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Issued by Sinn Féin POW Department

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*Armagh Prison*



IN NOVEMBER 1982, the British government implemented yet another draconian policy of repression in the six counties in the form of strip-searching women prisoners incarcerated in Armagh top-security jail. Barely two years on and with the number of strip-searches climbing to the 2,000 mark, the establishment media has done little to inform the vast majority of Irish people as to what a strip-search is, or, for that matter, *why* it is being systematically concentrated on a very small number of women prisoners.

This pamphlet has several objectives: 1. To place strip-searching into its political context; 2. To explain the circumstances surrounding the introduction of the strip-search procedure; 3. To expose as a complete lie that strip-searching is a 'security' measure; 4. To explain the effects, psychological and physical, on the women concerned; 5. To outline the growing support generated by the Stop the Strip-Searches in Armagh Campaign which is still in its infancy. Steadily, the British government is coming under pressure from a cross-section of opinion concerned at the practice of strip-searching. However, this must and can be improved and expanded upon.

Hopefully, this pamphlet will provide another essential tool in helping to shatter the granite wall of British propaganda and mistruths it consistently uses to cover-up and defend its use of such an inhumane policy.

The women in Armagh, some as young as 15, pregnant women, menstruating women and grandmothers, are enduring an extreme form of sexual harassment and psychological torture.

This pamphlet is dedicated to the courage and resistance of the women in Armagh, to their families and friends and to those who are relentlessly working on their behalf on the outside to bring this obnoxious procedure to a speedy end.



# The seeds of repression

THE STRIP-SEARCHING of women prisoners in Armagh Jail which exists today should not be viewed in isolation but seen as another method of repression used by the British over the last 15 years to weaken and demoralise the nationalist population.

The seeds of today's inhumane treatment of strip-searching women prisoners have been sown for over a decade in Armagh Jail by successive prison regimes in an attempt to break the morale and comradeship of republican prisoners.

The following brief summary of how this was used by the prison authorities in Armagh since the early 1970s reveals that strip-searching in turn was introduced as a means of humiliation and as such is a calculated extension of repressive British policy.

Armagh Jail was built in 1780. It is a sinister, austere building which, with today's technology, is a formidable top-security prison. From 1971, nationalist women became even more involved in the liberation struggle against British occupation, and as a result of militant protests women were sent to Armagh. There was no political status then but the women quickly gained this tacit recognition from the prison authorities.

It was not until 1973, two years after the introduction of internment, that the number of republican women prisoners began to increase. The successful winning of political status in June 1972 by republican prisoners in Crumlin Road Jail thus ensured that conditions in Armagh were at least tolerable. From 1973 to 1975, numbers had risen to over 120 and the women POWs had, primarily because of their numbers, been able to limit petty harassment by the prison regime.

This situation was to dramatically change from mid-1975 onwards when the British government, in a new attempt to defeat the armed struggle, introduced the three-pronged policy of 'Ulsterisation, normalisation and criminalisation'. This policy was a vain attempt to present the unstable six counties as being a 'normal' society, 'like any other part of Britain', with the sectarian RUC being promoted as typical 'friendly British Bobbies'. To criminalise the national liberation struggle it was vital that the British also criminalise republican prisoners — and so after March 1st 1976 anyone sentenced for a political offence was denied political status.

In Armagh this meant that by 1979, due to the number of sentenced prisoners dwindling because of releases, there were only seven prisoners,



then four, and then one, Pauline Deery, left with political status. During the decline in these numbers, the prison administration grew more arrogant and vindictive in their treatment of prisoners, concentrating much of this on those who had been newly sentenced from March 1976. Thus began one of the most concerted campaigns of harassment, until, that is, November 1982, when strip-searching was imposed.

With the commencement in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh of the blanket protest against the withdrawal of political status, by February 1977 five women were engaged in a 'no work' protest. This number rose to 38 by March 1979 during which time women were locked up 21 hours per day; with loss of remission and privileges, and one visit per month.

In May 1978, male prison warders baton-charged a group of remand prisoners protesting against withdrawal of status. This attack, in which several women were injured, was an indication of the upsurge in state violence within the jail. Over the next two years, trumped-up charges of breaches of discipline were made against the women at every given opportunity. The tension again rose in February 1980 when prisoners were the victims of an unprovoked attack by male and female prison warders as they were queueing up for dinner.

On February 7th of that year, the women were forced to commence the 'no wash' protest after having been locked in their cells after the assaults. They had not been allowed to 'slop-out' their chamberpots. They had no alternative but to empty their urine under their cell doors and dispose of their excreta by daubing cell-walls with it.

Three women joined the first hunger-strike, in 1980, and remained on it until it ended in December 1980 with what was believed by the prisoners at the time to be a satisfactory settlement. This turned out not to be the case when the British reneged on the agreement and a second hunger-strike commenced on March 1st 1981 which eventually



*Photograph of Mairead Farrell which was smuggled out during the 'no wash' protest*

resulted in ten republican prisoners dying. The 'no wash' protest ended on the day this hunger-strike began. With the ending of this hunger-strike the attitude of the various prison regimes changed and the republican prisoners attempted to secure the best conditions possible.

In Armagh the new prison governor, Thomas Murtagh, who took over from Governor Scott early in 1981, introduced an even harsher regime than his predecessor. He, it seemed, was determined to break the women prisoners. The women proved equal to the task of resisting this repression and it was as an extension of this policy that Murtagh, in collusion with the colonial Northern Ireland Office, in November 1982, began to systematically use the strip-search procedure. For Murtagh and the NIO the strip-search tactic was merely another way of degrading and humiliating the women prisoners.

## **The pretext for strip-searching**

Why was strip-searching introduced in Armagh Jail in November 1982? The official British government response from ex-direct-ruler James Prior and his prisons' minister Nicholas Scott to numerous

questions in the House of Commons, claims that it was introduced on 'security grounds' and 'for the safe custody of inmates'. They cite a trivial incident which occurred in the prison on October 22nd as the pretext for making women remove their clothing against their will and social upbringing – often while menstruating – in front of prison officials who are completely hostile to the women's political and religious opinions.

The incident on October 22nd was as follows. Two 'young offenders', known as YOs, being held on remand on non-political charges, were discovered to have taken two keys into Armagh after returning from a county court appearance. Both girls were juveniles and afterwards admitted they had taken the keys as part of a childish prank. The keys were discovered on the pair – after the RUC contacted the prison authorities – during what was then the normal 'rub-down' body-search, *not a strip-search*. When referring to this incident the British government implies that these keys could in some way have aided or abetted a possible breach in prison security when in fact the two keys could not have possibly assisted any such breach. A further reflection of how trivial the authorities viewed the incident is that no disciplinary action was taken against the two women concerned.

A few weeks later, the 'rub-down' body-search was replaced with the 'full-search' strip-searching – the British making yet another excuse to harass republican prisoners.

From November 1982, all women prisoners from the age of 15, pregnant women, menstruating women and even grandmothers were to be subjected to this degrading treatment when entering or leaving Armagh Jail. Non-politically aligned women are also subjected to strip-searches but this is a smokescreen to cover the fact that it is really republican women the authorities wish to harass in an attempt to break their spirit and morale.

At the beginning, the remand women, those who are mainly affected by strip-searching, refused to comply and were forcibly restrained while their clothing was torn off by both male and female warders who pinned them down on the floor. Several women, including Derry woman Catherine Moore, were injured during these assaults. In fact, Catherine Moore had a towel placed over her eyes, thus blindfolding her while her clothes were torn off. She later suffered severe disciplinary measures on charges brought against her for assaulting the warders involved!

Strip-searching mainly affects remand prisoners, i.e. prisoners who, even under the corrupt colonial judicial system in the North, are innocent of the alleged offences until supposedly proven otherwise. With the RUC's paid-perjurer system, coupled with the biased Diplock courts, remand prisoners can be held for up to two years or more until their case is brought to trial. Sentenced prisoners going out of Armagh on inter-prison visits, i.e. visiting a father or brother in another prison, and prisoners either being released or going to an outside hospital, are all strip-searched going in and out of Armagh.



## What is a strip-search?

So what does a strip-search entail? Accounts from women who were acquitted of charges brought against them and other ex-POWs portray a disturbing picture of how strip-searches can be carried out by between six and eight female warders.

Remand prisoners must compulsorily attend court every week. The prisoner is taken down to what is known as the 'reception' area in the jail, and shown into a very small cubicle with a bench along the back wall and a curtain at the front. The curtain is only shoulder-high and in length reaches the prisoner's leg half-way down. The prisoner is told to remove her clothes and hand them out to the warders who often, according to ex-POWs, stare at them over the top of the curtain while she does so. Each item is thoroughly examined and its colour and size noted in a book. Women who are menstruating are ordered to hand over their sanitary towels or tampons for inspection and are given fresh sanitary protection. On occasions, women who have been too embarrassed to remove their pants because they have their periods have had them forcibly removed against their will. This happened to Marie Wright in December 1983. Cynical comments are made about the prisoners' clothing and about their bodies; pregnant women and women who have had stretch marks on their bodies have been jibed at.

The women are visually scrutinised from top to bottom — not a brief clinical inspection carried out with 'sensitivity' as the authorities claim — then ordered to turn around while their backs are examined by the warders who run their fingers through their hair. The palms of



SINEAD MOORE

the women's hands are turned over for inspection and their legs are lifted to inspect the soles of their feet. Former prisoner Sinead Moore, who spent seven years in Armagh and was strip-searched on her release, compared the procedure to "*being treated like cattle in a market place*".

After the search, the women are given back their clothes and under joint RUC/prison staff escort are taken in either a Transit van or 'meat wagon' to Armagh Courthouse, which is only a few hundred yards from the jail, or to Belfast, 40 miles away. *At no time do the prisoners come in contact with any member of the general public during their brief court appearance.* Again they are taken back to the prison under the same heavy escort and can be strip-searched once more.

Throughout almost 2,000 such strip-searches since November 1982 the only items which the authorities claim to have discovered on prisoners is a £5 note and a small phial of perfume. How then can strip-searching be justified when these statistics unquestionably confirm that strip-searching is of no security value to the authorities but is used as a means of control and petty harassment? As a method of control it has failed abysmally, it has, however, had a traumatic effect on the women in other ways.



Chris McAuley addresses the inaugural meeting of the Belfast Stop the Strip-Searches in Armagh Campaign



## The case of Jacqueline Moore

DERRY WOMAN Jacqueline Moore, a remand prisoner in Armagh, gave birth to a baby daughter at the end of June 1984. She had been brought to an outside hospital for the delivery but shortly afterwards was transferred back to the jail's hospital wing under heavy RUC escort. Prior to this, however, and despite her condition, she had been subjected to a vicious campaign of deliberate harassment with, among other things, not being permitted to share a cell with her mother, Anna. Both have been charged with allegedly being involved in causing an explosion at the Droppin Well Bar in Ballykelly in December 1982.

In her seventh month of pregnancy Jacqueline Moore was moved away from her mother to another wing of the jail. In effect, this move restricted communication and contact between them at a time when Jacqueline most required the moral support and strength of her mother. To make matters worse, the cell she was moved to was infested with insects and she subsequently had to spend two nights in the hospital wing while her cell was fumigated.

Baby clothes which friends and relatives sent into Armagh, in preparation for the birth, were withheld from Jacqueline on the pretext that these would 'clutter' her cell and would amount to 'a fire hazard'. Essential items for her new baby, including a pram and cot, were only

grudgingly allowed into Armagh as a 'special favour' by Prison Governor Thomas Murtagh. Indeed, according to Ms Moore, Murtagh had made no secret of the fact months before the birth that the baby would 'prove a burden' to the prison authorities. This attitude was blatantly reflected by the prison staff shortly after Jacqueline brought her daughter, Dominique, back to the jail and culminated in Jacqueline being subjected to a traumatic strip-search on July 24th 1984 when going to court on a remand appearance.

The authorities, well aware that she was still bleeding from the vagina and leaking milk from her breasts, thus requiring sanitary and breast protection, insisted that she comply with the full strip-search procedure. In a letter from the jail, Jacqueline wrote:

*"Despite my medical condition, I was strip-searched. Once naked, I attempted to cover my breasts with my arms as I was embarrassed with my breasts leaking milk. I was ordered to remove them to facilitate the warders' inspection of my naked body."* Other women had been going out to court that day yet Jacqueline was consciously singled out for the most degrading and emotionally upsetting strip-search.

As a further means of bringing emotional pressure, her daughter has been, and continues to be, body-searched each time Jacqueline takes her out to the exercise yard, a meagre one hour per day; to Mass; to the doctor; or out on visits. On average, this amounts to 26 times per week. Referring to her letter once more, Jacqueline believes that the intention of the authorities is to *"deliberately harass myself and the baby, hoping to persuade me to send her out to be totally reared by my family"*. Under prison rules, prisoners may keep their child in Armagh until the child is one year old.

Typically, the NIO's official response to public concern on this issue, following publicity, was extremely defensive and shrouded in flowery diplomatic jargon cleverly used to gloss over the lies. Here is part of their reply, dated August 29th 1984, in response to a letter from Frances Mary Blake, the compiler of the Ernie O'Malley papers:

*"... Your comments have been noted. However, it would appear that you have been given misleading information about the treatment of the child and I welcome this opportunity of correcting these inaccuracies.*

*"Searches can occur when Ms Moore takes the child and its pram from the wing to the exercise yard or when she takes the baby with her to the visits area. A female prison officer gently places her hands on the child's clothing and gives her a light frisk. When the child is in the pram the covers are gently rolled back by a female prison officer. the searches are carried out with due sensitivity and there is no question of the child's clothing being removed.*

*"The search is carried out in a wholly sensitive manner by female prison officers, many of whom are mothers themselves.*

*"The child is in a prison which holds prisoners who are on remand or have been convicted of very serious terrorist-type offences and while the mother chooses to let her remain in this environment an assurance cannot be given that discreet searches of the kind described will not*



*occasionally be carried out in the interests of maintaining security and control in the prison.” (Our emphasis.)*

Once again the weak and transparent excuse of ‘security’ is callously promoted by the British authorities to justify the unnecessary and regular, not ‘occasional’ body-searches of a young baby, a method which is being used to emotionally blackmail its mother into prematurely breaking links with her by sending her out to relatives before the specified one-year period.

Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein MP for West Belfast, made representations to the NIO on Ms Moore’s behalf in July 1984. The ensuing publicity was quickly met by further persecution by the prison authorities with the prison governor threatening further ‘disciplinary measures’ if she continued to publicise what was happening. Meanwhile, Dominique had been denied baby rice to supplement her bottle-feed, and nappies were issued under strict control by the authorities who refused to leave a supply in Jacqueline’s cell where she would have access as required. Another request to allow her mother to take care of the baby at least one night per week in order to allow for Jacqueline’s recovery was also denied.

At present (October 1984) the body-searches continue unabated, nappies are still being restricted and when Jacqueline Moore’s trial commences in the near future – unless something is done quickly – she will have to face the prospect of being strip-searched *twice daily* for the lengthy duration of the trial.



# Campaigning against strip-searching

THE Stop the Strip-Searches in Armagh Campaign was initiated on July 29th 1984 when two former Armagh prisoners, Linda Quigley and Mary Doyle, plus Chrissie McAuley of Sinn Fein's Belfast POW Department, addressed a meeting of the Sinn Fein Women's Department in Dublin. After hearing horrific personal accounts of strip-searching, those present elected a committee at the request of the prisoners, to start campaigning on this essentially humanitarian issue.

In its initial stages the campaign gained impetus from substantial

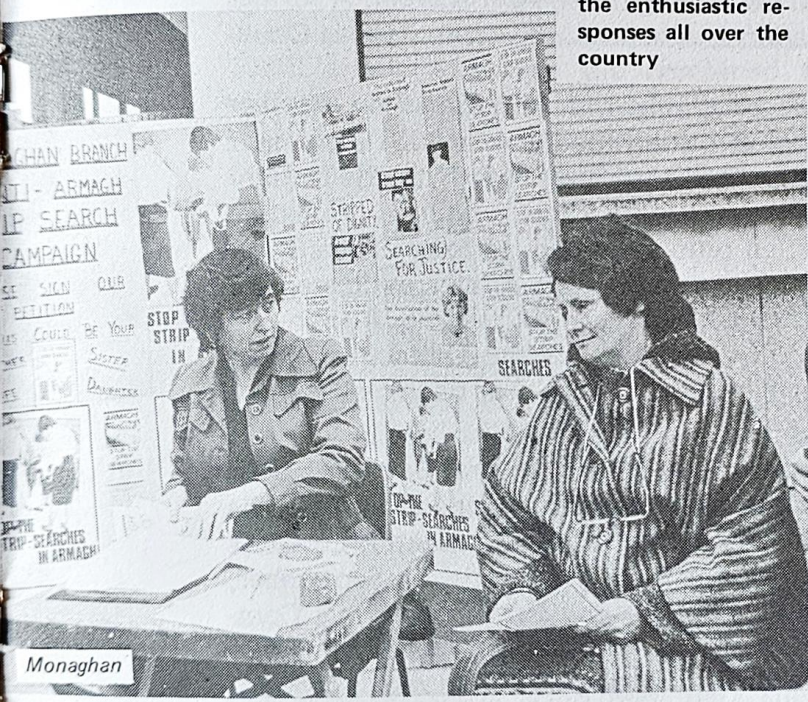


Andersonstown Road, Belfast

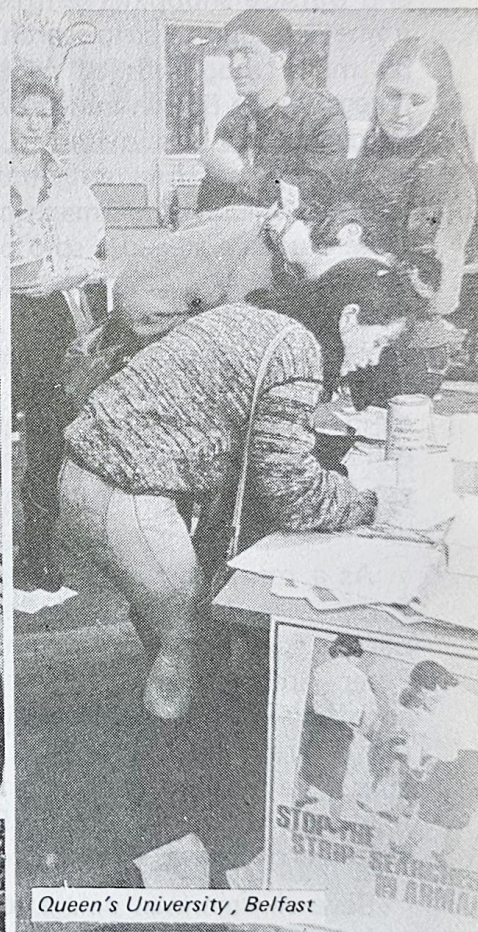


Ex-Armagh POW Linda Quigley meets Ann Scargill, wife of NUM president Arthur Scargill, in Dublin

The broad support for the campaign is evident in the enthusiastic responses all over the country



Monaghan



Queen's University, Belfast



Dundalk



Letterkenny, County Donegal

media coverage, which included interviews with an ex-prisoner. Lengthy reports were carried in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Press*, *Hot Press*, the *Sunday World*, *In Dublin* and other newspapers. Linda Quigley was interviewed on Sunshine Radio.

During the following two months the campaign rapidly gained momentum. Numerous action groups have been set up in the Dublin area, including the Liberties, Rathmines, North Inner City, Ballymun, Howth, Darndale, Tallaght and Dun Laoghaire.

Committees have also begun active campaigning in Monaghan, Limerick, Cork, Waterford, West Clare, Shannon, Sligo, Counties Louth and Armagh, South Down, and Belfast.

Groups have organised meetings, distributed leaflets and petition forms. Stalls and photo exhibitions have been mounted on main streets and outside shopping centres in many areas. A petition calling for an immediate end to strip-searching in Armagh Jail has already been signed by many thousands of people, including MPs, trade unionists and a delegation of British miners' wives, among them, Ann Scargill. A former Armagh POW was invited to address meetings of Dublin Trades Councils.

To publicise the Armagh prisoners' plight, Dublin Sinn Fein member Rose Dugdale staged a solo protest during the Carrolls Irish Open golf tournament in Dublin on August 4th. Later that month, at the Dublin-Tyrone Gaelic football semi-final at Croke Park, a banner protesting against strip-searching was carried onto the pitch, to loud cheers from the crowd. In Crossmaglen, on September 5th, a rally addressed by ex-POW Linda Quigley was attended by about 300 people. A lobbying campaign of trade unionists, TDs, senators in the Oireachtas, local government councillors, women's groups and the churches is also underway.

As a result of similar campaigning in Britain, several British Labour Party MPs have publicly condemned strip-searching, including the party's spokesperson on women, Jo Richardson and, recently, Labour's Peter Archer, the party's spokesperson on the North. In September, an official delegation from the London Labour Party's Women's Committee travelled to the North to gather information on the strip-searches. They visited remand prisoners in Armagh Jail and met prisoners' relatives. And at the Labour Party conference in Blackpool, in October, strip-searching was strongly condemned.

Several American delegations which visited Ireland have also expressed deep concern at the situation in Armagh and pledged to start campaigning groups in the USA.

The campaign in Ireland is still in its infancy but already the enthusiastic localised responses to the humanitarian issues involved proves that there is broad support, particularly among Irish women, for the campaign's central demand — an immediate end to strip-searching.

Throughout Ireland we need to explain what is going on in Armagh, we need to demonstrate the massive opposition which exists to the British government's oppressive strip-searching policy.



## Will it be me?

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THIS article expresses the combined thoughts and feelings of the women on remand in Armagh about strip-searching. It was sent out from Armagh Jail in September 1984.

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It's Monday night and everyone is apprehensive. Tuesday is remand day for POWs in Armagh Jail. The general discussion is what clothes we will wear and, of course, the inevitable strip-searches.

*"I have my period this week, I hope I'm not stripped."*

No one even tries to dispel my fears, we all know what to expect. The atmosphere is tense. Lock-up arrives at 8.30pm. No one looks forward to Monday night, it's all in front of us the next morning.

**Tuesday**

*"Hurry up in that shower!"* shouts the Screw. *"We'll never be ready for 10 o'clock."*

Nobody mentions the word court. Everyone is preoccupied, mentally preparing themselves for the worst morning of the week. Court used to mean an outing, now it's a nightmare. One of the women is away down to reception. God help her. The rest of us huddle together, guessing among ourselves as to who'll be next. Try to keep them waiting and maybe 'X' won't be stripped, she has her period and they can't keep us late for court.

But they don't care who's late. It's 10.30 and I'm the last one. Transport has arrived but unfortunately our tactics have been unsuccessful.

*"Full reception search this morning. Do you want a sheet or the can-can gown?"* she smirks. Huh, can-can gown, it's obviously some enjoyment she's looking for.

I hear myself asking for the medical officer. That's a joke. They've no medical training, they're just another Screw in a white coat.

*"So you have your period, eh? We'll have to wait a few minutes*

for the MO." Attempting to belittle me, she whines, *"Be a good girl and take off all your clothes."*

This is it. This is what a full reception search boils down to. I'm frightened, I've nobody to turn to – how many times is this? If I refuse I know what will happen, they'll forcibly strip me. I have my period, has she no consideration at all? I'd love to hit that Screw. A million and one thoughts crowd my mind but uppermost is that I have to strip completely naked and display myself for this pervert.

Off come the shoes and socks. *"Ah, here comes the MO now. Are you ready yet? Hurry up, girl, we haven't all day, the transport is waiting."*

Yeah, the transport is waiting. Well, 'girl', this is it! I hand out my clothes and ask for a fresh sanitary towel.

*"Where's your pants? Now come on, you know you have to take your pants off too."*

*"But I have my period,"* I tell her, what does she expect me to do?

*"The MO is here, hand it out to her. She'll inspect it and give you a clean one."*

This must be a dream, I'll wake up in a minute.

*"Are you going to hand out your pants and sanitary towel?"*

It's definitely not a dream this time. Inside, I'm panicking. I know I have to give her the sanitary towel but what'll I do if I bleed and have no protection. I've pleaded with this Screw before and she and others forcibly removed my pants and sanitary towel.

*"I have my period,"* I tell her again, but I know her reply before she even opens her mouth.

*"That's a good girl. We'll give you a clean one in a minute. Turn around now till I see your back."*

This has to be the dance! My feet are stuck to the ground, I can't move – I'm at my lowest, defenceless without my clothes.

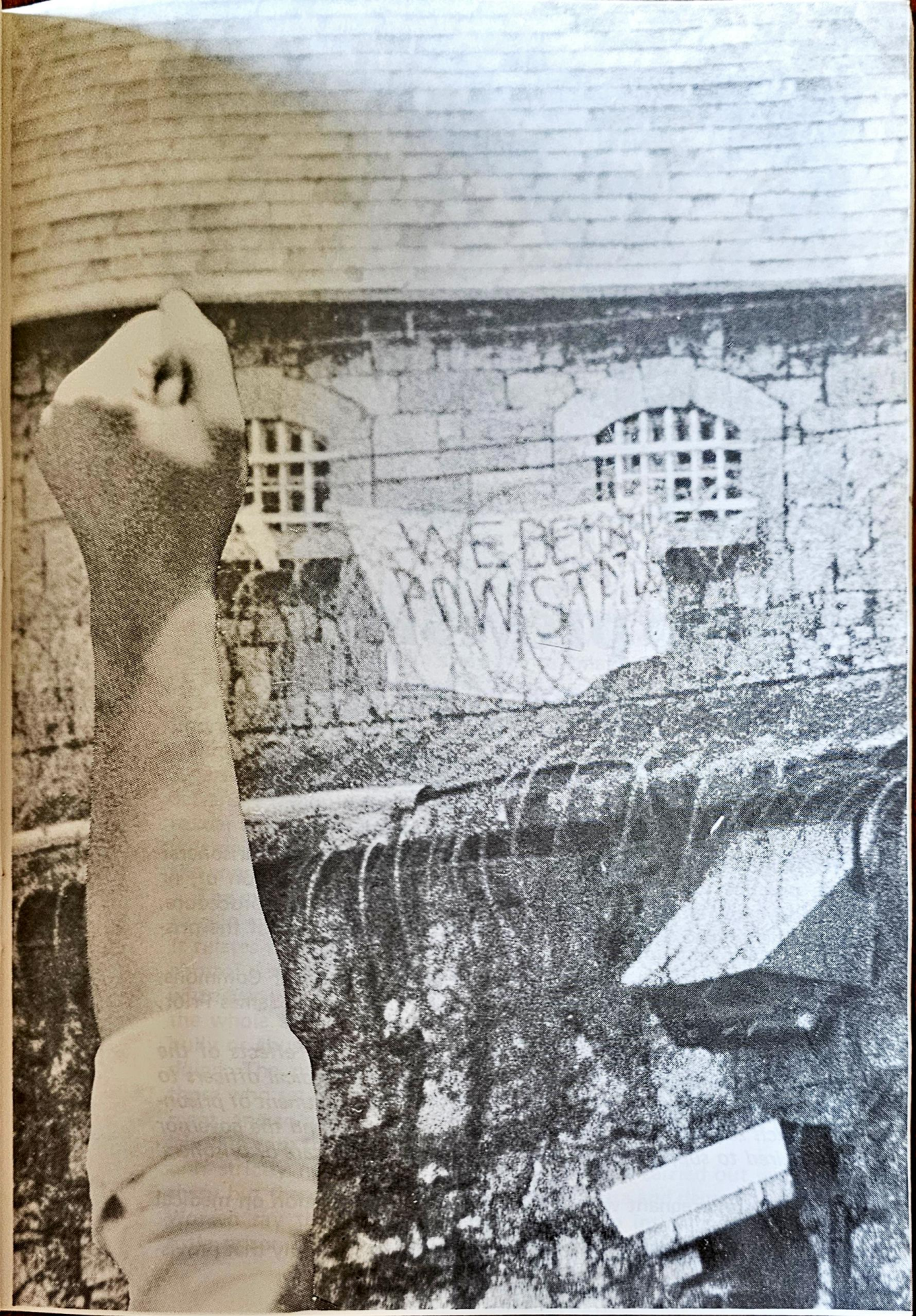
Her eyes travel over every inch of my naked body and I could cry, but I won't cry. I despise this Screw. No, I hate her. Do I hate her? I've never hated anyone before, I don't understand how I feel, I've never felt this way before. I've never felt so much contempt for anyone. I wonder how she feels. Does she think about me? Next she'll say it's part of her job. I know that if the roles were reversed I couldn't strip anyone.

I concentrate on trying to block out this trauma. It's no use, I'm embarrassed, I'm degraded, I'm ashamed. No, I'm not ashamed! Why should I be ashamed? The shame is on them!

Now she thinks I'm a horse, lifting my legs to inspect my feet, and with one final look at my naked body she returns my clothes.

*"Oh, we nearly forgot your sanitary towel. Hurry up now, transport's waiting."*

Hurriedly I get dressed again. The eyes of all the Screws are on me as I walk out of the cubicle. I ignore them. I can do nothing else. The journey to court is uneventful, but on my return I have to face this disgusting woman again. Is she a woman?





## No provision for monitoring strip-searching

WHAT kind of effect is strip-searching having on the women prisoners? The practice was introduced without any prior consideration of, or provision for, either short- or long-term monitoring of the procedure. Both the psychological and physical health and well-being of the prisoners is ignored.

When challenged on this point in the British House of Commons, the following answer from former Northern direct-ruler, James Prior, on June 28th 1984, stated that:

*"There are no special facilities for monitoring the effects of the search procedures. Prison rules provide for prison medical officers to inform the governor of any matter relating to the treatment of prisoners which requires consideration on medical grounds and the governor is required to support prison medical officers in their care of prisoners' health."*

Obviously, pregnant women do not merit 'consideration on medical grounds'.

On the surface, Prior's statement would appear to imply that provis-

ion is available, that the occasional presence of medical officers safeguards any abuse of the system. However, when one examines the deplorable record of the medical staff in Armagh over the years, who neglected the health of several women suffering from *anorexia nervosa* and who were subsequently released on 'compassionate' grounds, this statement rings very hollow indeed.

Professor Ivor Browne, of the Department of Psychiatry in University College Dublin, has recently spoken out strongly against the use of strip-searching and was interviewed on video by the Derry Film and Video Workshop. His comments and analysis of the procedure reveal a disturbing picture for lay people of the probable effects of strip-searching which the British, motivated by political expediency and bias, have chosen to ignore.

Professor Browne has kindly given permission for the following extracts of his interview to be used to outline these effects.

**L** Strip-searching is a rather violent procedure and a tremendous intrusion on a human being. I've spoken to several of the women who've undergone this procedure and there doesn't even seem to be a reasonable security purpose for doing it. The only time they're strip-searched is when they are going to court or coming back from court, when they've had absolutely no contact with anyone from the outside world. This seems to take away any rational security reason for doing it. So it makes me think there must be some other purpose.

In Irish Catholic culture, where very often even married people don't undress in front of each other, strip-searching is experienced as especially traumatic and is a tremendous intrusion. In Ireland, clothes are almost a part of the person's body. To invade this is a violation. It's a violent act and I think, in this sense, rapacious. Most people think of rape as a sexual act; in fact the more you go into studying rape the more clearly it is revealed as an act of hatred and violence and strip-searching has all the connotations of this.

The motive of strip-searching is highly suspect; it is at least an attempt to gain control over the person, but I think it may well go beyond that. It relates to the fact that Northern Ireland was founded on injustice to control a sizeable minority, a growing minority of the population. And whenever you set up a state on that basis, injustice percolates through the whole system and the dominant part of the population inevitably bully or abuse the minority, without even being aware of what they are doing. The ultimate responsibility for this therefore must rest with those who set up the state and their successors, i.e. the British government, and to a lesser extent the Irish government (insofar as they collaborate with this situation).

If strictly necessary, strip-searching could be carried out with sensitivity but there seems to be quite a sadistic aura and degrading attitude. Women say they are often jeered, subject to intimate remarks, with male prison officers being just outside a partition so that they could

hear what was going on. All of that increases the similarity to a rapacious situation or the feeling of being raped.

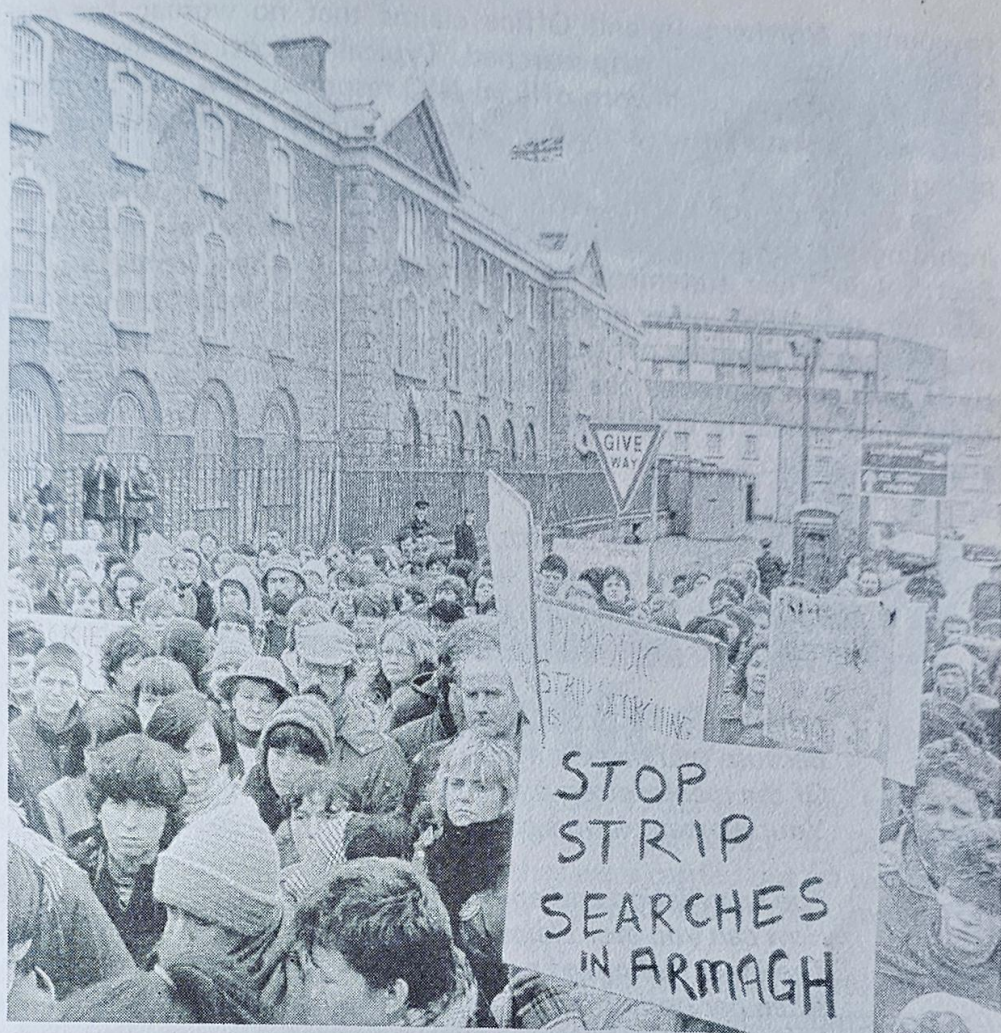
While this strip-searching is going on I understand there are a whole lot of people all crowding around, handling and touching the person, often very roughly. If they resist, of course, then it becomes more violent, and this is a real violation of the most intimate space which a person feels is part of them. I think it's probably one of the more traumatic things that you can do to a person of either sex.

It probably affects women more, particularly if it's done, as apparently happens, at the time of their periods. So part of the reason for doing all this, the main reason, would seem to be to gain emotional control over the person, as part of other things that are happening in the prison life.

If this was happening to sentenced prisoners some people might excuse it and say 'Well, these people are guilty and have committed crimes', but the main strip-searching is on people who are on remand and have yet to be proven guilty. Some of these people could be totally innocent and yet they are subject to an extreme procedure of this kind. I think this could only happen in a state like the North of Ireland or some other fascist-style state, like some of the states of South America and so on. I mean, that's what we're really dealing with in the North of Ireland. Nobody wants to look honestly at this, particularly it would seem to me our authorities in the 'Republic'.

Speaking as a psychiatrist, I think we're probably more aware than ordinary doctors of how sensitive a person's persona is to them and that any act which violates that, which intrudes into that private space of a person, is probably more traumatic than anything else you could do to them, short of perhaps extreme torture and in some ways worse even than that, because when you're under extreme pain you won't be noticing things like that. But to intrude and violate the very private part of a person is, I think, one of the most damaging and violating things that you can do and is therefore a very powerful way of breaking down a personality. That would be my professional view of this.





## Insensitive and unacceptable

NICHOLAS SCOTT, the Tory government's prisons' minister in the North — a man who has vehemently defended strip-searching in the British House of Commons — visited the jail on August 28th 1984.

As many as 15 prisoners, half the total number of women in the prison, spoke to Scott on the issue of strip-searching and pointed out that it was invalid and futile for the purpose of 'security'. They all called for its immediate end and, for the record, focussed much of their criticism on the traumatic effect regular strip-searching was having on their mental and physical health. They specifically did this in order

to counter Northern Ireland Office claims that no woman has ever complained about being strip-searched. Typically, Scott dismissed their arguments with the well-worn official NIO response: it would continue as it was "*necessary to maintain an acceptable level of security*" in the prison.

The republican prisoners wrote to several newspapers in the North, including the supposedly nationalist daily, the *Irish News*, replying to Scott's lies. Their statement, as with numerous others issued by the prisoners since 1982, never appeared in any of them. The British government was once again let off the hook. The following short but poignantly bitter poem expressed the feelings of remand prisoners in Armagh, those most regularly strip-searched. It was sent out of the jail shortly after Scott's visit.

*Can you give me a truthful answer,  
Can you unashamedly say  
Strip-searching is not degrading  
'Cause it's done in a 'sensitive' way?*

*I think not, Mr Scott,  
Because you haven't a clue  
Of the mental stress and anguish  
Your woman victims go through.*

*The humiliation and embarrassment  
How can you ever claim to know  
The inner feelings of a woman  
When her body's put on show?*

*Our bodies are grossly violated  
And inspected part by part.  
Can you be so insensitive, Mr Scott?  
Perhaps you lack a heart.*

*When women have a period,  
Even when they're pregnant too,  
You continue to abuse them,  
Isn't this true?*

*Even sanitary protection must be removed,  
Sometimes this happens with force,  
But you and your lackeys in the NIO  
Will claim, 'It's sensitively done, of course'!*

*Your lies are plain and open  
For all the world to see,  
You can't fool anyone, Mr Scott,  
Least of all me!*



## Statistics

DURING the 14 months from November 1982, when the NIO and prison authorities introduced the strip-searching policy, to December 31st 1983, a total of 1,615 strip-searches were carried out on women in Armagh Jail. The number of women stripped varied from month to month, from 24 up to a maximum of 41.

During the first four months up to March 1st 1983, a total of 772 strip-searches were carried out, an average of 193 each month and involving an average of 24 women. By May 1983, the number had declined to 97, on a total of 29 women.

In the first five months of 1984 (the latest for which the British government figures are available), 149 strip-searches were carried out, an average of 30 each month. Since then the rate of strip-searching seems to have increased somewhat.

These figures are all the more appalling in the context of Armagh's tiny prison population. In June 1984 this was just 30 women, of whom ten were remand prisoners. Frequently within the past two years, the total has been significantly less.

Women attending court for trial have been subjected daily to degrading strip-searches. Women attending brief remand court hearings, or going on inter-prison visits, are also liable to be strip-searched every time they leave or re-enter the jail.

The British government's own figures confirm that individual women have been singled out for insensitive strip-searching as a means of harassment. For example, in March 1983, two women were each strip-searched 21 times, while two others were each searched 18 times in the same short space of time.

Twenty-three-year-old Marie Wright from Andersonstown, Belfast, has calculated that she was strip-searched at least 18 times during her

first six months on remand in Armagh, on one occasion twice in the space of 15 minutes!

Cold statistics do not reveal either the psychological trauma of the women nor the authorities' use of procedure as a pretext for imposing unjustified punishments. Marie Wright was strip-searched forcibly within a space of four days, on December 20th and again on December 23rd 1983, after she refused to remove her underpants and sanitary towel. Two prison warders, one a 'medical officer', carried out the assault. Shortly after both strip-searches, Marie's period unexpectedly stopped, a clear indication of the mental stress she was suffering.



PAULINE McKINNEY

Marie was subsequently sentenced to three days' solitary confinement, plus seven days' loss of remission (despite the fact that she has not been convicted in any court), on trumped-up charges of refusing to obey an order, using abusive language and assaulting a warder.

Earlier that month, remand prisoner Catherine Moore, from Derry, was sentenced to seven days' loss of all privileges after she refused an order to open her legs during a strip-search. Women refusing to remove their clothes in full view of up to 12 prison warders have been stripped forcibly.

In line with the policy of 'criminalising' republican prisoners, and in order to obscure the reality that strip-searching was introduced in a renewed attempt to break the will of republican women prisoners, the prison authorities have also imposed frequent, degrading strip-searches on women imprisoned on non-political charges, of whom there are only a few at any one time in Armagh. By these means, the NIO has sought to depict strip-searching as a matter of 'prison routine'.

Two such women were each strip-searched scores of times over a six-month period going to and from the jail on a pre-release 'working-out' scheme. This was carried out despite the extreme unlikelihood that the women would do anything to jeopardise their imminent release, a factor which makes nonsense of the NIO's claims that the strip-searches are necessary for 'security' reasons. In September 1983, the two women were each strip-searched 26 times.

The frequency of strip-searching has tended to fall somewhat when the courts are in recess but remained significantly higher, for example, during the Black and Gilmour trials, when women being held on

the uncorroborated word of RUC-blackmailed perjurers frequently faced twice-daily strip-searching on their way to and from Belfast Crown Court. One woman accused by Black was strip-searched over 100 times.

Because the prison population is very small, such events can cause large variations from month to month in the total number of searches. In fact, taking such fluctuations into account, it is clear that since the decline which followed the initial intensive strip-searching, the prison authorities have not, in any degree, relaxed their repressive policy, despite growing political pressure on them to abandon the humiliating procedure altogether.

A diary kept over a short period by the women prisoners themselves illustrates the everyday relentlessness with which the strip-search policy is implemented. From May 24th 1984, during a ten-day period which included a bank holiday, 15 strip-searches were carried out, 12 of them on remand prisoners. The prison population at the time totalled just ten remand prisoners plus 20 sentenced prisoners.

- Thursday May 24th** — A sentenced prisoner being released was strip-searched
- Friday May 25th** — A sentenced prisoner going out on parole; a 62-year-old woman and a six-months pregnant woman both on remand were strip-searched returning to Armagh from court
- Saturday May 26th** — Two remand prisoners strip-searched coming in from court
- Wednesday May 30th** — Four remand prisoners strip-searched going to court, including the 62-year-old woman and the six-months pregnant woman
- Thursday May 31st** — One remand prisoner returning from court strip-searched
- Friday June 1st** — A remand prisoner coming from court and one sentenced prisoner being released both strip-searched
- Saturday June 2nd** — Two remand prisoners coming in from court strip-searched.

In May 1984, 36 strip-searches were carried out on 20 women. In June, according to the women prisoners' estimates, there were 38 and 26 in July. In August, the number rose to 36, of which 20 were inflicted on women making brief remand court appearances.

# Strip-searches in Armagh

Month(s)	Total number of women strip-searched	Total number of strip-searches	Monthly average number of strip-searches per prisoner searched	Number of strip-searches for 10% of women most often searched
1982 Nov-Dec		400		
1983				
January	24	175	7.3	31
February	34	197	5.8	35
March	25	145	5.8	20
April	29	88 (54)*	3.0	13
May	29	97 (48)*	3.3	18
June	31	103 (48)*	3.3	19
July	23	76 (36)*	3.3	18
August	24	90 (41)*	3.8	21
September	30	103 (51)*	3.4	19
October	39	53	1.4	3
November	41	48	1.2	2
December	29	41	1.4	3
		1216		
1984				
January	13	17	1.3	2
February	21	39	1.9	4
March	21	32	1.5	2
April	17	25	1.5	2
May	20	36	1.8	4
June	—	38+	—	—
July	—	26+	—	—
August	—	36+	—	—
September	5	17+	3.4+	—

All figures, unless otherwise indicated, are derived from the British parliamentary report, *Hansard*. A dash — indicates that no British government figures are available.

\* Two non-political prisoners on a pre-release scheme were being intensively strip-searched during this period. The figures in brackets (which exclude these strip-searches) indicate that, contrary to NIO claims, there has been no gradual relaxation of the strip-search policy.

+ These figures, supplied by the women republican prisoners are probably underestimates

**SUPPORT THE GROWING CAMPAIGN AGAINST STRIP-SEARCHES**

Write to your elected representatives, the clergy, women's groups, trade unions and other groups and individuals within your community.

**Join your local action group, if none exists in your area contact:**

Stop the Armagh Strip-Searches Campaign,  
c/o Lucilita Bhreatnach,  
44 Parnell Square,  
Dublin 1.  
Tel: 726932

**In the Six Counties contact:**

Marie Moore,  
POW Department,  
51/53 Falls Road,  
Belfast 13.  
Tel: 223214

