

**The Ticking Time Bomb: H-Block, the Connection between Nationalism and  
Violence**

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Thesis Title

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**The Ticking Time Bomb: H-Block, the Connection between Nationalism and  
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**Nichole Mousavizadegan**  
**Chapter One: Introduction**

I am a proud young Irishman; In Ulster's hills my life began. A happy boy  
through green fields ran; I kept God and Man's laws, But when my age was barely  
ten, My country's wrongs were told again By tens of thousands marching men,  
And my heart stirred to the cause. So I'll wear no convict's uniform  
Nor meekly serve my time, That Britain might brand Ireland's fight Eight  
hundred years of crime.<sup>1</sup>

Francie Brolly wrote "The H-Block Song" in 1979, and his words capture the Irish republican everyman, a person whom every Irish republican should strive to be and who models what they should feel for their nation.<sup>2</sup> This song embodies the feelings and motivation behind the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike and those who participated in "The Troubles" from 1969 to 1998. Nationalism was utilized frequently during "The Troubles" by all sides of the conflict including, the Irish Unionist, the English government, and the Irish republicans. Both the Provisional IRA and the English government used nationalism to encourage their respective supporters and members of their nations to identify and sympathize with their country. Their use of nationalism also influenced the public to support either the Provisional IRA's or the English government's interests. I argue that, due to the intractable nature of the questions of national (imperial) identity and belonging, actors on both sides of "The Troubles" turned to violence to broadcast their voices. Lacking legitimate or effective outlets to articulate their perspectives, members of the Provisional IRA and the Irish Unionists turned to violence against themselves and others as a political tool. They utilized both the Provisionals and the Unionists, hunger strikes as performative propaganda against each other and supporting their nationalist ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Francie Brolly, "The H-Block Song," 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Francie Brolly, "The H-Block Song," 1976.

The idea of presenting a unified force in the face of an enemy under the banner of a single nation and assuming the problems and intentions of one's country as your own became highly prevalent in propaganda, public opinion, and politics during times of war and civil unrest. One prominent modern example of nationalist propaganda, and on a vehement and extensive scale, took place in Northern Ireland during a 30-year period from 1969 to 1998. This period became known as "The Troubles," a time of civil unrest and devastation caused by the Provisional IRA, the English government, and the Northern Ireland Unionists supporting their own forms of nationalism. Notably, the Provisionals arose in opposition to the English government's involvement and interference in Irish politics and the livelihoods of Northern Ireland's population, including the suppression of the Irish Catholic population at the hands of the Unionists and their supporters. The Provisional IRA's nationalist ideal, according to the writings of former members of the organization and the academic community, sought both Ireland's unification into a single cohesive nation-state and the subsequent removal of English governmental influence in Northern Ireland and their supporters.

Opinions, however, differ on whether religion and religious differences played an integral part in the Provisional IRA's main agenda due to their emergence in defense of the Irish Catholic communities' civil rights instead of being an organization without morality comprised of primarily criminals and criminals. This opinion was held mainly by the Unionists and the English side of the conflict at the time. Organizations similar to the Provisional IRA also developed during this conflict. However, these groups contained primarily Unionist supporters who participated in much of the same activities as the Provisionals. The people within these groups had different motivations and reasoning behind their desire to fight on either side's behalf, thus making the debate behind the direct involvement of religion as a primary motivator

challenging to argue and come to a consensus. The academic community further debates the morality of the Provisional IRA's cause and whether or not the organization was strictly motivated by the mayhem and destruction they caused as opposed to fighting for equal rights. Academics also debate if the Provisional IRA's employment of religion and civil rights issues served as justification for their actions and activities. This debate also discusses the disparities between how members of the Protestant and Catholic faiths perceived each other and the relations between the two communities both in Northern Ireland and internationally. While an essential factor to keep in mind when discussing the Provisional IRA's creation and motivation throughout this thesis, the morality behind the Provisional IRA's actions is not the central theme, nor is it entirely possible to address at this time as many sources remain classified. The debate over religion's central role in "The Troubles" is not one that scholars could easily decipher as the participants who joined either side did so with different motivations.

The Provisional IRA was an Irish organization located in Northern Ireland whose members participated in terrorist activities. The Provisionals developed in opposition against the Irish Unionists' suppression of the Catholics civil rights and the extreme responses of various parties towards these issues in Northern Ireland's. The civil rights movement in Northern Ireland sought to address the discrimination in the distribution of housing, work, and political power towards members of the Irish Catholic majority of Northern Ireland at the hands of the Protestant or Unionist pro-English government minority. The United States' civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s inspired many Irish Catholics to form protests, marches, and organizations in several attempts to speak out and combat the injustices the Protestants and Unionists carried out against them and their lack of political representation. This movement allowed the Irish Catholics to speak out to protest discrimination and draw further attention to their situation when

the government and the political route failed them. The English government, however, willfully ignored them and did not attempt to de-escalate and resolve the multiple problems caused by the lack of housing and employment due to the discrimination and the suppression of the Irish Catholic's civil rights. The government did not attempt to interfere upon this marginalized group's behalf even when a solution was proposed by the Irish Catholic community and their supporters. The solution was for the government to provide pre-built housing, that they initially intended to use newlywedded Protestants and, instead, repurpose these homes for the victims who suffered from these discriminatory actions. This neglect and intentional ignorance of the issue inspired the development of the IRA's Provisional branch to form and participate in terrorist activities to force the government to consider their grievances and suffering. Although the Provisional IRA originally emerged in defense of the Irish Catholic population, the republican group's central goal and the basis for their form of nationalism centered on removing English influence from Northern Ireland. The Provisional IRA's form of nationalism was also exclusionary towards the Unionists and Protestant members of the Irish population, believing them not to be proper Irish and did not belong.<sup>3</sup> This exclusion also means that the Provisional IRA's form of nationalism did not incorporate those who supported the English government and Ulster in their ideology of a united Ireland. The republicans and the supporters of the Provisionals wanted the removal of all those who supported the existence of Northern Ireland as a separate entity under the dominion of the United Kingdom (UK). The focus of their terroristic activities took place primarily in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and London, England, and took the form of bombings, shootings, assassinations, propaganda, and hunger strikes. The hunger strikes, specifically from 1981-1985, also known by the public as the H-block protests or H-block

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<sup>3</sup> R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 459.

hunger strikes, are a particularly prominent example of the Provisionals' propaganda at work. The Provisional IRA and their supporters used these hunger strikes and protests as a form of self-inflicted violent propaganda to obtain political status for themselves and other republican prisoners and in an attempt to garner public sympathy and support, which they had steadily lost as the conflict dragged on. The correspondence, autobiographies, manifestos, and interviews of those who experienced "The Troubles" firsthand, along with some of the many primary documents from the Foreign Correspondences Office, personal writings, newspapers, and government documents, provide information necessary to the understanding of this form of propaganda and its impact during "The Troubles." We will also be able to discern and dissect the connection between nationalism and self-violent methodology as represented by the H-Block hunger strikers due to their use of their fast as performative and psychological propaganda.

This thesis contains five chapters focused on different aspects of this research. Chapter One, the introduction, primarily seeks to provide an overview of the Provisional IRA's background and the historical conflict between Irish Catholics and Protestants due to repeated persecution and discrimination performed by both parties, and the methodology behind this study and its development. The introduction will also focus on how the conclusion was reached through research at the United Kingdom National Archive in Kew, newspapers found in several digital collections, and the Irish Leftist Archive. The sources compiled from these archives and other outlets include newspapers, correspondence, government documents, and secondary documentation. For example, Richard O'Rawe's *The Blanketmen* and Tommy McKearney's *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament* provides insight into the development of the H-Block hunger strikes and the animosity between the Provisional IRA and the English government. Chapter one also contains a brief history of the turbulent relationship between

Ireland and Great Britain while also focusing on the continuously developing historical academic documentation and the modern study of the Provisional IRA and "The Troubles." The Irish Left Archive features digital imagery and documentation tied directly to the Irish leftist and republican movements. This digital archive contains posters, digital copies of *An Phoblacht*, the leading newspaper outlet used by the Provisional IRA, leaflets, and other documents pertaining to its history and the Irish left. This introduction also contains an overview of the historiographical study of the Provisional IRA and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. A brief example of the changes in the historical study of "The Troubles," the Provisional IRA and the 1981 Hunger Strike, is that after archival documentation became available, including personal accountings of these events, academics focused on different and specific areas pertaining to this period. For example, at the beginning of "The Troubles," academics proposed solutions in an attempt to resolve "The Troubles" and the removal or destruction of the Provisional IRA around the early to mid-seventies. Scholarly researchers, however, did not hold a monopoly on the advice they provided in the hopes of ending "The Troubles." An article published by *The Guardian* refers to the writings of Tim Pat Coogan in a letter, in which he suggests that a solution employed at Portlaoise, a French prison which had a similar situation, be a model for a possible resolution to the H-Block issue.<sup>4</sup> The academic study of "The Troubles" and the internal events of the conflict changed over time to focus on an observational and neutral point of view as opposed to the academics' of the 1980s previous approach and their attempts to enforce their own opinion upon the governments and population through the publication of their works. Academics in their publications during the 80s showed either their support the Provisional IRA or they denounced the organization's members' actions. The academic study of "The Troubles"

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<sup>4</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter 'TNA'): CJ 4/3025/67, n.a. "The Irish Dimension," *Guardian*, October 31, 1980.



and the Provisional IRA has also expanded due to the recent declassification of documents found at the United Kingdom National Archives in Kew and potential sources found in Dublin and Belfast.

Chapter Two will primarily feature an overview of the history behind the development of "The Troubles," the Provisional IRA, and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike and a literature. The background of the Provisional IRA featured in this chapter will also discuss information concerning the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the Irish Volunteer Force (IVF), the Original Irish Republican Army (OIRA or IRA), and their contribution to the development of the Provisional IRA and republicanism. The second chapter will also discuss some of the aftermaths of the Good Friday Accords, also known as the Good Friday Agreement (1998). In its entirety, this chapter will focus on providing the background information behind the animosity between Irish republican nationalists and the English government dating back to 1916 during the Easter Rising when the original IRA began their violent campaign against English imperialism. Chapter Three, "The Death of Bobby Sands and the Continuance of the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike," discusses the supposed backroom deal between the H-Block prisoners, the Provisional IRA, and Margaret Thatcher, which led to the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike and the negotiations following Sands' death. Chapter Four, "Nationalism, Violence, and Propaganda," primarily focuses on the connection between nationalism and violence, as demonstrated by the Provisional IRA's use of psychological and physical propaganda exemplified by their 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. This also includes how they protested and the several actions they took to voice their displeasure and demand for political or special status. Their activities included and were not limited to denying themselves food, refusing to work or wear the prison uniforms, and dirtying their prison cells. The fourth chapter will also contain

information detailing the involvement of international parties on behalf of the hunger strikers in pursuit of preventing their deaths and placing pressure on Margaret Thatcher to enact prison reforms and changes. The information featured in these four chapters is synthesized in the conclusion.

The fifth and final chapter contains the conclusion and details the importance of the in-depth study of the Provisional IRA and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike due to its nature and reach as a performative form of propaganda utilized during "The Trouble." This information also includes the connections between their use of violence and their nationalist agenda. The conclusion will also feature information on the developing historical impact of the Provisional IRA and their use of violence as a nationalistic tool by other nations. The conclusion will also address other potential areas in which the study of the Provisional IRA and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike would be relevant for future research. For example, women like Marcella Sands and Mary Doyle played a significant role during "The Troubles" and the hunger strike; however, their influence and role are not as thoroughly documented as opposed to those detailing the republican men of Long Kesh and their outside constituents' participation in murders and bombings.

Despite the Provisional IRA's actions and the connections between nationalism and violent methodologies, a brief background of the continuous conflict between England and Ireland is needed to understand the nationalist ideology behind the Provisional IRA and their conflict with the English government. The conflict between the Irish and the English harkens back centuries and features the divisions caused in Irish society based upon religious differences. For the sake of brevity, however, the background information provided will start with the Easter Rising in 1916, when the original IRA took over strategic locations in Dublin in order to force

the English government to concede to their demands. Although the animosity against English imperialism in Ireland has a long history, the powder-keg of animosity finally "exploded" during "The Troubles" with the development of the Provisional IRA and their campaign of violence and propaganda. The Provisional IRA's aimed to use their self-violence and propaganda to perpetuate their nationalist ideology in an attempt to remove the English and their governmental influence once and for all through the use of popular support and force.

Further insight into the background of "The Troubles" is located later in this chapter, along with the historiographical background of the study of this period. The H-Block Hunger Strike in 1981, one of several events crucial to the study of "The Troubles," utilized the power of propaganda and its effects on the opinions of the people and the government. This event, however, also encompasses the distinct connection between Irish republican nationalism and the connection between this ideology and self-violence. This strike appeared to be a part of the Provisional IRA's continuous campaign to legitimize their cause and obtain the backing of the populace, which further included a combination of hunger strikes and violence against oneself and others. Their use of hunger strikes, and protest, appeared indicative of several historical themes found in both Irish history and world history. The significance of this form of study is to bring to mind that nationalism and nationalist ideology are often perpetuated through violent methodology, as exemplified by the Provisional IRA and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. However, according to several sources, the ties between nationalism and violence, notably the H-Block Hunger Strike in 1981, directly ties to events in Irish history and the strikers' utilization of nationalism and hunger strikes against imperialism. These sources include writings by Robert English, Padraig O'Malley, and Richard O'Rawe who details the historical connection between hunger strikes and Irish republicanism.

The previously provided information detailed a brief background on the beginnings of "The Troubles" and the internal struggle between England and Ireland and the fields' academic historiography, it however, does not address the significance of studying the H-Block Hunger Strike and the academic study of "The Troubles" in its entirety. Several of the works do not fully address the connections between nationalism and violence concerning "The Troubles" and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. For example, in his 1990 publication, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*, Padraig O'Malley addresses the historical connection between the Irish use of hunger strikes and their bid to obtain a goal. Additionally, he addresses the inspiration behind the strikers' desire to keep going despite the deaths of their comrades and the opposition they faced. He does not, however, address the hunger strikes as a form of propaganda. The death of Bobby Sands especially had a significant impact on the strikers and the world population.

F. Stuart Ross' 2011 *Smashing the H-Block: The Rise and Fall of the Popular Campaign against Criminalization, 1976-1982*, similar to O'Malley's work, focuses on providing an in-depth political history and examining the motivation behind the H-Block Hunger Strike. Ross focuses primarily on the effect of criminalization and the continuous struggle the republican movement faced in its wake from 1976-1982.<sup>5</sup> Ross' work details the Provisional IRA's campaign against criminalization, Thatcher and her predecessor's policy of classification designating the Provisional IRA and their supporters imprisoned as ordinary criminals instead of a legitimate organization with historical precedent and a moral foundation. His work also provides a down-up view on the study of the movement against criminalization and the 1980-81 H-Block Hunger Strike by focusing on the significance of grass-root movements as represented

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<sup>5</sup> Ross, 3.

by the hunger strikers and their supporters. For example, he discussed the PIRA council's slow acknowledgment of the prisoners' situation and the impact of the Relatives' Action Committee, and the effect their campaign had on republican policies.<sup>6</sup> His work also traces the phases of the movement and lays out a clear and concise timeline allowing readers to thoroughly comprehend and understand the importance of the movement's development and its historical impact.

Other works that focus on "The Troubles," or contain information on the 1981 hunger strike primarily feature a comprehensive analysis of the issues in Northern Ireland, or they address other aspects of "The Troubles," and do not feature in-depth information on the H-Block issue itself. The academic writing of the previous hunger strikes which preceded the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike, particularly during the 70s and 80s, focused on proposing solutions or provided, or at least attempted, to provide a neutral point of view on the hunger strikes. These writings, however, do not discuss the influence of the Provisional IRA's use of the hunger strikes had as performative propaganda pieces, beyond the historical significance of the Irish people's frequent use of hunger strikes. However, these works provide several insights into the scope and influence the strikes had upon the people, which correlates with the primary documents. The primary documents also show multiple attempts by several foreign governments to influence Prime Minister Thatcher on behalf of the strikers. In conjunction with the use of primary sources, secondary works show the effect the H-Block Hunger Strike had upon the academic study of "The Troubles" and the strikes themselves. This thesis seeks to fully address the connection between the hunger strikers' form of performative and psychological propaganda and their impact and influence upon the international population. For example, the strike influenced members of outside governments to intercede on their behalf and attempt to persuade Thatcher to

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin Bean, *Irish Historical Studies* 38, no. 150 (2012): 379-80, Accessed October 13, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43654510>.

conceded on the strikers' five demands. This work, however, does not focus on one prisoner in particular, nor does it analyze the psychological motivations of the strikers. Instead, it seeks to draw attention to the connection between nationalism and violence, as exemplified by the propaganda used by the Provisional IRA and the republican strikers in their denial of food and intimidation tactics they employed.

The 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike, while a smaller event compared to the Good Friday Agreement or the assassination of Lord Mountbatten, impacted and influenced several foreign governments and populations. However, how has the historical study of "The Troubles" and the H-Block Hunger Strike developed over the forty-year time span since its conclusion? The historical study of the hunger strike, PIRA, and "The Troubles" can be divided based on political, economic, and social effects. Padraig O'Malley, for example, author of *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strike and the Politics of Despair*, provides a unique perspective of the hunger strike through his discussion of how integral the idealized power behind the hunger strike was to Irish nationalism, particularly the Irish republican nationalism employed by PIRA and the hunger strikers during "The Troubles."<sup>7</sup> His work, compared to similar works, also provides a more detailed insight into the cultural and historical connection between Irish nationalism and hunger strikes. Like in his 1983 publication, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today*, O'Malley provides an academic and clinical study of "The Troubles" and the hunger strike while providing a thorough analysis and background behind the conflict in Northern Ireland. Historians should consider and incorporate the circumstances surrounding the groups' development and motivation while incorporating multiple perspectives in their analysis, mainly when dissecting situations like the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. For example, Bobby Sands started the second hunger strike

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<sup>7</sup> Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strike and the Politics of Despair* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1990), 14.

because the English government rescinded its deal, and the correctional officers cruelly treated the protestors who spoke out against the government's withdrawal.<sup>8</sup> The historical study of both PIRA and the H-Block strikers should include and consider the documentation's accuracy. For example, Bobby Sands' diary, which details his first seventeen days on strike, could have been tampered with by the IRA Council or affected by mental issues Sands obtained due to the lack of food and hydration.<sup>9</sup> The historical study of both PIRA and the H-Block strikers should include and consider the news's accuracy, interviews with previous detainees, and primary documentation declassified and located in public archives. In one account, a former member of the Provisional IRA, Mary Doyle, for example, discusses her involvement with the organization and her contribution to the 1981 Hunger Strike.<sup>10</sup> Doyle's writing of her participation in the hunger strike provides a different account than Bobby Sands' due to its later publication and accurate description of the events in 1981. Her account provides both a striker's point of view and a woman's perspective of the event and decisions of the IRA Council unaffected by starvation, dehydration, and intentions of using one's words as propaganda intended to further the Provisional IRA's cause.

The majority of the sources covered in this literature review span several disciplines of history, including economic, political, military, and cultural, which provide a rounded overview and understanding of the Provisional IRA and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. The analysis is organized by decade, theme, and argument. Their use of archival sources and their direct personal engagement with documentation and members of the Provisional IRA and those who experienced "The Troubles" themselves changed from a personal and direct accounting of events

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<sup>8</sup> Sands, Loc 509.

<sup>9</sup> Sands, Loc 509.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Doyle, "The Feelings are Still Raw," ed. Danny Morrison, *Hunger Strikes: Reflections on the 1981 Hunger Strike* (Kerry: Mount Eagle Publications, 2006), 23.

to a more historically based academic research using multiple archival documents and a diverse range of sources. The shift in academic writing and interpretation of events and the availability of interviews from members of PIRA further encouraged a shift in the study over the course of three decades during "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland and the decades after. The academic writing on the Provisional IRA and "The Troubles" shifted over the decades from incorporating personal opinion to historically neutral writings that centered the history of the IRA, the Provisionals, and "The Troubles." Academics also began to focus on specific aspects of "The Troubles" and the Provisional IRA. These aspects included the military stratagems used, the English perspective, the morality behind their terrorist activities, and the policies which encouraged the H-Block Hunger Strike in 1981 and earlier protests.

PIRA's victims consisted of both civilians and members of the military. When it came to reporting these events, Simon Winchester attempted to report "The Troubles" as accurately as possible and as moderately as conceivable during his time in Belfast as a reporter for the *Guardian* and a firsthand witness of the tumultuous and bloody period.<sup>11</sup> He stated that like himself, both the reporters and the English soldiers who were involved or encountered the events of "The Troubles" had a job to do. He stated that they were in Northern Ireland "to do a job, and the manner of its doing was a source of professional pride to him, even though it was a matter of high politics and high emotion to everyone outside."<sup>12</sup> Throughout his work, Winchester details his experiences and his reports on the actions of the IRA while attempting to be as neutral as possible considering the environment. Despite his personal experience as a witness of PIRA's atrocities, Winchester provides a starting point in the documentation of "The Troubles" in an

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Winchester, *Northern Ireland in Crisis: Reporting the Ulster Troubles* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1975), 124.

<sup>12</sup> Winchester, 124.



academic and accurate method. Further, in his works, *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today* and *Biting at The Grave: The Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*, Padraig O'Malley details both sides of events and does not paint the Provisionals nor the English as the heroes of these events despite having an experience similar to Winchester's. His works indicate a shift in the study of "The Troubles" because he published his work in both the 1970s and 1990s. For example, his work *Biting at the Grave* focuses on the cultural ties between hunger strikes and Irish nationalism and emphasizes their personal suffering as a weapon against the enemy. Compared to his other earlier work, *The Uncivil Wars*, *Biting at the Grave* focuses on the hunger strikes and protests during "The Troubles" itself. However, *the Uncivil Wars* provides an encompassing history of "The Troubles," particularly the republican movement, with the intended purpose of sparking debate among the academic and scholastic community.

After the 1970s, the angles historians employed in their study of the Provisional IRA, "The Troubles," and their series of protests, shifted to focus on specific aspects of "The Troubles." Academics such as D.G. Pringle and James Adams also attempted to explain why Ireland had fallen into and possible solutions. These explanations came to a consensus that "The Troubles" was a peculiar and inevitable event. The only question would have been when it would have occurred. The information provided in these studies, however, does not stray from focusing primarily on the broader history of the conflict in some form. The source work found in these depictions of the events and the analysis of the political, economic, and ideological climate of Northern Ireland primarily consists of public records. For example, *One Island, Two Nations? A political Geographical analysis of the national conflict in Ireland*, published in 1985 by D.G. Pringle, focuses on the political aspect of "The Troubles" while providing an in-depth analysis on the reasoning behind "The Troubles" and the internal conflict in Northern Ireland. According

to the author, his work is not a historical analysis of the underlying causes of the events in Ireland, though he does not wish to encourage Irish people's preoccupation with the past.<sup>13</sup> Pringle, however, argues that for Ireland to unite into one country, which is highly unlikely, the republicans and the Unionists would have to come to some form of agreement and realize the indifference felt by the Irish population when it comes to a united Ireland.<sup>14</sup> At this point in 1985, when Pringle's work was published, not only did popular opinion and the desire for a united and independent Ireland dwindle into indifference, members of the public no longer supported the Provisional IRA. According to Pringle, the conflict no longer had a material basis and was now only a fight between two different factions with differing ideologies without public support and the lack of a sense of nationalism and unity.<sup>15</sup> *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today* by Padraig O' Malley attempts to explain the motivation behind those participating in this perpetual conflict and the conflict's background.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of his work, unlike in later sources, is his objective for debate and does not propose any form of a solution; instead, he perceives the focus on solutions as aggravating the problem further.<sup>17</sup> His analysis of the time also does not explain the issue and the resulting consequences if the struggle ended. Instead, he presents the facts and information logically and academically. O'Malley also provides a thorough explanation of the H-Block hunger strike, its development, and impact. Unlike his later work *Biting at the Grave*, this does not dedicate more than a brief description of the event and its impact.

In a similar work, *The Financing of Terror: How the Groups that are Terrorizing the World Get the Money to Do it*, James Adams discusses one of the key factors behind the survival

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<sup>13</sup> D.G. Pringle, *One Island, Two Nations?: A political Geographical analysis of the national conflict in Ireland*, (Hertfordshire: Research Studies Press, 1985), 274.

<sup>14</sup> Pringle, 275.

<sup>15</sup> Pringle, 277.

<sup>16</sup> O' Malley 16.

<sup>17</sup> O'Malley, 16.

of any terrorist organization, funding. For organizations like PIRA, funding was crucial to achieving their goals and their continued survival as an organization.<sup>18</sup> Adams explains the financing behind the PLO, the IRA, Red Brigades, and M-19, terrorist organizations similar to the Provisional IRA.<sup>19</sup> Money, according to Adams, is essential to the survival of any organization. Even those who receive funding from the government need additional money for supplies and updated equipment. Adams at first discusses his understanding and the inevitability that the goal of a unified Ireland will not succeed because PIRA faced opposition from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.<sup>20</sup> He also describes the different veins of funding PIRA received. One vein came from the Irish Northern Aid Committee or NORAID, an American organization established by Michael Flannery, a supporter, and member of the Provisional IRA. The other was the PLO, a Palestinian organization whose members participated in terrorist activities.<sup>21</sup> Through his descriptions of the financial success of PIRA and the lack of enforcement by the English, despite their international cooperation with the United States to successfully remove NORAID, he describes the English government's effort as a failure. The English government failed to prevent the development of PIRA into a competent and cohesive terrorist organization due to its inability to adapt to the changing political and economic climate in the United Kingdom.<sup>22</sup> O'Malley and Adams attempted to remain neutral on the subject of the Provisional IRA. However, they did not avoid incorporating their internal biases into their writings entirely. For example, Adams appeared to have been in support of the English and their attempts to end the conflict in Ireland. He advised them to attack the economic backing upon

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<sup>18</sup> James Adams, *The Financing of Terror: Behind the PLO, IRA, Red Brigades, and M-19 Stand the Paymasters: How the Groups That Are Terrorizing the World Get the Money to Do It*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 135.

<sup>19</sup> Adams, 155.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, 155.

<sup>21</sup> Adams, 135.

<sup>22</sup> Adams, 155.

which the Provisional IRA was reliant and expose their inner corruption that is supposedly inherent to all terrorist organizations, or the English would be too late to stop the Provisional IRA's development into a more effective and influential organization.<sup>23</sup> While incorporating public records and observing specific aspects of "The Troubles" is highly valued by the academics of the 1980s, the reoccurring trend in the writings of the 1980s centered on solutions and logical explanations of the situation in Northern Ireland and its development. They attempted this form of explanation while maintaining their focuses on specific aspects of Irish history, whether the center is politics, finance, the people of Northern Ireland, or nationalism.

While the information provided by monographs in the 1980s began with the questioning of the motivation of the fighting in Northern Ireland, the authors of works detailing "The Troubles" in the late 90s and early to mid-2000s began to look in-depth into certain aspects of the Provisional IRA and the history of the Provisional IRA itself. The availability of new information, archival sources, and interviews from retired members of the Provisional IRA offer insights about their own experiences and their views of the situations that they found themselves in at the time. Their experiences, however, are not the focus of their work; instead, they discuss their views on the Provisional IRA, and through that discussion, one can discern how these events impacted their views of "The Troubles" and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike and affected their nationalist ideology.

Tim Pat Coogan, Tony Geraghty, and J. Bower Bell detailed the histories of "The Troubles," the IRA, and the history of English involvement and their conflict with the IRA. Coogan today is a well-known author who details the troubling events in Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1998. His works *The IRA: A History* and *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and*

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<sup>23</sup> Adams, 184.

*the Search for Peace* contain in-depth studies of the historical actors and the past events that were beginning to move towards peace at the time of his writings. Coogan's previous work of the two, *The IRA: A History*, details the development of the IRA until its division over the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the growth of PIRA and their horrendous actions from 1969 onward.<sup>24</sup>

The Provisional IRA is an organization that nimbly adapted to the shift in the popular and political climate and cannot be discussed in its entirety without mentioning the role of the English military and English intelligence and their role in defending English interests in Northern Ireland. Tony Geraghty's *The Irish War: The Hidden Conflict between the IRA and English intelligence* describes the inner workings and mechanisms of the actions and reactions between English intelligence and security forces and the Provisional IRA until 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>25</sup> However, while much of his work focuses primarily on the military aspects of the conflict, Geraghty also provides a history that shows the development of "The Troubles" and the historical background of the relationship between Ireland and England from the English perspective. J. Bowyer Bell, in a similar work, focuses on the actions of the IRA and their development until 1996. In *The Secret Army: The IRA*, Bell discusses his personal experiences with the IRA and describes the evolution of their actions, motives, and methods used by the original IRA and PIRA as these organizations developed and adapted to the changes in the political climate. He describes previous histories of the IRA as lacking and in need of more thorough and direct research into the evolution of a group that played a key historical role in the history of Ireland.<sup>26</sup> As one of the foremost researchers on the IRA, he provides a thorough historical narrative of "The Troubles" and the events that led up to the thirty-year conflict in

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<sup>24</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA A History* (Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1994),3.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Geraghty, *The Irish War: The Hidden Conflict between the IRA and British Intelligence* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), xxxiv.

<sup>26</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), x.

Northern Ireland. His historical narrative of the H-Block hunger strike's development and reach contained a thoroughly researched and academic account of the English and Irish points-of-view and response towards the strike. Bell described the hunger strike as a tactic that PIRA's council and the English government found undesirable; however, according to Bell, the prisoners who wished for justice demanded to go on strike in retaliation against the prison regime.<sup>27</sup> He also states that the hunger strike did not gain traction with the general population until March 3, 1980, when Cardinal O'Fiaich and Dr. Edward Daly, Bishop of Derry, visited the H-Block and observed the squalor and inhumane treatment the prisoners received and they smuggled out photos as proof of this inhumanity. Bell further states that "the guards, the warders, personally and as policy, would not give an inch; they were as brutal as they needed to be, not just to restore order, but also to impose humiliation."<sup>28</sup> His words, while descriptive and robust, provide a clinical view of the H-Block situation and thoroughly cover the situation. Bell's work is also one of the few works containing more information dedicated to the H-Block than previous works.

Andrew Sanders' *Inside the IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War of Legitimacy* focuses on the military stratagems and methods used by the Provisional IRA during their reign of terror. His work uses a contemporary lens in his description of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland instead of a strictly historical view. While the political, economic, financial, and historical overviews are important and found in several of the sources utilized in this work, women also played a central role in the historical background, which led to the development of "The Troubles," particularly from 1923-1941. Women who participated in the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike and held membership within the Provisional IRA and their involvement lack academic study and documentation. Ann Matthews, however, provides a brief academic study in

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<sup>27</sup> Bell, 483

<sup>28</sup> Bell, 483

her dissection and analysis of specific women who were involved in the early stages and activities during the early era of the republican movement in Ireland before and during World War II. She argues in *Dissidents: Irish Republican Women 1923-1941* that women played a vital role in the movement but were disenfranchised and forced back into the private sphere of the home away from the domain of the men. Matthew's work influenced this research to observe women who participated or were influential in the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. These women include Mary Doyle, Marcella Sands, and the women of Armagh Women's Prison. Although previous sources have focused on "The Troubles" and the Provisional IRA, in the early years and even during "the Troubles," women played a vital role in the expansion of the republican movement and the work for and against the Provisionals. For example, women involved themselves directly within the republican campaign and political life; however, after the forties, they disappeared from political life, according to Matthews.<sup>29</sup> While women in this particular study are not directly related to the Provisional IRA and the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike, one must consider what role did they play in "the Troubles." For example, Marcella Sands, sister to Bobby Sands, argued upon her brother's and several other prisoners' behalf at the European Commission on Human Rights before his death in order to bring his and the other strikers' circumstances to their attention in the hopes the ECHR would intercede and force Britain to either answer the strikers' demands or make some form of concession upon which they could capitalize. Another woman directly involved in the affairs of the Provisional IRA and the H-Block strike was Bernadette McAliskey, a former Member of Parliament for Ulster. She readily petitioned the United Nations and argued for the H-Block strikers and for England to compromise, or else they would have continued the violence, and the deaths would be on the

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<sup>29</sup> Ann Matthews, *Dissidents: Irish Republican Women 1923-1941* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2012), 9.

English government's hands.<sup>30</sup> Matthews' work primarily focuses on the women directly involved in the Irish Republican Movement and the Original IRA in 1923-1941, however, her work provides insight into the involvement of women in the movement and the critical role they played in both the IRA's development and its successes, directly correlating with the contribution of Irish women in the extension of the hunger strike's propaganda's reach.

Another work similar to Matthews' *Dissidents* is F. Stuart Ross' *Smashing H-Block: The Rise and Fall of the Popular Campaign against Criminalization 1976-1982*. The development and inclusion of different factors beyond a generalized history of these events and the inclusion of women, minorities, civil rights, and other factors beyond political boundaries are indicative of the 1990s. In the 2000s, however, historians attempted to explain the Irish nationalist and republican mythology that the Provisional IRA had fought and died for. Previous sources attempted to defuse the situation and provide solutions, despite their attempts at an unbiased analysis of the events around them. Nationalism does, however, factor into some of the early source work but scholars further expand upon its involvement after the end of "The Troubles," and the long-term consequences of these events began to take effect. Historical writings of the early 2000s attempted to incorporate further nationalism and Irish republicanism, which motivated the Provisional IRA, while also providing detailed overviews of "The Troubles" without generalizing the subject or attempting to provide their advice on how the government should have handled the situation, unlike academic writings published by members of other disciplines. Sources from the 2000s even attempted to explain the motivation behind the Provisional IRA and, in one source, attempted to dissect the morality behind terrorism and the actions of terrorists themselves. Timothy Shanahan's *The Provisional Irish Republican and the*

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<sup>30</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1062/72 n.a. "Bid to Raise H-Block Campaign at the UN," *Newsletter*, July 22, 1980.



*Morality of Terrorism* is one such source.<sup>31</sup> His primary focus is the philosophy of science. In *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism*, he dissects and analyzes the devastation and instability caused by PIRA's campaign. However, they did not achieve their central goals, and what they did gain was little in comparison to their actions and motivations.<sup>32</sup> While previous research centered on the politics, ideology, military stratagem, and other traditional fields of academic study, attempting to rationalize and dissect the morality behind the actions of a terrorist organization is relatively new. Even though historians and other scholars attempt to understand the motivation and ideology behind the Provisional IRA's activities, it is seldomly discussed in the academic community if the Provisional IRA's actions had any moral basis. Shanahan's work, however, does not directly discuss the morality behind the H-Block strikers' use of a hunger strike as propaganda; what he does discuss, however, is Bobby Sands' use of the Republic of 1916 or the Original IRA in his diary as a symbol of his confidence in PIRA's historical destiny.<sup>33</sup> His methodology and dissection of the morality and reasoning behind PIRA's actions appear cohesive, though slightly dramatized, and addresses the Provisional IRA's use of a historical narrative to legitimize and establish their nationalist ideology.

In *Irish Freedom: A History of Nationalism in Ireland*, Richard English presents years of personal research focused on Ireland's nationalist history, primarily concentrated on Irish nationalism after the Act of Union 1800, focusing on the political and cultural continuities and the impacts nationalism. While encompassing Irish history and the historical development of Irish nationalism, English concentrates his attention on the intricate ties between nationalism and power, the Irish community, and the Irish people's willingness to struggle against an oppressive

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<sup>31</sup> <https://bellarmine.lmu.edu/irishstudies/faculty/?expert=timothy.shanahan>

<sup>32</sup> Timothy Shanahan, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Shanahan, 46.

nation and later emerge victorious in their efforts. For example, his description of the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike identifies it as a means of struggle and propaganda intended by the Provisional IRA and the prisoners, which the Provisional IRA and the prisoners pragmatically used this struggle in addition to their political battle to challenge the status quo, rally the public and challenge the English government.<sup>34</sup> He further discusses the Provisional IRA's transformation from utilizing military might and protest to their utilization of direct and aggressive politics. They believed peaceful political tactics were wasteful, energy-consuming, and would inhibit their ability to achieve their ambitions.<sup>35</sup> English's and Shanahan's works further contribute to understanding the connection between Irish republicanism and nationalism. Facilitating an understanding of the role culture can play in the execution of nationalist ideology and its development is central to understanding the motivation and methodology of these organizations. This thesis developed from the consideration of nationalism and violence to be connected based upon the weapons or methods employed by the Provisional IRA and the republicans. This thesis, however, was further developed after observing the Irish republican nationalists' frequent use of hunger strikes throughout Irish history as documented by English and O'Malley. This is further represented in other writings focused on the H-Block hunger strike and Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism. The consideration of culture when it comes to the understanding of the connections between nationalism and violent methodologies is important when considering the development of organizations similar to the Provisional IRA. For example, religion may play a role in the hunger strikers use of their fast and suffering as a way of martyring themselves in order to perpetuate themselves as victims forced to suffer at the whims of English imperialists. This is not to say any or all culture is inherently violent or predisposed

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<sup>34</sup> English, 379.

<sup>35</sup> English, 379.

towards the development of organizations similar to the Provisional IRA. Other factors, beyond politics, may play a role in these organizations' development.

The works of Robert White and Tony Geraghty provided two different examples compared to Shanahan's in that they look at several personal accounts through the incorporation of interviews and different perspectives of the conflict. They also focus on a historical and sociological aspect of "The Troubles" and PIRA instead of the cultural, political, and philosophical angle employed by English and Shanahan. Robert White compiled hundreds of personal accounts of the actions of PIRA and the significant events of "The Troubles," including the hunger strike, in 1981's *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of The Provisional Irish Republican Movement*. These accounts provide an examination of the choices made by the activists in their decisions to stay, leave, and the motivation behind the republican movement.<sup>36</sup> The interviewees' opinions and firsthand accounts of the hunger strike provide insight into their opinions of the hunger strike and how their beliefs shifted as "The Troubles" continued into the 1980s and later ended with the Good Friday Agreement. For example, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, a cousin of Fergal O'Hanlon, a republican supporter killed in 1957, who at the time of the hunger strike held a comfortable position at a bank, stated, "I became aware of it and interested in it through the work of the Relatives Action Committee and the other campaigning groups, but it actually was the hunger strike period of 1980 before my conscience was sufficiently disturbed by my spectator role of all that was unfolding in my own country."<sup>37</sup> The hunger strike and the actions of the hunger strikers encouraged Ó Caoláin to involve himself actively in the activities of the republican movement in support of the hunger strikers and their plight. His work also is

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<sup>36</sup> Robert White, *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (Kildare: Merrion Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>37</sup> White, Ch 12.

comprised of information from interviews featured in newspapers, books, government documents, and media, lending credibility to the research White incorporated into his work and allowing for a more rounded piece of academic scholarship as opposed to using only his own personal interviews between himself and those who experienced “The Troubles.”

Tony Geraghty’s work focuses on the English perspective, particularly those who were militarily involved on behalf of the English and participated in the conflict and the tactics and stratagems they used. His compilation of sources and their use allows Geraghty to compile his research and provide the point of view of a member of the English military stationed in Northern Ireland during the conflict instead of focusing primarily on the Irish perspective and Irish nationalism. For example, Geraghty's writings on the hunger strike contain an analysis of hunger strikes as propaganda tools that combined both moral force and political impact.<sup>38</sup> Although Geraghty's description of the H-Block hunger strikes and the events of “The Troubles” contained an analytical overview, his portrayal of these events was not strictly academic. Instead, he portrayed the strikes as a drama or an epic performed in theater, which slowly reached the climax and later its conclusion.<sup>39</sup> His portrayal, while interesting, may suggest a lackadaisical attitude towards the subject. This perception is offset by his dissemination of archival information and his analysis, providing facts to support his dramatized description.

Andrew Sanders’ *Inside the IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War for Legitimacy*, provides an overview of the IRA's general history until the late 1960s early 70s when the Provisional IRA split from the IRA. Sanders' work also explores the connections between the United States and PIRA; however, despite its lack of cohesive narrative, it provides insight into

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<sup>38</sup> Geraghty, 97-98.

<sup>39</sup> Geraghty, 99.

Irish republicanism and the other forms and interpretations of republicanism.<sup>40</sup> He thus allows for a thorough understanding of Irish republicanism and its development. His work, however, does not directly tackle the hunger strike issue and instead focuses on the military interactions between PIRA and correctional officers. He also focuses on Sinn Fein's use of the H-Block campaign in 1982 to obtain supremacy within the republican movement, thus shifting from military violence to political stratagems.<sup>41</sup> However, according to an article posted by the English Broadcasting Channel (BBC), the English government stated that Theresa May's Brexit deal does not interfere with, nor does it negate, the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>42</sup> The article, however, did not feature the exact BREXIT agreement itself nor the government's exact plan to prevent another conflict within Northern Ireland due to its confidentiality.

Historical research and academic writings on the Provisional IRA and the H-Block hunger strike has shifted from the incorporation of opinion, attempting to solve the issues of "the Troubles," to centering on PIRA's reasoning and what caused the troubles to occur and the reasoning and mythology behind the hunger strikes. For example, Pringle's work expands on whether Ireland should remain divided into two countries. He also argues that PIRA's ideology of uniting Ireland was highly unlikely to succeed. Pádraig O'Malley attempts to understand both sides of "The Troubles" and the reasoning behind PIRA and the start of the conflict after the 1980s academic writing began to study specific aspects of the IRA while also providing an overview history as presented by J. Bower Bell, Tim Pat Coogan, and Tony Geraghty. The authors of these works expressed their hope for a peaceful resolution to the killing. This continued into the 2000s. However, the writings became less personal and more historical with

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Sanders, *Inside the IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War for Legitimacy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) 19.

<sup>41</sup> Sanders, 60.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-46428851>.

the inclusions of interviews and the dissection of secondary source work. The topic of PIRA itself has become a popular topic because England wished to separate itself from the UN and enter the EU. This resulted in suspicion of whether this was a breach of the Good Friday Agreement and sparked debate among the academic community. Today 20 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, issues have arisen because of Brexit and the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (EU) because the agreement has come into question. The Good Friday Agreement was signed to end the Troubles and to assure the Catholic population of their rights; however, as the Republic of Ireland is a part of the EU and the issue of borders, it was feared that this would inspire organizations like the Provisional IRA or their members themselves to take up arms once again.

## Chapter Two: Background of the Conflict

Conflict between the English government and the people of Ireland is centuries old. Although Britain's colonization of Ireland features heavily in Irish history, the conflict in Northern Ireland and the schism that resulted in Ireland's division into separate countries did not begin until 1916 with the Easter Rising, also known as the Easter Rebellion. During the Easter Rising, members of the original Irish Republican Army, other Irish insurgents, and the English military in Dublin, Ireland, clashed, resulting in 2,000 casualties during the uprising. The Easter Rising and the actions of the IRA and the English government influenced the division of Ireland and the later development of the Provisional IRA. These events are significant to this study because, along with Britain's colonization of Ireland, they led to "The Troubles" and the figurative powder keg's explosion. Understanding the historical background and the development of nationalism and republicanism in Ireland is one of the many factors needed to understand the connection between nationalism and the use of violent methodology to promote and defend the Provisional IRA's form of nationalism. In order to understand their ideology and the connection between nationalism and violent methodology, one must understand how it developed and how "The Troubles" escalated to make violence necessary.

The Provisional IRA's nationalist ideology, as discussed in the previous chapter, primarily benefited the republican population of Northern Ireland and scorned the Unionist and English interlopers. However, the opposite could be said of the Unionist and the English government because, according to Benedict Anderson, a nation is essentially imagined and fluid to suit each party's needs.<sup>43</sup> Anderson's words mean that a nation is imagined because, while

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<sup>43</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 5.

members of the population will never know everyone within their nation, they maintain this belief that they all make up the nation, thus establishing community and comradery amongst the people of that particular nation.<sup>44</sup> This exclusion is only possible if someone is perceived as being other or not belonging within the nation. For example, republicans within Northern Ireland did not perceive the Irish Unionist as being Irish due to the Unionist's support of the English government's involvement in Northern Ireland. Another reasoning could be due to members of the Irish republicans perceiving the Unionists as representatives of England's continued and oppressive colonization of Northern Ireland.

The conflict between members of the Protestant and Catholic communities in England and Ireland, including their prejudicial animosity towards each other, is one of the multiple factors that influenced the development of several civil rights issues and led to "The Troubles." This animosity, however, has diminished today from what it once was. There are still conflicts, however, between factions, and the hostilities, if they should arise, do not escalate beyond heated debates, arguments, or perhaps the occasional brawl, nor are their differences centered on religion. Instead, the focus is now on politics and or economic issues. For example, politics and economic problems potentially caused by BREXIT have featured heavily in many arguments in the United Kingdom. Although religion played a significant role at the beginning of the civil rights movement and "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland, the main divisions between the English government and the Provisional IRA were political in nature. Their respective supporters focused on whom they supported instead of their religious background. For example, the supporters of the Provisional IRA came from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds and

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<sup>44</sup> Anderson, 5.



comprised the republican group. The same could be said for the Unionists, who supported the English government and opposed the Provisional IRA and the organization's agenda.

Religion has been featured highly as the reasoning behind several conflicts, both military and political, however, the influence religion once had over the reasoning behind these large-scale conflicts has diminished over time. Instead, religion has been replaced by politics and economics as the deciding factors behind the mobilization of troops and legislation. However, this was not true 50 years ago when the Provisional IRA and the Catholic Irish first attempted to defend and contended for their civil rights and civil liberties to be respected by the English-supporting Protestant Irish minority and the English parliament. Despite being the minority, the Irish Protestants, especially those who participated in gerrymandering and held prejudice against the Catholic population of Northern Ireland, maintained powerful positions. The year 1969 marks the first year of "The Troubles," thirty years of bombings, murders, torture, and assassinations, all in the name of Ireland's unification and the removal of English authority in Ireland. Although the Provisional IRA's prominent appearance began in 1969, much like the conflict between Ireland and the English and between the Protestants and the Catholics, their development starts a hundred or so years before they took the central stage. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the first predecessor of the Provisional IRA and the original IRA, began in 1858 as an organization dedicated to establishing an independent democratic republic separate from England. At that moment in time, Ireland was still one nation, and World War I would not begin for 50 or so years, meaning the events that would later influence the Easter Rebellion were in their infancy. The IRB also did not have the motivation or influence to employ any extreme actions of violence or propaganda to aid in their pursuit of an independent democratic republic until April of 1914. This inability to act was primarily due to the lack of motivation and support

until the Easter Rising in 1914.<sup>45</sup> Their moment, however, came in 1914 due to their continuous involvement in nationalist activities. They used brute force against English forces in an attempt to forcefully remove them from Ireland. Their attempt, however, failed due to their lack of support and ability to execute such a massive undertaking.<sup>46</sup> Their failure, along with the consequences of World War I, would lead to the rise of the first or original Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the split of Ireland.

The IRA of the 1920s primarily contained remnants of the IRB and WWI veterans from the Irish Volunteer Force (IVF) and the Sinn Fein Party, who provided the IRA with their political and monetary support. The rift within the organization from which the IRA formed centered on differing views on which methods they should have used to remove English influence, policy, and the commitment one had towards their cause. During the 1920s, the IRA became organized and structured to slightly better handle removing English influence through violence. They later failed, and a firing squad would execute the more prominent members at Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, Ireland. The IRA's first central military act, the Easter Rising, was an armed insurrection over the week of Easter in April 1916. The Easter Rising or Easter Rebellion took place over Easter Week in Dublin, where over 1,600 Irish nationalists seized official buildings and critical businesses. After seizing these locations, they declared themselves the Irish Republic, a separate entity from England.

Although this was the IRA's first significant act in rebelling against the English government, the public opposition to the Home Rule Bill of 1914 incited their uprising. The Home Rule Bill of 1914 allowed for an Irish parliament to be installed and allowed for Ulster,

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<sup>45</sup> History - 1916 Easter Rising - Insurrection - Background to the Rising," *BBC (BBC)*, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/easterrising/insurrection/in01.shtml>.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Mansergh, *The Irish Question 1840-1921: A commentary on Anglo-Irish Relations and Social and Political Forces in Ireland in the Age of Reform and Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 198.

modern-day Northern Ireland, to remain under the dominion of the English parliament. When the Home Rule Bill finally passed through parliament in 1914 after two years of debate, it became obsolete after establishing the Anglo-Irish Treaty, making the Home Rule Bill redundant. The nationalists and the IRA clashed with English troops during the rising. The resulting execution of the IRA leaders, deaths of 2000 or so people, and several executions were some of the most severe consequences of the insurrection. The Anglo-Irish Treaty, however, was another more positive result in the creation of the modern-day Republic of Ireland. Although creating the Republic of Ireland was one of several consequences of the treaty since the division between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it also ended the fighting, for the time being, and allowed for a part of Ireland to separate itself from England. This division over the years has continued to cause unrest in those who prefer Ireland to separate in its entirety. The Republic of Ireland's separation from Great Britain allowed for the population of the Republic of Ireland's decolonization efforts to take hold; however, the decolonization of only part of Ireland caused tension and unrest within members of Northern Ireland's population who did not desire further association with Britain. For example, the tension caused by the division of Ireland and the animosity held by both Catholics and Protestants members of the population, specifically those who held power and misused their power for malicious purposes amongst the Protestant Irish and English supporting faction, existed as one of several reasons for the revival and transformation of the IRA. This transformation resulted in the creation of the Provisional IRA, started the active pursuit of civil rights issues, and led to "the Troubles." This was because the Anglo-Irish treaty divided most of Ireland into a separate nation and a colony under the English government. This, along with Ulster or Northern Ireland, which contained primarily supporters of the English government and those who conformed to Protestant ideology and thus held their own power,

resulted in several political and social issues. One can physically see this divide between the communities, in schools that cater to specifically Catholics or Protestants, gated communities, and murals depicting those who lost their lives or organizations who participated in the event.

The 1981 Hunger Strikes, which is the central theme of this work, began between 1980 and early 1981 in the Long Kesh Prison H-Block, and the Armagh women's prison. This strike, led by Bobby Sands, started as a response to Thatcher's removal of the special status of prisoners suspected of affiliation with the Provisional IRA and other similar organizations incarcerated after 1976. These prisoners actively supported the Provisional IRA or held membership within the organization. The prisoners who lost this special status suffered severe mistreatment at the hands of corrupt prison officials. This mistreatment was influenced by Margaret Thatcher's policy of criminalization and the lack of administration within the prisons. However, to better understand the importance of Thatcher's removal of political status and its impact on the lives of the prisoners, the events of the year 1972 must first be addressed. In June of 1972, William Whitelaw, the English government's Conservative Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, granted prisoners convicted of political crimes special category status, or in the eyes of the prisoners and the Provisional IRA, political status. Special category status was granted after a hunger strike led by Billy McKee, the former Provisional IRA leader in Belfast. This special status allowed the prisoners to wear their civilian clothing, not participate in prison work, as well as receiving increased visits and food parcels. The prisoners were also granted better facilities and food.<sup>47</sup> The situation changed for prisoners convicted after March 1, 1976. As a part of her new policies, incoming Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher removed political status from prisoners convicted of being involved in or suspected of colluding with members of

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<sup>47</sup> O'Malley, 264.

the republican movement. This resulted in the criminalization of these prisoners and, in turn, created unrest amongst the Provisional IRA as well as other detainees who believed they were not common criminals and instead were political prisoners or prisoners of war.

The government developed the H-Block prison to initially house internment prisoners and built in the form of a large "H." According to Richard O'Rawe, prisoners were held in the vertical, parallel sides of the "H," and each side was divided into two wings with twenty-six cells and contained one double-sized cell each.<sup>48</sup> The central line of the "H" housed the offices of the prison guards. However, due to the number of prisoners on strike, correctional officers utilized cell block 26, one of only two double cells. The guards used this cell as a control point to perform searches, and as a control center, this forced the prisoners to share cells intended to house only one prisoner.<sup>49</sup> The removal of special status in 1976 did not end the protests and strikes in Long Kesh Prison. Instead, it fueled the flames for another strike to begin. This strike became known as the "blanket strike" or "blanket protest" and was one of the first modern strikes to influence the 1980-81 strikes. The "blanket protest" began three months after the removal of special status in September of 1976, and it was during this protest that republican prisoners, led by Kieran Nugent, "went on the blanket." This protest meant that prisoners who went on protest wore only a prison blanket as clothing, refused to wear the prison uniform and participate in prison work. According to O'Malley in his *The Uncivil Wars*, Loyalists, those loyal to the English government, also joined in the "blanket protest" because they too believed that they were undeserving of standard criminal status.<sup>50</sup> Although this shows that Nugent's protest inspired others, even those from an opposing faction, the Loyalists subsequently removed

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<sup>48</sup> O'Rawe, ch 4.

<sup>49</sup> O'Rawe, ch 4.

<sup>50</sup> O'Malley, 265.

themselves from the protest in 1978 because of their belief that this was primarily a Republican issue.<sup>51</sup>

Thatcher's policy of Ulsterisation focused primarily on removing the Provisional IRA and English soldiers from the conflict, though the immediate removal of English soldiers was their top priority. The policy of criminalization contained another goal, this was to delegitimize the Provisional IRA and their nationalist ideology perpetuated by the blanket protestors, as well as the H-Block hunger strikers. The English government further used this policy to dismiss the Provisional IRA and labeled their organization and supporters as common criminals; thus, they did not provide the Provisional IRA political legitimacy as an organization with both a political and moral agenda and attempted to diminish their value and stance in the eyes of the public and their supporters. This policy would succeed in removing public support from the Republican movement and the hunger strike if it succeeded. Labeling members of the Provisional IRA and their supporters as common criminals further strengthened normalisation and the idea that it was a domestic issue, not a direct conflict with England and did not fall under their jurisdiction. This policy made the events of "The Troubles," and the actions of the Provisional IRA as a local issue would remove England's responsibility of helping what is essentially a colony that fell under England's rule and protection. This issue, however, did not enter the international stage and escalate until the 1980s when English military personnel and citizens became involved. Thatcher's actions and policies can also be seen as a form of colonization, particularly when compared to the United States' Revolutionary War because she is refusing to acknowledge the Provisional IRA and the civil rights issues affecting Northern Ireland and refusing to

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<sup>51</sup> O'Malley, 265.

acknowledge that reforms and changes needed to prevent the mistreatment of the Irish Catholics and the republican strikers.

While criminalisation focused on causing the public to withdraw its support from the prisoners, the policy also pertained to an increase in imprisonment or internment of people suspected of working with the Provisional IRA or holding republican political views in any capacity, whether through peaceful protest or by providing monetary or political support. However, the adoption of this policy led to the mistreatment of those who were imprisoned by corrupt officials, especially those held at Long Kesh Prison's H-Block. Their imprisonment centralized on their political affiliation and other offenses, and in this situation, it was primarily the Civil Rights Movement, the Provisional IRA, and the Republican movement supporters who suffered.<sup>52</sup> The mistreatment of prisoners no matter their crime, was inhumane and driven by political corruptness and animosity. Thatcher's actions not only relegated the prisoners back to prior criminal status and attempted to denationalize them and remove, essentially, their voice, further colonizing and delegitimizing the hunger strikers and protesters. Her actions and policies can be perceived as a form of colonization because of her continued refusal to acknowledge the Provisional IRA and the civil rights issues affecting Northern Ireland. Thus, Thatcher refused to listen to the peoples' concerns about these problems and their lack of voice and representation within the Northern Ireland parliamentary system.

Although this policy directly pertained to the H-Block strikers and other prisoners incarcerated after 1976, PM Thatcher also enacted two other policies that escalated the situation during "The Troubles." The first was the policy of Ulsterisation, which Margaret Thatcher enacted in 1976. This policy meant increasing local policing forces such as the Royal Ulster

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<sup>52</sup> Bobby Sands, *One Day in My Life* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2001), Introduction.

Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR) and enlisting them on the front lines while withdrawing English troops simultaneously. The purpose of this policy was to reduce the number of English casualties in favor of developing the RUC and the UDR as a local policing force in Northern Ireland. The RUC, first established in 1922, was initially organized as a paramilitary group until it reformed into a police group, under the policy of Ulsterisation, meant to police areas of Northern Ireland during "The Troubles." The members of the RUC and the UDR, however, lacked both human resources and ammunition to complete their intended purpose successfully.

The UDR was initially formed in 1970 in response to the rising unrest in Northern Ireland. The organization contained 4,000 men who formed a part-time, locally recruited military force. Their primary directive was to help the RUC who lacked personnel and could not successfully police the growing conflict due to their lack of human resources.<sup>53</sup> Though Thatcher initially formed the UDR to help regulate the conflict alongside English troops, her policy of Ulsterisation focused on attempting to cut down on English casualties and promote "the Troubles" as strictly an internal strife in which England did not have any responsibility to help manage the situation nor resolve it and was instead attempting to keep the peace.<sup>54</sup> Thatcher's policy sought to portray the English and their troops as peacekeepers instead of a colonizing or politically powerful country stepping in. The policy of Ulsterisation was also established to prevent homegrown support for the Provisional IRA and beginning dissent over the desire to bring the troops home. The establishment of homegrown forces in Northern Ireland should have

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<sup>53</sup> "The Ulster Defence Regiment." National Army Museum. Accessed April 11, 2021. <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/ulster-defence-regiment>. <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/ulster-defence-regiment>

<sup>54</sup> Sands, Introduction.



bolstered the English and their supporters' regiments, thus allowing the government of Northern Ireland to police the region and the Provisional IRA more adequately. This isolation would have occurred if the policy of Ulsterisation had achieved its goal. However, due to the lack of human resources and supplies, Margaret Thatcher could not entirely withdraw English troops from Northern Ireland during "The Troubles."

Normalisation, the second policy Margaret Thatcher, enacted, focused on handing over security details and decision-making power to the RUC. This shift of power was intended to further cement the image of the conflict with the Provisional IRA as an internal one while also perpetuating the image that the Provisional IRA's organization contained criminals who focused on gang-oriented dealings.<sup>55</sup> Thatcher's policies, however, influenced Provisional IRA members and republican prisoners to participate in further protest against her attempts to denationalize and demoralize them. Veteran inmate, hunger striker, and member of the Provisional IRA Robert "Bobby" Sands found these policies and their resulting consequences to be strong motivators to lead a hunger strike. This hunger strike became known as the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike and was performed in protest against being demeaned and forced to suffer inhumane treatment at the hands of the Long Kesh correctional officers, as well as regulations placed upon common criminals.

Although the 1980-1981 H-Block hunger strike is one of the central connections between nationalism and violence, it was not the first, nor would it be the last use of hunger strikes as propaganda pieces in an attempt to achieve specific goals. For example, as previously mentioned, the first strike was led by Billy McKee on May 15, 1972, along with five other

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<sup>55</sup> Sands, Introduction.

Provisional IRA members, and started the campaign for special or political status.<sup>56</sup> This status was granted just a month later by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. According to his obituary, Billy McKee not only participated in the hunger strike but also founded the Provisional IRA branch after the split between the Provisionals and the Official or Original IRA. At the time of his death, however, he separated himself from the organization he once founded.<sup>57</sup> This separation was due to his belief that the Provisional IRA had lost their way and that they no longer upheld the original ideals of republicanism and instead devolved from the Provisional IRA's original agenda. Through this hunger strike, McKee managed to obtain special status for republican prisoners. This standing meant they would be treated similarly to prisoners of war and granted certain rights and treatments. Prisoners of war is a designation mentioned when discussing prisoners whom their enemy imprisoned during times of war. The POW status dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is still used to this day. This designation, as it applies to the H-Block hunger strikers, is fluid and ever-changing. This fluidity is mainly due to the English government's refusal to acknowledge the Provisional IRA's political legitimacy, thus denying the prisoners preferential treatment to which the prisoner of war moniker entitles them. The right of remission was one such right republican prisoners experienced as prisoners of war when they held this status until 1976 and one of the motivations behind the strikers' desire to re-achieve special status. Remission is a common policy found in most prison systems worldwide which states that prisoners can reduce their sentences because of good behavior. However, were the H-Block hunger strikers to regain special status they would be able to reduce their sentences and

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<sup>56</sup> F. Stuart Ross, *Smashing H-Block: The Rise and Fall of the Popular Campaign against Criminalization, 1976-1982* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>57</sup> n.a. "Billy McKee obituary: Senior IRA Man who Crossed swords with Gerry Adams," *Irish Times*, (Dublin, Ireland), June 29, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/billy-mckee-obituary-senior-ira-man-who-crossed-swords-with-gerry-adams-1.3940555>.

they would not be extended, despite the prisoners' participation in protests and hunger strikes. The prisoners could also reduce their sentences with good behavior without conforming to traditional prison standards. For example, they could adorn their civilian clothing and not participate in typical prison activities such as prison work. Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister at the time, however, later rescinded this status in order to relegate them to prior criminal standing, thus removing personal effects, the ability to self-governance, and other previously stated rights. These policies, however, had unintended consequences, as previously stated, in the form of hunger strikes and protests during the 1980s.

These protests, however, were temporarily stopped in 1980 due to a potential compromise between the English government and the prisoners. According to Gerry Adams' autobiography, the first hunger strike and blanket protest during the 1980s briefly ended on Christmas of 1980 due to this compromise proposed by the English government. This compromise was intended to satisfy the prisoners' demands. What the government publicized and delivered, however, did not fall in line with the agreement, nor did the English government acknowledge that such an agreement existed.<sup>58</sup> In the eyes of the strikers and the Provisional IRA, the English government backed out on their deal and thus, further incited animosity and imbued the strikers with increased motivation in their endeavor against Margaret Thatcher and her constituents. Together with the rising conflict, denial of political status and the abuse of these policies by government and prison officials, Northern Ireland and its people suffered a thirty-year conflict from which the consequences are still felt to this day. Thus, the H-Block hunger strike represents a significant connection between nationalism and the consistent use of the violent methodology in the name of one's nationalist ideology.

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<sup>58</sup> Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 288.

### **Chapter Three: The Death of Bobby Sands and the Continuance of the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike**

“I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land.<sup>59</sup>” These words written by Bobby Sands on March 1, 1981, the day he went on hunger strike, describes his feelings towards the English government and their supporters. Sands’ words, however, also depict Irish republicanism and his support of the ideology perpetuated by this form of nationalism. His words also contain the feelings and motivation behind the Provisional IRA and Republican prisoners who first went on "the blanket" in protest against their treatment as common criminals instead of as the prisoners of war they believed themselves to be. The blanket protest was the first protest to start the campaign against criminalisation and their mistreatment within Long Kesh Prison from late 1976 to 1980. The Provisional IRA and the prisoners also utilized the blanket protest as performative psychological propaganda to regain their special status and the privileges that come with this designation. Their propaganda took form in their denial of first prison clothing and later their denial of food as the English government continued to refuse to meet their demands and restore what the prisoners felt due them. The Provisional IRA also utilized photos of the hunger strikers to highlight their actions and evidence of their suffering and increase the legitimacy of their propaganda.

The strikers demanded five rights, the right not to wear a prison uniform, the right not to do prison work, the right of free association with other prisoners, the right to organize their

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<sup>59</sup> Sands, Loc 1337.

own educational and recreational facilities, and the right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week. The H-Block protesters and hunger strikers would continue to utilize these demands and push the English government into conceding and acknowledge that a war has been raging between the government and the Irish for centuries. The H-Block strikers also wanted the government to acknowledge that the Irish peoples suffered and were suppressed because of England's colonization of Northern Ireland. This acknowledgment would legitimize the Provisional IRA and prisoners as entities with political and historical precedence and compel the English government to accept liability on their side for denying the civil rights issues in Northern Ireland and the continued colonization of Northern Ireland. In acknowledging the grievances proposed by the Provisional IRA and the republicans, the English government would also acknowledge their role and inability to prevent the corruption within the Northern Ireland governing system and the subsequent civil rights issues born from the exploitation of the internal corruption by government officials. For example, in a House of Commons, *Hansard* Atkins expressed that answering these demands "would go far to give, and are intended to give, the protesting prisoners control over their lives in prison, and could not be agreed to by the government, since to do so would be to legitimize and encourage terrorist activity."<sup>60</sup> He further stated that the "Government are committed to is to ensure that, for all prisoners, the regime is as enlightened and humane as possible."<sup>61</sup> Atkins words show that the government was affected by the hunger strike and the publics' opinion on the treatment of the prisoners; however, to answer the people's concerns, they could only reassure them that the prisoners were being treated as humanely as possible. The writer did not mention within the document the correctional officers'

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<sup>60</sup> TNA: CJ 4/3027/81/124/12, United Kingdom *Hansard Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, vol. 995, December 4, 1980.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

mistreatment of the protesters and how the government planned to address this issue. Instead, they planned to stand firm on their presented front that the prisoners received humane and equal treatment. This was one of the several motivations behind the blanket protest and the subsequent hunger strikes, including the negotiations between the English government and the IRA Council. The council's decisions to deny the terms within these negotiations and lack of intercession upon the hunger strikers' behalf resulted in several deaths and the Provisional IRA's deterioration of public support and legitimacy. This resulted in a decline of support both within the Provisional IRA, and the public was due to the Council's decision because this showed that the council was unwilling to negotiate and saw the strikers as pawns in the perceived, never-ending conflict between the Republicans and the English government.

Although this strike marked the beginning of the H-Block Protests, the main spark that started the flame which ignited the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike was the first backroom deal between the Provisional IRA, the prisoners, Humphrey Atkins, and the prison governor, Stanley Hilditch. This first negotiation, however, fell through with the H-Block prisoners not achieving their primary demands and Hilditch and the English government proving to be inflexible despite their agreement with Sands to be flexible and willing to concede on the issues of clothing.<sup>62</sup> The consequences of the negotiation between Bobby Sands, Hilditch, and the English government were two-fold and exacerbated due to the government's and the corrections officer's refusal to acknowledge the strikers as political prisoners and keep to their conditions negotiation. The corrections officers' mistreatment of Bobby Sands and his comrades further escalated the situation by fueling the protestors' motivation to prove the guards and everyone else wrong. "The

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<sup>62</sup> O'Rawe, Blanketmen, 12.

screws had laughed that morning at the frozen wretches grabbing the blankets, but those boys could not comprehend what made us tick. They never realized that the more they laughed and the more pain they heaped on us, the more we drew upon each other. The brutality only ensured that the famous blanket *esprit de corps* made us soulmates rather than mere cellmates: we became indestructible.<sup>63</sup> O'Rawe's words prove the effect of this mistreatment and denial of political status upon the protestors, which not only united them but encouraged them to continue the fight until it escalated into a hunger strike on March 1, 1981. The correctional officers also participated in brutalizing the protestors of H-Block and subjecting them to forced bathing and invasive searches in their bid to find communication between the prisoners and the Provisional IRA and other contraband. The strikers' actions also showed that they internalized violence inflicted upon themselves by an outside force and repurposed their mistreatment to increase morale and support their nationalism. This internalization and redirection of their inhumane treatment clearly show a connection between nationalism and violent methodologies due to the prisoners' violence upon themselves and the Long Kesh correctional officers as part of Thatcher's criminalisation policy.

The first deal between the H-Block prisoners and the English government took place towards the end of 1980 and supposedly ended the blanket protest. However, this deal was not honored, and the consequences of this deal sparked the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. This deal supposedly allowed the strikers to wear civilian clothing. For example, in an article published in the *Daily Telegraph* on December 4, 1980, Mr. Atkins announced that the prisoners could wear civilian clothes.<sup>64</sup> His announcement, however, did not deter the hunger strike because Atkins

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<sup>63</sup> O'Rawe, 12.

<sup>64</sup> TNA: CJ 4/3027/81/124/10, James Wightman, "Firm Line on Hunger Strike," *Daily Telegraph*, December 4, 1980.

and the English government only conceded upon one of their five demands and the easiest to fulfill. The feelings of outrage and animosity the consequences of this deal's failure influenced within the prisoners indicate a connection between nationalism and violent methodology. This is indicative of such a connection because the protestors like Bobby Sands and Richard O'Rawe took the violence inflicted upon themselves and by the correctional officers as further affirmation that they were political prisoners and that their methods would help them achieve their goals. The prisoners also internalized their feelings caused by the English government's and the correctional officer's actions as a form of colonization meant to deny the Irish Republicans any representation. They used this information as a sign that their propaganda needed to be increased to show their treatment at the hands of the English government and show that their mistreatment was a form of acknowledgment and increased the Provisional IRA and the strikers' legitimacy.

A second negotiation, however, was attempted in July of 1981 by Humphrey Atkins and Margaret Thatcher. However, due to the failure of the first negotiation, a third person was included and directed the negotiations with the Provisional IRA. This man coordinated and directly negotiated with the Provisional IRA in an attempt to facilitate this deal and end the hunger. This man was known as Brendan Duddy. Duddy, formerly known by the codename Mountain Climber, was a Londonderry businessman to the public eye; however, he was an intermediary for the English government at the time of the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. He negotiated directly with the Provisional IRA, the prisoners, and Margaret Thatcher to end the hunger strike. The resulting deal, however, failed and was later disavowed by Margaret Thatcher and the English government, thus causing further outrage and spurring the H-Block hunger strikers to continue the hunger strike Bobby Sands started on March 1, 1981. This second wave of negotiations came a month after the death of Bobby Sands and plead of ignorance of such



dialogues by the English government, and Margaret Thatcher would continue until October 3, 1981, when the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike ended.

This deal would become known as the Mountain Climber deal or more commonly known as the backroom deal. The terms negotiated in this deal are as follows.

1. “The clothing regime in Armagh Prison would be applied to all prisons in Northern Ireland (i.e., own clothes subject to approval) by the Prison Governor.”
2. “Parcels, visits and letters would be made available on the same basis as for conforming prisoners at present;”
3. "On [work, association, and] remission the government's position will be as set out in the Secretary of State's statement of June 30. However, emphasis will be laid on the government's record of its readiness to administer the regime flexibility, and on the 'scope for yet further developments.'<sup>65</sup>

The terms dictated within this document would partially grant the H-Block hunger strikers a portion of political status without fully granting all five of the striker's previous demands. However, the above offer is dated July 6, 1981 and proposed by Margaret Thatcher and Brendan Duddy on July 7, one month after Bobby Sands' death, and two months after Margaret Thatcher's speech classifying the strikers as only criminals who would not be granted special privileges. The proposal of this deal by Thatcher and her constituents presents another aspect of the affect the performative propaganda of the 1981 H-Block had on Thatcher and the English government. This presents another aspect of this propaganda's affect as Thatcher was willing to

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<sup>65</sup> TNA: PREM19/506/f313, No. 10 Minute, “Hunger Strike Message to be sent through the channel,” *HMG prepared to issue statement-making certain concessions if and only if it leads to the immediate end of hunger strike*, July 6, 1981. <http://www.longkesh.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/EIGHTH8OFFER81JUL6.pdf>

concede part of the strikers demands over a period of time because of the pressure of potentially several more deaths and perhaps the growth of public sympathy. Her willingness to concede on these specific points, however, does not appear to fully grant the strikers and future Provisional IRA prisoners' full special status beyond being allowed to wear their civilian clothing and receiving more frequent parcels and visits from their families. This limited the control the prisoners may have had if Thatcher were to concede on the five points fully. Thatcher, however, further states in the document, "If the reply we receive is unsatisfactory and there is subsequently any public reference to this exchange we shall deny that it took place. Silence will be taken as an unsatisfactory reply."<sup>66</sup> Meaning that if the negotiations did not succeed, Thatcher and her fellow governmental officials would deny that any such negotiation took place, thus denying any potential liability, comparability, and responsibility the English government may have had should the hunger strike continue. This denial also potentially allows the public to continue believing that the English government does not believe the Provisional IRA and the organization's nationalist ideology and belief that Northern Ireland is a colony is legitimate and holds no historical precedence or political legitimacy.

Thatcher's denial of any form of previous negotiations, however, lead to international and local support for the hunger strikers. This would undermine Margaret Thatcher's desire for the English government to maintain a form of façade as being powerful and unwilling to submit under pressure and continue their reasoning that "The Troubles" is strictly an internal issue perpetuated by the criminals that make up the Provisional IRA. Their denial and inflexibility indirectly encouraged international support for the H-Block hunger strikers and failed to keep the events and roots of "The Troubles" focused within Northern Ireland. Instead, "The Troubles"

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

became international news and gained attention from several nations and governments who subsequently protested against the English government and Margaret Thatcher and their treatment of the strikers. These countries included the United States, France, Germany, Canada and Australia, and Wales, to name a few. Correspondence from these nations can be found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom and are addressed to Prime Minister Thatcher asking for flexibility, concessions, or any form of negotiations between herself and the hunger strikers of H-Block. Family members also became further involved throughout the hunger strike in an effort to prevent the deaths of their loved ones. Marcella Sands, for example, sister to Bobby Sands, spoke to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) on behalf of her brother and his fellow hunger strikers in order to receive more direct intervention by the convention as opposed to the indirect censoring of the English government by their international constituents. The governments of outside nations could not directly interfere due to multiple treaties and alliances, which prevented other nations from interfering with another nation's sovereignty and so had to rely on indirect methods of communicating their distaste of the English government's handling of the situation within H-Block. Should a nation directly involve itself in another nation's internal affairs either by providing weaponry, ammunitions, human resources, or any other form of direct involvement could have multiple consequences for that nation. These penalties included but were not limited to tariffs, embargos, the failure of trade agreements, and other penalizations enforced by entities like the United Nations.

The Provisional IRA and the H-Block hunger strikers, however, according to their members and pieces of historical evidence, did have both precedence and a form of legitimacy due to the frequent historical use of hunger strikes by Irish people and organizations who had similar motivations and desires. Despite having its own political system at the time, Northern

Ireland still fell under English governmental authority. This meant that the English government had the authority and right to involve themselves with the civil rights issues in Northern Ireland. The above deal represents the government's involvement in negotiations with the prisoners and the Provisional IRA. The document detailing the terms of this negotiation is dated July 6, 1981, two months after Bobby Sands' death; however, it is not incorrect to assume that the terms listed were similar to the terms previously negotiated by Bobby Sands and the IRA council before the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike started on March 1, 1981. Margaret Thatcher's denial of such a negotiation in February of 1981 correlates with this document and proves that such a negotiation occurred before the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. This not to say that the fuel that sparked the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike was only on Margaret Thatcher and the English government. Richard O'Rawe, former hunger striker and member of the Provisional IRA, has written two books discussing his time in Long Kesh Prison in 1981, his participation in the hunger strike and the IRA Council's role in the negotiations between the strikers and Thatcher.

O'Rawe, in his book *Afterlives*, his second work discussing the H-Block Hunger Strike and their previous protests, alludes to the IRA Council/War Council being aware of the deal. He also alludes to the councilmen's desire to push the English government for more concessions. O'Rawe also states that he and his fellow prisoners did not control the hunger strike and that the IRA Army Council had unrestricted control over their actions. This suggests that the council utilized the hunger strike as a form of performative propaganda that they controlled and changed to suit their immediate needs or directives.<sup>67</sup> The council, according to O'Rawe, denied the deal after he and fellow hunger striker and CO Bik McFarlane accepted the offer. O'Rawe states, "Shortly after McFarlane had communicated our acceptance to the outside leadership, a comm

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<sup>67</sup> O'Rawe *Afterlives*, 21.

from Gerry Adams arrived at the prison informing us that there was not enough in the offer to settle the hunger strike, and that 'more was needed.'" Meaning that the English government had to make more concessions to prevent further deaths in order for the IRA Council to call off the hunger strike. This would prolong the hunger strike until October, when the strikers officially ended their fast. Several other factors besides the council's decision influenced the continuance of the hunger strike. One such factor was the replacement for Bobby Sand's seat as MP of Fermanagh and South Tyrone and the IRA Council's desire to have an inside man within the governing system. However, their replacement candidate Owen Carron, a republican and member of the Provisional IRA, did not gain Sands' seat in parliament and instead lost it in 1983. The purpose behind this attempt was to place one of their own in a position to influence any significant political decisions involving the Provisional IRA and the organization's constituents. Another factor was the belief that if the English government was willing to concede on these points, they would be able to concede on others, such as political negotiations or favorable terms for political prisoners. Public support for the Provisional IRA was also dwindling at this point due to the loss of loved ones and the mental and emotional damages caused by the events of "The Troubles," and the consequences of bombings, assassinations, and murders.

These two arrangements are representative of the impact the propaganda produced by the 1981 H-Block had on the English government and the public because, Margaret Thatcher and her administration were under significant pressure by the continued deaths of the hunger strikers and the public who sympathized with the prisoners. Thatcher, in these negotiations, showed her willingness to concede to at least three of the prisoners' five demands instead of refusing to interact or negotiate at all with the H-Block prisoners. Thatcher's negotiation, however, was not directly between herself, Brendan Duddy and the prisoners themselves and instead was between

her and the IRA Council, who according to O'Rawe, controlled the strikers' actions within Long Kesh. The council's control of the events within the prison further perpetuates this image of the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike as a form of performative propaganda and the connection between nationalism and violent methodologies because the council refused the deal on both accounts and instead wanted to continue to push the English government to make further concessions. This desire to push for further concessions shows that the IRA Council was willing to continue losing lives during the hunger strike in order to use these lost lives and the probability of more deaths to guilt the English government and the worldly population while also gaining sympathy to win the conflict. This, at its core, was not just a way of pushing their propaganda, but essentially, members of the IRA Council were willing to gamble lives on the probability that the English government would feel enough pressure to concede to further demands.

## **Chapter Four: Nationalism, Violence and Propaganda**

The divisions between humanity and its communities continue today. The differentiations focus on a small-scale characteristic like social status, income bracket, schooling, or a larger scale like race, nation, or politics. These differences that we as humans have placed upon ourselves have influenced our acts of violence, greed, and inhumanity towards those perceived as other. Although humanity has differentiated itself based upon these several factors and has committed many acts that would be considered inhumane, we as a whole have achieved great heights and made historical achievements. For example, during World War I and World War II, several nations incorporated the actions performed by other nations into propaganda demonizing the other side. Another example of more recent use of nationalism and violence was the mobilization of U.S. Forces in the Middle East in reaction to the attack on the twin towers on September 11, 2001. The attack on these buildings and the pentagon unified members of the United States in the hunt for Osama Bin Laden, who instigated 9/11. Although, the utilization of violent methodology and nationalism in concert unified and motivated a nation's people to attempt and achieve incredible feats, however, nationalist ideology also created divisions within a nation's community, similar to the division between Irish Republicans and Unionist, over who supported the correct ideology. This belief of going to war or protecting one's country and or civil liberties against an enemy in times of unrest or considering oneself a part of a specific nation is one of several interpretations of nationalism. For example, despite its effect as a unifying factor, nationalism still causes divisions between people who do not hold the same beliefs or interpretations of what it means to be a member of that particular nation. While central to the development and installation of nationalism in the minds of people, two particular events

encouraged the development of the Original IRA and the Irish Volunteer Force (IVF), the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland and led to "The Troubles." These events included the United States' own Civil Rights Movement and World War II, which inspired these organizations in Northern Ireland to oppose English imperialism and the Protestant Unionists. However, one additional factor key to understanding the development of PIRA's ideology of removing English influence, uniting Ireland, and later removing England's supporters, i.e., the Protestant Irish, even at the expense of several thousand lives, is the continued colonization and subjugation of Ireland and the Irish, specifically the Catholic Irish, subsequent oppression and persecution at the hands of the English government and the Protestants over the past 800 plus years. The reasoning behind this animosity is due to the lack of work, housing, religious and political prejudice, and the lack of resolution to these issues on behalf of the government and the people to form a compromise between each faction. Colonization, however, is only one of the contributing factors towards PIRA's mentality, not the primary reasoning behind their or their supporters' actions. These factors included disgruntlement concerning the Protestants and the English government's infringement upon the Catholics' fundamental human rights to housing, representation, and employment. The English and Northern Ireland government's willful unawareness of these rights and inflexibility caused animosity and discontent within the Catholic community. The situation, however, further escalated when the Catholics attempted to make their discontent known. They were met with the English government's violent suppression of the Catholic community's protests and attempted appeals. The information provided above, while integral to understanding PIRA's motivation, the buildup of conflict leading to "The Troubles" and the English government's role is not the primary motivation behind the 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike. The main motivation behind the H-



Block hunger strike in 1981 was for the Provisional IRA to utilize the strike as propaganda to break the English government's will and force them to meet the IRA Council's demands. In his work *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*, Padraig O'Malley argues that the use of hunger strikes and the striker self-suffering was heavily influenced by a glorified past, idealizing their historical struggle to perpetuate this idea of martyrdom that later grew into an integral aspect of Northern Ireland nationalism.<sup>68</sup> He also states that "the crisis for nationalist Ireland came in trying to deny that the actions of the hunger strikers were a substantiation of this myth, and, therefore legitimate in terms of their connection to a historical past, and in trying to assert, at the same time, that the prisoners were somehow different."<sup>69</sup> The author words mean that the strikers' attempted to legitimize their cause by connecting themselves to this romanticized past, while also proclaiming themselves as different from their predecessors' and PIRA's attempted use of the hunger strikes as propaganda pieces and their ultimate goal of achieving their ideology of nationalism ultimately failed, resulting in further failure after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1981.

Nationalism played a central role in the Provisional IRA and the development of other similar organizations in Northern Ireland. However, despite having a nationalist ideology and goal the Provisionals and the Irish Unionists employed several violent methods and killed thousands of people in an attempt to achieve their goals. The Provisional IRA initially developed in response to the injustices members of the Irish Catholic population in Northern Ireland faced at the corrupt Protestant Irish and English supporters' hands. According to Dr. Con McCluskey in Dungannon, where the issues first became popularized, Protestants controlled the most lucrative workplaces and held the higher paying positions. "Only in the Golf Club did the middle class of

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<sup>68</sup> O'Malley *Biting at the Grave*, 137

<sup>69</sup> O'Malley, 138

both persuasions associate as equals."<sup>70</sup> Both the Protestant Irish and English supporters denied members of the Catholic population work and housing based on their religion. Though religion played a large part in the denial of Catholics' basic housing, the constant gerrymandering, the illegal movement of county lines, and the politicians' abuse of the system resulted in the Catholic population's lack of points to build new housing in the Catholic wards. Instead, the only homes available were rundown or cramped, filled with families who could not build or afford new homes. This lack of representation and inability to accumulate enough political support resulted in the Catholic population's inability to vote into office a representative who held the influence and power to even the playing field. During the Civil Rights Movement, Northern Ireland's political system modeled off of England's parliamentary system contained two houses; however, the voting system utilized by the Irish was unique. This voting method used the 'first past the post' (FPTP), which allowed voters to select one person from a list of candidates for a seat in the House of Commons for a five-year term.<sup>71</sup> Although the parliamentary system in Northern Ireland was modeled after and later directly ruled by England, the lack of representation in the local government elections directly affected the Catholic population in Northern Ireland and later started the civil rights movement. This disparity in voting ability directly affected this aspect of the population due to Ratepayer suffrage. This form of suffrage detailed that only those owners or tenants of a dwelling could vote in local elections.<sup>72</sup> Thus many adults, particularly members of the Catholic population, could not vote in representatives due to the lack of housing and jobs

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<sup>70</sup> Conn McCluskey, *Up Off Their Knees: A Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Southampton: Camelot Press, 1989), 10.

<sup>71</sup> Dr Martin Melaugh, "Politics: Elections: Introduction to the Electoral System in Northern Ireland," CAIN (Ulster University, 2021), <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/electoralsystem.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Dr Martin Melaugh, "Politics: Elections: Introduction to the Electoral System in Northern Ireland," CAIN (Ulster University, 2021), <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/electoralsystem.htm>.

due to discrimination, corruption, and prejudice held by members of the Protestant and Unionists communities. The English supporters and members of the Irish Protestant community's consistent abuse of power added to the buildup of feelings of injustice, hostility, and animosity towards the current political climate at the time. Protestants also primarily controlled these re-lets and rental properties, and due to the lack of anti-Unionist officials, the landlords abused members of the Catholic population's needs of housing by overcharging and providing poor accommodations. This lack of political power and dwellings also led to families moving in with each other, thus causing overcrowding, which resulted in health issues and further inadequacies.<sup>73</sup>

This lack of new housing and gerrymandering resulted in the population being unable to vote in an Anti-Unionist official that could have represented the Catholics' best interests and help police and or cut down the discrimination they faced at the hands of Unionist supporters. Mrs. Angela McCrystal organized and led the Homeless Citizen League; a committee formed to address housing shortages and overcrowding. After the accumulation of statistics and other census materials, including medical documentation stating the undue stress and medical issues caused by overcrowding, however, the public representative did not seem to care enough to arrive at the meeting to discuss these prominent issues at the time.<sup>74</sup> In a righteous fury, the sixty-seven members of the Homeless Citizen League took to the streets to protest the government's refusal to provide housing in June of 1963.<sup>75</sup> The council, however, stubbornly refused to supply them with already built, unoccupied, and furnished homes they had dedicated to the housing of Protestant newlyweds, nor did they allow them to live in bungalows that the

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<sup>73</sup> McCluskey, 10.

<sup>74</sup> McCluskey, 11.

<sup>75</sup> McCluskey, 10.

newlyweds and or their families vacated because of the availability of newer housing. The bungalows were also in relatively good repair and livable condition, despite possible cosmetic and internal repairs, and could have potentially solved the issue until the government built new housing for the Catholic population and resolved the lack of representation. The situation later escalated into violence in 1969 with bombings, shootings, murders, and later hunger strikes. The year 1969 marks some of the worst riots Northern Ireland experienced. These riots were mainly due to the English government's attempts to suppress Northern Ireland's very own Civil Rights Movement, and later the violent storm and war with the Provisional IRA raged throughout the 30-year struggle. The English government's continuous attempts to suppress the protestors lead to even more riots and eventually caused the "Battle of the Bogside" in western Derry.<sup>76</sup> This battle began on August 12 when during the annual Protestant Apprentice Boy's march, disturbances broke out, and the RUC exacerbated the issue. The RUC attempted to enter the Catholic district, and the residents attempted to expel them. The "Battle of Bogside" ended with English enforcements resolving the conflict and the RUC retiring.<sup>77</sup> However, this discontent within the Irish Catholic and republican communities was just the beginning as rioting and violence broke out due to the government's inability to handle the situation, the constabulary's abuse of the system, and internal corruption.

Although the Provisional IRA's primary use of violence usually occurred through their continued usage of military weapons, bombs, and their resulting deaths, these, however, were not the only lengths PIRA and their supporters were willing to go to. In their continued attempts to achieve their goals, they inflicted violence upon themselves. One of their final stands against the English government and their final propaganda attempts to reignite public and international

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<sup>76</sup> Bartlett, 505.

<sup>77</sup> Bartlett, 505.

support for Irish nationalism before both the public's support and member morale petered out in the 1990s and during this time one of the most violent and devastating period of years in Irish history began to end. Protestors, rebelling prisoners, and activists used hunger strikes as a form of peaceful protest for years; however, while the method is not outwardly violent, it inflicts violence, suffering, and pain upon oneself and is a psychological tactic meant to manipulate the public and governmental figures while also potentially martyring the protestors. The glorified history of several historical figures using this method also did not help and continued the perpetuation of the idealization of hunger strikes, and that suffering for one's beliefs and essentially dubbing themselves martyrs legitimized their cause. While the suffering of historical and religious figures provided one aspect to which the H-Block Strikers tied themselves and drew inspiration and legitimacy from another modern historical event that inspired the strikers took place sixty years earlier in 1923 when several thousand IRA prisoners went on hunger strike to protest their internment by the Irish Free State.<sup>78</sup> These connections found in Catholicism, Christianity, and PIRA's history allowed for its members to feel their cause was legitimate despite Thatcher's attempts to degrade them to the status of common criminals. Through the use of historical context to back their propaganda and ideology of nationalism, they connected with the people of Northern Ireland who understood their history.

In 1981 the H-Block Hunger Strike entered the international stage as an effective propaganda method and wielded power over the international population's opinions. The 1972 hunger strike, which preceded the “blanket protest” and the 1981 hunger strike, originally led to the achievement of political or special status because of public support and the belief that PIRA and the strikers were political prisoners instead of criminals. However, after her elevation to the

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<sup>78</sup> Bartlett, 378.

prime minister's office, Thatcher rescinded their political status, leading to further protest and unrest facilitated by H-Block prisoners. The blanket protest began as a reaction to the removal of their status in 1976, and it was during this protest that republican prisoners refused to wear the uniform provided to them and instead wore the single blanket provided to them and a towel when they went to bathe. The protestors also refused to participate in several activities that prison rules mandated their participation. For example, in most prisons, the detainees participate in work besides furthering their education instead of doing nothing. This work included but was not limited to servicing the prison, cleaning or cooking, industrial work, or vocational training.<sup>79</sup>

The year 1981 marked the first full year of the H-Block Protests or H-Block Hunger Strikes, which resulted in several imprisoned PIRA supporters' and members' deaths due to their refusal to eat unless the government granted them political status and answered their demands. The H-Block Hunger strikes occurred in Long Kesh Prison in Northern Ireland and within Her Majesty's Prison Maze or H-Block. The architect and the government designed the prison as an internment camp where prisoners affiliated with paramilitary groups, including the Provisional IRA members, were held. However, the prison was further divided based on paramilitary and political affiliation, although this did not last after Margaret Thatcher's policy of criminalisation and normalisation. This policy resulted in paramilitary members receiving regular prisoner treatment and conformation expectations towards regular prison rules and regulations. However, because the English government removed these special privileges and corruption within Long Kesh's internal governing system, several prisoners affiliated with PIRA and the republicans went on hunger strike in protest of inhumane conditions, treatment, and the redaction of privileges. According to the prisoners and their supporters, the strikers' demands, and their plight

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<sup>79</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1062, n.a. *Northern Ireland Prisons: The Current Protest Campaign against Refusal by the Authorities to Grant "Special Category" Status to Convicted Prisoners*, February 1980, 10.

went beyond Northern Ireland and their Government, thus making themselves known on the international stage as members of several nations empathized with the strikers and spoke out on their behalf.

Their demands were also debated at the European Commission on Human Rights. The European Commission on Human Rights or ECHR was an organization established by the European Convention on Human Rights, which focused on dedicating themselves to hearing complaints and ruling on court cases based on breaches of civil rights by the state in which the victim felt wronged and answered their demand for justice until the commissions' disbandment on October 1, 1998.<sup>80</sup> The Commission was made aware of the prisoners' demands through Marcella Sands, sister to Robert "Bobby" Sands, and several prisoners from the H-Block in their undertaking to acquire political support and the court's attention towards their cause in order to prompt an investigation of allegations towards the English government. This investigation would have resulted in the possibility of the ECHR forcing the English government to submit to their demands. The prisoners five demands included "the right to wear their own clothing, to refrain from prison work, to free association amongst other political prisoners, to organize their own educational and recreational facilities and to receive one visit, one letter, and one parcel a week, to complete remission of sentences."<sup>81</sup> The prisoners made these demands after sullyng their cells and employing intimidation tactics in an attempt to arouse public support and force the police to answer their demands. However, their demands developed in response to criminalisation policies, their treatment by the correctional officers, and the removal of political status. The actions of several correctional officers retaliating against the hunger strikers and other

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<sup>80</sup> "European Commission on Human Rights." 2006, Collins Dictionary of Law, 2006.

<sup>81</sup> TNA: C.J. 4/4159/1B, Martin Crowley, "British Group to back demands of N.I. prisoners "September 29, 1980, 1.

PIRA inmates are well documented in newspapers, autobiographies, and writings by former prisoners. Their personal writings are potentially classified due to certain time restrictions placed by England's and Northern Ireland's governments because, they could not be accessed digitally or physically through the National Archives of the United Kingdom and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. Though what documents are available are their policies concerning the demands of the prisoners, for example, the prisoners had ample opportunity to earn an income through prison work, remission is granted based upon good behavior, and they are allowed to receive packages from family members; however, like remission, this privilege can be rescinded based upon the individual's behavior.<sup>82</sup> The English government and Long Kesh's governing body noted in minutes dictated from a meeting on January 7, 1981, that the strikers or dirty protesters had at least two opportunities to receive clean accommodations. Sands reacted aggressively and refused to clean out his cell instead of complying with the correctional officers.<sup>83</sup> Further within the document, they also state the English government's stance on the policy for ending the strike in that they would provide clean accommodations and clarify what the consequences would be, if the strikers to conceded and conformed to the prison regime.<sup>84</sup> However, it was clear that the government would not falter and succumb to the idea of a deal or further concessions despite wishing for the strike to end.<sup>85</sup> Though the document provided information on the government's attempt to deescalate the situation and Bobby Sands increased efforts to work out a compromise because of the deaths and the attacks on several outside supporters, his negotiations did not succeed and the hunger strike continued.

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<sup>82</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1261, From the Northern Ireland Office to Reverend Mahoney, June 30, 1981, 3-6.

<sup>83</sup> TNA: CJ 4/3645/104, *Notes of a meeting on the Prison Protests held in PUS's Office*, January 7, 1981, 4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> TNA: CJ 4/3645/104, *Notes of a meeting on the Prison Protests held in PUS's Office*, January 7, 1981, 4.



This was potentially due to the English government's refusal to adhere to their previously arranged agreement.<sup>86</sup> According to Robert White's *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement*, the government agreed to allow the prisoners to wear their own clothing and be moved to clean cells; however, they would have only received their clothing if they accepted the prison regime unchanged.<sup>87</sup> The prisoners incensed, wrecked their new cells, and the guards forced them back into the dirty and soiled wings without clothing, blankets, mattresses, or water and left them there for fourteen hours, encouraging Sands to prepare for a second hunger strike in 1981.<sup>88</sup> The Provisional IRA's governing body did not support a hunger strike, however, in an interview with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, one of several military leaders within the Provisional Irish Republican Army, Bobby Sands felt responsible and let down by the government's refusal to honor their deal and took upon himself the responsibility to rectify the situation by going on hunger strike.<sup>89</sup> After Sands began his fast on March 1, 1981, Richard O'Rawe and Danny Morrison, fellow PIRA member, released a statement "We have asserted that we are political prisoners and everything about our country, our arrests, interrogations, trials, and prison conditions, show that we are politically motivated and not motivated by selfish reasons or for selfish ends."<sup>90</sup> They continued their statement by asserting that Sand's hunger strike proves the legitimacy and justness supporting their cause and selflessness and that he will strike until his death unless the English government answered their demands and abandoned their criminalization policy.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> White, Ch 12.

<sup>87</sup> White, Ch 12.

<sup>88</sup> White, Ch 12.

<sup>89</sup> White, Ch 12.

<sup>90</sup> White, Ch 12.

<sup>91</sup> White, Ch 12.

Neither did the demands of these prisoners nor their conditions appear upon the European Commission of Human Rights' desk without some help. On April 23, 1980, Marcella Sands, sister of M.P. and inmate hunger striker Bobby Sands, submitted an application appealing to the Commission on her brother's behalf. In her application, she states, "My brother is a victim of a violation of the convention by the English government. His state of health is such that he is unable himself to make an application directly."<sup>92</sup> She further discusses that Sands had no other choice to undertake the hunger strike due to the unavailability of domestic remedies to declare the prisons inhuman or degrading conditions and violated human rights laws. In response to Marcella's words, the European Commission reached a partial decision and declared their worry over the English government's inflexibility and the lack of improvements within the Northern Ireland prison system.<sup>93</sup> However, despite her pleas on behalf of her brother, the primary victims dictated by the European Commission on Human Right's court case were Thomas McFeeley, Kieran Nugent, John Hunter, and William Campbell.<sup>94</sup> They argued that the situation deteriorated from 1977-1978 after Thatcher's recension of special status because the guards only allowed them one towel to wear out of their cells and washed with the guards who heavily watched them during ablutions and continuously searched the prisoners' orifices for contraband.<sup>95</sup> The government also consistently denied their allocations with their claims that the prisoners did not present themselves at adjunctions to defend their actions and defiance of H-Block rules. Even though Marcella Sands interceded upon her brother's behalf, she also wished to see that these men received a type of justice or at least compensation for what they suffered at

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<sup>92</sup> TNA: PREM 19/504/f239, *Northern Ireland Office Minute ("Bobby Sands to ECHR) [application to ECHR by Marcella Sands to request that HMG allows a delegation from the Commission to meet with Bobby Sands]*, 2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *McFeeley et al. v. the United Kingdom*, 1981, *McFeeley*. App. 8317/78 (1981).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

the hands of the correctional officers and the English government. In a recent article published by *The New York Times*, the English government encouraged Sands to seek the ECHR's interference on their behalf to help resolve the situation.<sup>96</sup> Though their methods appeared extreme the deplorable conditions the strikers experienced firsthand, they perhaps justified the means they used to protest their treatment and the system's constabularies abuse. However, for the sake of this work, the debate on whether the ends justified the means will have to wait. This situation developed from several issues on both ends of the spectrum and created a powder keg waiting to release. The hunger strike within the H-Block moved people internationally to speak on their behalf, and PIRA's propaganda externally helped influence the masses' perception. Unfortunately, despite the provided evidence and avid support on behalf of the strikers, the ECHR ruled in favor of the English government, claiming the issues within the H-Block did not fall under the guidelines of political status nor a human rights concern.

In support of the prisoners, PIRA used propaganda separate from the prisoners' actions and facilitated the populace's consideration of the possibility of answering the detainees' demands. According to the *Hunger Strike Bulletin*, the hunger strikers inspire the people not to give in to the Brits and continue the fight.<sup>97</sup> To quote the bulletin, "The Courage and Determination of the Hunger Strikers has united and mobilised the Nationalist population in the six counties and has put the H-Block Story in the international spotlight."<sup>98</sup> The strikers they wished to support were John Nixon, Sean McKenna, Brendan Hughes, Leo Green, Tom McFeely, Raymond McCartney, and Tommy McKearney. The bulletin even contained an advertisement and an address to send money to support these seven strikers. The author did not

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<sup>96</sup> Deaglan De Breadu, "U.K. encouraged human rights approach to Maze," *Irish Times* (Dublin, Ireland), December 31, 2011, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/uk-encouraged-human-rights-approach-to-maze-1.17042>

<sup>97</sup> Irish Republican Socialist Party, *Hunger Strike Bulletin* vol. 1, (Irish Left Archive, 1980), 4-6.

<sup>98</sup> Irish Republican Socialist Party, 7.

mention in the bulletin that PIRA chose these seven strikers specifically to represent the different counties of Northern Ireland and the original signers of the 1916 declaration.<sup>99</sup> The bulletin, however, may have mentioned these strikers primarily because of their representation of the counties. The H-Block also contained two other prisoners who today have left their mark on the history of the hunger strike and "The Troubles" Their writings contain in-depth information on what occurred within Long Kesh Prison and their experiences. These inmates were Bobby Sands and Richard O'Rawe.

Bobby Sands and Richard O'Rawe both supported the Provisional IRA and experienced the consequences of criminalization, the strikes, and their development firsthand. In his writings, Sands details the indignities of having no clothing, blankets, and subpar food while having to listen to biased and bigoted jailers mock and demean him and his fellow inmates. The situation continued to escalate in response to the government's denial of special status and the correctional officers' mistreatment of republican prisoners. Thus, began the 'no-wash protest' or 'dirty protest' during which IRA prisoners refused to clean out their cells and bathe themselves. The 'dirty protest,' however, was the precursor for a series of hunger strikes from 1980 to 1985, during which several prisoners would die in an attempt to regain their status and further undermine the government's authority. O'Rawe, in a recent interview on his book with the *Tribune* he mentioned that after the first four deaths of the hunger strike, the IRA Council turned down a settlement that the prisoners found agreeable resulting in six more unnecessary deaths.<sup>100</sup> This demonstrates that the fault of the prisoners' hardship did not rest solely on the shoulders of

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<sup>99</sup> White, Ch 12.

<sup>100</sup> Richard O'Rawe, "Sinn Féin and the SDLP--From Alienation to Participation: Gerard Murray and Jonathan Tonge Hurst and Company £14.95 New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the 21st Century: Agnes Maillot Routledge £15.99 Blanketmen--An Untold Story of the H Block Hunger Strike: Richard O'Rawe New Island Books £9.99 The Politics of Northern Ireland--Beyond the Belfast Agreement: Arthur Aughey Routledge" *Tribune* 69, no. 35, 2005, 20.

Margaret Thatcher and the government; however, he goes on to state that the past should not be ignored or shoved into an unknown corner of history. In his work *Blanketmen: An Untold Story of the H-Block Hunger Strike*, he states, "To garner that sympathy, our internal leadership believed that we had to be seen as helpless victims of screw pettiness and brutality who had been left with no choice but to go on a dirty protest, when in fact was our intention to engineer those conditions."<sup>101</sup> Although according to O'Rawe, it was the Army Council, the commanding body of the IRA or the Provisional IRA, intent to create the circumstances that lead to their dirty protest the "screws" or prison officials made the task easy for them because they did not miss an opportunity to humiliate or degrade them.<sup>102</sup> Their attempt to garner the sympathy of the public and the populations of other countries would place their form of nationalism on the international and national stages, thus increasing its spread and their support network, whether born from pity or dedicated support and belief in their ideals, varies. O'Rawe, however, held his doubts over the idea of public opinion breaking the English government's will to withhold political status.<sup>103</sup> He states, "I pointed out to him that, as far as I could see, outside of our immediate families, the public was apathetic to the protest."<sup>104</sup> While he was correct that the public's opinion would not break the stalemate, aspects of the public did not hold an apathetic view of the strike, and its audience expanded beyond the general public.

This form of propaganda also worked at the governmental level, especially in the U.S. and other countries with a similar history; in a letter addressed to Prime minister Thatcher, Marie Howe, the assistant majority leader from Massachusetts, implored Thatcher to grant the strikers political status in the spirit of the Holiday. Howe also states that due to the continued support for

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<sup>101</sup> O'Rawe, Ch 4.

<sup>102</sup> O'Rawe, Ch 4.

<sup>103</sup> O'Rawe, Ch 4.

<sup>104</sup> O'Rawe, Ch 4.

the strikers in the United States, they will not sit ideally by and step in unless the English government rectified the situation and help end the hunger strike.<sup>105</sup> In another more detailed letter Arthur Gietzalt the Senator, at the time, of New South Wales, and the Shadow Minister of Administrative Services and Home Affairs, addresses the issues of the H-Block and the information perpetuated by the press. In his letter, he states that his purpose for writing was not to debate the issue of the H-Block but see an end to "the degradation and squalor so rife in this pathetic place of internment" and implores Prime Minister Thatcher to grant the strikers immunity from their treatment because they deserved to receive equal and humane treatment despite their previous actions.<sup>106</sup> This correspondence indicates that Senator Gietzalt and South Wales people believed the prisoners suffered inhumane treatment and punishment for their actions. The letters continue to include France and Northern Ireland itself, while Gietzalt spoke on behalf of New South Wales and the Australian Parliament in the previous letter. These correspondences from more than two governments and the people of nations separate and connected to England meant that members of the international community began to become involved in "The Troubles." Parliament mostly debated the issue the hunger strike presented; according to the House of Commons Hansard on December 4, 1980, in this paper, they discussed the prisoners' demands, their reasons for striking, and what giving in to their demands would cost the government. The Hansard states, "Such changes would go far to give, and are intended to give, the protesting prisoners control over their lives in prison, and could not be agreed to by the government, since to do so would be to legitimize and encourage terrorist activity."<sup>107</sup> They

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<sup>105</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068/486, United States State Representative Marie Howe to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, December 16, 1980.

<sup>106</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068/483, A.T. Gietzalt to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, December 29, 1980.

<sup>107</sup> TNA: CJ 4/3027/81/124/12, United Kingdom *Hansard Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, vol. 995, December 4, 1980.

further discuss that under the rules of the prison, the rights of the inmates would not be infringed upon as stated under the statute written by the Secretary of State. However, also under this decree, prisoners were prescribed certain privileges so long as they conformed to the rules, but the government could withhold these luxuries due to misconduct.<sup>108</sup> The rules discussed in the government document show that the prisoners already had access to most of their demands so long as they conformed to prison rules except for their clothing, self-governance, and refrain from prison work. However, while it would appear the prison and its rules conformed to their demands already, there are multiple points of view to this issue. For example, according to the writings of Bobby Sands and Richard O'Rawe, several correctional officers abused their power and mistreated them either in retaliation for PIRA killing several correctional officers in the form of back and forth. Bobby Sands, within his diary, described the correctional officers participating in harassment and abuse towards the prisoners. He also alludes to the depths to which he was willing to go to remove the English government and its supporters from Ireland. Within his diary, Sands stated that he was willing to die as it was the only thing left that was within his power to accomplish could do and that many of his comrades were willing to die for their cause. Sands stated, "I was proud to be resisting, to be fighting back. They couldn't defeat us outside; they are torturing us unmercifully inside their hell-holes and have failed to defeat us again."<sup>109</sup> His words perpetuated the idea that he believed himself to be a martyr and was sacrificing himself for the greater good and defying the prison guards and the English government's attempts to break him. While they provide a personal view into his situation, the words of Bobby Sands should be thoroughly studied as his writings may have been potentially used as propaganda themselves by PIRA and or affected by possible psychological issues caused by the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Sands, Loc 560.

lack of food and dehydration. However, they do show how intrinsically tied he was to his sense of nationalism, Irish pride, and willingness to protect those he saw as his from the mercy of the English government who, in his mind, willingly left them to rot in squalor within the ghettos of Belfast and die from poor hygiene, housing and a lack of jobs and representation in the government. He further states that the whims of the English government would not criminalize him because Sands' cause was one worth fighting and dying for and implied he held the moral high ground.<sup>110</sup> This further exhibited the image of Bobby Sands as a martyr in his eyes because he believed he was dying for a greater purpose and that the English government could not criminalize him and treat him as an ordinary prisoner.

The propaganda perpetuated by the hunger strikers' performance also affected the clergy and the North Irish government. For example, in a letter from Sean MacBride, an Irish statesman and former member of the original IRA, he wrote, "However, as one who is not unfamiliar with the history of the relations between our two islands in the of the many problems that impinge on that relationship, I feel that I must seek to impress on the English government, as strongly as I can, the urgency of adjusting its prisons rules in such a manner as to ensure an end of the existing hunger strike."<sup>111</sup> He further states that the demands of the strikers are not unreasonable and that the image of the English government could only be improved should they deign to treat the strikers more humanely by allowing them more control over their lives in prison. This correspondence is dated December 17, 1980, four months prior to the hunger strike, which began on March 1, 1981; however, it shows the effect the hunger strike as a form of propaganda began to have upon the people. At the time, M.W. Hopkins, who was a part of the Northern Ireland Office, wrote to Michael Alexander Esq., an official at the office of Margaret

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<sup>110</sup> Sands, Loc 560.

<sup>111</sup> TNA FCO87/1068/458, Sean MacBride to L.C.W. Figg, December 17, 1980



Thatcher, to discuss the imminent death of Bobby Sands and the trouble they may have faced in the wake of his death. Hopkins also discussed the continuing pressure from both the republican and Unionist factions to influence the English government to concede or stand firm against the pressure.<sup>112</sup> He states, "Throughout all these pressures our stance has been simple and consistent: we will not concede political status or negotiate a separate regime for protesting prisoners: we are determined to administer a fair and humane prison regime, and we are determined to uphold and enforce the law against all who challenge or break it."<sup>113</sup> Although Hopkins's words show a façade of being unaffected by the hunger strikers propaganda, people within and outside of the English government were not only affected by the propaganda but also divided in their perceptions and discontent with the handling of the situation, particularly within the United States and other countries who share a similar history.

Several supporters and sympathizers of the hunger strikers primarily came from outside the United Kingdom from the United States, France, Canada, and Germany. These countries also share a similar history with Northern Ireland in that they suffered under an oppressive power or persecution and rebelled against these forces in an attempt to establish their own separate regimes. Former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders was one of several U.S. government officials who wrote particularly harsh words to Margaret Thatcher in defense of the hunger strikers. One such letter written in July of 1981, shortly after Bobby Sands' death, contains Sanders' outrage at the strikers' treatment. He wrote, " We are deeply disturbed by your government's unwillingness to stop the abuse, humiliation and degrading treatment of the Irish prisoners now on hunger strikes in Northern Ireland."<sup>114</sup> He further writes " We ask you to end

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<sup>112</sup> TNA: PREM19/504/f230, M.W. Hopkins to Michael Alexander Esq., 2.

<sup>113</sup> Hopkins, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Bernie Sanders to Margaret Thatcher, <https://www.irishpost.com/news/bernie-sanders-letter-margaret-thatcher-disturbing-treatment-irish-hunger-strikers-resurfaces-178787>.

your intransigent policy towards the prisoners before the reputation of the English people for fair play and simple decency is further damaged in the eyes of the people of Vermont and the United States.<sup>115</sup>" Governor Hugh Carey, the governor of New York at the time, utilized his connections to people within the English government in an indirect attempt to influence Thatcher. He contacted Lord Carrington, a member of the House of Lords and the Foreign Secretary, to utilize his connections within the English government to prevent further agony and tragedy caused by Bobby Sands' slow and agonizing death. Carey also wrote that while the English government must take a firm stance against terrorism, the situation had exceeded prison discipline, and the effects caused by the continued hunger strike could be widespread and take on further momentum and grow too large for the English government to control.<sup>116</sup> Although Carey's words are not in direct defense of the strikers and their treatment, his words represent the extent to which the strikers' propaganda has affected the people's perception and influence of the hunger strike and the potential backlash the English government faced.

Edward Daly, the then Bishop of Derry, wrote, "With respect, I feel that Mrs. Thatcher has succeeded in putting the IRA back into business as regards recruits and support. Whilst the present policy may have short-term success, I fear that it will be disastrous in the long term."<sup>117</sup> This conveys that the Bishop of Derry believed that Thatcher needed to change her policy and approach in resolving the hunger strike or the long-term consequences would overshadow that short term success of her criminalisation policy. Although, the Bishop of Derry and his constituents are not traditionally considered key political figures, like Thatcher and Atkins, they played a key role during "The Troubles" and the 1981 hunger strike due to their

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: PREM19/504/f172, Governor Carey to Carrington, May 5, 1981.

<sup>117</sup> PRONI: CENT/1/10/36A, Bishop E. Daly to Lord Elton, May 18, 1981.

religious role within the Catholic Church and the potential influence they had over the Provisional IRA and the strikers. The English government utilized these officials in several attempts to negotiate with the strikers in order to end the hunger strike. Members of the Irish Episcopal Church and the European Episcopal Conference also sought to involve themselves in the hunger strikers' determination to achieve political status however, members of this conference did not in fact wish to campaign for the return of this status but instead they campaigned for complete prison reform. Cardinal O'Fiaich, Archbishop of Armagh, in a memorandum prepared for the conference stated, "from the advice given us by the prisoners' parents and by the prison chaplains during recent months we are convinced that substantial changes in these two areas would not only have averted the present hunger strike but would probably have brought the prisoners' protests in all forms, to an end. Hence our bitter disappointment with the change announced by the English government on Thursday 23rd October 1980, which gave a concession with one hand and took it away with the other."<sup>118</sup> Meaning that O'Fiaich and his constituents were disappointed with the lack of execution of the reform Thatcher promised and the continuance of the hunger, which he perceived as preventable if the English government had already made the reforms and changes necessary to prevent the hunger strike.

The divisions caused by the differentiation between different forms of nationalism are prominent during "The Troubles" and, more specifically, the 'H-Block' hunger strikes. The difference, however, is that the republicans found it necessary to utilize self-violence and a hunger strike and order to be heard by the government, as opposed to the Unionist faction, who felt the conflict was primarily between the English government and the republicans. For

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<sup>118</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068/492, Cardinal O' Fiaich, *The Crisis at Maze Prison (Long Kesh)*, November 17, 1981, 4-5

example, the strikers took it upon themselves to self-inflict more violence upon themselves through their continuous denial of food, clean shelter, and clothing, thus drawing attention more inwards as people not imprisoned realized they had some if not all of these comforts, including freedom. The strike also influenced the Irish people to reignite their sense of nationalism and patriotism, which sparked many a revolution and rebellion throughout the history of Northern Ireland, thus creating sympathy for the strikers and drawing upon shared historical experiences. The Provisional IRA also intended for the propaganda provided by the strikers to draw attention to both government's failures to reform the prison system and their mistreatment of those who they originally granted political status as a result of the (1972) hunger strikes. The Provisional IRA also received financial funding backed by NORaid. They are officially known as the Irish Northern Aid Committee, an American organization developed by Michael Flannery, an avid supporter of the Provisional IRA and a former member of the Provisionals. This organization provided funding and supplies for the Provisionals. They also sought to draw upon the public's sympathies to garner widespread support that steadily decreased during the 80s to continue the fight in the hopes of achieving their objectives. Thatcher's removal of this special status on March 1, 1976, and her later policies, including Ulsterisation, Normalisation, and Criminalisation in 1980, influenced inhumane acts taken against republican and the Provisional IRA's prisoners and later resulted in several deaths of hunger and other causes. These inhumane acts and the prisoners' multiple attempts to garner sympathy and support continued throughout the duration of the hunger strike. They drew not only domestic interest to their actions and the governments but also international attention as well.

The strikers also placed themselves upon the international stage as not only did their actions strike a personal chord with the people, but their propaganda also gained support from

around the world. They also made their actions and the actions of their detainers a humanitarian issue when in the 1980s, the European Convention on Human Rights met to debate the strikers' actions and whether they deserved political status. They ruled that the prisoners and their actions did not constitute being granted special status; however, they did express concern over the inflexibility of the English government and that surely a compromise could be made to end the deadlock.<sup>119</sup> By promoting their strife and agenda on the international stage, the Provisional IRA and the strikers gained popular support at home and overseas, especially in the United States. Bobby Sands, in his work, further called out those who denied them support or did not see fit to speak out on their behalf. He stated, "Who among those so-called humanitarians who had kept their silence on the H-Blocks, who among them could put a name on this type of humiliation and torture, when men are forced by extreme torture into the position they had to embark upon a dirt strike to highlight the inhumanity poured upon them!"<sup>120</sup> His words demonstrate his outrage and confusion at the English government having allowed for the abuse of criminalisation, the emergency laws and removal of previously granted political status that political prisoners had to face such abuse, humiliation, and torture that in order to draw attention to such indignities they had to resort to a "dirty strike" for people to listen. In the quote above, Sands also calls out the Commission of Human Rights and their rejection of PIRA's representative's petition for the strikers' special status by referring to them as so-called humanitarians.

However, the 'dirty protest' or 'dirt strike' was an elevation of extremes following the 'Blanket' strike. The 'Blanket' strike as described by Bobby Sands in his above description of his lack of clothing as he laid nude with only a blanket and a towel for clothing and protection

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<sup>119</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068, Cardinal O'Fiaích, Archbishop of Armagh, *Northern Ireland: The Crisis at the Maze Prison (Long Kesh)*, November 1980, pp. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Sands, Loc 509.

against the elements, was the denial of prison clothing in favor of wearing nothing after the guards seized their personal effects, specifically clothing, in protest. Sands goes on to describe the humiliation imposed upon him by one of the guards whom he addresses with the letter A, who, according to Sands, was particularly vindictive. For example, the guards were ruthless when they forced them to shower and when they checked the prisoner's person for contraband, or anything possibly snuck into the prison during familial visits. Cardinal O'Fiaích, in his memorandum he prepared he also describes the background for the 1981 Hunger Strike or 'Dirt' protest and the previous 'Blanket' Strike. He stated that prisoners of the conflict from 1972-1976 initially received special status from the government, who later removed this status in March of 76', and the continued strikes created enmity between the prisoners and prison staff.<sup>121</sup> The good Cardinal also writes that in order to come to a form of compromise, he and Bishop Daly of Derry attempted to discuss with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mr. Atkins in the hopes of reforming the prison structure.<sup>122</sup> He stated, "We believe that this only half of the truth and that in any case the sufferings of relatives and the dangers to the community demand that a serious effort be made to bring the present situation to end for the following reasons."<sup>123</sup> His reasons argued that the government should have resolved the situation on account of some prisoners' age and that their sentencing was before a non-jury court, prison staff corruption, and that the prison was a fertile grounds for IRA recruitment. This demonstrates that if the prisons, especially Long Kesh, had already been restructured and the government had imposed different policies, the hunger strikes may not have happened, and more lives would not have died of starvation. The

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<sup>121</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068, Cardinal O'Fiaích, Archbishop of Armagh, *Northern Ireland: The Crisis at the Maze Prison (Long Kesh)*, November 1980, 4

<sup>122</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068, Cardinal O'Fiaích, Archbishop of Armagh, *Northern Ireland: The Crisis at the Maze Prison (Long Kesh)*, November 1980, 4.

<sup>123</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068, Cardinal O'Fiaích, Archbishop of Armagh, *Northern Ireland: The Crisis at the Maze Prison (Long Kesh)*, November 1980, 5.

Cardinal's writings also showed that he and other fellow clergy members were willing to speak upon the striker's behalf and that they sympathized with the loss of life and are willing in the face of more deaths to call out the government on their mistakes.

To further draw attention to the H-Block and Armagh's plight PIRA and their supporters used outside propaganda in the form of newspapers, pamphlets, and other media outlets. For example, a pamphlet titled "The Struggle for Political Status by the H Block & Armagh Prisoners is a Just and Historic Struggle by Revolutionary Irish Patriots" argued that the English government's previous concession on political status acknowledged the heroism and legitimacy behind their struggle. The National Executive of the Communist Party of Ireland, the producers of the pamphlet, further debated that the division of Ireland at the beginning of the century was, in fact, illegal and performed with malicious intent on behalf of the English government and succeeded with the backing of corrupt Irish capitalists.<sup>124</sup> Their pamphlet also contained information on how the hunger strike developed, the current amount of deaths at the time, and other propaganda.<sup>125</sup> For example, the author addressed the dead strikers as heroes and viciously dressed down the actions of the English government, calling their actions immoral, illegal, and unjustified. The author of the pamphlet also called the English government out as an enemy of democracy and that the hunger strike revealed their true colors and drew the attention needed to expose them to the world. "The whole world is learning, through the hunger strike, what really goes on in Northern Ireland. The refusal to grant political status despite the existence of what amounts to internment is showing what reactionaries and enemies of democracy the

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<sup>124</sup> The National Executive of the Communist Party of Ireland, *The Struggle for Political Status by the H Block & Armagh Prisoners is a Just and Heroic Struggle by Revolutionary Irish Patriots* (Dublin: The Irish Left Archive, 1981), 2.

<sup>125</sup> The National Executive of the Communist Party of Ireland, 3.

English ruling class is.<sup>126</sup>" They further point out that the strikers' tremendous self-sacrifice and selflessness proved the justness of their cause and their determination to achieve their freedom.<sup>127</sup> The pamphlet also includes information on the juryless trials prisoners suspected or know of colluding with the Provisional IRA, and the republicans were forced to endure. Another pamphlet, provided by the Irish Leftist Archive published rapidly after Bobby Sands' death, *the Socialist Republic Emergency Bulletin*, detailed Bobby Sands' death and placed the blame for his death directly upon the English government's shoulders. The author stated, "Responsibility for the death of Bobby Sands M.P. rests entirely with the English government. The cruel intransigence of Thatcher and Atkins, their rejection of national and international opinion represents a calculated insult to the whole of the Irish people and demonstrates the racist contempt in which the English ruling class holds the people of this country."<sup>128</sup> Although hastily written, this pamphlet contains a powerfully worded piece of propaganda utilizing Bobby Sands' death to encourage others to support the strikers and undermine the government. This shows that the English government's refusal to acknowledge and concede political status was an insult to the Irish people and filled with racial contempt and hatred directed towards the Irish people. These pamphlets allow for another method used during the hunger strike to further perpetuate PIRA's nationalism, Irish nationalism and their continued use of struggle as a self-righteous weapon and propaganda. The pamphlets issued in 1980-81 not only allows insight into the nationalist propaganda but also the Irish culture of suffering and martyrdom firsthand despite, their original use as propaganda pieces. Though PIRA, other republicans or other outside supporters used outside propaganda pieces to draw attention to the strikers is no surprise however, when other

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<sup>126</sup> The National Executive of the Communist Party of Ireland, 4.

<sup>127</sup> The National Executive of the Communist Party of Ireland, 5.

<sup>128</sup> People's Democracy, *Socialist Republic Emergency Bulletin* (Ireland: The Irish Leftist Archive, 1981) 1.



government or even religious officials who did not directly support their cause voluntarily draw attention and support for the strikers the situation appeared dire enough to necessitate their intervention. For example, during his election, Vincent Doherty used pamphlets to address the issue of the H-Block. He states "Already four hunger strikers have died at the hands of a bloody and vindictive English Government led by Margaret Thatcher, a government which has shown nothing but contempt for the entire Irish people. By these deaths, the English have tried to make lesser people of all of us."<sup>129</sup> Another piece utilized the continued success of the hunger strikers' "suffering" propaganda can be discerned in the tidal change of public opinion against PM Thatcher; not only just the public's opinion of her but also her constituents plead for the situation to reach a swift end and their shrewd reprimands of her policies and actions. For example, in the 1980 *Chicago Tribune* article titled *Is Thatcher Prepared to defuse Irish time bomb?* the author Michael Kilian questions whether Thatcher is genuinely interested in reaching a peace accord or only looking for a swift resolution after finally meeting with Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey.<sup>130</sup> Thatcher, in her continued pursuit of denying the prisoners political status, states at a press conference in Saudi Arabia, "Crime is crime is crime: it is not political, it is crime, and there can be no question of granting political status. I just hope that anyone who is on hunger strike for his own sake will think fit to come off hunger strike, but that is a matter for him."<sup>131</sup> Prime Minister Thatcher stated this on April 21, 1981, two days before Marcella Sands, would send in an application to the European Commission of Human Rights and just two weeks before Bobby Sands dies at the age of 27. Thatcher's words further solidified the English government's

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<sup>129</sup> The National H-Block/ Armagh Committee, *Make H-Block The Issue!: Vote Doherty No. 1* (Ireland: Irish Leftist Archive, 1981).

<sup>130</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068/478, Michael Killan, "Is Thatcher prepared to defuse Irish Time Bomb?," *Chicago Tribune*, December 18, 1980.

<sup>131</sup> TNA: PREM19/757 f154, Margaret Thatcher, "Extract from Prime Minister's Conference," April 21, 1981, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104501>.

stance on the issues of concessions and further denounced the strikers and their cause as one of selfishness and criminality, not one to be resolved on equal footing with political issues. Another example of how the hunger strikers' propaganda affected the people and promoted feelings of sympathy for the strikers and antipathy against the English is embodied in the words of Padraig O'Malley.

I was attracted and repelled by the hunger strikers' actions: attracted by the heroic element, the steely determination to sacrifice life itself on behalf of conviction, the impulse to transcend the daily petulance of soporific resistance; repelled because I was tired of the small gestures of impotence, the fusing of the praxis of suffering and the pretensions of idealism to evoke the easy sentimentality that too often is the hallmark of the Irish response to questions of life and death.<sup>132</sup>

Padraig O'Malley, Dubliner and author of *Biting at The Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* and *The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today*, alongside Tim Pat Coogan, experienced and reported the Hunger Strikes during the 1980s. His book *Biting at The Grave* discusses the hunger strikes and the interconnection between Irish nationalism and hunger strikes themselves. His words also provided insight into how a member of the public viewed the strikers' actions and the sentimentality and idealism behind the hunger strike. O'Malley covers the global impact of Ireland's Hunger Strikes as well in his work; however, throughout much of his writing, O'Malley does mention his feelings about the hunger strikes and the emotional impact they had at the time during his tenure as a journalist, however, he attempts to remain neutral and unbiased lending further credibility to his work. The influential reach of the hunger strikers extended beyond English and Irish borders and their constituents to the Government of New South Wales, Australia, and the United States. The news of the hunger strikers and their plight even reached Lisbon, the capital of Portugal. In a telegram addressed to the prime minister, the

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<sup>132</sup> O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave*, 6.

Portuguese assembly resolved that the treatment the English subjected the strikers to was inhumane and should be made a worldwide issue.<sup>133</sup> Making the hunger strike into human rights issue would allow for other nations to interfere upon the strikers' behalf on humanitarian grounds were the issues of H-Block to be contested in court at the ECHR. The protesters before starting their hunger strike in 1981, suspended the dirt protest in July of 1980 due to an alleged deal made between themselves and the English government and after the deals recension they put off the dirt protest in favor of the hunger strike. This deal included, according to an article in *The Guardian*, the strikers' demands being fulfilled over a period of time and included reforms of the prison regime; however, the English government did not honor their end of the bargain.<sup>134</sup> This resulted in the prisoners of H-Block starting a hunger strike in protest of this betrayal. However, the government's inability or unwillingness to uphold the deal is detailed in the writing of Gerry Adams in his autobiography *Before the Dawn*, which details not only his life but also his experiences with the republican movement, PIRA, and the H-Block hunger strike from 1980-1981. He also describes his connection to Bobby Sands and his view of the prisoners' treatment during his time as a fellow internee during the Hunger Strike in the late 70s.<sup>135</sup> He remarked that the prison guards implemented the policy of criminalization by employing cruel and overly aggressive treatment against the inmates and protestors by participating in forced washing and forced feedings, further inciting the animosity and humiliation, at the prisoner's expense, between the "screws" and inmates.<sup>136</sup> He also remarked that they had

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<sup>133</sup> TNA: FCO 87/1068/451, Draft Telegrams to Lisbon, 1980.

<sup>134</sup> "H-Block 'Deal'." *Guardian*, (Manchester), January 6, 1981. <http://vortex3.uco.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.vortex3.uco.edu/docview/186306649?accountid=14516>.

<sup>135</sup> Gerry Adams, 285

<sup>136</sup> Gerry Adams, 285-86

not intended for a second hunger strike to take place in 1981 and was, in fact, unfavorable for them to proceed with a second strike.<sup>137</sup> Sands' however, would not be swayed from his desire for revenge against the "screws" and the English government. Margaret Thatcher, in her own autobiography *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography*, disputed the strikers and, by association Gerry Adams, the implication of government concessions on December 18, 1980, as their motivation for ending the strike.<sup>138</sup> She disputed the existence of such a deal and blamed it on the pretext that she had misspoken at a meeting the week before, and her advisor had misinterpreted her words in an official meeting to discuss how to address the hunger strike situation.<sup>139</sup> Whether her denial of the secret deal or concessions was correct or even if a deal took place is highly disputed. However, in her writings, she does discuss that her advisors encouraged her to placate the strikers in an attempt to stall and or end the strike, thus preventing the development of martyrs and removing support from PIRA. Thatcher, however, did not heed her advisor's advice, and instead, in the wake of a new Hunger Strike spearheaded by Bobby Sands and his eventual death, she consulted the Catholic hierarchy and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP).<sup>140</sup> She communicated with these organizations in the hopes that the strikers would listen and cease the hunger strike. This, however, did not succeed, as exemplified by the strike's continuance during the time and that the constraints of traditional Catholicism no longer held any sway over the strikers and Bobby Sands. Thatcher attempted these communications on the assumption that Catholicism and the Catholic hierarchy could influence the actions of the strikers and PIRA because of the historical background and

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<sup>137</sup> Gerry Adams, 286.

<sup>138</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher: The Autobiography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 467.

<sup>139</sup> Thatcher, 468.

<sup>140</sup> Thatcher, 468.

myth they used to legitimize themselves integrated many Catholic values and examples in their activities. She also contacted the Catholic hierarchy under the assumption that if the strikers did not follow the priest's requests, the priests could verify the protesters' situation and their treatment. For example, Bobby Sands, during his time as a striker and his subsequent death in 1981, painted Sands as a martyr who died to serve a cause more significant than himself.

The H-Block Hunger Strikes, particularly the one that began early in 1981, embodied a turning point in Irish history. According to Padraig O'Malley's *Biting at the Grave*, hunger strikes as part of the national mythology and integral to Irish nationalism.<sup>141</sup> Through these multiple pieces of propaganda and several letters addressed to Margaret Thatcher and other cabinet members, one can discern the intricate connection between violence and nationalism and the domino effect of events in one country/nation and its enduring influence on the people in another nation. Emotions of sympathy and camaraderie are primarily influenced by this type of propaganda both at home and overseas. For example, in the United States, several organizations developed to supply funding to PIRA and support the hunger strikers. The United States at one point supplied arms and ammunition to the Provisionals. This was perhaps due to feelings of sympathy and comradeship as the United States was once occupied by the English whose government, during the American Revolution, oppressed the colonizers by denying them representation in Parliament and overly taxed them by placing outrageous taxes on teas and luxury items. The most prominent organization was NORAID or the Northern Irish Aid Committee who dedicated themselves to providing aid to nationalist families who suffered during the early

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<sup>141</sup> O'Malley, 5.

years of "The Troubles" and even raised twice the amount they usually earn in 1981 during the hunger strike. NORaid was primarily established in the United States and organized and fundraised money from Irish-American families, particularly those with family members. Though their intentions were well inclined, perhaps some of the money was used to fund PIRA's armory and continued operations.

Other groups developed within Northern Ireland and Europe. One such organization, known as the Anti H-block group, comprised of supporters of the H-block hunger strikers, and in 1981, the political group ran for election under the banner of Anti H-block, hence the name. The principal forerunner was hunger striker and republican prisoner Bobby Sands himself. However, due to the Representation of the People Act, Sands was not allowed to participate because his successions of imprisonments exceeded the limit of one year as stipulated in the act and the extension of jail time due to the loss of remission and other consequences for protesting. Another organization formed in response to the H-Block strikes was the H-Block Committee.

Along with several others, this committee fought on behalf of the strikers to influence the government to concede their demands. The families of the hunger strikers' primary objective focused on keeping their family members alive. However, some families achieved the removal of their members from the strike-through by pleading medical needs or underlying health issues instead of seeking the group's political goals. The rallying of the families of prisoners, the public, and representatives of several international governments leads credibility to the statement of their use of the hunger strikes as propaganda as a powerful tool; in her writings, Thatcher acknowledges the influence and power the strikers and PIRA wielded. She states, "There was some suggestion to which

some of my advisers gave credence, that the IRA was contemplating ending their terrorist campaign and seeking power through the ballot box. I never believed this. Nevertheless, it indicated how successful their propaganda could be.<sup>142</sup> Her statement, however, was in reference towards Sands' victory in achieving the parliamentary seat of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which he attained through the garnering of sympathy and support throughout his hunger strike. This meant she not only acknowledged the power behind this form of propaganda, but her statement also exemplifies the connection between nationalism and violence because the strikers' use of violence allowed for Bobby Sands to be placed in office in an attempt to forward their nationalist cause. However, this did not succeed because Sands was removed from office due to the afore-stated Representation of the People Act. Her words, however, held a prophetic tinge because in 1996, before the Good Friday Agreement, PIRA changed its role from one of a terrorist nationalist organization to one of a political organization. Also, according to O'Malley, while Sands' run for election drew attention to the strikers' cause, his bid for a parliamentary seat triggered further crisis over Irish nationalism due to his representation of all things constitutional and unconstitutional.<sup>143</sup> This also caused discrepancies in the people's decisions to support Sands or not because of his further representation of the mythological history he, PIRA, and their supporters use to legitimize their actions.<sup>144</sup> This demonstrates that the people of Northern Ireland were torn over who they supported and whether it was suitable to support someone visibly and politically tied to the Provisional IRA and a historical rivalry many may have hoped to forget.

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<sup>142</sup> Thatcher, 468.

<sup>143</sup> O'Malley, 139

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

The situation later devolved and evolved from the domain of violence and entered the political platform after the Good Friday Agreements in 1998 and the ending of the Hunger Strike in 1981. However, this would not occur until Sands's eventual death in 1981 and the end of public support for the strike, and the interference of several family members who did not wish to hear about their loved one's deaths. Though Sands no longer held the parliamentary seat, even in absentia, Sands also held the position of Commanding Officer (CO) of the strikers and held sway in decisions to confirm or oppose the correctional officers and their rules. He was also PIRA's representative within the prison and designated to the role of C.O. at PIRA's council's behest. His death, however, held even more of a drastic impact on the Irish community according to an article in *The Guardian* during the weeks following Sands' death and the possible end of the hunger strike, according to *The Guardian*, a national holiday would be declared, and people were preparing to celebrate Sands' life and attend his funeral. This shows that his martyrdom influenced people to hold Sands' in their hearts and minds to form an emotional connection with the photos produced, showing his struggle and the indignities he may have faced.<sup>145</sup> The impact of his death also showed the power of the propaganda produced by the hunger strike and the photos produced showing the struggle of the strikers by PIRA because the physical violence of denying oneself food and other imagery showing this form of violence resonated with those who believed in the myth perpetuated by PIRA and the strikers.

The H-Block Committee was one of several committees that developed in an effort to support the hunger strikers in both Long Kesh prison and Armagh jail. This organization, chaired by Gerry Adams and later Fr Piaras O Dúill, dedicated itself to speak

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<sup>145</sup> George Brock. 'The Legacy of Bobby Sands: *The Observer*, May 3, 1981, 15.



on behalf of the protestors and draw attention to their plight as prisoners of war.<sup>146</sup> According to F. Stuart Ross, author of *Smashing H-Block*, the development of this committee, along with their establishment of information centers and information services about the H-Block as Prisoners of War (POWs), endeavored to remind Ireland and her people of their duty to support the strikers. They also attempted to mobilize and influence the public's focus towards supporting and perhaps joining PIRA.<sup>147</sup> This meant the H-Block committee attempted to inspire feelings of nationalism in the Irish people, the beliefs that allowed for the development of the Irish Civil War, the Irish War of Independence, and the Easter Uprising meaning, and it was time for the Irish people to remember their duty to their homeland and its people and forsake the English government and its influence. The H-Block Committee figuratively attempted to call the people to arms to provide support and do what they must for PIRA's brand of nationalism to succeed, similar women during World War II in the United States and other countries who took up positions of manufactures, engineers, nurses, and other professionals to keep the economy and Allied soldiers supplied. The Women Against Imperialism group allowed for the propaganda to be redistributed and dovetailed, as they initially used it for the Blanketmen in 1976 and redirected its focus to the strikers.<sup>148</sup> Their primary focus, however, centralized on the thirty-eight republican women on strike in Armagh jail.<sup>149</sup> The development of these committees lead to picketing of Armagh Jail, marches with the slogan "Smash H-Block." Though these marches did not always succeed, and the government stopped their mobilization efforts in 1980. However, this did not deter the H-Block Committee.

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<sup>146</sup> Stuart, 55.

<sup>147</sup> Stuart, 55.

<sup>148</sup> Stuart, 56.

<sup>149</sup> Stuart, 56.

According to an article published in *The Newsletter*, the committee planned to launch a petition at the United Nations (U.N.), and the leader, a former Mid-Ulster MP Bernadette McAliskey, confidently believed the U.N. campaign had the potential to force the English government to answer the strikers' demands. She also warned the government, "It has been obvious that the campaign would have to go outside Northern Ireland to bring greater pressure on Britain."<sup>150</sup> McAliskey further stated that the protest would continue until Britain broke and conceded to their demands although this article's published date was July 22, 1980, five months before the strikers temporarily ended their protest, this article provides information on the methods used to allow for the perpetuation of the H-Block propaganda and the methods employed in their attempts to undermine the English government.

The 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike's connection to violence and nationalism is embodied in the Provisional IRA's use of the strike as propaganda, and a psychological tool to raise the public's dwindled support by transforming the striker Bobby Sands into a martyr. This embodiment also included the hunger strike's introduction to the international stage. Historically the issues of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland remained within the domain of their own nations and the English government except during World War I and World War II. However, what has not been discussed so far is PIRA's use of the propaganda as a method to demean the English Government further and incite outrage in other nations of the United Nations, Europe, and the United States to interfere upon their behalf and force Britain to submit to the strikers' demands and legitimize PIRA's nationalist ideology as a result. The interference by other nations upon PIRA's behalf could have

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<sup>150</sup>TNA: FCO 87/1062/72 n.a. "Bid to Raise H-Block Campaign at the U.N.," *Newsletter*, July 22, 1980.

forced Britain not only to legitimize their organization but also take responsibility for their actions and incompetence in managing another nation's government which falls under their dominion. For example, in the previous article, Bernadette McAliskey stated that those who supported the H-Block strikers and thus PIRA's nationalism needed to seek interference outside of England and Northern Ireland to bring pressure upon the English government and force them to concede. This, while a plausible stratagem, however, if other nations were to directly involve themselves either through political assistance, military assistance, or foreign aid, they would be undermining Britain's sovereignty and governing prowess. Nations wishing to interfere upon the striker's behalf encouraged their representatives to seek a lawsuit on civil rights grounds thus, allowing these nations to intercede further were the lawsuit to be accepted. Organizations similar to Bernadette McAliskey's and family members of the protestors also attempted to contact the Ambassadors of Northern Ireland who were located in several different countries and convince them to help. These nations, however, could have interfered upon the striker's behalf through pleas and attempts to convince Britain to concede on humanitarian grounds. Unfortunately, they could only send letters pleading with Britain to concede to the five demands influenced by popular support among their own people or, in some cases, as a gift to celebrate Christmas, generally a time of goodwill and forgiveness. These pleas, however, fell upon deaf ears as legitimizing PIRA's cause would have promoted their continued undermining of the English government's authority and any negotiations they may have attempted to parlay. The English government would no longer be able to maintain their upper hand were they to acknowledge the Provisional IRA and thus potentially lose any bargaining power. The United States also attempted to interfere on humanitarian grounds;

however, they also supposedly provided weaponry to PIRA but later stop perhaps due to their famous policy of not negotiating with terrorist organizations or providing them with assistance. The significance of other nations' attempted interference was unprecedented because, unless the government was corrupt, war, or, in the case of a dictator, nations in the modern era did not directly interfere with the issues of another government. The main reason behind this lack of interference in the ruling of other governments includes but is not limited to trade, alliances, debt, the disparity in military prowess, and treaties. Nations, however, can intervene on behalf of an injured party against another's government on humanitarian grounds.

Margaret Thatcher, in her autobiography, however, makes no mention of these pleas this perhaps suggests she either did not receive these pleas or they did not impact her life or work as the magnitude of the situation would suggest during her tenure as Prime Minister and did not deem it worth writing. She does, however, mention in her autobiography her attempts to prevent further deaths after a striker fell unconscious during the strike. She allowed for the prison to contact the injured party's family to gain their authorization to feed their family member intravenously or through a drip, thus preserving the striker's life despite her inability to concede to their demands.<sup>151</sup> She also made some concessions after the hunger strike ended by allowing further leniency on clothing, association, and remission.<sup>152</sup> However, despite Thatcher's provision of concessions, PIRA suffered a loss because the concessions were made after they ended the hunger strike; thus, neither Thatcher's administration nor the English government's political authority was undermined, nor did they submit to pressure. These concessions after the fact caused PIRA

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<sup>151</sup> Thatcher, 468.

<sup>152</sup> Thatcher, 468.

further losses because their supporters had begun to lose faith and their desire to support PIRA. Her concessions, however, did not prevent the previous deaths, nor did she attempt to negotiate beyond the one supposed deal in 1980 and instead waited out the hunger strike. The strikers' families also interfered after ten strikers died and forced PIRA's hand because they wished to avoid any more deaths, and the desire for the fighting to end began to develop.

The Hunger Strike's propaganda influenced several governments to interfere and attempt to negotiate or encourage the English government to reach a favorable solution on their behalf. The strike also undermined the government's control over convicted prisoners and the population and the Northern Ireland government, which fell under the English government's domain. The strike also called in to question the English government's authority, and power wielded as a governing body. This propaganda campaign also undermined the English government because the Irish people no longer trusted the government to protect them and their best interests. Instead, they sought help from a paramilitary organization and decided to inflict pain upon themselves rather than seek governmental assistance from the English or Irish Parliament. For example, during the Hunger Strike, Bobby Sands ran for and obtained a seat in the House of Commons as a Member of Parliament; however, because of his tenure in prison for felony charges, he could not maintain his seat in Parliament. Though this attempt failed, it showed a majority supported the strikers and, to a lesser extent, PIRA instead of the government and a potential English supporter who would not help resolve the conflict and the underlying civil rights issue were he to be placed in a position of power. Several politically inclined organizations involved themselves in creating several propaganda pieces to help support

the strikers and or further demean the English government. These organizations included youth groups, Sinn Féin, The Workers Party, the People's Democracy, the National Communist Party of Ireland, and the European Parliament. The propaganda perpetuated by these organizations focused on demonizing the English government and canonizing the strikers to influence national and international opinion. For example, in *Ireland*, an international magazine publication printed by Sinn Féin The Workers Party, the author focused their writing for members of the international population by explaining the background of the Provisional IRA and their connection with The Workers Party. Throughout this work, the author, similar to the previous pamphlet, disparages Thatcher and romanticizes the suffering of the hunger strikers in an attempt at drawing the attention and sympathies of the reader while also encouraging the, for lack of a better term, underdog story of the Irish and their continued rebellion against the English government. For example, the author insultingly called Thatcher the Iron Maiden and alluded her to being naïve and unable to comprehend or hold compassion for the working-class citizens and their plight. The author also stated, "For the immediate future we state that we are not underestimating the gravity of the situation that peace and democracy in Northern Ireland are a fundamental and require the support and commitment of the international community in opposition to terrorism and who are committed to the establishment, defense and extension of the democratic process."<sup>153</sup> This quote is taken from the editorial narrative written within the magazine, and though the editor appeared to be strictly against the Provisional IRA, they, however, do not appear in favor of Margaret Thatcher. The magazine also provides other parties' perspectives, such as the socialist party and the

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<sup>153</sup> Tomás MacGiolla, "Order End to Hunger Strike: Says Sinn Féin," *Ireland*, Autumn 1981, 2. Irish Left Archive.

Labour party. Though the magazine did not support the strikers or the Provisional IRA, the author, however, provided multiple perspectives in order to facilitate a complete comprehension of the situation in Northern Ireland and encouraged members of the international community to become involved with a complete understanding of whom they align with and the consequences of their potential involvement. According to an article written by Martin Cowley, English groups formed to back the demands of the prisoners.<sup>154</sup> This group was formed from several from the Labour Party and various left-wing organizations with the intention of launching a campaign demanding Charter 80 be launched and used to regulate the English government. Charter 80, an organization backed by the aforementioned M.P.s, was dedicated to the hunger striker's achievement of their five demands; however, similar to other organizations, the primary source documentation does not contain much information. Though most of these organizations focused on demonizing the English government, however, members of the European Parliament, according to an article in the *Irish Times*, only requested that the authorities' respect the strikers' political gestures and movement in the direction of accepting their demands. This preface of acceptance proposed by the European M.P.s involved the English authorities participating in discussions about improving the prison regime.<sup>155</sup> This further shows the reach and extent this form of propaganda achieved due to the multiple forms of interpretations and the emotions manipulated by the hunger strike allowing for "The Troubles" and the H-Block Hunger Strike designations as domestic issues an internationally humanitarian problem. This propaganda influenced foreign and domestic

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<sup>154</sup> TNA: C.J. 4/4159/1b, Martin Cowley, "British Group to back demands of N.I. prisoners," September 20, 1980.

<sup>155</sup> TNA: CJ 4/3655/78/124/01, Leonard Doyle, Euro-MPs seek move by Britain," *Irish Times*, April 28, 1981.

communities to involve themselves in subverting the English government's authority to help the H-Block martyrs.



## Conclusion

The 1981 H-Block Hunger Strike represents the intractable nature of the questions of national (imperial) identity due to their use of violence against others and self-violence because they lacked legitimate and effective outlets to articulate their perspectives perpetuate their separate forms of nationalism. These factions' use of performative propaganda and violence against others developed from several historical events. However, "The Troubles" and the hunger strike are more recent pieces of history representing the utilization of violent methodologies in replacement of legitimate methods to usurp a perceived dominant power to obtain decolonization. The legacy of "The Troubles" and its historical effects are still felt to this day because, despite the Good Friday Agreement, the situation continues to evolve, and the archives containing information on "The Troubles" still have documents waiting for declassification and are not available to the public at this time. Because these documents still maintain classification status, much is left unknown until the end of this century. For example, one of the files obtained from this research is missing several correspondences, which have been replaced by 'dummy' documents as placeholders, stating when the archive will make the document available unless other researchers request to declassify the document before the stated date. The fear of a revival of PIRA and "The Troubles" is still highly prevalent with the continued negotiations of the BREXIT deal and England's departure from the European Union. The reason being that the E.U. allows a fluid border system between its nations, and this makes many people fear that a revival of PIRA and their supporters may occur, or a new organization may develop all together. Studies of a similar nature and the Provisional IRA themselves allow academics to understand why and how nationalism and identity are connected to a people's use of violent methodologies instead of legitimate methods in one nation compared to another. For example, Irish nationalism during

"The Troubles" heavily featured the use of self-sacrifice and sufferance, particularly hunger strikes, as a tool against the English government and the Provisional IRA. According to this and previous studies, the reasoning behind this was because hunger strikes, and the idealization of martyrdom featured heavily within Irish republicanism and nationalism. They also believed that to repay someone who wronged you, i.e., the English, you must suffer in turn to force them to realize their mistakes and repent.<sup>156</sup> PIRA also used the religious connotations behind the H-Block hunger strike 1980-1981 in an attempt to further legitimize their position and actions against the English government. They also utilized the hunger strike as a form of propaganda that allowed them to enter into the international community because of people sympathizing with the strikers and further encouraged them to involve themselves and protest in favor of the strikers. These supporters included family members, Members of Parliament, foreign dignitaries, and members of the general populace. The people, both foreign and domestic, who supported the strikers attempted to manipulate Margaret Thatcher into agreeing with the five demands through slander, negotiation, and even a court case presented by Marcella Sands, sister of Bobby Sands. The latter initiated the H-Block Hunger Strike from 1980-1981. She went before the ECHR and argued that the treatment the correctional officers and the English government inflicted upon her brother was inhumane and a violation of his human rights. Along with the many other forms of propaganda developed to support the hunger strike, this case undermines the English government's authority and sovereignty. The Provisional IRA and the hunger strikers used the hunger strike to influence foreign governments to interfere on their behalf. Foreign governments, however, could not have interfered because their interference could have potentially caused more significant issues than a hunger strike and the Provisional IRA's activities. Due to several

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<sup>156</sup> English, 379.

restrictions, these foreign dignitaries could not involve themselves beyond letters filled with pleas for Thatcher to be flexible or resolve the situation swiftly to prevent more deaths. Thatcher left these pleas unheeded and did not reference them in her autobiography, suggesting they had little impact on her recollections of "The Troubles." However, Thatcher attempted to prevent deaths by involving the families of hunger strikers who starved themselves into unconsciousness and gained permission to feed the unconscious party intravenously. The research that facilitated this conclusion contains primary and secondary documentation in the form of diaries, correspondence, newspapers, pamphlets, government documents, and monographs. These documents also included further information on the history of Irish nationalism, its development, and their historical use of hunger strikes combined with nationalism. For example, Richard English's work *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* and Padraig O'Malley's *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strike and the Politics of Despair* provided information on the H-Block Hunger Strike in Northern Ireland and the correlation between Irish nationalism and hunger strikes by stating, within Irish culture that suffering was a highly used tool and provided the sense of holding the moral high ground. The information provided by the primary documentation and monographs in correlation with this thesis's research allows one to see the connection between nationalism and violence as exemplified by the H-Block Hunger Strike 1980-1981 because the strikers not only suffered the correctional officer's brutality but also inflicted pain upon themselves in defense of their cause. The difference between this research and previous research on the subject of the H-Block is the idea of the hunger strike as a form of violent propaganda used to manipulate and inflict pain upon oneself and those who witnessed the strikers suffering either through photos, firsthand accountings of family or religious figures, and smuggled letters. The extension of the propaganda's reach to the international community allows

one to observe the effectiveness of the propaganda in influencing beyond the original targeted audience.

The H-Block Hunger Strike in 1980-1981 failed after the death of Robert "Bobby" Sands, who led the strikers after the English government backed out of the deal they negotiated. However, despite the strike's failure and the impact of the strike and PIRA's actions are still felt to this day. The hunger strikes and "The Troubles" are still recent and according to the hundred-year rule generally applied by young researchers when choosing a topic. The total historical effects are still developing and changing. The potential for further research is expansive because documents are still being declassified over time and upon request. For example, one could research the morality of a hunger strike and whether the academic community should consider it a form of peaceful protest or other viable forms of protest. Another example of potential research is investigating the methods governments used to defuse hunger strikes or the effects a hunger strike had on prison policies and the granting of political status. The psychological effects and influence of the use of a hunger strike as propaganda may be a worthy research topic as well. Another research topic featuring an in-depth study of the cultural connections between hunger strikes, nationalism, and propaganda and if this connection is unique to Ireland could expand further understanding of the connection between nationalism and violence and the possibility of decolonization without violence. This topic could also be dovetailed to include gender studies and the involvement of women during the hunger strike, and any potential differences in their treatment during their protest compared to the men of Long Kesh.

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