

The Struggle for Political Status by the H Block & Armagh Prisoners is a Just and Heroic Struggle by Revolutionary Irish Patriots

SUPPORT THE PRISONERS' FIVE DEMANDS!

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'H'BLOCK AND ARMAGH PRISONERS IS A JUST
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The nationalist prisoners who have been incarcerated in the 'H' Blocks and in Armagh prison have been put there because of their part in the struggle to reunite Ireland and to throw out the British army of occupation.

Ireland was illegally divided at the beginning of this century by the British ruling classes with the assistance of the most backward sections of the Irish capitalist class in the north and the south of the country. The purpose of this division was the same as the purpose of the several hundreds of years of occupation and slaughter in Ireland by the English and British ruling classes -- namely to exploit and oppress the Irish working people to the maximum, including stealing their land and plundering their natural resources.

The fight to reunite the nation and to throw out of Ireland once and for all the butchers and mercenaries that have been responsible for the death and enforced emigration of many millions of Irish men, women and children, is a noble and heroic fight. The fight is against a tyranny that has exploited and oppressed all working people of all origins and religions. The liberation and reunification of Ireland, under the leadership of the working class, will put this country on a path of real development and prosperity and will help end the rule, not only of the foreign exploiters, but also of the internal exploit-

ers, all of whom use "religion" as a cloak to cover their selfish activities.

THE FIVE DEMANDS EMBODY JUST REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THE DIPLOCK CRIMINALISATION POLICY.

After over four years waging a struggle for the restoration of political status -- or Special Category Status, as the British government call it -- first of all through the blanket protest, escalating to the no-wash protest -- the patriotic prisoners once again took up the tactic of the hunger strike.

So far 6 heroic patriots have died in this hunger strike campaign -- Bobby Sands, elected M.P. for Fermanagh /South Tyrone during his hunger strike ; Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreech; Patsy O'Hara, Joe McDonnell and Martin Hurson. As each has died another prisoner has replaced him and the prisoners are determined they will continue the hunger strike with 8 prisoners on hunger strike at the one time until the British government concede their five demands.

The five demands of the patriotic prisoners are :-

1. The right to wear their own clothes, instead of prison uniform.
2. The right to use their time on vocational, craft or cultural education and activity, instead of prison work.
3. The right to free association with fellow political prisoners.
4. The right to one letter, one parcel and one visit per week.
5. Restoration of remission of sentence lost through their protest.

The origin of the 'H'Block /Armagh struggle for the five demands clearly show the justice of

the prisoners' case. After the mass upsurge in the north, demanding civil rights, in 1968/69, the British government launched a campaign, along with the Unionist government of Stormont, to suppress the civil rights movement with armed force and pogroms. The British government tried many tactics : internment without trial; then imprisonment under the Emergency Powers Act , where they were forced by a mass hunger strike in Crumlin Road Jail in 1972 to concede "Special Category Status" to prisoners sentenced under this legislation. This amounted to an admission by British imperialism that these patriots were, indeed, political prisoners or prisoners of war.

In the course of many further political and military manoeuvres to try and suppress the democratic and patriotic movement -- the abolition of Stormont and the attempt to bring in one element of the civil rights movement, the SDLP , to the colonial ruling circle through "power sharing" so as to split the progressive movement -- the British government instituted the Diplock Commission to devise a policy to "criminalise" the revolutionary democratic and patriotic mass movement

According to the imposition of the Diplock Report, on March 1st 1976, "Special Category Status" was abolished - henceforth all prisoners were simply treated as criminals, with only those whose "offences" dated before March 1st being treated as Special Category. So although patriots were imprisoned for the very same "crimes" - resistance to the brutal suppression of the Irish people and their rights -- from March 1976 they were denied the same treatment which had been established since 1972. That this change was simply an instrument of colonial policy of national subjugation was made absol-

utely clear by the treatment of "special category prisoners" who attempted to escape, e.g. Pat McGeown, the 14th on the hunger-strike. These prisoners often sentenced to 20 years to "special category status", on attempting to escape simply had their special category removed, with the instant transformation of them from political prisoners into criminals!

Even a brief examination of the legislation under which the patriotic prisoners are "tried" exposes the Diplock policy of "criminalising" the democratic, anti-colonial movement. Under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, the British imperialists, following the pattern of the "Detention of Terrorists Order" of 1972, defines terrorism as "the use of violence for political ends". It is under such "scheduled offences" that these prisoners are arrested and tried - if that is a term which can justly be applied to the conveyor-belt system of torture at Caslereaigh and other police barracks, forced "confessions" trial by juryless tribunal and conviction solely on the basis of unsubstantiated confessions, flimsy evidence -- and imprisoned in Long Kesh concentration camp.

THE HUNGER STRIKE HAS WON SIGNIFICANT VICTORIES FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE AND EXPOSED FURTHER THE BRITISH RULING CLASS.

The whole world is learning, through the hunger strike, what really goes on in Northern Ireland. The refusal to grant political status despite the existence of what amounts to internment is showing what reactionaries and enemies of democracy the British ruling class is. The tremendous self-sacrifice on the part of the

hunger strikers is showing the world as well, how just the basic cause of the Irish people is and how determined they are to achieve this justice, despite the many difficulties placed in their path.

Although the British government (all the major capitalist parties support the Thatcher policy) is refusing to grant the demands of the prisoners it is clear that the real victors in this struggle are the Irish people. The British government cares nothing for the Irish people and for their demands to be reunited. It cares even less for these patriots who are in prison for fighting for freedom. But each day that the hunger strike goes on, and each time a prisoner dies, another nail is put in the coffin of British rule in Ireland. The Irish people are not going to forget that these 6 patriots were allowed to die despite the overwhelming justice of their demand. The growing international support for the Irish people is starting to create major difficulties for the British ruling class in its attempts to present itself as a democratic country. More and more countries, especially those smaller countries who have known national oppression are thinking twice about trading and having cultural ties with such reactionaries and enemies of democracy and nations as the British ruling class.

In Ireland itself the heroism of the hunger strikers is inspiring more and more to take up revolutionary political activity. The results of the elections in the south show that this sentiment is growing also in this part of the country. The growing strength and determination of the Irish people to seek justice and to punish the British government, its military forces and the local traitors that

defend it is showing itself in the growth of the revolutionary political organisations. By refusing to grant political status the British government has created for itself a lot of trouble in Ireland. Out of the present movement will surely in the near future come a final solution to the problems of British annexation and suppression of part of Ireland.

Whatever the outcome of the hunger strike, it will not be the Irish people who are dishonoured. It has been the British government that has been exposed as completely opposed to democratic rights. The British government cares nothing for the Irish people and for the right of the Irish nation. It cares even less for the lives of young revolutionaries such as those that are in the 'H'Block and on hunger strike. If the British government concedes it will be because it decides that overall it is in the interests of continuing the maximum exploitation of the Irish people, to back down, rather than give rise to a movement that brings about a hasty end to British rule. The death of dedicated revolutionaries such as those engaging in the hunger strike is a serious thing for the Irish people that can only be continued if the results justify it. There is no doubt that one way or another the struggle against British rule will be greatly intensified as a result of the sacrifices that have been made.

WHO ARE THE ALLIES OF THE IRISH PEOPLE IN THE FIGHT FOR POLITICAL STATUS.

Today in Ireland there are elements who claim to be "republicans", who oppose the democratic fight for political status and in some cases actually say that these nationalist fighters

are the cause of the present problems for the Irish people ! These elements come into two categories, and in both cases they must be denounced and exposed as traitors to the Irish people, who would rather become wealthy or who are such careerists and lackeys, that they would oppose the Irish people and look to the British murderers for a "solution to the Irish question".

The first category is the straight big capitalists, namely the leaders of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the SDLP. There are a number of these toadies in the Alliance Party. These Parties are Parties of the rich and Parties of profit. Profit comes first, and principle counts for nothing at all with these people. Their leaders can never be reliable allies of the people. They will only "support" the Irish national struggle when this "support" coincides with profit. They may support in some way if the situation develops and it becomes necessary for them to do so to maintain any credibility and possibility of continuing to dominate the politics of the country and use this to their advantage. The possibilities of this should be looked for and utilised, but the real objective of those who want to see an end to foreign occupation of Ireland and exploitation of its people has to be the destruction of the influence of these Parties and the elimination of the wealth of the class that they represent.

The second category is those parties that also claim to be "left" and representative of the working class. This includes the Republican Clubs or Sinn Fein the Workers Party. This organisation represents the interests of the rich and is an enemy of the Irish working class and the entire Irish people. This organisation is one of those that in practice considers revolutionary nationalists to be a bigger enemy than the British

government. In fact this organisation goes as far as asking the British government, the government of murder, torture, of Goebbels-type cynical and lying propoganda, to grant a "Bill of Rights" in order to somehow or other rid the working people of their oppression.

This British government actually says that the fight for national liberation is a question of a gang of "criminals". It then carries out assassinations when it can get away with it; tortures, harasses, jails when it can for long periods, and **ALLOWS TO DIE ON HUNGER STRIKE** anyone who challenges its authority and its right to exploit the Irish people. Yet the "Workers Party" would look to this government for reforms.

The "Workers Party" associates the interests of the working class in their fight for socialism with opposition to the national struggle. The openly capitalist parties associate the big capitalist class with opposition to the national struggle, something which is in fact true to life. The "Workers" Party and other "socialists against nationalism" are opposed to the interests of the Irish people and are playing a crucial role in defending the British government and preventing the resolution of the hunger strike. The struggle to win political status and to strengthen the movement for national unity and independence should also be a struggle to destroy the influence of these organisations of traitors and opportunists.

The struggle for political status is winning the support, and can rely on the support, of the ordinary working and exploited people of Ireland. It is in their interests to support any struggle for democracy, and increasingly the working people are seeing the importance

of the 'H' Block /Armagh struggle as a part of the struggle to throw out British rule, the main prop of all reaction in Ireland, and to reunite the country and end particular forms of division and strife that stem from partition.

The parties of big capital, and the sham so-called "socialists" who are against the patriotic struggle do not have the interests of the ordinary people at heart and cannot be reliable allies.

THE QUESTION OF TACTICS IS A QUESTION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE.

The British government, along with the openly capitalist parties and of course the "Workers Party", point a finger at some of the tactics used by the nationalists and say that this gives Britain the right and even obligation to continue to occupy part of the country. The Irish people have every right to use whatever tactic they like in the fight against the national enemy and to reunite the country. The fight is against a force that has destroyed millions of Irish people and has prevented the development of a united, prosperous and settled nation. The problems with the tactics of some of the organisations and individuals cannot be used to oppose the struggle for national unity. In fact the problem of tactics is a problem for the Irish people alone and is a problem of how best to unite the greatest force to actually bring about a complete victory. No tactic can be said to make an organisation or individual as "bad" as or "worse" than the British ruling class itself.

There are major problems of tactics in the Irish revolution. But no worker should accept the propaganda of the British government and its allies in Ireland and confuse the basic question of who is right and who is wrong. The prisoners in 'H' Blocks and Armagh Jail are there because they support and are fighting for national unity and independence. They are not there because they sat on the sidelines or opposed this just fight. Every worker must support these prisoners in their fight against British occupation and must support their fight for political status. The Irish people, united as a solid force against our enemies, can sort out how to actually achieve the noble aim of national unity and complete independence and can sort out the question of tactics and precise aims. The question of supporting the prisoners and their struggle is a question of supporting the overall aims against a mass murderer and its allies, it is not a question of supporting a particular religion or the particular kind of state which already exists in the south, the southern capitalist Parties or any specific organisation and its tactics at this stage.

THE LONG TERM SOLUTION IS A UNITED SOCIALIST
AND SECULAR IRELAND.

The long term aims of the Irish working class are to establish a united, socialist and secular Ireland. The struggle to throw out all foreign rule, including and especially the struggle to throw out British military occupation of part of the country is a just and necessary struggle. It is because of their work of trying to bring this about the 'H' Block/Armagh struggle has been forced on Irish patriots in Northern Ireland.

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