THE H BLOCKS

An indictment of British prison policy in the North of Ireland

40p

First published in 1981 by Information on Ireland
1 North End Road, London W14 8ST

Text by Liz Curtis
Graphics by Jack Clafferty and the Committee to Unsell the War
Design by Adrian Yeeles
Typeset by Adrienne Lee
Printed by The Russell Press Ltd., Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4ET

ISBN 0 9507381 1 5

Trade distribution by Southern Distribution, tel 01-251 4976, and Scottish & Northern Books, tel 031-225 4950 and 061-228 3903

An
Information on Ireland
publication

The people have spoken

On 9 April this year, 30,492 people in Fermanagh and South Tyrone went to the polls to vote for Bobby Sands, who was on the fortieth day of his hunger strike in Long Kesh prison.

Bobby Sands died in the early hours of 5 May, and three days later some 100,000 people attended his funeral. The population of Ireland is 4½ million, so an equivalent demonstration in Britain would have involved over 1 million people.

Soon, tens of thousands were to attend the funerals of hunger strikers Francis Hughes, Ray McCreesh and Patsy O'Hara.

On 20 May, local elections were held in the North of Ireland. In nationalist districts, politicians such as Gerry Fitt, who do not support the H Block prisoners, were overwhelmingly rejected by the people, who elected in their place pro-prisoner candidates (many of whom are refusing to take their seats until the prison issue is resolved).

Then, on 11 June, two H Block prisoners, Paddy Agnew and Kieran Doherty, were elected to the Dail, the parliament of the South of Ireland.

Thus the nationalist people have repeatedly and in massive numbers shown their support for the protesting prisoners both through the ballot box and on the streets.

This means that the policy of successive British governments, of trying to get the nationalist community to reject the prisoners by defining them as 'criminals', is in tatters.

It is in tatters not only in Britain, but worldwide. The international community has condemned Mrs. Thatcher's intransigent handling of the prison issue, and has gone on to question Britain's handling of the whole political situation in the North of Ireland.

'Mr. Sands was a great man who sacrificed his life for his struggle. I have also undertaken hunger strikes. That is why I grieve for him.' Lech Walesa, leader of the Polish trade union, Solidarity.

The British view and the Irish view

The issues raised by the prison dispute go much wider than just the prisons.

The prisoners, supported by the nationalist community, are saying, 'We would not be in prison but for the political situation in our country.'

They are saying that there is a major political problem in the North of Ireland, caused by the continuing British occupation. They are saying that violence there results from the political situation and will only be ended by a political solution.

The British government, for its part, is saying that violence in the North of Ireland has the same roots as criminal violence in the rest of the United Kingdom, that the prisoners are 'ordinary criminals', and that the violence in the North can be cured not by a political solution, but by a heavy dose of law and order.

'The death of Raymond McCreesh exemplifies the cruel dilemma in which northern Catholics are caught . . .

'Raymond McCreesh was born in a community which has always openly proclaimed that it is Irish, not British. When the northern troubles began he was barely 12, a very impressionable age at which to learn of discrimination. Those who protested against it were harassed and intimidated. Then followed Burntollet, the Bogside, Bombay Street, and Bloody Sunday in Derry, all before he was 15. These events gave rise to very deep emotions in nationalist areas . . .

'I repudiate unequivocally this recourse to arms, but I well remember how easy it was in the mid-70s for many young men on both sides to become convinced that this was the best way to defend their own community.

'Raymond McCreesh was captured bearing arms at the age of 19 and sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment. I have no doubt that he would never have seen the inside of a jail but for the abnormal political situation.'

Cardinal O Fiaich, 22 May 1981.

Prison numbers

It is obvious, when we look at the prison statistics, that the vast majority of prisoners in the North of Ireland would never have been imprisoned but for the political situation.

In 1969 there were 600 prisoners in the North of Ireland. Now there are 2,500. Most of these prisoners were convicted of offences related to 'terrorist' activity.

As the *Guardian* pointed out on 30 September 1980, 'Before the troubles Northern Ireland had one of the lowest prison populations in Europe. Now its prisons are bursting. There must be at least some truth in the argument that most of the prisoners would not be there but for crimes deriving from the political situation in which they find themselves.'

Most of the adult men, 1,400, are held in the Maze prison, which was formerly the Long Kesh internment camp.

Some 370 of them have special category status and live in compounds. About half the special category prisoners are republican and half are loyalist.

Just over 1,000 are housed in newly built H-shaped blocks. Each wing of the blocks contains 25 cells and the crossbar houses the administration. About 700 of the men in the H Blocks are republican, and 300 are loyalist. Some 450 of the republicans are on the blanket protest, refusing to wear prison clothes or to do prison work.

Armagh prison holds 70 women prisoners. About 30 of them are also on protest, refusing to work. Like all women in British jails, they are allowed their own clothes.

While many of the prisoners are serving very long sentences, these are often for relatively slight offences. Bobby Sands, for example, was serving 14 years because a revolver was found in a car in which he and three other young men were travelling.

In 1982 new prisons for men and women will be opened at Magheraberry, Co. Antrim. Prison-building has been described as the only growth industry in the North of Ireland.

Who are the prisoners?

Over half the prisoners convicted of scheduled offences—offences related to 'terrorist' activity—are under 21, and few are over 30.

Most of them, then, have grown up in the latest round of 'troubles', and many were ten years old or less when British troops returned to the streets of the North in 1969. Very few of them (only 8% of republicans convicted in 1979, for example) have a previous conviction for serious 'ordinary' crime.

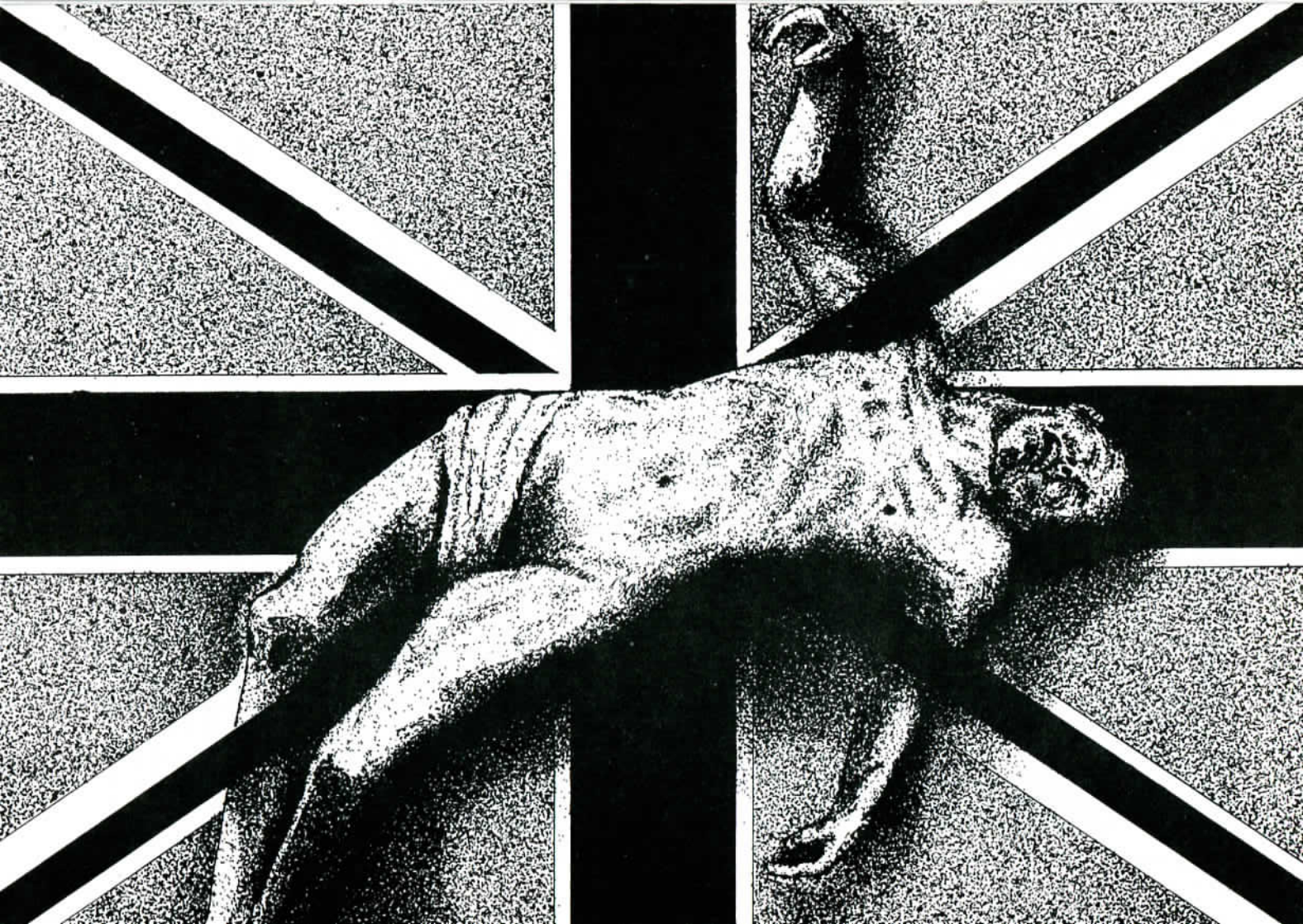
In their study of the legal system, Ten Years On In Northern Ireland, Professor Kevin Boyle and lecturers Tom Hadden and Paddy Hillyard wrote that most republican prisoners 'are recruited as school leavers who feel it to be their duty to assist in continuing the struggle for what they regard as their natural political and socio-economic rights. They do not fit the stereotype of criminality which the authorities have from time to time attempted to attach to them.'

The life of the late Bobby Sands MP shows well the kind of pressures which make a young person join the IRA. Bobby Sands was brought up in a mainly Protestant housing estate. As a youngster, he was keen on sports and ran for Protestant clubs, winning a lot of medals. At 16 he got a job as an apprentice coach builder and joined the National Union of Vehicle Builders and the ATGWU. But the 'troubles' were to change his life.

In the early years of the 'troubles', loyalist intimidation of Catholics was to cause the biggest population movement in Europe since World War II. In 1972 the Sands family, too, were driven out of their home, moving to a safe nationalist area. Soon Bobby Sands was threatened at gunpoint at work, and told he would be shot if he continued working there. He joined the IRA.

'I had seen too many homes wrecked, fathers and sons arrested, neighbours hurt, friends murdered. Too much gas, shooting and blood, most of it our own people's. At eighteen and a half I joined the Provos . . .

'My life now centred round sleepless nights and standbys, dodging the Brits and calming nerves to go out on operations. But the people stood by us. I learned that without the people we could not survive and I knew that I owed them everything.'
Bobby Sands



The roots of the crisis

The present crisis has its roots way back at the beginning of the 'troubles'. The intervention of the army, and its heavy repression of nationalist areas, led to a rising tide of republican revolt. The British authorities were faced with the age-old colonialist's problem—how to imprison large numbers of actual or potential militants when there was no hard evidence against them.

In August 1971 the Tory government introduced internment, which provoked worldwide protests. Soon, as Peter Taylor puts it in his book, Beating the Terrorists?, 'the government realised that internment, which was both politically and morally unacceptable, could not last forever. But if internment was to be ended, other ways had to be found of locking up the paramilitaries. Clearly, the existing judicial system, which was indistinguishable from that in the rest of the UK, with its juries, witnesses and rules of evidence, was, as it stood, an ineffective alternative.'

Lord Diplock was appointed to review the situation, and his recommendations were incorporated in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act of 1973, which replaced the Special Powers Act.

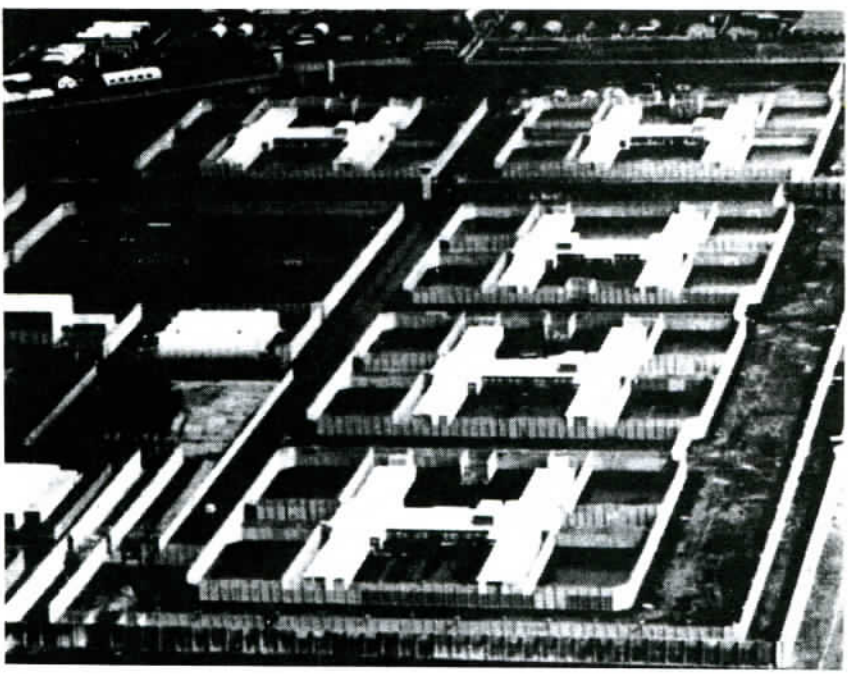
The new judicial system was to be totally different from that in Britain. The emergency legislation suspended liberties that had taken centuries to consolidate.

Under the Emergency Provisions Act people can be held for three days without being charged. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, passed in 1974, permits seven day detention periods.

The emergency legislation also allows the army and police to arrest for questioning, a power unknown to common law. In the courts handling 'terrorist' charges, a judge sits alone. Where people want to apply for bail, or where they are charged with possessing proscribed articles, the burden of proof has been reversed so that the onus is on the accused.

Most controversially, the rules regarding the admissibility as evidence of statements made by an accused person were altered. In effect, from now on statements obtained by ill-treatment were admissible as evidence, thus, as Peter Taylor puts it, 'giving the green light to Castlereagh'.

The Emergency Provisions Act created a new category of



offences—scheduled offences, which are related to 'terrorist' activity. These offences are tried in the non-jury Diplock Courts (named after Lord Diplock, who recommended them).

Ironically, since the government insists that prisoners convicted in these courts are not political, Section 31 of the Emergency Provisions Act defines terrorism as 'the use of violence for political ends'.

Colonial emergencies

'Emergency' is the term British governments have used to describe all their colonial wars since World War II, such as those in Malaya, Kenya, Aden and Cyprus.

By refusing to describe them as wars, Britain was justifying her rule over these countries. Britain, the thinking went, had a 'moral right' to rule these 'backward peoples'. Those who rose up against British rule were therefore not freedom fighters, but irrational primitives or criminals who failed to appreciate the 'benefits' of British rule.

This racist ideology served to justify also the methods Britain used to suppress these freedom struggles. These methods included shooting people in their tens of thousands, the forced removal of hundreds of thousands to 'fortified villages', systematic torture and imprisonment on an enormous scale (34,000 in Malaya, 78,000 in Kenya).

In Kenya, resistance to criminalisation led to the most widely publicised massacre of detainees, at Hola Camp in March 1959. The Hola detainees regarded themselves as political prisoners. Although they were prepared to undertake domestic duties, such as collecting firewood, they refused to do penal work.

The Kenyan authorities were determined to break their spirit. With the approval of the British Governor, they evolved the Cowan Plan, named after its author, which advocated the use of force to make detainees work.

On 3 March 1959, 85 Hola detainees were so badly beaten for refusing to work that 11 of them died and 22 were seriously injured. In June that year, John Black Cowan, author of the Plan, was made an MBE in the Honours List.

In distant countries Britain could get away with internment on a mass scale. In the North of Ireland, so close to Britain, where the world's press couldn't be kept out, where the inhabitants were white and spoke English, it was not so easy. A more sophisticated system of imprisonment and more sophisticated propaganda were necessary.

This cartoon by Vicky appeared in the New Statesman and Nation on 20 June 1959 after John Black Cowan, author of the Cowan Plan, received his MBE.

Propaganda offensive

By 1975 the new legal and judicial framework was ready. Internment could be ended, as it could now be replaced by a system which would put away almost the same number of people, but under the guise of 'due process of law'.

Special category status was also brought to an end. This had been given in 1972, after a hunger strike by republican prisoners, to prisoners convicted of politically-motivated offences. It meant that prisoners belonging to the various organisations were housed in separate compounds, where they could decide their own daily activities. They did not have to wear prison clothes or do penal work, instead engaging in handicrafts or educational activities.

The 370 remaining special category prisoners retain this status because they were convicted of offences committed before the government's arbitrary cut-off date of 1 March 1976. No prisoners convicted after 1 April 1980 have been given this status, regardless of the date of their alleged offence.

Internment in particular but also special category status carried the clear implication that the prisoners were prisoners of war, and therefore engaged in a legitimate struggle against British rule. With both of these out of the way, the field was clear for the Labour government to begin a major propaganda offensive to persuade the world that there was nothing 'political' about the conflict in the North of Ireland.

The new policy was known as Ulsterisation, called after the American policy of Vietnamisation.

The idea was to give the North a spurious appearance of 'normality'. The image now was not to be of regular soldiers at war with freedom fighters, but of the police cracking down on criminals.

The police force, which is armed, and the locally recruited Ulster Defence Regiment were increased and strengthened. The number of troops from Britain was reduced. The overall level of security forces, at over 30,000, remained the same.

From now on, Labour's Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy

Mason, was to measure his success in dealing with the North in terms of the number of 'criminals' convicted each week before the non-jury courts.

Britain's aim, then, was not just to criminalise the prisoners, but to reduce the whole conflict in the North to a 'cops and robbers' issue.

The prisoners, for their part, in resisting criminalisation, were fully aware that they were also resisting the criminalisation of the whole republican struggle.

'We admit no crime unless, that is, the love of one's people and country is a crime.'
Bobby Sands.

The new system

Nationalists in the North called the new system the 'conveyor belt'. This summed up the way prisoners were processed from their arrest through brutal interrogations to lengthy periods on remand, then to the Diplock Courts and from there to the H Blocks or, for the women, Armagh prison.

Interrogation centres such as Castlereagh were crucial to the new policy. The systematic brutality and torture used in them were exposed by an Amnesty report in 1978 and by the Bennett Report in 1979.

Confessions obtained by various degrees of physical or psychological force, or the verbal testimony of a policeman that a suspect has made a confession, form the basis of 80% of convictions in the non-jury courts. These courts have a 94% conviction rate, and more than 7,000 people have passed through them in the last eight years.

Many of those so convicted strongly assert their innocence. At least three have gone on extended hunger strikes, saying they have been wrongly convicted.

When is a crime not a crime?

The application of 'justice' in the North has been very partial. Not only have loyalists been less vigorously pursued than republicans, and have often got off with lighter sentences, but also their biggest paramilitary group, the Ulster Defence Association, remains legal. The UDA is believed by reliable journalists to have committed a series of murders in recent months, including those of several leading H Block activists.

Nationalists are equally, if not more, bitter over the apparent free hand given to soldiers and police to kill with impunity. Eighty or more innocent Catholics have been killed by the army and RUC since 1969. Many more have been subjected to extreme brutality in interrogation centres. Yet hardly any soldiers or policemen have been sentenced for crimes committed while on duty. Indeed, Lt. Col. Derek Wilford, who led the paratroopers when they killed 13 people on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, was awarded an OBE.

Little wonder that nationalists are very sceptical about the government's repeated use of the Pope's phrase, 'Murder is murder wherever it is committed', or Mrs. Thatcher's variation, 'A crime is a crime is a crime'.

The blanket protest

The blanket protest started in September 1976, when Kieran Nugent became the first person to be convicted under the new rules. He refused to wear prison clothes or do prison work, and was confined to his cell with only a blanket to cover himself.

The Labour government, determined to break the protest, responded in the harshest way possible. The protesting prisoners were stripped of every single 'privilege', and left only with the minimal statutory rights.

They had no parcels, and no entitlement to civilian clothing (which conforming prisoners wear in the evenings and at weekends). They had no exercise. They had no reading material other than religious books, no radios, no compassionate leave and no remission (conforming prisoners in the North have 50% remission).

Additionally, till October 1978, protesters were given three

days' cellular confinement every month. They were already confined to their cells 24 hours a day, so the additional punishment involved the cell being stripped of everything in it.

On top of this the prisoners were, and still are, subjected to degrading body searches before and after visits and when they are moved from one wing to another. These involve the prisoners being forced to squat over a mirror placed on the floor, so that their back passages can be seen, and then having their whole body examined by prison warders.

The only rights left to the prisoners were one statutory half-hour visit per month and one letter per month.

Four prisoners took cases to the European Commission of Human Rights. The Commission, while finding against the prisoners, stated in June 1980, 'The Commission must express its concern at the inflexible approach of the State authorities which is concerned more to punish offenders against prison discipline than to explore ways of resolving such a serious deadlock.'

No wash

The prisoners said they were regularly beaten, and were harassed going to and from the toilets. They said the prison officers kicked over their chamber pots, soaking their mattresses. In protest, in March 1978, the prisoners refused to wash or to slop out.

After visiting them on 31 July that year, Archbishop (now Cardinal) O Fiaich said, 'The nearest approach to it I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer pipes in the slums of Calcutta.'

The no wash protest continued until March 1981, when the prisoners decided to end it in order to focus full attention on Bobby Sands's hunger strike.

Armagh

The women on protest in Armagh prison, like women in British prisons, are allowed their own clothes. This change was introduced in the North in 1972, several years after a similar move in Britain. A booklet published by the Northern Ireland Office in March 1981 states, 'The rationale for this move was the view that it was

much more likely to have a positive effect on the rehabilitation of female offenders.'

As punishment for their refusal to work, the women were locked up 21 hours a day. They had no educational or recreational facilities, no literature except religious magazines, and no food parcels. They too lost all their remission. They were allowed one hour's exercise a day and the statutory monthly visit and letter.

Because of the smaller numbers in Armagh, and because the protest involved only refusal to work, the punishment regime was less severe than in the H Blocks, and relations between prisoners and prison officers were not quite so bad.

But in February 1980 male and female prison officers conducted a search of the prisoners and their cells using considerable force. Several of the women were beaten. They were then locked up without access to toilet facilities. As a result, they too refused to wash or slop out.

The first hunger strike

Anticipating the European Commission's findings, the Tory government introduced some minor concessions in early 1980. These involved additional letters, an extra visit, access to compassionate leave and the offer of exercise in prison-issue sports wear. This last would have compromised the protest—and anyway conforming prisoners are allowed to exercise in their own clothes—so the prisoners rejected the whole package.

In March 1981, when Bobby Sands went on hunger strike, the prisoners accepted some of these concessions in order to demonstrate their willingness to be flexible. They did not accept the sports wear. At this time, too, the authorities, vainly trying to head off international criticism, gave the prisoners some of the 'privileges' that they had been denied from the start. These included a limited supply of books and also a reduction in the amount of remission lost by the protesters.

During 1980, Cardinal O Fiaich held a series of talks with Tory Nothern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins. These talks broke down, dashing the hopes of prisoners and their relatives, and seven prisoners in the H Blocks announced they would go on hunger

strike from 27 October. On 1 December, three Armagh women joined them.

Five days before the hunger strike was due to start, and hoping to head it off, Humphrey Atkins announced that 'civilian type' clothing, supplied by the prison, would be available to all prisoners in the North, replacing the denim prison uniform. The initial announcement was made in a way that suggested the prisoners would be allowed their own clothes. The subsequent correction caused great resentment in the nationalist community and was criticised by Cardinal O Fiaich, who had hoped Humphrey Atkins would make the full concession.

A long tradition

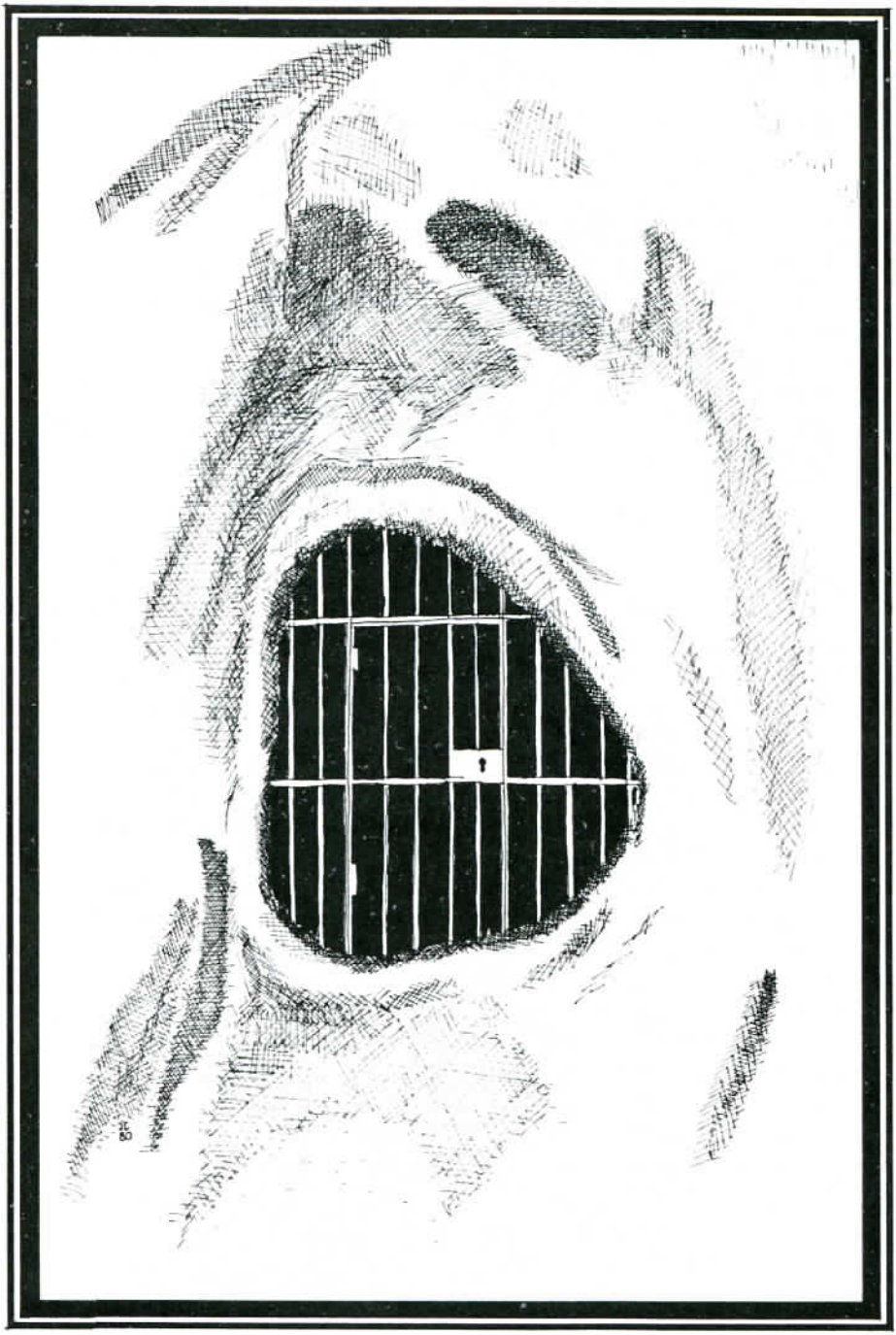
In refusing prison clothes and prison work, and in adopting the hunger strike tactic, the prisoners are following a long tradition.

For centuries, Irish people have challenged both through violent and peaceful means the legitimacy of British rule in Ireland. Britain has always portrayed such resistance as 'criminal'. Irish militants have consistently rejected this view, and when taken prisoner have always refused to be treated as criminals.

The Fenian prisoners, for example, sentenced to imprisonment in Engiish jails in 1867, were treated with extreme vindictiveness because of their refusal to conform. Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa was chained hand and foot and forced to lap his food from the floor. Fenian John Devoy went on work strike, and was successful in getting moved from the penal class cells and in winning the abolition of the Fenian 'penal diet', which consisted almost entirely of bread and water.

The hunger strike as a means of peaceful protest has an even longer tradition. It can be traced back to the early Irish Brehon laws of the seventh and eighth centuries which closely parallel traditional Hindu law. The offended person fasted on the door-step of the offender to embarrass them into resolving the dispute.

Many Irish prisoners have gone on hunger strike in both British jails and jails in the South of Ireland. One of the most famous hunger strikers was Terence MacSwiney, the Sinn Fein Lord Mayor of Cork, who died in Brixton prison on 25 October 1920 on the seventy-fourth day of his hunger strike.



The prisoners' demands

The protesting prisoners are making five demands:

1. The right to wear their own clothes
2. The right to refrain from penal work
3. The right to free association
4. The right to organise their own educational and recreational facilities and to one letter, visit and parcel per week
5. The right to full remission of sentences.

In making these demands, they have no argument with other prisoners. Writing in the *Irish Times* on 19 September 1980, journalist Nell McCafferty said of the women protesters in Armagh, 'In rejecting criminalisation they are not distinguishing themselves from other prisoners. They are drawing a distinction between their definition of the problem as political, and the British definition of the problem as a breakdown in law and order.'

Therefore the prisoners have no objection to the same reforms being given to all prisoners. In his diary, written on toilet paper during the first weeks of his hunger strike and smuggled out, Bobby Sands wrote, 'We republican prisoners understand better than anyone the plight of all prisoners who are deprived of their liberty. We do not deny ordinary prisoners the benefit of anything that we gain that may improve and make easier their plight. Indeed, in the past, all prisoners have gained from the resistance of republican jail struggles.'

The prisoners obviously have a political motivation for wanting these particular reforms, in that they reject those elements of the prison regime which symbolise criminalisation. But at the same time these reforms are already in existence in liberal prisons. Thus, as has been widely recognised in Ireland and elsewhere, there is room for the British government to meet the demands without having openly to concede that they are political prisoners.

Bobby Sands on his deathbed emphasised that he was on hunger strike for the five demands and no more, and that if they were granted he would stretch out his arm for the life-saving injection. Hunger striker Joe McDonnell also stressed this point.

Precedents for such reforms already exist. Women prisoners in British jails, and prisoners in the Barlinnie Special Unit, are


ULSTER
IS
BRITISH
Bigotry
Repression
Intolerance
Torture
Injustice
Special powers
Blocks

allowed their own clothes all the time. In Portlaoise prison in the South of Ireland, a confrontation similar to that in the H Blocks and Armagh was ended when the prisoners, while not formally being given any special status, were nevertheless allowed to wear their own clothes, to decide on their own activities, which centre on craftwork and education, and to associate freely within their own wings.

Also, it is most unlikely that such concessions would lead to a 'loyalist backlash', because the Ulster Defence Association has called for the restoration of special category status and 'a vast general prison reform'.

Tragically, despite the options open to them, Mrs. Thatcher and her government have maintained an utterly inflexible 'not-an-inch' position.

They are holding out against the prisoners for one simple reason: they do not want to lose face. But the more intransigent they are, the more they are condemned in the eyes of the world, and the more respect the prisoners gain.

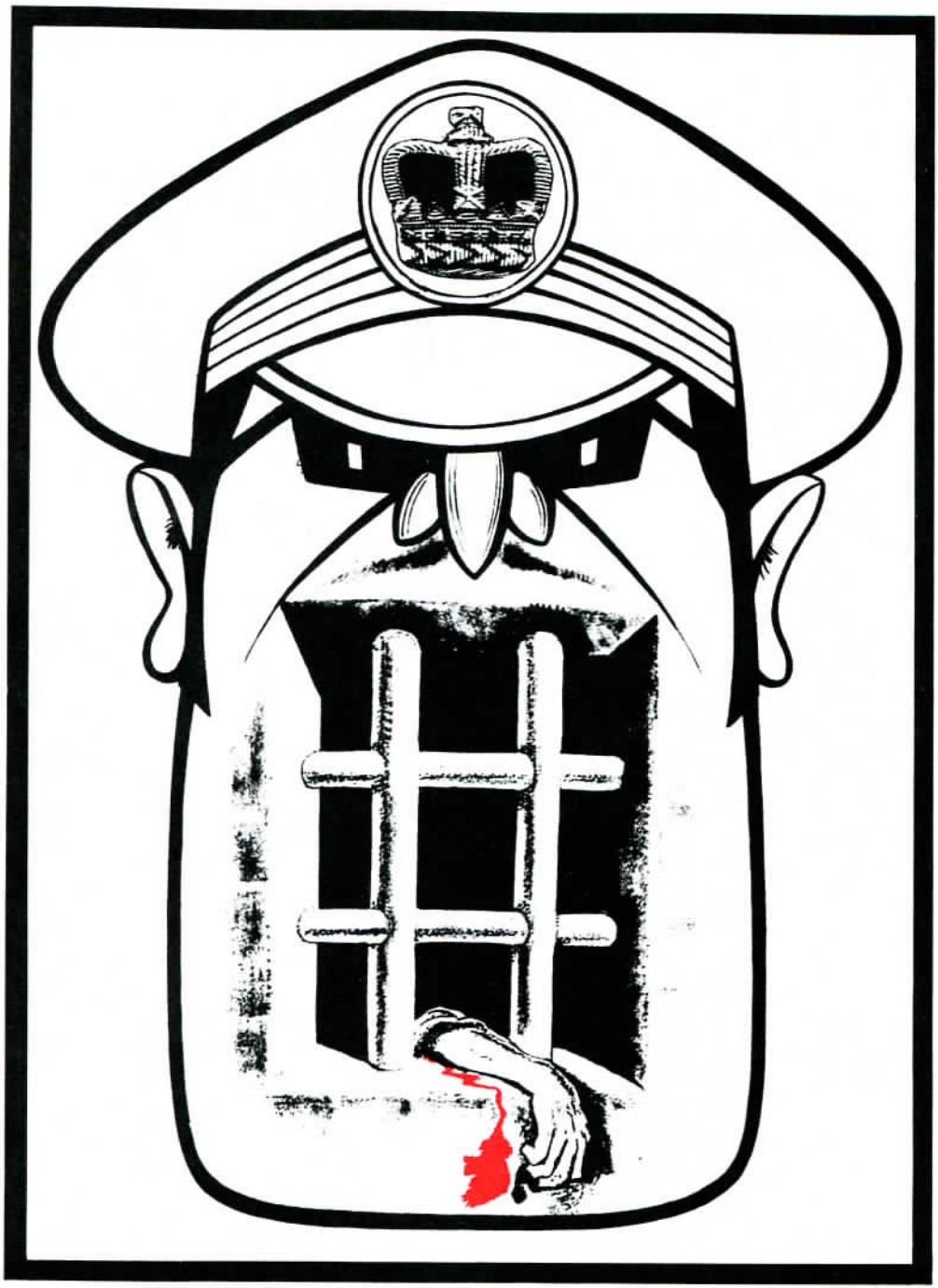
One hunger strike ends, another begins

The way the first hunger strike ended showed how far the prisoners were prepared to go to meet the government, and how easily the issue could have been resolved at that time if the government had had the will to do so.

On 18 December 1980, when the hunger strikers had been without food for 53 days and Sean McKenna was on his deathbed, the government presented them with two documents. The prisoners were led to believe that these would be interpreted flexibly, so that the substance of their demands would be met. They ended their hunger strike.

One of these documents was a statement by Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins which said that if the hunger strikers chose to live, 'the conditions available to them meet in a practical and humane way the kind of things they have been asking for.'

The documents offered a redefinition of work, to include



education and cleaning their cells, both of which the prisoners are prepared to do. They offered an immediate review of remission. The question of parcels, visits and letters was not an issue, since conforming prisoners already have more than the protesters are asking for. Free association was not thought particularly problematic, since conforming prisoners already have a great deal of association. Although the republicans want to be housed separately from loyalists, this should not have presented a problem, since it would make the running of the prison much easier for the authorities.

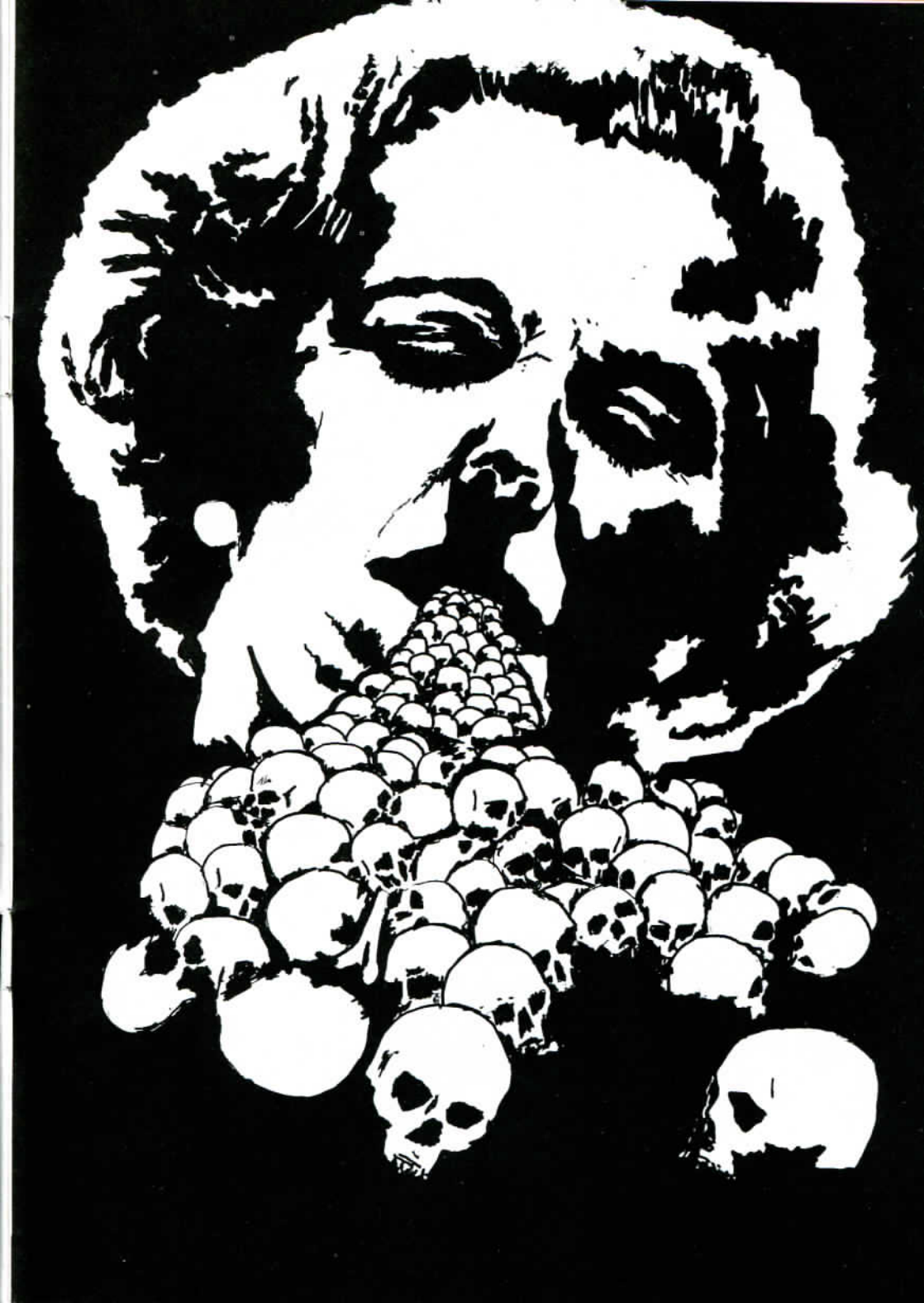
It was on the clothing issue that the agreement was to break down. Humphrey Atkins' 18 December statement said, 'Within a few days clothing provided by their families will be given to any prisoners giving up their protest so that they can wear it during recreation, association and visits. As soon as possible *all* prisoners will be issued with civilian-type clothing for wear during the working day.'

Since conforming prisoners were wearing their own clothes during the working day without opposition from the authorities, the protesters believed that once they had received their own clothes the same blind eye would be turned to which clothes they were wearing. To make this easier, they resolved to ask their relatives to bring clothes that resembled the prison-issue clothing.

With the ending of the hunger strike, the government facilitated meetings between the republican commanders in the H Blocks and the prison authorities. In succeeding weeks, the prisoners did their utmost to co-operate in a 'step-by-step' approach to ending their protests.

To test out the possibilities, 20 men ended their no wash protest. Their relatives brought clothes, which the prison authorities accepted. The men then asked for the clothes to be given to them on a Friday evening, as no work—and hence no prison clothing—is required at weekends. But, in direct contradiction of Humphrey Atkins' promise, the authorities refused to give them their clothes, demanding instead from the prisoners a declaration of their willingness to work and to wear the prison-issue clothes.

The prisoners, having made every effort to accommodate a reasonable solution, could bend no further. On 1 March 1981 Bobby Sands, who as republican commander in the H Blocks had



conducted the negotiations with the prison authorities, went on hunger strike. By the time of his death, as a Member of Parliament, two months later, his name was known throughout the world.

'We render homage to the courage of this militant who sacrificed his life for his cause. Our Party condemns the inflexibility of Mrs. Thatcher and her inhuman attitude. Throughout Sands's long agony, she has refrained from taking the few measures which would have made it possible to avoid this tragic outcome.'
French Socialist Party statement, 5 May 1981.

'By appearing hard and unfeeling, firm and determined, she (Mrs. Thatcher) has spectacularly illuminated for growing bodies of opinion in neighbouring and allied countries, whose comments are flowing in hourly, the Government's moral bankruptcy and the colossal and criminal incompetence of Conservative governments at all times in their dealings on Ireland.'
Pat Duffy, Labour MP for Sheffield, Attercliffe, speaking in the House of Commons, 5 May 1981.

Further reading

Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden, Paddy Hillyard, Ten Years On In Northern Ireland, The Cobden Trust, 1980.
Tim Pat Coogan, On The Blanket: The H-Block Story, Ward River Press, 1980.
Peter Taylor, Beating the Terrorists?, Penguin Special 1980.


JOKER
THE ORANGE CARD

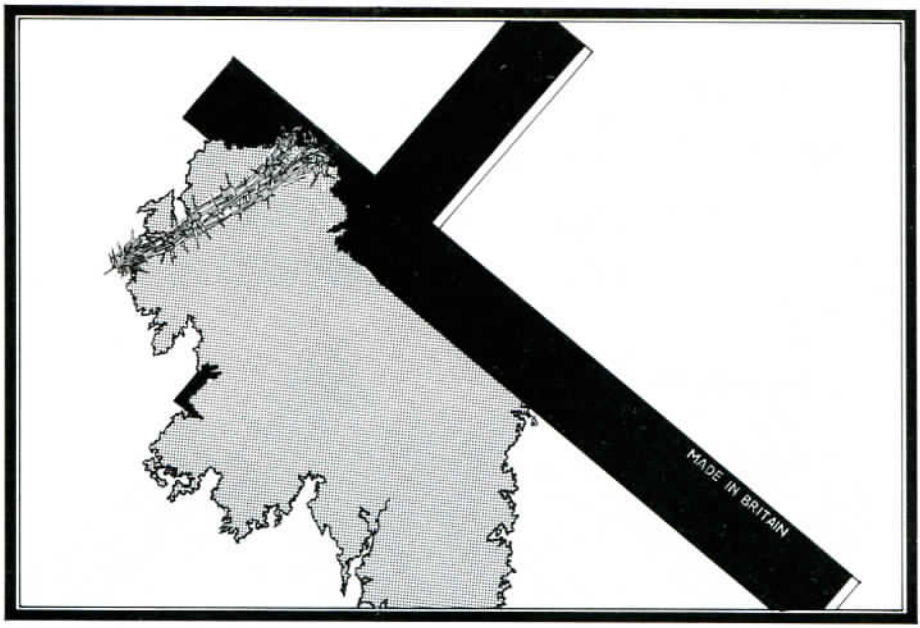
The following are among the host of prominent people, political parties, trade unions and other organisations that have criticised the British government's intransigent policy towards the prisoners in the North of Ireland:

Britain: Stan Thorne MP, Ernie Roberts MP, Bob Cryer MP, Dennis Skinner MP, William Wilson MP, David Winnick MP, Norman Atkinson MP, Dennis Canavan MP, Frank Field MP, Ken Eastham MP, Joan Maynard MP, Dafydd Thomas MP, Jim Callaghan MP (Middleton), William McKelvey MP, Laurie Pavitt MP, Frank McElhone MP, Ron Brown MP (Leith), Sydney Bidwell MP, Guy Barnett MP, Lewis Carter-Jones MP, Allan Roberts MP, Robert Parry MP, Raymond Ellis MP, Reginald Freeson MP, Reg Race MP, Michael O'Halloran MP, Pat Duffy MP, Sheila Wright MP, Martin Flannery MP, Jim Marshall MP, Chris Price MP, Stuart Holland MP, Alf Lomas MEP, Lord Gifford, Lord Milford, Labour Party Home Policy Committee, Scottish TUC, Annual Conference of Trades Councils, Plaid Cymru, Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers, Indian Workers Association, Federation of Irish Societies, Connolly Association, NATFHE Outer London Regional Council, Labour Committee on Ireland, Frank Filgate (chairman, Liberal Friends of Ireland), Ken Livingstone (leader, Greater London Council), Gordon McLennan (general secretary, Communist Party), 40 barristers and solicitors, prominent people in the arts including John Arden, Edward Bond, Julie Covington, Miriam Karlin, Adrian Mitchell, Max Stafford-Clark, Stephen Rea.

Ireland: Charles Haughey (Prime Minister), Dr. Garret Fitzgerald (leader, Fine Gael), John Hume (leader, SDLP), Cardinal O Fiaich (Primate of All Ireland), Bishop Edward Daly of Derry, Euro-MPs Neil Blaney, John O'Connell, Sile de Valera, and Paddy Lalor, Sean MacBride, Mairead Corrigan, many Irish people prominent in the arts, including Edna O'Brien, Brian Friel and Benedict Kiely, Belfast Trades Council (unanimously), Justice and Peace Commission of the Irish Bishops' Conference, National Executive Council of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, Communist Party of Ireland, Gaelic League, Union of Students in Ireland, Dublin Council of Trade Unions, Ulster Defence Association, plus many other individuals and organisations.

International: Dr. Kurt Waldheim (UN general secretary), Amnesty International, Mrs. Gandhi (Indian Prime Minister), Edward Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (US senators), Speaker Tip O'Neill, Hugh Carey (Governor, New York State), several state legislatures, International Longshoremen's Association, 51 US congressmen, US National Lawyers' Guild, Iranian Parliament, Nicaraguan Government, 60 members of Portuguese Parliament, Socialist Group of the European Parliament (with 120 members), French Socialist Party, French Communist Party, Australian Labour Party, East German Communist Party Congress, plus many others.

Major newspapers include: Irish Times, Irish Press, Irish Post, New York Times, New York Daily News, Pravda and Izvestia (USSR), Le Monde and L'Humanite (France), Le Soir (Belgium), La Republica (Italy), El Pais (Spain), Noticias (Mozambique), Indian Express and Hindustan Times (India), Hong Kong Standard and Sing Tao Jih Pao (Hong Kong), Sowetan (Soweto, South Africa).



What you can do

Press your MP to raise the issue in the House of Commons.

Ask your organisation to take immediate action. Make sure resolutions are forwarded to Humphrey Atkins, and send copies to the addresses below.

Write to Humphrey Atkins, Northern Ireland Office, Great George Street, London SW1P 3AJ (tel 01-233 3000), and to Margaret Thatcher.

Write to the national and local papers and phone your local radio station.

Organise or support the activities taking place in your area.

If you have done all these things already—do them again!

Useful addresses

National H Block/Armagh Committee, 30 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1, Ireland, tel 0001-747200.
H Block/Armagh Committee (London), PO Box 353, London NW5 4NH, tel 01-267 2004.
Don't Let the Irish Prisoners Die Ad Hoc Committee (Chairperson Ernie Roberts MP), 8A Beatty Road, London N16.

Information on Ireland

This booklet is published by Information on Ireland, 1 North End Road, London W14 8ST. If you like it, you can help by taking a number of copies and selling them. We give one-third discount on orders of ten or more copies. One copy costs 40p + 15p (50p p&p overseas), 10 copies cost £2.70 + 80p p&p (£1.80 p&p Europe, £3.80 p&p elsewhere). Write to the above address, make cheques/POs payable to Information on Ireland. Send SAE for list of our publications.