

Outta Control

News & Views of the Belfast Anarchist Collective

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW
MORE ABOUT THE BAC...
WRITE: BAC, c/o
TIMMY AVERY, ST. 1
BELFAST

OUTTA CONTROL... of the state bosses, patriarchy, schooling, churches... As Anarchists we oppose the authority and exploitation of this society and advocate one of FREE association and self-management. This paper comes out every four weeks and we welcome contributions, criticisms etc.

MARCHES, RIOTS AND FUNERALS

Bobby Sands, from Belfast, died on May 5th, 66 days after beginning a hunger strike for political status in Long Kesh prison. One week later on the 12th, Francis Hughes, from Co, Derry, died after 59 days. As we go to press, Raymond Mc Creesh and Patsy O'Hara are reaching a very critical stage of their strike.

The funerals were the biggest ever shows of support for the campaign for political status with crowds of 75,000 at the first and up to 50,000 in Bellaghy.

HARASSMENT

Francis Hughes family were harassed and insulted by the RUC, who hijacked the coffin to avoid areas where crowds had gathered to pay their last respects. The RUC, incidentally, failed to stop the hearse from being stoned at Belvoir Park.

His funeral was prevented from passing through Bellaghy village by the RUC, with lorry loads of Brits backing them up. The Belfast buses, returning home, were stoned in Portlengone by Loyalists, and several people injured. The only action the RUC took was to fire plastic bullets at those who left the buses to drive off the stone throwers.

PROTESTS

The deaths resulted in days of sustained rioting. But for several reasons these have not had the affect of the 'general level of lawlessness' which forced the British to grant political status in the early 70s.

BURN A BUS FOR IRELAND

From 69 onwards there was a massive shift in the population due to sectarian attacks. People were forced to abandon their homes and now live in well defined ghettos.

The security forces are content at present to contain the violence 'to an acceptable level' and within the ghettos. They are happy to let property and cars be burnt within the areas. There is little commercial or industrial property left to worry about protecting anymore.

On the 21st May, both Raymond Mc Creesh and Patsy O'Hara died on their 60th day of hunger strike. Brendan Mc Laughlin, after only 6 days into his strike was taken to a Belfast hospital with a burst ulcer. He refuses medical treatment.

NO GO, NOT ON.

No Go areas may have been possible in the early 70s when the Brits didn't quite know how to react to a situation where hundreds of people were behind the barricades. But any attempt to erect barricades now, results in armoured saracens periodically crashing through them and later removing them permanently with armoured bulldozers and cranes.

An exception seems to be the Divis flats complex which kept the Brits and RUC out for several days. The unusual geography and sense of community were mainly responsible.

RIOTS FOR RIOTERS

The nature of rioting has changed over the last few years. Most people feel hesitant and afraid about getting involved when live rounds are periodically used by the Brits and RUC.

Though petrol bombers can 'legitimately' be shot with lead, recently plastic bullets are used. These can be just as lethal and have already resulted in several deaths. Their use has the advantage of not bothering the liberal conscience and not stirring up too much media attention as a result of possibly dozens being killed.

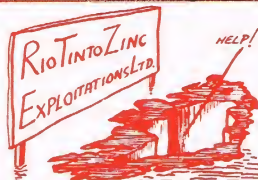
CROPPIES DOWN

A local demonstration in the Lower Ormeau area after Bobby Sands death resulted in the RUC firing plastic bullets into the crowd of children, men and women who were peacefully protesting. Not because the RUC feel threatened but just to give people a taste of things to come if they step out of line. This tactic frightened some from picketing the next day.

IRON FIST

But even in this small area of about 7 streets they are forced to deploy large numbers of RUC and set up base in a cricket ground in the centre of the community to keep a continuous eye on things. However the youth of the area bravely resisted the RUC for several nights of running battles.

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It's not news to be saying that the working people of Ireland, North and South are more and more dependant on big firms — multinationals — whose one over-riding purpose is to make as much profit as possible for the few big shareholders, pay as low wages as possible, think as little as possible about the nature of the work, and care as little as possible about the pollution of all living creatures and their environment. A depressing scene without a doubt. And the more we examine these multinational corporations, the more we see their local, national and international connections, the more we realise just how much they rule over and control our lives, our habits and our thinking. But likewise, the more we realise were being messed about, the more we'll react against it — because we'll have to!

Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) is one such corporation operating in Ireland. They are exploring for and mining minerals the world over, from Africa to Australia, from Europe to America. They've been looking for uranium in Donegal since 1976, and have just recently been granted an exploration license by the N.Ireland Office (Min. of Commerce) to look for minerals — including uranium — in the Sperrins area of Tyrone... an area stretching from Strabane to Draperstown. Sounds like a few extra jobs in these times of recession, but jobs we could well do without!

RTZ are notorious for their treatment of people and the environment — anything that could hinder their work in extracting minerals and selling them is obliterated, no matter what our need, no matter what purpose. They've been operating illegally in 'SW Africa' (Namibia) for years, extracting uranium from huge tracts of land... paying starvation wages and uprooting communities, spreading radioactivity, to get at the uranium... essential for the nuclear war economy of many European countries, and in particular, Britain. Irrespective of protest, ignoring a United Nations ban on their activities, the company press ahead (aided by all the Western govts who buy the uranium....and not surprisingly, Fianna Fail consistently vote in favour of the big 5 [GB, France, USA, Japan, and Germany] at the UN, against any move to halt RTZ operations). The most unscrupulous, corrupt, power-tripping, callous bunch of directors that exists. (It can come as no surprise that leading personalities from all of the big British political parties are on the RTZ board of directors,



One of the many marches up the Falls.

cont. on back page

I Can't Bear It

We have to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. It is right to share, to be free and to fight against all forms of oppression. It is wrong to oppress or exploit others

Is it wrong to eat meat? To exploit (imprison in factory farms) and kill animals I've been asking myself this, and I'm now eating almost no meat at all. If you can get good vegetables and can learn to cook a bit, you don't miss it – In fact you positively can't stand it. Of course I have to ask "what about animal products.....and clothing (leather for example)?" Also, experiments on animals? The Animal Liberation Front (ALF), a clandestine, decentralised network of groups in England, have been waging a guerrilla war against vivisection laboratories and also freeing thousands of animals, trapped and terrorised in them. Lately they have been attacking fur-trading shops.

To try to answer ethical questions of right and wrong, I have to follow my instincts and draw conclusions from my understanding of this repressive society and possible alternatives.



What we eat of course affects our health. It **can't** be good for our bodies and minds if we eat crap. Tasty, balanced non-synthetic food – vegetables, grains, herbs and spices, salad and fruit and decent bread and drinks etc, seems to be what we need. Ok, we can survive (can we – and for how long?) with poor quality and poisoned food, but can we **live**? And after all, it's enjoyable to take care over eating, preparing and sharing food, isn't it?

So, to cut a long story short, I'm trying to work out, as are more and more people, my ideas which relate to food. All aspects of our lives are related, and whilst we must confront and change as far as possible our conditioning, at the same time we have to confront and change together, through social revolution, the present system.

To discuss and to spread these ideas, and to act against the institutions of control, people must create in every locality and workplace, a movement — A network of independant groups. This is the responsibility of all those who are sincere in their desire to improve their lives.

As we seize control of our environment and get rid of money and bosses of all kinds, we create a new, free society — Anarchist, ecological and communistic.



In the last week of April, a delegation of assorted reactionaries visited the Health Minister, Patten, demanding that the abortion legislation in Britain should not be extended here. They were told what they wanted to hear.

The strange bedfellows included the Catholic Bishop Philbin (life long celibate), Presbyterian moderator Girvan (another religious nut), Robert Bradford (advocate of British citizenship, but not British law), and Gerry Fitt (well known Socialist). Also among the delegation were members of the anti-abortion organisation, LIFE - Dr. Nuala McAllenan, Dr. Robin Taylor, and Mrs. Jean Garland.

It is no coincidence that most of the delegation were men, and all of them religious. None of them have answered the demand that each woman has the right to control her own body, and she herself should decide whether or not to have an abortion. To have that control, and that choice, abortion facilities must be available.

At the moment these facilities are not available, and LIFE itself estimates that 2000 women travel to England each year for abortions – The Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign Group put the figure higher, at 5000, and go on to point out that even if the '67 Abortion act was extended to N.I., it would be inadequate. The act gives each Area Health Authority a lot of discretion in the avoidance of providing abortion facilities, and many parts of England are without any facilities whatsoever. The combined influences of the Protestant and Catholic Churches, the religious bias of the political parties, and the deep rooted system of sexism would render the act ineffective here.

The delegations attitude to women is best summed up by Bradford, *"We decided to visit the minister because of our deep concern about the increasing pressure from womens' rights groups for the liberalisation of abortion laws here"*

OVERHEARD DURING
A TELEPHONE CALL
TO AUSTRIA....

Perhaps some English readers of "Outta Control" might be interested in taking a look at a little spot in Gloucester, at Chedsworth. Just outside the village, there's a wood, and hidden within it and sunk deep in the ground, is a secret bunker, no doubt complete with royal splendour.

Because this is where the "royals" have their nuclear-war bunker, sunk into the well drained oolitic limestone of the area. Charles and Diana will soon have a house nearby, Anne and horse have a holiday home there....The Duke of Beaufort and The Queen Mother....to name but a few, also have country residences in the vicinity. Sounds incredible, but unfortunately it's ALL TRUE!

PROPOUTKIN IS ONE OF ANARCHISM'S GREATEST THEORETICIANS. FROM AN ANTI-STATIST BACKGROUND, HE JOINED THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ORDER IN 1874, WAS IMPRISONED IN SIBERIA, BUT ESCAPED TO FRANCE & LATE LONDON. PROBABLY, HIS BEST CONTRIBUTION TO ANARCHISM WAS HIS THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL WORKS CONCERNING THE THEORY OF COOPERATION (NOT COMPETITION) AS A MEANS OF PROGRESSIVE EVOLUTION. HIS WORKS HAVE BEEN RECENTLY REPRINTED BY ANARCHIST PRESS.

SAIBABOY
AIDE SQ.,
W/1
AN DEN
MINISTER DES RECHTS
TEINERWEGE 110A
BONNI, GERMANY

ARREST IN GERMANY

BRENDA CHRISTIE, FROM CIENFUEGOS PRISON, #10 BEEN ARRESTED IN GERMANY. ARE NOT SURE OF THE CHARGES YET, BUT IT IS BECAUSE OF HER ANTI-TRANSPORT RECORD. SHE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN LIFTED BUT RELEASED DURING THE ARABY BOMBING "TRIALS." LETTERS OF PROTEST TO ATTORNEYS ADDRESSED, SHOULD BE SENT. THE SPIRIT OF FUNDRAISING LIVES ON.

ANARCHISTS ARE CRIMINALS

The charge of "criminal" was the conclusion of Michael O' Riordan of the Communist Party, speaking at a day long seminar, "The Spanish Civil War", organised a week ago by the Workers' Education Association.

As one of the guest speakers his topic consisted of a litany (read from his book, "The Connolly Column") of the group of 150 men who went to Spain in '36 to fight for the government forces against a military rebellion which had the backing of the Catholic Church.

The seminar began with the showing of an RTE programme on the Irish who went to Spain. Not only did 150 Republicans and Communists make the journey (60 of them dying in battle), but 150 "good Catholics" went off under General O' Duffy to help the fascists. This latter group ignominiously returned after a mistaken skirmish with their own side!

This video was followed by a talk from Joe McMin on the various novels which took the Spain of that period as their theme.

In the afternoon session, Mick Cox suggested that the Spanish war was determined by the super-powers of the day — fascist Germany and Italy on one side and the Communist USSR on the other, with the "democracies" of France and Britain playing an obstructive role. Because of the USSR's role of wooing these governments into an alliance against Nazi Germany, they felt it necessary to contain any revolutionary upheaval in Spain which would threaten the bourgeoisie of these countries.

After the lectures a discussion began which led to the slander usually propagated about the Spanish working-class, and especially the Anarchists, by the Communist Party.

The rebellion, which was sparked off by the Generals' rebellion and the faltering of the Republican government led to one of the largest scale examples of workers' control in history. Factories, transport, bakeries, health services and security patrols were taken over by members of the largest workers organisation — The CNT (Anarcho-Syndicalist), and the UGT (Socialist). Similarly, the peasants collectivised the large estates of absentee landlords and produced food from previously fallow land, with modern equipment which was too expensive for individual farmers. Women organised in a way which took them nearer emancipation in all areas — social, sexual and economic, than in any other socialist revolution.

However, this was all branded as being "criminal" by O'Riordan. In fact the accusations he made conjured up a strange

spectacle — That the 1.5 million CNT'ers were "petty-bourgeois" and "individualistic"; Proof of this individualism was that they wouldn't march in step!

Further allegations were that they avoided fighting the fascists; stayed at home and played with workers control; stabbed the government in the back during the May Days of '37, and finally handed over Barcelona to the Fascists without firing a shot. The CP see the best form of defence as attack, and their role during the war/revolution has brought them much criticism — everything from starving the fronts of weapons to assassination of opponents at the rear.

These are dealt with amply elsewhere, so this space will reply just to O' Riordan's accusations. As for the May Days, the UGT and CNT workers in the Barcelona Telephone Exchange had taken it over soon after the revolution. The government (a coalition of reformist parties and leaders, including the Communist Party) sent the assault guards from Valencia to kick them out. When word of the attack spread, barricades were erected in the workers' district, with CNT and POUM (Trotskyist) militants to the forefront. Hundreds of workers lost their lives in the ensuing battle, before those who had established themselves in a position of power (in the UGT) and of influence (in the CNT) sold them out.

If the Anarchists stayed at home, who defeated the military uprisings in Spain's three most important centres — Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid? Most of the Anarchists joined the *Malitias* and fought in many fronts, but these were later absorbed into the hierarchical government army.

The most famous example of the *Malitias* was one of 3000 CNT'ers formed into the Durrutti Column, which marched to Zaragossa, helping out struggles on the way. But they got bogged down on the Aragon front as Zaragossa was taken before they got there, and was heavily fortified.

The column next went to Madrid, where it fought with the International Brigades and the local population in the unsuccessful attempts at resisting the encircling fascist troops. In fact Durrutti himself was killed here.

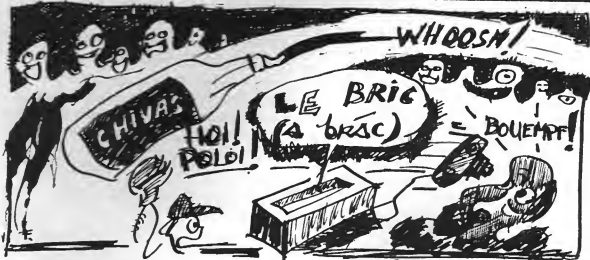
As for Barcelona being handed over, the surrender was given because of the hopelessness of sacrificing any more lives, and the resultant wave of revenge and repression which was expected from the fascist forces.

Other documents cover the role of the Communist Party, such as "Homage to Catalonia," by George Orwell, and "The Spanish Labyrinth," by Gerald Brenan. But maybe O'Riordan would like to say who assassinated Camillo Berneri, the well known Italian anti-fascist, and Andres Hui, the POUM leader?

LETTER

Dear friends,
You may be interested to know of a little action in my old hotel (prison). Five provos went up to the roof at Long Lartin (4/5/81) and stayed there for seven days as a protest about Bobby Sands. Also another prisoner (who I didn't know, but I don't think he's Irish) was reported in the local paper as being on hunger-strike for two weeks, demanding equal remission rights for English prisoners with those in prisons in the six counties. His name is Michael Birch. Getting half-remission brought in over here (you only get one third in England) and the other 'privilegedes' (like food parcels) that exist over your way would actually be the biggest thing in prison reform since they got rid of the treadmill... it would mean also, that a large number of the Republican prisoners in English nicks would be OUT. Stay on your toes, P.

The 'privilegedes' exist here for 2 reasons — one is to try and buy off the prison protests, and the other is to counter-balance the Emergency legislation of no juries, etc.



Fire-bombs chased by their own luminous tails out of the dark of Divis Flats. A few old fellows, aged about 35, warming themselves by the burning Ford Escort. Stones hanging down the lids on the RUC jeeps. Brits sneaking plastic bullets into peoples faces.

Images not lost on the stroboscopic flash-guns or the infra-red filters. Images caught for Sunday breakfast supplements, liberally sprinkled with Brittle toast, or for the sterile waiting-room of Comrade Dentist in the sleek suburbs.

Two photo-journalists trying to snap the same image on the same spot. Two onto

one brick won't go. No queue. I was here first! No, I was! Shit! Geroff! Push a shove. Shove a push. All fall down. Stand up and fight! Fisti-bang-bang. Two photo-journalists bashing the light cells outta one another's brains.

A cauffle not lost on the honest-to-goodness rioters. Ceasefiring! Maybe pick up a pointer or two. The young persons gather round in a circle. The first daft birds of dawn begin chirping. It is not often a body is treated to an inter-continental war on a body's waste ground. Up the ante!

GROUPS AND COMMUNITY

While thousands turned out for Bobby Sands funeral, the problem still remains how can this passive support become active?

There still is a gap between the militants (the left and relations of the prisoners) and the community. Too rarely the hunger strike meetings are not advertised enough and communication from the committees tend to be very poorly produced on both a technical and information level.

Some of the problems which arise from a community under pressure need to be faced up to – sectarianism, destruction within the community, arrests and death. Although many of these maybe uncomfortable to deal with, it has to be done to retain the support of the community.

SINGLE ISSUE?

The campaign should not be narrowly seen as a case of the prisoners getting their demands, but also whether a community can act together, in cooperation, and work towards the longterm welfare of that community which takes up issues of the RUC, housing, city hall, and indeed the very existence of the sectarian state.

TROOPS IN!

More British troops have been sent to the north to reinforce the UDR and RUC. They have not been brought in to deal with the 'wave of terrorism', as we are often led to believe, but in the repression of the thousands of people who would otherwise have swept aside years ago the sectarian state.

The RUC, UDR, and SAS units could probably contain the armed struggle, but it would always take thousands of troops to deal with an insurgent population. They cloak themselves under the guise of peacekeepers.

SOUTH AWAKES?

With a pattern emerging of riots erupting after each death, and isolated bomb and gun attacks, there is very little room to manoeuvre with such a concentration of police and army.

On the day of Bobby Sands funeral a new consciousness seemed to be taking hold as many towns along the border counties closed down completely.

And on the night of Francis Hughes death a crowd of 2000 clashed for a short time with the Garda outside the British embassy. The following night, petrol bombs were thrown in O'Connell St.

As tension grows in the north and while more people attend the marches and funerals and more hurl a brick or a petrol bomb, it is in the south that the enormous potential lies (both in industrial and civil disorder) to change the stand of the British government.

LOVETT OR LUMPEIT

Community politics academic, Tom Lovett (we're all in the same boat, chaps) has received a generous £75,000 grant from the rightwing Portuguese Gulbenkian Foundation which has been responsible for funding many counter-insurgent activities. He is setting up the 'Ulster Peoples College (Ulster as in the 6 counties). They will concentrate on providing the historical justification for the 2 nations theory and provide the ideological foundations and lend support to the UDA's independent Ulster idea (again minus 3 counties).

NATIONAL H-BLOCK COMMITTEE

At the last National Conference, called in an emergency 2 weeks ago, many issues arose which revealed the different tendencies within the movement.

The national committee began two years ago with a campaign to mobilize thousands onto marches and build political support by putting pressure on the parties north and south. All this was to win the 5 demands, and avoid an almost inevitable hunger strike.

But the strike began and so far 2 prisoners have died. The terms of reference have changed, but the committee still talk, print and encourage 'more mobilization, more pressure on the SDLP and Fianna Fáil', etc. This despite the fact that marches alone are not enough, and there are no other suggestions as to what can be done after all this mobilization. Also pressure on the professional politicians can only result in them using the issue to their own political advantage.

The national committee (made up of Sinn Féin, P.D., and notable public figures) seem as remote from the local committee feelings as ever. They disown many of the riots, and in Dublin called off a march on the day of Francis Hughes funeral. Two days earlier a group of demonstrators broke away from the main march and destroyed up-market shop windows in Grafton St. The H-Block committee again 'disowned' this and cancelled the next march as a sign of goodwill on their part; to whom – the capitalists and bosses of Dublin!

MEDIA – THE GREY AND THE BLACK

When faced with crisis the media throws aside its carefully disguised 'balance of unbiased viewpoints' and shows its true colours (red, white and true blue). It ultimately reflects the interests of its owners, who want to retain their privileged positions.

In the north they publish 'black' propaganda, such as saying it was the IRA who shot the Ardoyne butcher, Martin, for not closing his shops after Francis Hughes funeral. The truth later came out that he had closed his shops and it increasingly looks like a sectarian murder.

There was also the example of claiming that Raymond McCreesh had asked for food, while in fact he had been deliberately confused by the medical staff.

The media also put out grey propaganda (half truths that cannot be substantiated) such as Chris Ryder's report in the Sunday Times (Slimes).

Instead of 14 year old Julie Livingstone being clearly murdered by a plastic bullet fired by the Brits, he suggests that 'other possible causes' were put forward by some surgeons.

ATKINS TO LOSE SEAT?

Politicians can rest easy in their daily harassment of people, follow the statement made by Edgar Graham of the Law Dept. Queens University. Following the death of Bobby Sands he said, 'Anyone who has been convicted of a terrorist offence is eligible for election to the House of Commons'. Presumably, if legislation is changed, quite a few MPs will have to forfeit their seats – Whitelaw, Joseph, Atkins Thatcher, Mason.....

The Queen of England, through fiddling share deals, remains one of the biggest share holders, despite her claims to the contrary). Many of the British Universities hold shares (particularly the various colleges of the no.1 British establishment University, Cambridge), as do banks (and in particular the Bank of Ireland), many clergy men and local governments. The Ministry of Finance at Stormont holds 6,000 shares and the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland – 4,500 shares. These are the sort of people backing RTZ. Taking a way of life that puts people and their needs bottom of the list of priorities.

The one ray of hope is that more and more people the world over are waking up to companies like RTZ... The 'Week of Action' against RTZ has links from America to Europe to Australia... a truly amazing display of solidarity. One "week of action won't stop RTZ – our whole life style will have to change to do away with all the RTZ's of this world – but it's a hopeful beginning. RTZ ARE ON THE WAY OUT.



Just as expected the British government has 'decided' to have no independent authority to protect us against the misuse of information held in government and commercial computers. It rejected all recommendations and now plans to sign a Council of Europe convention on data protection with the clever lie that the government itself will be the 'authority' as to how the information is used; the decision was taken by what well known friend of the people, Willie Whitelaw operating from the Home Office. It is they who manage the national security industry exactly the same crowd who have millions of files on computer. The Home Office is our protection against the Home Office. Is it any wonder that so few people DID fill in their census forms? The government is so little trusted that even the RUC were reluctant to fill it in! And thousands were burned on the streets or in private. Government snooping is not appreciated.

But it's hard to stop it – there's many more ways than through a census. Take the British Army computer, housed in Lisburn. It was set up in 1974, supposedly containing information only for the use of Army "intelligence" (sic), to monitor cars crossing the border. From such humble beginnings, (and even then, Merlyn Rees denied it's very existence!) it has come to get 65% of the people recorded... and in what detail we can but guess. It works by registering our name and date of birth or address, or car number, or information extracted when passing through a border check point... It reads out a pre-conditioned response... like "pick them up and take them in. Too bad! The British state is now anxious to increase such cover to passports, starting with the EEC passport we'll all need for travel by 1985.

HUNGER STRIKE IN GERMANY ENDS WITH SOME GAINS

April 16th. saw the ending of the German hunger strike after 66 days with the death of Sigurd Debus. It looks like the state has given in to the demands of some of the prisoners. The West German justice minister assured Amnesty International that none of the prisoners will be kept any longer in conditions of isolation but will be put together in several small groupings.

A COLLECTIVE HUNGER STRIKE

This latest hunger strike did not take place solely in German prisons, there were also three prisoners on hunger strike in Switzerland and Austria. The Red Army Faction (RAF), 2nd. June Movement and some social prisoners had also gone on hunger strike around the same time with different demands, although each group declared solidarity with each other. Information on how the hunger strikes have developed is difficult to get since the media and state have had a near or total clampdown on such information.

ISOLATION TORTURE

All prisoners from militant backgrounds have been recognised as political or special prisoners in the way that the prison regimes have dealt with them. Over the past 4-5 years, the prisoners have been systematically isolated in special wings; alone, or in two's, making contact with other prisoners impossible.

Within this type of isolation the prisoners are being constantly watched by TV cameras, listened to by microphones, visits numbering one a month take place behind glass walls and are watched by prison officials, specialists of the criminal investigation bureau and psychologists. After each and every visit the prisoners have to undress and are subjected to body searches. The wings which they are kept in are sound proof as are the cells. All lighting is artificial and all walls are painted white. There is a 23 hour lock-up, although some are on 24-hours. These conditions amount to nothing less than brain washing and go a long way towards destroying health and life.

WHAT WE WANT!

The prisoners stated "In this situation, after having been isolated from each other, cut off from every political process and development and from the outside world, we are determined to make this separation come to an end by using the one effective means that we have: the collective hunger-strike, in order to be able to survive as human beings and to get conditions necessary for a collective process of learning and

working"

Their demands on the state were "association in groups, no high security wings, the abolition of all forms of isolation and the release of two prisoners;" one suffering from open tuberculosis and another suffering from severe brain damage as a result of a head wound received when they were first arrested.

"Scientifically Perfected repression"

As the hunger strike progressed, the prisoners were eventually force fed and surprisingly some doctors who were there to administer the feeding saw this as an attack on the prisoners. "Force feeding is not a medical solution but a method of force used to break peoples' resistance. In this situation, force feeding must be regarded as a direct attack on the lives of the prisoners."

Many of the prisoners were moved around between different prisons in an attempt to isolate them even further. Prisoners were hand-cuffed and tied down while force feeding was carried out. Some prisoners nearly suffocated, others had blood in their urine.

This type of scientifically perfected repression extended even into the death of Sigurd Debus. After being force fed in an attempt to break his resolve, Sigurd was placed on a life support machine, so that the authorities had final control over the moment of his death. Although his heart had stopped beating, he was kept "legally alive" for a further week until the machine was switched off.

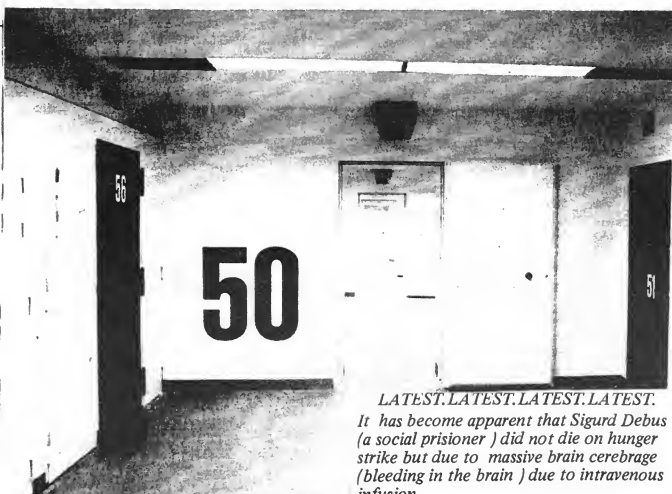
REACTIONS

News of his death brought riots and demonstrations to the streets of Berlin and the city was the scene of spontaneous attacks on shops and government buildings. In Frankfurt, a shopping centre was burned out, while in Dusseldorf, a car park was attacked and many cars were burned out. Churches were occupied in protest in several towns throughout West Germany, and in Hamburg a bomb wrecked the department of the University where research into isolation torture for use in West European prisons was being carried out.

COMPLICATIONS

Since May 1980, when Amnesty International produced its report on conditions for politically motivated prisoners in West Germany, the West German government has been pressurised by AI to discontinue special programmes of isolation. A possible outcome of the W.German governments deliberations might be the ending of 'total' isolation for a number of the prisoners, and the increased use of small group isolation. The West German state, however, has given no guarantees whatsoever, and the situation is further complicated by the division into federal states, with individual responsibility for the implementation of prison conditions. While in Berlin, Schleswig, Holstein, Stuttgart, Nordrhein-Westfalen authorities have already indicated that they are ready to consider 'concessions'—Dusseldorf and Rhineland Pfalz have so far refused to respond to protests.

Unfortunately, only time will tell whether the hunger strike has been successful or not — one major point worth noting is the extent to which the state and the media worked hand in hand. There was near total repression of any news. One local paper (about the equivalent of the Belfast Telegraph) carried only a small paragraph a few days before the death of Sigurd Debus and paradoxically had a half page news item on the Bobby Sands hunger strike, which was at a relatively early stage. The only time that the media gave any mentionable coverage was when the hunger strike had ended and the riots erupted. Then the headlines read "Smash the new Terrorists."



LATEST. LATEST. LATEST. LATEST.
It has become apparent that Sigurd Debus (a social prisoner) did not die on hunger strike but due to massive brain cerebrale (bleeding in the brain) due to intravenous infusion.

BROKDORF '81



Since 1976 the German government has been forced through massive resistance from the population, and a court case, to stop all the building at the nuclear power plant, Brokdorf. On Dec. 1st 1980, however, the court and the government decided to go ahead with the building. On the 21st December a rally was held at the site, where approximately 10,000 anti-nuclear demonstrators turned up. It was a peaceful protest, and there wasn't any kind of direct action. After the protest some short actions against institutions of the nuclear industry took place. On the 2nd. Feb, the SPD (Social Democratic Party) at Hamburg held a special meeting about Brokdorf, and four days later gave the final go-ahead for the building. From then on, Anti-Nuclear groups prepared for a demonstration to be held on the 28th. of February against the building. Preparations for it started all over Germany. There was a lot of work to be done, like organising transport facilities and printing leaflets and posters (co-ordination between all groups was made at some national meeting near Brokdorf, where the demands and aims were worked out:

No nuclear power in Brokdorf and elsewhere.

Stop nuclear energy in nuclear stations and weapons plants.

HEW (Hamburg Electricity Works) to stop their work for Brokdorf.

Release of all imprisoned anti-nuclear demonstrators & dropping of all charges.

Nearer the time of the demonstration, the state began to prepare its counteraction, and as usual, the media, press, government & security forces worked close together to 'protect law & order. They banned any demonstrations from the 28th. February to the 1st. March in Wilster Marsch (the area around Brokdorf), Stoltenberg. The Christian Democrats spread horror news in the papers and 'Bilo. Am Sonntag' (Springerpress [notorious right-wing paper owner] sensation paper) carried headlines like "Brokdorf: Bombs, fires, hostages, Anti-Nuclear protesters to burn down farms and take farmers as hostages." This is only one example out of numerous

accusations. They painted pictures of the anti-nuclear people as violent murderous gangs, so that the police can get away with their beatings of people as an act of defence.

Days before the demonstration, the police started to prepare the area for the arriving masses, they destroyed parts of the ice which the area was covered in and took away road signs. Trains and bus services were told not to transport demonstrators. From the 27th Feb to March the 1st, demonstrators from Holland and Denmark were stopped from entering Germany. Friday night before the demonstration, people were faced with transport problems and long waits for lifts. A lot of people didn't get lifts and had to stay behind. Once they were on the road they were stopped at roadblocks by the police, who asked for I.D., took sticks, poles and helmets and basically tried to hassle people as much as possible. Finally, buses arrived in Wilster, and there was a lot of confusion which made co-ordination impossible. 'Cause the police were blocking the roads behind Wilster, vehicles had to park there and everybody had to walk, and it was still another 15km to Brokdorf.

On Saturday morning, Jo Leinen, one of the leaders of the BBU (central committee, friends of the earth type) managed through tactical arrangements to direct the march right to where a barricade of police sandbags was. Jo Leinen made a lot of demonstrators believe that this was the only way through to the site. The way to pass the police lines was to give personal information to the police and to get body searched. He stressed that 'peaceful demonstrators don't need to hide anything'. The aim of being 'friends with the police' was to keep the demonstration 'democratic and peaceful'. During all this, some people split and actually managed to get right to the broad water ditch in front of the fence. There was no way that they could use the ropes to get over the fence, cause the police were very quick and managed to force people back with teargas and water-cannons, they chased demonstrators around the fields and beat them up with their sticks. Because of the broken ice,

many people got stuck in the ice and had to give up, how many people were hurt is not known. As this was going on the rest of the marchers finished their demonstration and passively walked back, leaving the rest without any solidarity or help. 65 were arrested and were charged with "violation of public peace" and "assault."

After the demonstration was over, the media showed how peaceful it was. There was no mention of the violence the police used against demonstrators.

It was great to see how the demonstration attracted such a big crowd (over 80,000). It is good to have such big demonstrations at the sites every so often, simply to show the govt. that there are a lot of people opposing their nuclear plans. The problems at such large demonstrations are:

1. That the police are able to organise such a concentrated & powerful armed force, hard to overcome.
2. That it is difficult to find solidarity with all the people & the resistance is therefore reduced to individual acts (as a result, these are usually the most effective). The lack of solidarity with people who got chased and beaten up by the police at the demonstration was obvious.

One big demonstration is not enough, and not the only way for people to resist. There are other ways such as opposing atomic power in the cities, where the fundamental plans are made. Lots of different actions would integrate the fight into an everyday struggle against the state. There is a split in the anti-nuclear movement — there are the middle class "protectors of the earth" by all their means pacifist, they build the integrated type of resistance the state can afford. On the other side are those who have come to the conclusion that that the state is responsible for nuclear power, and to get rid of nuclear power you have to get rid of the state....

Another good development would be the coming together of the autonomous anti-nuclear groups with other autonomous movements like the squatters, military service resisters etc...as an act of solidarity so as not to be isolated by the state.

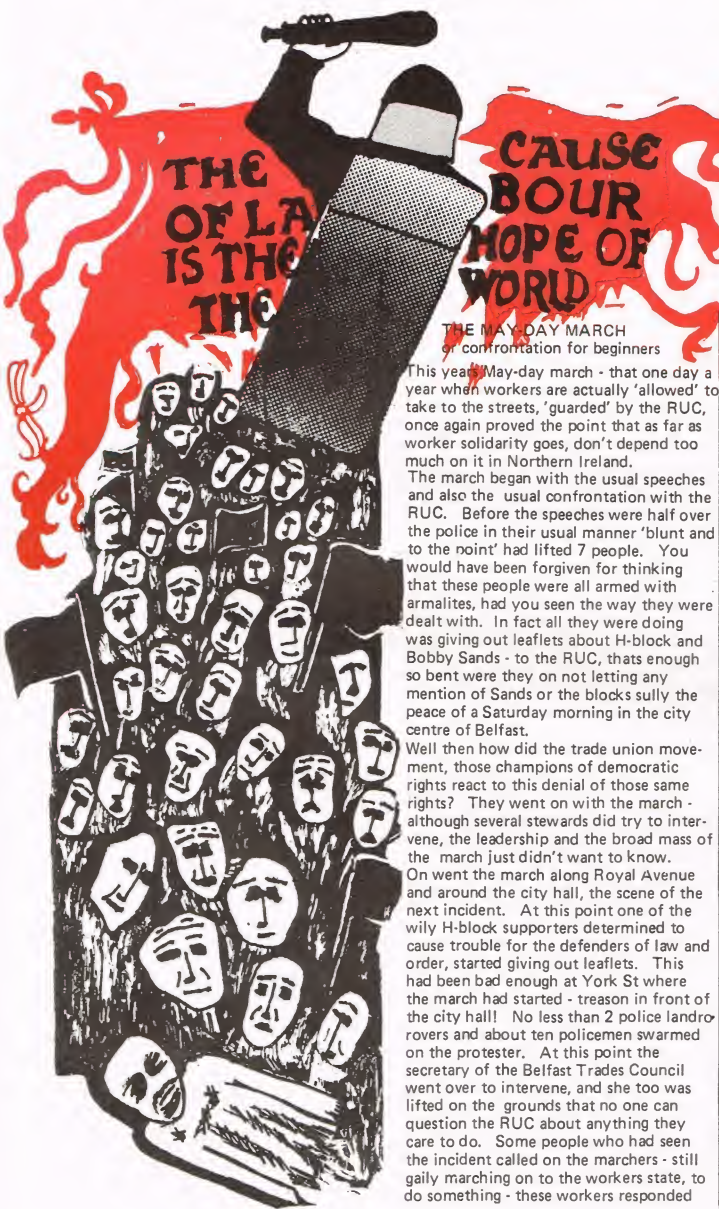


Gaining Ground

OUTTA CONTROL

ANARCHA-FEMINIST NEWS

The right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands, but true emancipation begins neither at the polls, nor in courts. It begins in woman's soul. History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts. It is necessary that woman learn that lesson, that she realise that her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches.
EMMA GOLDMAN 1911



THE MAY-DAY MARCH or confrontation for beginners

This year's May-day march - that one day a year when workers are actually 'allowed' to take to the streets, 'guarded' by the RUC, once again proved the point that as far as worker solidarity goes, don't depend too much on it in Northern Ireland.

The march began with the usual speeches and also the usual confrontation with the RUC. Before the speeches were half over the police in their usual manner 'blunt and to the point' had lifted 7 people. You would have been forgiven for thinking that these people were all armed with armalites, had you seen the way they were dealt with. In fact all they were doing was giving out leaflets about H-block and Bobby Sands - to the RUC, that's enough so bent were they on not letting any mention of Sands or the blocks sully the peace of a Saturday morning in the city centre of Belfast.

Well then how did the trade union movement, those champions of democratic rights react to this denial of those same rights? They went on with the march - although several stewards did try to intervene, the leadership and the broad mass of the march just didn't want to know. On went the march along Royal Avenue and around the city hall, the scene of the next incident. At this point one of the wily H-block supporters determined to cause trouble for the defenders of law and order, started giving out leaflets. This had been bad enough at York St where the march had started - treason in front of the city hall! No less than 2 police landrovers and about ten policemen swarmed on the protester. At this point the secretary of the Belfast Trades Council went over to intervene, and she too was lifted on the grounds that no one can question the RUC about anything they care to do. Some people who had seen the incident called on the marchers - still gaily marching on to the workers state, to do something - these workers responded

immediately - with shouts of 'fuck off' - so much for worker solidarity. Totally enraged many women and men demanded that Terry Carlin do something in his capacity as secretary of the ICTU. This he did by approaching the police to release the secretary of the trades council as this was clearly a 'mistake'. He failed to mention the 8 others who were also lifted, these presumably were not mistakes? Around 40 people followed the trade union women's banner to Musgrave St station much to Carlin's dismay, to demand the immediate release of the people detained. The crowd were met by an equal number of RUC who were abusive and violent to what was a peaceful protest. They kicked, thumped, shouted, and attempted to break the arms and fingers of some of the protesters, and then they seized the banner itself. The secretary of the trades council was released 2 hours later. The other 8 were held for over 48 hours charged with obstruction. When their cases came up the following Tuesday they got off every charge, but they got no compensation for their mini-interment. The RUC have been going on much as usual since the event. If you're planning to go on any marches in the future, particularly trade union ones here are a few hints that you may find helpful.

DO be sensible about clothing-

DON'T wear anything they can grab, we would recommend a leotard and tights, a diving suit, or perhaps naked is the best policy.

DO wear strong shoes, industrial steel toe-caps are advised otherwise you may have a few broken toes - there are a lot of heavy RUC men's women.

DO wear your hair short, cut it to about one inch all over, or better still shave your head that way the RUC cannot pull it.

DO keep your hands firmly in your pockets at all times otherwise they will charge you with assault.

Other things to note:

DON'T depend on 'workers' to come to your aid, especially the trendy lefty types who dust their badges down once a year and spend the rest of the year reading and writing about the working class.

DON'T carry anything - cameras, plastic bags (especially if they have green on them), paper hankies, etc., are all likely to be offensive weapons and you'll get charged accordingly.

DON'T assume that you have any rights - you have none.

DON'T assume that the RUC aren't out to get you - you would be wrong again.

BARRICADING THE MIND

For the past three weeks or so, life has become more and more tense in the North. The RUC and British Army have dropped their so called low profile approach of recent times, arresting over 120 people and detaining them for anything up to seven days, beating and firing plastic bullets at people whenever and wherever possible as a substitute for live ammunition. The British Government through the spectre of Humphrey Atkins and their mass media have been scaring people to death with some of the most incredible headlines and announcements about plans to raze the Short Strand, about the inevitable bloodbath which was to follow the death of Bobby Sands and that families in West Belfast are stockpiling food for the outcome of a long campaign—who can afford to stockpile food in such quantities these days? In an atmosphere of such fear, ignorance and intransigence on the part of the British State, how many women like my friend's neighbour are literally eating the valium these days?

With well over three quarters of a million prescriptions for tranquilisers handed out each year mostly to women who have been diagnosed as anxious, depressed and tense and a further half a million 'hypnotic' prescriptions (barbiturates—sleeping tablets) and this in a population of one and a half million people, you can be sure that the number is quite staggering! Not all are prescribed because of the

troubles of course. Valium and Librium are the cheap and easy modern cure all for anyone who can't cope with appalling housing conditions, unemployment, no social amenities, domestic violence, the cost of staying alive these days and the pressures of urban life: they blot out your problems and although you are reduced to the walking dead you can still carry on with your 'normal everyday life'.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THE WONDER DRUG VALIUM?

It makes you more laid back, divorced from the reality in which all of us are forced to live. By acting directly on the anxiety centres of the brain and on the spinal cord, reactions are dampened down and muscles relax. In relation to other drugs like morphine for example, there is rarely a physical addiction but as physical and psychological roots are not easily separated, it is quite easy to become dependent on it. Some people, especially the old, get drowsy and confused, some suffer from headaches, blurred vision and a dry mouth. These days it is more common for a doctor to prescribe Mogodon (a stronger form of Valium) as a sleeping pill. Again it is less physically addictive than the usual barbiturates or other types of sleeping tablet but can be just as hard to give up.

Valium doesn't cause cancer, but there is evidence to suggest it can promote it by making cancer tumours grow more quickly. Many doctors do prescribe it to patients who have cancer and who are naturally anxious, so they may well be making the disease worse. The researcher who made the studies has been denied funding four times on the grounds that further research was 'not worth doing' and was fired from the Clinical Research Institute of Montreal for talking about his work to the press.

CHILDBIRTH AND AFTER

Tranquilisers are not just prescribed to those of us who can't cope with life without them. They are, for instance, commonly administered during the first stage of labour to take the edge off contractions. The effects on the baby are well known and also quite common. The baby's breathing becomes sluggish and valium can interfere with the baby's ability to cope with cold stress and may cause jaundice. Other tranquilisers in common use include Sparine with Nisental (a narcotic) and Phenergan which may cause the labour to slow down or stop altogether. After the baby is born every mother is doled out a ration each day of painkillers and sleeping tablets.

This practice of handing out tranquilisers continues if a woman suffers from post natal depression. Instead of seeing her as a woman isolated and overwhelmed at home with a demanding new born baby, unsure of what is the best thing to do, lacking emotional support and assistance, they see her as some sort of neurotic woman who doesn't have the right instincts to be a good mother. It becomes the woman's fault if she can't cope.



BORED HOUSEWIFE SYNDROME

This leads us into the whole area of housework, the crushing boredom of it all enclosed in a world which has meaning only for the person in it. If a woman cannot live up to the ideal, that excessively houseproud caricature, then she becomes a failure in the eyes of her family and the State and her inability to carry on and the stress she is under can all too easily lead to tranquilisers. Feelings of lifelessness and exhaustion from the lack of stimulation in the home ensue, and maybe also because women are unconsciously 'on strike' and the only way they can signify that the work is oppressive and too much is by complaining of being tired all the time.

LIFE MAY BEGIN AT FORTY FOR THE FILM STARS BUT FOR MANY WOMEN IT DOESN'T BEGIN AT ALL

The medical profession doesn't feel it has done its job right if it hasn't bombarded every pregnant woman with scientific and technological know how and equipment. It is even acceptable for the young pregnant woman to suffer some 'emotional instability'. Not so for the woman coming to the end of her fertile years..... in a word the medical profession 'ignores' these women. They are fobbed off with Valium and painkillers. And yet this is the time in a woman's life which can be the most traumatic, and certainly there is more likelihood of suffering depression at this time than at any other. Apart from the physical symptoms, the hot flushes which occur mostly at night disturbing sleep, and the reality that one is an 'ageing' woman, menopause often coincides with the time when a woman's youngest children are leaving home. What does society expect a woman to do after her children have left home? Those of us who do not have a 'worthwhile and satisfying' job in the outside world are faced with redundancy. Our assignment to be sex objects and then mothers, is finished. Everything that was expected of us by our families and friends, by the State, mass media and the Church has been done. And the logic is that if you do as you are told you get a reward.

And what a reward...the most soul and mind



destroying of jobs and also the lowest paid, cleaning hospitals, offices, factories, other people's houses—it is no small wonder that some women end up feeling useless and worthless and not allowed by definition to become hostile to their families, and seeing no other outlet for them, turn the resentment inwards and become depressed.

BETA BLOCKERS

These amazing little pills have suddenly become a subject of interest. They have been doled out for the past twenty five years to treat heart and circulation problems but they have an added value to the medical profession—they can alleviate anxiety and are 'less addictive' than tranquilisers like Valium. But how can one crutch be less addictive than another if you just can't get through the day without it? As yet only propranolol, an ICI product, is officially licensed for treating anxiety, but with the enormous profits to be made from tranquilisers, these pills will rapidly appear on the market to treat depression.

These drugs act differently on the body—apparently, whenever we are anxious, afraid and tense the body's defense mechanism pumps more and more blood to the heart and the arms and legs so that if we want to make a quick exit we can. Chemicals like adrenalin, for example, aid this flow of blood. They flood the body, particularly the heart's muscle cells and the blood vessels to stimulate them—hence that thumping heart. From such a graphic description you will be able to guess what propranolol does—it cancels it all out, not totally safely, nor without side effects and anyone suffering from asthma and any other breathing difficulty had better forget about them altogether.

PERSONAL CURE—COLLECTIVE SOLUTION?

It is difficult to know what to say to the woman on Roche 10, spaced out of her head. With people dying round you, the obvious and brutal repression of the State, the blatancy of unemployment and poverty and the peddling of pills by the medical profession, such statements about a future society based on people's needs seem idealistic and distant. And yet we will always need props like Valium et al, like excessive drinking, cigarettes, sleeping tablets, to help us serve our time make profits for multi national companies and to save the medical establishment time and energy because by prescribing them they neither have to talk or listen to their patients.

We can all gain help and solidarity from meeting and talking to other women in consciousness raising groups and self help groups. By realising that we do not have individual problems but that these are common to all, we will be nearer the solution—the control of our own bodies in a society where all people are free.



WE'VE DECIDED HUNGER STRIKE

Gaining Ground is no longer a woman's supplement to Outta Touch!!! (Stoics please note).

The idea of the first supplement was to celebrate International Women's Day and to sound out whether or not we had the support and the resolve to produce a monthly paper. We were tentative about it; having been in various women's groups in the seventies, we knew that we didn't want a paper which would be irregular and consequently out of date very often.

We were a bit taken aback by all the encouragement to make it into a permanent paper in its own right and were glad of the criticism and the unexpected compliments: its good to have that feedback to keep us on our toes! There has not been a feminist paper in the North for over a year now and whatever may be decided in the future, for the present Gaining Ground will try to fill the gap.

But Gaining Ground is firmly rooted in the place where it is written and produced—Belfast. We don't make any apologies for that because we feel the more local papers, newsletters, etc that women produce the better. Recently there has been talk about an all Ireland feminist magazine getting off the ground but we feel that firstly as there has been no Northern Irish one in quite a while and the chances are very remote and we are not so sure that that would be the best thing for the women's movement. Too much work has yet to be done at the basic grassroots level before we go on to greater things.

One possibility that we hope will be in circulation by June is the publication of a Northern Irish feminist newsletter for women only giving details, news and events of issues of interest to women. If you feel you have anything to contribute send it off to Women's Newsletter, Women's Centre, 18 Donegall Street, Belfast or also if you would like to receive it — its £1.00 for one years sub.

Remember too—we want contributions, letters, views, ideas as well—C/o 7 Winetavern Street, Belfast.

VIOLENCE

A Public Meeting is to be held in the near future on Domestic Violence and the new law, the Domestic Proceedings Order for Northern Ireland which came in on December 1st of last year. Most women don't realise the rights that they now have under this order within the courts and that they can now obtain Protection and Exclusion Orders.

There are four refuges in Northern Ireland, for help and solidarity phone Belfast 662385 or 662348, Derry 69279 and 65969, Strabane 882261 and Portrush 823195 and 823182.

RVH Creche

The creche at the Royal Victoria Hospital reported last month in Gaining Ground is to have a new building within six months. In the meantime there is the problem of

During the hunger strike in Germany, which ended with the death of Sigurd Debus on the 16th April, there was a remarkable support from women.

At the beginning of the hunger strike prisoners relatives mostly mothers, occupied the Spiegel building and put out a resolution in support of the hunger strike.

A video was made and was then shown at a women's conference which was held by 'women against imperialism' in Hamburg. Before the video was shown women had already successfully stopped Mrs. Leithauser (Senator for Justice) to make her speech on women in jail (she is responsible for two prisoners being forced). Instead women started talking about the hunger strike. Impressed by the film over 300 women decided to make a spontaneous demonstration to the NDR (Radio station) to demand the broadcasting of the film on television.

UNITY MEETING

The May Women's Unity meeting was held a week later than usual because of the May Day march on the first week of the month. This may explain why the meeting was smaller than usual—but withstanding that the discussion was interesting and wide.

The main theme of the day was on the question of a creche for the meeting and then on creches in general. Some women are interested in setting up a similar organisation to the Dublin based 'Rent a creche' group. This group is made up of about twenty part time workers. The group will provide a creche for any organisation or group—their charge is £2 an hour for each worker needed, travel costs plus £5 for wear and tear on their equipment. For this they will provide all equipment needed—and they will charge reduced or sometimes no money for certain groups.

A group like this would be invaluable in Northern Ireland, as last Saturday all the children who were in the creche (3) were content as were their mothers in the meeting. At the end of the meeting a collection was taken up to pay for the worker and this would be possible at every meeting and at all women's meetings. Any women interested in helping even on the basis of a few hours per week with payment should contact the women's centre.

The meeting also discussed the newsletter which is now hoped to have ready by June and the council elections. A letter has been drafted on behalf of the Unity meeting and will go out to all political parties involved demanding specific action on women's issues.

The next unity meeting is on June 6th at 11.00 in Women's Centre—the theme Nuclear Power.

finding a building to hold the creche in the meantime as their existing building is needed for the handicapped, its original purpose. An appeal has been made for a six month postponement of the closure of the existing building by the 66 parents who use it.

TALKING TO DOMITILA

Domitila de Chungara, a Bolivian from the Aitiplano, is the wife of a miner in Siglo XX. She has been arrested and tortured under each of the dictatorships which the Bolivian people have had to bear during the past ten years and on no less than three occasions she was taken whilst pregnant and miscarried as a result of torture. On 17th July when General Meza seized power in the last coup, Domitila was attending a conference parallel to the UN sponsored conference on women...when news of the coup broke, she burst into the latter conference to denounce the brutality of the Bolivian army and to issue an appeal for solidarity with the Bolivian people. The following interview has been translated from Bicieleta, Latin America, special issue 1980.

Ariane: We know that quite a few women have been arrested since the coup. How would you account for the fact that repression is also directed against women?

Domitila: In Bolivia, women have always played an important role in campaigns for social and economic betterment. For instance, Maria Barzola was killed along with demonstrating workers back in 1942. After that, in a more organised way women have been active in the mines since 1961. On 20 June 1961 a woman's organisation was set up for the first time in the mining towns...it became known as the Housewives Committee. It was formed out of the need to stand up against the repression and injustice then being visited on the labour movement. The fact was that those women's husbands were in prison. In desperation the women met in union rooms and decided to march together to demand the release of their menfolk in the hope that together they would be stronger and more successful. And so it occurred to them to go to La Paz and they mounted the first hunger strike which lasted for nearly nine days and secured the release of their menfolk. The women realised that organisation meant strength and so they decided to remain in touch with one another and pursue their struggle.

In Bolivia as elsewhere we were not used to women getting involved in other than the domestic affairs for which we had been educated. So the women in the group were criticised by other women and even by their men. Their little organisation would not last 24 hours, it was argued. But such was the determination of those comrades and their tireless devotion to their labours that they won and so over the past ten years the Committee has been as much a target for repression as any of the trade unions. Perhaps others too saw that union meant strength and that they posed a threat. And so they also repressed the women's organisations, the Housewives Committees.

Along with the Miners Federation and the underground Labour Central, COB, the women were the spearhead of the struggle and took charge of all the business, because their colleagues of the Miners Federation were not able to walk the streets as they were subject to persecution in 1976, 1977 and 1978.

At the end of 1977 after careful planning with the miners and the COB the women began the hunger strike which, effectively routed the Banzer regime. That strike lasted 21 days.

Having toppled that pseudo-democratic sham, the women and their colleagues were convinced that women were a real force to reckon with, and that the housewives needed to be organised, not just in Siglo XX but also in the countryside, in all the mining towns and in the cities. So they began to organise the peasant women as well and managed to hold a congress of peasant women attended by some 2000 representatives. This conference dealt with issues of every sort: political, social, and economic, everything. So much so that the congress discussed the problem of birth control, food prices, the high cost of living, and housing etc. Finally the federation

of peasant women affiliated to the COB.

We were not unconnected with what was going on in the mines. These were our sons, our men; we were their wives and daughters. There was no distinction between us. We all had our part to play.

Ariane: The involvement of Bolivian women in the struggle has altered their relationship with the men. Would it be true to say that you are no longer considered just household servants.

Domitila: Yes. I think there have been great changes, even though many people may not accept it. But most people do accept it. For instance we housewives have our own place and part to play in the trade unions. Whenever delegates meet, they represent just as much as they do the men. We all take an equal part in discussions. In Siglo XX we no longer face such discrimination in other areas though, discrimination still exists. I have seen such discrimination and have heard people say, 'No way, this is not an assembly of workers'. But we and our comrades must understand and what the women have realised, is that exploitation is not just the lot of the worker and labourer but also that of a woman and her children. And we have seen the truth of that in our encampments and mining districts.

Ariane: So the growth of consciousness among women has been a slow and difficult process?

Domitila: There has been a great awakening among women over the past three years. Most of them have come to appreciate that they are being exploited. They knew that they suffered greatly but what we were told by the traditional church - and religion, by our grandmothers and mothers! ...that this is how it has always been and must be! The Church teaches that here in this life, one must suffer, otherwise this would not be this life but paradise. But there has been an awakening during the past three years. I think we are making huge strides forward. And this is at the root of the coup and the repression which is at this moment striking hard at workers, peasants, and women... because these are the back bone of the resistance, the source of the threat.

Ariane: Do you think the coup represents a threat to the growth of consciousness which has eased the move towards democracy?

Domitila: I don't think the people will give an inch. We have so many coups in Bolivia...but we have always fought back from clandestinity, always pursued the struggle. At least I have not noticed any retreat since I became 'aware'.

Ariane: Is it true that at the start of the hunger strike you did not get much support from the parties?

Domitila: Yes it is. Nobody wanted to support us. The political parties thought it inopportune. Even the people in the human rights league did not believe in us. The only ones who did were the Miner's Federation, and the COB. The heresies only turned up when it was all over...like the human rights people! Even when the strike was at its height they dared to make concessions...in our name! What's going on I asked myself, so they told me and Dr Siles Salinas told me: 'Ah but I must not let myself be compromised by extremists.' But doctor, I answered, 'it just so happens that we are the ones who are being compromised. Because my husband was not in jail and I still one member of my family is in prison but I am still here on strike. Right? Then I am placing them in danger. So thanks, doctor thanks say no more and leave us to get on with our strike.' But the booklet published by the human rights league about the hungerstrike, makes no mention of us. No all it talks about are the priests and the Siles Salinas types.

Ariane: What is your chief concern at the present time?

Domitila: The campaign for the release of the union leaders, because they should not be locked up. Because even the law recognises their right of association and their trade union rights.

Ariane: How were you received at the Copenhagen conference?

Domitila: Badly. The police set about us whenever we tried to enter the official UN congress on women, where government representatives were sitting. The other conference involved non governmental organisations. I was invited to the latter conference. But imperialism intruded even into it. When the coup came I denounced it and we all made for the UN congress to make our voices heard there...and that is when the police attacked us.

Ariane: What have been greatly and pleasantly surprised to discover in the homes of the Bolivian exiles whom we have visited is that every body

joins in the discussions, political or otherwise, from the oldest to the youngest.

Domitila: Look the peasants in Oruro invited me to deliver a talk and organise lectures on trade unionism. I was a bit rash and said 'sure, I'll go along and talk to them about the women's issue. ...I'll pester them so that they will let their women go to the union meetings as well...and organise themselves.' And then what happens? So I go along to the offices, quite big offices, the offices of Radio Oruro which used to belong to the priests, who then made a present of it to the peasants. So I go in and find that I am being introduced to a packed hall consisting of men and women and wawas (children). The there leader gets up and introduces me and says 'Comrade, please excuse us. We invited you hear to lecture the menfolk but we have brought our women along with us too, for we are peasants and we follow in the footsteps of our forefathers and they involved their women in everything. So we want the women to fight at our sides. Except the wawas might bother us a little.' And I said, 'That's all right comrade: it is just as well that you did bring the women, I was all set to make your ears burn for not allowing them to come... instead it is my ears that are burning. And you might as well know that I never bring my children along to the lectures that I attend. You have certainly taught me a lesson. We had a great discussion.'

Ariane: Did the peasant women speak up?

Domitila: Certainly! Indeed they did most of the talking. The menfolk were a bit quiet.

The peasants have clung to the Indian traditions more than the miners and workers. Especially regarding restraints on their leaders. The workers there told us 'No sacred cows here. Nothing sacred here.' So you get some stick if you deserve it. I don't know how many times I have heard them shutting up even comrade Lechin Ched of the COB at meetings. I remember how many a time they reduced us at the Housewives Committee meetings to tears. They took us to task and gave us good dressing down, but it is true that sometimes we took a crazy line. Now I see that...little bit little we have been learning better.

