The British government reviewed this situation and decided that they were introducing TWO new security policies.

1) ULSTERISATION: this intended to gradually remove 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 fall 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.

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.

10 KEY RESULTS OF THE HUNGER STRIKES

1) TEN Republican prisoners died and would be regarded as martyrs in republican circles
2) 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.
3) Thatcher would herself become a target of the PIRA in the Brighton bombing of 1984 which came close to killing her.
4) Many unionists regarded the prisoners as terrorists and murderers and were glad Thatcher had not conceded. Although they were unhappy with the end result.
5) Many nationalists felt further alienated from the British state
6) Support for the more moderate nationalist SDLP began to drop.
7) Support for Sinn Fein grew significantly.
8) Many nationalists regarded the prisoners as terrorists and murderers and were glad that Thatcher had not conceded. Although they were unhappy with the end result.
9) The British and Irish government were concerned about the loss of nationalist support and began working towards what would become the Anglo Irish Agreement. Sands victory. They began a dual campaign of the armalite (gun) and ballot box (election) which they would adopt in their drive towards victory. This would lead to a long and deadly battle of wills.

PROTEST CAMPAIGNS

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 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 MacSwiney, 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.

The hunger strike however faced a very tough opponent- Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher had seen one of her closest advisors killed by republicans and she was also completely opposed to doing any deals with those she saw as terrorists. This would therefore be a deadly battle of wills.

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 intervals to increase the pressure on the British government.

The hunger strike however faced a very tough opponent- Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher had seen one of her closest advisors killed by republicans and she was also completely opposed to doing any deals with those she saw as terrorists. This would therefore be a deadly battle of wills.

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. In a carefully choreographed move however, a few days after the strikes ended, the nationalists were granted several of their key demands

- they could wear their own clothes
- they could freely associate
- visits would be relaxed
- they could retain their 50% chance of remission

These concessions however came at a very high cost.

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 won over many nationalists.