

IRISH HUNGER-STRIKE COMMEMORATION RALLY

BIRMINGHAM

**DIGBETH CIVIC HALL
SAT 21 JUNE
2p.m.**

**SPEAKERS FROM SINN FEIN /
IRSP / IRISH POW CAMPAIGN
PAC / ALL AFRICAN PEOPLES
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY /
KASHMIRI LIBERATION FRONT /**

and others

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It was the failure of the British government to live up to the settlement of the first hunger-strike in 1980, and to implement a promised enlightened prison regime which directly forced Bobby Sands and his comrades on to a second hunger-strike. On March 1st, 1981, Bobby Sands embarked on a hunger-strike, hoping that the sacrifice of his life and the political repercussions which it would unleash, would perhaps force the British government into a settlement before any of his comrades would have to die.

After Bobby Sands went on hunger-strike he stood on a 'Political Prisoner' ticket in a by-election in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency, and on April 9th, 1981, 30,492 people elected him as their M.P. to the British parliament in a blaze of publicity. British propaganda had described the prisoners as having no support, but the result of that historic election clearly demonstrated the extent of support for the prisoners among the nationalist people. When defeated by their own rules at the polls the British government's concept of democracy altered and the electoral law changed to suit them and prevent a republican prisoner candidate from standing for election. The election victory was a watershed and a major repudiation of Britain's criminalisation policy of Irish republicans. The British government's propaganda claims suffered a major setback, and was then to be shattered when in the by-election caused by Bobby Sands death, on the sixty-sixth day of his hunger-strike, Owen Carron, his election agent and Sinn Fein member, standing as an agreed H-Block candidate won the seat with an increased majority.

By August 20th, 1981, nine other blanket men - Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreesh, Patsy O'Hara, Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty, Thomas McElwee and Mickey Devine - had also died on hunger-strike, murdered by British callousness and vindictiveness.

In the past 12 years of this present phase of the Irish liberation struggle 2 other Republican POWs died on hunger-strike in prisons in England; Michael Gaughan died in June 1974, in Parkhurst prison, while being forced fed on hunger-strike. Frank Stagg died in February 1976, in Wakefield prison, while on his third hunger-strike. Their demands were for political status and repatriation to Ireland, after years of suffering a brutal prison system intended to crush the spirit of Irish liberation.

For centuries the Irish people have struggled to free themselves from British rule and repression, asserting Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity, which are inalienable and indefeasible. It was only after the 1916 Easter Rising, that Britain surrendered in 1921, her military and political occupation of the 26 counties, and imposed the partition of the 6 counties against the wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people. Britain continues

to occupy 6 of the 9 counties of the Ulster province, and despite censorship and propaganda by the British, there exists growing awareness of the heroic resistance being waged by the nationalist people inside the puppet state of "Northern Ireland", ruled direct from London.

The British government pretend that their 12,000 troops are a "peace keeping force", but this myth is long blown, since British Paratroopers, in 1972, murdered 14 unarmed civil rights marchers in Derry City who were demanding an end to internment without trial. This army of occupation is backed up by over 20,000 RUC and UDR members, recruited almost exclusively from the local pro-British unionist population, and whose ranks include former members of the notorious, disbanded, Ulster Special Constabulary (B Specials).

The British government allow the use of plastic bullets which have been used to murder 15 nationalist people, 7 being children. Many more people have suffered horrific injuries. The European Parliament voted to ban the use of plastic bullets - yet Britain still uses them.

In the name of 'security' Republican women in Maghaberry and Brixton prisons are being routinely sexually abused by regular strip-searches, used to degrade and humiliate these women prisoners. The racist Prevention of Terrorism Act was brought into use in Great Britain in 1974, and is used to harass and intimidate Irish people. Over 6,000 people have been arrested since the PTA was introduced, with little over 100 people being charged with mostly trivial things as failure to produce documentation at ports, failure to cooperate, and withholding information. 'Northern Ireland' has been governed under such emergency legislation for almost 60 years.

Top security prisons in Britain hold 34 Republican political prisoners and 11 innocent victims of frame-up trials, and all are subjected to the most repressive prison regulations that can be officially imposed. Five prisoners have died over the last 12 years - 2 on hunger-strike and the other 3 as a result of medical neglect. Beatings and long periods of solitary confinement take place. Plastic bullets, strip-searching of women prisoners, non-jury Diplock courts, paid perjurers, SAS/RUC/UDR assassination gangs, murder of Irish political prisoners, and a barrage of other repressive weapons is how Britain attempts to rule in the north of Ireland. The only solution is for Britain to get out of Ireland now and leave the Irish people to determine their own future in their country. Commemorate with us these twelve true and committed Irishmen who died heroically in the long tradition of republican resistance to British occupation, oppression and injustice in Ireland.

Organised by the Irish Hunger-Strike Commemoration Committee, Birmingham.