

BULLDOZER

THE ONLY VEHICLE FOR PRISON ABOLITION

ISSUE 2

IWOC



NOV. 22



If you are a prisoner or a relative of a prisoner in the Irish prison system, north or south, and would like to highlight an issue of concern, rights or prisoner struggle then please get in touch with IWOC below.

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Disclaimer: The views, information, or opinions expressed within these pages are solely those of the individuals involved and do not necessarily represent those of Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee.

CONTENTS:

Index	Pages
Welcome	4
Prisons Crime and Class War	5
The Struggle for Prison Abolition	6
Who is in prison?	7
The revolutionary potential of prisoners	8
Prisons are harmful	13
Access to healthcare: Know your rights!	14
CJINI report into solitary confinement	15
Prison expansions in the south of Ireland	16
IWOC Dictionary	18

WELCOME TO BULLDOZER!

Welcome to Bulldozer #2!

Much has changed since we published #1 in 2021, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine creating global uncertainty that has sent fuel and food costs spiralling.

This is creating a once in a generation cost of living crisis, the effects of which will be felt for years - if not decades - to come. In this critical moment, it is essential that we continue to create spaces of radical reflection for people in prison, former prisoners, and abolitionist comrades. Bulldozer aims to be one such platform.

In this issue there are contributions analysing the use of prisons as weapons of class warfare, the revolutionary potential of prisoners and prison expansion in Ireland.

We thank our contributors for their contributions and their ongoing commitment to prisoner solidarity and mutual aid.

Bulldozer is published by IWOC Ireland. IWOC stands for "Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee". IWOC is a division of the radical trade union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

IWOC aims to help those currently in the prison system organise themselves and take action to improve their own conditions, as well as to further the goal of prison abolition.

IWOC Ireland is looking to grow its membership and support both inside and outside the prison. To get involved, or contribute to Bulldozer write to:

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Prisons, Crime and Class War

Ultimately, what results in a person becoming imprisoned, in a legal sense, is criminal law. Most people assume that criminal law exists to protect them and their interests, however, power dynamics are at play, and it is usually ruling class interests that are served. Given that they possess the money, property, and influence, they have a huge bearing on what makes it into law. Criminal 'justice', thus, is not apolitical but an element of class war.

Criminal law fails to recognise the harms caused by those in power. Corrupt government officials and ministers may 'breach codes of ethics' but they are at no real risk of prosecution and imprisonment. Corporations too can harm communities and spoil the natural environment with impunity.

The state itself stands outside criminal law. States have used violence against their own people, imposed discriminatory measures

upon certain groups and engaged in illegal wars with other states. All without real consequence.

The criminal 'justice' system plays a key role in maintaining state power and the current social arrangements. While some vulnerable people may serve some degree of protection from the system, certain groups – addicts, sex workers, welfare recipients, migrants, and so on – are controlled and the state, in turn, is empowered.

Through the creation of so-called Public Order Offences, political actions that arise from civil unrest, or as protests against the status quo, are criminalised. This ensures the system works against the working class and its interests. Therefore, it is absolutely in our interests to create a new justice, one that empowers people and protects those that need it.

JPW
Maghaberry Prison

The Struggle For Prison Abolition

The core struggle for prison abolition must be fought within the prison system itself and prisoners themselves must be at the forefront of that struggle.

For decades, what has determined the treatment of prisoners is their collective ability and determination to resist and fight back against a system capable of the worst and most inhuman repression. It is at the sharpest edge of prison repression, within the jails themselves, that the struggle to overthrow prisons must be centred. The struggle against slavery was centred amongst the slaves themselves in the West Indies and America, and the abolition of slavery was achieved by slave rebellions and not white middle class liberals in Britain, and so the struggle for prison abolition must find its root energy within the places of captivity and involve those who occupy an existence comparable to slaves.

What essentially determines prison and penal repression is the relationship of power imposed on prisoners that seeks to disempower them completely and re-enforces prisons as state weapons of social control and repression.

When prisoners collectively fight back there is a dramatic shift in the balance and relationship of power within prisons, and the very foundations of the prison system is rocked.

Solidarity with prisoners engaged in conflict with their jailers is therefore critically important because it is at the very coal face of state repression that the real struggle originates.

John Bowden
Prisoner Solidarity Network

Who is in prison?

In the popular media, there is a constant flow of headlines and stories that highlight often highly visible violent street crime.

This presents a certain image of 'criminals' and prisoners, which creates and reinforces negative stereotypes of people as violent immoral things, devoid of normal emotion and thought. They are dehumanised and reduced to this over simplified archetype.

The fact that a person in prison may be a mother, a father, a student or a worker easily becomes forgotten.

What is certainly not to the fore is that they are likely to have had an incredibly unstable family life, where abuse (whether physical, sexual, or emotional) and addictions (they themselves or their parents may have) are frequent features, and mental and physical ill-health is rife.

Poor educational attainment and

difficulty finding emotionally, or financially satisfying employment are common too.

In fact, even victims of gendered violence can find themselves behind bars. This can be a result of arrest policies, such as 'dual arrest', whereby the police, unable to identify a primary aggressor, arrest both parties after a report of domestic violence.

Often, too, when women have been forced to defend themselves physically, they have found themselves prosecuted by the authorities for doing so.

So, when we look behind the headlines, many people who find themselves in prison, do so because of several factors, most of which involved much suffering on their part. Prison only adds to this suffering.

JPW
Maghaberry Prison

The revolutionary potential of the prisoner class

In October 2021, after a workshop about herbalism and PTSD with a group of ex-prisoners in Glasgow, I felt inspired to make a meme. It said, “The prisoner class has the most revolutionary potential. Change my mind”. It went kind of viral and inspired me to write this article about why the prisoner class has revolutionary potential.

The revolutionary power of the prisoner class is not a new concept, George Jackson wrote: *“The sheer numbers of the prisoner class and the terms of their existence make them a mighty reservoir of revolutionary potential. Working alone and from within a steel-enclosed society, there is very little that people like myself can do to awake the restrained potential revolutionary outside the walls. That is part of the task of the ‘Prison Movement’.*

A close friend of mine in prison and I were chatting once about probation officers, solicitors, social workers, offender managers, prison officers, police and even middle-class comrades who feel like social workers, like we are projects, or people to fix or save. We talked about the injustice of everything and how most reforms are just not gonna make a fucking difference at all. Her words stayed with me; she said: *“It’s all got to go, we have to start again.”*

The local revolutionary potential of the prisoner class

When you are in prison, when you are seeing the extent of state violence, the ease at which it is inflicted and the brutal obviousness of how it is classed, racialised and gendered: you have no hope for Jeremy Corbyn, or liberal ideas of reform. There is no trust or invest-

ment in politicians. No hope for participating in some kind of 'civil society'. All the energy it takes to radicalise people, to make them see that this system is rotten to the core isn't needed. People who have been in prison know. They know with their bodies, their families, their lives. It is because of this lived experience of oppression that the prisoner class has revolutionary potential.

Prison takes everything from you, so you feel like you have nothing to lose anymore. For prisoners who are doing serious time or for those who have families (which is a lot of them), they may 'self-regulate' their behaviour or limit their organising because things like parole are weaponised against them. But compared to people without a history of imprisonment, you're already fucked and excluded from the workplace, you've already had your kids taken off you, you've got no chance at a 'career' or even access to many higher education programs. You're already facing huge stigma from society and will have a 'bad character' reference anytime you end up in the dock again. I've tried so hard to build my

life up since prison, but self-employment has been the only option, and of course, it is precarious, low-paid, without a pension and completely resting on your ability to work and your physical and mental health (which prison also destroys).

So compared to privileged populations who are often pacified by the comforts and luxuries of capitalism, the prisoner class by default may lean towards resistance and rebellion. We've seen this with the Bristol riot in March 2021 and how many of the defendants having grown up in the care system, having been in prison before and living with a hatred of the police due to their life experience. How can we support people harmed by the prison system? For many of the Kill the Bill defendants who have been in prison before, they've never had political support in the same way - getting post from comrades all over the world, being supported financially, having their names shared worldwide as people who fought back against the police. What is the revolutionary potential if this comradeship is extended to people behind bars in

general? Those whose lives have been destroyed by the 'criminal justice system'?

The global revolutionary power of the prisoner class

Prisons have always been a hotbed of struggle around the world - from the Kurdish freedom movement to the Black Panthers. Sakine Cansiz, a Kurdish revolutionary imprisoned in Turkey for many years wrote "Prisons are a battlefield". They have been sites of organising, education, strikes and more for decades. We cannot forget that prisoners keep each other alive through collective care too - listening to each other, sharing resources, giving emotional support, etc. These forms of resistance are often less visible than actions like hunger strikes, but they form a vital part of daily resistance to conditions that build power and solidarity. Separating prisoners into individual cells, as is the biggest pattern in new prisons, is a state strategy created to destroy prisoner organising and these more collective forms of life.

Prisons are also a major colonial

tool - from the Gulags that enabled the colonisation of Siberia and the destruction and oppression of the many indigenous communities living there, to the penal colonies of the British, French and other colonial powers. This isn't just past tense. Prisons continue to be a colonial tool. In settler colonies such as the so-called United States, Canada, Australia and others - First Nations and indigenous communities continue to be massively criminalised and make up large numbers of people in prison. This is no accident. This is how white supremacy and colonialism survive. Anti-colonial struggles are therefore interlinked to prison resistance, and so it is important to cultivate international solidarity amongst oppressed peoples across the world.

Recognising prisons as weapons of state power makes them strategically important. IWOC organisers wrote "...prison is vitally connected to all the other apparatuses of domination. They depend upon prison, so for us, attacking the legitimacy of prison is a means to destroy the state, or at least erode it's power. We are anarchists, bitter

enemies of the state, and we focus on prison because we are looking for the weakest spots in our enemies' armour.”

Starting with solidarity, building through action

Another IWOC quote that has stayed with me is “Rot doesn’t grow where the sun shines”. We need to shine a light on what is happening behind bars. Not just from think tanks and inspection reports - from the prisoners themselves. Action alerts can inform comrades about when a prisoner is being targeted and responses they generate do make a difference. It might be the difference between someone getting beaten by officers with absolute impunity and that person staying ‘safe’ because the prison knows people are watching them. It feels mundane to constantly create action alerts and graphics for Instagram asking people to contact prisons with complaints, but without it, they can continue to target and torture people. Through these action alerts, we can build relationships with more people in prison and we can keep building a movement that takes action for and with people inside.

Prisoners have been intellectual engines of movements for decades too. Sharing their writings beyond the prison walls is a revolutionary act. Likewise, supporting prisoner political education is incredibly important.

We never know when that revolutionary moment might happen, when riots and strikes sweep through prisons when there are mass breakouts and mass outrage enough to make the system buckle. But it’s not going to come out of nowhere. We cannot predict it or control it, but we can try to inspire it. We can be the match. We can work to create the infrastructure that can support prisoners directly, that can amplify prison uprisings and rebellious prisoners. We can rupture the ‘social license’ the prison system and the state have which means that whole populations believe prisons are natural, normal and necessary. Abolition is a verb (a doing word) - we can be proactive and take the offensive.

This infrastructure is not just about prisons themselves but about communities of care. This is the biggest thing I’ve learnt from Black and Brown feminists and abolitionists

- from housing to harm reduction, to alternative mental health support to structures to challenge sexual violence and support survivors. I feel distracted by my rage sometimes, I just want to destroy the prison system right now, I forget that abolition is so much more as a revolutionary strategy. It involves everyone. Check out *Brick by Brick: How to build a world without prison* by Cradle Communityⁱ if you're interested in this aspect of abolitionist work.

But why should we focus on supporting prisoners when there are so many other things to fight? Author Karlene Faith writes that "Prison is the place where all injustices converge". Prisons are the main tool of the state to maintain a class-stratified society. It's what stands between us and taking everything back from capitalists. Prisons keep people poor. They target racialised populations. They are an epicentre of violence against trans communities. The list is endless. Name any group of people experiencing oppression and you can guarantee they are a targeted part of the prisoner class. There are no 'single issues' when it comes to

prison. All these forms of injustice are interconnected and as Faith says, they converge in prison.

We cannot forget either that this is a life and death struggle. England and Wales had at one point the highest rate of prisoner suicides in the world. The chance of dying from Covid-19 in prison was three times higher than the general population on the outside.

I know prisoner support work is hard. I know it can feel less sexy and adrenaline-filled than being on the streets, fighting fascists or sabotaging a fox hunt. But it is important revolutionary work. We cannot forget people behind bars. We need to prioritise building relationships with prisoners, supporting prisoner families, challenging prison expansion, and resisting the whole prison system and its role in society. But prisoners cannot be excluded from these movements, they need to be the heartbeat.

Nicole Rose is an anarchist organiser and herbalist who supports people surviving and recovering from state violence. She served a 3.5 year prison sentence when she was 21 and has been supporting loved ones, partners and comrades in prison for over 17 years.
www.solidarityapothecary.org

Prisons are Harmful

The tabloid press has created a sense of prison in the popular mind as soft, or even as being 'holiday camps.' This has created concern that prisoners are too well looked after at the public expense and are in fact being rewarded for their activities.

Prisons are, however, incredibly harmful places. At best, they make life meaningless and deprived. At worst, they are painful and deadly. Long-term imprisonment is psychologically devastating and people can waste away. Many lose the will to live.

Relationships become abnormal, as interactions with other prisoners and prison guards are predominantly hierarchical and exploitative: a product of imbalanced power relations.

The worst outcome is death. In some places this is a direct result

of a sentence of death, something that is still regularly deployed in many places in the world.

At other times it is a result of the psychological pressure imposed by imprisonment which makes people feel they have no other way out then to take their own life. Deaths in state custody constitute a high number of avoidable deaths, yet it often goes unreported.

Prisons have been described by experts as '**warehouses of suffering**' and, in the end, they are deadly.

To achieve true justice in society we must reduce harm wherever it may be encountered. This includes harm done by the state through imprisonment. We cannot have justice without abolition.

JPW
Maghaberry Prison

Access to healthcare: Know your rights!

A cornerstone of prisoner's rights is access to timely and empathetic healthcare. Yet, there are many institutional and cultural barriers that make accessing healthcare in prison difficult.

Security protocols, obstructive prison staff, and jaded healthcare workers all combine to restrict prisoners' access to healthcare and medications.

As a result, prisoners commonly receive substandard healthcare, which is neither timely nor empathetic.

Many prisoners are unaware of their healthcare rights and entitlements – they do not know how to request healthcare support or who to complain to if they are denied the care that they need.

It is with all this in mind that a member of the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee (IWOC) Ireland has put together a healthcare leaflet for prisoners in the north of Ireland.

The leaflet outlines five key things prisoners should know about prison healthcare.

It also provides advice on how to access healthcare in prison, highlights issues around medication, and what to do if prisoners experience problems or complaints.

**RSM
IWOC Ireland**



CJINI Report into Solidarity Confinement



On 1st of February 2022 the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland's (CJINI) report into the Care and Supervision Units (CSUs).

The report clearly shows the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is in breach of international standards in its use of CSUs as sites of 'solitary confinement.'

More than that, the report highlights the NIPS complete disregard for prisoners' health and wellbeing and willingness to abuse their fundamental rights to purposeful activity and meaningful human contact.

The CJINI report into Care and Supervision Units reflects the flagrant abuse of prisoners' rights in the north of Ireland.

Prison authorities claim that CSUs are used only when a person is evidenced to be violent or proven a danger to themselves or others.

Yet IWOC members have witnessed prisoners being labelled 'disruptive' and moved to CSUs under the pretence of 'maintaining good order and discipline' – with no due process in the decision making.

Continues Page 22

Prison expansion in the south of Ireland



In May 2022, Fine Gael Justice Minister Helen McEntee indicated the Irish Government's intention to expand the south of Ireland's prison capacity.

An additional 220 new prison spaces are to be opened across the prison estate by the end of the year. The Prison Officers Association (POA) has called for 600 new prisons spaces to be created and more guards to be recruited.

The 'need' to expand Ireland's prison system is said to be caused by the 'problem' of overcrowding. Yet, overcrowding is merely symptom of a much bigger issue:

the ever-increasing number of people being sent to prison under the false premise that prisons keep communities safe by rehabilitating prisoners.

Ireland currently has approximately 4,000 people in prison – an increase of around 44% since 1999 (2,763). Of the 4,000 people currently caged by the state, around 80% are serving terms of 12 months or less.

Even by liberal standards, short sentences are ineffective at achieving 'rehabilitation' since a person sent to prison for 12 months or less has no opportunity gain new skills -

let alone start to address any addiction or mental health problems they might have. Without meaningful opportunities to undertake education or receive therapeutic support, short sentences are a particularly cruel form of punishment.

Sending someone to prison denies them of their liberty, strips them of their identity, and subjects them to emotional, intellectual, and sensory deprivation.

Being imprisoned can damage a person's mental and physical health and causes harm to family and loss of housing and employment. This being understood, people sent to prison on a short sentence are more likely to leave prison debilitated compared to when they entered it. This does not make the communities they return to safer, rather it destabilises them and makes them even more precarious as ever-larger number of working-class communities are caught in cycles of poverty-violence-imprisonment.

Rather than spend millions of taxpayer money on building new prison cages and employing prison guards, sentences of 24 months or less should be abolished.

This money should be funnelled towards creating community resources. This would cut the current prison population by 80% and radically reduce the number of people sent to prison on an annual basis.

The abolition of short sentences and the reduction of the prison population would enable divestment of money out of the prison system, public money which could then be diverted into alternative education, health, housing, and employment services and opportunities in working class communities.

Despite the unerring logic of abolishing short sentences and radically reducing the number of people sent to prison, this is unlikely to happen.

This is because prison expansion is not about keeping communities safe, but about consolidating political power.

In a historical moment of an impending polycrisis – war, fuel, food, housing, migration – Fine Gael are using the narrative of being 'tough on crime' to score cheap political

Continues Page 20

IWOC

Dictionary

To shape a vision of a better future, radical social movements need to create their own language. Below is a list of key definitions used by prison abolitionists.

Abolitionist – Person who believes that prisons have failed and who works to achieve the long-term goal shutting down all prisons.

Abolitionist reforms – A reform which does not strengthen or legitimate the prevailing prison system. Can also be called non-reformist reforms.

Cage – Refers to places of involuntary confinement in prisons or jails. Official language calls them “cells”, “rooms” or “residencies.”

Criminal (in)justice system – Denotes lack of justice in a series of procedures beginning with arrest and ending with release from prison or parole, which are not part of a single coherent system.

Decarceration – Decarceration refers to attempts to limit the number of people who are detained behind bars, either by reducing the number of people sent to prison in the first place or by creating avenues to release people already in custody.

Divestment – Divestment refers to the active process of reducing the amount of financial, ethical and political investments made in prisons. At its most basic level divestment means spending less money on building and maintaining prisons, and using that money on health, housing, and education.

IWOC Dictionary

To shape a vision of a better future, radical social movements need to create their own language.

Below is a list of key definitions used by prison abolitionists.

Diversion – Diversion refers to initiatives aimed at diverting people from entering prisons through community-based responses and services.

Incarceration – The state of being confined in prison; imprisonment.

Prisoner – A person held in custody, captivity or a condition of forcible restraint. Dishonest language calls them "inmates" or "residents."

Prison-industrial complex (PIC) – Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC) is a phrase that highlights incarceration to be a profit-making industry.

The phrase PIC is used to describe the mutual interests of private companies that profit from incarceration, politicians who are “tough on crime,” and the media who demonise working class prisoners.



Prison expansion in the south of Ireland

Continued From Page 17

points and divert attention from their own political failings.

Meanwhile the POA's calls for expansion ring hollow and merely reflect an attempt to consolidate their own petty political power.

Communities and labour must recognise prisons as a weapon of class war and resist right-wing

sirens to expand Ireland's prison system.

The labour movement in particular should stand up for the people they claim to represent and call for the abolition of short sentences and divestment from the prison system that ravages working class communities.

RSM
IWOC Ireland

Relapse

*Where is this higher power
These anonymous preachers claim
Is going to save meek old me
From my relapsing shame
I was on the path to safety
When off the wagon I fell
One little slip and now into
Another inebriated hell
I had beaten all the sickness
That came from withdrawal
But I couldn't beat the weakness
Inside this broken shell
Someone please save me
I can't do this on my own...*

**PC
Magilligan Prison**

CJINI Report into Solidarity Confinement

Continued from Page 15

This has allowed prison authorities to use the CSUs as ‘Control and Segregation Units’ – to isolate and repress prisoners deemed ‘difficult,’ with no regard for the psychological and physical harm caused.

It is intolerable that public money is being used to enable solitary confinement – a mode of torture with the capacity to ravage the mental health of a person.

In response IWOC Ireland published a statement, calling on all workers, unions and public officials to speak out about the state sponsored torture of prisoners in the north of Ireland and campaign to ensure prisoners’ right to access healthcare and purposeful activity is upheld.

The CJINI’s report is further evidence that prisons are toxic institutions that wreak havoc on individuals, families and communities.

The recommendations made by the CJI, if actioned, may go some way to slightly lessen the harms some prisoners experience, yet they will never quell the unerring violence of prisons.

They are, and always will be violent instruments of class oppression.

RSM
IWOC Ireland

Recipe for disaster

One part father who can only show emotions with fists

One part mother with depression and delusional mental health

Add in society that is violent and hateful

Just a touch of isolation both externally and internally

Add a dash of addictive personality and dependence of chemical happiness

Let stew in prison for six years

With no proper or adequate help

Release into hostel full of drugs, anxiety and repeat offenders

Enjoy a life cold and bitter in perpetual downward spiral.

Nobody cares!

They believe I have chosen this
So I must lay in the bed I've made
But I wish so much it could be better
That I could ask for help without being
Made out to be whingy or crying
That I could be given the help I need
Whether people believe I deserve it or not
For me and my family I want to change
No more debt or money problems
No more fear or worry
No more oblivion smoked off tinfoil
Or pushed through the pin of a needle
To them I got myself addicted
So it's my own fault
Doesn't matter why I use
Doesn't matter I was trying to hide demons
That life inside me that feeds off the fear
They create in my head
If I win and live
Or if I lose and die.

PC
Magilligan Prison