in Crumlin Road Jail, Belfast, went on hunger strike for political status, with massive support from the people, and won it. 'An enormous outburst of lawlessness', as the Northern Ireland Office recently described it on TV, 'concentrated like a dam bursting into a particular moment in history which made it impossible to build in our prisons, to introduce a normal prison regime'.

What this particular 'special category status' meant was treatment familiar to Prisoner of War camps: the prisoners had their own command structure by which to deal with the prison authorities, they organised their own daily lives and kept up their identity as resistance fighters against foreign rule of their country. 'In an ordinary penal institution their dealings with the prisoners is done on a one to one basis, they (the Administration) laying down the rules to the prisoners, playing off one against the other and dividing and controlling them. We, through our staff officers, in dealing with the Administration prevent these divisive tactics from being effective against us.' (Irish PoW)

In March 1976 this political - or PoW - status was taken away, by decree of the British Labour Government. It was part of the Government's propaganda

campaign to deny that there was actually a war going on. They tried to kid us, and the world in general, that all these prisoners were criminals, motivated by personal gain or psychopathic instincts, not by desire to free their country. The propaganda campaign did not stop the British Government from using brutal interrogation techniques against them (admitted in the Bennett Report, March 1979), nor from trying them in courts without juries and without the normal rules of evidence applying.

### **STRENGTH OF WILL**

No matter - that was the Government's great master plan in 1976. What defeats it is the incredible strength and will of the prisoners of war, itself proof enough that they are not criminals.

Their protest started first by a simple refusal to wear prison uniforms: 'If they want me to wear prison garb, they will have to nail it on me', said the first blanketman, Kieran Nugent. What followed from this was a whole series of horrors which now has resulted in the hunger strike. Far from being 'self-imposed' and 'IRA propaganda' it was all punishments imposed by the prison authorities and part of the Government's propaganda campaign.

The men prisoners in the H-Blocks of

Long Kesh were punished for refusing to wear prison clothes by loss of all remission, loss of parcels, letters, newspapers, radio and TV. In fact, they had *no* contact with the outside world apart from a monthly half-hour visit. They were confined to their cells 24 hours a day because the warders forced them to walk naked if they wanted to leave the cell. The women prisoners in Armagh suffered similar punishments for refusing to do prison work (all women prisoners are allowed to wear their own clothes).

### **CALCULATED BRUTALITY**

Over the next two years the warders increased the suffering in Long Kesh with severe beatings being a daily occurrence and obscene body searches (the men are forced to squat over a mirror or have their back passages probed by a warder's finger. The warders started to kick over the pots in the cells and took to not bringing round the slop-out buckets so the pots overflowed.

The prisoners responded in March 1978 with a declaration of total non-cooperation. They refused to leave their cells at all except for Mass and visits, and refused to clean out their cells. To punish them for this *all* the furniture was taken from the cells and the warders insisted that they had to ask permission to go to the toilet, and get beaten up on the way more often than not. Thus began the 'no wash' protest because the men had to use their cells as toilets. It is almost impossible to imagine how the prisoners survived the conditions, the stink, the maggots, soaking mattresses on the floor, the cold and nakedness.

### **FINAL STRAW**

In February of this year the women in Armagh were brutally attacked and beaten up by male warders brought in from Long Kesh. They were then all locked up without toilet or washing facilities and then found out that these were to be considered privileges they had to beg for. They refused to submit and went on a no-wash protest. Beatings have become a regular occurrence and male warders are now permanently on the wing, day and night.

The conditions all these prisoners suffer are beyond normal human endurance. Their health is suffering badly, and one of them, Pauline McLaughlin, is very near death. Over the years support for them has been growing on the outside, mainly in Ireland but also in the USA - pressure that has forced the British Government to make pathetic gestures (piped music in the cells etc.) but time is against the brave men and women in Britain's concentration camps. The final straw that drove them to the desperate step of hunger striking was the failure of talks between Archbishop O'Fiaich and British minister Humphrey Atkins.

Imprisonment, degradation, torture are just words to us maybe - but they are a living reality in Northern Ireland. We in Britain **MUST** show our total condemnation of the Government which imposes them.

### Partition acclaimed

In December 1921, a few months after the Labour Party conference, Lloyd George persuaded Michael Collins and Arthur Griffiths to sign the 'Articles of Agreement for a Treaty'. Partition, the division of Ireland into 6 and 26 County regions was formally agreed between the British government and the leaders of the republican movement. The Labour Party was jubilant. 'The whole of the British labour movement', said Party leader Arthur Henderson, 'will welcome the news of the settlement, not only with joy but with great satisfaction'. The Coalition Government was congratulated for implementing the resolution of the recent Labour Party conference:

'Step by step, this policy has since been put into operation, until it reached the terminating point when an agreement was arrived at. . . [which] will mean the inauguration of a new era in the history of the British commonwealth of free nations.' (*Daily Herald*, 7 December 1921)

The following day the General Council of the TUC and the Labour Party NEC issued a joint statement expressing 'the deepest satisfaction that an agreement has been reached' (*Daily Herald*, 8 December 1921). The labour bureaucrats had campaigned the length and breadth of the country for a British solution: now they had it. Their endorsement of Partition endowed the 1921 settlement with a powerful legitimacy among British workers. A cunning imperialist manoeuvre was passed off in the labour movement as a progressive solution.

Partition led rapidly to the defeat of the republican movement. A substantial section of 'anti-Treatyites' split from the leadership and continued the struggle against the new form of British domination. After a bitter civil war in which the new government of the Twenty-six Counties was backed by Britain the republican movement was crushed. In the Six Counties residual republican resistance was smashed in a wave of sectarian pogroms. Once stable British rule was thus re-established the troops were withdrawn from the streets of Ireland.

## A NOTE ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR POLITICAL STATUS

EVEN THE Tory government of 1970-74 recognised that those in prison as a result of activities in the conflict in the North of Ireland were political prisoners. The then Northern Ireland Secretary Willie Whitelaw granted them certain 'privileges' which confirmed that status. But British policy changed.

The Labour government that followed sought to isolate both Republican and Loyalist activists from support in their communities by portraying them as common criminals. New courts were set up under the guidance of Lord Diplock which made the conviction of people for 'terrorist' offences much easier. Juries were abolished, and the judge decided innocence or guilt on his own. More important, uncorroborated confessions were allowed as evidence.

For all those convicted under this new legal procedure all privileges given to earlier prisoners were withdrawn. In protest Republican prisoners and even a small number of Loyalists went on the 'blanket'. They refused to wear prison uniform and were left wrapped in only a blanket. They were denied proper toilet facilities and were subjected to regular beatings from the prison warders in the 'H' blocks of Long Kesh. Now 400 men in Long Kesh and 40 women in Armagh Jail are living in such conditions.

It took a long time to break the wall of silence that was erected around the appalling conditions of the 'H' blocks, but eventually the outside world began to wake up to the reality. Cardinal O'Faich, the leading Catholic churchman in Ireland, visited Long Kesh and protested that the men there were being treated worse than animals. In particular he drew attention to the fact that most had been convicted without a proper trial and on the basis of confessions extracted through torture. Torture of prisoners was confirmed by one of the police surgeons who worked in Castlereagh barracks; the Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg found Britain guilty of 'degrading and inhuman treatment of prisoners' and Amnesty International documented numerous case histories of those who had been subjected to torture.

More than 150 people, against whom no charge has ever been proved, have already been deported indefinitely without trial from one part of Britain to another. None of them dares break the terms of his or her deportation because to do so would invite instant long-term imprisonment. \* \* \*

So far as I know, of all the countries in the world, only Indonesia, Chile and Britain deport people *sine die* (indefinitely). It is, I think, worth reminding ourselves, that the Labour Party conference has never discussed the operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. \* \* \*

When the PTA was first brought before Parliament, Roy Jenkins emphasised the 'draconian' character of the measures contained in it and was at pains to assure the House and the people that it was only a temporary measure. We have now had it for more than four years and we can see clearly that it has turned out to be an instrument used for harassing the population; more than 98 per cent of those arrested under the Act were innocent of any offence connected with terrorism; innocent trade unionists in the course of their trade union activities have been arrested and, in some cases, deported; people who had no connection with Ireland at all have been arrested, others have been arrested simply on the basis that they were married to, living with or merely friendly with, Irish people; even babes in arms and toddlers have been arrested, as happened at Heathrow earlier this year.

# CRIMINALISATION

## CRIMINALISATION

Since March 1st 1976, the British government have been implementing a policy of non-recognition of political status for prisoners sentenced after that date, and thus they created two categories of prisoners sentenced for political offences – those with, and those without 'special category status'; i.e. what was special after that date became merely 'criminal' instead. This has become known as the British criminalisation policy.

The 'criminalisation' of the prisoners, however, represents only one aspect of this policy, for its effects are felt throughout the whole spectrum of Northern Ireland politics. Indeed, this policy can be said to be the master copy, or hard core theory, which guides and determines all British policy making in Northern Ireland. The tragedy of the situation here is, of course, that this analysis does not reflect the political reality of the six counties; that it has been conceived and imposed on the people of the six counties as an act of political expediency, and that the more this illusion is shattered, and the more awkward it becomes to apply, the more severe and repressive become the means adopted by the British government to sustain it.

### Rationale of Criminalisation

In 1969 there were only 712 prisoners in the six counties; now there are nearly 3,000. This huge increase has been due to 'crimes' that are politically motivated, and which are dealt with by special types of British legislation – the men and women involved are sentenced to special long sentences by special non-jury courts after being interrogated by special methods under detention by special emergency laws. Yet the claims they make to 'special category' status (i.e. political status) is denied them. Why? And why was this status granted them in 1972 and yet denied after March 1976? The answer is simple: in 1972 with the numbers of sentenced prisoners moving towards 3,000 the British government was embarrassed by an international statistic which was frightening – 3,000 prisoners in a tiny population of 1½ million. With the situation like this the British were open to the accusation of being tyrannical and oppressive, denying civil liberties and political freedom. Their response was to deny this statistic by removing the special label, and by branding all prisoners instead as mere criminals and terrorists.

'On Saturday morning 9th February I was taken from my cell by two female officers and once on the wing was pulled around to be forcibly searched. Before I knew what was happening I was attacked by several male officers and thrown to the ground.

'While I was on the ground I was continually punched and kicked all over my body but particularly on my face. At this stage I felt very heavy throbbing round my eyes and my nose appeared to be bleeding very heavily. After more kicking I passed out and when I came round I was being thrown into a punishment cell. Not satisfied with what they had already done several male officers entered the cell and once again I was continually kicked until I passed out.

'Hours later I was examined by surgery staff. Extensive bruising to my body was noted. Also a severely swollen left eye and badly swollen nose.'

Lynn O'Connell, to her parents

Since the PTA was introduced by a Labour government in 1974, more than 4600 people have been detained. Of this number 64 were charged with offences under the Act and 44 found guilty. More than 200 people were expelled from Britain to Ireland after detention and interrogation.

## A NOTE ON THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT

THE PREVENTION of Terrorism Act, rushed through Parliament in the aftermath of the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974, was originally represented as a 'temporary provision' only. Roy Jenkins, then Home Secretary, said: 'These powers are draconian and in combination they are unprecedented in times of peace.' In plain language, the police got powers usually reserved for wartime. Existing legal rights were wiped out at a stroke. Under the Act 'terrorism' is defined as 'the use of violence for political ends', which has wide-reaching implications. (Of course, the use of the British Army in the streets of Northern Ireland is 'the use of violence for political ends' . . . but that's different.)

So far only the IRA has been proscribed, but other organisations could also be proscribed at the discretion of the Home Secretary. It is an offence to organise a public meeting which in any way supports a proscribed organisation, or to wear or display anything which suggests you are a member of or support such an organisation. The police have the right to arrest and search anyone, anywhere, at any time, and to seize property. A suspect can be held for seven days without access to a solicitor, and can be forcefully photographed and fingerprinted. The Prevention of Terrorism Act actually creates a new crime, that of 'withholding information'. The police have power to deport detainees by obtaining an 'exclusion order' from the Home Secretary. The police need give no reason for deportation.

Between November 1974 and the end of 1979, 4,524 people were detained under the Act. Only 49 of these were charged with offences under the Act, and of these twenty were acquitted! A further 249 detainees were charged with offences under other laws. Most of these charges alleged 'conspiracy' to commit an offence, not actual crimes, and seventy were later acquitted.

Of all those 4,524 people arrested, only 208 have been found guilty of any offence, and most of those were unrelated to terrorism. In addition 217 people have been deported. These are people against whom the police have no evidence for prosecution, but simply want out of the country.

To understand the real motive behind the Prevention of Terrorism Act, we must look at those it is directed against. Many of those detained are active trade unionists and socialists, journalists, students, and Irish workers seeking employment. Detainees are frequently questioned about political and trade union activities which are entirely legal. The police need not inform a detained person's family of their whereabouts or of their arrest. Many trade unionists have lost their jobs as a result of being detained.

### **Prevention of Terrorism Act: statistics**

Between the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1974 and 1 January 1980, 4,345 people were detained, 205 people were excluded, and 46 people were charged with offences under the Act.

Eight years ago, the double killing — in October 1972 — was dubbed the 'pitchfork murders' and was attributed to loyalists. But those charged are Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, Sergeants John Byrne and Stanley Hathaway, both aged 38; plus a former member of the regiment, Iain Chestnut, aged 31; and Captain Andrew Snowball, aged 28, is charged with withholding information about the double killing.

### STRUCK

The second incident, involving James Curry, from Hollybank, happened near the border at Kilturk when he stumbled upon a group of Brits in a dug-out at the roadside, in the early hours of the morning. During the encounter James Curry was held by two of them while a third struck him in the face with a rifle-butt, knocking him to the ground.

The RUC eventually showed up, and their response was to arrest him and take him to Enniskillen barracks where, despite heavy bleeding, he received no medical treatment, and was not released for several hours.

Once home, his family doctor arranged admittance to Erne Hospital where James had stitches

inserted in his face and was treated for his broken nose. Ironically, in their forty-mile round-trip with their prisoner the RUC had passed the hospital twice even though their own police doctor had recommended X-rays.

Because of these, and other, incidents, where schoolchildren, aged only seven and eight years, have been forced to stand bare-foot in the rain after soldiers ordered them to remove their shoes and socks, community representatives have met together with parents and clergymen to discuss what action to take. Their greatest fear at present is the

## LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

In an editorial on October 3rd, *The Guardian* called the conflict in the Six Counties 'the most serious and sustained armed rebellion which any Western nation has had to face since the war.' But if you were to use the Labour Party Conference as your guide to the major issues facing the labour movement, then Ireland would seem very much a side issue.

The debate on a motion calling for 'political and military withdrawal, political status for Republican prisoners and the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act' lasted half an hour on the Wednesday morning where it had been scheduled at a time when there was no TV coverage. This, and the motion's rejection by a large majority, shows the extent to which apathy, chauvinism and unconcern is rife in the labour movement.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE?

The fact that the motion was discussed at all is an encouraging sign. It was brought about by the increased grassroots pressure which was largely coordinated by the Labour Committee on Ireland. And another encouraging sign is the support it received from nearly 200 constituency Labour Parties. This, the most successful campaign in the Labour Party in recent times, raises a tactical question. First, whether by allowing the motion to go for a vote its rejection will affect discussion on the National Executive Council — which is preparing what 'could be' a progressive and comprehensive document on Ireland. The large vote against the motion could well do this, but on reflection the support of 200 or so constituencies could be enough to offset any such negative effects, particularly since the NEC power base tends to be in the constituencies rather than in the unions.

### TOO LATE

But at the present rate of progress the breaking of the bipartisan policy (Tory/Labour agreement on Ireland) will come too late for the hunger strikers in the H-



Denis Healey (future Labour leader?) with friends in Belfast.

Blocks. The forces propagandising in or at the Labour Party need to make Ireland the main issue. Everything must be concentrated to swing public opinion around and help avert tragedy.

DEC 5<sup>TH</sup> 1980

STOKE NEWINGTON

TOWN HALL  
HKN GAZ

## Uproar as Benn rejects Irish hunger strikers

UPROAR broke out when Tony Benn criticised the Irish hunger strikers at Tuesday's public meeting.

Asked to speak for the H-block protestors, he refused and instead made a plea for the unification of Ireland.

'Ireland has had enough martyrs for a thousand years,' he said.

'I believe hunger strikers by sacrificing their lives, will release more bloodshed and I do not want that.'

While he sympathised with the prisoners, he said there was no point in dealing with symptoms — the root cause of Ireland's troubles was the split of north and south and the need was for political unity.

# H - BLOCKS