

TROOPS OUT

Vol. 4, No. 5 February 1981 **Paper of the Troops Out Movement** 15p

BERNADETTE McALISKEY



**SHOT FOR
BACKING
IRISH
PRISONERS**

***Inside - We
Explain the
Settlement
of the
Hunger
Strike***

(Photo: Jeremy Nicholl)



**TROOPS OUT NOW!
SELF DETERMINATION FOR THE
IRISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE!**



EDITORIAL

During the hunger strike, Loyalist politicians and paramilitaries threatened violent retaliation if the government gave in to the prisoners' demands. The concessions by the government that ended the strike were denounced as a betrayal by Loyalist leaders such as the Reverend Ian Paisley and Enoch Powell. The attempt to kill Bernadette McAliskey may be the beginning of this violent backlash.

The Loyalists and the British Government have failed to defeat the mass movement among the nationalist community that built up behind the hunger strikers. Instead, as they have often done in the past, they have turned to the systematic elimination of leading Republican activists. Already dead are John Turnley, Miriam Daly, Ronnie Bunting and Noel Lyttle. The thing that all of these people shared in common is the fact that they were all engaged in political work and *not* military activity and that they shared a socialist outlook. This made them far more vulnerable targets than IRA leaders. The aim of the Loyalist death squads is to strike fear into the heart of the Catholic community in the same way that they have tried to do over the years in a series of sectarian assassination campaigns aimed at ordinary Catholics.

The *Daily Mirror*, speaking of the shooting of Bernadette, said that "the irony of it was that she was saved by the very British Army whose withdrawal she had so often called for". The gunmen are alleged to have been arrested by soldiers just after the shooting, and the *Mirror* is using this to mask the real collaboration of the Army in this murder campaign.

Bunting and Lyttle may have been shot by members of the SAS: at the very least the security forces eased the path of the assassins by removing security checkpoints and by being unaccustomedly absent from the area at the time of the shootings. And in the same week as the shooting of Bernadette two British soldiers were convicted of murdering two Catholics during an earlier Loyalist sectarian assassination campaign. This is only the tip of the iceberg of Army direct involvement and complicity in assassinations. Information is regularly passed to Loyalist paramilitaries, arms are obtained by large numbers of Loyalists who are members of the RUC (police force) and UDR (Ulster Defence Regiment); attacks can be co-ordinated with the movements of RUC and UDR patrols, investigations are deliberately soft-pedalled by sympathisers in the police, and many of the members of death-squads like the Shankill Butchers are actual or former members of the RUC or UDR.

The British Army has failed to break nationalist resistance in the last 11 years. The Loyalist terror that goes arm in arm with the British presence will not do so either.



Loyalist assassins on the move again?



The Troops Out Movement is a movement in England, Scotland and Wales made up of people who believe that the cause of the 'troubles' in the north of Ireland is the continuing British presence there, both military and economic. We believe that British troops are in Ireland not as a peacekeeping force, but in order to maintain British rule, and that their presence is the most serious obstacle to any progress towards peace. For over ten years the troops have been occupying a part of Ireland, coercing and oppressing the nationalist people, maintaining the division of Ireland and ensuring that its people cannot unite to determine their own future.

We have been working as an organisation for immediate British withdrawal since the early 1970s. We now have over 40 branches in England, Scotland and Wales. These branches, working locally in whatever ways circumstances allow, are the backbone of the TOM. Membership, or affiliation, is open to any individual or group supporting the demands:

TROOPS OUT NOW

SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE

TROOPS OUT is produced by an editorial collective drawn from TOM branches in London. Contributions are welcome (although we can't guarantee to publish everything that comes in).

Copy for the next issue must be sent in to arrive not later than 11th. Feb.

Subs: £3 for 10 issues yearly. Make cheques and POs payable to Troops Out (Literature Committee). Send subs to Box 10, 2a St Pauls Rd, London N1.

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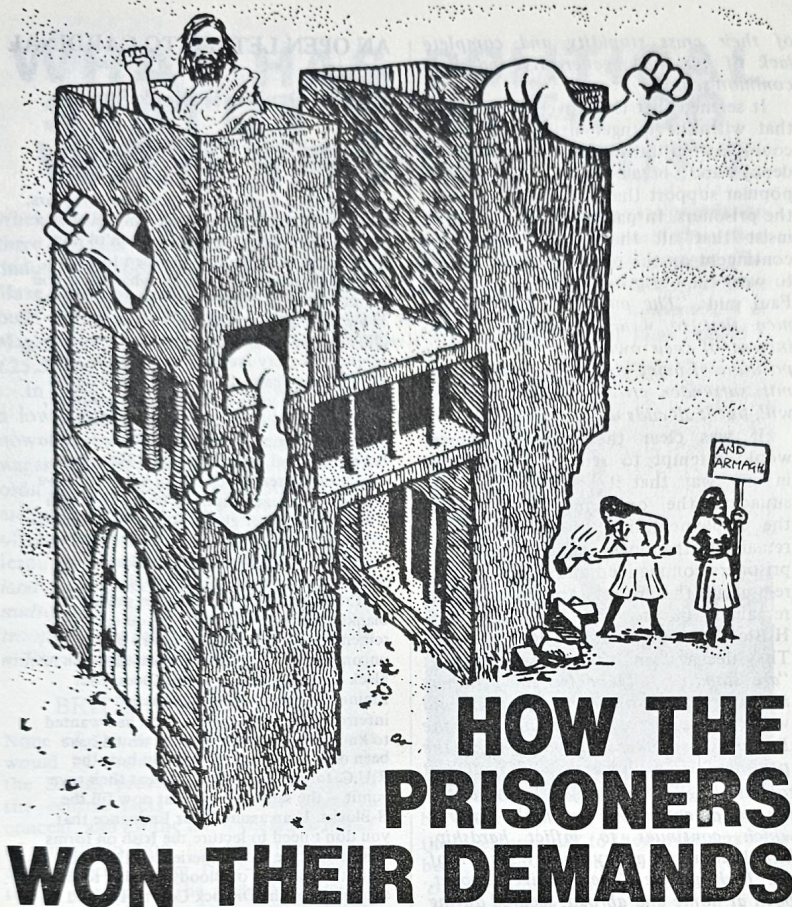
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HOW THE PRISONERS WON THEIR DEMANDS

The hunger strike was the culmination of a struggle in the prisons stretching back 4½ years. In 1976 Britain stopped recognising Republican prisoners as political prisoners as they had done between 1972 and 1976. Since then the prisoners have been fighting to have their rights restored, firstly by refusing to wear prison uniform or to co-operate with the prison authorities (the 'blanket protest') and then, in face of escalating warder brutality, by refusing to leave their cells or stop out and smearing the walls of their cells with shit ('the dirty protest'). Women did not have to go 'on the blanket' because they were allowed to wear their own clothes, but they too refused any co-operation from 1976, and in early 1980 they too joined the 'dirty protest'. For both the men and the women, the hunger strike was the last stage of a protracted and bitter struggle.

"Republican prisoners will not be wearing any form of prison uniform and will not be participating in any form of prison work. The speed at which the phasing out of the blanket protest proceeds is entirely dependent on the sincerity and upon the manner in which the British Government implement their proposals. . . . For our part we know that the masses who took to the streets are our real guarantors."

(Statement by Bobby Sands, Officer Commanding the Provisional Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks, 19th Dec. 1980)

The British Government's cave-in to the prisoners' demands was delayed to the last moment, so that there was no time for the prisoners to negotiate. With Sean McKenna already rushed to hospital in a coma and on the point of death, a government representative took into the prisons a document elaborating government concessions that had been prepared and showed to prominent church leaders

some seven days before. That document, together with a number of verbal assurances and guarantees, formed the basis of the negotiated settlement of the strike on 19th December. The timing was such that the hunger strikers could not wait for proof that the promises would be implemented: implementation would take weeks, but some or all of the strikers would be dead in days or even hours. They had no alternative but to accept the assurances in good faith and end the strike.

But the Government were preparing very different 'assurances' for the British public. The next day, the press were trumpeting the message that the Government had won a total victory.

The truth, however, was very different. The Government made much of the fact that they had not publicly admitted 'political status', but the prisoners had never asked for, or expected, a formal statement from the Government that they were prisoners of war. Instead they

had always held that the substance of political status was contained in their five demands. And these in large part they got. The Government's position was that they would *never* grant any special recognition, yet, over the 4½ years of blanket protest and 50 days of hunger strike, they had bit by bit, through a series of 'humanitarian reforms', offers, modifications and 'elaborations', gradually given way to the principal demands. What they called 'an elaboration on our earlier position' was in fact the final step of government retreat.

The government concessions can be summarised as follows:

DEMAND No. 1: The right to wear their own clothes instead of prison uniform.

Government concessions: Prisoners can now wear their own clothes for visits, in the evenings and during weekend association. The old prison uniforms are abolished, but the government has introduced a range of civilian clothing to be issued by the prison but which will become the personal property of individual prisoners. Both sets of clothing will be kept in the prisoners' cells. In practice they will be indistinguishable and the prisoners will not wear prison clothes.

In other words, **NO PRISON UNIFORM!**

DEMAND No. 2: The right to refuse to do prison work.

Government concessions: Various forms of educational activity will now be classed as prison work, as will cleaning and tidying the prisoners' own cells.

In other words, **NO PRISON WORK!**

DEMAND No. 3: The right to organise educational and recreational activities and to send and receive a weekly letter, parcel and visit.

Government concessions: Even before the hunger strike began, the Government themselves admitted that most of this demand was met in full by their 'general prison reforms': the extended educational activity granted for Demand No. 2 also falls into this category.

In other words, **WEEKLY VISITS, LETTERS, AND PARCELS!**

DEMAND No. 4: Restoration of full remission of sentence.

Government concessions: Before the hunger strike started the government began to concede restoration of remission to individuals coming off the protest. Now this will be systematically extended as the protest ends. Once the blanket protest is phased out some 60 prisoners will be released within weeks.

In other words, **RESTORATION OF FULL REMISSION OF SENTENCES!**

DEMAND No. 5: The right of free association with other prisoners.

Government concessions: Although cell type accommodation remains and the prisoners will not rejoin their fellow Republicans who have Special Category Status and are held in compounds, the concessions on education and work greatly increase the amount of free association.

In other words, more though not complete **FREE ASSOCIATION.**

THE FIVE DEMANDS: The Government have given in to 4½ of the 5 Demands.

Because of the nature of the negotiations and the conditions in the prisons, these reforms had necessarily to be introduced gradually. There would be a period of transition from one prison regime to

another. This period required continued good faith by the British Government, and an alternating series of co-operating moves by the Government and the prisoners, what the National Smash H-Block Committee termed 'principled co-operation'. But the next three weeks saw the Government delaying, hedging and attempting to renege on their concessions.

Naturally the British Government has sought to disguise their defeat and claim a victory. The British Army and state are engaged in a vicious war against the Irish people; it isn't a game of cricket in which the defeated Britain congratulates the winner and goes home. So, of course, Britain tries to make out that it did not lose. And having been defeated, it doesn't stop but tries to undermine and subvert the prisoners' victory. Since December 20th, the British have tried every way they can to split the united forces that defeated them. Claiming that the prisoners had given in was just part of this. They have followed that by trying to split the prisoners and their supporters by fostering confusion and mistrust. At the same time they've tried to break international support by portraying themselves as reasonable and flexible – when they have been nothing of the kind.

Some progressive people in this country have mistakenly seen the end of the hunger strike as a massive compromise, or even a defeat for the prisoners. Maybe this confusion happens because we sometimes forget that Irish people are struggling for their freedom not ours. The Irish people's leaders have said they don't care what the British call it so long as the five demands are met, because Irish people will know it as a victory.

It's easy for us here to fall into the mistake of wanting the Irish people to win our struggle for us; wanting them to force the British Government to announce its defeat here. And when that doesn't happen, to feel the Irish people have failed.

The Irish people are helping us. By fighting for their own freedom they are really hurting our masters. And we can serve their cause and our own by telling people both of how much our support is still needed, perhaps more than before, and telling of the big victory the prisoners have just won.

The first three days saw the beginnings of mutual compromise in the prison. The Officers Commanding the Provisional Republican prisoners were allowed to meet with each other to discuss the implementation of the concessions and there was an atmosphere of detente in the prison. But then, over Xmas, the prison authorities began to draw back. Relatives bringing in clothing for the prisoners were turned away and mocked and jeered at, and the Government began dragging their feet. As the prisoners' priest Father Faul said: *"The prison authorities have lost a splendid opportunity to end the jail crisis because*

of their crass stupidity and complete lack of humanity, generosity and plain common sense".

It seemed that the Government hoped that with the hunger strike ended they could sow confusion and create despondency and break down the massive popular support that had built up behind the prisoners. In particular they began to insist that all their concessions were contingent on the prisoners first agreeing to wear the old prison clothes. As Father Faul said: *"The purpose of getting the men first to wear prison-issue clothes instead of their own is to put them in a position of being seen to capitulate, submit, surrender, grovel – call it what you will, but it all adds up to humiliation".*

It was clear that the Government would attempt to renege on its offers in any way that it could. And in this situation the only real guarantee of the implementation of the settlement remained the mass support that the prisoners commanded and their ability to re-escalate the protest. And both of these remained intact. The National Smash H Block at once began to mobilise again. They declared on 7th January that they: *"are standing fully behind the prisoners in the new phase of their struggle. We will wage a vigorous campaign to force the British Government to implement the prisoners' five demands. We will not tolerate English treachery once more (for the umpteenth time in Irish history) which continues to inflict hardship, humiliation and agony on any section of the Irish people. The massive support, both at home and abroad, secured during the hungerstrike is being activated again. Together we can end 4½ years of cruel and degrading treatment in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and in Armagh prison".* Meanwhile the prisoners themselves stated that if necessary they would once again escalate their protest even to another hunger strike.

Fresh moves to resolve the deadlock did not come until 12th February when the Northern Ireland Office informed the prisoners that they were ready to make a "positive move" to end the protest. In the light of this, 48 of the protesting prisoners agreed to come off the protest and move to clean, furnished cells which they agreed not to foul, "as a gesture of the sincerity of their desire to end the conflict with the prison authorities". This move removes any excuses that the government may have for not honouring their promises. As Bobby Sands, the Officer Commanding, stated: the move has been made "with acute cynicism given the treacherous manipulations of the British authorities following the end of the hunger-strike". One way or another this new compromise should clarify the issue. Either the government will fulfil their part of the bargain and begin implementing the settlement or the prisoners will know that they have reneged on their concessions. The ball is firmly in the government's court. Either they give in or they will have to face a renewal of the campaign that defeated them last year.

AN OPEN LETTER TO CARDINAL HUME.

Michael Devine, H Block 5.

Everyone seems to talk these days about 'forms of violence', the most notable of course being you, Cardinal Hume of Westminster. As a blanketman these past 3½ years, I believe I can enlighten Your Eminence on a few forms of violence that you don't know about or have deliberately chosen to ignore. It would interest me to know what name you would use to describe locking a human being in a prison cell for four years and never allowing him to see day light, depriving him of any and every method of easing the days, months and years of loneliness, a loneliness which you, in your mansion in Westminster, could never begin to understand. Have you ever been dragged from a dirt infested cell to have your head forcibly shaved? Have you ever been beaten naked over a mirror to have your anal passage examined by a screw with a torch and rubber gloves? It is even less likely that you have had metal tongs inserted into your back passage searching for something which never existed in the first place.

I'm prepared to bet this torn smelly blanket I'm wearing that you can't remember the last time you were beaten unconscious or the last time you dined on black tea and hard dry bread. Does Your Eminence know what a Castlereagh interrogation consists of? If you had wanted to know, I'm sure Father Faul would have been only too happy to tell you how the R.U.C. forced their victims to eat their own vomit – the same victims that now fill the H-Blocks. I can assure Your Eminence that you don't need to lecture the Irish on forms of violence; we have experienced them all from the blattance of Bloody Sunday to the subtleness of the Diplock Courts. I would suggest that you investigate the violence of your fellow countrymen who are responsible for driving their victims into near insanity. The H-Block hunger strike is not a publicity stunt; it is a last desperate cry for help. In the case of Your Eminence, Cardinal Hume, it seems destined to be a cry which will go unanswered. So much for Christianity.

Michael Devine

H Block 5

Editorial Note: Cardinal Hume circulated a pastoral letter to Catholics denouncing the hunger strike as being a form of violence against one's own body.

TRADE UNIONISTS TO DISCUSS IRELAND

An important step forward in questioning the British media's approach to the war in Ireland should take place later this month, when trade unionists meet to discuss the issue.

The conference – which is to be held in Birmingham on Sat. 28th February – is a result of a motion passed at last year's annual conference of the National Union of Journalists. The BBC workers' union ABS, and the film & TV technicians union ACTT are both supporting the conference.

The conference is open to delegates from trade union branches, trades councils, and the Labour Party; but the unions' leaderships seem to have done little as yet to publicise or build for it.

For further details, write to Ron Knowles, NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Grays Inn Road, London WC1.

WHAT HAS POLITICAL STATUS GOT TO DO WITH TROOPS OUT?

When the British Army marched into the Six Counties in 1969, the prison population there was less than 600. Today it is well over 3,000. In those 11 years the prison 'industry' has become the fastest growing sector in the Northern Ireland economy. The Maze prison at Long Kesh is the largest high security jail in Western Europe, purpose built during the 70s, and a further giant prison complex is under construction at Magheraberry at a cost of £25 million. The current cost of running these prisons is £25.517m. per year.

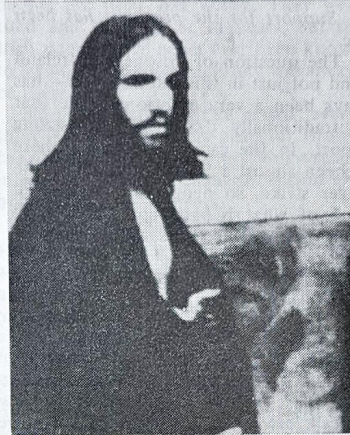
In 1969, the job of prison warder was a lowly dead end job for 224 persons: now there are 2,594 earning spectacular wages high up on the wage ladder. An ordinary warder starts on £8,500 per year and with overtime gets £10,000: a senior officer will get £13-16 thousand. As one leading journalist has put it, "*ill fares the land where jobs decline and prison warders multiply*". *The prisons along with the troops are the principal symbols of British military occupation today.*

BRITISH POLICY FAILS

None of the occupants of the H-Blocks would be there today if it were not for the British presence: But this is one of the central facts that Britain wants to conceal, and for the last 4 years the policy of 'criminalisation' has been pursued for that purpose. From 1972-6 they bowed to the strength of the nationalist struggle and conceded special category status to Republican prisoners. From 1976 they have been trying to take this away.

In practice, of course, by their use of special laws and special courts - let alone their use of a heavily armed Army presence backed up by a militarised police - they acknowledge every day that they are not dealing with ordinary criminals but with an armed political movement with massive popular support.

Now as a result of the 4½ year blanket protest and the recent hunger strike and the string of concessions the government were forced to make in their efforts to end them, the political unity and strength of the prisoners and their popular support on the streets has been demonstrated before the eyes of the world as never before. The British Government still refuse to use the words 'political status'



but their hopes of being able to attach the label 'criminal' to these prisoners have been utterly confounded. *The policy of 'criminalisation' has been torpedoed.*

NOT A WEAK POINT

The H-Block confrontation was engineered by the British government because they believed that they could break the prisoners, physically and mentally. They thought that it was the weak point at which they could divide the Republican movement from the nationalist community, but in fact the struggle has once again cemented and reinforced these links. The 'blanket-men' have already become a timeless symbol of the unceasing opposition of that community to British rule, and the hunger strike provided the opportunity for that mass opposition to make itself visible on the streets for the first time in many years.

WAR IN THE PRISONS

There is a Republican saying that '*the war will be won in the prisons*', which recognises that if the British cannot make their authority stick in the prisons then they cannot make it stick outside. The confrontation between the prisoners and their jailers has therefore always been yet another battleground in the war. The fight becomes one against the forces of the State inside the prison instead of outside it as formerly. For criminals the game is up once sentence is passed and the cell door closes; but for political prisoners the struggle merely moves to another location.

This has been going on for over 100 years. In a book called *Irish Felon's Prison Life* Tom Clarke tells of the attempts at 'criminalisation' in the 1870s. He tells

DEATH OF TOM LITTERICK, MP.

The death of former MP Tom Litterick is a sad loss for the Irish movement. He was one of the very few politicians who was willing to stick his neck out. For his public statements he was pilloried by the gutter press which mounted a vicious campaign against him during the period of his first heart attack in 1977. This campaign was supplemented by letters and telephone calls from fascists threatening to kill him.

From the moment he entered Parliament he associated himself with the campaign for withdrawal of British troops from Ireland, frequently appearing on TOM platforms, supporting our activities and helping us to get publicity. In 1976 his speech at a packed TOM meeting at the Labour Party Conference attracted considerable press coverage. At the meeting he made the point that as a Scotsman he could more easily understand the oppressive nature of Britain's occupation of Ireland. Britain was the cause of Ireland's tragedy, and had to get out. In 1978 he cooperated with us to get a House of Commons showing of the film "Home Soldier Home".

After losing his seat at the last election he wrote a number of articles for *Tribune* and in each he stressed that the Labour Movement's neglect of Ireland was a dereliction of duty.

One of the very first meetings on the H Blocks was organised by him in the House of Commons. This was in 1977 with Lily Fitzsimmons as the main speaker. During his speech he made his position clear: the Republican prisoners were political prisoners because the conflict in Ireland was a war of national liberation.

how 'we set ourselves to defeat the officials' designs. It was a fight against dreadful odds. On the one side were the prison authorities with all the horrors of the prison machinery relentlessly striving to accomplish its objects with unlimited ways and means at their disposal. On the other side were the prisoners, each standing alone and friendless, but resolved never to give in, with nothing to sustain him in the fight but his own courage'.

A STEP TOWARDS VICTORY

The British Government may have lost the latest ground in their attempt to 'criminalise' the struggle, but as long as they are in Ireland they won't stop trying. For unless they can call their opponents criminals and make the label stick, they are not really in control. When the government envoy took the 34 page list of concessions to the hunger strikers' bedsides and to the prisoners' Officer Commanding in Long Kesh, it was an admission that the latest drive to 'criminalise' the prisoners had received a setback. *The final end of such efforts will only come, however, on the day the troops come out and the prisoners are freed.*



**Interview with Joe Austin, of
Belfast Provisional Sinn Fein
(Jan. 3rd).**

TO: Throughout the hunger strike and since it ended, IRA and yourselves, Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF) have provided the British Government with every opportunity to be flexible and reasonable.

JA: There was a degree of flexibility exercised by the Government, the prison authorities and by the prisoners which lasted for 3 days after the hunger strike ended. That did give hope that not only could the hunger strike be ended successfully but also the blanket and no wash protest could be ended fairly quickly after.

Since the hunger strike ended, the prisoners and the movement have carefully given the British Government the opportunity to move, time for the British to re-think their previous intransigence. And I believe the IRA are most anxious for the H Block problem to be solved, because it is Republicans who are suffering in the prisons. I do not see the movement becoming involved in any action which is counter productive to that.

So the ball is very firmly in British Government's court. But they appear to be going back to a position where they are more concerned to try to break the prisoners physically and mentally, to break the prisoners' will to resist than with trying to solve the actual problem. They are being intransigent, and if they continue to be so, then they will face strong and united opposition inside Armagh and H Blocks and we have no doubt that the support shown outside for the last hunger strike would re-emerge.

The British are apparently intent on forcing a confrontation. They have certainly forced it in the prisons. If they seek to force confrontation outside, then they must expect it to be bloody. Whether it would take the form of street riots or attacks on prison warders, I could not say. But it is not necessary: from the Republican point of view, the successful resolution of the H Blocks and Armagh situation does not lie in attacks on prison warders or attacks anywhere. It lies with the British Government.

TO: The prisoners' statement does not rule out another hunger strike.

JA: They say in their statement that they will not hesitate to escalate the protest. Within the confines of H Blocks and Armagh, the ways in which the protest

can be heightened are very limited, and I am particularly disturbed that the men do not rule out another hunger strike.

The position of the movement is that we are opposed to hunger strikes. We were opposed to the hunger strike that we have just come through, and we would be opposed to any hunger strike that is likely to occur in the future. But we also recognise that the men are being totally frustrated by the British Government. We realise that the onus for preventing another hunger strike lies with the British Government.

TO: Support for the prisoners has been huge.

JA: The question of prisoners in Ireland – and not just in this last 10 years – has always been a very emotional issue that has traditionally drawn in very strong support. In the case of H Blocks, there has been almost a 5 year build up to the hunger strike, so people are fairly well aware of what is happening. They have by now seen the rights and wrongs of the Blocks. That means you don't have to go through a period of educating the people again.

If the British Government does go back upon its agreements with the prisoners they certainly will not diffuse or confuse support. They will simply indict themselves.

TO: The support that has been built up is very diverse.

JA: The diversity of support is the key. It was clear from the first days of the hunger strike, that if the British could make the conflict one between the British Army and the IRA, or the British Government and the Republican movement, then the British would win because they can withstand that type of pressure. They can even confine it to the ghettos.

So the hunger strike, and the issues of the hunger strike had to be fought on the broadest of bases, and the vehicle for that fight had to be the broadest. Hence the formation of the National H Block Committee. This allowed people who did not totally agree with the movement's aims or its methods to become involved for humane or liberal or other political reasons.

That diversity of support put tremendous pressure on the British. There were people in the theatre, in the arts. The ILP – not at all a republican party – withdrew its councillors in protest. The SDLP saw its supporters marching away so it had to permit its members to participate and make their protests. The Southern Irish Government wanted to put pressure on

A BATTLE WAR TO



LONDON (top left), DUBLIN (top right) and P...
support of the hunger-strikers, and exerting int...

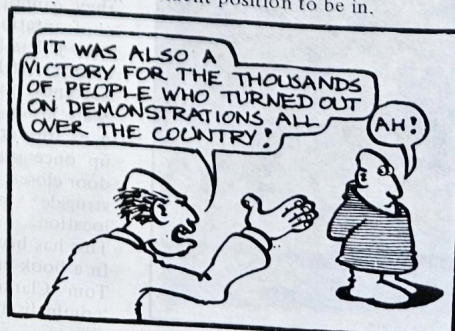
Britain because they feared an overspill of protest, and they could more easily do so because of the broad base of the Committee.

TO: The experience of the last few months has affected the whole movement.

JA: We want to see the H Block and Armagh issue resolved. Still it is a door that has opened. It has allowed us to understand our struggle.

We did tend, especially in the early 1970s, to struggle in almost total isolation from other revolutionary groups and forces, and there was a course of learning that was closed to us, perhaps closed by ourselves. Having to take the prisoners' issue out, meant that we had to form a relation with all the radical forces throughout Western Europe.

Our priority in those days was to get ourselves organised and to do all the things that we were able to do. Now we are in a position in which we can stand back, and learn and move on and that's a very confident position to be in.



WE WON! NO WIN!



PARIS: Thousands marching last weekend in international political pressure on the British

Interview with Maura McCrory, vice chairperson of the National H Block/Armagh Committee.

TO: The hunger strikers won a big victory in December.

MM: It was a very big victory. First and foremost, the prisoners were recognised as political prisoners, because the Northern Ireland office had to go in and speak with the prisoners and deal with them directly, and also deal with the OC of H Block, recognising that he was the Officer Commanding. They were guaranteed the 34 page document plus elaboration on the document – and this contained the basis of the 5 demands being met. So the British Government did then concede what the hunger strikers had demanded.

TO: But, now, the British Government is trying to renege on that agreement, and turn the victory of the prisoners into a defeat.

MM: The British Government seems to be welching on the commitment it gave to

the hunger strikers. They made promises when the support for the prisoners was very strong, and now that there is a pause in protest activity, they have not seen fit to honour their promises. That is nothing new from Britain. They are very shrewdly trying to out-manoeuvre the commitment they made to the prisoners. They seem to think that with the de-escalation of the last couple of weeks, the people will not want to be re-vamped again, what this breathing space has made people placid and not want to become involved again.

But the British are very wrong. The people are tired and weary. They were tired and weary after 11 years, but the Irish people have never ever been known to let prisoners down and they will always be there.

Since the hunger strike ended, everything has been relatively peaceful. Britain has had a golden opportunity. But it seems intent on having a struggle within the prisons and on the streets.

The H Block committees did not disband: we took a break to see if Britain would carry out their promises: we did not dissolve – but are there, just waiting to be called back again.

The National Committee is now in front for the first time. When the hunger strike was called last time we were behind, because we had a lot of people to win over. Those people are now there, so for the first time we are in the lead, and we will be dictating policy to the British Government.

The prisoners and the H Block committee will have more strength because the eyes of the world are on Britain looking for it to do what it promised – to be flexible in solving the situation, which it hasn't done. So it will be more than the National Committee and the people of the North asking the questions. The world will be asking why Britain hasn't moved.

TO: The last few months has seen the struggle for the prisoners demands move out and well beyond the 6 Counties.

MM: For a time we kept the struggle confined to the North. But we cannot win alone. They can keep us in our ghetto areas in West Belfast, and they're quite prepared to let us march up and down, and take over shops and buildings. But when other countries start to want to know what they are doing, start embarrassing them, that's when they get worried. Britain will never feel endangered while the struggle is confined to the 6 counties.

The turning point was the prisoners, the prisoners themselves. It wasn't a

thought that came by us. The prisoners sent out to us that while we had worked hard, and they appreciated everything that we had done, it wasn't enough. They wanted us to do out throughout the 32 counties and throughout the world.

TO: Right now, there is a great deal to be done.

MM: People should know that the struggle is not won, and Britain has welched, and the prisoners themselves are in a more dicey situation than they were even before the hunger strike. All groups throughout the world should redouble their efforts.

A smuggled letter, dated Jan 7 from the spokesman for IRSP H Block prisoners Patsy O'Hara says in part,

"We recognise the victory won in the hunger strike, and the fact that the British Government has reneged on its agreement with the hunger strikers granting the 5 demands".

The letter points out that the OC of PSF prisoners, Bobby Sands, is not able to speak for IRSP prisoners, whose own OC is Patsy O'Hara.

It draws attention to the attempts of the British to isolate the IRSP prisoners and especially hunger striker John Nixon from each other, from all contact with PSF prisoners and from all outside contact. The more frequent visits granted to the relatives of the other hunger strikers during December were denied by John Nixon; IRSP prisoners were not given any facilities to meet to discuss the outcome of the hunger strike, but were and are kept on 24 hour lock up; the IRSP officer mainly concerned with liaising between prisoners and outside support, and with PSF has been excluded from the 6 Counties.

The letter thanks the National H Block Armagh Committee and all the action group throughout the country for *"the tremendous work in mobilising national and international public opinion behind the 5 demands . . . in the campaign for political status."* And notes that *"the success of this campaign rests on the broad non-politically sectarian strategy."*

The letter states that if the agreement is implemented it will be a great victory, but in the meantime, it says, *"Our position remains that we stay on the blanket. We will wear no uniform. And if the protest needs to be escalated we are prepared to escalate it. Three of our IRSP comrades have volunteered for this aware of the possible consequences to their own lives. We will continue to play our full part in this protest."*



AROUND THE BRANCHES

LEEDS

As a result of our activity built up throughout the hunger strike, the branch is now in its healthiest state for quite some time.

We carried out lots of leafletting throughout the hunger strike, and managed to get a few pieces in the local press. The issue was also discussed at a number of trade union branches, including NALGO, NUJ and ACTT (although no branch supported the motions before them, the very fact that the discussion took place is a significant step forward).

On Wed. 17th December a well attended TOM public meeting at Leeds Trades Council Club heard from the trade union organiser of the National H Block/ Armagh Campaign.

Within hours of the hunger strike ending, Leeds TOM put a leaflet out explaining the prisoners' point of view, and why the ending was a victory for the prisoners.

And then on Saturday 20th Dec., while some Leeds TOM members attended a 100 strong VICTORY march through Bradford, others held a Leeds-TOM organised picket of Wakefield Prison, which highlighted the demands of Irish political prisoners in this country to be given the right to repatriation. The picket was attended also by Barnsley TOM, Leeds Women and Ireland Group, and Manchester RCT.

In January Leeds TOM continued leafletting, explaining the basis of the ending of the hunger strike, and the government's subsequent apparent going back on their word; and building support for the Bloody Sunday commemoration march in Cardiff.

Morale and enthusiasm is very high, with plans for a major public forum on Ireland being hatched for the Spring.

MERSEYSIDE

Similar leaflettings and blanket protests were held by Merseyside TOM during the hunger strike. We distributed 5,000 leaflets to marchers on the unemployment demonstration in Liverpool, Nov 29th. A broad-based H-Block Committee was also set up, whose first activity was to demand a clear statement from local MP Eric Heffer on where he stood regarding the H-Blocks.

BRIGHTON

Towards the end of last year Brighton TOM held a Day School on Ireland. One of the products of the British media's censorship around Ireland is that many people who actually support a Troops Out position are not familiar enough with the issues arising from the anti-imperialist struggle to feel confident about arguing their politics to others. Topics covered include Women in Ireland, the media, Loyalism, the campaign for political status, anti-Irish racism and the role of the British Army. We showed a slide show on the history of the present struggle and the TV documentary film "Creggan".

This day school strengthened the TOM in Brighton: people are now better informed and more willing to participate and be active in the TOM and the Ad Hoc Hunger Strike Committee that was set up in October.

MANCHESTER

During the course of the hunger strike the Manchester Support Group organised a number of activities. This started with a torchlight rally in Piccadilly Gardens which was well attended and well received. A regular series of street meetings/presences continued throughout the hunger strike. A number of public meetings including several film showings attracted a groundswell of support which grew continually.

A demonstration supported by the LPYS and CP as well as many other groups and individuals was held just after the end of the hunger strike. Due to the proclaimed victory at this time the demo was not as large as it would have been had the strike been in progress. A smaller but very vociferous crowd marched through the centre of Manchester to be well received and then addressed by representatives of the republican and liberation movement.

The Hunger Strike Support Group is currently re-organising for the forthcoming struggles. We hope to build on the growing support we built during the hunger strike itself.

COVENTRY

An Ad Hoc Hunger Strike Committee was set up in Coventry which held regular blanket protests every Saturday and leafleted Catholic Churches every Sunday. (These activities were carried out in towns across the country throughout the hunger strike.) Signatures were collected for the national petition and a letter expressing support circulated amongst trade unionists. On Dec 10-11th the Coventry Women's Group held a 24-hour fast in the City centre Precinct, in support of the women in Armagh Jail and especially Pauline McLaughlin (see p.). This got reported on the local radio. The Troops Out Society in Warwick University also held a blanket protest on Dec 13th. The public activities of Coventry TOM were greatly enlivened by the singing of busker Eddie Maddock - who has produced a tape of 12 original songs about H-Block, Armagh and the repression in Northern Ireland. It is available from Eddie Maddock, 53 Sullivan Road, Coventry, Wores, price £2.00 + postage.

Troops Out received many press cuttings on the activities of other European support groups who support the political prisoners in Northern Ireland. The actual quantity proves how much Northern Ireland can no longer be contained as "Britain's internal problem" and the analysis is recognising the imperialist nature of the conflict.

In Brussels the British Embassy was presented with a large model 'H' - smeared with shit! And the Queen's visit to that fine city was met with smoke and stink bombs, a torn-up Union Jack and a very loud expression of disapproval of Britain's intransigence during the hunger strike.

The demonstrations reached such a point that the mayor of Brussels imposed a ban on all demonstrations. Instead, the Irish solidarity group Werkgroep Ierland marched 12 miles on Christmas Eve from Antwerp to the British Army NATO base in Emblem. They handed a Christmas cake to the guard with whipped cream lettering on it saying "Give Ireland back to the Irish".

Manchester March (photo: T.O.M.)



REVIEWS

TV PROPAGANDA

TV PROPAGANDA?

Since 1969 when British Troops arrived on the streets of Derry and Belfast, the British public, who never before objected to any former colonial exploits, have been a willing and complacent audience for the constant media and government propaganda like, "Our boys are keeping the peace," "It's simply a religious war" or "the trouble's just a small group of terrorists, murderers and psychopaths." With that staple diet for 12 years it's more than safe ground on which to present a long overdue TV history of Ireland - little chance of any mass reaction from the English viewer wishing to right the wrongs of 800 years!

Both ITV and the BBC are now running a TV series on Ireland's history, with the former a more contemporary approach in 5 episodes called 'The Troubles' whilst the latter is being spread over 13 weeks and is named 'Ireland: A Television History'.

SMUG ACADEMIC

The BBC version by British historian Robert Kee is the most predictable. Narrated by the author and with his smug academic detachment and trying to appear as objective as possible, it will be consumed by the historically ignorant British public without a word of criticism. The first episode sought to emphasise Ireland's lack of nationhood - or so he would have us believe. Until the seventeenth century, we were told, the Irish were a mongrel race descended from Celts, Normans and Vikings and constantly warring amongst themselves. The clever, and almost subliminal means of supplementing this image was the use of a film from a modern hurley match in Ireland, with the players fighting while the historical commentary continued. These 'violent people' were then colonised by the large plantations of Scottish and English settlers in the 16th and 17th centuries. The major emphasis was on the religious differences between settler and native, whilst failing to bring out the nature of the colonial situation and the following four centuries of economic and political subjugation imposed on the native Irish.

If anything, ITV's 'The Troubles' has a starker and harsher appraisal of Britain's role in Ireland, but failed, as did the BBC, to explain the underlying politics behind Home Rule in the late 19th and early 20th century. The viewer was shown a

minority in the North 'loyal' to Britain, her traditions, culture, way of life etc., whilst the majority of Irish people favoured a 'Catholic Ireland' without Britain - hence the confrontation. No mention was given that this sham concern for British traditions etc. merely hid the realisation that continuation of their centuries old power and privilege meant continued rule from Britain. Likewise, complete emancipation for the Catholic Irish was soon seen to entail an Irish Republic free from the colonial power, Britain.

CHILLING

It was also a chilling experience to watch a present day interview with an ex-Black and Tan, one of the notorious mercenaries recruited by Britain to fight in the Anglo-Irish war before partition. He spoke in a seemingly unrepentant manner about their atrocities which even to this day are remembered by Irish people much as the French regarded the bloody actions of the occupying Nazis.

The nuances and slants however are subtle and will no doubt be missed by the vast majority of the British public who will heap praise on this their first insight into why the Irish 'just can't live at peace'. But perhaps 'The Troubles' could prove the more honest if only for the fact that Ian Stoddard, one of those responsible for its production, recently gave a very frank interview on the London radio station LBC when he dismissed much of the media approach to the IRA and the present situation as simply "Government propaganda".

pulling England's troops (who are not necessarily English troops) out of the north of Ireland.

If, on the other hand, you reject the state's lies about a single, national identity for the so-called UK - and I'm sure you do - why on earth perpetuate the lie in your own literature?

I wish you every success in TOM. But please sort this out because it is important. Let TOM call itself what it is - an international movement. You don't have 40 branches "around the (singular) country". They are scattered around the (plural) countries of Britain. And demos like the London rally on December 7th are only 'national' if they are exclusive to the people of England. When anybody else turns up they become INTERNATIONAL rallies - and so they should be!

M.P.

[Eds: We take your point - see page 2!]

Dear TOM,

As the person responsible for the report of the Margham Park anti-recruitment demonstration (Troops Out, Nov.), I'd like to answer the criticisms made by RJ's letter (Dec.).

Sure enough, there are problems in planning and carrying out such actions - RJ mentions the dangers of individual actions unsupported by other protesters. Also there is the problem of effective action often needing secrecy in order to maintain an element of surprise. This can pose problems of actions degenerating into elitism; but it's not inevitable.

But I do not agree with RJ's categorisation of the Margham Park tactics as "Romanticism". Nor do I accept the claim that demonstrators provoked soldiers into brawls. The protest was certainly enjoyable - but do we have to have deadpan faces to take politics seriously? Let us not forget that Welsh politics, like Irish politics, has a long tradition of resorting to physical force and direct action in order to make an effective point and not be ignored. There are many strengths in this tradition which we should learn from. That's not to suggest some sort of *blanket* use of civil disobedience tactics in every situation. Obviously there is no correct preconceived way of demonstrating - the action taken depends on the specific conditions one is likely to demonstrate in, which can vary greatly.

But from my experience in England (at least), we have relied for too long on tactics that have been ultra-polite, unthought out, tokenistic and not least of all *ineffective*. So let's start a thorough but sensitive discussion of these problems.

B.J.

Cardiff TOM

PS The original article was wrongly attributed to Cardiff TOM as a branch rather than myself as an individual, which might lead to misunderstandings.

LETTERS

Dear Comrades,

Much as I support the work of the Troops Out movement, one feature of your literature causes great - and unnecessary - offence.

This is typified by the opening line describing the aims of TOM on page 2 of 'Troops Out' magazine: "The Troops Out Movement is a *national* movement..."

The British State would have us believe that "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" is one indivisible nation. It suits the purpose of those who would keep all the people of the countries of the British Isles under Westminster control to maintain the illusion that the United Kingdom is a nation.

Thus agencies of the state like the BBC produces programmes like 'Nationwide'. The blurb for Radio 1 screams 'National Ray-de-oh Wuun'. Tory MP's (and not a few Labour ones as well) commit youngsters to their deaths for 'this great nation of ours'. Fascists would protect some mythological 'national culture' of the UK against any black, yellow or brown threat they can invent.

But the UK is not a nation, and never has been. There are a number of nations within these islands. Ireland is one. Wales is another, and England is a third (this list is not exhaustive!).

If you accept that the UK is a nation you play right into the hands of the British (i.e. English) state and you destroy the basis for

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Here Is The News

DECEMBER

9th

29 RUC policemen are subpoenaed to attend the first ever public inquiry into alleged police brutality in Northern Ireland. James Rafferty had spent three days in police custody in 1976, after which he was taken to hospital with multiple injuries. Doctors testified that they could not be self-inflicted. Council for the RUC claimed the police might incriminate themselves if they appeared(!). They appeal against the subpoenas, the appeal is upheld and the tribunal collapses.

10th

Soldier of the Ulster Defence Regiment shot dead in West Belfast — not known by whom.

For the first time in seven weeks an official of the British Government visits the seven hunger strikers in the H Blocks "to explain the Government's position".

Day of Action called by the National H Block/Armagh Committee: rally of 5,000 in West Belfast; three women in Galway chain themselves to the Dublin-Galway express and a sit-in at RTE (Irish TV) studios. Workers in Dundalk, Sligo and Monaghan leave work to demonstrate. 400 workers at Alumina Contractors site in Limerick take part in protest march. In Bray 75% of council workers strike for the day. All shops close for the day in Castleblaney and Clones. Half-day strikes by 1,200 steel workers in Cork and one-hour stoppage by Ford workers. Strikes and shop closures in Cavan, Swanlinbar, Drogheda, Leitrim and Letterkenny, Buncrana, Ballyshannon, Derry, Enniskillen, Omagh and Strabane. Main road in Toomebridge, Co Antrim, blocked: 20 arrests.

In Denmark MPs of the Socialist Party raise the hunger strike issue in Parliament and the Foreign Minister expresses concern. Danish dockers state that they are prepared to take action against British ships on instruction of Belfast dockers.

11th

Big demonstrations when Thatcher visits Cardiff — mainly about unemployment but also about the hunger strike. Her home in Chelsea is picketted by the Armagh Co-ordinating Committee and petitions calling for the release of Pauline McLaughlin are handed in at Downing Street.

Six UDA prisoners in Long Kesh start a hunger strike demanding 'Special Category' status and segregation from Republicans.

12th

The Senate of New Jersey, USA, passes a resolution supporting the five demands of the Republican hunger strike.

13th

March in South London to support the hunger strikers rallies at Brixton Jail in support of Maurice Ward, an Irish prisoner on solidarity hunger strike (he ends his fast on Dec 19th). There are rallies in towns across Ireland. A speaker addresses the crowd at the Armagh/Roscommon football match to call for political status.

14th

Another picket of Thatcher's house. Ian Paisley calls for a referendum in England, Scotland and Wales to decide if they wish Northern Ireland to stay in the UK — he aims for an 'independent Ulster' if the vote went against.

15th

23 more Republican prisoners join the hunger strike in the H Block in the morning and six more in the evening, bringing the total to 39 — the largest ever Republican hunger strike. The original seven are now in a critical state — Sean McKenna is going blind — but the British fail to follow up the meeting of the 10th, except to cancel all police leave. At a Press Conference Archbishop O'Fiaich warns that a death would "put the situation over the brink".

16th

O'Fiaich appeals to Thatcher "to avert tragedy". She restates in the House of Commons "there is no question now or at all of giving these hunger strikers political status".

Seven more men Republicans join the hunger strike. The three women hunger strikers are moved to the prison hospital.

Gerard Tuite escapes from the top security wing of Brixton Prison, where he had been held for a year without trial.

17th

Thatcher replies to O'Fiaich, again denying political status but expressing concern on the humanitarian aspects: "I earnestly hope that your work and prayers, together with our own practical efforts, which will continue, will lead to an early resolution of the present critical situation". Hypocrisy! Sean McKenna is given the last rites. O'Fiaich reveals that Atkins gave him and other church leaders a 32-page document that could be the basis of a settlement, but this document has not been shown to the hunger strikers.

The Portuguese Parliament passes a resolution condemning Britain's treatment of Irish prisoners and calling for political status. This leads to the Portuguese ambassador being summoned to the Foreign Office. The Labour NEC appeals to the Government for a compromise. Six Irish MPs, French Gaullists and Italian Communists and various independents organise to table a motion at the EEC Parliament "calling on the British Government to grant prison conditions compatible with basic human rights" (leave for an emergency debate is voted against on the 18th). Margaret McKearney, sister of hunger striker, and ten students break through security and demonstrate in the Irish Parliament. The offices of the *Irish Independent* are occupied and RTE studios picketted to protest distortions and suppression of news on the hunger strike. Mass street violence now looks inevitable.

The UDA prisoners call off their hunger strike, for no clear reason.

18th

A Government document is presented to the prisoners and accepted as granting the substance of the five demands. **THE HUNGER STRIKE ENDS.**

In the long-drawn out Sallins mail train robbery case in the Irish Republic, for which the Irish Republican Socialist Party was harassed and fitted up, Nicholas Kelly is refused leave to appeal against a 12-year prison sentence. He was originally tried with two others but went to America before the verdict was given: the other two were first convicted, then acquitted and freed on appeal. Kelly returned to Ireland in June and was immediately arrested and imprisoned.

19th

Sean McKenna is moved to the intensive care unit of a civilian hospital.

Prison warders in Crumlin Road Jail go on a rampage and beat up Republican prisoners.

Thatcher and Paisley have a stormy meeting in which Paisley accuses her of selling out on the hunger strike and at the Dublin summit. She denies it.

20th

Rallies in London and Glasgow express solidarity with the prisoners in the H Blocks and Armagh. Big marches in Frankfurt and Paris.

Victory march in Belfast Dec. 21st (photo: D. Evans)



21st
An Opinion poll in the Sunday Times — taking up Paisley's referendum idea — shows 63% against Northern Ireland staying in the UK, 37% in favour.

23rd
Unemployment figures for Northern Ireland show a record level of 16.3% — a total of 93,752. In Stabane, Co Tyrone, it tops 42%. The overall UK figure is 9.3%, in the Irish Republic 12%.

27th
Sinn Fein hold a picket of Wormwood Scrubs Prison, London, to express solidarity with Republican prisoners and protest against their treatment in English jails. 2 are on the blanket, many are in solitary confinement for months and even years on end.

29th
In Armagh a member of the Territorial Army is shot dead by INLA.

30th
A prison warden is shot dead and another wounded in Belfast by a Loyalist group, "Prisoners Action Force" for 'maltreatment of Loyalist prisoners'.

31st
Two bombs damage a gasholder in East London. They are later claimed by the IRA.

JANUARY

5th
The National H Block/Armagh Committee announce resumption of the campaign, to force the British Government to stand by its promises. They ask O'Faich, John Hume (leader of SDLP).

and Irish PM Charles Haughey to say where they stand: "if they honestly settled the hunger strike question with the British, and were fooled, or were they a party to the treachery?"

6th
Chancellor of the Exchequer Geoffrey Howe visits Belfast — the first ever chancellor to do so! His speech stresses co-operation between the UK and the Irish Republic as the solution to the desperately floundering economy of Northern Ireland. On the same day the Northern Ireland Office announces the axing of 2,000 Civil Service jobs.

Martin Meehan's appeal begins, against conviction and a twelve year sentence on a kidnapping charge. In 1980 he had to go on a hunger strike, in which he almost died, in order to get this appeal.

7th
No doubt in the spirit of co-operation, the British Government tries to block the appointment of Irish minister Michael O'Kennedy as overseer of the EEC budget in the EEC reshuffle. There seems some confusion whether he would be above or below Christopher Tugendhat, the Budget Commissioner. Nonetheless, O'Kennedy gets the post.

8th
A bomb explodes in an RAF station in Uxbridge. It is claimed by the IRA, who also now claim earlier bombings of Hammersmith Territorial Army base and East London gasholder, and the attempted shooting of Tugendhat.

Enoch Powell attacks Paisley for his idea of a referendum, his general trend towards an independent 'Ulster' and his taste for mass,

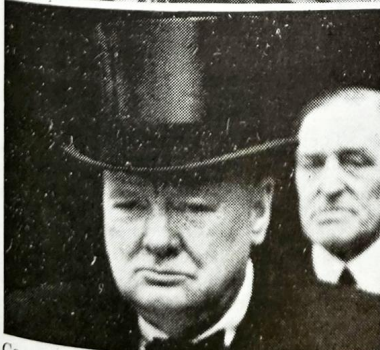
rather than Parliamentary, action. A weekend meeting of the Official Unionist Party (of which Powell is a member) downplayed the Dublin summit and restated its established position: maintenance of the Union, devolution and greater powers for local government. The same weekend Paisley ("Democratic" Unionist Party) announces a series of rallies to start in February aiming to "inform the people of the process of Irish integration intended to flow from the Dublin summit."

10th
PAULINE McLAUGHLIN IS RELEASED FROM JAIL. AT LAST.

40,000 Irish farmers march in Kilkenny — the second protest in a month. Agricultural income has dropped 50% in two years, and farmers are further threatened by a cut in the EEC Common Agricultural Policy.

11th
A possible breakthrough in the H Block situation comes in a statement from Provisional Sinn Fein following news that the authorities are granting protesting prisoners clean cells with furniture. "We received word from the prisons administration yesterday (Saturday) that the British Government intends making a positive move to end the blanket and no-wash protests early this week. We view these proposed moves with acute cynicism, given the treacherous manner in which the British Government has handled the protestors, especially since the ending of the hunger strike. However, as a guarantee of our sincerity in wishing to end the protest in a principled fashion, we have agreed that prisoners affected by the proposed move will not soil cells."

MORE SLIPPERY THAN HOUDINI, MORE DARING THAN CARLOS, MORE ALLURING THAN MATA HARI — GERARD TUITE! POLICE ISSUE NEW PICTURES:

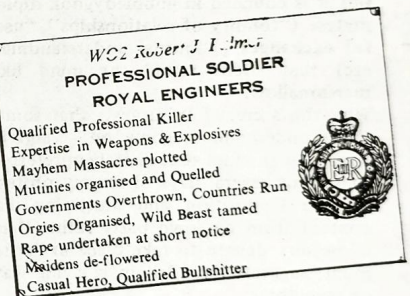


Commander Peter Durfy of the Police Terrorists Squad warned yesterday: "Do not attempt to handle this myth — it is liable to explode at any time."

Seriously though, Tuite has not been tried let alone convicted of anything, yet he has been held in prison for over a year.

Following the arrest of Peter Sutcliffe for the murder of a woman in Leeds and the 'Ripper Squad' police press interviews, the Solicitor-General warned newspapers about the publicity: "a man accused of a crime, however serious, is presumed to be innocent and is entitled to a fair trial". Tell that to Gerard!

BRITISH HUMOUR AT ITS BEST



This "business card" was passed on to us by a soldier who had served in Northern Ireland. Evidently soldiers have these things printed as their idea of a joke.

In the same spirit of good humoured sadism, a soldier and an ex-soldier let off a CS gas canister in a crowded Bradford pub last December. One woman was blinded and had to go to hospital to have her sight restored. Another ex-soldier, in Cardiff, beat up a woman in a pub last November. He didn't like her singing Irish songs. "I think I can understand", said the magistrate but warned him to "pause and think a little before lashing in."

Funny, eh? Like the two Catholic farmers murdered by British soldiers in Fermanagh. One was stabbed 17 times, the other 13, for which two ex-sergeants from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders have been given life sentences. The regiment hope the officer who managed to cover up the murders for eight years will stay in the Army, as it would be a "sad loss" if he left.

Heard the one about the army being in Northern Ireland as a peacekeeping force?

WELL, GOT THAT SORTED
AT LAST — I THINK.



THE TOTALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS — OK?

DUBLIN SUMMIT

On December 8th a summit meeting took place in Dublin between the Prime Ministers and leading Cabinet Ministers of the Governments of Britain and Ireland. There has been a lot of confusion about what really went on, because those involved have chosen to keep it secret. A communique was issued after the meeting but it is couched in gobbledygook diplomatese ("totality of relationships", "useful exchanges", "mutual understanding" etc) that sticks round the mind like marshmallow.

Why the secrecy? It suggests that something underhand is going on — and in particular the fact that Thatcher preferred to sit out several days of stormy protest by the Opposition and muttering discontent from her own party rather than allow any debate to take place in Parliament, suggests that Britain is giving way on something.

SELF DETERMINATION

The background to the summit was the hunger strike in the H Blocks and Armagh Jail, which was receiving massive support from the Irish and drawing embarrassing attention internationally to the existence of the concentration camp of Long Kesh. And beyond that the relationship between the two countries and the question Where does Northern Ireland belong?

On the one hand, the Constitution of the Irish Republic lays claim to the whole of Ireland, and this is given force by the armed struggle of nationalist people in the North and by the whole of history which shows that Britain's control of Ireland could only be maintained by force of arms against a hostile population. This is the basis of the Troops Out Movement demand "Self-determination for the Irish People".

But on the other hand, the Government of Ireland Act 1920 claimed the Six Counties of Northern Ireland as part of the UK, and this was backed up in 1949 by the "Guarantee to the Majority": that

it would remain part of the UK as long as the majority of people in Northern Ireland wish it.

CAST IRON?

We think that the major significance of this summit is that it marks a quite decisive crumbling of this guarantee. The British Government always used to hold that whatever happens in Northern Ireland is purely a matter for Britain and Northern Ireland to deal with; but now the Government is being forced to concede that Southern Ireland must have a say in it.

So for example, Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins said in Parliament on May 8th last year "decisions on Northern Ireland's future are for the people of Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Government and Parliament". And on May 21st the communique following the first summit between the Prime Ministers stated: "While agreeing with the Prime Minister that any change in the Constitutional status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland, the Taoiseach (Irish PM) reaffirmed that it is the wish of the Irish Government to secure the unity of Ireland by agreement and in peace."

This time around the "people of Northern Ireland" did not get a look-in, at least not as decision-makers: "The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed that the economic, social and political interests of the peoples of the UK and Northern Ireland and the Republic are inextricably linked, but that the full development of these links has been put under strain by division and dissent in Northern Ireland. In that context, they accepted the need to bring forward policies and proposals to achieve peace, reconciliation and stability; and to improve relations between the peoples of the two countries." By downplaying the goal of Irish unity, Mr Haughey (the

Taoiseach) has got himself accepted as equal arbiter of Ireland's fate. The point comes across even more strongly in his speech in the Irish Parliament, when he said rather as an afterthought that "Northern Ireland's political leaders clearly have a very important part to play in any solution" — important, but not essential — and suggested that they occupy themselves with the joint studies on security matters.

HUNGER STRIKE WEAKENS BRITAIN

What results the summit will have remain to be seen. The only concrete thing to come out is a series of joint studies on "possible new institutional structures, citizenship rights, security matters, economic cooperation and measures to encourage mutual understanding". The significant fact is that the question of Northern Ireland is being treated in a new, and more hopeful, terrain. The British Government seems to be weakening on the "guarantee" in effect, by the recognition of the Irish Parliament is right to have a say in the matter. This weakening has come about partly as a result of the total failure of Atkins' initiative last year to get the Northern Ireland parliamentary parties "round the table". Also the Unionist camp is in disarray: on the street level there was the fiasco of the Loyalist hunger strike, while on the Parliamentary level we see Unionist MP Enoch Powell describe Unionist MP Ian Paisley as "a greater threat to the union than the Foreign Office and Provisional IRA rolled into one". It seems that the Unionists are not in a fit state to launch a campaign like the one that overthrew power-sharing and the Council of Ireland in 1974 (although a Unionist reaction is still quite possible).

More important than these is the fact that the British Government was under intense pressure from the hunger strike. Its democratic face is looking after rather torn and tattered, its rule in Northern Ireland threatened by popular uprising in the event of a hunger strike dying. So it seems they were prepared to concede a lot to Haughey in return for his backing for their line on the hunger strike. Which he duly gave.

RELYING ON THEIR OWN STRENGTH

There is not much point in speculating on the next steps. Britain's record of two-faced double-dealing to protect its imperialist interests should make us wary: the vagueness of diplomatic language is especially invented for this purpose. And Charles Haughey is not exactly a reliable champion of the Irish people, as his backpedalling on the hunger strike and on Irish unity shows all too clearly. He has to be pushed before he moves anywhere.

We should note that the 800-year old violence of British occupation of Ireland has just taken a bit of a battering. The Irish people and their organisations can carry that process further. It is after all, they who have brought the situation to this point.