



IBRG

LAMBETH

IRISH IN BRITAIN REPRESENTATION GROUP

BRITAIN'S ROLE IN THE STRIPSEARCHING OF WOMEN

In 1978, following worldwide debate and condemnation, Britain was found guilty by the European Court of Human Rights of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of Irish prisoners in North Eastern Ireland - a charge slightly less than that of torture.

Since November 1982, however, the British government has again been the subject of controversy and condemnation due to a decision to introduce a procedure of stripsearching female prisoners in Armagh Gaol 'in the interests of security and the safe custody of inmates'. This decision followed the smuggling of a set of doorkeys into the Gaol by two prisoners.

Methods used in the stripsearching have included physical contact instead of 'brief visual examination'; the presence of up to 12 prison officers (including male wardens); the use of a small screen which just covers part of the body; physical assault during forcible stripsearching where a woman refuses to submit - and this has included the removal of underwear and sanitary protection when a woman is menstruating. Age is no protection and nor is pregnancy.

During the first four months following introduction ninety seven prisoners were stripsearched on a total of 772 occasions (an average of 8 searches per prisoner). In March 1983 two women were stripsearched 21 times and two were stripsearched 18 times. In April two women were stripsearched 17 times; in June one woman was stripsearched 27 times and one stripsearched 28 times. Often women have been forced to strip on their way to brief half-hour court appearances where they are surrounded throughout by RUC officers. They are then forced to strip once again on their return. The frequency of the stripsearches is not disputed and the figures have been made available as a result of Parliamentary questions.

The arguments put forward by the Northern Ireland Office to justify the use of stripsearching do not stand up to unbiased questioning. There is no answer as to why such methods are necessary now - following ONE incident - and yet were not necessary during the previous 13 years of conflict. Nor is it clear why 'security' demands such frequent searches, or indeed why stripsearching is necessary at all when a more cursory rub-down search accompanied by the use of a metal-detector would suffice.

Hopefully the recently announced Commission of Enquiry by the National Council for Civil Liberties will increase the pressure on the authorities to cease these acts of humiliation - particularly as recent information suggests that the Governor of Armagh Gaol is considering the introduction of internal body searches in the prison.

Whatever the rights and wrongs concerning the imprisonment of these women, there is a level beyond which a society must not go - or else it loses its right to be called 'civilised'. The sentence of degradation is one of these unacceptable levels.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD ON THIS ISSUE BY SIGNING THE ANTI-STRIPSEARCH PETITION.



IBRG.

LAMBETH

IRISH IN BRITAIN REPRESENTATION GROUP

STOP THE STRIP SEARCH CAMPAIGN

We, the undersigned, demand that the degrading and humiliating sexual harassment of women in Armagh Prison by STRIP SEARCHING be stopped immediately.

NAME

ADDRESS

ORGANISATION



IBRG

LAMBETH

IRISH IN BRITAIN REPRESENTATION GROUP

245 a Coldharbour Lane SW9 8RR

274-7700
622 7498

STRIP SEARCHING.

It's cold here - not a lack of heat
but a lack of,
Love - of Kindness,
An eerie atmosphere,
intimidating, menacing,
Cold.

I've heard about it often enough,
In newspapers, on TV, Radio,
Funny how you don't really relate
to it then,
Abstract.

How should I act? - React?
New experience - unprepared,
How would anyone know how to
approach it?

Nervous.

It's not begun, commands are
uttered,.

Oh Lord! Must it be me?

But no - no! I don't mean others
should be chosen.

Alone.

Should I resist? Refuse to comply
with the degradation of myself?

Resistance means force,
brutality,

Violence.

'Men of Violence' - the Media
and others say, Why not
'Women of Violence'?

God! - thoughts of sexist
terminology at such times,
Escapism.

Maybe they won't want all my
clothes! - Yes. Yes - a few
may suffice!
Sure they know....., Can see.....,
Even....., Maybe....! Fear.
I can't...., I won't...., Look I....!
Oh help someone!
Please...., I need someone...., Need
help...., Someone...., please!
Can't move, my limbs won't
move, won't obey. My brain's
severed from my body, arms,
legs, hands, feet. I've left them,
Apart.
On the floor, thrown there,
roughly, quickly, arms pinned
down. Around me gathered they
close in, laughing, jeering.
What was it they said? Comply
and you won't be hurt, Just your
body we want - look at - to
search.
Oh God! - end it now - cease -
Stop it - I can't think - Breathe,
It's cold - It's dark, Pants
removed, I'm Naked!
I've left my body - shut out my
mind - let them do as they will.
Legs yanked apart, handled,
Fondled, groped.
Must have happened ages ago -
Hours must have passed in the
space of minutes,
Assaulted, Degraded, Abused - I
sit in, Tears.
It's cold here - not a lack of heat
but a lack of Love - of Kindness.

"In an interview given this morning Mr Nicholas
Scott said that strip searching of the women
prisoners in Armagh Jail would continue. Mr
Scott said that ..'contrary to the claims of the
prisoners and a few misguided individuals in the
public, strip searching is not a degrading or
humiliating experience, and it is in fact carried
out in the interests of the prisoners'
....."

Lorcan MacEoin
H2 Block
Long Kesh.



IBRG

LAMBETH

IRISH IN BRITAIN REPRESENTATION GROUP

245a Coldharbour Lane SW9 8RR

274-7700
622 7498

BRITAIN'S ROLE IN THE STRIPSEARCHING OF WOMEN

In 1978, following worldwide debate and condemnation, Britain was found guilty by the European Court of Human Rights of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment of Irish prisoners in North Eastern Ireland - a charge slightly less than that of torture.

Since November 1982, however, the British government has again been the subject of a controversy and condemnation due to a decision to introduce a procedure of stripsearching female prisoners in Armagh Gaol 'in the interests of security and the safe custody of inmates'. This decision followed the smuggling of a set of doorkeys into the Gaol by two prisoners.

Methods used in the stripsearching have included physical contact instead of 'brief visual examination'; the presence of up to 12 prison officers (including male wardens); the use of a small screen which just covers part of the body; physical assault during forcible stripsearching where a woman refuses to submit - and this has included the removal of underwear and sanitary protection when a woman is menstruating. Age is no protection and nor is pregnancy.

During the first four months following introduction ninety-seven prisoners were stripsearched on a total of 772 occasions (an average of 8 searches per prisoner). In March 1983 two women were stripsearched 18 times and two were stripsearched 21 times. In April two were stripsearched 17 times; in June one woman was stripsearched 27 times and another 28 times. Often women have been forced to strip on their way to brief half-hour court appearances where they are surrounded throughout by R.U.C. officers. They are then forced to strip once again on their return. The frequency of the stripsearches is not disputed and the figures have been made available as a result of Parliamentary questions.

The arguments put forward by the Northern Ireland Office to justify the use of stripsearching do not stand up to unbiased questioning. There is no answer as to why such methods are necessary now - following ONE incident - and yet were not necessary during the previous 13 years of conflict. Nor is it clear why 'security' demands such frequent searches or indeed why stripsearching is necessary at all when a more cursory rub down search accompanied by the use of a metal-detector would suffice.

Hopefully the recently announced Commission of Enquiry by the National Council for Civil Liberties will increase the pressure on the authorities to cease these acts of humiliation - particularly as recent information suggests that the Governor of Armagh Gaol is considering the introduction of internal body searches in the prison.

Whatever the rights and wrongs concerning the imprisonment of these women, there is a level beyond which a society must not go - or else it loses its right to be called 'civilised'. The sentence of degradation is one of these unacceptable levels.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD ON THIS ISSUE BY SIGNING THE ANTI-STRIPSEARCH PETITION