Leadership and the Prison Experience: The Irish Republican Movement, 1971 to the Present

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ABSTRACT

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The mass incarceration of Republicans in the North of Ireland was a policy decision that would have far-reaching consequences for the Republican Movement, the conflict and the peace process in Ireland. Addressing the Irish political prison experience serves as a contribution toward expanding discussion of prison resistance in general, and its impact on social movements and state policy. More specifically, this thesis traces the evolution in political thinking and resistance among the captives in three distinct periods of incarceration at Long Kesh, in order to show how their time in prison influenced the nature and quality of leadership in the Republican Movement. In so doing, it reveals how the trust born of solidarity and unity of action among prisoners enhanced leadership in the Movement by making it more diffuse. In the lead-up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, it also reveals the extent to which the prisoners assisted the Adams-McGuinness leadership in persuading the Republican community to back the peace initiative. The educational and resistance elements of their captivity coalesced to form trained politicized volunteers capable of contributing to a sustained un-armed strategy, and assisting Sinn Fein in becoming a vibrant force in the new political configuration of the North.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The tenuous endgame currently being played out in the North of Ireland, that has commanded the attention of commentators and analysts the world over, is the culmination of thirty years of war between the Republicans (the non-constitutionalist section of the nationalist community) on the one hand, and the British government and Unionist community on the other. The search for a solution to the violence and injustice that was recently undertaken is largely the initiative of the Republican movement. 2004 marks ten years this year since the two governments issued a "Joint Declaration" setting out the parameters for peace negotiations. It took five years to sign a peace accord, and five years after that, new forms of governance still seem far from cemented in the political landscape. The process of making peace is disconcertingly slow at times and fraught with vertiginous turn-arounds and reneged promises on the part of politicians in the Unionist camp. Despite this less-than-ideal situation, the nationalists of the North and many in the Unionist community believe that a just and workable form of governance is within reach for the two national communities on the disputed territory.

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April of 1998, there has been a burgeoning contribution to the already massive literature relating to the "Troubles" in the North of Ireland. Efforts to explain, understand and analyze how the conflict shifted from an armed struggle to a negotiating struggle have been numerous and have produced a rich body of work. Many have sought to pierce the mystery of this momentous historical occasion, for it presents a sometimes baffling contradiction to what some thought was an "intractable" ethnic conflict.

As the conflict's principal insurgent, the Republican Movement, whose organizational incarnations are Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA, is the central focus of this peace process. It is therefore understandable that much attention has been devoted to examining its strategies, philosophy and patterns of behavior. Since the first stirrings of a peace accord in the early nineties, there has been a proliferation of articles and books discussing the aims, strategies and history of the IRA and/or Sinn Fein.[1] Members and leaders of the Republican Movement have, themselves, assisted the public in getting to know them by producing works that help to understand their disposition. Gerry Adams, the movement's leader, has been prolific in this regard.[2] But other republicans have also provided some insight into what makes the Republican Movement tick.[3]

In the quest to understand the transformation in the political landscape of the North, several factors have been cited and analyzed as reasons for the dramatic change from armed struggle to peace table. These span a multitude of discipline-defined approaches from the economic considerations of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon or the European Union, to the International Relations consideration of the U.S. involvement under the Clinton administration.[4] The changing of the guard at Westminster is also considered of major import to the unfolding of events, though in fairness, it should be

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[1] These include Ed Moloney (2002), *The Secret History of the IRA*, New York: W.W. Norton; Brian Feeney (2002) *Sinn Fein: 100 Turbulent Years*, Dublin: O'Brien Press; and the late J. Bowyer-Bell (2000), *The IRA 1968-2000: Analysis of a Secret Army*, London: Frank Cass; Tim Pat Coogan (2000), *The* IRA, fully rev. and updated, New York: Palgrave, to name but a few.

[2] Gerry Adams has written several books including his recent release, (2003) *A Farther Shore: Ireland's Long Road to Peace*, New York: Random House.

[3] For instance, see Laurence McKeown (2001) *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000*, Belfast: Beyond the Pale; Brian Campbell; Laurence McKeown; Felim O'Hagan (eds.) (1994), *Nor Meekly Serve My Time: The H Block Struggle 1976-1981,* Belfast: Beyond the Pale; Danny Morrison (1999), *When the Walls Came Down: A Prison Journal*, Cork: Mercier Press,.

[4] Many authors cite the U.S. involvement in Northern Ireland as crucial to the peace process. Conor O'Clery devotes an entire book, (1996) *The Greening of the White House*, London: Gill & Macmillan, to the subject.

mentioned that much of the preparatory work for the peace process took place during (and in spite of) the Thatcher government.

In 1987, the Eksund, aboard which the IRA was smuggling an arms shipment from Libya, was discovered off the Irish coast and sunk. And the same year, the IRA detonated a bomb on a Rememberance Day gathering in Enniskellen, Co. Fermanagh, killing eleven people. These events had a disastrous impact on the Republicans and are also cited as reasons that have contributed to the change of plan.

From another perspective, there is the popular notion that Gerry Adams, in his infinite wisdom and with his charismatic stance, single-handedly brought the movement to the negotiating table, either by sheer force of will, or by his ruthlessness.[5] The success of the South African end to apartheid and the interrupted success of the Middle East peace process influenced the unfolding of events on the island.[6] And then of course there was the end of the Cold War that spelled a reshaping of global geopolitics and aided in viewing the "Troubles" with a different eye.

While these elements all influenced the peace initiative, another factor that bears on the events is the impact of the prison experience on the leadership of the Republican Movement. It is the contention here that imprisonment not only served an important legitimizing criterion for the leaders of the Movement, but also provided the training ground necessary to promote the required leadership skills for a sustained unarmed struggle.

What is proposed is the exploration of this factor of influence in the quest for a peaceful solution in the Six Counties. The mass incarceration of the nationalist/republican

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[5] All of these are evoked in Moloney, op. cit.

[6] See John McGarry, ed., (2001), *Northern Ireland and the Divided World:The Northern Ireland Conflict and the Good Friday Agreement in Comparative Perspective*, Oxford: OUP.

community, it is contended, provided a fertile training ground for republicans and contributed in a unique way to their development into a vibrant political force capable not only of sustaining a massive change in orientation without disintegrating, but of being creative participants in the shaping of a new political landscape. Internment, the criminalization policy, the ruthless and unmitigated attempt by Margaret Thatcher to quell the IRA, produced opposite results to what was intended: it strengthened a movement and provided it with unwavering bonds of solidarity in the community; it provided the training ground within the prison for a politics of resistance that could be transferred beyond prison walls; and gave the Republicans strategic weapons in the control of their movement, their relationship with the international community and their negotiation strategy with the British government. Moreover, it created leaders at all levels of the Republican movement. From the *Ard Chomhairle*[7] to local offices, Sinn Fein has working for it a vast array of talent selected from the community with a noticeable membership emanating from prison.

The dynamics of the prison experience is the focus of this thesis, several features of which will be examined. To begin with, an analysis of the period of internment will shed light on Gerry Adams' incarceration, along with that of several other prominent members of Sinn Fein, including Gerry Kelly, Jim Gibney and Bik McFarlane. Life in the cages of Long Kesh formed a particular kind of incarceration experience, because of the sudden influx of hundreds of nationalists in a military-style war camp. Internment was not new to Irish Republicans and serving time was seen as an extension of their participation in the struggle.

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[7] Irish term for Executive Committee

Without a doubt, British policy toward the Republicans and the conflict only served to swell the ranks of the IRA and to provide momentum for the Republican cause. But this was greatly assisted by the Republicans' inimitable ability to present the cause and frame issues in a persuasive manner that greatly increased mobilization, to take the hunger strike as but one example. The political opportunities provided by the lack of a governing consensus in the Six Counties helped to sustain the Republican Movement. But it is the expertise of the leadership and their emphasis on publicity that helped produce the mobilization necessary to engage in a political process in such a vibrant and dynamic manner.

The process of legitimization of the Republican movement occurred largely through the efforts and campaigns waged by the prisoners. There exists a consensus in the literature that the 1981 hunger strike represents a watershed in Republican history and indeed, the conflict. The resounding vote of confidence offered by the nationalist population during the election of Bobby Sands to Westminster propelled Sinn Fein into electoral politics and the emerging political force it has become.

This thesis connects the prison experience with leadership. Not only will it show how it affected leaders during internment, it will also show how prison molded the life and thinking of a whole range of prisoners who went on to exercise leadership roles at various levels in the Movement. Being incarcerated provided the space to think about the politics of the struggle and its tactical considerations; furthermore, the struggle inside the jail impacted on the leadership outside, for instance, during the campaign for 'special status' when leadership was a cooperative effort between those inside and outside the prison. It also addresses, later in the nineties, the impact prisoners had on the community

during the lead-up to the Good Friday Agreement. The substantial number of elected officials and staff in Sinn Fein with prison records testifies to that group's importance in the Republican Movement.

There are some contributions that deal with prison in the literature. Laurence McKeown, former political prisoner in Long Kesh and surviving hunger striker, has written a book based on his PhD dissertation on the social construction of the Irish Republican prisoner community of Long Kesh. This important work traces the struggle from within the prison and focuses on the nature of the resistance that took place within its walls.[8] Another former Republican prisoner, Declan Moen, has also written about prisoner resistance in Long Kesh.[9] In addition, Gerry Adams' writing provides insight into the Republican structure and the tactics used in the struggle against the British government from within the prison.[10] From a different perspective, Chris Ryder portrays life in prison from the authorities' point of view in a work entitled *Inside the Maze: The Untold Story of the Northern Ireland Prison Service*. He contends that the Maze is "an extraordinary penal establishment" along the lines of the Soviet Gulags, the Nazi concentration camps and others.[11]

An in-depth analysis of political imprisonment in the North is contained in Kieran McEvoy's *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, Management and Release*, that focuses on the relationship between the prisoners and the

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[8] Laurence McKeown, op. cit.
[9] Moen, D. (1998), "Irish Political Prisoners and Post Hunger-Strike Resistance to Criminalization", *British Criminology Conference: Selected Proceedings, v.3, Papers from the British Society of Criminology Conference, Liverpool, July 1999. 27 p.* http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/bsc/bccsp/vo103/moen.html
[10] Gerry Adams (1995), *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace*, Dingle, Brandon; (1996), *Before the Dawn* New York: William Morrow & Co.; and (2003) *A Farther Shore: Ireland's Long Road to Peace*, New York: Random House.
[11] Chris Ryder (2000), *Inside the Maze: The Untold Story of the Northern Ireland Prison Service*, London: Methuen, p. ix.

authorities.[12]McEvoy looks at the 'political status' of paramilitary prisoners and claims that "the action, targets, motivation, and ideology of the prisoners...are all at least equally as important (as the degree of recognition by the state) in assessing the claim to 'political status'".[13]

As for other prison struggles, Fran Buntman's *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*[14]tackles the legacy of political imprisonment in South Africa and points to prison resistance as an important step in re-orchestrating relationships of power, first within the prison and then effectively challenging the apartheid regime and instituting democracy beyond the prison wall.[15] The book examines such processes as the transformation of Robben Island from a "hell-hole" to a "university" and the effect of prison resistance on political processes.[16] Buntman calls for a theory of resistance and offers a theoretical contribution by classifying resistance as either "categorical" or "strategic" and by inviting the reader to see resistance on a continuum:

> ...I argue that resistance is the necessary first step in creating space to rearticulate key relationships of power. As such, resistance is a beginning of a process and continuum that aims at more far-reaching resignification or emancipation in the polity.[17]

Lastly, Buntman asks "how did (and does) incarceration in political prisons affect liberation struggles, social movements and the actors within them?"[18] and calls for the

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[12] Kieran McEvoy (2001), *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance,Management, and Release*, Oxford: OUP, p.1.
[13] Ibid., p. 6.
[14] Fran Lisa Buntman (2003), *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*, Cambridge: CUP.
[15] Ibid., pp. 4, 5.
[16] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[17] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[18] Ibid., p. 7.

"need to analyze the politics of political prisons beyond Robben Island and the South African case."[19]

Fran Buntman also wrote an article with Tong-Yi Huang that focuses on the role of prisoners in elite positions during democratic transitions. Comparing the South African case with the Taiwanese experience of political imprisonment, these two authors contend that prison experience provides a fertile training ground for leaders both inside the prison and upon their release so that they can be and often are key players in the transition phase to democracy. In other words, the elite of the movement often emanates from the prisoner community.[20]

In another vein, Graham Ellison and Greg Martin tackle the issue of state repression and the mobilization it creates in social movements by addressing the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland and the police and sectarian brutality that resulted. According to them, police brutality became the gelling ingredient that provided the glue for the movement over and above unfair housing policies, and gerrymandered electoral districts. They assess the connection between repressive police behaviour and the creation and mobilization of the social movement.[21]

In line with the above analyses, the object here is to further develop the idea that the repressive arm of the state influences social movements in a positive way, only this time by focusing on the repression apparatus a couple of notches further up the ladder from the baton-wielding police, to that king of repressive institutions, the prison. But

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[19] Ibid., p. 7.
[20] Fran Buntman and Tong-Yi Huang (2000), "The Role of Political Imprisonment in Developing and Enhancing Political Leadership: A comparative Study of South Africa's and Taiwan's Democratization", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 35(1), 2000, 43-44.
[21] Graham Ellison and Greg Martin (2000), "Policing, Collective Action and Social Movement Theory: The Case of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Campaign", *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(4), 681-699.

unlike Ellison and Martin, the object here is to unearth the dynamics between the leadership of the Republican Movement, its regular constituency and the prisoner constituency. What will emerge is congruent with the thesis elaborated in Buntman and Huang, that prison is an experience that enhances leadership qualities and the perception of leaders by their constituents.

Furthermore, this work is offered as a preliminary and partial response to Buntman's question: "How did (and does) incarceration in political prisons affect liberation struggles, social movements and the actors within them?"[22] While a comparison of Robben Island and Long Kesh is too complex for this particular venture, addressing the Irish political prison experience within Buntman's framework nonetheless serves as a contribution toward expanding discussion of prison resistance in general, and its impact on social movements and state policy. More specifically, this thesis traces the evolution in political thinking and resistance among the captives in three distinct periods of incarceration at Long Kesh, in order to show how their time in prison influenced the nature and quality of leadership in the Republican Movement. In so doing, it reveals how the trust born of solidarity and unity of action among captives enhanced leadership in the Movement by making it more diffuse. In the lead-up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, it also reveals the extent to which the prisoners assisted the Adams-MacGuinness leadership in persuading the Republican community to back the peace initiative. The educational and resistance elements of their captivity coalesced to form a trained political volunteer capable of contributing to a sustained un-armed strategy, and assisting Sinn Fein in becoming a vibrant force in the new political configuration of the North.

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[22] F. Buntman, op. cit., p. 7.

The next chapter, which examines the period from 1971 to 1975, traces the history of internment of Irish people during the twentieth century and discusses the 1971 internment of many hundreds of Catholics in the Six Counties at the beginning of the "Troubles". What will emerge is the longstanding tradition of imprisonment of Irish people which helps to explain why prisoners hold a particular status within the community. This part examines the thinking that went on in the cages of Long Kesh by men who later formed the "republican think tank". A study of Gerry Adams' smuggled "Brownie" articles will reveal the early political instincts of Adams and his colleagues. Incarceration provided a breathing space for their political thought and helped to gel a long-term strategy that included electoral participation.

The following chapter, which focuses on the period from 1976 to 1981, centers on the campaign for political status. Once again, a recapitulation of "political status" throughout the century reveals that the British have always gone back and forth between considering Irish prisoners as P.O.W.'s and criminals. The campaign that was waged in 1976 is thus not an isolated case of demanding political status but part of a long-running demand to recognize the conflict and its insurgents as political. The "blanket" and "no-wash" protests and the 1980 and 1981 hunger strikes form one campaign made up of different tactical maneuvers that escalated with time. This campaign cemented a politics of resistance within the prison by the use of various symbols including the Irish language, the naked body, excreta, starvation, and political candidacy, that broadened mobilization, had a positive impact on international opinion, and ultimately influenced British policy. The tenacity and determination of the prisoners in this period contributed to the respect they garnered from the community, which in turn, enhanced their legitimization in the

eyes of the international community. Reversing the roles and making the British out to be the "bad guys" in public opinion was the crux of the legitimization strategy. The hunger strike is considered a watershed in the conflict and in the development of Sinn Fein into a viable political force.

The subsequent chapter, which looks at the period from the 1982 to 2000, tackles the legacy of the "University of Freedom", otherwise known as Long Kesh. It discusses the education program and the leadership structure that was in place in prison. The discipline, study and discussion of political issues relating to the history of Ireland, worldwide revolutionary movements, social movements in general and the philosophy of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire all coalesced to form an educated political volunteer, one who espoused different values from his more conservative militaristic predecessor. While the prisoner constituency was initially very reticent about the peace initiative and the ensuing ceasefire, the process of persuading them of its merits was simpler by virtue of their political consciousness. It was then normal that the leadership enlist their help, whenever possible, in order to speak at republican gatherings and give their view point on the peace initiative.[23]

The last chapter reviews the influence of the prisoner constituency on Republican politics in the last thirty years. It addresses the impact this process has had on Republican policy, starting with internment right through to the peace process. It argues that, thus trained in resistance and patience, prisoners are well groomed for leadership. It is the patience and vision that was developed in prison that is, to a certain extent, responsible for the solid functioning of Sinn Fein since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Many disappointments handed over by the Unionists could try the patience

[23] Brian Feeney, op. cit., p. 402.

of many. But Adams and his party have been preparing for a long and difficult battle. They have emphasized that this is a *pro*cess that will take time. But time, for those who have been incarcerated has a different notion than for most.

Chapter 2: Internment

This chapter considers internment in all its dimensions. It starts from an historical perspective, then outlines the political situation that gave rise to it in 1971. 'Operation Demetrius', its British Army codename, is depicted in all its phases including arrest, brutality and torture, interrogation and imprisonment. An examination of Gerry Adams' writing while in Long Kesh reveals his fledgling vision for the Republican Movement including hints at the necessity of engaging in politics. A discussion of the impact of this policy on republicans points to a core theoretical premise: while this kind of state repression aims to contain political insurgency, it can have the opposite result, effectively providing fodder to the mobilization of a movement and providing a space to train leaders and potential leaders who can exercise influence while in prison and upon their release. In this particular context, internment provided those with leadership potential an arena in which to hone their skills; it allowed a space in which to engage in political debate about the struggle; it made followers on the outside and contributed to molding the Republican Movement into a vibrant political force.

History of internment

Britain has had recourse to internment on several occasions. In 1881-82, the British detained over 1,000 Irishmen without laying charges during the Land War. After the Easter Rising in 1916, the British detained over 3,400 persons, of whom over 1,000 were released shortly after. [24] According to John McGuffin, instituting internment in response to the 1916 Rising was a big mistake for, "[T]he camps became hotbeds of 'sedition', political education centers and training grounds for resistance fighters, the

[24] John McGuffin (1973), *Internment*, Tralee: Anvil Press, p. 27.

foremost of all being Michael Collins".[25] At the time of the truce, in 1921, 7,000 Irish political prisoners were still jailed in Britain and Ireland.[26] Internees of this period fought for and won the right to be treated as political prisoners.[27] On the eve of World War II, the British government passed the Prevention of Violence Bill in record time through the House, and by 1940, 1400 Irishmen were detained on the Isle of Man and other camps. The failed IRA campaign of 1939 gave the British an excuse to act, but the timing was good as it kept so-called enemy aliens in custody during World War II.[28]

Internment was also a popular response to any insurgency threat in the new 26-County state, but this is beyond the purview of this work. Meanwhile, in the newly created Northern Ireland statelet, 2,000 individuals were being detained as the Government of Ireland Act came into force in 1920.[29] A couple of years later, the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act of 1922, also known as the "Flogging Bill", and which has had several incarnations to date, was passed. It provided for the 'lifting' of some 500 men in response to an escalation in violence that was the result of the pogroms of 1920-1922 and the forceable ejection of some 5,000 Catholic workers from the shipyards in Belfast.[30]

Following the British general election in 1955 in which Sinn Fein, on an abstentionist[31] ticket, collected one of every three votes, the IRA undertook what is known as the "border campaign",[32] which failed due to a lack of popular support.

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[25] Ibid., p. 27.
[26] Ibid., p. 28.
[27] Ibid., p. 30.
[28] Ibid., p. 36.
[29] Ibid., p. 62.
[30] Ibid., pp. 64-65.
[31] Abstention refers to the Republican policy of contesting elections but not recognizing the legitimacy of the parliament by refusing to take seats.
[32] Roger Faligot (1977), *La résistance irlandaise*, Paris: Maspero, p. 92.

Nonetheless, in response to this, Britain instituted internment again. Some of the detainees in the border campaign were to be re-apprehended in 1971. Internment was nothing new for Irish republicans, and certainly nothing new in terms of British policy.

Events leading up to internment

After the failure of the border campaign (1956-1962), Republicans in the North of Ireland fell silent for some time. There had been little popular support for the campaign or for the prisoners and this was demoralizing. Those involved continued on with their lives so that the Republican Movement was all but dead. The agitation around the issue of inadequate housing for Catholics in the late sixties would ensure it was re-animated. At the time, the Catholic population, often with large families, occupied squalid living quarters altogether too small, and totally inadequate for the number of people they contained. Housing committees were created and protests were undertaken in order to address the discriminatory policy in housing allocation that benefited the Protestants over their Catholic counterparts.

But, over and above discrimination in housing policy, the Nationalist community had several other problems to contend with including job discrimination and gerrymandered electoral districts. The entire *raison d'être* of the Northern Ireland statelet was to serve the interests of the Protestant majority to the detriment of its Catholic counterparts. Inspired by the American civil rights agitation, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was created in 1967 to deal with these grievances.

By 1968, several protests had been organized either by NICRA or by local housing committees. The first of these occurred around March 25 when the Derry Housing Action Committee disrupted a meeting of the Londonderry Corporation to

protest the housing shortage in that city. In April, NICRA organized a protest because a Republican Easter Parade was banned. Then, in June, led by Nationalist Member of Parliament Austin Currie, a protest took place because a house was allocated to a single Protestant woman over a Catholic family in Caledon, County Tyrone.

On October 5, 1968, the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and NICRA organized a march in Derry. This march was met with the brutal onslaught of baton-wielding RUC police and several people were injured including Gerry Fitt an elected MP. Television coverage of this event gave worldwide attention to the violent police repression. Rioting continued in Derry over several days. It was this march that later, would be considered the start of the "Troubles".

After 2000 students protesting violent police repression at the October 5th march were blocked by a counter-demonstration led by Ian Paisley in the days following, People's Democracy was formed, an organization that would be very prominent in the civil rights movement. Protests continued to be staged to address the excessive police brutality used on October 5th.

In response to the upheaval, on November 22, 1968, Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, Captain Terence O'Neil, announced a reform package that included changes to the housing allocation based on need, a repeal of the Special Powers Act and changes to the local government franchise to make it fairer for Catholics.

Early in the New Year, the newly formed People's Democracy (PD) organized a march from Claudy to Derry. It was ambushed by a large group of Loyalists at Burntollet, who attacked the crowd causing several injuries. Marchers reported that the 80-strong RUC contingent stood by and did nothing to dissuade the attackers.

Several members of O'Neill's government expressed their opposition to the reforms. Furthermore, the loyalist bombings of electrical plants and water installations showed the extent of Protestant revolt for the proposed improvements for the Catholic population. By late April O'Neill was forced to resign and James Chichester-Clark, who had resigned as Minister of Agriculture in response to the reforms, was elected Prime Minister.

August 1969 saw continued violent clashes in Derry leading to the first use of CS gas on Bogside residents by the RUC. By the 14th, British troops were sent into the Bogside and the RUC was pulled from the Catholic enclave. Violence in Belfast continued to escalate. Hundreds of Catholics were burned out of their homes in West Belfast, making it the largest population displacement in Europe since World War II. The IRA was ill equipped to defend nationalist neighbourhoods, though barricades were erected and stone-throwing and petrol-bombing were *de rigueur* as methods of keeping Loyalists and the RUC out. The situation reached a climax when the first deaths were reported and the British government deployed troops in Belfast as well, ostensibly in order to defend Catholic enclaves from Loyalist onslaught.

The IRA's unwillingness and/or incapacity to come to the rescue of the nationalist residents sparked a major upheaval in the organization that led to the split from which was born the Provisional IRA. This new group, more militant and eager to defend neighbourhoods under attack, was engaging in gun battles with the Army by April 1970.

On July 3 1970, the British Army imposed a military curfew on the Falls Road.[33] Known by local residents as 'the rape of the Falls', it conducted raids on 5,000 homes in

[33] The chronological order of events is taken from CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) Web Service, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/chron.htm

search of IRA arms and members. The curfew was not lifted until two days later. The brutish manner in which these raids were conducted and the extensive damage done to people's homes clinched Catholic opposition to the British Army presence and radicalized the nationalist community in a unheralded manner. According to Gerry Adams, the troops "went on a rampage...firing 1,500 rounds in the narrow streets". [34] He continues:

> They broke down doors with pickaxes and rifle butts; they ripped out fireplaces, pulled up floorboards, smashed kitchens, walls, ceilings, and religious statues. They arrested 300 people, in all, fifty-two pistols, thirty-five rifles, six automatics, and 250 rounds of explosives were found—a small enough haul in the context. Meanwhile, of a total of 107,000 licensed guns in the Six Counties, 80% were in the hands of unionists.[35]

O'Neil's efforts to legislate reforms aimed at stabilizing Northern Ireland and responding to the Civil Rights protests for fairer conditions for the Catholic population earned him his downfall. There was no room for reform in a state built on pure sectarianism. Chichester-Clarke briefly replaced him before heading off into obscurity. His successor, Brian Faulkner, would soon take drastic measures to curb the unrest.

Faulkner was a partisan of internment and had indeed been Minister of Home Affairs in 1959 when internment was used during the border campaign. Many did not consider internment a viable or desirable policy and this included senior military staff in Ireland as well as the Chief Constable of the RUC at the time. The primary reason was that lists of IRA suspects were largely obsolete. Nonetheless, Faulkner was persuasive

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[34] G. Adams (1996), op. cit., p. 138.
[35] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

and succeeded in convincing London to adopt his strategy against the better judgment of senior military staff, Generals Kitson, Tuzo and Carver.[36]

In spite of his objections, Brigadier Frank Kitson, one of the senior British generals in Ireland, saw internment as an opportunity for information gathering. After all, the Army and Police were ineffectual in countering the armed struggle:

> ...the growing impotence of the Army and police was underlined when Taylor revealed that 2000 pounds of gelignite had been detonated since August 1969 with only nine prosecutions resulting.[37]

A second consideration that the General found enticing was that internment would provide "a technique for confining suspected terrorists' against whom court convictions could not be obtained".[38]

Faulkner wanted to allay Protestant fears. He was under pressure by members of his party and also from the Protestant population. Four thousand Protestant shipyard workers were protesting in the streets of Belfast demanding the introduction of internment following the killing of three Scottish soldiers by the IRA.[39] But also, Faulkner mistakenly attributed the failure of the 1956-1962 border campaign to the power of internment. In fact, the border campaign had failed because the IRA, at that time, did not have the support of the nationalist community.[40] The flaw of his analysis would be disastrous. As a result, hundreds of youths would flock to the IRA and Sinn Fein, and it would make sympathizers out of an entire community.

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[36] McGuffin, op. cit., p. 85.
[37] Chris Ryder,op.cit., p.74.
[38] Paddy Hillyard (1983), "Law and Order" in John Darby, ed. *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict*, Belfast: Apple Tree Press, p. 37,as cited by Allen Feldman(1991), *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 86).
[39] Tim Pat Coogan (2002, c1995), *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for Peace*, New York: Palgrave, p. 143-144.
[40] Ibid., p. 145.

'Operation Demetrius'

The Army did a 'dry run' in July 1971 when 1800 British Army troops were dispatched to raid Republican homes. This gave plenty of advance warning to the leadership of the Republican Movement who quietly and efficiently went into hiding. In the wee hours of the morning of August 9, 1971, by virtue of Section 12 of the Special Powers Act, thousands of troops lifted 340 people who were then interrogated, brutalized and detained.[41] "Many of those held were released within hours or days, often traumatized, radicalized and infuriated by the experience".[42]

Under the Special Powers Act, detainees could be held, under Regulation 10, 48 hours for preliminary interrogation. After that, the Act provided for 21 days of detention followed by indefinite internment provided by Regulation 12.[43] Six months following 'Operation Demetrius', roughly 2400 persons had been arrested, of whom 1600 were subsequently released after interrogation. This represents 67 per cent of the total number of arrests.[44]Why? Quite simply because the British arrested the wrong people presumably due to the obsolete lists of suspects they had. Fathers were mistaken for sons; some people were mistaken for others; often people were arrested who had no connection to the IRA.

Many young activists at the time who were trying to defend their neighbourhoods, or who were in Sinn Fein, were eventually arrested. Among these were Gerry Adams, Danny Morrison, Jim Gibney, and Bik McFarlane. Some of these men

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[41] David McKittrick and David McVea (2000), *Making Sense of the Troubles*, Belfast: Blackstaff Press, p. 67.
[42] Ibid., p. 68.
[43] C. Ryder, op. cit., p. 76.
[44] McGuffin, op. cit., p. 87.

would later form the "Republican think-tank." [45] Many of them are still involved in Sinn Fein either as elected officials, or as members of the party's personnel.

Gerry Adams was arrested and imprisoned three times, twice during internment. His first arrest occurred while the house he was staying in with his wife Colette was raided at dawn March 14, 1972, and Adams was taken away, interrogated, beaten, and sent to the Maidstone prison ship. He was eventually transferred to the cages of Long Kesh where he met up with his father, brother, cousin and several friends.[46] Adams explains that, after being on the run, being an internee was somehow a relief.[47] His first stay in prison was soon interrupted when he was released as part of a team of Republicans that was flown to England to engage in negotiations toward a resolution of the conflict with William Whitelaw. He was released in order to take part in the failed negotiations that took place July 7.

Billy McKee, the IRA Officer Commanding (OC) of the Belfast brigade, was on hunger strike in the Crumlin Road Prison at the time for the recognition of Republican prisoners as "political prisoners". Others accompanied him, including women in Armagh prison and Gerry Adams and his cousin Kevin Hannaway. Adams was on hunger strike 14 days and Billy McKee was in critical condition when the Republicans managed to hammer out an agreement with the British to establish talks. One of the preconditions was to grant political status to prisoners and hence call off the strike, and the other was to release Gerry Adams from Long Kesh in order to attend the negotiation session with Whitelaw.

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[45] For references to the Republican think-tank, see Liam Clarke (1987), *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and Sinn Fein*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, and also Ed Moloney, op.cit., p. 401
[46] Gerry Adams (1996), op. cit., pp. 195.
[47] Ibid., 220.

After the failure of the 1972 truce, Adams was back on the run again and was re-arrested, along with Brendan Hughes and Tom Cahill on July 18, 1973.[48] Adams' third arrest occurred February 18, 1978, right after the bombing of the LaMon Hotel that killed a dozen people. He was charged with membership in the IRA, but the charges were dropped when evidence could not be produced. He was released after seven months.[49]However, his second arrest had kept him behind the wire for 4 years.

In some ways, internment can be more difficult than being sentenced. An internee never knows how long the prison stay might be. It was an unsettling experience for starters, and the over-crowded, inadequate and squalid conditions did nothing to bolster morale. Of course, being reunited with old friends and neighbours often helped those detained from losing their sanity. And republican prisoners had many ways, including Irish lessons and political education lectures to help maintain morale. Yet many who were in detention had not been active in the Republican Movement. In some cases, this unfair detention was the turning point for them and they became active upon release.

Brutality, torture, interrogation

The brutality and torture that accompanied internment were remarkable affronts to the values purported to be held dear in a Western democracy such as the United Kingdom. Father Denis Faul and Father Raymond Murray co-authored a small book that details the kind of abuse to which detainees were subjected. The most popular forms of torture used punching, kicking and hitting the men with a baton about the head, stomach, kidney, and genital area while keeping them in the "search position" with fingers on the

[48] Ibid., p. 217.
[49] Gerry Adams (2003), op.cit., p. 10.

wall, spread-eagled.[50] Some of the more perverse gestures included squeezing the testicles, inserting instruments in the anal passage and urinating on the prisoners.[51] Even more radicals measures included using an electric cattle prod on the prisoner. Burning the flesh with cigarettes or candles was used as well.[52] Security forces also used psychological forms of torture that included hooding, white noise and sleep deprivation. Moreover, internees were often threatened, their families threatened, and false confessions were used to incriminate the person being interrogated.[53]

The Army is also reported to have bundled up internees, hooded them and taken them in a helicopter. Then while in the helicopter, they would be thrown out the trap door. The internee fully expects to fall to his death, but to his surprise, he is only a few feet off the ground.[54] Other forms of abuse included theatrics. In his autobiography Gerry Adams describes how a supposed madman entered the interrogation room with a hatchet in his hands, purportedly to kill him.[55] All these techniques were used over a period a seven days. Those detained were deprived of sleep, often not allowed to use the facilities and interrogated while being constantly and brutally beaten.[56]

Reported incidences of brutality and torture led to an enquiry that contravened most of the guidelines established by the British on how to conduct enquiries to ensure their objectivity and independence. Its conclusions were contained in the Compton

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[50] Frs Denis Faul and Raymond Murray (1972), *British Army and Special Branch RUC: Brutalities December 1971 – February 1972*, Cavan: Denis Faul and Raymond Murray, printed by Abbey Printers (Cavan) Ltd., p. 9.

[51] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[52] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[53] Ibid., p. 10.
[54] This form of torture was meted out on Kevin Hanaway, Gerry Adams' cousin. G. Adams (1996), op. cit., p.160.
[55] Ibid., p. 190.
[56] See Adams, ibid., and Faul, op. cit.

Report, thought by many observers to be one of the worst cases of whitewashing exercises ever seen. [57] Most of the report consists of an extensive introduction by then Home Secretary Reginald Maudling. The findings of the report itself consist of a few paragraphs in a subheading entitled "Terms of Reference" , and a few more paragraphs in a subheading entitled "Summary".[58] The report has no terms of reference. The section under that subheading is an explanation of the mandate of the committee. It never defines "physical brutality" even though it refers to the term. It concedes that some measure of "ill-treatment" and "hardship" did take place but does not say what is meant by these terms either. The summary states:

> Our investigations have not led us to conclude that any of the grouped or individual complainants suffered physical brutality as we understand the term. [59]

The Irish government intervened and referred what became known as "the torture case" to the European Commission of Human Rights, which declared that the interrogation techniques used in Northern Ireland constituted not only 'inhuman and degrading treatment' but also 'torture'. However, the European Court of Human Rights rejected the verdict of 'torture' to settle for simply 'inhuman and degrading treatment'.[60]

The Cages of Long Kesh

Long Kesh was an abandoned World War II airfield just outside Belfast, on which stood Nissen huts.[61] Several huts made up a Cage. The Cages were enclosed by wire mesh, hence the expression "behind the wire". Given the substantial increase in internees

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[57] J. McGuffin, op. cit., p. 128; T.P. Coogan (2002, c1995), p. 153.
[58] *Compton Report into Security Force Behaviour in August 1971*, Cmnd 4823, HMSO, London, 1971. http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/compton.htm
[59] Ibid.
[60] T.P. Coogan (2002,c1995), op.cit., p. 152.
[61] A Nissen hut is a prefabricated semi-circular sheet steel building, named after the Canadian engineer who invented it.

and sentenced prisoners since the onset of internment, the place had grown and had over twenty cages. Each cage had four or five huts, huts to sleep in, one for the canteen, one that housed the facilities and the study and a half-hut for recreation. There were 30 men to each hut, which provided no privacy. They were draughty, leaky and uncomfortable.[62]

When Gerry Adams was re-arrested in 1973, after suffering brutal beatings at the hands of the security forces, he was shipped off, once again, to Long Kesh internment camp where he was housed in Cage 6.[63] It was not until after the burning of the camp[64] that he was relocated. Cage 11, his new quarters, also housed Brendan Hughes, Bobby Sands, Bik McFarlane and Gerry Kelly among others.[65] Tension was high in Cage 11, and by popular demand, Adams reluctantly took on the job of OC (Officer Commanding in the IRA military structure) of the Cage and made it his business to democratize the place.[66] He developed a collective education project aimed at discussing Republican policy:

> First we educated ourselves as to its [*Eire Nua*, the Sinn Fein program] content, then we critically reviewed the program and identified what we thought was wrong with it. We came up with the notion of having extra tiers of community councils to add to the governmental structures, and we also discussed the role of the activist in all of this. We considered questions such as communication with the base of our support, the role of newspapers, bulletins, co-ops, tenants' associations, and women's organizations, as means of empowering people.[67]

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[62] Adams (1996), op. cit., p. 221.
[63] Ibid., p. 221.
[64] In September 1974, the inmates at the sentenced end of the camp set the place on fire in protest at the conditions that included poor food, lack of clean laundry , and the treatment of remand prisoners (those charged and awaiting trial) among other things. See Ibid., pp., 235-236.
[65] Ibid., pp. 240-242.
[66] Ibid., p. 241.
[67] Ibid., p. 244.

The status of "political prisoner" , which was in force at the time, allowed the IRA command structure to thrive in prison. Negotiation with the prison authorities was done by the Republican officer commanding each cage. Ivor Bell, a close friend of Adams' at the time, was OC of Cage 9. Along with Gerry Kelly, Brendan Hughes, Bik McFarlane, Bobby Sands and Gerry Adams, these men advocated a more open and participatory way of doing things. Camp OC Dave Morley was very militaristic. Compulsory drill was imposed as well formal lectures with little or no exchange with the 'students'. A further feature was the discipline. Volunteers[68] could be suspended on a number of grounds such as releasing sensitive information under interrogation, pleading guilty, or naming other volunteers. Opposed to the old-school style of prison leadership, these men pressed for change. [69]

This encouraged more debate and an exchange of ideas in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Toney Catney, imprisoned from 1975-1989 and currently a prominent electoral strategist for Sinn Fein, explains,

> I remember a lecture on the morality of armed struggle which was not a text book piece but something based on people's own beliefs and feelings and it was the most interesting lecture I was ever at in the Cages. What you were doing was listening to someone else's feelings about how they felt about armed struggle and being involved in it and then you could articulate your own feelings on the matter. [70]

It is while Adams was in Cage 11 that he wrote articles under the pen name Brownie, at the request of Danny Morrison who was then editor of the *Republican News*. These articles were smuggled out of Long Kesh and printed in the weekly newspaper.

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[68] This refers to IRA's term for its soldiers.
[69] Ibid., p. 44.
[70] Ibid., p. 43.

Adams covered several themes in his pieces, including the conditions of their imprisonment and life in the Cage, loyalism, sectarianism, "active republicanism", and abstentionism, to name but a few. Sometimes Adams would write light pieces describing the scene in the Nissen huts that made up each Cage, always with colourful characters that included Cedric, Egbert, and "your man".[71]

In one such article, Adams provided a vivid depiction of life in the Cages, capturing the mundane details, as well as more poignant and telling moments. In one fell swoop, Adams recounted the details of getting ready for a visit, lashed out at a British soldier for killing an ex-P.O.W., reported on the mandatory Republican "lectures", and translated the meaning of "visits" for prisoners:

> WEDNESDAY: Slept in and had to bluff my way with the hut OC. I touched for a warm shower and had the traditional Long Kesh four s's. A shave, a shower and a shampoo. Couldn't find the smoothing iron, but I managed to persuade the Company QM to borrow one from another cage. Our section had a lecture/discussion on the social content of Republicanism this morning. Afterwards I read that a Private...David Walter Scott, was charged with manslaughter which in any man's language means that he murdered Jim Gallagher, an ex-POW (only released last week) and shot a man and a woman passer-by...Had a great visit, came back, sat on my bunk and tried to hold onto the visit feeling as long as possible.[72]

On another occasion, the light-hearted Gerry Adams explains to the *Republican News* readership that there exists two kinds of internees, those who get up early and those who do not. Obviously belonging to the latter category, the author questions why anyone in their right mind would want to rise early...in prison of all places. He goes on,

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[71] Brownie, "The Change Will Do Us Good", *Republican News*, July 3, 1976, p. 5.
[72] Brownie, "A Week in the Life", *Republican News*, May 29, 1976, p.3. The reader will notice that the fourth 's' is missing.

> Hut by hut. Cage by cage they muster. In the washrooms, by the tea-boilers and under the showers. When everyone else is dragged out of bed by ambitious hut O/C's, the early risers are sitting, smiling their superior smiles, and trying to look innocent. Just as if they hadn't been doing anything at all.[73]

He uses this tale as a springboard to make a pitch for the Irish language. After making fun of the early riser who is learning Irish, he holds him up as a model. Brownie goes on, "These last few years have convinced a lot of good people that there is more to freedom [than] a Brit withdrawal. Without our own language, we will be rebuilding on sand."[74]

Ever concerned to mobilize the grass roots of the Republican Movement from within the prison wall, Adams the internee tirelessly hammered on the same nail. It was done with subtlety but it was unmistakeable. Whether he called it "active Republicanism" or "active abstentionism", he systematically imparted his political thinking to the outside. Mindful of the necessity of being supportive toward Sinn Fein's President, Ruairi O'Bradaigh, Adams was careful to be extremely conservative in his proposals but insisted that a political alternative needed to be developed in order for the Movement to advance. Abstentionism and armed struggle lay at the core of the Republican ethos. Republicans were firmly convinced in the value of armed struggle, and armed struggle alone, until the British left Irish soil definitively. Politics, or 'electoralism' as it is referred to, was anathema to the Movement. Any ventures of that sort, it was considered, quickly led to betrayal by the British.

On one occasion that happened to be the eve of a Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis*[75], Adams gingerly introduced his idea of "active abstentionism" and begged his readers to bear

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[73] Brownie, "Early Riser", *Republican News,* October 11, 1975, p. 5.
[74] Ibid., p. 5.
[75] Annual conference.

with him as he developed his concept.[76] He called for a 'government structure' at the local level in order to fill the void left by abstaining from the regime in place. He reminded readers that local republican government structures were already in place: "And what of 69?...Who housed the people then? Who cleaned the areas then? Who policed the areas then?...Didn't governments exist behind the barricades?"[77] He reassured his audience by saying: "I'm not advocating a diversion from the war effort. Far from it. I'm advocating an extension of it plus an implementation of policy. He continued: Whether or not the Truce continues, an alternative will be needed. An alternative which can be spearheaded by the IRA into whatever phase of the war comes next".[78]

The discussions that took place in the Cages, as the captives' time in prison turned into years and they considered what lay ahead in terms of their struggle for freedom from Great Britain, sowed the seeds of change. There seemed no immediate end to the conflict but it emerged that the Movement needed to prepare for that eventuality. It may not have been clear at the time that the armed struggle was insufficient to drive the British away, but the Movement needed to explore a more political route as well, if only to prepare themselves to govern.The question was how to persuade people to consider a political route that would accompany the armed struggle.

Impact on the Republican Movement

Violence in the North escalated after internment. Thirty soldiers, 73 civilians, 11 RUC and UDR men died in the four months following internment, compared with 4 soldiers, 4 civilians and no RUC men during the same length of time prior to its

[76] Brownie, "Active Abstentionism", *Republican News*, October 18, 1975, p. 6.
[77] Ibid., p. 6. 1969 was the year that Catholics suffered sustained attacks from the Loyalists which led to the dispatching of British troops to the Six Counties.
[78] Ibid., p. 6.

introduction.[79]Catholics and Protestants were burned out of their homes. A total of 7000 people, mostly Catholic were displaced, of whom 2500 fled to the South.[80]

Witnessing the swelling ranks of the new Provisional IRA, the Loyalists, led by Ian Paisley and William Craig, called for the creation of a "third force". This led to the founding of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). According to T.P. Coogan,

> Many of the existing Loyalist paramilitary groups formed links with the new grouping, which at peak may have had a membership of 50,000. Its activities ranged from public marching, in a uniform which combined dark glasses with masks, bush hats, combat jackets or balaclavas, to welfare, to extortion, thuggery, murder, and, as we shall see, helping to bring down a government.[81]

This ensured that sectarian strife would continue and reinforced the armed struggle.

Internment made it easier to arrest and detain people like Gerry Adams and other prominent republicans who might otherwise never have been incarcerated. As a result, Gerry Adams, upon his third release in 1978, encouraged Sinn Fein to devote attention to the plight of prisoners by creating the POW department. Moreover, Sinn Fein was successful in mobilizing the prisoners' families around prison issues and, later in the conflict, the Relatives Action Committee, a group of concerned family members extended their activism and established the H-Block/Armagh Committee. The impact of the H-Block Committees on Sinn Fein's later electoral success will be discussed in the next chapter on the campaign for "special category" status.

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[79] J. McGuffin, op. cit., p. 112.
[80] T.P. Coogan (2002, c1995), op. cit., p. 152.
[81] Ibid., p. 154.

Furthermore, internment had an enormous impact on prisons, prisoners, and the population's relationship to them. Chris Ryder, in his book, *Inside the Maze,* had this consideration:

> ...the introduction of internment sowed the seeds for an even more debilitating conflict that would turn the prisons into universities of terrorism and heavily influence the turbulent events of the next quarter of a century.[82]

Lastly, internment impacted on the leadership by radicalizing the nationalist community, swelling the ranks of the IRA and providing a bigger organization to command. Furthermore many currently in positions of influence in Sinn Fein (and speculatively the IRA) have, at some point, been arrested and incarcerated.[83]

Conclusion

Several events helped to galvanize the armed struggle in the North, such as the pogrom of 1969 and the Falls curfew in which thousands of homes were raided for weapons. The Parachute Regiment of the British Army killed 14 innocent civilians in Derry in January 1972 during an anti-internment demonstration. This event, known as Bloody Sunday, also had a profound effect on the nationalist population. However, internment in August 1971 was certainly a transformative moment in the development of the conflict and the Republican movement.[84] This British policy cemented a community together in a unique way for, in the space of six months, it gave families something in common: they all had loved ones, relatives, friends and neighbours who were "lifted" in

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[82] C. Ryder, op. cit., p. 81.
[83] Notable exceptions to this are Bairbre de Brun, SF Minister of Health and Mitchel McLaughlin, National Chairperson of Sinn Fein.
[84] Internment happened 5 months prior to Bloody Sunday, also considered a vital marker in leading nationalists to the IRA.

the early morning swoops undertaken by the British Army. In *Sinn Fein: 100 Turbulent Years*, Brian Feeney declares:

> If the Falls Road curfew was the first major error that boosted the Provos in Belfast, internment in August 1971 and Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972...alienated the whole of nationalist Ireland. Each of those two traumatic events produced an influx into the Provisional IRA that made it the dominant force on the military side, finally eclipsing the Officials everywhere and bringing hundreds into Sinn Fein.[85]

While this phase of the conflict was probably not so influential on the Republican psyche and development as the campaign for 'special status' phase, it certainly provided for the development of leadership abilities. It gave those prone to political thinking an ample space to think through Republican strategy. Sidelined from the conflict, these local and/or potential leaders watched events and, having the necessary distance from the day-to-day affairs of the struggle, were able to cast a critical eye upon the Republican Movement's leadership. Gerry Adams is the best known and most prolific of these. However, others in less high-profile positions also spent time in gaol debating the issue of armed struggle and politics. Jim Gibney, a senior Sinn Fein strategist, was interned from December 1972 until September 1974. Having been on the run since the introduction of internment, Gibney says there was no time in the intense "roller coaster" of the 1970-1972 period for reflection.[86] He continues:

> So to be able to sit back and say now "Why am I in this situation at 17 or 16," and I suppose you needed time out to reflect and that's what internment was for me anyway. It was time out of this intensity, during which then I began to explore ideas, political ideas, political history.[87]

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[85] Brian Feeney,op.cit., pp. 270-271.
[86] Jim Gibney, interview in *Frontline Online: The IRA & Sinn Fein*, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/gibney.html , p. 6.
[87] Ibid., p. 6.

As with the South African and Taiwanese experiences, the imprisonment of insurgents helped bring together potential leaders. While incarcerated, they learned from each other, about politics and leadership. Eventually, when they were released, these prisoners were more apt and better able to undertake leadership roles in the transition to democracy.[88] The Irish case is a good example of the importance of the prisoner community in the development of the movement. It also reveals a strong historical tradition of prison resistance that has served every generation of Irish republican.

Internment failed. It was devised in order to contain the nationalist uprising. It was meant to defeat the insurgents, but instead people flocked to the IRA and Sinn Fein. The British had not learned from past mistakes. They had used internment after the 1916 rising as well. Upon their release at Christmas 1916, the prisoners took control of Sinn Fein and turned it into an electoral success. Referring to the mobilization that internment created in the 1970s, Brian Feeney declares:

> Internment had produced intense rage and resentment among those affected, prisoners and extended families alike. It had brought together men from all parts of the country and bonded them, even those innocent of any involvement in political conspiracy, into an organic unit.[89]

The examination of the internment phase of the conflict (1971-1975) supports the thesis of Ellison and Martin, that "the response by the state and its repressive apparatus can exacerbate levels of mobilization and collective action over and above the original grievances which led to the formation of the movement".[90] The consistent thread in

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[88] Fran Buntman and Tong-Yi Huang, op.cit., p. 44.
[89] B. Feeney, op. cit., p. 60.
[90] Graham Ellison and Greg Martin , op. cit., p. 695; Ellison and Martin's work concerns the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement (NICRA), but the theoretical assertions are equally valid for the Republican Movement which was a part of NICRA.

British policy with regard to the conflict in the North has been repression. It will be shown to ultimately fail in the next chapter as well, in a discussion of the campaign for 'special category status'.

Chapter 3: The Campaign for 'Special Status'

There is a consensus among scholars and commentators that the 1981 hunger strike marked a turning point in the conflict and more particularly in Republican strategy. Given the worldwide media attention on Bobby Sands and his nine comrades, great attention was focused on the strike itself. However, the 1981 hunger strike was the culmination of a campaign that began in 1976. The prisoners orchestrated this campaign after the British government's one-hundred-and-eighty-degree change of attitude regarding their "prisoner of war" status. On March 1, 1976, the government introduced its new "criminalization" policy. It built new facilities on the same grounds as Long Kesh, several H-shaped one-story buildings and renamed the prison The Maze. Overnight, those newly-sentenced for 'scheduled offenses'[91] were forced to wear prison uniforms, do prison work and were withheld free association. In short they were treated as common criminals, a far cry from life in the Cages of Long Kesh. The campaign for "special category" status was the longest, most difficult and most important in terms of repercussions on the Republican Movement. Most who were involved in it from inside or outside the prison have yet to come to terms with the cruelty of it and the human suffering it inflicted.[92] Nonetheless for republicans, it is a powerful symbol of resistance to the British oppressor and a source of pride in their community. Kirean McEvoy has this characterization:

> Dirty protest and hunger strike (for Republicans in particular) offered a historical template from which to draw inspiration and legitimacy, they represented resistance through endurance and self-sacrifice.[93]

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[91] "Scheduled offenses" refer to so-called "terrorist" charges as specified in the Special Powers Act.
[92] In an eloquent tribute to the hunger strikers, Gerry Adams said at the inaugural Friends of Sinn Fein (Canada) gala in Toronto, in November 2001, that he still finds it hard to think about this period.
[93] K. McEvoy, op. cit., p. 45.

This chapter briefly traces the historical context of hunger striking in relation to the Republican cause which evokes the traditionalism in which the Republican Movement is steeped. Then it looks at the campaign from its inception when Kieran Nugent first refused to wear a prison uniform in September 1976, until the end of the hunger strike in October of 1981. It examines the leadership within the prison at this time and explores the dynamic between the inside and outside leaderships. It provides the context on the outside including the family support, the media treatment, the international attention and the British government's inflexibility. It addresses the Republican Movement's electoral debut and its significance. Finally, it assesses the campaign in terms of the relationship between imprisonment and leadership and qualifies British policy as a prime motivating force behind the growth in Republican sympathy.

Brief history of hunger striking and the Irish

Hunger striking is a very Irish activity and predates Irish republicanism. In medieval times, it was used to shame someone who was considered to have committed an injustice against the faster. *Troscad* or *Cealachan* meant literally, fasting on someone's doorstep.[94] It was a practice that Republicanism latched onto. Bobby Sands was not the first to die on hunger strike.

Thomas Ashe, a former president of the IRA's predecessor the Irish Republican Brotherhood, died from force-feeding while on hunger strike in 1917. He and eighty-three others were fasting for "political status" prior to the Anglo-Irish War of Independence. According to Gerry Adams, Ashe's death was "a turning-point in rallying

[94] David Beresford (1987), *Ten Men Dead:The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, p. 7.

mass support behind the demand for independence".[95] His funeral was attended by over 3000 uniformed Irish Volunteers and Michael Collins delivered the oration.[96] Thomas Ashe became another martyr. Many more would follow.

Cork Mayor Terence Macswiney also died while on hunger strike in Brixton Prison in 1920. MacSwiney had been arrested by the British at a meeting of the local IRA brigade and sentenced to two years in prison for sedition.[97] Also a poet, playwright and philosopher, he wrote the famous words that would inspire successive generations of Republicans: " ...the contest on our side is not one of rivalry or vengeance, but of endurance. It is not those who can inflict the most, but those that can suffer the most who will conquer".[98] Two of his comrades also died by hunger strike back in Cork prison.[99]

Hunger strikes were also undertaken in the 1940s in the South. The treaty that partitioned Ireland in 1922 divided nationalists into pro- and anti-treaty factions and led to a bloody civil war. The pro-treaty forces became the legitimate army of the new state. The anti-treaty IRA still fought for a 32-county state. State forces instituted harsh measures to bring them to heal. Those taken prisoner fought for recognition of their political status. Tony D'Arcy, Jack McNeela and Sean McCaughey, all anti-treaty members of the IRA, undertook hunger strikes for this recognition but were ruthlessly treated and allowed to die in 1940.[100]

In 1972, Billy McKee, leader of the Belfast Brigade of the IRA, led a hunger strike with 80 Republican prisoners and 40 Loyalist prisoners for the recognition of

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[95] Gerry Adams (1995), *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace*, Dingle: Brandon, p. 70.
[96] K. McEvoy, op. cit., p. 75.
[97] D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 9.
[98] Terence MacSwiney as cited by D. Beresford, ibid., pp. 9-10.
[99] D. Beresford, ibid., p. 10-11.
[100] Ibid., p. 11.

"political status" and segregation between Republicans and Loyalists in prison.[101] This hunger strike was successful because it came just when William Whitelaw, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, was trying to negotiate an IRA ceasefire in order to conduct talks with a view to settling the crisis in the North. Part of the deal was for the recognition of "political status", and so the prisoners were taken off the strike and "political status" instituted.[102] Whitelaw conceded "political status" for expediency's sake and was later to admit, "It did establish a practice which caused my successors considerable trouble".[103]

Also in 1972, Sean MacStiofan, the Provisional IRA's Chief of Staff was arrested and imprisoned in the South. He undertook a hunger and thirst strike but went off it without winning any concessions, a point that hurt him politically in the Movement. There is speculation that he sought an order from the IRA Army Council to stop his strike. However that transpired, the IRA did put an end to his fast but his influence in the Movement dwindled after this event.

In late 1973 Marian and Dolores Price undertook a hunger strike in a British jail. They were demanding to be transferred to the North of Ireland to serve out their sentence. Hugh Feeney and Gerry Kelly were also in prison in Britain and undertook a fast. All were force-fed for over 200 days and eventually transferred to the North.[104]

Michael Guaghan undertook a hunger strike in 1974, protesting for 'political status' from the Parkhurst prison on the Isle of Wight. He died from complications

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[101] Chris Ryder, op. cit., p. 102.
[102] Ibid., p. 103.
[103] William Whitelaw (1989), *The Whitelaw Memoirs*, London: Aurum Press, p. 94.
[104] Tim Pat Coogan (2000, c1970), *The IRA*, fully revised and updated, New York: Palgrave, pp. 410-413.

arising from force-feeding on June 3.[105]His hunger strike attracted little attention but his death was steeped in controversy. Firstly, in British medical circles, there was an argument over the ethics of force-feeding. And secondly, he had a funeral procession of IRA sympathizers that spanned the width of Ireland as his body was met in Dublin airport and was accompanied all the way to County Mayo. The funeral cortege practically closed down the town of Ballina, and created much publicity for the Provisionals. [106]

Frank Stagg, a better-known Republican martyr died in Wakefield prison, in England in 1976. The British re-routed Stagg's body from Dublin to Shannon and secretly buried him under concrete, all in an effort to thwart IRA plans for a military funeral. The IRA dug the coffin up and re-buried it in a republican plot.[107]British theatrics used to foil this IRA man's proper burial greatly enhanced his martyrdom.

This short view of striking shows that both the British and Irish governments have had different responses to this form of protest, sometimes letting prisoners die and other times negotiating with them. It points to a lack of coherence in policy and shows that the importance of gaining P.O.W. status for republican prisoners transcended the prison issue and went to the heart of the age-old battle for the legitimacy of the Republican cause.

Withdrawing "special status"

The 1981 hunger strike was the culmination of a protest that began in 1976 when Britain introduced its policy of "criminalization" and withdrew the "political status" of republican prisoners. This involved three features: the removal of "special category status" for prisoners; processing suspected IRA members through the juryless Diplock

[105] Ibid., pp. 415-416.
[106] Ibid., p. 416.
[107] Ibid., p. 417.

courts[108], also known as the conveyor-belt system, used for the "disposal of unwanted members of the public"; [109] and the continued use of "deep interrogation" techniques[110] to extract self-incriminating statements and confessions from members of the nationalist community who were arrested.[111]These methods allowed the authorities to send up to 3000 people to prison, mostly, though not all, nationalists[112].

"Criminalization", "Ulsterization", and "normalization" formed a three-pronged strategy developed by the British government in response to the failure of internment and the failed attempt at shutting down the IRA. The first of these was developed by Lord Gardiner whose 1976 report condemned 'special category status' and called for a new approach that involved building cellular accommodation (the H-Blocks) and treating prisoners as common criminals.[113] "Ulsterization", referred to the handing over of security to the RUC and Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR) and "normalization" meant making the Six Counties look normal so that if a bomb destroyed a building, it would be rebuilt as soon as possible. In this way, the government could better claim that the IRA was merely a bunch of criminals wreaking havoc on a peace-loving nation. Making the Six Counties look normal would also be dependent on the media's treatment of the 'Troubles'. The Gardiner Report was eloquent in its advice:

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[108] Named after Lord Diplock who introduced new judicial measures that tightened bail conditions, shifted the burden of proof of innocence onto the accused and did away with juries because of the fear of intimidation. See Coogan (2002 , c1996), *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for* Peace, New York: Palgrave op. cit., p. 440.
[109] Frank Kitson, as cited by Gerry Adams, ibid., p. 71.
[110] A euphemism for brutality and torture.
[111] Ibid., p. 71.
[112] T.P. Coogan op. cit., p. 262.
[113] Ibid., p. 262-263.

> There can be no question of introducing censorship in a free society in time of peace. But this does not mean that nothing can be done. We recommend that it be made a summary offence for editors, printers and publishers of newspapers to publish anything which purports to be an advertisement for or on behalf of an illegal organization or part of it...In the present situation, we suggest that the Press Council should closely examine the reconciliation of the reporting of terrorist activities with the public interest.[114]

Roy Mason, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the time, endorsed these recommendations wholeheartedly and pursued the security policy and the recommendations of the Gardiner report with gusto.

Prisoners undertake a campaign

Faced with the withdrawal of "special category status", incoming prisoners began to protest by refusing to wear a prison uniform. The first prisoner to protest these measures was Kieran Nugent who chose to be naked rather than wear a prison uniform and so used his prison-issue blanket to cover himself.[115] As more republican prisoners filed in, many copied Nugent's reaction and thus began what came to be known as "the blanket protest". The refusal to wear prison clothes or do prison work entailed a loss of 'privileges' including free association, visits and parcels. Prisoners were not allowed to communicate among each other and when they did, prison guards assaulted them.[116] Around 250 prisoners had been on the blanket for eighteen months whey they decided to escalate the protest by further refusing to co-operate with the authorities.[117] The situation rapidly degenerated when prisoners were refused access to the toilet without donning

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[114] *Gardiner Report on Counter-Insurgency* Methods (recommended H-Blocks), Cmnd 5847, HMSO, London, 1975; as cited by T.P. Coogan, ibid., pp.356-357.
[115] Laurence McKeown, op. cit., p. 51.
[116] Ibid., p. 53.
[117] Ibid., p. 56.

prison garb, being forced to use the chamber pots. In turn, these were rarely emptied by the staff, or "accidentally" tipped over in the cell. In response, these same pots were spilled under the crack of the cell doors and contents were thrown through the windows that had been systematically smashed to alleviate the stench of the cells. Soon the contents were being thrown back into the cells by prison staff.[118] As Laurence McKeown explains:

> With the screws throwing the excrement back in the windows the decision was soon taken to smear it on the walls of the cells. In the context of this new phase of struggle, of becoming active as opposed to being passive, the idea of putting excrement onto the walls was not looked on in any horrific fashion, or at least no one voiced their reservations. Probably again we thought it would be short lived.[119]

Thus began what republicans refer to as the "no-wash" protest and what the authorities called the "dirty" protest that was to last until March 2, 1981 the day after Sands started his fast.[120] In late 1979 the situation looked bleak and prisoners started to talk of staging a hunger strike. The prisoners had been on protest for three years now with no sign of movement from the government. The "no wash" protest was in its second year and living in filth and picking maggots out of one's eyes was taking its toll. Cardinal O'Fiaich, the former Archbishop of Armagh, visited the prison during the "no wash" protest and made these famous remarks to the press:

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[118] Ibid., p. 57-58.
[119] Ibid., p. 58.
[120] L. McKeown, op.cit., p. 77.

> One could hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being...The stench and filth in some of the cells with the remains of rotten food and human excreta scattered around the walls was almost unbearable.[121]

The Catholic clergy at the time was trying to seek resolution to this state of affairs by engaging in meetings with British authorities but to no avail. Brendan Hughes, the Officer Commanding (OC) in the protesting block, wrote to the leadership on the outside saying that for the sake of the younger lads who faced the prospect of ten years on protest, something should be done. Discussion centered on the idea of a hunger strike. Hughes was exasperated and told a Sinn Fein official that "the leadership just did not appreciate what was happening inside, the savagery of it all".[122]But outside, the leaders had serious difficulty contemplating a hunger strike for several reasons:

> Our opposition in Sinn Fein to the hunger strike had to do partly with that difficulty[123], partly with the fact that close personal relationships existed between the prisoners themselves and between prisoners and republicans on the outside, as we all knew that we were entering a period of intense anguish. But primarily, we opposed it because we did not believe that it would succeed in moving the British government. It must also be said that, in terms of the political priorities of the movement, we did not want the hunger strike. We were well aware that a hunger strike such as was proposed would demand exclusive attention, would, in effect, hijack the struggle, and this conflicted with our sense of political priorities of the movement.[124]

The "difficulty" that Gerry Adams refers to represents the quintessential consideration behind the hunger strike. For over and above trying to foresee the

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[121] Cardinal Thomas O'Fiaich, as cited by G. Adams, op. cit., p.73.
[122] D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 22.
[123] "That difficulty" refers to the fact that it takes a special kind of person to go through with a hunger strike to the end, "to resist the voices in one's own head, the concern of friends and family, not to mention the pressures of the authorities, and it is extremely difficult to know, until one is staring death right in the face, whether one is that particular kind of person". G. Adams (1995), op. cit. p. 79.
[124] Ibid., p. 79.

opponent's response and analyzing one's chances of winning the battle, there was the problem of whether the hunger striker would actually go through "to the death" with his fast, no matter what eventuality cropped up short of major concessions. However Gerry Adams, having been on remand in the Blocks after his 1978 arrest for IRA membership, was sympathetic to the prisoners' plight. While awaiting trial, Adams joined the "no wash" protest, an experience that marked him and helped him to realize that it was possible to fight from within the prison system. [125] Also, his close friend Brendan Hughes was leading the strike. So despite the fact that the outside leadership had serious reservations about it, ultimately the decision fell to the prisoners since there was nothing the outside leadership could do to dissuade them short of a direct order...and that, they were not prepared to do. They could no more forbid a hunger strike that attempted to move the situation forward, than they could order one.

Under the leadership of Brendan Hughes, Sean McKenna, Leo Green, John Nixon, Raymond McCartney, Tommy McKearney and Tom McFeely started their fast on October 27, 1980. The inflexible attitude of the British government increased the pressure and drama of the strike and on December 1, Mairéad Farrell, Mary Doyle and Mairéad Nugent, three women from the Armagh prison who had already been on the 'no wash' protest, joined the hunger strikers. On December 15th and 16th, 30 more prisoners from Long Kesh joined in an effort to exert pressure on the British government for a solution.[126] By then, Sean McKenna's life was in danger. Physically, he was the weakest of the hunger strikers. On December 18, after 53 days and while McKenna was close to death, a deal seemed to have been reached in which the government was granting a

[125] D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 24.
[126] Liam Clarke, op. cit., p. 127; G. Adams (1996), op. cit., p. 286.

concession on the crucial issue of the right to wear one's own clothes. However celebration was quickly replaced by despair as the hunger strikers, who under the pressure of the dying McKenna, had ended the strike, realized that they had been out-maneuvered by the British: the concession was not the right to wear one's own clothes but the right to wear "prison issue" clothes that resembled civilian clothing.[127]

Brendan Hughes was devastated. Having been on hunger strike, Hughes had relinquished his position as OC to Bobby Sands, another friend of Gerry Adams. Sands quickly moved to organize a second hunger strike, though Hughes begged him to reconsider. Sands was adamant. Once again, a list went around and those who considered themselves willing and capable of facing certain death, signed up for the second strike. There was no shortage of candidates.

The second hunger strike commenced on March 1, 1981, to coincide with the 5th anniversary of the removal of "special status". It took that long because the leadership on the outside was no more in favour of the second hunger strike and had argued quite forcefully against it. Bobby Sands was undeterred. In response to pleas from the leadership outside, an unsigned comm[128] that clearly had Sands' imprint on it, stated:

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[127] D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 27.

[128] a message written out on a cigarette paper or toilet paper, folded and wrapped in Saran Wrap, and smuggled in and out of the prison by visitors to the prison. The system was perfected to the point where the inside and outside leaderships could be in communication several times in the same 24-hour period.

> 31.1.81 To Army Council
> Comrade, we received your comm. (dated 30.1.81). We have listened carefully to what you have said and we recognize and accept the spirit in which it was wrote [*sic*], likewise in view of the situation we do not deny you or criticize your extreme cautiousness. But, however distressing it may be, we regret that our decision to hunger strike remains the same and we reconfirm this decision now with the same vigor and determination...We hope that you accept that the struggle in H-Blocks, being part of the overall struggle, must also go on in unison. We reconfirm and pledge 'our' full confidence and support to you and march on with you to the Irish Socialist Republic.[129]

The recognition of political status entailed having a number of 'privileges' that were not granted to common criminals. The prisoners had a list of five demands that essentially encompassed 'political status' and had remained unchanged from the beginning of the 'blanket protest'. These were:

1. The right to wear their own clothes;
2. The right to be segregated from other non-republican prisoners;
3. The right to be free from doing prison work;
4. The right to extra parcels and extra visits;
5. The right to free association.

Bobby Sands led the hunger strike and was replaced by Bik McFarlane as OC. The prisoners had decided to stagger the strike so that there were always new men going on the fast, so as to exert maximum pressure on the British government. The women of Armagh prison, who had participated in the 'no wash' protest, and the first hunger strike, were asked not to participate in the second fast. On the outside, the Relatives Action Committees worked tirelessly to publicize the plight of republican prisoners in Long Kesh. Amnesty International, The International Red Cross, politicians from the South,

[129] Unsigned comm. Most likely Bobby Sands in position as OC; cited in D. Beresford, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

Catholic clergymen, and the European Commission of Human Rights all went at some point to observe, discuss, and persuade around the issue of the fasting prisoners, prison conditions in Long Kesh, and British policy toward the prisoners.

Bobby Sands had been fasting for two weeks when the Nationalist Westminster MP for Fermanagh-South Tyronne, Frank Maguire[130], suddenly died. By now there was a committee headed by Gerry Adams to manage the hunger strike on the outside, along with Martin McGuinness, Danny Morrison , Jim Gibney and Tom Hartley. It was Gibney who first floated the idea of running Sands in a by-election on a H-Block ticket to replace Maguire. Gibney's reason for putting Sands up as a candidate had nothing to do with entering electoral politics but was meant to increase publicity for the hunger strikers' cause:

> What was motivating me was, 'We've got to break through this censorship thing' [the absence of health bulletins, etc.]. I hadn't even got to the point of thinking we'd win. In my head was, 'If we announce we're putting Bobby Sands up, it's going to be loads of publicity. It's going to make our job of building support on the outside all the easier'."[131]

Tactically the Republican Movement had to ensure that Sands would have no nationalist competition lest it split the vote and give Harry West, the Unionist candidate, the victory. Bernadette McAliskey (*née* Devlin) was thinking of running. So was Frank Maguire's brother Noel, and the SDLP's Austin Currie. Not wanting to run the risk of being responsible for Sands' death in case someone else won, and not wanting to risk

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[130] Maguire, ironically, had been very supportive on the prison issue.
[131] Jim Gibney; cited in Brian Feeney, op. cit., pp. 288-289.

splitting the vote in favour of the Unionist candidate, everyone stood down and left Sands an open field.[132]

Activists poured into the constituency from all over Ireland in order to help Owen Carron, Sands' election agent, with the campaign. The hunger strike committee also spent most of its time there. They worked tirelessly for the nine days of campaigning to ensure that the nationalist voters came out.[133]

On Friday, April 10, 1981, Bobby Sands was elected MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone. The score: Sands—30,492, West—29, 046. It was a time for jubilation. The Republicans had just shown that, contrary to the British government's claim, they had the people's support. It was a devastating blow to the government and the contradictions emanating from their policy in the North were now barely veiled. According to David Beresford, the election win,

> ...Undermined the entire shaky edifice of British policy in Northern Ireland, which had been so painfully constructed on the hypothesis that blame for the "Troubles" could be placed on a small gang of thugs and hoodlums who enjoyed no community support.[134]

This was an incredible morale boost for the prisoners. Fellow prisoner and yet to be hunger striker Laurence McKeown explains:

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[132] Ibid., p. 289. Wrongly, winning the election gave the Republicans hope that the British would not let Sands die.
[133] D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 83.
[134] Ibid., p. 85.

> We were ecstatic about the victory. We thought it would greatly improve Bobby's chances of living, that the Brits would not want one of their own MPs to die on hunger strike...But it made no difference, not in that sense anyhow. Bobby's election gave worldwide publicity to our protest and struggle but he still died. Some believe that the very fact that he got elected sealed his death as the Brits couldn't then let him live.[135]

Kieran Doherty and Paddy Agnew, both H-Block candidates, won elections in the South as well. It was these events that changed forever the nature of the struggle for the republican movement. After Sands' death, his election agent, Owen Carron, ran in his place and won by an even larger margin. Support for the hunger strikers and for the nationalist cause was evident. Prime Minister Thatcher was undeterred and allowed Sands to die without even an attempt to engage in discussions based on the five demands. No amount of drilling prepared the Republican Movement for his death. Bik McFarlane, a deeply religious person with a rare combination of sensitivity and *sangfroid* was wrecked. Upon hearing the news, McFarlane wrote at least six comms. One was sent to the other hunger strikers:

> To:—Frank—Ray + Patsy—Hospital
> I feel a great sense of personal loss also—in fact we all do—blanket men are more than comrades—they are brothers. Therefore our loss is all the greater. We all feel a bitterness of immeasurable depth and a very great anger at this callous act by the British government...[136]

And to the outside leadership, he had this to say:

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[135] L. McKeown, op. cit., p.78.
[136] Bik McFarlane in a comm.; cited in D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 100-101.

> Liam Og Tue. 5.5.81 8:00 a.m.
> Comrade, this grief is unbelievable. I know you all must be wrecked out there. Words fail me to tell you the truth. I always was prepared for this and thought it would come but I was always praying and hoping that we could avoid it. When it did come it stunned me and I still feel numb...Let's stay together comrade and hammer the bastards into the ground....[137]

Later the same day, he wrote another message to the outside leadership:

> Comrade, I've been following all the news and trying to keep a clear head at the same time. Things must be hectic out there...Well mate, it's been a heartbreaking day for us all. We lost someone we all loved very dearly and we can't cry in case someone is looking. Who made these rules, eh?[138]

One hundred thousand people attended Sands' funeral cortege to Milltown cemetery in Belfast. All over the world, there was an outpouring of sympathy. The state of Rhode Island declared a day of mourning. Some state legislatures passed motions condemning Margaret Thatcher's stance on the issue. In Norway, a balloon full of tomato sauce splattered on Queen Elizabeth, who was there on an official visit. Newspapers around the world condemned the British government.[139]

Francie Hughes, legendary IRA gunman, died shortly after followed by Ray McCreesh, then Patsy O'Hara of the INLA.The weeks passed, more prisoners died[140], and Gerry Adams' reading that Thatcher was immoveable seemed correct, since she seemed prepared to let one after the other die. As the deaths accumulated, Irish politicians

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[137] Bik McFarlane, Ibid., p. 100.
[138] Bik McFarlane, Ibid., p. 101.
[139] G.Adams (1996),op. cit., pp. 295-296.
[140] The ten dead hunger strikers were, in order, Bobby Sands(IRA), Francie Hughes(IRA), Ray McCreesh (IRA), Patsy O'hara (INLA), Joe McDonell (IRA), Martin Hurson (IRA), Tom McIlwee (IRA), Kevin Lynch (INLA), Kieran Doherty (IRA), and Mickey Devine (INLA). McDonell was the oldest and died at 30. Thomas McIlwee was the youngest at 23. The rest were between 24 and 27 years old.

and the Catholic clergy were anxious to pressure Britain into a solution. Finding a compromise led them to visit the fasting prisoners and talk with British officials. An initiative of the Catholic Church's Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP) was established to try to reach a suitable solution. The ICJP saw its role as mediator in the crisis, a role that Bik McFarlane and the outside leadership would not entertain, especially since it risked thwarting another more promising secret initiative. This covert scheme was taking place between the hunger strike committee (on the outside) and the Mountain Climber (a secret British envoy) in the hopes of finding an acceptable negotiated settlement. The Mountain Climber discussed the British dilemma with frankness and told the Republicans that Thatcher had the backing not only of her entire cabinet but also the opposition and foreign heads of state, so could not come up with a package different from the proposed settlement that he had shared with them July 19. In short, this included "their own clothes, the restoration of letter, parcel and visiting privileges, the restoration of one fifth of lost remission, but no advances possible on association and more fudging on the work issue".[141] He insisted that the government had genuine good will and gave them verbal reassurances. The external leadership replied that this would not be enough for the prisoners. They themselves (the external leadership) were surprised by the prisoners' resolve to continue to die for the five demands. They told the Mountain Climber that verbal assurances would not work and the prison warders would ignore anything that was not written down. It was their comrades who suffered at the hands of the British, and so they could not possibly give their accord to such a proposal.[142] The secret initiative was over.

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[141] Beresford, op. cit., p. 249.
[142] Ibid., p. 251.

Father Denis Faul was a well-known figure to Republican prisoners. He was the chaplain in Long Kesh and had been quite vocal in exposing British brutality and torture of detainees. He decided that enough was enough. He organized meetings with parents of the hunger strikers and began to persuade them to take their loved ones off the fast once they lapsed into unconsciousness, a measure that some mothers were only too eager to take. As Paddy Quinn reached the critical stage and lapsed into a coma, his mother took him off. [143] Eventually other relatives indicated that they would take their loved ones off the strike as well at the critical stage, and they began to do just that.

Obviously the hunger strike could no longer work if relatives started to prevent their loved ones from dying. Out of loyalty to their dead comrades, the prisoners could not end the strike without a principled settlement and to continue would have meant countless more deaths. In the end it seems as though parental interference proved a good way out though the prisoners and the leadership were displeased at the time. Bik McFarlane explains:

> We discussed the situation back in the Block and realized that our hunger strike had finally come to an end, not because we were in any way defeated by Thatcher's government or because we lacked the will to continue. We had effectively been robbed of the only means we had of making our protest a real threat, and the element which robbed us did so out of deep concern and love.[144]

Though the parents had taken control of the situation, the leadership regained that control by deciding how and when to call off the strike. The leadership held off ending the strike for a couple of days, long enough for Bik McFarlane, in collaboration with the hunger strike committee, to prepare a lengthy statement recounting the protest of the last

[143] Ibid., p. 275.
[144] Bik McFarlane as cited in B. Campbell et. al, op. cit., p. 256.

five years, outlining British hypocrisy and its "death policy", blaming the clergy and accusing Irish politicians of ineptitude and accessories to murder. The statement also declared:

> There were several reasons given by our comrades for going on hunger strike. One was because we had no choice and no other means of securing a principled solution to the four-year protest. Another, and of fundamental importance, was to advance the Irish people's right to liberty. We believe that the age-old struggle for Irish self-determination and freedom has been immeasurably advanced by this hunger strike and therefore we claim a massive political victory. The hunger strikers, by their selflessness, have politicized a very substantial section of the Irish nation and exposed the shallow, unprincipled nature of the Irish partitionist bloc.[145]

The hunger strike ended October 3, 1981. In its immediate aftermath, the prisoners were granted the right to wear their own clothes. Not wanting to appear lenient toward the Republican prisoners, the British government extended this right to all prisoners in the Six Counties. Not wearing the prison uniform had severely curtailed the prisoners' movement since the authorities were unwilling to let them out in a towel or blanket. So, this single concession radically changed the prisoners' conditions: "For the first time in five years, we could get out of our cells, eat in the canteen, go to the yard for exercise, watch television during association time, listen to the radio, get access to the library and have weekly visits".[146] They maintained their protest however, as they were not prepared to do prison work. It remains a matter of perspective whether or not the campaign for 'special status' ended in victory or failure. From the prisoners' point of view, the changes that resulted simply from wearing their own clothes were enormous.

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[145] Republican Statement, as cited by Brian Campbell, et al., ibid., pp. 259-264.
[146] L. McKeown, op. cit., p. 81.

Moreover, being able to associate meant that they were better able to regroup and re-direct their struggle. The mass escape in 1983, in which 38 republican prisoners drove out the main gate of Long Kesh testifies to the short time it took for prisoners to gain control of the jail.[147] Nonetheless, based on the notion that the IRA Army Council "had not fully accepted the strategic and symbolic logic of the hunger strike", Buntman advances that "the hunger strike was an inadequate means to secure the political struggle".[148] It will be argued below however, that the hunger strike did just that (pp. 59-60). First though, in order to understand the controversy about whether or not the hunger strike was a success or a failure, it is necessary to examine the context in which information was disseminated in a bid to win over local and international observers.

The propaganda war

Upon the introduction of the criminalization policy in 1976, Sinn Fein set up the Relatives Action Committees (RAC) as a way to make the prisoners' fight heard and to broaden the base of support for the struggle in the H-Blocks.[149]Still the prison issue made little impact on the general public. Jim Gibney could see the problems with the RAC, made up almost exclusively of Republican members of Sinn Fein. A larger organization was needed that would include people from other sections of the community. He suggested the establishment of a "National H-Block/Armagh Committee" in order to attract more people who were not necessarily committed to the Republicans' armed struggle.[150]Moreover, because its membership was no longer limited to the North, it became a truly national organization and could exercise influence on the South. And

[147] Laurence McKeown, telephone conversation with the author, April 26, 2004.
[148] Buntman, op. cit., p. 280.
[149] B. Feeney, op. cit., pp. 281,284.
[150] Ibid., p. 285.

because it was no longer limited to Republicans, it changed its discourse, and in fact, developed the five demands as a way to circumvent the demand for 'special status'. In this way, the struggle could be portrayed as a humanitarian battle, therefore appealing to a wider audience.[151]

Britain, on the other hand, had at its disposal several tools to discredit the republican community, including media censorship. The information battlefield played an important role in the conflict and the British government spared no expense in trying to influence public opinion through the media.[152] It exercised severe constraints on it by using intimidation tactics on journalists and executives, and enacting legislation to constrain media reporting of "The Troubles" and especially the Republican Movement.[153] Journalists and broadcasters covering events in the North were sometimes arrested, imprisoned, threatened, dismissed, and intimidated by State authorities.[154] The existence of repressive anti-terrorist legislation as well as other laws like the BBC licensing agreement and the Broadcasting Act of 1981 have been more than sufficient for journalists and broadcasters to exercise extreme caution in their treatment of the conflict.[155]

Censorship has always been hotly debated in parliament, especially in regards to the 'Troubles'. The dilemma is that censorship can be damaging to the credibility of media and broadcasting. Other measures were therefore used. For instance, the BBC

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[151] Ibid., p. 285.
[152] D. Miller (1984), *Don't Mention the War: Northern Ireland, Propaganda and the Media* , London: Pluto Press, Appendix B, p.292.
[153] There exists a body of literature on media censorship of the conflict. See David Miller, Liz Curtis, Bill Rolston, and others.
[154] D. Miller, op. cit., 238-239.
[155] Ibid., p. 239. For a discussion of different legislation, see Bill Rolston (1996) "Political Censorship" in Bill Rolston and David Miller (eds.) (1996), *War and Words: The Northern Ireland Media Reader*, Belfast: Beyond the Pale, pp. 237-238

exercised self-censorship in the form of 'professional improvements' that included a vetting system at the highest levels of the corporation.[156] This vetting system, known as the "reference upward system" ensured that no programme or story contained unpalatable information on issues such as army brutality, or the reasons why Catholics supported the IRA. According to the Federation of Broadcasting Unions Chief at the time, Tom Rhys,

> Frustrated staff [ ] were beginning to avoid 'items on which they ought to work', or avoid Irish subjects altogether, and members believed that their careers were jeopardized by disagreements over items on Ireland.[157]

Not only did reporting on the nationalists' perspective of the conflict become difficult, this was combined with the introduction by the army of an "information policy unit" in Lisburn, a few kilometers south of Belfast, a propaganda machine better known in journalistic circles as the "Lisburn Lie Machine".[158] This unit was part of the army's "psy-ops" or psychological operations, "otherwise known as disinformation".[159] The resources allotted to this were to aid in fabricating the perception that the IRA were at best, just criminals, and at worst, akin to the mafia, and that there really was not a political crisis at all in the North. According to Gerry Adams,

> The contradictions in the British position were enormous but their access to world media and the resources they could bring to bear in the propaganda war meant that they could achieve considerable success in presenting the struggle in the Six Counties as a species of 'Mafia terrorism'. When the contradictions threatened to emerge, they used various means in their continuing psy-ops war to obscure the reality of the situation.[160]

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[156] Ibid., p. 12.
[157] Ibid., p. 13.
[158] D. Miller, op. cit., p. 79. According to Miller, the IRA was considered more truthful than the Army.
[159] Ibid., 78.
[160] G. Adams (1995), op. cit., p. 70.

It is crucial that the media have the appearance of being independent from the State, for the State to maintain its legitimacy.[161] More importantly, in terms of this particular exploration, the British government sought to project an image of the conflict to the international community. In short, it maintained that the IRA invented the conflict, and that getting rid of the 'terrorists' would put an end to the crisis. It also tried to show the Republican prisoners as a small isolated group of extremists.

The international broadcaster of the BBC, the External Services, was one such vehicle for taking this message to the international community. Its approach to reporting the hunger strike on the BBC World News was deliberately couched in neutral-sounding terms. Because it is directed at an international audience, the World News Service is run independently from the BBC, and is even housed in separate quarters. It is funded by, and consequently receives guidance from, the Foreign Office.[162] It therefore treated the conflict differently than the national BBC. For instance, it tended to avoid using the term 'terrorist', because of its concern to appear to be a credible source of news.[163] In explaining this, World Service news editor David Spaull declared:

> We too would often like to relieve our feeling of revulsion by using the broadcastable [*sic*] equivalents of 'murdering bastards'. We don't because we feel that something far more important than our feelings or the feelings of some of our listeners is at stake.[164]

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[161] D. Miller, op. cit., p. 13.
[162] Donald R. Browne (1982), *International Radio Broadcasting: The Limits of the Limitless Medium*, New York: Praeger, p. 265; also see note 18, p. 183.
[163] Ibid., 168-169.
[164] Ibid., p. 169.

That "something far more important" had to do with two notions: That journalism is about fighting terrorism, and that the appearance of impartiality is far more important than actual impartiality. According to David Miller,

> The debate in the World Service revolves in part around the notion that it is the job of the journalist to 'fight terrorism'. Editorial staff have 'no doubt' that not using the 'T' word enhances their credibility and therefore the fight against 'terrorism'...[165]

Its reputation as a paragon of impartiality and objective reporting should not be underestimated. In the words of Gerard Mansell, "they [External Services] are to the free mind...what Oxfam is to the hungry".[166] . The BBC World News Service avoided the use of the term 'terrorist' because it was concerned with its reputation and the appearance of providing objective news. Nonetheless, a news story about the hunger strike usually captured much more than the immediate issue of the hunger strike and the reasons behind the campaign. For instance, in a May 9th , 1981 story about Joe McDonell joining the hunger strike, the second sentence said, "Violence continued in Northern Ireland". The last sentence of the bulletin read:

> At the funeral of a policeman murdered in Belfast on Wednesday, the Anglican Bishop of Down and Dramoor, Dr. Robin Eames, called on the world to recognize that the real agony in Northern Ireland was in the death of those cut down by the terrorists, not in the deaths used as [...] blackmail and intimidation of ordinary decent people.[167]

Moreover, the background to the hunger strike was never discussed in the World News bulletins. "Special status' or 'special category' was never explained in any of

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[165] Ibid., p. 169.
[166] Gerard Mansell (1982) *Let the Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting*, London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, p. 265.
[167] BBC World News Service, *BBC World News*, May 9, 1981.

these.[168] The listener comes away with the idea that a few crazed republican prisoners were starving themselves to death for the 'privilege' of wearing their own clothes. Despite this attempt by British authorities and the media to influence international opinion, the Republican Movement, through the National H-Block/Armagh Committee and Republican solidarity groups around the world garnered sympathy for the plight of Republican prisoners on a humanitarian basis. The Republican prisoners fought for the right to wear their own clothes as a symbol of their status as 'prisoners of war'. The drive for 'political status' was at the heart of the Republican cause. According to Gerry Adams:

> In an unprecedented way, the prisoners had insisted on being recognized as prisoners in a war of national liberation, and their identity as such had been accepted throughout the world.[169]

In this sense, while the hunger strike did not signal victory in its immediate aftermath, its legacy cannot be dismissed. The leadership's political acumen and sense of 'agitprop' ensured not only that the hunger strikers would be the focus of local and international attention, but in so doing they made the political struggle in the Six Counties known around the world. Furthermore it provided the impetus for a deeper engagement in electoral politics.

The dynamics of the leadership

Primarily three men led the campaign for 'special status' on the inside: Brendan Hughes, Bobby Sands and Bik McFarlane. These individuals all had a close relationship with Gerry Adams and were all devoted Republican activists. Likewise on the outside, Danny Morrison, Jim Gibney, Martin McGuinness and Tom Hartley were all close to

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[168] This was ascertained by using a random sample of BBC World News broadcasts from January to October 1981, for a research project on censorship and the BBC World News that the author undertook in 2003.

[169] G. Adams (1995), op.cit., p. 86.

Adams. The comradeship of these individuals greatly facilitated managing the campaign for 'special status'. For instance the strong connection between Adams and Brendan Hughes channeled his (Hughes') leadership role toward continuing the resistance in prison:

> ... I remember firing some ideas and my idea was to end the blanket protest, put on the gear, go into the system and wreck it. I put that idea to Tom and others in the wing and it was rejected out of hand almost. I remember deciding we must then do something else because I knew Gerry (Adams) was outside trying to rebuild a Movement and I saw my purpose in the Cages as assisting that. In the Blocks, although it took me a little while to realize it, that was still my position.[170]

This comradeship also provided an extraordinary unity of ideas and action between these men. And, far from being governed by the outside leadership, it is clear from the messages that left the prison that the inside leaders were perfectly in control of their campaign. For instance, Bobby Sands' comms leave no doubt that he was dictating the pace of events and the strategy to be deployed:

[170] Brendan Hughes, as cited by L. McKeown, op. cit. p. 57.

> Marcella to Liam Og 16.3.81
> Sagart Mor thought this is a good move and was enthusiastic, but Silvertop put a halt to it saying that I did not want this, pointing out to him (1) I would not accept any petty concessions which would only serve to undermine 'once again' the true issue at stake i.e. status. (2) My advice is Sagart Mor is to take a political redner [blush] and speak out with clarity and with vigour against the Brit intransigence to solve this issue. (3) Sagart Mor also knows that only a public declaration from Brits or direct negotiations with guarantees leading to package of five demands will solve this issue okay. Now that Bik is OC only he, me and OC of Armagh...will negotiate and no one else and if (when) I die Bik will (and at all times) be in control okay.[171]

It is also clear from this message, that while the clergy were free to explore possibilities for a settlement with government officials, the prison leadership would accept no intermediaries to negotiate on its behalf. On the outside, Danny Morrison, Bobby Sands' spokesperson and considered the party's "most gifted spin doctor" [172], did the best he could in terms of publicizing the plight of the prisoners, in spite of the media black-out on republican views and news. Morrison had been chosen National Director of Publicity for Sinn Fein in 1979. Along with Jim Gibney, the committee was responsible for putting Sands up as the "Smash H-Blocks" candidate in Fermanagh-South Tyronne in 1981. Sands won the election by more than double the majority that Thatcher had in her constituency of Finchley.[173]This largely drove home the point that Sands was legitimate in the eyes of many. Moreover, another hunger striker, Kieran Doherty was elected in County Cavan in the South while other H-Block candidates in the same election in 1981

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[171] Bobby Sands, as cited by D. Beresford, op. cit., p. 68. Marcella is Bobby Sands; Liam Og refers to Tom Hartley of Sinn Fein; Sagart Mor is Irish for "older priest" and refers to Cardinal O'Fiaich; Silvertop is Father Murphy

[172] B. Feeney, op.cit., caption below photograph of Danny Morrison.

[173] Danny Morrison (2001), "Twenty Years Ago", *Andersontown News*, April 9, 2001. http://www.irelandclick.com

took a sizeable number of votes away from Fianna Fail, tipping the balance of power in favour of the Coalition.[174]

The irrevocable train of electoral politics unleashed by the success of the prisoner candidates facilitated the process of entering electoral politics, paving the way for Sinn Fein's accession into the ranks of 'legitimate political party' with a cohesive political platform. Sinn Fein severely ate into the SDLP's nationalist majority, jumping from 35.1% of the nationalist vote in 1982 to 42.8% in 1983.[175] These gains enabled Morrison to ask the 1982 *Ard Fheis*,[176] "Is there anyone here who objects to taking power in Ireland with a ballot paper in one hand and an armalite in the other?" and hence coin the famous phrase, "the armalite and ballot box strategy".[177]

The single-mindedness of Brendan Hughes, Bobby Sands and Bik McFarlane during the campaign was a testament to their leadership qualities. All of them were under enormous pressure as they tried to engage the British authorities in negotiations toward a settlement. The solidarity and trust between the prison leaders and the outside leadership, and between themselves and the prisoners, ensured that no dissent would take place that could jeopardize the campaign. Such solidarity was in good part due to the shared experience of most of these men during internment. Whether they were actually in the same cage or in Long Kesh at different times, matters very little. What counts is the fact that they could all relate to one another as former prisoners, as prisoners of conscience, as people who had suffered under the repressive conditions imposed by the British authorities. Moreover, Hughes, Sands and McFarlane were all blanketmen, which in their

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[174] T.P. Coogan (2000), op. cit., p. 500.
[175] Jim Smyth (1987), "Unintentional Mobilization: The Effects of the 1980-1981 Hunger Strikes in Ireland", *Political Communication and Persuasion*, v. 4, p187
[176] Annual Conference.
[177] Jim Smyth, op. cit., p. 187.

own words made them "more than comrades—it made them brothers".[178] Their political and strategic acumen afforded them the necessary focus to stay on track during the unfolding of the campaign. Trust among themselves and commitment to the cause characterized their working relationship with the prison issue. It helped them to keep cool heads during the confusion of having the clergy, the SDLP, and the Irish government all trying to mediate on the Movement's behalf, and the camaraderie that existed between prisoners and ex-prisoners gave them the confidence and courage to see it through, and to let comrades die in spite of Thatcher's obstinacy.

Conclusion

The campaign for 'special status' provided the Republican Movement's leaders with an unparalleled experience in resisting authority, analyzing government response, developing pressure tactics and connecting the prisoners' plight with the nationalist cause. On the inside they created resistance by sheer force of will and on the outside they developed into a clever information management team. In 1987, Jim Smyth, said of the prison issue, that it,

> ...touched off a mass political movement which led to a far-reaching shift in the internal balance of political power in the North of Ireland and in the relationship between Ireland and Britain.[179]

A dominant trend in the 'Troubles' was the determination of the British government to respond to protest by escalating security measures. Repeated policy failures such as the Falls Road Curfew, Internment, and Bloody Sunday did not deter government leaders from this approach. Criminalization with its accompanying features of media censorship, juryless Diplock Courts, a "shoot-to-kill" policy, and continued

[178] Bik McFarlane, in D. Beresford, op. cit., p.100.
[179] J. Smyth, op. cit., p. 179.

brutality during interrogation, aimed at crushing the IRA. One could argue that part of the reason for this trend is that the government "doesn't talk to terrorists". But this is untrue. The British have always talked to the IRA. During the hunger strike, they engaged in secret talks with the Movement via the Mountain Climber. In fact, the British engaged in contact with the Republicans right up until the peace initiative was made public. Furthermore, the decision to call a by-election in Fermanagh-South Tyronne upon the death of MP Frank Maguire was another bad call. The government calculated that several nationalist candidates would run, splitting the vote and allowing Unionist Harry West to get elected. The opposite happened and Bobby Sands was elected because the British underestimated the solidarity of the nationalist community.

Harsh security measures and consistently faulty analyses of the situation on the ground on the part of the British government played a decisive role in increasing the level of protest among the nationalist community. This British *penchant* for repressive policies and analytical ineptitude further sustains the thesis that state repression bolsters mobilization. In this particular instance, Britain's security and penal policies fostered a prison resistance that transcended the 'political status' issue and struck the core of the nationalist Irish identity. The result was a massive increase in mobilization that was translated into votes for prisoner candidates and the consequent worldwide legitimization of the Republican struggle.

Chapter 4: The University of Freedom: Long Kesh

The campaign for 'special status' that so dramatically altered the Republican struggle was not the result of any planned strategy. In incremental steps, the years following the 1981 hunger strike revealed drastic changes in the prisoner community, as a more conscious undertaking of protest took place. By the time the prisoners were released *en masse* from Long Kesh between 1998 and 2000, as per the dispositions of the Good Friday Agreement, they had gone far beyond the '5 demands'. In fact, their military structure was recognized by the authorities and they completely ran almost every facet of their lives in jail, published books and magazines, produced plays and music, and were generally a vibrant community of intellectuals who engaged in analysis and sought input in the Movement. They negotiated directly with the prison authorities and indirectly with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) via the prison governor. They were granted parole for short periods and took advantage of these times to attend Sinn Fein *Ard Fheiseanna.*[180] Sinn Fein also took advantage of these times in order to get the prisoners to speak to the community about the recently elaborated peace initiative.

On the outside, momentum was gathering for the peace plan which, though after a decade is still far from yielding the desired results, nonetheless changed the face of the Six Counties in ways that were not thought possible by many. By having gained a more relaxed prison regime through a series of protests, the prisoner community was better able to engage in a dialogue with the Republican Movement, eventually assisting Sinn Fein in promoting an expansion of the political struggle and replacing the armed struggle altogether.

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[180]Annual conferences.

This chapter discusses, in continuation with the theme of jail protest, some of the actions taken by the P.O.W.s over an eighteen-year period that defied British attempts to "criminalize" them. By the time they were released in 2000, none of the rigidity of the prison rules remained and indeed the captives were on a 24-hour 'unlock', that is to say, they benefitted from complete freedom of movement within the camp. It examines the education programme developed by the camp staff[181] that helped to foster self-confidence, analytical thinking, creativity, and solidarity among the captives. It explores the powerful changes that resulted and the conditions that it helped to secure. Further, this chapter shows how the prisoners would come to exercise sizeable influence on the Movement outside. It looks at how the transformation of these prisoners through self-development led to their demand to be included in the discussions of the Movement and to participate in debate by a number of means, including the publication of a successful prisoner magazine, *An Glor Gafa/The Captive Voice*. The conclusion addresses the impact of prisoners and ex-prisoners in persuading the Republican Movement grass roots to support the peace initiative. This dovetails with the Buntmann and Yuang thesis referred to earlier that the prison experience enhances and develops leadership abilities in the transition to democracy.[182]

The 'pragmatic education programme'

In terms of tactics, the campaigns undertaken by the prisoners to improve prison conditions were conducted by retaining the principle that the prisoner community had to behave as a collective and not as individuals. This created more unity of action so that

[181] The camp staff refers to the army structure inside the prison: Officer Commanding(OC), Vice OC, Public Relations Officer (PRO), Intelligence Officer (IO), Education Officer.
[182] Fran Buntman and Tong-Yi Huang, op. cit., p. 44.

protest measures could increase chances of success. In 1982, a book made its way into the camp. It was Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*[183], that was to have a resounding impact upon the thinking of the camp staff.[184] Paulo Freire conceived of education as a revolutionary force. He was critical of the traditional teacher/pupil style of education and argued for breaking down "vertical patterns" (hierarchical structures) in favour of horizontal dialogue, as a transformative measure toward liberation from oppression. He claimed that there existed a 'culture of silence' that needed to be challenged. [185] Emphasis was put on 'conscientisation' or,

> arousing a person's positive self-conception in relation to their environment and society through a 'liberating education' which treats learners as subjects (active agents) and not as objects (passive recipients).[186]

The people responsible for introducing the theory into the camp were Jackie McMullan and Laurence McKeown. They held the view that, in order to advance any kind of struggle within the prison, the structure of military command had to be altered. They felt that, as long as there was a vertical hierarchy, things would be difficult to change. Inspired by Freire and a handbook for community workers entitled *Training for Transformation*[187], they began trying to knock down these structures. They felt it was necessary for the prisoners to have a space in which to discuss their feelings about themselves, their experience and the Movement. Such a space needed to be safe in order for the men to open up.[188] A good starter was the 'blanket protest' as, according to Jackie

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[183] Paulo Freire (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, New York: Herder and Herder.
[184] Laurence McKeown, op. cit., p. 130.
[185] Ibid., p. 130.
[186] Ibid., p. 131.
[187] A. Hope, S. Timmel & C. Hodzi (1984), *Training for Transformation:A Handbook for Community Workers*, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press.
[188] Ibid., p. 130.

McMullan, the protest acted as a " 'Great Leveller', where everyone was the same".[189] Indeed the 'blanket protest' was a time of lengthy debates and analysis of political situations.

Systematically, a small group of prisoners spearheading this education project went to see the men in small groups and engaged in an open discussion about how they felt about themselves and their environment. They encouraged the prisoners to voice their concerns and their issues. An atmosphere of trust needed first to be established in order to facilitate the delicate work of getting a bunch of men to open up about issues that had been heretofore kept hidden, or perhaps criticisms of how the struggle was managed. While some were reticent to engage in this sort of discussion at first, they were eventually persuaded because, as McMullan said: " ...we owed it to ourselves, to the struggle and to the protest that had given us the conditions".[190] Previously unspoken problems and issues began to come to the fore as the prisoners started to voice their personal opinions and ideas in a more open fashion. The result of this initiative was that the majority of the prisoners became involved in what was referred to as the "pragmatic education programme". A more inclusive approach to running the camp was instituted and men who traditionally did not seem to fit the leadership role were brought in to carry out different tasks related to the pragmatic programme. Trust, sensitivity, and debate that focused on the issue and not the individuals contributed to changing the structure of learning, in order to promote exchange and engage prisoners in new ways of learning. This co-operative approach was to yield positive results.

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[189] Jackie McMullan as cited by L. McKeown, ibid., p. 131.
[190] Ibid., p. 133.

Having managed to change the way prisoners saw themselves and their role in the struggle (from a passive role of taking orders to an active role of critiquing the movement and getting involved in the debates), the next step was to analyze Republicanism. In order to do this, an historical document based on a class analysis of republicanism was developed in 1984 in order to engage in a more meaningful discussion of its tenets. This process of drafting an analysis was also collective. The draft was prepared, then discussed in groups, debated and changes added until everyone was satisfied with the content.[191]

Out of these initial discussions came a new motivation to learn. In fact, the tradition of boycotting initiatives by the Prison Education Department was dropped and many began taking courses with the Open University.[192] The underlying consideration was their role in the struggle once they were released. As Sean Murray, then Vice-OC in charge of political education, said of the push for scholarly pursuits,

> You wanted people to come out of jail stronger people, more confident because that would have an affect [*sic*] on the struggle outside. It was a new value system and we hoped that that would transfer to outside.[193]

This new orientation toward formal education led to more challenges to the prisoners' way of thinking. Among the more transformative academic courses was a women's studies course. Developed by Joanna McMinn, an Open University professor, at the request of, and in collaboration with, Jackie Mcmullan and Laurence McKeown, this course also played a key role in the development of the prisoner community. The

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[191] Ibid., p. 138.
[192] Ibid., p. 139.
[193] Ibid., p. 141.

'feminist rang'[194] became so popular that within two years, 200 prisoners had taken it.[195] This was a unique situation for nowhere else could there be found women's studies classes made up by and large of working class men. This experience served to challenge the prisoners' understanding of themselves in terms of power relations and their effect on both men and women.[196] Moreover, it provided another contradiction to the oft-exploited image of the 'hardened terrorist'.[197]But it also provided some insight into struggle and resistance.

The captives found new ways of interacting by leveling out hierarchical structures of command. At the same time, they sharpened their analytical and negotiation skills. As a result, the nature of protest in the prison changed in such a way as to lead to important gains and victories without the harsh physical and psychological consequences that early battles had incurred.

Honing the art of protest

The nineteen-year period following the hunger strike was a time of change in Long Kesh. First there was a mass escape in which 38 Republican prisoners drove out of Long Kesh prison in 1983. Second and more importantly, several campaigns were fought for acquiring rights and improving conditions in prison. Among these were the segregation campaign aimed at segregating prisoners according to paramilitary affiliation, which the prisoners were successful in achieving and the 'lifer' campaign that altered the way that life sentence reviews were conducted. On another level, as the years passed, more and more "freedoms" within the prison were gained until in the 1990's , prisoners

[194] Rang: Irish for class.
[195] Ibid., p. 145.
[196] Ibid., p. 145.
[197] Ibid., p. 145.

could come and go as they pleased throughout the camp. They no longer had lock-up, either day or night. The prison authorities and the NIO recognized the army command structure[198], and when the peace initiative was being elaborated, high-ranking Sinn Feiners as well as top brass from South Africa's ANC came in to meet with the prisoners and discuss the peace strategy.[199] Paroles were granted periodically, enabling prisoners to return to the community for a few days and fifty per cent remission of sentences was introduced, which meant many prisoners were released from prison sooner than was previously envisaged. The confrontational attitude that was once the hallmark of relations between the authorities and the P.O.W.s was replaced with more reasoned negotiations. More normalized relations actually led to greater acquiescence on the part of the authorities on different issues.[200]

In 1987, the prisoner community handed the authorities a 'Conditions Document', outlining the demands for change to prison rules ranging from the extensions of shop facilities to the abolition of 'controlled movement', whereby the number of prisoners allowed in one area at one time was restricted.[201] The protest campaign on conditions that followed from 1988 to 1989 was considered along with the "lifer" campaign[202], a watershed in the prison community's skill in pursuing change.[203] The first of these changes was that negotiations were conducted directly with the camp OC, a recognition by the prison authorities of the IRA command structure within Long Kesh for the first

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[198] D. Moen, op. cit.,p. 11.

[199] L. McKeown, op. cit., pp. 214, 216.
[200] D. Moen, op. cit., p. 18 of 27.
[201] L. McKeown, op. cit., pp. 173, 175.
[202] This refers to the campaign to participate in and improve the "Review of Life Sentence" Procedures.
[203] Mickey McMullan, as cited by L. McKeown, ibid., p. 175.

time since criminalization was introduced, though there was never any official acknowledgement of this.

On this and other campaigns such as the 'lifer' campaign, the P.O.W.s acted in unity. They combined their powers of argument with the power of resistance/action to bring about change that would improve the conditions of their daily lives.

The lifer issue

This new approach definitely had a positive impact on the "lifer issue". It had long been policy for Republican P.O.W.s to boycott the Life Sentence Review Board. This board was responsible for periodical reviews of prisoners committed to life sentences and offered the possibility of a release depending on certain criteria, the most offensive to Republicans being the demonstration of remorse. Republicans considered that in any case, there was no way any of them would be released barring an end to the conflict. While prison authorities regularly attempted to review prisoners' cases, the life sentence board only considered a case once the prisoner had served ten years. However, by the time most of the prisoners in the Cages (those who retained their Special Category status) had served ten years, whether or not to participate in the Life Sentence Review Board started to become an issue.

Orders from the leadership outside were to maintain the boycott on the 'Lifer Review'. However, a thorough discussion of the issue took place within the walls and a decision was reached that lifers would attend the reviews without compromising their principles. This was another example of the prisoners taking charge of their lives and the outside leadership not being able to counter it. Buttressed by their new capacity for analysis and argument, they insisted on being present at the Review and on having

interviews with the overseeing governors. It became quickly evident that the prisoners were outdoing the administration in their arguments and the authorities were forced to replace some governors with others who had university education in order to keep up with the prisoners' arguments. As campaign coordinator Tony Catney explains:

> Basically, what we did was take the governor's questions which they [*the administration*] expected yes or no answers to and put them into their political and historical context...At the end of the day the admin put a certain number of governors in charge of conducting the reports, ones who had recently been through University and who they believed would be able to take on board the philosophical arguments we were putting forward and they did take them on board but they ended up agreeing with us and regarding the state's line as untenable...By sticking to the guidelines we had laid down we completely flummoxed the admin.[204]

The force of the P.O.W.s arguments combined with their unity of action brought the contradictions in policy to the fore and led to profound changes for those sentenced to life imprisonment. For instance, when a British soldier sentenced to life in prison for the murder of a West Belfast man was released after three years, the prisoners made much of the state's disregard for its own rules.[205]

Between 1989 and 1994, the campaign dramatically increased the rate of release for lifers and was responsible for the introduction of short parole periods for them as well. This in turn was used as another argument for their release. If they were safe enough out on the streets at Christmas, for instance, then why not release them permanently?[206]

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[204] Tony Catney, as cited by L. McKeown, ibid., pp. 156-157.
[205] Ibid., p. 157.
[206] Ibid., 158.

The success of the lifer campaign was largely due to the revolution in how the prisoners viewed themselves and the notion of resistance, and the new tools that the 'pragmatic education programme' enabled them to develop.

Setbacks and disappointments

The Republican prisoner community in the post-hunger strike period cannot be portrayed as one cohesive unit that marched uniformly in the same direction toward success. There were setbacks and disappointments. It should be noted that there were still prisoners in the Cages, those who were convicted prior to March 1, 1976 when "criminalization" was instituted, and who therefore still held 'special category' status. That prisoner population was cut off from the men in the Blocks and lived a very different reality from the others. They had not benefited from the Pragmatic Education Programme, were more individualistic, and could not benefit from the influx of new blood. In 1987 they moved to the H-Blocks. This change was brought about when several men from those Cages, including the camp staff, asked to be moved to the blocks where they could be with the other prisoners. Although eventually they were all moved and stripped of their status, and actually found the blocks an improvement over the Cages, the difficult decision of moving created bad feelings. Those who remained felt betrayed and those who left were accused of selling out.[207]It was a time of upheaval for the men left behind as they pondered their own transfer to the blocks.

There also came a time when some of the captives resigned from the Movement, in 1986. On the one hand, there were those whose adherence to Marxism clashed with the more moderate view of the camp staff. Eventually, they resigned from the Movement and

[207] Pat Thompson, as cited in ibid., p.176.

created the League of Communist Republicans (LCR).[208]There were others who also resigned because they were just generally dissatisfied with the prison leadership and had criticisms of how the struggle was being waged outside. Altogether they numbered around 40.[209]This was enough to make the outside leadership take notice. After all, those resigning all had friends and family and these resignations had ramifications for the solidarity of the Movement on the outside. It was serious enough for Gerry Adams to round up ex-prisoners to try and formulate an assessment of the situation.[210] He was also being kept informed by the prison leadership. The outside leadership eventually presented the prisoners with a detailed written communication outlining how dissenting opinions were to be dealt with in prison:

> The communication from outside made it very clear that channels existed for volunteers to express their opinions and to make criticisms and that these would be dealt with in a comradely manner. The communication also made it equally clear that the IRA would not tolerate the undermining of its authority within the prison. It concluded by calling upon those who had resigned to reconsider.[211]

Despite this, the dissenting prisoners asked to be transferred to the newly-built Maghaberry prison. Once the dissenting prisoners were gone, prison resistance continued to take on new and different forms. There seemed to be no shortage of ideas on how to express the Irish Republican identity while in captivity. Writing was already a practice that was solidly in place in Long Kesh. However, the introduction of a poetry workshop

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[208] Ibid., p. 161.
[209] Ibid., p. 167.
[210] Ibid., p. 167.
[211] Ibid., p. 168.

into the camp incited a great deal of enthusiasm but also provided an impetus for publishing prisoners' work.[212]

Speaking out from captivity

Many captives took part in the poetry workshops that were offered as part of the 'pragamatic education programme', which led to a recognition of the need to have an outlet for the writings. The workshops had unleashed a desire to speak out on a range of issues, from the personal to the more political. Moreover, there was a sustained aspiration not only to participate in the Movement's discussions but also to clearly bring out the prisoners' perspective on the struggle and provide a forum for their voices to be heard.

Sinn Fein's Education Department put out a small publication entitled *Iris Bheag* in 1987, that continued for three consecutive years, in which the prisoners contributed articles on a variety of topics ranging from the Irish language to neo-colonial economies.[213]This marked an important beginning for the prisoners because, as Laurence McKeown offers:

> The magazine provided direct access for us into mainstream political thinking within the Republican Movement and allowed us to air the issues we felt strongly about. In this way we saw ourselves as playing an important role in the development of the Movement. We were not just prisoners but political activists and theorists whose intellectual influence could expand beyond the confines of the prison camp.[214]

In direct response to the need of the prisoners to see their poetic endeavours published, the prisoners established a small publication entirely on their own , *Scairt*

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[212] Ibid., p. 180.
[213] Ibid., p. 180.
[214] Ibid., p. 180.

Amach (Shout Out), a small leaflet for internal distribution.[215] And in a bolder move, from 1989 until 1999, the Republican prisoners of Long Kesh published *An Glor Gafa/The Captive Voice*, a totally prisoner-written and prisoner-run magazine for distribution outside that addressed some of the issues and concerns of the prisoner community. It contained political articles as well as creative writing and its distribution was local as well as international. Its objective was to express "the diversity of the culture of imprisoned republicans and the high level of political awareness that existed. It would also provide us with a creative role in promoting the wider struggle."[216] Clearly, *An Glor Gafa* put the prisoners' political thinking on the map. Already in the second issue, its success was evident. The editorial reads: "We have been tremendously encouraged by the response [to] the *An Glor Gafa/The Captive Voice*. Within a fortnight of the first issue going on sale, it was virtually sold out and more copies had to be printed."[217]

It also served to give a voice to Republicans imprisoned around the world in places such as the United States, Germany and England. In the same issue there was an article written by Joe Doherty, imprisoned in New York's Metropolitan Correctional Centre. In it, he compared the duplicitous nature of the British and Irish justice systems with the U.S. justice system:

> The unjust and unconstitutional methods used to imprison my fellow escapees...and then, upon their release, to rearrest them under extradition warrants from the British is an unspeakable betrayal...particularly in light of the US courts' decision in refusing my extradition.[218]

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[215] Ibid., p. 181.
[216] Ibid., p. 183.
[217] Editorial, *An Glor Gafa/The Captive Voice*, v.1 no. 2, Winter 1989, p. 1.
[218] Joe Doherty (1989), "Carrying the Torch", *An Glor Gafa/The Captive Voice*, v. 1 no. 2, Winter 1989, p. 4.

An Glor Gafa discussed the very real challenges of being imprisoned for a lengthy period of time and the creative ways that prisoners had of dealing with life's real difficulties. For instance, how can one parent a child while in prison? In a 1996 issue, republican captive Martin Dillon explains how several men in Long Kesh faced this heart-wrenching problem and decided to form a 'parenting group'. The group took a course with the local children's charity and learned about children, the different stages they go through, issues about disciplining a child, communicating with a child and so on. Dillon explains the impact this had on him as a father of two young children:

> I can now understand how they must be feeling. I also think that I can relate to my children a lot better when I see them, as I realise now that they need so much love and security from me, which I didn't really understand when I first came into prison. Of course the separation caused by jail is always going to damage a parent's relationship with their children but that damage can be limited by the sort of activities I have outlined. Our parenting group is committed to helping each other to protect and develop this relationship in the future.[219]

But the magazine also presented the prisoner community as a vibrant fighting force for change. Ever mindful of the parallells between prison resistance and the struggle beyond the wall, the Republican prisoners held themselves up as a model for the broader fight. In an article entitled "Prison Struggle", one can read,

> We view our organizational set-up as more than a simple 'closing of ranks' against the administration. Principally, it equips us with a frame of mind which allows us to develop a better understanding of, and commitment to, the struggle for a new society and to put forward ideas on how this new society should be shaped. The primary task of all Republicans is the continuance and improvement of this construction.[220]

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[219] Martin Dillon , "Parenting in Prison", *An Glor Gafa/The Captive Voice*, v. 8 no. 3, Winter 1996, p. 19.
[220] _____, "Prison Struggle", ibid., v.2 no. 3, Winter 1990, p. 4.

An Glor Gafa served to connect republican prisoners everywhere but more importantly, it created a strong connection with the broader community of Republicans. Furthermore, it brought into focus the prisoner community as a 'constituency' in its own right within the Republican Movement and allowed for a platform in which the men could 'write their own history'.[221]

Conclusion

Negotiating directly with the prison officials and indirectly with the Northern Ireland Office provided the Republican prisoner community with skills in organizational strategy and mobilization that could be transferred to the political struggle outside upon their release. But more importantly it served to convince them of their strength within the prison and bolstered their confidence. If a bunch of republican prisoners could bring about the kind of monumental change they witnessed from the brutality of 'Blanket protest' days to the permanent unlock they succeeded in obtaining in the 1990's, then bringing about peace to a conflict whose last chapter had extended over twenty-five years was not such a far-fetched concept. Taking charge of their lives in prison through efforts like the 'pragmatic education programme' gave the prisoners hope and confidence in themselves as well as in the struggle. This kind of realization and the contagion of their attitude was helpful when it came time to convince republicans of the capacities of the Movement to engage the British and the Unionists in finding the mechanisms to bring about a just and lasting peace.

Endurance is what characterized prison resistance in the years of The 'Blanket protest', the 'no-wash' protest and the hunger strike. The form of protest developed in

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[221] Ibid., p. 183.

Long Kesh in the 80's and 90's created a new resistance where clear argumentation and negotiation combined with measured and controlled protest action were the *modus operandi*. Though less dramatic, this new prison resistance provided better results to those obtained during the campaign for 'special status'. The legacy of the University of Freedom, as Long Kesh is known in republican circles, is a highly skilled and politicized group of leaders and participants who are able to exercise their talents in a variety of ways. Over and above elected officials such as Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly, Conor Murphy, Alex Maskey, Fra McCann, and a host of others, there are strategists such as Jim Gibney, special advisors such as Leo Green, and press secretaries like Richard McAuley. They exemplify the myriad ways in which former prisoners now pursue the struggle.[222]

This study of the years of imprisonment at the Long Kesh "University of Freedom" shows how the political education of the republican captives changed both the prison resistance and influenced the wider struggle. Buntman and Huang's study of imprisonment and leadership points to the political prison as "university" and explains how they cultivate leaders.[223] They break down resistance into three distinct layers, the first being "to secure the basic conditions of mental and physical survival".[224] The second level of resistance has to do with combating the ill-effects of incarceration by using intellectual stimulation[225] and the third level is seen as using their political education to bring about change within the prison but also, and more importantly in this context, to

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[222] Most have been imprisoned in Long Kesh at some point. Notable exceptions are Martin McGuinness who was imprisoned in the Curragh prison camp in the 26 Counties and Ella O'Dwyer who was jailed in England before being transferred to Maghaberry prison in the Six Counties.
[223] Fran Buntman and Tong-Yi Huang, op. cit., pp. 55-56.
[224] Ibid., p. 49.
[225] Ibid., p. 50.

extend this form of resistance beyond the prison walls.[226]The Republican prisoner community in Long Kesh followed the same pattern of resistance as the prisoners on Robben Island and Green Island. Having secured a basic way of existing after the end of the hunger strike, they proceeded to educate themselves and broaden their intellectual horizons. They then brought about important changes within the prison, changes that would confirm that they were not "criminal". Moreover, they used their education to expand the wider struggle by insisting on becoming active agents within the Republican Movement. Even while still imprisonned, they insisted on being heard, by their publications and by attending political party events like the Ard Fheis during parole. They were recognized as an important constituency and were seen an asset to the fledgling peace initiative elaborated in the 1990's. Once again, this shows how prison and British penal policy contributed to enhancing the leadership skills of a large number of insurgents and making them into a formidable adversary in the political process that is currently ongoing.

[226] Ibid., p. 51.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Physical force has been one of the hallmarks of the Republican ethos since the days of Wolfe Tone. This tradition has been jealously guarded over many years against anyone attempting to adopt an alternative path, the specter of a sellout to the British being foremost in the minds of its keepers. Such an alternative path, when the Official IRA took a stand in favour of recognizing the "'partition parliaments' of Dublin, Stormont and Westminster,"[227] to the detriment of armed force, led to a blood-soaked split and the birth of the Provisionals in 1970. How these same Provisionals managed to effect the shift from armed struggle to peace table in the 1990's without another split among the faithful is the question that propelled this investigation. Part of the answer lies in the way the leadership and the Republican constituency interacted, and an important feature of their recent history has been their mass incarceration by the British in the Six Counties. What role do former prisoners play in the Republican Movement? Answering this question sheds light on the functioning of the movement and explains in part their successful departure from the armed struggle. It should be noted that this departure from the armed struggle has not been achieved without incurring some dissidence. Real and Continuity IRA are the result of this but their numbers do not add up to a split from the movement. Other Republicans, like Brendan Hughes and Dolores Price, have also left the movement, having concluded that engaging in the peace process is not serving the best interests of the Republican community, given the general lack of progress on substantive issues. A fragile balance continues but is in danger given the lack of concrete gains for the nationalists as the Good Friday Agreement is under constant pressure of being thwarted .

[227] T.P. Coogan, (2000), op. cit., p. 336.

It is the contention here, in accordance with Fran Buntman and Tong-Yi Huang, that prison provided leadership training to individuals who are key players in the movement today. More importantly, leadership in the Republican Movement is diffuse precisely because of the prison experience. Gerry Adams is not a solo act, far from it. He is surrounded by a well-honed machine that exercises considerable influence on his agenda, his speeches and his representations. Close associates, including Martin McGuinness, Jim Gibney, Gerry Kelly, and Bik McFarlane are all former prisoners and exercise considerable influence on the peace strategy. Referring to ex-prisoners like Kelly and McFarlane, as well as Bobby Storey, Seanna Walsh and Padraid Wilson, Brian Feeney says that it was always Adams' men who were in charge in the prison. Storey was the mastermind behind the 1983 escape from Long Kesh, and Walsh and Wilson were camp O.C.s in the 1990s.[228] But just as importantly other players, both elected representatives and staff are also former prisoners and thus emanate from the same political culture with unwavering bonds of solidarity, and a way of doing things that was learned at the same school, namely prison.[229] For instance, Leo Green who was special advisor to Bairbre de Brun when she was Minister of Health, is now on the party's negotiating team. Brian Campbell works as an aide to Assembly member Conor Murphy, and Ella O'Dwyer currently works as an aide to Sean Crowe, 26-County TD for Dublin South West. Martina Anderson, who was imprisoned many years in British jails along with O'Dwyer, is the coordinator of Sinn Fein's important "All-Ireland" campaign.

The objectives of Republicans are a united and democratic Ireland. That was so during the armed struggle and remains so during the peace process. What has changed is

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[228] B. Feeney, op. cit., pp. 370-371.

[229] This entire work has focused exclusively on Long Kesh but other prisons have also held key players who have engaged in political education such as Maghaberry and Armagh.

the strategy for obtaining this objective. Leadership in the Republican Movement has been traditionally a top-down structure of command, given the nature of the IRA. Leaders are respected and those who are vocal in their disagreement can be dealt with harshly. But Sinn Fein is different. It is steeped in the same tradition, is often made up of the same people, but because it is a political party, it is an open organization that meets regularly with delegates representing the community to engage in debate and take positions on a number of issues. Though members of the *Ard Chomhairle*[230] exercise a great deal of authority, the space for discussion and debate is formalized in the *Ard Fheis*. Moreover, an intricate network of encounters is regularly organized through local Sinn Fein offices to keep the constituents abreast of developments, listen to their concerns and explain current affairs in the peace strategy. Those serving time in prison were, by and large, volunteers in the IRA. They have been the keepers of the faith, ensuring that the physical force tradition be kept alive. It thus stands to reason that the political initiative of the nineties is intimately connected with those who have passed through the prison gates. Imprisonment produced a class of republicans that are politicized, educated, and has strong ties with both the leadership and each other. Many now hold positions at all levels of Sinn Fein.

It is widely recognized that Gerry Adams played a key role in effecting the shift toward peace while keeping the Republican Movement intact. In Brian Feeney's words: "Keeping by far the biggest part of it [the Republican Movement] together required all

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[230] Ard Chomhairle (Executive Committee) members for 2003 – 2004 are: Gerry Adams, President, Robbie Smyth, General Secretary, Teresa Quinn, Treasurer, Joe Cahill, Honorary Vice President, Mitchel McLaughlin, Chairperson, Dawn Doyle, Director of Publicity, Pat Doherty, Vice-President, Margaret Adams, Treasurer, Martina Anderson, Gerry Kelly, Francie Molloy, Ernie O'Connell, Bairbre de Brun, Alex Maskey, Mary Lou McDonald, Ken O'Connell, Michelle Gildernew, Martin McGuinness, Coimhghin O Caolain and Aengus O Snodaigh. Taken from Sinn Fein's home page: http://sinnfein.ie

the subtlety, political caution and personal authority Gerry Adams could command".[231] But to his credit, he was also astute enough to pay attention to an important constituency, the prisoner community. The formidable task of changing people's view of the necessity of armed struggle and replacing it with a strategy of dialogue with the adversary is a task in which several people participated. Many were engaged in the persuasion exercise whose influence on the constituency is derived in part from the prestige of their prison experience.[232]

Imprisonment affected those detained for any length of time, whether it be during internment, the criminalization phase, or the post hunger-strike period. This is not to say that those exercising leadership roles only became leaders because they were imprisoned. Nor does it mean that those with leadership qualities or leadership roles necessarily continued upon their release. For instance Danny Morrison was a senior Sinn Feiner when he went into prison but upon his release, became a writer. Brendan Hughes, who was OC during the campaign for 'special status', did not remain in the Movement. What it means is that those who are leaders were positively influenced by their time as captives.

Internment provided a space for debate to take place and allowed a young contingent of activists close to Gerry Adams to perfect their political acumen. These discussions propelled Adams to share this developing vision with those outside the prison by regularly publishing articles in the *Republican News*. Further, internment provided the stage upon which to fight for the recognition of their prisoner of war status, which in itself was a big legitimizing criterion for Republican activists. Internment also provided the nationalist community with something in common (loved ones in prison) that created

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[231] B. Feeney, op. cit., p. 384.
[232] Ibid., pp. 371, 402.

unwavering bonds of solidarity in the community, and drove nationalist youth to the IRA. There was therefore no shortage of eager nationalists to mobilize.

The hunger strike period revealed itself as a transformative time for many people in the Republican Movement. It was a time of intense pain and anguish and many would concede that they have still to come to terms with the harshness of it. Watching comrades suffer and die for a cause, or suffering and nearly dying oneself, and watching families put through unbearable anguish, necessarily brought into focus some deep resonance of pain, suffering, injustice and death but also life, love and hope. It was, in this sense, a time of emotional upheaval and spiritual journey. It was also a "fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants" exercise in crisis management that taught leaders to trust their instincts, work in close collaboration and allow power to be diffuse. The campaign for 'special status' forced contact with the British government. In some measure, this confirmed the age-old belief that the British were not to be trusted. Nonetheless the contact via the Mountain Climber, Britain's secret envoy, and with the prison authorities did serve as a lesson on how the British operated. They could count this episode as experience and it enabled the Republicans to garner a clearer picture of British tactics in later years when the peace initiative was being elaborated and since the Good Friday Agreement has been signed.

The post hunger-strike years in prison served a different but equally important purpose for the Republican Movement. The 'pragmatic education programme' initiated largely by Laurence McKeown and Jackie McMullan, contributed in an inestimable measure to the development of the Republican prisoner community. First, by breaking down the traditionally hierarchical structure of command while retaining people's discipline and collective attitude, it enhanced their sense of worthiness, ability, and self-

esteem. Second, it honed people's intellectual and creative skills which in turn, came in handy for negotiating better conditions in the prison. It also gave them the tools necessary to participate more fully in the Movement's debates. Lastly, while the prisoners were initially quite reticent about the peace initiative, once they were persuaded of its merits, they became a powerful pro-politics force capable of exercising considerable influence in the community. For instance, in an *An Phoblacht/Republican News* article May 18, 1998, Bik McFarlane drew a parrallel between the election of Bobby Sands to Westminster and the 1998 New Assembly elections:

> ...The election of Bobby Sands opened the door for building a political movement which played the Brits at their own game. By standing candidates in the Assembly elections [1998] Sinn Fein is undercutting any attempt by our opponents to retreat and retrench, Republicans have the ability and the confidence to pursue their objectives in all arenas. The struggle continues.[233]

A combination of "street cred" and education made them the leadership's best asset as it set about the process of convincing nationalists that the cause would henceforth be better served by political engagement than physical force.

What does this tell us about leadership in the Republican Movement? And what does it say about British policy in the North? The combination of collective consciousness and education in prison had a lasting effect on former captives. The fact that Sinn Fein has former prisoners on their payroll has not only facilitated the challenging work involved in negotiating a new arrangement because they come largely from the same political culture (prison), but it also legitimizes Sinn Fein in the eyes of the rank and file. The strong emotional connection between the community and the prisoners

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[233] Bik McFarlane (1998), "Reflections on the H Block/Armagh Prison Struggle", *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, May 18, 1998, as cited by K. McEvoy, op. cit., p. 98.

has greatly assisted the credibility of the organization even as peace proceeds from crisis to crisis.

Long Kesh is now enshrined as one of the most powerful symbols in the latest installment of the Irish-Anglo conflict. It is not only *the* symbol of British repression *par excellence*, but it stands as a formidable representation of mankind's will to resist in the face of seemingly hopeless conditions. Thus, it encapsulates some kind of hope for oppressed peoples the world over who wish to break out of shackles and overcome injustice. There is currently a discussion to make part of the prison into a museum as a way to contribute to an understanding of "how imprisonment was (and is) used to manage conflict, how the forced separation of families is one of the most common and most painful experiences of conflict, and more besides".[234]If this project, which is spearheaded by the Coiste na nIarchimi (the National Network for Republican ex-prisoners), goes ahead, it would join the ranks of other "sites of resistance" such as Robben Island in South Africa.[235]

The latest installment of the Irish-Anglo conflict has been underpinned by the same policy failure that previous installments have seen. Penal policy, one arm of the security arsenal designed to deal with the insurgents, systematically failed in its objectives. It reinforced the legitimacy of the cause, created powerful support for the IRA, and inadvertently provided the Republicans with valuable strategic tools that allowed them to develop a peace initiative on their terms. Unfortunately, though the Good Friday Agreement has set out worthwhile parameters for achieving a just and

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[234] Louise Purbrick (2003), " The Maze/Long Kesh: Significant Site and Inclusive Museum", *A Museum at Long Kesh or The Maze?: Report of Conference Proceedings, 14th June 2003, Lagan Valley Island Centre, Lisburn*, Belfast: Coiste na nIarchimi, p. 8.
[235] Ahmed M. Kathrada, "Foreword" , in F. Buntman, op. cit., p. xi.

lasting peace, the dynamic between the British and the irreconciled Unionists has precluded many aspects from being implemented. The failure of the British government to adopt the recommendations of the Patten Commission on police reform in full; the suspension of the New Assembly; and the pressure on the IRA to decommission weapons while other armed groups are not required to disarm are all salient examples of the lack of good faith with which the British have thus far engaged in the process.

Two themes emerge from this analysis. The first is that British security policy and especially its penal aspect did nothing to stymie the Republican Movement. Not only has it survived, but it is now thriving electorally. Consistent with Ellison and Graham's thesis, the repressive nature of the state's security apparatus is actually fodder to social movement mobilization. The chapters on internment and criminalization show how British policy drove thousands of nationalists to the IRA and turned world opinion against Great Britain. The second theme corroborates Buntman and Huang's thesis that prison resistance trained leaders in South Africa and Taiwan. Prison resistance provides skills that allow a political activist to pursue the liberation cause beyond the prison walls.[236] The chapter on Long Kesh and the 'pragmatic education programme' establishes the tendency of political prisoners to capture education as a primary objective of doing time. As activists, it is seen as their job while in prison, to get educated and amass tools that will be used upon their release. Once out of prison, these former captives assisted the political struggle by lending their voices to the peace initiative.

This investigation also speaks to the nature of prison resistance in general, its impact on prisoners, on the community, and on the democratization process of a divided society. In the context of the Anglo-Irish conflict, it demonstrates that prison resistance is

[236] F. Buntman and T.Y. Huang, op. cit., 43-66.

part of a continuum that extends to a developing political arrangement based on equality and justice for both communities. This is consistent with Buntman's theory on Robben Island prisoners and their impact on South African politics.[237]

Sinn Fein is the only all-Ireland party. In a matter of a few years, it developed from a small ad hoc organization to a well-organized party with many elected officials, advisors and election strategists. It has an array of specialists to consider constitutional, political, economic, and security matters of concern to the Irish people North and South. In recent years, Sinn Fein has become an unparalleled electoral force, consistently making gains in all levels of government both North and South. Since 2001, they have surpassed the SDLP in the polls, to become the largest nationalist party in the North.[238]This vibrant political force is shaping a new political arrangement. This is a time-consuming objective and one that would have discouraged many by now given the poor response of their adversaries. Nonetheless, they continue to focus on the goal, undistracted by the endless attempts to thwart the process. The fact that many who are at the helm are former prisoners has a positive impact on Sinn Fein. First, it maximizes the party's credibility given that prisoners are held in such high-esteem by the rank and file. But it also provides the movement with men and women who have spent years in prison thinking about the struggle with the freedom to 'think outside the box'. There can be no better candidates to effect the transition from the armed struggle to a political strategy. People who have carefully evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the struggle and the adversary, and who have come to an understanding of how to engage people in

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[237] F. Buntman, op. cit., p. 4.
[238] ARK Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive and Nicholas Whyte, "Election Results in Northern Ireland Since 1973", in, Elections: Northern Ireland Elections, http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/gallsum.htm

meaningful dialogue toward a solution to the conflict are, in the end, the best candidates for the elaboration of a just and lasting peace.

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