



BACKGROUND: (CAUSES)

Before 1976 republican prisoners were granted what was known as **SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS**. This viewed them as 'political prisoners.' As such they were allowed certain **privileges** such as the **right to wear their own clothes or associate together in prison**.

In the light of the violence and stalemate at the time the British government reviewed this situation and decided that they were introducing **TWO new security policies**.

1) ULSTERISATION: this intended to gradually **reduce the British troops** from Northern Ireland as they were regarded as now being part of the problem with a great deal of nationalist antagonism towards them. This followed events such as internment, the falls road curfew and Bloody Sunday. The **RUC (police)** and a new local regiment called the **UDR (Ulster Defence Regiment)** would replace the British army.

2) CRIMINALISATION: This second policy was designed to **end Special Category Status**. It wanted all prisoners to be seen **not as political prisoners but common criminals**. In this way it was hoped to starve PIRA of some of its propaganda. It was also concerned that prisoners associating together was actually leading to greater organisation in the long run. It would reduce this as well as make them do prison work and wear prison uniform, like other prisoners. The British government also began to build a completely **new prison** to house these prisoners.

It was called the **MAZE** prison and the prisoners were housed in **H Blocks**.

REACTIONS.

Republican prisoners were deeply **angry** at this. They regarded themselves as **political prisoners** and were determined to keep their special category status. This would lead to a long and deadly battle of wills.



HOW DID THEY PROTEST?

Republicans started a long campaign of protests designed to get concessions from the British government on these issues.

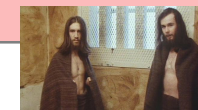
1) BLANKET PROTEST: they began by refusing to wear prison uniform. They wore prison blankets instead.

2) DIRTY PROTEST: they then began to refuse to wash and smeared their excrement on the walls of their cells.

3) PROTESTS: outside the prisons, republican sympathisers across the world staged protests in support of the prisoners.

4) ATTACKS Attacks on prison officers took place with many killed or injured.

5) FIRST HUNGER STRIKE: the use of the hunger strike was a potent weapon in republicanism. It had been used in 1920 by Terence mcswiney, republican mayor of cork who starved himself during the war of independence. **However, the first attempt at hunger strike was not successful. It was tried with large numbers and got little results.** Into its 50th day the hunger strike was called off when they believed they were getting concessions.. these were never given. This would be transformed when the PIRA commander in the prison, **Bobby Sands** changed the strategy completely.



WHAT WERE THE HUNGER STRIKERS 5 DEMANDS?

1) No Prison Uniforms

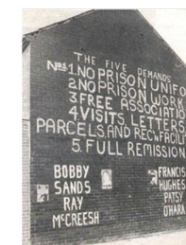
2. No Prison work

3. Free association within Prison

4. Full remission should be available on sentencing

5. Visits parcels and letters should be increased

THE FIVE DEMANDS



10 KEY RESULTS OF THE HUNGER STRIKES

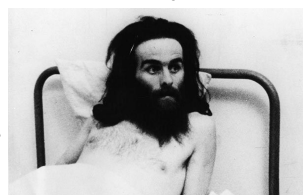
- TEN Republican prisoners died** and would be regarded as martyrs in republican circles.
- Violence** spiralled out of control with up to **60 murders** taking place in the period of the hunger strikes. **Tensions** between unionist and nationalist communities were at an all time breaking point.
- Thatcher** would herself become a target of the PIRA in the **Brighton bombing** of 1984 which came close to killing her.
- Many **unionists** regarded the prisoners as **terrorists** and murderers and were glad Thatcher had not conceded. Although they were deeply unhappy with the end result.
- Many **nationalists** felt further **angered and alienated** from the British state.
- Support for PIRA** grew.
- Support for Sinn Fein** grew significantly.
- Support for the more moderate **nationalist SDLP** began to drop and its leader Gerry Fitt lost his seat to **Gerry Adams**.
- The **British and Irish government** were **concerned about the loss of moderate support** and began working towards what would become the **Anglo Irish Agreement**.
- Sinn Fein** realised the success of the **electoral process** through Sands victory. They began a **dual campaign** of the **armalite (gun) and ballot box (election)** which they would adopt in their drive towards a United Ireland.



4) RESULTS



1) BACKGROUND



THE HUNGER STRIKES

3) HOW DID THE HUNGER STRIKES END?

2) WHAT HAPPENED?

1981 HUNGER STRIKE

Bobby Sands transformed the hunger strike into a much more **successful strategy**. Instead of a mass hunger strike he introduced **STAGGERED HUNGER STRIKES** with volunteers going on strike over **weekly intervals** to increase the **pressure** on the British government.

The hunger strike however faced a very tough opponent- British Prime Minister, **Margaret Thatcher**.

Thatcher had saw one of her closest advisors killed by republicans in the 1970's. She was dubbed 'The Iron Lady' and was also completely opposed to doing any deals with those she saw as terrorists. This would therefore be a deadly battle of wills.



BOBBY SANDS ELECTION

Even with all of the protests and the hunger strikes, it looked as if the campaign was not having much success. However, this was to change. In **Fermanagh** the local nationalist MP, Frank Maguire, died. This was seen as the perfect opportunity to show support for the hunger strikes. **Bobby Sands** was put up to be candidate and against the odds **won** the seat in the British Parliament, effectively becoming an **MP** while in prison and over 40 days into his hunger strike. This was **publicised** all around the world and considered a huge boost for the hunger strikes and republican campaign... now the British government faced not just the death of Bobby Sands, republican prisoner but Bobby Sands MP.

BOBBY SANDS DIES

66 days into his hunger strike Bobby Sands died. His funeral was attended by over **100,000** people illustrating how the issue had attracted the support of many moderate nationalists too.

The hunger strikes did not end with bobby Sands death.

TEN HUNGER STRIKERS would die altogether before they were called off in **October 1981**.

It appeared as if **Thatcher had won**.

HOWEVER, In a carefully choreographed (planned) move, **a week after the strikes ended**, a new British Secretary of State, **Jim Prior**, announced that the republicans **WOULD** be granted several of their key demands

- They could wear their own clothes ✓
- They could freely associate ✓
- Visits would be relaxed ✓
- They could still retain their 50% chance of remission ✓

HOWEVER, the British Government would not concede on the political status issue... **Special Category status** would not be regranted in full.

These concessions came at a very high cost.