

Maghaberry POWs undertake 72 hour fast

by Seán Ó Murchú - Republican Sinn Féin - Cork *Monday, Sep 18 2006, 2:14pm*

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Republican POWs in Maghaberry Gaol will commence a 72-hour fast on Tuesday, 19th September. The situation in Maghaberry has now reached crisis point. A representative of the Archbishop of Armagh met with the prisoners last Tuesday, however conditions in the gaol have not improved.

The Republican Prisoners' Action Group has organised a picket in Newtownbutler, Co. Fermanagh, on Saturday, 23rd September at 1:30p.m. and calls on everyone to support the demands of the Republican prisoners.

The RPAG has also launched a website at URL: <http://www.freewebs.com/powstatusnow>

Republican POW's in Maghaberry have been engaged in a prison protest since 19th June 2006 and there are now over thirty POW's on the protest.

They are fighting to improve conditions for segregated prisoners in Maghaberry who are in effect being punished for exercising their right to segregation from non-political prisoners. They are demanding that their 5 demands be addressed.

1. RIGHT TO FREE ASSOCIATION
2. END TO CONTROLLED MOVEMENT
3. RIGHT TO FULL TIME EDUCATION
4. SEPARATE VISITING FACILITY
5. RIGHT TO ORGANISE OUR OWN LANDINGS

POW's in Portlaoise have been acting in solidarity with their comrades in Maghaberry during the prison protest.

FACTS ABOUT REPUBLICAN PRISONERS AT MAGHABERRY GAOL.

* Thirty-eight Republican Prisoners currently imprisoned in Maghaberry Gaol.

*"Controlled movement" is imposed on Republican landings with only three prisoners permitted out of their cells on the landing at any one time with each prisoners accompanied by two prison officers. Free Association on landings completely removed.

*Legislation introduced by British government following the Good Friday Agreement removed the right of Republican prisoners to organise themselves on their own landings and removed the right of Republican prisoners to spend their time in prison constructively.

*Prisoners made to chose between daily exercise or education. Prisoners denied educational facilities to enable them to organise their own education.

*Easter lilies banned in the prison. Other Republican handicrafts confiscated and destroyed by prison officers.

*PSNI/RUC approval required before prisoners permitted on Republican landing.

*Republican prisoners' parole entitlement has been reduced to half that of other prisoners.

*Denial of compassionate paroles for family and religious occasions. Parole for funerals of immediate family members often restricted to 6 hours or less.

*Constant use of strip searching to humiliate prisoners contrary to international law. One prisoner received 31 strip searches and 1,135 rub down searches in a six month period.

*Prisoners locked in their cells for alternately 21/23 hours per day.

*Abuse of the sniffer dogs in an attempt to criminalise political prisoners. Families and prisoners are wrongly accused of smuggling drugs into the prison. Families are forced to have closed family visits which take place through Perspex screen while prisoners returning from parole are placed in solitary confinement for 48 hours.

*Family visitors exposed to Loyalist visitors while visiting prison. Prisoners exposed to Loyalists going to and from legal visits.

*The power of the Governor to punish a prisoner by taking away remission was reintroduced specifically for Republican prisoners after it was banned by the European Court of Human Rights in 2002.

*Access to a doctor available only once a week.

*Interference with correspondence.

*Irish language and cultural items including handicrafts made relating to hunger strikes confiscated or destroyed by prison officers.

STATEMENT FROM REPUBLICAN PRISONERS, MAGHABERRY GAOL

On 13th July 1981 a young boy 8 years of age was hoisted onto his uncle's shoulders. He was given a hammer and a black flag. The young boy then hung the flag on the side of the coal-shed.

Around him he saw grown men openly crying, women talking and going from door to door. The people looked tired, sorrowful and a gloominess hung in the air like a thick dense fog. The answers to the boy's questions didn't really register. "A young man from the locality had died on hunger strike", he was told. He had seen old people die before and there were no black flags. "Why now?", he wondered. Little did he realise then, that was the beginning of his introduction to Irish politics and Irish history.

Some years later in his teenage years, the young man began reading books on Irish history and came to realise the significance and the symbolism of the black flag which he had hung years before. He read about the struggle for political status in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, the blanket protest, the no-wash protest and eventually the Hunger Strike which culminated in the deaths of 10 young volunteers. He couldn't believe the intransigence of the British as they allowed these young men

died.

Now as a grown man he continues reading and believes strongly in the Republican ideology which was held dearly by those who died to achieve humane conditions for hundreds of Republican prisoners. Are conditions today better because of the sacrifices of these men?

The young lad who 25 years ago raised a black flag to his coal-shed now lies in a British prison camp. He too suffers the same degrading treatment. He and his comrades suffer strip searches designed to humiliate and degrade as well as 23 hour lock ups in an 8 x 12 tomb. They suffer sectarian abuse from loyalist staff working the landings. They are forced to eat all their meals in their cells like caged animals. They are denied any association with each other on the landing and are only permitted to leave their cells in 2s or 3s, accompanied by at least twice the number of prison officers. Families are denied visits for weeks at a time due to the suspicious reaction of the prison "drugs dog" despite the fact there has not been a single find of drugs on a Republican prisoner or visitor.

Rights that are granted to the rest of the prison population are denied to Republican prisoners; education, exercise, social inter-action - basic human rights. They are threatened with the loss of remission, or of being transported to England if they do not conform. But they will not conform to a regime that denies them the right to be treated with dignity and humanity. They cannot conform with institutional discrimination brought about to criminalise the Irish struggle.

That same young man and his comrades are now on protest in Maghaberry "concentration camp". This is a protest against criminalisation, a protest for Political Status. They too have issued 5 demands. Freedom of Association, Freedom of Movement, Full Time Education, Separate Visiting Facility and the right to Organise their wings. They remain adamant in the belief that theirs is a just struggle. They are prepared to do whatever is necessary to achieve their objectives.

They are not, as the prison authorities are trying to portray, asking for the keys to their wing. They do not expect control of the landings. Their demands have been reasonable, but have been ignored.

In their protest they have been refusing to eat in their cells and are refusing to co-operate with the discriminatory regime imposed upon them. They are showing great restraint in the face of constant provocation. Both the Church and human rights groups have pledged their assistance, but all calls for humanity have been ignored. The prisoners, who have yet again been backed into a corner, feel that their only weapon is to fast. There has been a series of 24 hour fasts and this week a 48 hour fast but there is still no recognition from the authorities.

That young man now experiences the intransigence for himself and asks you the people of Ireland to support the prisoners and their demands, to do all in your power to challenge this injustice, to write letters of support to your politicians, to the press and to the authorities, to show your numbers on the streets in the protests and in the pickets that are being organised across the country.

Go raibh maith agaibh

O/C Republican Prisoners Maghaberry Gaol

IRISH REPUBLICAN POWs NEED YOUR SUPPORT

PLEASE PROVIDE ANY SUPPORT YOU CAN TO REPUBLICAN PRISONERS ACTION GROUP OR JOIN YOUR LOCAL PRISONERS ACTION GROUP - PHONE 028 90319004 (6 COUNTIES - North of

Ireland) OR 223 PARNELL ST, DUBLIN 1, 01 8729747 (26 COUNTIES - South of Ireland) in the United States Cumann Na Saoirse Náisiúnta. - National Irish Freedom Committee. - <http://irishfreedom.net>

POLITICAL STATUS IS A RIGHT NOT A PRIVILEGE

<http://www.rsfcork.com>

<http://www.rsfcork.com/pows.htm>

Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-310.html>