

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

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press statement from amnesty international



Turnagain Lane
Farringdon Street, London EC4
Telephone: 01-236-0111/3
Telegrams: Amnesty London

Secretary General: MARTIN ENNALS

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NORTHERN IRELAND

The attached report on allegations of ill-treatment of persons in custody in Northern Ireland is based on the material, individual statements and affidavits, which reached the Amnesty International headquarters in London between 9th August and 30th October, 1971. The Sir Edward Compton Commission of Inquiry covers only a small part of that period -- forty-eight hours in fact. A statement issued from 10 Downing Street on 18th October suggested that all allegations of ill-treatment could be considered by the Commission. However, in a letter to Amnesty from the Home Office dated 21st October it was stated: "Finally we have considered your suggestion that the Committee should examine complaints arising in the period 9th to 31st August but it is not proposed to vary their terms of reference for this purpose."

In the light of the serious and apparently substantiated allegations of ill-treatment Amnesty International urges that an independent, international Commission of Inquiry should be established to investigate all aspects of treatment of internees and report publicly.

Amnesty International is an independent, non-governmental organisation which has consultative status with the United Nations and the Council of Europe. It endeavours to ensure the right for everyone to hold and express his beliefs. Amnesty International works, irrespective of political considerations, for the release of men and women who are in prison because of their beliefs, or their ethnic origin, colour or language, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence.

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to take measures to keep the peace as he sees fit, the arrest of 337 persons was carried out in the early hours of Monday, 9th August, 1971. Amnesty is in possession of 25 affidavits executed by persons alleging that torture and brutality were used against them during the period when their liberty was thus curtailed. Of these 25, 21 were arrested on 9th August, the remainder within a few days.

Allegations by Detainees

The statements are, as noted preliminarily above, broadly of two types. Those of detainees (persons released within 48 hours of arrest) will be treated first. These allegations (12 in number) have many similarities: all arrests were made by army personnel; all were in the pre-dawn hours of 9th August; rarely was mention made of the authority by which the arrest was made; all were carried off within 5 minutes of being arrested, most with no chance to dress properly. The indignities began at once, with the detainee usually forced to lie on the floor of the army vehicle in which he was transported, often with other detainees. In several cases the vehicles were subjected to attack from outside by missiles (often stones) hurled at them, and the detainees were used to shield army personnel from possible injury. Some beatings took place en route to prison, many savage in nature. Certain of the older (over 60 years) men in this group were brutalised to such a degree that they could not properly walk or speak upon arrival at prison.

Upon entry into "prison", usually an army barracks or headquarters, these men were taken to a gymnasium or exercise hall where they sat for some hours. Their possessions were taken from them along with their shoes. Many had their hands tied behind their backs. The men were then directed to run from the gymnasium across rough ground strewn with broken glass. The purpose of this exercise was apparently to convey the prisoners to the nearby Crumlin Road prison. In so doing, the soldiers ran along with the detainees, beating them as they ran and stumbled. Many fell and were again 'savaged'. Alsatian guard dogs are alleged to have been allowed to chase the men to within inches of their bodies when their leads would be restrained with military laughter - but one person was not so protected and had his arm bitten and coat ripped off his back in such an attack. The men were allowed little sleep and were forced to do exercises at great length in some cases. Finally, they ran a sort of gauntlet over an obstacle course, a brutal practise in no way justified by the necessity to transfer them quickly to a nearby prison.

These men generally were not severely brutalised (if a comparative standard can be employed to measure any such dehumanising activity) but they were subjected to calculated cruelties, imposed on them solely for the entertainment of their captors. The beatings and verbal abuse in these cases were clearly of such an unsophisticated type that it cannot be supposed that they were employed to ease the future extortion of information from the detainees. Rather, it served as a summary punishment for being suspect. The men were subjected also to indignities designed to disgrace them in the eyes of their fellows. Typical of this type of activity is the experience of the person who broke out in a rash after being beaten and was shaven from scalp to ankles "to protect the other men", after being told by a "doctor" that he had venereal disease (after release an M.D. confirmed that this man had no such condition).

In conclusion, it is noted that all of these men were released within 48 hours of arrest. Many were arrested by mistake: one of the men most severely brutalised was 61 years old and the licensed owner of two guns. He was savagely attacked in his own home by soldiers and again at an army camp.

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Ironically, he is a Protestant living in a Roman Catholic area and friendly with local police. He has no criminal record and is not active in politics and obviously was one of many arrested mistakenly on 9th August. His treatment typified the careless and brutal methods of the army left to their own devices in being permitted to detain any person they desire. The next group provides a more chilling, if no less terrifying picture.

Allegations by Internees

The contrast is provided by the victims of the so-called "Hood torture". This method of torture involves extremely brutal physical cruelties coupled with psychologically disorienting techniques designed to break the will and spirit of the captive and thus induce him to confess to crime or reveal information about illegal activities and/or organisations. This is the practice about which certain details were first published in Britain on 17th October, but the existence of which, sworn to, was known to many sources, including Amnesty, in early September.

These extremely serious charges have been made by 9 men whose statements vary greatly from those taken from apparently less politically interesting subjects such as the detainees already discussed. These 9 men, detained by the army on 9th August; were apparently all marked for special treatment before arrest. They were, after arrest, initially subjected to two different forms of treatment before they were all brought together to the sophisticated interrogation centre, thought now to be located at Palace Barracks, Holywood, near Belfast. The first of these groups (5 men) were beaten and forced to do exercises for many hours, including running around the camp and being forced to urinate while running in place. Generally they were treated like the other detainees above until Wednesday a.m. The other group of 4 were treated quite decorously until Wednesday a.m., 11th August. These men were not even questioned extensively as were most of the others, and indeed one of them complained he was not allowed to exercise. This condition was soon remedied. The men were soon prepared for their trip to the interrogation centre and its sophisticated methods.

Before dawn on the 11th, the 9 men had their heads covered with heavy sacks fashioned of opaque cloth. No ventilation was provided and breathing was quite difficult. The men were forced into helicopters and made to lie on the floor of the aircraft. All were handcuffed, many too tightly. Aircraft personnel occasionally joked that the men were to have their "graves in the sea". Upon arrival at the interrogation centre, the men were forced to strip naked and after physical examination were dressed in large coveralls, the hoods in place throughout. The men were then made to stand with their feet spread apart, their fingers pressed against a rough stone wall with their body weight on their finger tips in a "search" position. They were not permitted to move for four to five hours and when they did they were bludgeoned and forced to reassume the tortuous stance. The same happened if they collapsed. The room was filled with a strange noise, likened by some to a hissing of steam, by others to the noise of an operating air compressor. The heat inside the hoods became intolerable and the condition was compounded by the denial of all food but a few crusts of dried bread. The prisoners were forced to estimate the length of time they held the search position as they cannot reckon the passage of time in the circumstances. Some were subjected to this for 2 to 4 days. One man was taken away in a helicopter after 1 to 2 days, given a physical, taken to the Crumlin Road jail and again hooded and forced to assume the search position until 17th August - 5 days of torture. During their ordeal, the questioning of the men was intermittently attempted. According to the statements in possession of Amnesty, the interrogation was a welcome relief from the torture. The men did

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not co-operate and thus the torture was to no avail. One man was unable to speak during his interrogation as he had consumed no food or water for three days and had collapsed four times while trying to maintain the search position. He finally blacked out and awoke in solitary confinement where he was allowed to recover and be sent to Belfast prison. Before he was sent, the numbers chalked on his hands and feet by his captors were washed off his body. This man lost 13 lbs during his week's ordeal.

The Compton Commission

On the 31st August, in response to the leaking to the press of certain of the above allegations, a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry was established by the United Kingdom Parliament to investigate the situation in Northern Ireland. The Committee, a three member panel, is chaired by Sir Edmund Compton, former Ombudsman to the Westminster parliament and presently holding the same office for the parliament of Northern Ireland. The two other members are a barrister with experience of sitting on an enquiry panel previously (aircraft disaster investigation) and a physician, currently President of the British Medical Association.

The terms of reference were narrowly drawn: "To investigate allegations by those arrested on 9th August under the Civil Authority (Special Powers) Act of 1922 of physical brutality while in the custody of the security forces prior to either their subsequent release, the preferring of a criminal charge, or their being lodged in a place specified in a detention order". The Commission has enjoyed little co-operation from detainees or internees, most of whom believe that no fair investigation can issue from a body made up solely of Englishmen and which holds its hearings in camera. A Home Office spokesman has stated to Amnesty that the "Privacy Rule is an essential part of the Committee's terms of reference for the protection of members of the security forces". The obvious implications of lack of public confidence in such a policy must be assumed to be of less importance to the Government in this context. It further allows counsel to complainants only for the purpose of questioning their own clients, and the terms of reference exclude (although this was sought to be dispelled by Prime Minister Heath on 18th ~~October~~ September) torture after arrival at the place of detention. If this were so, the worst aspects of the "bag torture" would be excluded, as many of the men involved were served with detention orders and carried, however briefly, to the named place of detention before being further airlifted to the interrogation centre. This fulfils the legal requirements of the Special Powers Act and removes the allegations from the Compton scope of inquiry virtually at a stroke. The Commission is proceeding to make its Report, based on gleanings from the press in the main as no prisoner on the HMS Maidstone proffered a complaint, and only 6 of 100 men at Crumlin Road prison responded to Sir Edmund Compton's visit to lodge a complaint. The Report is due within two weeks time. The Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Northern Ireland (Brian Faulkner) has publicly denied all allegations of brutality and torture without exception.

Persons Arrested After 9th August, 1971

These more than 70 persons, 4 of whom have given statements in the possession of Amnesty, along with 14 others whose statements have been widely reported in the press, have been victims of all degrees of brutality and torture noted above. Among these are recorded even more shocking experiences which lead to the conclusion that the authorities have in no way been restrained or intimidated by the Compton Commission or the publicity given to allegations of torture in the Sunday Times of 17th October, 1971. Indeed, those in charge of interrogations may well consider their activities to be insulated from criticism because of the narrow scope of the Commission's mandate and think themselves able to act more freely in regard to persons arrested after 9th August. This is a possibility which

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publication of the Compton Report will affect little, if at all. Persons arrested in September and October continue to allege tortures similar to the bag technique and worse: electric shocks, injections of hallucinatory drugs, physical abuse of genital organs. (N.B. The above recitation of techniques of torture and brutality is by no means exhaustive and only the more striking of the methods have been set out in this memorandum.)

Conclusion

As of this writing, no complaints have been received based on these allegations by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, nor have any of the States party to the European Convention on Human Rights as yet seen fit to institute action against the United Kingdom under the provisions of Convention Article 24, although the government of the Republic of Ireland is presently under severe internal pressure to do so. Therefore, as a prima facie case of torture and brutality is clearly substantiated by the sworn statements in Amnesty's possession, it is thought advisable to pursue this matter, not only to put a stop to any barbarous practices now in use, but to do so in the larger context of helping to extinguish the root cause of these alleged atrocities, the internment without trial of political prisoners in Northern Ireland. Finally, it must be recognised that such conduct as has been alleged against the British Army is perhaps the inevitable result of using men untrained in methods of dealing with a civilian population to accomplish tasks properly within the sphere of legitimate law enforcement agencies.