



IRSP

HUNGER STRIKE BULLETIN NO.3



Beechmount Rally Wed. 12th.

NATIONALIST PEOPLE ANSWER FITT

DESPITE POLICE HARASSMENT AND MEDIA SILENCE THE SUPPORT FOR THE SEVEN HUNGER STRIKERS CONTINUES TO GROW AND HAS BEEN MANIFEST ON THE STREETS EVERY DAY SINCE THE HUNGER STRIKE BEGAN ON OCTOBER 27th.

To begin with, there was a flurry of publicity centering around Atkins making misleading and incoherent statements about prison clothes and then having to repeatedly reassure Loyalists that political status would not be re-introduced under any circumstances. Since then the press and T.V. in league with their British and Loyalist masters, have operated a system of self-censorship aimed at demoralising the people who are daily demonstrating their support for the hunger strikers and their five demands on the streets of cities, towns and villages throughout the thirty two counties of Ireland.

Just whose side the media is on is clearly seen when one remembers the sympathetic reporting and blanket coverage given to Loyalist campaigns such as the U.W.C. strike in 1974, when the British Government forgot whatever principles it might have had and surrendered to the threat of Loyalist violence.

The media is attempting to relegate the struggle for political status from the headlines and when they do cover events they are unable to hide their hostility.

The British Government is worried about the situation and is clearly dismayed at the frequency,

size and widespread nature of the protest. In order to gain support for their policy of "criminalisation" their latest ploy has been to wheel on QUISLING FITT to denounce the political status campaign. This was the man who, according to himself, if one can believe him, got down on his two knees and begged Whitelaw to grant status in the first place.

FITT IS STILL ON HIS KNEES BUT THE IRISH PEOPLE ARE NOT.

But rather than sway support away from the hunger strikers QUISLING FITT'S statements have enraged his former supporters and he has been denounced from all quarters - except, of course, the broad spectrum of loyalist opinion from the Alliance Party to the D.U.P.. Gerry Fitt, who once purported to represent the causes of Republicanism and of Labour is now on his knees begging the British Government to allow Republican prisoners to die on hunger strike.

By exposing the heartless nature of the British Government, crawling lackies like QUISLING FITT and the murderous reactionary nature of Loyalism the action of the hunger strikers, in three weeks, has succeeded in uniting and mobilising the entire nationalist people.

THAT ALONE IS A GREAT STEP FORWARD.

HUNGER STRIKE HISTORY

TWELVE REPUBLICAN PRISONERS HAVE DIED SO FAR THIS CENTURY ON HUNGER STRIKE. THEY WERE:-

Thomas Ashe, died August 1917; Michael Fitzgerald, died October 1920; Terence MacSwiney, died October 1920; Joseph Murphy, died October 1920; Joseph Whitty, died September 1923; Commandant Denis Barry, died November 1923; Captain Andrew Sullivan, died November 1923; Tony D'Arcy, died April 1940; Jack McNeela, died April 1940; Sean McCaughey, died May 1946; Michael Gaughan, died June 1974; Frank Stagg, died February 1976.

In our last issue we dealt with hunger strikes in general and with Thomas Ashe in particular and now want to continue this tragic and courageous history to the present day.

Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, was arrested on August 12th. 1920, whilst presiding at a meeting at the City Hall in Cork. At his inauguration as Lord Mayor MacSwiney made a speech which has since inspired scores of hunger strikers - *"The contest, on our side is not one of rivalry or vengeance, but of endurance. It is not those who can inflict the most but those that can suffer the most who will conquer. It is conceivable that the army of occupation could stop our functioning for a time. Then it becomes simply a question of endurance. Those who have faith will endure to the end and triumph."*

His court-martial charge was that he was in possession of documents, the publication of which *"would be likely to cause disaffection to His Majesty."*

MacSwiney refused to recognise the authority of a British Court in Ireland and along with the ten men who were arrested with him, went on a hungerstrike in protest against the continual arrests of public representatives. On the third day of the prisoners refusal to take food MacSwiney was separated from the rest and was taken by warship to England and imprisoned in Brixton.

Two months later on October 17th. 1920, Michael Fitzgerald, one of the prisoners in Cork, died. He had been commandant of the 1st. battalion of the 2nd. Cork Brigade and had been remanded time and time again without trial - a tactic still being used by the Brits in their "internment by remand" policy.

MacSwiney lingered on as the rest of the world watched with growing respect and admiration. It seemed incredible that anyone could cling so tenaciously to life without food and only strength of will to keep going. He starved for 74 days and died on October 25th. 1920. Within hours of his death, another one of the Cork prisoners died, Michael Murphy, a lad of 22 years of age. The 7 remaining hunger strikers, at the request of the acting President of the Republic, Arthur Griffith, then abandoned their strike.

Thousands watched a procession of honour carry MacSwiney's tricolour draped coffin through the streets accompanied by uniformed volunteers. The day of his burial in Cork, October 31st. was one of public mourning. (The Brits showed their contempt for Irish lives the very next morning when they hanged Kevin Barry in Mountjoy Jail.)

In March 1923, 91 women prisoners in Kilmainham Jail went on hunger strike when their right to send and receive letters was removed. After 7 days the right was restored and the strike ended. Throughout that year (there was anything up to 11,500 men and women republican prisoners in Free State jails at this time) there were sporadic and isolated instances of hungerstriking and the first person to die was Joseph Whitty, a Wexford man, who died in September



Terence MacSwiney

On October 13th. 400 men in Mountjoy started a mass hungerstrike which soon spread to other prisons and camps and within two weeks the total number on strike was; Mountjoy 462, Cork Jail 70, North Dublin Union 50 women, Dundalk Jail 200, Kilkenny 350, Tintown 3,300, Newbridge Prison 1,700, Gormanstown 711, and 1,000 in Hare Park.

Only certain people are temperamentally suited to maintain a fast to the death and that which makes up this temperament is not immediately apparent. A mass hungerstrike is, therefore, prone to the increased chances that some of the people will have to give up and thus weaken the morale of all. And this was exactly what happened but not until the strike had claimed the lives of Denis Barry who died in Newbridge on Nov. 20th and Andrew Sullivan, who died in Mountjoy on Nov. 22nd.

With the deaths on one side and the defections on the other all hope had been lost and on November 23rd. the strike was called off. To be continued...

SAVE THE HUNGER STRIKERS!

Sunday 30th Mass Demonstration

DUNVILLE-BUSY BEE
Assemble 2pm

BLANKET MEN SPEAK OUT

Marching to the scaffold on and on and on and on
Noble youth a plenty, on many a summer morn,
A scene oft times repeated, its a scene we yet will see,
A scene thats never changing while we remain unfree

Mothers tears and martyrs blood have become so commonplace,
that the withered lines of heartbreak are etched on a nations face,
Endless years of sorrow have plainly had their toll,
and Eireann proud and lovely is a land without a soul.

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For some accept the tyrant and contrive their soul to sell
and send the few that wouldn't, to their death in a H. Block cell,
On to meet the scaffold on to meet the end,
Pain and death and torture are Eireanns once again.

Poem from Michael Devine H. 5

TO THE I.T.G.W.U.

I lie here in this wretched abode on hunger strike to the death. I hunger for justice, I have no death wish. I do not want to die for I am still young. The action I have taken was forced upon me. The choice that faced me was to hunger strike or continue to live in this hell and suffer degradation and ill treatment. The decision to hunger strike was not easy. We are well aware that death or serious illness may result from it, but as you are aware we have tried every way and every means for 4 years and more, we have suffered daily and extensively in doing what we are. So we have made our message clear to the world that we do not possess the qualities of common criminals. We have made clear to the world our distinction. Our willingness to endure all punishment and degradation meted out to us by the prison authorities, now we have come to the climax in our present protest in the H. Blocks. We resort to the only weapon that is left to us. The weapon of self-sacrifice Connolly understood. Did he not hunger strike also? Did he not find the highest expression



of his idealism self-sacrifice? there can be no doubt that we have the full support of the people in this issue. It is the most crucial issue in the history of the six-county struggle. The British Government have made it so, not us. In their stiff upper-lipped attitude they have ignored all appeals and efforts to resolve the issue. They can still do it before it is too late, before life or lives are lost, they can prevent a bigger crisis.

If they continue in their arrogance and ignorance there is no doubt the situation will be beyond their control. We appeal to you to help in any way at all. Act as a union. You know the demands we have made are reasonable. We are well justified in making these demands. We are victims and prisoners of an unjust system of special laws emergency powers, non jury courts in which the flimsiest of evidence is admitted. Our motives are not self gain. We believe that our actions are justified. The justice of our cause we maintain, determines our right to struggle. Once before we faced this problem. The weapon used then was hunger strike. The British Government resolved the issue then, before it was too late and only when the maximum pressure was exerted. They can do it again before it is too late.

Those who want to help must do so now. There is a time factor. Every day brings us closer to death. Due to the conditions we have existed in for over 4 years, we were in a weak state at the outset of the strike. The days are now counted in double figures. We have deteriorated rapidly since day one. We don't reckon to hold out for a long period, we will not be forced fed. Our only hope is you the people and any people that can exert pressure. This is why I have asked you to help. Consider the situation and how it may be if someone dies. If you do so, then you will know that you must help.

John Nixon on hunger strike.

Today we got our first medical examination, I will send you out all the facts as soon as possible. The only development so far, Leo Green has pains in his back, I hear Brendan Hughes has pains but I'm not sure where. I saw Sean McKenna at mass he has deteriorated worst and has pains in his back, we are all going through the initial phases, stomachs shrinking, headaches, and floating sensations. Tom McFeely has obviously lost weight but is not too bad. I am about the same condition I reckon I've lost about half a stone. I have not heard much about Tommy McKearney.

I hear they intend to keep us here for a while. McFeely reckons they are going to let us die here until the end, I don't think so, we have all asked for new blankets. I have requested a body sheet showing markings of scars and rashes that are on my body. I have a rash now for about 2 years and more and it covers a fair part of my body. This is about it mentally I'm fighting hard to overcome any pains although my speech has slowed down I can still converse and do so for it keeps my mind off the anaw... in my stomach. As of yet the wounds I received have not affected me. I hope they won't cause any setbacks. I force myself to walk a bit in the cell at night when any strength in my body seems to be at its peak. Most times I sit up on the bed close to the warmth of the pipes. The heat helps me the most it seems to keep the hunger down and my body needs the least resistance.

We are kept up to date on the scene here and are fully aware of the vast support and the tremendous work you are all doing. We know you will not relent in your efforts and use all and any means.



I cannot send you enough encouragement at this time, everyday now brings us closer to bad health and death. There is a time factor, for we have suffered for four years alone under inhuman conditions, they have taken there toll on us - so you must realise that we must force the issue soon.

I will give you now the details of our medical examination, I weigh 62-65 kilogrammes, that is about 9st. 11lbs, so I have lost a stone already. I was a bit shocked as I had put much more on over the past year or so. McFeely weighs 64-2 kilogrammes about 10st. 2lbs and he has lost I'd say about over a stone and a half. McKenna was the worst at exactly 8 stone. I reckon he was about 9½ st. last Monday. Raymond McCartney I reckon has lost the most, he is 9st.7lbs and was the weightiest among us. I don't know about the other 3 in H.4.

The doctor gave us a full medical examination, eyes, ears, tongue, blood pressure, pulse, heart etc. - my reflexes, so far all is ok. with me.

There is nothing that any human being values more than life, every man clings to it with every strength of his being. To willingly surrender it is acknowledged as the greatest sacrifice any man can make. Not only to die but to choose a death which is slow and agonising. Future serves to illustrate the depths of his courage and sincerity in the H. Blocks of long Kesh. To willingly undergo this ordeal, willingly undergo suffering. None of us can possibly imagine as each day passes, the dark shadow of the shroud descends ominously on each of these brave Irish men as it has done oft times before. But the question that springs immediatly to mind is, will we stand back and allow them to surpass the great sacrifices that they have already made on behalf of people like you and me, for remember concern for people and their freedom was the motivation for their actions on the outside, not personal gain as Brit propoganda will have us believe.

These people who built an empire on death and destruction have gone to great pains to portray the H. Block blanketmen as criminals. Yet despite the torturous regime their warped minds have created, they have failed miserably to break the spirit of the now 500 men in the H. Blocks. Failed miserably despite enforcing total isolation accompanied by starvation diets, hosings, denial of T.V. radio and all reading facilities, beatings on an unparalleled degree plus the vilest living conditions in any prison in the world. We have proved now and assert once again that we will not be criminalised. We will not disgrace the brave men and women who shed their blood so nobly. We are POW's and will accept nothing less, we have waited patiently in these torturous conditions while attempts were being made to solve the H. Block issue. Unfortunately as we feared, the British used this period to relieve the weight of pressure that had been brought upon them. We considered our position and believe that a death of dignity is preferable to indefinite torture. Our comrades are not alone, should one or all of them fall to this inhumanity of Britain then there will be another to take his place as always has been the case through out the centuries of resistance. You, everyone has a duty if not as Irish men then simply as human beings to prevent these men from entering an early grave. Remember while you have your freedom today you, anyone of you, could be a prisoner in H. Block tomorrow, whether you are guilty of an action is irrelevant, being Irish is enough.

H. Block is a festering sore in the face of Ireland. It and those responsible for it, must be smashed, we are helpless, all we have to give is our lives; We simply ask you to do your share and prevent tragedy.

Michael Devine. H.5.

HUNGER STRIKE DIARY

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 5th - Harassment of Hunger-Strike activists continues as 4 activists including the Chairperson and P.R.O. of the Markets Hunger Strike Committee were lifted early in the morning from their homes and held in Castlereagh for 2½ days.

Loyalist assassins struck again as a catholic butcher was gunned down. Atkins showed his contempt for the nationalist people by appealing to loyalist assassins not to play into the hands of "terrorists". That night, 300 people of that area, Newhill, marched up the Springfield Road into New Barnsley to a meeting in the Matt Talbot Centre. Also that night several hundred ex-prisoners met in Turf Lodge to organise and help the solidarity campaign.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 6th - 200 H.Block activists occupied the British Home Stores in Belfast for an hour. There were pickets outside Andersonstown Barracks and Turf Lodge

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 7th - 100 people leafletted outside Lower Falls Unemployment Office and 7 women chained themselves to the railings of St. Mary's Teacher Training College.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 8th - A Mass Lobby was held on the S.D.L.P. Conference in Newcastle, 150 people lobbied the delegates, the vast majority of whom totally ignored them. A picket of Andersonstown Barracks took place attended by 200 people; there was also a vigil in Ladybrook, a rally in Strabane was attended by 600 people.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 9th - A National Collection took place for the H.Block campaign in every major area and town in Ireland. There were major rallies in Derry, Dungiven, Newry and Dungannon, nearly 15,000 people attended in all.

MONDAY NOVEMBER 10th - There was general road blocking by local hunger-strike committees in Ardoyne, Oldpark, Shorstrand, Markets, Divis Flats and the Kennedy Way roundabout.

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 11th - In one of the most significant developments of the Hunger Strike campaign, over 400 dockers, members of the I.T.G.W.U. marched to a picket of the N.I. Office of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. This represented a half-day stoppage of the Belfast deep-sea dock in support of the prisoners 5 demands, the media totally ignored this important strike with blanket censorship on all T.V. channels.

There was a picket at Fort Jericho, Turf Lodge with a 100 people present. Demonstrations took place in Unity Flats, Short Strand and Derry City, while 200 people took over a buffet at Beechmount Leisure Centre provided by the Belfast City Council. A march took place in Lurgan with massive support shown for the hunger strikers with 6,000 people from that area in attendance. A picket was organised on the house of John Cousins, the Alliance Party's spokesperson on security. A sizeable group of protesters chanted slogans outside his home in Twinbrook showing him the feeling of the people's support for the prisoners.

LOYALIST ASSASSINS

ON Friday night, November 14th. Peter Valente, a thirty three year old Catholic from Unity Flats was found dead in an alley off the Springfield Rd. in the Protestant Highfield district. He had been shot twice through the head and it is believed that he had been kidnapped by a Loyalist murder gang as he left work in Glengormley, just a few hours earlier.

Peter Valente's brother is a "blanket-man" in the H-Blocks doing ten years and Peter, himself, was active on the Unity Flats Hunger Strike Committee. Just the night before his murder he had taken part in a torchlight procession to support the demands of the seven hunger strikers.

His murder is not an isolated case. The day before (Thursday) the U.F.F. carried out two separate murder bids in Co. Down. The first was on a Catholic footballer with Bangor soccer club whilst he was at a training session at the club grounds and the second was on Sean McConville a Catholic from Dromara who was shot and seriously wounded as he worked at his garage.

It is now clear that there is a concerted and deadly attempt by British and Loyalist murder gangs to terrorise political status campaigners and silence their protests with bullets.

THE recent tour by the R.U.C. round the Unity Flats demanding the names of those involved on the Hunger Strike Committee so that they, the R.U.C., could give committee members protection now takes on an even more sinister meaning...

THE local policeman was traditionally the eyes and ears of the repressive Stormont regime.... IS THE COMMUNITY POLICEMAN NOW THE EYES AND EARS OF THE ASSASSINS???????

HUNGER STRIKE FIGHTING FUND

DONATIONS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED FOR OUR HUNGER STRIKE FIGHTING FUND IN ORDER TO PRODUCE POSTERS AND LEAFLETS TO COUNTER BRITISH PROPAGANDA AND ORGANISE SUPPORT FOR THE HUNGER STRIKERS.

DONATIONS SHOULD BE SENT TO..... HUNGER STRIKE FIGHTING FUND

392, FALLS ROAD

BELFAST 12

