

PROTESTS AND SECOND HUNGER STRIKE - WEEKLY BULLETIN No 7

0900 9 April - 0900 16 April

Prison Developments

1.1 Maze Hunger Strike All 4 strikers continue their fast and all are now housed in the Prison Hospital. As expected Hughes was transferred there on 10 April while McCreesh and O'Hara moved on 14 and 15 April respectively. However while the condition of the three later hunger strikers is giving no serious cause for concern at present, Sands is beginning to show signs of a marked general deterioration in his condition. It now seems probable that his condition will become critical within the next week to 10 days.

The prisoners' weights are:-

	Day of strike	Weight on first examin- ation	Weight today	Weight loss during week	Overall weight loss
Robert Sands	47	10st 11b	7st 10lbs	3½ lbs	2 st 5lbs
Francis Hughes	33	11 st 3½lbs	9st 8lbs	6½ lbs	1 st 9½lbs
Raymond McCreesh	26	9 st 13 lbs	8st 9lbs	5 lbs	1st 4lbs
Patrick O'Hara	26	12 st 11b	10st 21bs	5½ lbs	1st 13lbs

1.2 Sands election as an MP produced little reaction within the prison. A statement purporting to come from the Republican prisoners at the Maze said that "this important victory must be built on and the breadth of political support achieved during the election should be spread throughout the country. ... only in this

way can political status be won". The result "smashes Britain's criminalisation programme". Sands has made no comment whatsoever regarding his "victory" to prison staff. The new MP's victory speech was made on his behalf by Owen Carron who said:-

"Despite intimidation from the so-called security forces, the voters of Fermanagh and South Tyrone stood by the prisoners and told Mrs Thatcher today that we, on behalf of the Irish people, will not accept the situation in the H Blocks, and we demand an immediate end to the intolerable situation."

1.3 Visits to Hunger Strikers (a) Sands Election Mr Carron was given permission for 2 visits (11 and 13 April) following Sands election. Sands made a further request, which was refused, to be visited by Messrs McAliskey, McManus, Morrison and Gibney.

1.4 Visits to Hunger Strikers (b) Ordinary Visits All 4 hunger strikers have been visited by members of their families during the period and also by the normal "linkmen" such as Gibney and Browning. Sands has also been visited by his parish priest and Sister Bernadette. McCreesh had a visit from his brother Father McCreesh on 14 April.

2.1 Maze Protest Numbers have continued static at 418 while another prisoner has joined the no-wash protest, making 6 in all.

2.2 On 14 April all of the clean protestors requested that they should be issued furniture for their cells. Brendan McFarlane (self styled leader of the NCR) at an arranged meeting with an Assistant Governor reiterated this request and also stated that he would guarantee that the furniture, if provided, would not be abused. A statement was also made on behalf of the protesting prisoners by the Republican Press Centre which stated that despite ending the dirty protest 6 weeks ago they were still being forced to eat and sleep on the floor.

"The continual denial of cell furniture is completely unjustifiable, ... We are demanding of the prison administration that we be given beds and chairs and lockers and we ask the public to monitor the British reaction to our demand."

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2.3 It was agreed that the prisoners' request should be granted and accordingly on 15 April the following statement by the Governor was given to each of the prisoners:-

#### CELL FURNITURE

1. You have made a request to be provided with cell furniture.
2. To date such furniture has not been provided because of the risk of a repetition of the destruction of such furniture and damage to cells as occurred on 27 January.
3. It has now been decided that cell furniture will be issued to you on your assurance that it will not be abused or damaged.
4. The issue of cell furniture is a big job. It will start today. Beds will be issued first. When their issue is completed other items will follow. No furniture will be issued over the Easter holiday period (Friday to Monday inclusive) but issue will be resumed on Tuesday.

Beds have already been issued to the prisoners in D Wing H4 after they had each given an assurance that the furniture would not be abused or damaged. A further Wing in H3 will be furnished with beds today.

3. Armagh Protest This remains static with 29 protestors.

4. Prisons Assessment Sands' election victory appears to have passed with very little comment in the prison. There were no 'celebrations' and even Sands himself appears to have been largely unaffected by the result. In prison terms the two major events of the week have been the protest prisoners' request for furniture and the gradual but marked deterioration in Sands' condition. The former event came as a surprise (although such a request had always been a possibility) and had clearly been a co-ordinated operation between the prisoners and their supporters outside. Whether the move was part of some overall strategy by the prisoners or merely an attempt to 'wrong foot' the Government remains to be seen. However

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by responding positively and promptly the Government has probably taken the initiative from the prisoners, although only time will tell if this action will rebound, as clearly there must be a risk that should Sands die one response of the prisoners will be to destroy their furniture. Sands' condition after 47 days is now beginning to give cause for concern and he is likely to reach a critical stage within the next week. He has already rejected John Hume's suggestion that he should ask the ECHR to re-open the matter and his determination to die shows no sign of weakening.

#### Developments Within the NIO

5. Correspondence Somewhat surprisingly this continues to remain at a very low level.

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Northern Ireland

a) Political

6.1 The result of the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election on 9 April was:

Bobby Sands (Republican H-block)	30,492
Harry West (Ulster Unionist)	29,046
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Majority:	1,446

There were 3,280 spoiled votes in a total turnout of 86.7%. Although politics in Fermanagh are notoriously tribal, and there is a natural Nationalist majority in the seat, the result surprised most observers who had expected a larger proportion of Catholic voters to abstain (or spoil their votes) rather than vote for a convicted terrorist. In particular, it had been expected that the murder in Londonderry two days before the election of a young housewife acting as a census enumerator, as part of PIRA's campaign to disrupt the census, would have an adverse effect on Sands' vote. (PIRA denied the murder, but the weapon used was subsequently proved through ballistics tests to have figures in previous PIRA attacks.) In the event however the incentive to vote against West (the former UUP leader) proved too strong, and many Nationalist voters may also have been influenced by the implication in Sands' campaign that he would come off his hunger strike (which he began on 1 March) and resign the seat if he won. (In fact he announced after the result that he would continue his hunger strike for political status and would not resign).

6.2 The result was greeted with outrage in the Unionist community. Harold McCusker (UUP MP) described it as

"like 30,000 decent Catholics standing over the grave of Joanne Mathers (the enumerator) and shouting three cheers for her killers";

while the DUP commented that the result

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"explodes for all time the SDLP-Roman Catholic perpetuated myth that they have no sympathy for the IRA and its campaign of genocide against the Protestants of Co Fermanagh".

Oliver Napier, leader of the moderate cross-community Alliance party, called it "a black day for Northern Ireland":

"we have seen the real evil of naked sectarianism ... The people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone are prepared to come out and vote for the tribal candidate, regardless of whether it is a decent guy, a politician or gunman ..."

Many Unionists renewed their criticism of the SDLP's failure to put up a candidate and there was also some intra-Unionist squabbling - the DUP arguing that a "Unionist unity" candidate could have won the seat, while Harry West said that the DUP had tried to scupper his campaign:

"if we had had the full support of Unionists of all shades, we would have taken it".

6.3 After some early suggestions to the contrary, it was made clear on 13 April that the Government would not seek to have Sands expelled from the House. On 14 April John Hume (SDLP Leader) suggested that Sands might use his new-found status to take the H Block case to the European Commission on Human Rights: Sands subsequently dismissed this proposal as "ridiculous". PSF spokesmen also dismissed the suggestion, saying that Sands had no time and challenging Hume to call on HMG to grant political status. Prisons campaigners were interested in Hume's own attitude, not his advice. They called for SDLP backing for the NHAC. At a poorly attended Press Conference in Westminster on 14 April Sands' election agent, Owen Carron, called on the Government to "negotiate an honourable settlement" with Sands and the other hunger strikers, based on the 5 demands. Maura McCrory (NHAC) added that if Sands died, the programme of peaceful protests would continue. In a statement on 15 April, the Secretary of State reiterated HMG's position, but added that furniture would now be installed in the cells of those prisoners who had stopped the dirty protest on the understanding that it would not be abused.

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b) H Blocks Campaign

7.1 In the aftermath of Sands' election victory and in the run-up period to Easter, the week saw an increase in public disorder mostly in Belfast and Londonderry, some of it associated with H Block demonstrations. However the media impact of the riots should not obscure the fact that most of the demonstrations themselves were peaceful and - considering the late stage of Sands' action - showed no significant increase in support from the Catholic community as a whole. Typically the rioting was carried out by youths after the main events - stoning of security forces, petrol bombing and road blocking. Shots were fired (possibly by INLA youths) at security forces in West Belfast on 15 April. Notable amongst the week's events were occupation of the GPO building in Belfast by 40 protestors on 14 April (as a result of which 12 persons were charged); 150 persons demonstrating in central Belfast on 12 April, followed by rioting and about 1,900 in a Belfast march on 15 April called by the Trade Union subcommittee of the National H Blocks/Armagh Committee (HNAC) as the centrepiece of the Day of Industrial Action. This was also followed by rioting. There seems to have been little response to the call for a  $\frac{1}{2}$  day strike however. The largest demonstration/2-2,500 persons at Lurgan on 12 April; there was some local opposition from loyalists and 250 youths stoned police afterwards. A PSF spokesman accused the RUC of "deliberately and without provocation" attacking the demonstrators.

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7.2 Sands' victory obviously produced a jubilant response from the campaigners, who emphasised its wider political implications for the British presence in Ireland and the fact that it put the prisons ball squarely in HMG's court. McAliskey called it "a victory for justice and humanity and against all that Unionism stands for". Carron claimed it had been achieved despite "intimidation from the so-called security forces". However the need for further action was emphasised. A statement from Richard McAuley and Joe Austin (PSF) warned that "Bobby Sands' electoral victory while a clear indication of massive popular support for the prisoners does not mean the end of the hungerstrike or of the campaign ... now is the time for us to redouble our efforts". This was echoed by the Provisional-led Belfast youth against H Blocks. Gerry Adams (PSF Vice President) was particularly pleased that the

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Fermanagh voters had ignored Gerry Fitt's advice, and challenged Fitt to put his seat to the test in a by-election.

7.3 Loyalist paramilitary reaction to Sands' victory was predictable: UDA leader Andy Tyrie said that "it is going to harden the Protestants and make them very frightened. No matter what way you look at it, the vote was a vote for the IRA". There were media reports of a UDA commanders' "emergency meeting" to discuss the situation.

7.4 The possibility that Sands might have been expelled from the Commons produced a stormy reaction - Danny Morrison (PSF Director of Publicity) said "these moves (to expel Sands) can only further justify the IRA's argument that the Ballot Box has its limitations and only armed force can get the Brits out of Ireland".

7.5 PSF and NHAC speakers are reiterating Sands' resolve to die if necessary and his mother has also said (15 April) that it is futile to try and persuade him to call off his action. Jim Gibney (PSF) announced on 14 April that "the only sure way to bring this about (political status) is by pressurising the British Government in a mass campaign of demonstrations". In a statement on 14 April, Pearse O'Doyle (NHAC Chairman) said that the fact that British Cabinet could even contemplate Sands' death tore away the "humanitarian facade" of the British establishment.

7.6 Although PSF scotched rumours that they might put up anti-H Block candidates in the forthcoming local elections, this does not mean that "independents" might not be put forward on the prisons ticket and the NHAC have said that they are discussing this.



Republic of Irelanda) Political

8. In the Republic the Taoiseach commented in a radio interview on 12 April that it would be a mistake to see the by-election result as a vote for violence. He also dissociated himself from the view of Sile de Valera (TD, MEP) that the UK Government would be responsible if the hunger strike ended in death.

b) H Blocks Campaign

9.1 A small picket at the Fianna Fail Ard Fheis (11 April) handed in a letter to the Taoiseach, requesting an urgent meeting and demanding his unequivocal support for the "5 demands".

9.2 The main H Block function over the Easter period will take place in Dublin on Saturday 18 April. Representatives from overseas and from Great Britain are hoped for.

Overseas

10.1 Sands' election victory was welcomed by the INC in America; Congressman Mario BIAGGI, who has been vocal in support of the Irish nationalist cause, said "we feel it could be very significant". McAliskey paid a brief visit to the United States after the result was announced. It is claimed that 9 members of the New York State Assembly have announced their support for the hungerstrikers.

10.2 Maureen Gibson, Kieran O'Hagan and a third H Blocks campaigner continued their tour of Germany, but unlike the Western European tour during the first hunger strike, this event is attracting very little interest. It is badly planned and hampered by internal wrangling amongst the hosts. (The Germans will also be preoccupied with their own hunger strike problems!). Kieran Nugent has been visiting Scandinavia, but again appears to have aroused little enthusiasm.

Great Britain

11.1 Four members of the PSF and eight members of the local H Block Action Group leafletted in Birmingham city centre on 15 April. There was no disorder.

11.2 A procession and rally organised by the Revolutionary Communist  
/ (RCT) Tendency/in support of the H Block campaign, took place in the Longsight district of Manchester on 11 April. There were approximately 200 marchers and two persons were arrested.

11.3 There was a demonstration outside Brixton library in South London on 11 April. Some 25-30 persons took part representing RCT, SWP and PSF. Three of the participants were arrested for highway obstruction.



## Media

12.1 Sands' election won extensive coverage on local and national media, with an examination of what his 30,000 votes really signified. However, after it became clear that Sands would not be expelled from Parliament, the issue faded rapidly in national terms and was overshadowed by the Brixton riots and the American space shuttle. Coverage in the Irish press has remained at a slightly higher level than before the election. The 'Irish Times' of 16 April reported that individual members of the ECNR were prepared to mediate on the prisons issue.

12.2 An Phoblacht-Republican News described Sands' victory as "political recognition", won, it said despite Government censorship, security force harassment, Unionist threats and "sabotage by the despicable SDLP leadership". The centrepiece spread emphasised these handicaps but acknowledged the "help of unusually broad-based nationalist unity". The paper did not suggest any change in campaigning tactics in the light of Sands' victory.

## Overall Assessment

13.1 The Fermanagh election result was an important milestone in the prisons campaign, improving campaigners' morale, getting unprecedented media coverage and appearing to put the onus for solving the prisons dispute firmly on HMG. It was widely hailed in the press as a victory for the Provisionals and a setback for the Government and has helped to make feelings run high in the loyalist community. However, it is probable that the result reflected, most of all, traditional sectarian divisions within the constituency. The prisons campaigners will now be seeking to capitalise on Sands' achievement and the recent deterioration of his condition necessitates an urgent examination of whether to let him die (but what would be their next step?) or try and find some formula to permit an end to his action. However, it is possible that Sands would not be amenable to an instruction to abandon the hunger strike, unless personally satisfied that he had achieved his goal of political status.

13.2 He is not expected to die over the immediate Easter period

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5-13 and it is unlikely that there will be any concerted increase in terrorism before this comes about.

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