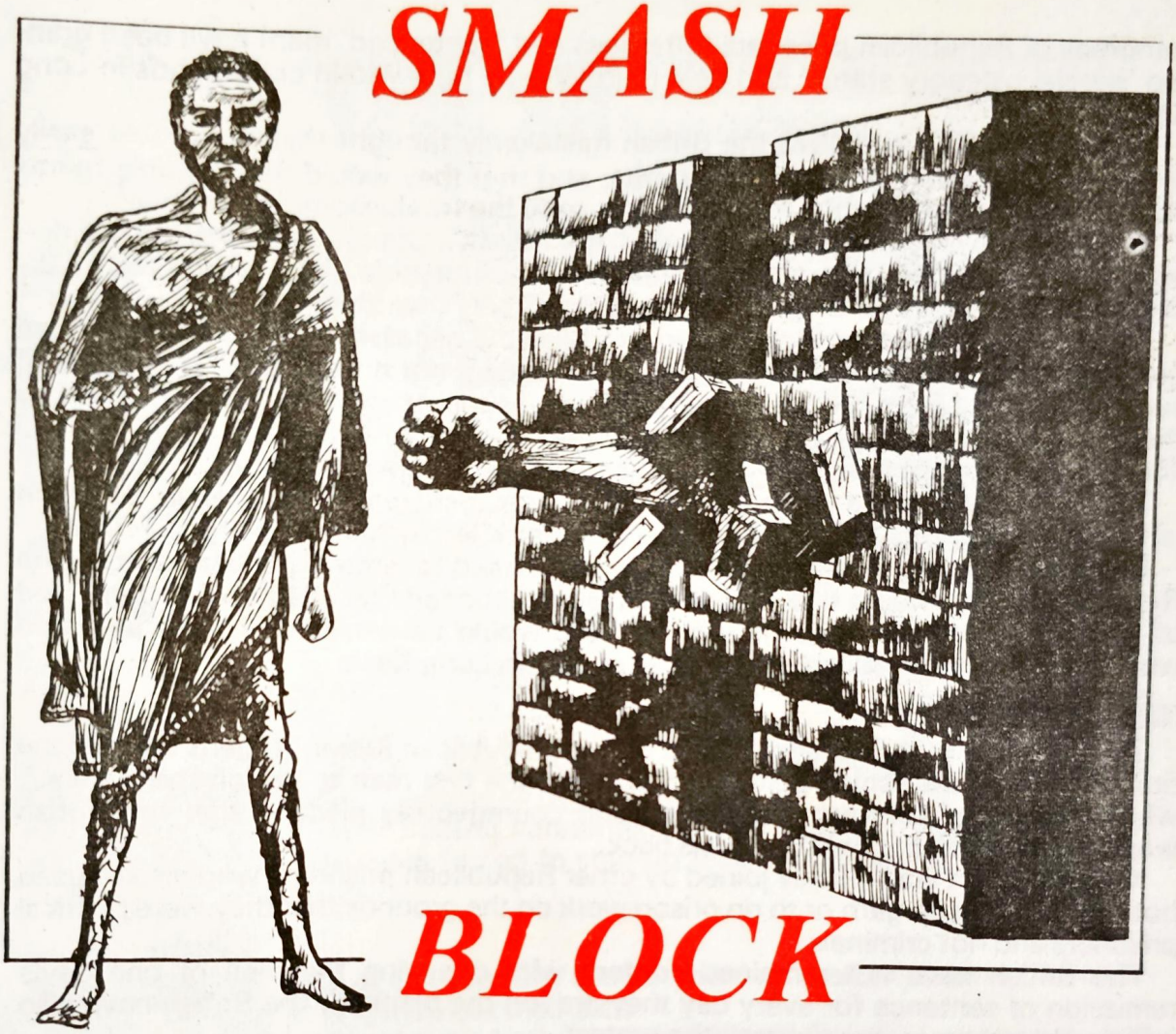
# SMASH



# BLOCK

**More than 350 Irish Republican political prisoners are today imprisoned by the British inside the H-Blocks of Long Kesh in conditions which are not even fit for animals.**

The unfortunate prisoners, who are kept totally naked (except for a blanket which they clutch around them) are locked in their cells 24 hours a day. Their cells contain nothing except damp mattresses upon which the bedraggled 'blanket men' lie surrounded by rotting mounds of maggot-infested filth, from which there rises a terrible stench.

Although people are increasingly aware of the blanket men's barbaric conditions, what is not so widely known nor understood, is exactly how their nightmarish plight came about and why it is that these men suffer such horrific treatment when only a few yards away, hundreds of their comrades have been granted political status and are held in normal prisoner-of-war type huts within compounds.

**SPECIAL STATUS GRANTED**

To understand this contradictory situation we have to go back to 1972 when Republican prisoners held in Crumlin Road gaol in Belfast, mounted a successful hunger strike demanding political status. Since that time over the last 6½ years

hundreds of Republican prisoners (internees and 'sentenced' men) have been granted 'special category status' and held in PoW-type huts within compounds in Long Kesh.

Throughout 1971 and 1972 the British mistakenly thought that they could easily defeat the IRA within a matter of months, and that they would then be able to impose some political 'solution' to their liking upon the troublesome six counties.

But the British totally underestimated the massive popular support for the IRA both within the nationalist ghettoes and in the countryside. As a result their wildly over-ambitious plans for a 'quick kill' were repeatedly thwarted.

The British were increasingly forced to realise the necessity to mount a prolonged propaganda campaign to isolate the IRA; to isolate it not only from its own bases of support, but also from the growing international support given by Irish exiles and by those throughout the world who recognised the IRA's legitimacy as a national liberation movement fighting against an oppressive occupying power.

The British therefore decided to project the Irish republican cause as being 'criminal'; to dub the IRA as a 'criminal conspiracy' led by Mafia-type 'god-fathers'.

Central to this 'criminalisation' policy was the need to remove political status from Republican prisoners. In late 1975 the British announced that all prisoners convicted of offences committed after March 1st 1976 would be denied political status and would be held in specially built H-blocks of cells in Long Kesh.

## 'ON THE BLANKET'

Thus it was that in September 1976 Belfast Republican Kieran Nugent became the first prisoner to be denied political status, and the first man to go 'on the blanket', when he refused to wear prison garb and courageously pledged that the British would have to nail the uniform to his back.

Kieran Nugent was quickly joined by other Republican prisoners who also refused both to wear prison garb or to do prison work on the grounds that they were political prisoners and not criminals.

The British have not remained content with depriving the men of one day's remission of sentence for every day they are 'on the blanket'; the British have also inflicted brutal measures to break the protest.

For over two years now the British have been guilty of cold-bloodedly inflicting an official policy of deliberate cruelty on the protesting prisoners. A policy of cruelty personally master-minded by petty tyrant Roy Mason.

The 'blanket men' have been allowed no exercise; no proper medical attention; no association nor recreation; no hobbies nor handicraft; no TV nor radio; no books (except for a bible); no newspapers nor magazines, nor other reading material; no pens nor writing material, and no food parcels.

Far from these conditions being self-inflicted by the prisoners, as claimed by British propagandists, in reality these conditions have been deliberately and officially inflicted on the men as punishment in order to break their refusal to wear prison clothes or to do prison work.

These naked and defenceless men have also been subjected to regular and savage physical attacks from baton-wielding prison warders; attacks which have sometimes even resulted in broken bones. Many injuries have been inflicted on the weakened prisoners during often repeated sadistic and degrading internal body searches carried out whilst prisoners are forcibly held stark naked, face downwards across a table.

At random, men have been regularly selected for brutal beatings together with inhumane dietary punishments and long spells totally isolated in silence in the Punishment block.

**We repeat: comprehensive deprivation of nearly all mental and physical stimulation together with consistent physical brutality have been deliberately designed to break the prisoners' spirit and their protest.**

The British claims that the prisoners have 'self-inflicted' these punishments and beatings is a sick twisting of the truth; they are the invention of cynical British propagandists who are totally uncaring about human suffering.

**BRITISH DESPERATION**

As usual the British have totally under-estimated Republican resistance. The courage and heroism of the men 'on the blanket' is proving more than a match for the British who are unable to understand the heroic spirit of continued Irish resistance to their dictatorial and blood-thirsty rule.

By March of last year, eighteen months after the protest had first started, there were nearly 300 men 'on the blanket' and the British were getting increasingly desperate at the obvious failure of their 'criminalisation' policy. No longer did they issue weekly figures of those prisoners *"refusing to obey prison rules"*, and propaganda phrases about *"criminal god-fathers"* receded into the background.

Since the most serious punishments available were already being inflicted, new methods had to be thought of, while simultaneously the beatings, dietary punishments, and spells in the Punishment block were all stepped up. **Young lads were repeatedly attacked and had their privates kicked on their way to their weekly shower.**

Getting permission to go down the corridor to the toilet became a 'privilege' which was regularly withdrawn as a form of punishment and harassment, and to grant permission the prison warders insisted on being called 'Sir'. In addition on entering the cells, the warders would kick over the already over-flowing chamber pots, deliberately spilling the foul contents all over the floor.

As a direct result of this increased harassment and to highlight their increasingly desperate plight, the men were forced to step-up their protest along the only lines open to them.

**THE DIRT STRIKE**

Starting on March 20th of last year the 'blanket men' refused to wash and shower themselves, or to brush and mop out their cells.

A week later, in the face of even further increased brutality, they were again forced to escalate their protest; this time by refusing to leave their cells to slop-out their chamber pots. The warders refused to bring around buckets to allow the men to slop them out. This then led to the cells getting into a disgusting condition with human waste over-flowing onto the cell floors.

To make matters worse, all cell furniture, namely bed, chair, locker and table were removed from the cells.

On July 31st Catholic Archbishop Dr. Tomas O'Fiaich visited Long Kesh. Clearly overcome by what he had seen, Dr. O'Fiaich stated:

**"Having spent the whole of Sunday in the prison, I was shocked at the inhumane conditions prevailing in H-blocks 3, 4 and 5, where over 300 prisoners were incarcerated. One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being. The nearest approach to it that I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer pipes in the slums of Calcutta. The stench and filth in some cells, with the remains of rotten food and human excreta scattered around the walls, was almost unbearable."**

The British response was predictable: more violence against the prisoners and a ban on all special visits such as Dr. O'Fiaich's.

Since being forced on to their 'No-wash no-slop-out' protest the men have been subjected to painful drenchings with high-powered water hoses being turned upon them in their cells. They have also suffered near-suffocation from forcible baths of boiling hot or freezing cold water.

In recent months the 'blanket men's' haggard bodies have been further cut and bruised when they have been forcibly dragged from their cells, scrubbed with deck scrubbers, their faces forcibly shaved and their hair forcibly cropped.

There seems to be no limit to the depths of depravity and barbarity to which the British are prepared to sink in their treatment of naked defenceless prisoners in order to achieve their political objective of 'criminalising' Irish Republicanism.

But the justness of the men's case for getting political status remains crystal clear.

**SPECIAL, SPECIAL, SPECIAL, . . . .**

The core of their case is simple.

They are political prisoners because the actions for which they were gaoled were politically motivated. Hundreds of their comrades ("convicted" of identical offences committed before 1st March 1976) imprisoned in the PoW-type huts within compounds, have 'special category status' and this is what the 350 blanket men are demanding. They are not struggling just for material privileges but for the principle of recognition as political prisoners.

In fact in every possible way, except for granting special status, the British already treat them as special political prisoners.

There is the **special** *'Emergency Provisions Act'* which specifically defines *"terrorism"* as *"the use of violence for* **political** *ends"* whilst proscribing the IRA as a *"terrorist"* organisation.

There are **special** broad powers for questioning, searching, arrest and interrogation for up to seven days without a solicitor.

There are **special** interrogation centres, with **special** teams of interrogators drawn from the hated RUC **Special** Branch using **special** brutal interrogation methods which have already resulted in the death of at least one victim.

There are **special** procedures making bail especially difficult to obtain. There are **special** long periods on remand.

There are **special** no-jury courts with **special** rules of evidence, and **especially** for arms charges the accused are deemed guilty until proven innocent.

Nine out of ten of these **special** prisoners are sentenced mainly on the **special** evidence of their own signed 'confession' obtained under **special** circumstances, as confirmed by the Amnesty International Report of June 1978.

The prisoners are sentenced to **special** long sentences. They are held in **special** H-block units with **special** prison guards with their **special** daily allowance.

There is **special** prison security with armed soldiers, machine gun posts, anti-aircraft guns, spotter planes, helicopters, and all the modern trappings of a prisoner-of-war camp.

The prisoners are given **special** prison treatment of beatings and brutality and are **especially** subjected to the vicious abuse of the petty tyrant Mason.

Yet the British still claim that these are 'ordinary' prisoners and are not **special** political prisoners. *Are they kidding?*

*Well, are they kidding you?*

Organise! Agitate! Make your support for political status known, before there is a dead 'blanket man' carried out of the H-blocks of Long Kesh.

Remember the terrible lingering deaths in English dungeons of Frank Stagg, Michael Gaughan, Noel Jenkinson and Sean O'Connell?

Do not let the British kill any of the heroic 'blanket men'.

**ISSUED BY SINN FEIN HEADQUARTERS, DUBLIN**
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