PRISONERS' STRUGGLE CONTINUES

During December, the hunger strike for political status intensified, with more prisoners joining in and the original seven reaching a critical condition.

On December 1st, 3 women from the 28 on protest in Armagh began a hunger strike, not simply in solidarity with the 7 men in Long Kesh, but because of the logic of their own resistance. In their statement, they said, "For four years we have been refusing to work and to confirm to Britain's criminalisation policy. Therefore we lost all privileges and were locked up 23 hours a day. Now for the past 10 months we have had our endurance stretched to what we would have thought of before as being impossible. However, comradeship and your unfailing support have been gifts to keep us sane."

Then on December 12th, 6 U.D.A. loyalist prisoners started a hunger strike calling for segregation from republicans, and political status. This lasted only 5 days when churchmen promised to take their case up. The prisoners threatened to resume the strike if the government refused to consider their demands. When the N.I.O. 'sold' the republican strikers, they dropped any pretense of considering the loyalist case, so the ball is now back in their court.

On December 16th, 23 more republicans joined the hunger strike in Long Kesh, because of N.I.O. duplicity. The previous day, the N.I.O. sent a senior civil servant to read from a prepared common document stating the governments position. The 7 men refused to have this done individually, and met in the canteen. When their spokesperson, Brendan Hughes, asked a few questions, the civil servant refused to answer. On December 16th, another 7 joined the strike.

December 18th was a day of great confusion. The 7 hunger strikers called off their strike when Atkins offered them considerable concessions but which didn't meet the demands of no uniform and no penal work. The proposals for work were sufficiently vague to allow for a certain optimism, but the prisoners were still expected to wear prison issue clothing for a quarter of the time. The statement issued on the 17th, by the hunger strikers said "...these proposals meet the requirements of our five basic demands; but the previous day had warned that the failure of the British government to act in a responsible manner towards ending the conditions which forced us into a hunger strike, would...lead to an inevitable and continuous strike within the H-blocks."

On the 19th, the women in Armagh came off their strike, and the 30 other republicans did likewise.

WHAT NOW?

In the 2 weeks since the ending of the strike, there has been both a sense of relief that no one died, and the almost inevitable street confrontations were avoided, mixed with a wariness about the British governments intentions to fulfill their proposals.

Accounts from inside Long Kesh claim that those coming off the blanket protest were placed in clean cells with the old prison uniforms provided. These were thrown out and the blanket protest began again. There are even rumours of another hunger strike starting again.

Only time will answer the following questions - will the N.I.O. implement their reforms; will the prisoners see them as enough; will a renewed hunger strike get the same support, and will it be of a different nature; will the loyalists also restart their hunger strike?

An important point is that any gains won by the republicans will benefit the whole prison population. The proposals are far too vague but include more association, more scope for education, including self study up to 20 hours a week, with work only to be worn ½ of the time, work to be based on the individuals needs as well as the prisons. The practical results have yet to be seen.

LEGAL DRUGS

As predicted in O.C. Ulster Television can continue to broadcast for the next 10 years until the next review of their licence. This is due to a little company, along with all the other right-minded, extremely decayed commercial stations around Britain will continue to feed us their shit, designed to maintain the status quo and line the pockets of the chosen few.

But in the latest bid to allay the off/on switches we will see a presentation by Breakfast-time TV shows.

RUC ESCAPE!

The first ever Police Authority tribunal into review in N.I. got off the ground last month. James Rafferty told that in Gough Barracks between the 1st and 13th Nov '76 he was punched, slapped, had his hair pulled and twisted to do inexcusable exercises. A doctor confirmed that the excessive beating could not have been self-inflicted. And a member of the RUC, then a chief inspector, who had conducted an internal RUC inquiry, had been able to pinpoint certain RUC interrogators as responsible. The DPP had received his file and the decision report, but after 3 years still had given no direction to prosecute. All interrogations were available for an exhumation conclusion for the RUC... so on the second day when the RUC barrister asked Rafferty about his republican involvement and he revealed his right to refuse to answer, the RUC barrister walked out of the room. The chairperson continued with the tribunal and issued subpoena for 29 RUC members to attend the tribunal. But the RUC put their case to the High Court and finally squashed the subpoena. Next day the tribunal had no option but to end, as there were no more witnesses. What its conclusions will be, and what effect they will have, time will tell. But the RUC can always claim that it was not important!
replace the internationally embarrassing
interment with a form of judicial trial. The Diplock
Commission's recommendations of a juryless court,
the admission of 'confession' as evidence, and the
reversal of the onus of proof of torture were
implemented and became "due process of law."

The 'primacy of the police' was to help portray the
political conflict as a problem simply of 'law and order'.

The R.U.C. established three interrogat-
ion centres—Gough in Armagh, Strand
in Derry and most notoriously Castle-
raigh in Belfast. They also increased
their number of patrols, surveillance and
armaments. Four new regional crime
units were established. Their role was to be as
flexible as the IRA's Active Service Units, and to carry out
interrogations.

The new policies had new people at the
top. The GOC was House, the Chief
Constable was Newman, and the Sec-
retary of State a certain Roy Mason.

In the new legislation which covered
the Diplock Courts, Section 6 allowed for
the admission of 'confessions'. When it was
challenged in May 77 Lord Justice McGonigle
interpreted the Act in a judgment which became known as
the 'torturer charter'—inhuman
 treatment had to cause SEVERE
 suffering. torture was an AGGRAVATED
form of inhuman treatment, and degr
ding conduct had to GROSSLY hum-
ilitate. Incidentally a Directive from the
Chief Constable in July 76 had stated
that the judges rules on questioning of
suspects, referred only to interviews
and not interrogations!

So the interrogators zealously set about
their work. Max/June '77 and Feb/ March 78 were the two highest periods
for alleged assault. By no coincidence
the period of the Amnesty Internation-
 al mission to enquire into torture
and their final report 7 months later were
the 2 periods of lowest allegations. On
the occasion of the Bennett Report
the RUC also played a low profile.

There is methodical coverage of many
cases—of those who were convicted
despite evidence of torture (Judge
Howland had the worst record) and of
those who were released because of
this evidence at the trial (there were
in fact many who couldn't be brought
to trial because of the obvious degree
of the beatings).

To release someone whose evidence
was that he was beaten implies that
many RUC interrogators could have
been changed. But the judges kept
their jobs by taking up a recurring
theme—there was no torture. But the
confession was 'induced' and so excl-
ded as evidence.

If the evidence of beating was overstate-
ing then a new line was taken. When
Patrick Fullerton was released without
charge from Castlereagh in July 77 he
took the RUC to court for assault.
The magistrate McLaughlin, had to
admit that there was assault but he
did not know by whom, because of
the large number of interrogators
involved. Five detectives walked fast
in fact not one member of the RUC
has ever been convicted for assault.

The most serious incident was the
death of Brian Maguire, a shop stew-
ard from Andersonstown. The RUC
alleged that he committed suicide but
the common practice of 'drowning'
suspects is well known in Northern
Ireland, and well documented in
the book. As Brian's mother said..."I
think they (RUC) went a bit too far
with him."

One of the main mistakes of the RUC
was to ignore complaints from police
surgeons that no explanation was
forthcoming as to the injured condi-
tion of the many people they received
for examination after interrogation.

Dr. Elliot operated from Gough bar-
acks, and Dr. Irwin from Townhall
Street in Belfast who received suspects
from Castlereagh.

Taylor methodically covers the cases
they came across and explains the
doctor's frustrations at being ignored.

The Police Authority also took
up several cases but even then they were given
the run around by the C.C.Newman.

Just before the British governments
Bennett Report was due for publica-
tion Dr Irwin agreed to an interview
with Mary Holland on ITV's "Weekend
World". He feared the Bennett Report
would not be extensive enough nor
give any context. But immediately
a smear campaign against him began.

Whitehall leaked a story to the Daily
Telegraph alleging that Irwin had a
grudge against the RUC because they
had failed to catch the man who had
raped his wife in '76. The 'dirty tricks'
tactic failed and even rebounded on
Whitehall.

The peak of tortures have not been
repeated, but the policies which lead
to them, and the practice, continues.

Dr Irwin and Dr Elliot left their jobs
and more cooperative doctors replaced
them.

An interesting postscript is one detect-
ives admission to Taylor. He keeps all
his interview notes in case there were
ever to be, at some distant date, a war
trials tribunal.

The Kee to Rewriting History.

Anyone who begins the series "Ireland: A
Television History," with the state-
ment about "telling the truth about Irel-
land" is immediately suspect.

Kee could have, at least, said the truth as
he saw it. There are different ways of
looking at history. We are told of the
exploits of kings, the queens and the
leaders and rarely a mention of the
"common" people's continual struggle
to survive and challenge their oppress-
or.

And by opening the series in the sensa-
tionalism way by saying that all the Irish
welcomed the Queen's Jubilee visit
and then SUDDENLY in Easter 1916
there was an Insurrection against
the British must be taking those pro-Brit
school history books too far. What
about Maud Gonne, James Connolly,
Jim Larkin and the thousands of others
during that period who were continu-
ously struggling to boot the Brits out?
**The DOLE**

The dole queues are getting longer and longer... many more women, kids, and people from outside of school, who have known nothing else, and people just now being made redundant... things are bad indeed. When people who were considered Protestant now live up to a week away from their "Catholic" counterparts. The dole is a lot of things to a lot of people but one thing it could be is a social handout for just your signature's work. If seen from the angle it doesn't have the trappings of guilt, the discouragement that some would use to feel (to force us off the dole).

The true appeal of a weekly handout is a commitment for having to live amidst a system run by clever fools, where only the interests of the possessed are protected... the dole, though doesn't conjure up such happy memories in most heads—it's a soul destroying experience for many, laden with years of guilt and trips about spurning. It would appear that even self respect is lost if we're not working 5, 6 or 7 days a week for some institution or employer that cares only what your time can create for them. The dole tries to strip us of our dignity, our stature as human beings. Last week in Shawsbridge, a man was told off for getting his card signed to be eligible for unemployment benefits. Every week rain or snow we are made to stand outside and wait until the last second before we get the privilege to queue up inside at our own risk, no prams inside the building... please keep your children under strict control. The supervisors sign, signing volumes about where they are at! The dole is the new estate at work, an inhuman, cold, bureaucratic network that is used to frighten people out of any workplace militancy... the more strike the more unemployment! The current lie that seems to suitably dussed people are queuing to join the new dole system (DUP and prison service rather than the IRS) and new rules and regulations this week make SS even more offensive to those who rely solely on their handouts.

At a time when police pay has risen over 50% in a year and a half, the dole is to be no longer indexed to the cost of living which could make next year's increase as low as nothing!! The N.I. Supplementary Benefits Commission responsible for overseeing SS operations make people attend. In that I wasn't wrong, the class, numbering about 25, fell into two groups. The majority were students, some who seem to be more interested in careers as social workers. Some even aspired to become doctors. They at least had had experience and some had intentions as an excuse. Not so, the second smaller group, which wouldn't have much been out of place at a Tory Law and Order debate. Although they were reticent about their motives it seems they were more concerned with personal advancement than the welfare of society's rejects.

There are three paths into a career in social work or the probation service, a degree, an MSc or a relevant experience. It was obvious that this course was going to be of 'relevant experience' that would pave the way to a cushy job for life. The fact that Probation Officers are 'officers of the courts' and are as much a part of the system as the screws in Long Kesh or the interrogators in Castlereagh won't trouble their conscience unduly. It's a melancholy fact that as Thatcher conceives more willing recruits into the ranks of the unemployed in her fight against inflation, the numbers of potential clients for these hypocrites will mushroom.

**The new social security code, used to determine a claimant's rates.**

**SOFT COPS**

Since Thursday 9th October, a course "The Community and Crime" has been running in the extra rural department of Queens University. It's jointly organised by the Probation Service and NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Retention of Offenders). Normally I wouldn't pay much attention to a course for middle class do-gooders (the last evening ends with a wine and cheese party) but I happened to hear the plug for the class on Radio Ulster. Apart from members of the Judiciary and the Probation Service, we were told, the list of guest speakers would include 'articulate ex-prisoners'. The phrase 'articulate ex-prisoners' is an unconscious revelation of the professional social workers view of their clients. They seem to be saying and passing on the prejudice to their next generation of recruits, that people in conflict with the law are monosyllabic social inadequates who have nothing to blame but themselves for their problems. Such a Victorian view of wrongdoers is of course a load of crap. Being an ex-prisoner myself I know that most non-political inmates become ex-prisoners as a response to harsh social conditions which condemn them to a soul destroying existence on the dole. So I went along to the initial lecture to see the middle class indoctrination process at first hand.

While I had known that the course was ostensibly designed for those interested in voluntary social work and I felt alienated I found the whole experience much better than I had expected, and this is playing a large part along with the opposition throughout the rest of Ireland. but the very nature of the nuclear industry (and uranium exploration/mining in particular) will always mean such sporadic ups and downs. Uranium exploration/mining is based on using share prices, BTR grants the price of demand for uranium on the world market,... with such nuclear armaments to kill us all 1000 times over, and enough nuclear waste literally lying around to do the same, the rush for even more uranium has slowed somewhat. As Anglo-United themselves say, they are temporarily running down... in view of the current worldwide circumstances affecting the short-term prospects for uranium". Demand for uranium and hence the minis of Anglo-United and friends to Donegal will depend on people like mad-Reagan pushing us all even faster than Carter did towards oblivion.

The uranium grabbers with their false promises of jobs and community welfare will be back when they suit them... this much they say. What they don't say, (but won't forget) is that the real feelings against them will not disappear in their absence!
**SUPPORT DURING HUNGER STRIKE**

**LETTER FROM A FRIEND**
**IN LONDON - A**

Though support for the hunger strikers seems to have gathered some more momentum in the past week or so, it has so far stayed within the traditional leftist milieu. I went on the Nov. 15th March a few days after returning from a week in Belfast—and upon seeing the homes of 52 innocent "Trouncers" acting among the masses I knew I was really home. In Belfast, I had just observed a situation in which support for the hunger strikers and their demands took the form of direct community based action against the state. While I was not expecting precisely that sort of "acts" in London at the moment, the stimulus that has several such leftist events still came as a shock: the various groupuscules shut off their business, exchange newspapers, take a Sunday stroll for solidarity followed by a pint of ale.

There has been some recent improvement, perhaps because of the increased urgency of the situation. The second national march was a bit more energetic, particularly as we entered Kilburn. (The police already in queues supply seemed to have increased in numbers and homeliness of this point) Local Troops (our chapters and ad hoc groups have been initiating action in their areas, and on December 10th the Central Polytechnic was occupied for a few hours). Needless to say, this sort of action should not be restricted to univerisities, but applied to department stores, banks, city streets and underground stations. Turn ours up on various demonstrations will tend to be low and dispersed status action is taken and information, where people actually are where possible with some creative disruption of the financial and economic relations of which the H Blocks, torture and the British occupa- tion are extensions.

The demand for political status has caused some controversy among British anarchists, giving the view that all prisoners are political. Questions regarding the relation of republication and rebellion to an anarcho- communist class movement have also been raised. While these issues won't be resolved easily, many anarchists have taken up at least critical sup- port. A leaflet put out by the "First of April Rising Four (an anarchist/libertarian communist bookstore in London) points out that the demand for political status relates to the specifically political nature of the prisoners' toil. "This may be no excuse for limiting these demands to 'political prisoners' for fear it is an excuse for not supporting these prisoners at all. . . . Revolutionary in Britain, the source of the military and administrative apparatus in the six counties has a direct responsibility to confiscate the British state and support the Irish working class."

For some time, a group of anarchists have been arguing on the marches and doing graffiti. Two were recently arrested for painting a bus and setting "actress" advertising "actress" to the "actress" supporting the hunger strikers on the Sunday Times building. A week after the anarchists "freed the press" their encounter with the law, another group of them boarded for graffiti in a new area held for two days and threatened with the PTA when rioting, an active safety section of the Workers Liberation H Blocks has been set up. This is already dealing with minor incidents in England, and using it's own resources to deal with the situation. The PTA has now been denied to us.

Over the past few months, and particu- larly since the beginning of the hunger strikes in Long Kesh and Armagh prisons, many people have felt the need to define for themselves the terms 'criminal' and 'political,' in relation to prisoners.

Republicanism, as well as some loyalist prisoners have been struggling since 1976 for a restoration of political status, removed by the then secretary of state, Roy Mason. This was a psychologically motivated move to label those people convicted of consciously political acts as 'criminals.' The reasoning behind this move should be quite clear: any person, or group of people who attack in any way an established order, are automatically labelled as criminals—social deviants, unresolved people committing certain acts for their own personal gain, be it spiritual or financial, psychopaths with no regard for the will of the majority. The British government attempted to hide the fact that they were, and are still engaged in a war, in opposition to a group representing the aspirations of a different political force, with their own political programme. These 'criminal' laws are used against these people, and those who offer any threat, on any level, to the present six county state.

Although we disagree on many levels with the means and eventual aims of Sinn Fein, we see that it is perfectly clear that anyone, who, in any way (ideologically/physically) attempts to undermine the existence of a given state, it's laws, it's repression, it's benefactors, interests, is going to be labelled as being a 'criminal.'

The fact that many people who commit political (in the states mind, criminal) acts are not conscious of having done so, or of the political nature of their crime, is impor- tant. Many of us automatically accept that people who are imprisoned for crimes of shoplifting, robbery, vandalism, violence against security forces, filling "social security" electric meters and other "property authority" related crimes that you can think of, are criminals. Yet when we look at the circumstances under which these people are convicted, we can see that they are not criminals.

Capitalism breeds wealth, the privileged few, and poverty for many. The vast major- ity of people are deceived from birth, deprived of an adequate education, deprived of an adequate environment in which to develop, bonded, we are given the maximum degree of control in what we are told we need. We are taught to accept that the consequences of our brilliance are non-existent (if we are good, a better life is in store). Then, a combination of such factors lead to us, labelled as failures at an early age, it is in fact that "our personal make-up" is a result of external elements, I'm sure. Those who are labelled as "criminals", those who are convicted to be "criminals", are those who are labelled to be "criminals," the results of which are always at the behest of a master. The group of chairmen, managers, politicians, state officials, to whom this really belongs, is clear, and they have, over many times, been very clear about our positions in society. It becomes a necessity for many of these people to act in order to fill the plate, and one of the ways to do this is to label other people. That's the way it seems to be.

**MORE POLITICAL PRISONERS**

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