

IRISH PRISONERS APPEAL

c/o Lambeth IBRG
245A Coldharbour Lane
Brixton, London SW9

8th July, 1986.

Dear Friend,

The aim of this information pack is to let you know the details of our work so far and to thank the numerous groups and individuals who have supported the campaign. The defendants and their relatives would particularly like to send their thanks to you.

We are planning to continue with our work (details enclosed) and we are also writing to ask for your support in our future activities.

This pack includes the following:

1. Summary of events over the last few months.
2. List of organisations that have supported us so far.
3. Copy of letters from Martina Anderson, Ella O'Dwyer and Gerry McDonnell
4. Affiliation form and model resolution.

The campaign also has the following Material for Sale:

1. Copies of the first information pack produced; April, 1986. 30p
2. STOP THE STRIP SEARCHES Badges: 30p. Stickers: 10p a sheet.
Posters: 50p each.
3. Further copies of affiliation forms and model resolutions: free.
4. STRIP SEARCHING IS TORTURE: END IT NOW pamphlet: 10p

The following material will be available in the near future:

1. Analysis of High Court Action against the strip searching of Martina and Ella and press cuttings.
2. Analysis of the trial and analysis of the press coverage.

There are also several events planned:

A demonstration outside the court at the trial of the Irish woman being charged after demonstrating outside the Old Bailey - July 24th at 9.30am at Guild Hall Court, London EC2. (see details in summary)

Two benefits at the Old White Horse, Brixton Rd., London SW9 on 25th July and 1st August - watch the press for details.

The Labour Women's Conference have called a demonstration against Strip Searching to be held on November 18th.

Thank-you again for your support.

Yours sincerely,

IRISH PRISONERS APPEAL.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS FROM 1st JULY 1985 to 23rd JUNE 1986

The trial of Ella O'Dwyer, Martina Anderson, Gerry McDonnell, Peter Sherry and Patrick Magee finally ended this week with savage sentencing reflecting the desperation of the British State's position and its determination to depict these Irish Republican prisoners as terrorists. Conspiracy to cause explosions therefore gets a life sentence which is applauded by the media. They are far stiffer sentences than meted out for non-political acts and yet in the judges words at the beginning of the trial:

"It's most unusual to have any corroborative evidence in cases of this kind"

For Patrick Magee the police and media's need to find the Brighton bomber was enough to ensure several life sentences. Evidence wasn't necessary and he became the devil incarnate according to the Mirror and other papers determined to condemn the Republican movement along with the bombing of the Brighton Hotel.

Attempts by I.P.A. to draw attention to the remand conditions the defendants endured and particularly strip searching, were met with an almost total wall of silence. Similarly, injustices being carried out in the Old Bailey and parallels drawn with the Show Trials common in Belfast were also silenced. The media showed scant interest in our protests and the demonstrations outside the Old Bailey were prevented from taking place by the police who acted in an unprecedented way by simply arresting the entire demonstration each week.

Britain's war in Ireland and the inevitable repression that is part of the war is again distorted by the media with any critical voice totally silenced by arresting and detaining people when necessary.

THE CAMPAIGN SO FAR

REMAND CONDITIONS

Another High Court judge had already argued, earlier, in March at a bail hearing for Ella and Martina that the conditions of detention were not relevant to the presentation of the case. At this hearing the number and random nature of the strip and body-searching, as well as other remand conditions were all presented as part of the case for bail. The strip-searches were slowly and meticulously carried out with the clear aim of attempting to break the defendants.

By the time the trial actually started Ella and Martina together had endured over 500 strip-searches and over 2,500 body searches. Throughout the 11 months on remand Martina and Ella kept an accurate record of the searches - the prison governor does not keep a proper record (a fact admitted in a letter from the Home Office to Stuart Holland M.P. on 24th January 1986) however Ella and Martina's figures are constantly challenged by the Home Office.

During the course of the trial all the defendants were strip-searched at least three times a day on court days, on their Saturday visits, and , a new development - on Sunday as well. So the rate of strip-searches for the trial reached an average of 60 each per month as opposed to an average of 23 each per month for the 11 months on remand.

The numbers of strip searches, body searches, cell changes and cell searches endured by Martina and Ella from their detention on 1st July 1985 to the end of their trial on June 8th, 1986 are as follows:

STRIP SEARCHES: MARTINA: 351 ELLA: 340
BODY SEARCHES: On average 4 times a day each throughout the period.
CELL SEARCHES: On average twice a week during the period.
CELL CHANGES: On average once a week during the period.
CELLS CLEARED: On average twice a week during the period.

A strip-search was even carried out on Martina after a gynaecological examination in the last week of October. Further, they were strip-searched after a visit by Bishop Daly in March and a visit by Clare Short M.P.; an implication that they are security risks. A search of Martina's cell at 6am on the morning of her birthday - 16th April is just another example of the intimidation faced by Ella and Martina. They write in their letter (attached) "The attitude this year, on the part of the authorities, has been simply 'break them'."

WEEKLY PICKETS

The pickets of Brixton prison continued on Saturdays right up to April 24th. Thanks to all the people who attended and helped make them successful - especially the singing round the back which the prisoners heard and enjoyed. A notable aspect of the pickets - apart from the media ignoring them ... was the change in attitude from the 'crims' who the first couple of weeks shouted out sexist and anti-Irish remarks to a section of the picket at the back of the prison. This attitude changed, with several obviously English/ non political prisoners putting up signs at the windows eg. about their lack of rights under section 37A (to do with your rights to see your solicitor) and joining in the shouts and singing.

On Martina Anderson's birthday we heard prisoners join in the singing to celebrate the event and to have a go about the prison wardens and strip-searching.

The other important aspect was the basic sympathy expressed by many of the visitors to the prison to us on the picket and to the relatives visiting Brixton. The IERG held an extra picket on May 24th with supporters coming down from Birmingham and Coventry.

DERRY CITY COUNCIL'S VISIT

On Friday May 2nd, four Derry City Councillors, two Sinn Fein and two SDLP arrived at the prison to visit Martina who is from Derry. They visited her on Friday and Saturday, after which the two Sinn Fein councillors, Dodie McGuinness and Mitchel McCloughlin attended the last

IPA picket outside the prison. Mitchell McCloughlin addressed the picket at the end - thanking people for their support and stressing the importance of this and other protests about Britain's role in Ireland.

PROTESTS MUZZLED OUTSIDE THE OLD BAILEY

The constant strip-searches, body searches and cell-searches and changes and other harassments Irish political prisoners suffer both in Ireland and here was suffered by all the defendants before the trial started on May 6th. We had emphasised the strip-searching of the women because they were strip-searched more than the men and because we were trying to highlight that fact before the High Court Action was taken.

When the trial started we held a demonstration on the first day outside the court in support of all the defendants. We wanted to highlight the remand conditions - we wore placards giving facts about these conditions. We also drew attention to the 'show trial' nature of the proceedings and gave out leaflets criticising the hysterical bias of the press when the defendants were arrested. This peaceful demonstration, held well back on a large pavement, not obstructing anyone, was broken up in 20 minutes by the City of London Police.

IPA called a demonstration at the beginning of each week of the trial and the entire demonstration was arrested every week except one of the six weeks.

One person has been charged with 'Obstructing the Highway' and 'Obstructing a Police Officer in the Course of his Duty'. 25 other people, including Linda Bellos (leader of Lambeth Council) and Jeremy Corbyn M.P. were arrested and have to report to Snow Hill Police Station after the 'test case' of the one person charged (she appears in court on July 24th). It would seem that the police are attempting to use an old statute to get convictions on the more serious charge of 'Obstructing a Police Officer'.

MASS TRIALS ARE SHOW TRIALS

Apart from the conditions on remand, there were numerous things happening inside the court that warranted these attempted demonstrations. In the first two days the judge - Justice Boreham - refused to grant severance to any of the defendants from Patrick Magee. That is, the four accused of the Seaside Bomb Conspiracy were asking for the right to have a separate trial. Only Magee was charged with Brighton and yet the media consistently throughout the trial linked all the defendants with the Brighton bomb, with the jury and the press seeing all the defendants in the dock together day after day, even when the proceedings did not concern them.

We argued that the racist and sexist coverage during the trial together with:

1. The sensational publicity around their arrests the year before -
2. The intimidating security and manner which the defendants were brought to court in a large police convoy accompanied by several police marksmen -

3. The way sympathy was built up for the victims - created an atmosphere which was so hysterical and prejudicial that defendants had no chance of a fair trial.

Other points mainly ignored by the media were the prosecutions lack of evidence against Magee for Brighton, various weak and contradictory statements made by the arresting police officers, the way the judge continuously summed up for the prosecution, the strong defence made by Martina and Ella (the only two defendants to take the stand) and the politically astute and convincing summings-up by each of the five defence barristors on the last few days.

Another point which the judge ensured the press could not write about, by making it subjudice, was the report that members of the jury were reputedly intimidated twice during the trial. The threats were supposed to have come from the IRA to say people would be killed if they found the defendants guilty. These threats plus the numerous reports of hypothetical bomb threats during the last few days of the trial smack strongly of the British security forces/police "dirty tricks department", used to such good effect in the North.

Also, not many people know that the jury in the Thomas Quigley case last year, received a similar threat, after five days of not being able to reach a decision. They then came back after two hours with a guilty verdict.

Martina Anderson's Sister Arrested.

Isobel Anderson was arrested along with seven others in Derry just before the end of the trial. She was arrested on the word of a supergrass who had made a statement in November 1985. She was just about to leave Derry with her Mother so they could be in court for the final few days of the trial, when the Authorities chose to arrest her.

PRESS SILENCE

The campaign tried to make its voice heard by sending out numerous press releases and a weekly bulletin. But these and even the weekly arrests of the demonstration were largely ignored by the press, with small mentions here and there.

Most of the journalists who had any interest in the strip searching were busy snooping around for personal details and photos of the defendants in preparation for their 'big story' at the end of the trial. It was only when Linda Bellos, leader of Lambeth Council, was arrested in the week before the last week of the trial that strip searching got a mention in a few dailies.

As we said on the demonstrations and in all our publicity - what chance was there of a fair trial? Moreover, we say now that none of the defendants would have been appearing in the dock at the Old Bailey this month if the British were not in Ireland.

SENTENCES

In case you missed the headlines Ella and Martina got life sentences (this could mean up to 15 years), as did Gerry and Peter. Pat Magee got life for conspiracy charges with 35 years minimum recommended for the murder charges relating to Brighton. Two other defendants - Craig and McShane who co-operated with the police and also pleaded guilty, were in court earlier on the day of the sentencing (Monday June 23rd). McShane got 8 years and the sentencing of Craig was deferred for two weeks pending a psychiatrists report. Boyle, another defendant who was granted severance at the beginning of the case last year, appeared in court the previous week and was found not guilty.

PRISON ADDRESSES

If you want to write to the prisoners:-

Ella O'Dwyer and Martina Anderson are still being held at Brixton Prison:

Ella O'Dwyer D25135; Martina Anderson D25134

HM Prison, P.O. Box 369, Jebb Avenue, London SW2 5XF.

They may be moved to Durham but there is no word of this yet. Gerry McDonnell B75882 and Peter Sherry B75880 are both in HM Prison Parkhurst, Isle of Wight, HAMPS.

Pat Magee B75881 is in HM Prison Leicester, Wellford Rd., Leicester LE27HA.

RESULT OF THE HIGH ACTION AND NEXT STAGE

We are going to continue campaigning against strip-searching. As you probably know there was an action in the High Court on May 1st by Ella and Martina who were seeking a temporary court order banning the Governor of Brixton prison from authorising strip-searches until their complaints received a full hearing.

Mr Justice Hodgson refused to grant this injunction, deciding that actions of a prison governor were not open to challenge by judicial review - saying he was bound by a previous court of appeal ruling on a similar attempt by another prisoner.

The barrister for the two women Mr Alec Carlisle QC argued that the Home Secretary Mr Douglas Hurd was acting unlawfully in failing to act upon complaints made on behalf of the women. Their rights had been infringed as a result of the strip-searches, he claimed, and quoted at length from a report by an independent consultant psychiatrist Dr Derek Russel Davies. The latter said in his report that the two women -

'...have been suffering a serious degree of distress, with amongst other things a significant impairment of concentration, and that the conditions in the prison, including the strip and body-searches, have made a significant contribution to the distress.'

If, as the High Court judge says, the prison rules are secret and cannot be challenged; then prison governors will be allowed to continue

to harrass remand prisoners - all of whom under British 'law' are supposed to be "innocent until proven guilty".

There will be an appeal in the British Courts against this decision - it will come up later this year and then the solicitors will take the case to the European court probably in late 1987.

Richard Balfe M.R.P. has tabled a 'motion for resolution' on strip-searching to the European Parliament. It notes the practice of strip-searching of women prisoners in British Prisons and in particular of women in Armagh in 1985 and in Brixton from July 1985. It calls on the relevant committee to 'prepare a report on the practice and efficacy of strip-searching.'

We are also planning to write an analysis of the press coverage of the trial and also details of how the trial was conducted - please contact us if you would like a copy of this.

The IPA has also from the beginning supported the defendants and relatives by taking in food parcels to Brixton and making sure its possible for relatives to visit and then to attend the trial. We want to continue to do some of this support work now they have been sentenced.

The IPA campaigned widely against the injustices and torture faced by those held in Brixton. There has been a lot of support not least from those organisations already campaigning against strip-searching in Ireland in England and from existing groups supporting Irish Prisoners of War in this country. But the campaign needs to be taken further. British trade unions and other organisations need to get more involved and campaign against this and other forms of repression being carried out in Ireland. We urge all supporters to take motions of support to their unions/organisations and to get as many affiliations as possible.

MONEY STILL NEEDED

First there are the legal costs of the court actions to stop strip searching. Even if the solicitor gets limited legal aid for each hearing (three in all), there will still be several thousand pounds of legal costs incurred at every stage - to cover the period from now until the end of 1987.

Then there are the welfare costs so that we can continue with the support work we have been doing. Finally there is the running of our office and putting out publicity. The IPA and other groups supporting us will be continuing to organise fund raising events - we hope with some big names - so watch out for announcements about this.

Thanks again for the money sent - but please continue to send anything you can.

LIST OF SUPPORTERS

Irish Groups

West London Wolfe Tone Society; An Cumann Cabhrach - Prisoners Welfare Gp.; Irish in Britain Representation Group; Haringey and Lambeth; West London Republicans Support Group

Withdrawal Organisations

Troops Out Movement; Irish Solidarity Movement; Irish Freedom Movement; Irish Aspects Group - Goldsmiths College

Women's Groups

Stop the Strip-Searching Campaign - London; Women Against Strip-Searching - Dublin; London Irish Women's Centre; East London Irish Women; Irish Women in Islington; Women In Troops Out; Peckham Black Women's Group; Women's Media Resources Project; Collettivo Donna, Forlì, Italy; Coventry Women and Ireland Group; Barnsley Miners Women's Group; Women's Studies in Education - Goldsmiths College; Preston Women and Ireland Group; Oxford Women and Ireland; Merseyside Women and Ireland; Lesbians and Policing Group.

Trade Unions

ACTSS - Camden; City and West End; 1/785. NALGO - Lambeth; GLC.
NUM - Hatfield; Stanthorpe, Doncaster. NATFHE - Barking. NUT - Lambeth.
ASTMS. ACTU - TV Branch. CORSE - Hillingdon. T&GWU - S. Wirral.
SCPS - DES London Branch Cttee.
Southwark Trades Council. Haringey Trades Council. Tower Hamlets Trades Council. Lambeth Trades Council. Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council.
Irish Prisoners Association passed a motion condemning strip searching.

London Borough Councils

Linda Bellos - leader of Lambeth Council attended pickets outside the prison as well as one of the demonstrations outside the Old Bailey where she was arrested.
Southwark Women's Committee; Lambeth Women's Committee; Ken Livingstone and Valerie Wise - GLC; Haringey Women's Committee.

Labour Party

Streatham CLP; Tottenham CLP; Basingstoke CLP; Dulwich CLP; Hendon South - Women's Section; Streatham - Women's Section; Labour Women and Ireland; Labour Committee on Ireland.

Student Unions

London School of Economics; Manchester Polytechnic; Plymouth Polytechnic; North East London Polytechnic; Middlesex Polytechnic.

M.P.'s

114 M.P.'s signed the Early Day Motion condemning strip-searching in Brixton. Clare Short visited Brixton. Jeremy Corbyn attended the picket outside the Old Bailey and was arrested. The following also wrote to the Home Office or asked questions in the House of Commons:

Harriet Harman; Kevin McNamara; Terry Fields; Tony Benn; Clive Soley; Clare Short; Joan Maynard; Martin Flannery; Jeremy Corbyn; Jo Richardson; Peter Archer; Denis Canavan.

Other Groups

Kilburn W.R.P.; Phoenix Aid; Format; Big Flame

Civil Liberties

Radical Alternatives to Prison; Brixton Community Law Centre; Campaign for Homosexual Equality

Churches

Scottish Justice and Peace Group; Fr Des Wilson; Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas; Cardinal Thomas O'Faolach; Mgr Bruce Kent; Edward Daly - Bishop of Derry; Cahal B. Daly - Bishop of Down; Hargrave Hall Ecumenical Centre; Bishop John Jubes; Auxiliary in Southwark; Fr Gerry McFlynn, Pax Christi; Fr Oliver McTernan, St Francis, W11.

There are many individuals who have contributed and workplaces who have held collections - too numerous to mention here - we'd like to thank you all.