

Free Marian Price

Bernie McAdam Mon, 21/05/2012 - 15:22

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VETERAN IRISH Republican Marian Price has been imprisoned without trial since May 2011. This harks back to the British government's widespread use of internment in the 1970's as a way of silencing opposition to its rule in the north of Ireland. This repressive policy only succeeded in broadening the scale of the anti-Unionist and anti-British revolt.

The 57 year old activist had been given a life sentence following the Old Bailey bombings in 1973, then released in 1980 following a prolonged hunger strike in which she had been force-fed over 400 times. She had been suffering from tuberculosis and weighed five stones. Her release had been based on a royal pardon.

Northern Ireland secretary Owen Patterson signed an order revoking her parole licence claiming that she had encouraged support for an illegal organisation. This amounted to holding up the script of a message read out at an Easter commemoration from a masked man representing the Real IRA.

Marian's lawyers pointed out that she was not on licence and there was no legal right to detain her as her release was based on a royal pardon. Patterson's lawyers were unable to find the royal document - the only copy of which it would appear was conveniently destroyed in 2010 - hence their claim it was not a pardon but a conditional release! After her arrest, the judge granted her bail only for Marian to be immediately rearrested on Patterson's orders.

Last July Marian was further charged with 'providing property for the purposes of terrorism', linked to the Massereene shootings of two soldiers. But as Eamonn McCann points out, she 'had been questioned for two days about this allegation in November 2009 and released without charge. There was no change in circumstances in the interim and no new evidence offered.' Again the court offered her bail only for Patterson to overrule.

It is patently obvious that Marian's detention is not about her being guilty of a serious crime, but about the British government's desire to silence her. As Bernadette McAliskey commented at a recent protest in Belfast: 'This is a clear message that no dissent will be tolerated. You challenge the status quo at your peril.' In short, don't oppose the Good Friday Agreement!

The British government would love to fool us into believing that a just peace reigns in the north of Ireland - but the reality is different. It is British repression that reigns supreme. Maghaberry republican prisoners are still subject to beatings and strip-searches. Loyalist parades continue to march through nationalist areas. Raids and beatings are regularly dished out in the pursuit of 'dissident' republicans. The northern state is still a sectarian prison house for all those that identify with a united Ireland.

Marian has been illegally incarcerated for a year now. She had been locked up in the all-male prison at Maghaberry and put in isolation. This long-term solitary confinement is a form of torture. Due to a serious deterioration in her health she has been transferred to the hospital wing of Hydebank prison where she still remains in isolation. The authorities are intent on breaking her body and spirit. Many protests have taken to the streets in Ireland.

We must call on Britain to drop the charges and release Marian Price now!

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