

# THE BLANKET

## IN IRISH PRISONS

# Militants "on the blanket"

One morning in early June Gerry Meehan received more than a rude awakening when, at 4:40 am, he was hauled out of bed and taken to a police station in Derry, Northern Ireland. Once there, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) repeatedly slapped his ears, tightened tourniquets around his wrists until the blood stopped, and bent his fingers until they nearly touched his arm.

Such police terror is common in Northern Ireland these days. The RUC and Britain's security forces regularly use torture as a means of extracting confessions and as a form of intimidation against those who oppose British control of the 'six counties'. In the words of British Brigadier Frank Kitson, a 'military expert' seasoned by years of 'interrogation' in Malaysia, Aden and Kenya, and the architect of 'hooding', anti-riot 'Glaswegian fences', 'white noise' and other techniques of torture used in Northern Ireland: "The goal should be used as just another weapon in the government's arsenal."

In Northern Ireland, the State's arsenal also includes concentration camps and the power to deny political status to imprisoned Irish activists. Anyone convicted between 1972 and 1976, on charges related to the political upheaval in Ireland was recognized as a prisoner of war and given special legal rights (the right to wear their own clothes, to receive political reading materials). Since this political status was revoked in 1976, over 3000 men (in Long Kesh and Crumlin prison) and 24 women (in Armagh prison) have carried out a continuing protest.

The men refuse to put on prison uniforms and wear only a blanket around them. They believe that wearing prison uniforms contributes to the government's propaganda

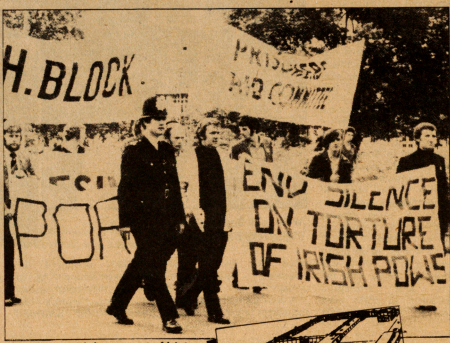
that political activists are just "common criminals." Many of those supporting the fight for political status recognize that all prisoners are political; that it's important to make a distinction at this time.

### "ON THE BLANKET"

The women who are protesting are kept in their cells twenty-three hours a day, though they are allowed to wear their own clothes, there have been moves to issue them a uniform, in which case they would go "on the blanket" too.

Even some Loyalists have joined in the protest and are refusing to wear prison uniforms. In May an estimated 6,000 people marched in the streets of Belfast to support the "Blanket men."

The lack of political status



London march in support of Irish prisoners (top); Long Kesh, Internment camp (bottom)

makes it difficult for people organizing marches and other support work to maintain contact with prisoners. Despite difficulties an array of prisoner support groups have sprung up in the face of British repression. For instance, in response to the brutality at Long Kesh, the North's most notorious concentration camp, a group called Green Cross has formed to raise funds for the dependents of prisoners and to supply prisoners with reading material, clothing, and tools for making handicrafts.

One of the most active support groups is the Prisoners Aid Committee, based in London. It publishes a bi-monthly news sheet called PAC NEWS and organizes public meetings and demonstrations in support of Irish prisoners in Ireland and England. In July, the Prisoners in Ireland Committee, an offshoot of PAC, organized the largest demonstration held in London in defense of the Irish struggle since 1974. Over 3,000 people showed up; members of leftist groups (including the Anarchist

Black Cross, Socialist Feminists, and Irish Republicans), London's Irish Community, and the labour movement.

PAC has a tendency to look upon itself as the proprietor of the prisoner support movement. It dismissed as "hoodlums" the action of two members of the Troops Out Movement and the Socialist Workers Party (one of them the daughter of Malta's Prime Minister Miffoff) when they threw shit on the carpet of the British House of Commons from the public gallery in an attempt to show the honourable upholders of British "Democracy" what an Irish prison cell smells like.

The Irish Trade Union movement has also supported political prisoners and fought against the torture used by the RUC and British military. The Trade Union Campaign Against Repression (TUCAR), which has branches throughout Ireland, publishes a bi-monthly bulletin and has organized several demonstrations. Two of its demonstrations in Belfast were attended by several thousand people.

### IRISH ANARCHISTS

While local anarchists oppose the Irish Republicanist authoritarianism, many of them actively support prisoners' resistance and endorse some of the Republican's actions against the State. The provisional wing of the Irish Republican Army is composed of people with disparate ideologies, including some anarchists. However, most of the anarchists who've worked with the IRA have now severed their ties to the group and those who remain do so on a tactical basis. They see their

first priority as getting the British out of Ireland and look upon the IRA as the only force capable of waging war against the British Army.

Much of the recent Irish anarchist activity has revolved around the case of Marie and Noel Murray, two anarchists who barely escaped the noose last year and are now serving life sentences on framed-up

## Links Without Chains

The War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012, has just published **While There Is A Soul In Prison** (\$5.50 a copy or \$13 for 4). Its 1979 Peace Calendar and appointment book. It contains many moving graphics, a powerful history of the prison movement and stories of personal experiences.

The Brotherhood of American Indians, inside the Washington State Pen, is asking for donations to help them win the legal right to practice the "natural spiritual ways of our people." Write the group at #1, P.O. Box 520, Walla Walla, WA 99362. Tax exempt number for cash or money orders is 891-1018893. For general information on many native political prisoners write the Native American Solidarity Committee, P.O. Box 3426, St. Paul, MN, or the Leonard Pelletier Defense Committee, P.O. Box 1, Port Angeles, WA 98562.

Asitrid Proll, a member of the West German urban guerrilla Red Army Faction, is fighting extradition to West Germany from England where she was arrested in September. She has very real reasons to fear for her life if returned to West Germany (eight RAF prisoners have died in jail since 1974. Send donations and letters of support for Asitrid C/O the West German RAF Defense Committee, her lawyers, Harold Asitrid Proll Defense Committee, 100 Grosvenor Gardens, London, England W2 4LXX and the Friends of Asitrid, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London, England EC1 ROAT. Often it appears that the West German State uses its powers to attack only members of the RAF and its "supporters." This page is far from real. For example, six members of the 2nd-of-June Movement, an anti-authoritarian guerrilla group in West Germany, are presently charged with carrying out a political kidnapping that secured the release of five prisoners. For further information contact AKAS, C/O Postfach 3021, 4 Dusseldorf 1, W. Germany.

## Anarchist under attack

When you're Black, an anarchist, and a prison organizer, the U.S. penal system isn't going to pull any punches in its attempts to get rid of you.

Such is the case for Lorenzo Kombo Erba, a 30 year old prison activist serving life for hijacking a plane from Atlanta, Georgia to Cuba in 1962 as an armed protest against both American aggression in Vietnam and the domestic war against Blacks. Kombo, along with three other Blacks, has been placed in the notorious Control Unit Behaviour Modification Program at Marion, Illinois Federal Penitentiary, after the

four had protested glass in the food in the isolation Unit. Several prisoners, including Kombo, were brutally beaten by guards during the protest.

Since then, prison officials have tried repeatedly to goad other prisoners to attack Kombo, even providing them with a zip gun and other weapons.

The Control Unit which is used to punish prison organizers and other "troublemakers" is described by Kombo as a torture chamber and a death camp.

Ten prisoners have died there in the last five years and hundreds of others have come out self-mutilated and

psychologically drained.

Letters are urgently needed to protest the conspiracy against Kombo's life and to demand that he be removed from the Control Unit immediately. Write: George C. Wilkinson, Warden, United States Penitentiary, P.O. Box 1000, Marion, Illinois, 62959.

More info from Audrey A. Meyers, National Committee to Support the Marion Brothers, 45664 Oakland, St. Louis, MO 65110.

Letters of support to Lorenzo Kombo Erba. #18759-175, P.O. Box 1000, Marion, Ill., 62959.