

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

The Prisoners Aid Committee is holding a picket on the Norwegian Embassy in London on Saturday, 10 December, 3pm-4pm in order to protest against the award of the Nobel Prize for Peace to Amnesty International. The work of the PAC over the last six years has been concerned with the treatment of Irish political prisoners in the country in which Amnesty has its Headquarters — England. During this period and particularly in the last three-four years, Irish political prisoners have been treated appallingly, yet on no occasion has Amnesty selected any one of these prisoners as a "prisoner of conscience" nor have Amnesty sponsored any investigation into the treatment of prisoners in police or prison custody in England, despite widespread evidence of ill treatment of both political and non-political prisoners.

1. In 1973-74 a total of nine Irish political prisoners were force fed for a long period of time, four of them for over 6 months. As a result of this treatment, which is known to cause serious psychological as well as physical injury, one prisoner, Michael Gaughan, died. Constant appeals were made to Amnesty during this period to condemn this treatment but these were ignored even though the World Medical Association condemned the force feeding of prisoners and the Labour Government gave an undertaking that it would never again be used against prisoners of "sound mind."

2. In November 1975 Amnesty (British Section) held a conference on torture as part of a world wide campaign against torture and information was given to two workshops on the prison conditions and treatment of Irish prisoners in England and Ireland. At the time the PAC was told that further work would be done on this, but nothing further was heard and furthermore the MP, Gwyneth Dunwoody, who chaired the meeting refused to allow a resolution of the treatment of Irish prisoners to be put to the meeting.

3. To coincide with the Campaign against Torture in 1975 the PAC furnished Amnesty with information about the treatment of Irish political prisoners who had been tortured in police custody, in particular the case of the six prisoners unjustly convicted for the Birmingham pub bombs as a result of having been tortured into making "confessions". Nothing more was heard of this.

4. During the hunger strike of the late Prionsias Stagg, Amnesty were asked to intervene on his behalf and raise with the Home Office the conditions in which he had been held for three years. His case was still under consideration when he died.

5. In early 1977 Amnesty together with the NCCL and the Howard League for Penal Reform produced a "Report" on an incident in which six Irish political prisoners were savagely beaten by screws in Albany, sustaining severe injuries. The "Report" not only totally ignored the political significance of this assault, but it led to nothing more than an "appeal" to the Home Office for more humane treatment, including such a bonus as allowing prisoners in solitary to have a pencil. It was left to the PAC to advise the men and their families to take legal action and as a result of this their cases are at present before the European Commission for Human Rights in Strasbourg. In fact a total of 40 such cases are now before the Commission on behalf of Irish political prisoners whose situation has been totally ignored by Amnesty.



Photo: Newline



Michael Gaughan  
Died 3rd June 1974



Frank Stagg  
Died 12th February 1976



Noel Jenkinson  
Died 9th October 1976



Seán Ó Conaill,  
Died October 2nd 1977

6. Amnesty does not support the right of Irish political prisoners to serve their sentences in Ireland nor does it in fact regard them as being political prisoners despite the fact that ample evidence of the political nature of their trials and treatment. Amnesty has never condemned the brutalities of the British Army of Occupation in Ireland. In a recent letter to The Guardian, the Chairman of Amnesty in Britain, Paul Oestreicher denied that he had implied in a speech that the British Army was guilty of torturing people in Ireland.

7. There are currently a large number of Irish political prisoners who are or who have spent long periods in solitary. Shane Paul O'Doherty is entering his second year; Brendan Dowd was 22 months in solitary; Joe Duffy was 13 months in solitary; Liam MacLarnon two years in solitary; Gerry Cunningham, Paul Hill, Ray MacLaughlin, John Walker have all spent periods of six months and over in solitary in the last twelve months. It is known that solitary can have massively damaging psychological effects. Steve Nordonne was held under conditions of extreme sensory deprivation in a supposedly defunct control unit in Wakefield last year. None of these cases has been investigated by Amnesty.

Amnesty's record on the treatment of Irish political prisoners is appalling. There are currently a score of prisoners serving massive sentences as a result of being framed by the police, yet Amnesty has taken up none of their cases although they have received some publicity even in the bourgeois press. Amnesty lent itself to be used as a political tool by the British Government when it launched an "inquiry" into the treatment of prisoners in the Free State which neatly coincided with the judgement against the UK government by the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of people tortured by the British Army and RUC in Ireland. They have shown no interest in the treatment of Irish people in police custody in England. Perhaps this record is not surprising when we consider that amongst the "sponsors" of Amnesty in England are Harold Wilson under whose Prime Ministership most of the brutalities outlined above took place; Lord Gardiner responsible for the ending of "political status" for political prisoners in the Six Counties; Sir Keith Joseph, extreme right wing representative of a party which supported 50 years of repression in Ireland accompanied by a welter of legislation aimed at curtailing basic human rights in the Six Counties. The "sponsors" also include numerous dignitaries who have never opened their distinguished mouths about the treatment of Irish people in England or Ireland. They include the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Hume, Jeremy Thorpe, Ralf Dahrendorf, Len Murray, the Chief Rabbi.

While it is clear that it must be deeply embarrassing for Amnesty to find itself with its Headquarters in the torture capital of Europe, we cannot but deplore that the opportunistic and politically selective stance they have taken as a result of this has led to them being awarded a prize for "peace" while they have ignored the war waged on their very doorstep against Irish people who have dared to stand up and oppose British imperialism in Ireland.

We urge you to support our picket on 10 December and to make known your disgust at the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Amnesty.



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