

out of their cells to wash. The prisoners made a second request to end the blanket and no-wash protest. But there was no movement.

At 2.30 p.m., six-and-a-half hours after the request for washing was made, the men were given the required facilities, but they were told by the governor that they would not be getting their own clothes until there was "strict conformity."

SURRENDER

By "strict conformity" the prison regime mean that the prisoners must unconditionally surrender their position. Events turned a complete circle back to 1976 with the prison administration demanding from republican prisoners that they accept criminal status.

The situation inside the prison rapidly deteriorated. The ninety-six men in clean cells in H5 and H3, frustrated and angry at the double-dealing, destroyed their cell furniture on Tuesday 27th January.

In H5 prison warders came in to the wing at 10 p.m. and severely assaulted a number of prisoners. Sean McPeake, from Bellaghy in South Derry, has an artificial leg. Warders attempted to make him run, but he refused and sat down in protest. He was kicked and beaten and dragged to an empty cell which was recently vacated and was covered in excrement and urine. The other prisoners in H5 were moved to cells in a similar condition where they were left during the night without any mattresses, blankets or drinking water, nor were they allowed to go to the toilet. The heating had been turned off and the prisoners were given only a small hand towel which provided no warmth.

HUNGER-STRIKE

The decision by the prisoners to go on another hunger-strike was not taken lightly. They know that the consequences they face are grave. They explored every avenue before giving in to exasperation and anger. The British government's officials in charge of prison policy in the six counties cynically responded to every move the prisoners made, thereby encouraging the present outcome.

SUPPORT

It is of the utmost importance that the tens of thousands of people who rallied to the prisoners during the last hunger-strike do so again. During the last hunger-strike the combined power of the mass movement on the streets of cities and villages throughout Ireland, and the determination of the hunger-strikers forced the British government to move from a position of intransigence to one of flexibility.

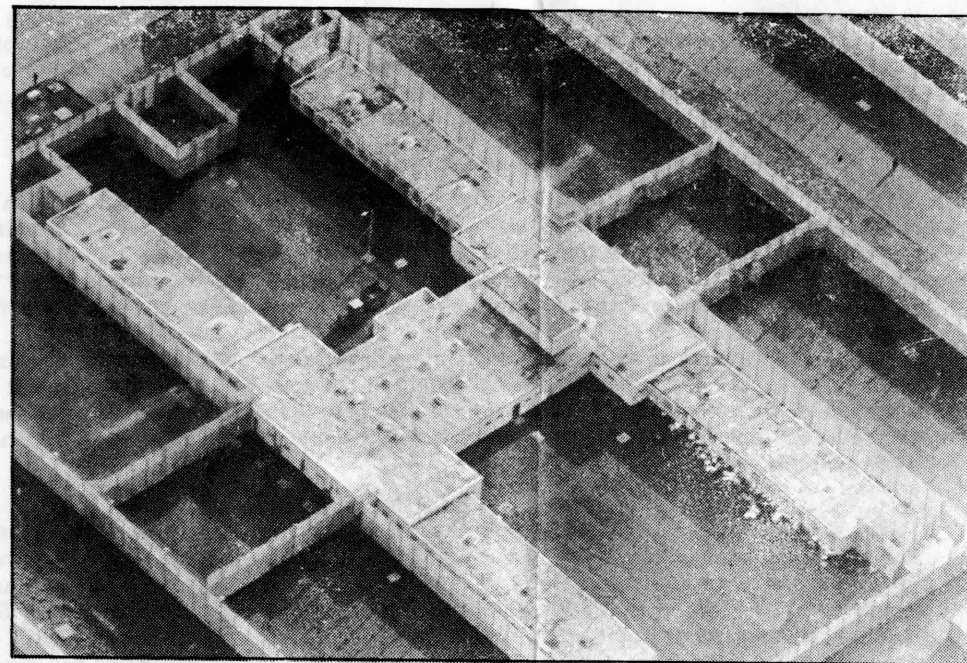
But the Brits were only moving to gain time. They wanted to defuse the mass movement on the streets and end the widespread international criticism they were receiving. Their behaviour since then has been designed to demoralise the prisoners and confuse their supporters on the outside. But the prisoners' hunger-strike statement clears up the confusion. The position now is simple: on one side of the fence stand the prisoners and on the other stand the British.

Who are you going to support? Who merits your support? The answer to both questions is obvious — the prisoners. If you are a member of an Action Group, activate it. If you are not form one, or join one. If you are a trade unionist, a member of a cultural body or a tenants association press your grouping to support the prisoners.

In their statement the prisoners said: "We call upon those who supported us during our last hunger-strike to again rally to our cause and we call upon the fence sitters to now see the intransigence of the British and the justness of our cause."

Help us therefore to wage a vigorous campaign, at home and abroad, and show the world that Irish men and women will never tolerate English treachery again. We appeal to the Irish people for morale, financial and active support in the new phase of this struggle.

National H-Block/Armagh Committee, 30 Mountjoy Square, Dublin. 747200.



H-Block/Armagh settlement British renegade

On Thursday 5th February seven weeks after the ending of a fifty-three day hunger-strike in the H-Blocks at Long Kesh, and a nineteen day hunger-strike by women prisoners at Armagh prison, a joint statement from both sets of prisoners was issued announcing another hunger-strike to begin on March 1st. The statement threatened that the prisoners would strike "to death if necessary" to achieve recognition as political prisoners and a status in accord with that recognition.

The prisoners' statement ended weeks of speculation that a settlement to the four-and-a-half-year-long protest was possible and confirmed for the prisoners and their supporters that the British reneged on the hunger-strike settlements of December 18th last.

The date chosen for the start of the second hunger-strike has important political significance. Five years ago, from March 1st 1976, a date arbitrarily selected, the British government withheld special category status from those prisoners sentenced for involvement in the military struggle in the six counties. This was the beginning of a policy of criminalisation of the prisoners and their political motives.

On October 27th 1980, after suffering four years and six months of horrifying brutality and degradation seven republican prisoners went on hunger-strike. Thirty-five days later they were joined by three women republicans at Armagh prison. Five days before

the hunger-strike ended thirty more prisoners at the H-Blocks joined the hunger-strike.

The hunger-striking prisoners' demand was for political status, which was broken down into five subsidiary demands: the right not to wear prison uniform; the right not to carry out penal work; the right to free association; the right to educational facilities and one visit, a letter in and out, and a parcel per week; and full remission.

BRIT OVERTURES

On December 18th, fifty-three days into the hunger-strike, with Sean McKenna on his death bed, the British government made overtures to the hunger-striking prisoners. They submitted to them two documents, one the text of a speech Humphrey Atkins was due to make in the British House of Commons, that day, but postponed until, to quote Atkins, "the full implications" were conveyed to the prisoners. The other document was thirty-four pages in length.

This document was an elaboration of the type of prison regime available to the prisoners if they ended their hunger-strike. According to the prisoners the document met the substance of their demands and they were led to believe that after a period of weeks with the media spotlight off the prisons all their demands would be realised. Atkins' statement confirmed this view.

HUNGER-STRIKE ENDS

The seven hunger-strikers were in an advanced weakened state. It was diagnosed that Sean McKenna had ten hours left to live and Tommy McKearney had not much longer. The prisoners faced a gruelling decision. They had a document which met the requirements of their five demands. Would they continue the hunger-strike and lose Sean McKenna or end it and give the British time to implement the conditions outlined? The prisoners ended the hunger-strike. They were satisfied that their hunger-strike had secured a principled settlement to the four-and-a-half-year - long protest.

The hunger-strike settlement ushered in an atmosphere of co-operation inside the prison, unseen since 1976 when republican prisoners were recognised as political prisoners. Bobby Sands, the spokesperson for the prisoners in the gaol was given facilities to meet with the other protesting H-Block spokespersons at 8 p.m. on Friday 19th December to discuss the terms of the settlement. The meeting had the approval of senior British civil servants at the Northern Ireland Office, and the prison governor Stanley Hilditch.

But this new era of co-operation was short-lived. At a meeting on Monday 21st December, between Bobby Sands and the prison governor to discuss the phasing out of the blanket protest and the implementation of the hunger-strike settlement, the governor told Sands that no movement would take place unless the prisoners conformed to prison rules and regulations. Sands argued for an implementation of the hunger-strike settlement but he was ignored. Talks between the prison regime and the prisoners broke down until Sunday January 11th.

In the intervening period the prison regime tried to induce men to unconditionally end their protest and moved a number of them in H3-Block from soiled to clean cells. The men were asked to end their protest and were offered cell furniture in return.

PRISON NEGOTIATIONS

On Sunday January 11th, the prison governor and a chief prison warden, named Barr, visited Bobby Sands in his cell. They discussed with him how best to end the blanket protest. Sands told them that it could only be ended by negotiations, with the prison regime moving and the prisoners responding. This was accepted and Sands was once again given facilities to meet spokesmen in other blocks to discuss what appeared to be a new situation. Sands and the governor agreed that forty men in H5 would be moved on Monday 12th January, from dirty to clean cells, and that the prisoners would not soil their cells.

The prisoners issued a statement describing the move and stated that they viewed it with "acute cynicism given the treacherous manner in which the British government have handled the protest since the ending of the hunger-strike." The move as planned went



ahead, followed by another negotiated move in H3-Block later that same week.

The men affected by these moves had expected to claim their own clothes on Friday 16th January. The day previous to this the prison governor asked Sands for one week's grace to give them time to ensure that things ran smoothly. As a sign of the prisoners' generosity they agreed to the week's delay.

At eight o'clock on Friday morning, 23rd January, ten of the men in H5 and ten in H3, involved in the successful wing moves from dirty to clean cells, requested to wash and have their own clothes when the working day finished. By 11 a.m. (at which time the clothes were delivered to the jail by relatives) they were still waiting to be let.

Title: H-Block/Armagh Settlement: British Renegade [Leaflet]

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