

BRITAIN'S HELL-HOLE

FIRST PRISONER

The first Republican prisoner to be held under the non-political status conditions was sentenced in September 1976. Since then Republican prisoners have been engaged in a battle of wills against the unbridled ferocity of a sectarian prison regime.

Today, the prison administration in charge of the H-Blocks has refined a system based on brutality and starvation which they impose on the prisoners in an attempt to weaken their protest by reducing them to physical wrecks.

NAKED CONFINEMENT

Central to the Brits' new gaol policy of criminalisation was to force prisoners to wear a prison uniform. This captured Republicans refused to do. Consequently, the screws stripped them and threw them naked into cells. To cover their nakedness they wear a rough woollen blanket.

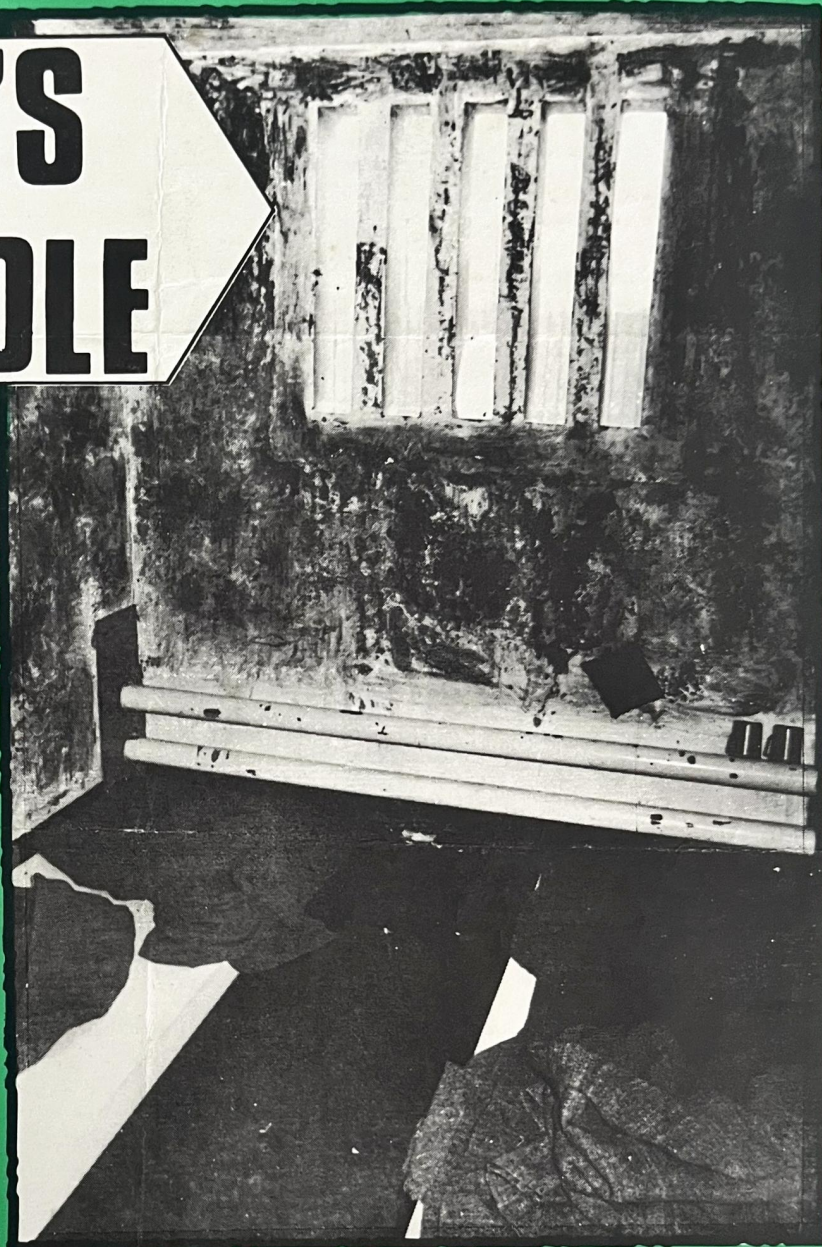
Not satisfied with imposing this form of degradation on the men their gaolers have deprived them of one day's remission for every day they are on the blanket protest. They also deprived the men of one hour's daily exercise in the fresh air,, association with other prisoners, reading material or radios.

All meals are eaten in the cell and natural functions are also carried out in the cell.

BRUTALITY

Brutal and unmerciful attacks have been an ever present feature suffered by the prisoners since the protest began. Physical punishment is a crucial element in the 'war on nerves' which the screws

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The above picture is not fake nor is it a publication by the Republican Movement. It was published by the Brit propagandists at the "Northern Ireland Office" during the last months of the British Labour government's term of office.

It shows the conditions inside a cell in the notorious H-Blocks of Long Kesh where at this very moment four hundred Republican prisoners exist in similar foul and disgusting conditions in H-Blocks 3, 4, 5, and 6.

These four hundred prisoners, along with forty women prisoners held in Armagh Gaol, are engaged in an intense prison struggle against the Brits' criminalisation policy. They are demanding the retention of political status which was arbitrarily removed in March 1976 by the then British secretary of state for the occupied six counties, Merlyn Rees.

Republican remand prisoners are also engaged in a solidarity protest with their comrades and are refusing to co-operate with the prison regime in Crumlin Road Gaol and Armagh Gaol.

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wage daily against the blanket men. It is not uncommon for scores of prisoners to be bludgeoned during cell searches or wing shifts. Many prisoners have been seriously injured after being batoned to the ground, punched and kicked, all the time being harangued by a tirade of sectarian abuse from the screws.

On several occasions prisoners have reported that their attackers smelled heavily of alcohol which they can obtain from the bar inside the confines of Long Kesh.

NO MEDICAL ATTENTION

The harsh living conditions enforced on the men are further worsened by the non-existent medical facilities. Even in the most serious of illnesses the screws will not permit a prisoner to be examined unless he first of all complies with being washed and wears a uniform.

These pre-conditions also apply where a prisoner has tooth ache, ear ache or stomach ache.

To cover up the results of brutal attacks on prisoners the doctor does not fill in body charts pinpointing the areas of the body which are bruised. Consequently none of the men have any confidence in the prison medical staff and prefer to suffer rather than be treated by them.

DEHUMANISING SEARCHES

Despite the fact that the men are constantly naked they are subjected to humiliating searches where the private parts of their body are probed. They are forced to squat naked over a mirror while either a torch or a metal probe is used to examine their back passage. On occasions

they are forced to open their mouths while a screw searches it by shining a torch inside. It has also been known for the men's ears to be searched in this manner.

These searches are often accompanied by beatings especially if the prisoner attempts to resist.

The screws realise the discomfort these searches cause the men and so they use them to the utmost. For a prisoner to get his monthly half-hour visit he must undergo this search. So humiliating is the experience that few men take visits.

STARVED

The quality of the food is foul and tasteless. The quantity is always meagre and hot meals are left to cool down before being served. Sauce, salt or sugar are luxuries which the prisoners receive only when "special visitors" are touring the H-Blocks.

Every meal is checked by prisoners for pieces of wire wool, glass or maggots which are frequently found.

On occasions men have been starved for several days because a screw or loyalist prison orderly decides to withhold or destroy their food.

This policy of keeping the men in a state of semi-starvation has reduced them to gaunt, emaciated figures.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Cut off from the outside world the prisoners gain comfort and reassurance from the knowledge that they are continuing the age old fight against the Brit oppressor.

But the battle for political status is not just the prisoners' - it concerns all the Irish people. Over the last few years tens of thousands of people have rallied to defend the prisoners. Now everyone must intensify their efforts.

If you are a member of an organised body such as a trade union, cultural group, tenants' association, raise the issue of the torture inside the H-Blocks. Demand some positive action from your association. Above all, support Sinn Fein demonstrations organised in support of the political prisoners' demands.

In the final analysis, however, the only way to end torture and imprisonment is to fight for the removal of the British presence in this country.

If we achieve this objective the Irish people can put prison struggles behind them forever.