

INTERNATIONALE KOMMISSION ZUM SCHUTZ DER GEFANGENEN UND GEGEN

ISOLATIONSHAFT

Members: from Italy, Netherlands, Great Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany.

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The International Commission for the Protection of Prisoners and Against conditions of Isolation calls for the abolition of conditions of isolation for political prisoners in the Federal Republic of Germany. The inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners in strict isolation as a means of trying to crush their political identity must come to an end. The prisoners must be able to proceed with their political development through exchange and collective activity in groups of at least 15 political prisoners under conditions corresponding to those laid down in the Geneva Convention concerning prisoners from liberation movements and prisoners of war. A further essential is the existence of an international body which can monitor the prison conditions and can intervene as a protector against any attempts made by the state to liquidate them.

It is not sufficient to say that isolation leads to death. It is more correct to say that in such conditions of severe isolation, and in instances like the implementation of the 'Kontaktsperre', which severs all connections between the prisoners and the outside world, it is possible to liquidate them. We therefore call for the immediate provision of conditions which preserve the health, life and political identity of prisoners in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The International Commission for the Protection of Prisoners and Against Conditions of Isolation was formed in June 1979 following the hunger strike of a great number of prisoners in the Federal Republic of Germany against isolation torture and new isolation wings, and in response to one of their demands that an international body be set up to monitor their prison conditions. Members of the Commission have repeatedly tried to visit prisoners in order to inform themselves directly about their prison conditions. In most cases, however, permission was denied by the authorities. Even so, the Commission is determined to continue its work on behalf of prisoners who are part of the anti-imperialist resistance in Western Europe.

There have been political prisoners in the Federal Republic since 1970. Prisoners convicted of being members of revolutionary groups such as the Red Army Fraction, the 2nd of June Movement, the Revolutionary Cells or as members of other 'terroristic gangs', as the authorities call them, have been held for several years in isolation or 'small group isolation'. Even those suspected of membership are held in isolation for periods of up to three years before trial.

The Red Army Fraction manifested itself as an anti-imperialist guerilla movement in May 1972 with bomb-outrages on the headquarters of the U.S. Army in the Federal Republic at Frankfurt and Heidelberg. In that month the U.S. Air Force had intensified the bombings of Hanoi, Haiphong and Thanh Hoa province. Since that time the Red Army Fraction undertook various actions, among others to free imprisoned comrades. Their latest action took place on June 25th 1979, when a bomb attack was committed at the Chief of Staff of NATO in Europe, Haig, who was considered to be responsible for the 'modified-interventionist reinforcement policy' against liberation movements in third world countries.

From 1970 onwards the state's policy has been to crush the political identity of prisoners through isolation torture and the use of sensory deprivation techniques. Isolation torture was applied most brutally against Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin and Astrid Proll, prisoners of the RAF, in a silent wing in Cologne prison. As soon as conditions of sensory deprivation were identified as such, reports were brought to the attention of relevant authorities and the media, and organisations such as Amnesty International, who were repeatedly urged to intervene by lawyers and relatives.

Political prisoners have consistently fought against these conditions. In 1974-5 they went on a hunger strike which lasted for five months. They demanded their full integration into normal prison conditions. Rather than concede these demands the authorities took responsibility for the death of one prisoner, Holger Meins, while force-feeding him, though in a manifestly insufficient way. On other occasions, similar demands for integration on these terms resulted in political prisoners being put with informers or fascists. Other prisoners repeatedly reported that they were pressed not to mix with political prisoners. Because of this, integration on these terms was regarded as unacceptable by the prisoners who now developed their demand for viable groups of not less than 15 political prisoners. This was seen by medical experts as the minimum in order to at least survive.

In July 1977 a group of 8 political prisoners was formed by the authorities and installed in the Stammheim prison, by way of accepting one of the demands. Only one month later, the group was broken up by force. The prisoners were isolated again, and some were replaced in other prisons.

Soon after, in September 1977, when the Schleyer kidnapping took place, some 100 political prisoners all over Germany were completely shut off from all contacts with each other or the outside world. Politicians stated that the fate of the prisoners should depend on the results of the guerilla actions. For instance the social democratic prime minister of North Rhine Westphalia Kuhn said:

"These terrorists must know that killing Hans-Martin Schleyer should have severe repercussions for the fate of detained violent criminals, whom they wanted to free with their disgraceful actions".

Only a few days later the hostage-taking by the state of these political prisoners against outside guerilla action was legalised by the contact ban law (Kontaktsperregesetz) that forbade even lawyers to see their clients.

Immediately after the commando action in Mogadishu three prisoners, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ennslyn and Jan-Carl Raspe, were found dead in their cells. Another prisoner Ingrid Schubert died soon after. The deaths of these prisoners have not been investigated by any independent commission, and have only been explained by the authorities as a case of 'collective suicide'. Evidence for very serious doubts have again and again been ignored, suppressed or denied by the authorities and by the media alike.

In order to demand conditions which at least preserve their health and life the prisoners again went on hunger strike in the summer of 1979, and demanded the application of the Geneva Convention. This would guarantee for the prisoners some minimum of protection as prisoners of liberation movements under the Convention. They also demanded that an independent international body should be established and recognised for the monitoring and control of prison conditions and for the protection of prisoners against future attempts to liquidate them as hostages.

The Amnesty International Report

Amnesty International has now, in May 1980, released their dossier on prison conditions and conditions of isolation practised on political prisoners in the F.R.G. This important document should be studied carefully. Amnesty has finally concluded that the conditions of these prisoners are of concern to it under its commitment to oppose 'torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' of prisoners. Their research reveals that prisoners are kept in conditions that can, and do, inflict serious physical and psychological damage. Therefore Amnesty is asking for 'humane treatment' and 'normal prison conditions'.

The International Commission wishes to comment that these demands are in fact denying the real situation in which these prisoners are fighting for their justified demands. The conditions under which the authorities will allow prisoners to be moved into the 'normal conditions' which Amnesty is asking for, were made clear in a letter from the Senator of the Justice Department in Berlin to Amnesty on 6th November 1979:

"I shall be prepared to make exceptions, when any one of the prisoners has shown by his conduct that he has dissociated himself from terrorism and when he is not expected to commit such crimes again".

By asking for 'humane treatment' and 'normal prison conditions' Amnesty International is in fact taking a political stand. It neglects the demands of the prisoners and denies the situation from which these demands were developed. In this way Amnesty is running the risk of tacitly sanctioning state policy to crush the political identity of these prisoners by all possible means.

Amnesty underlined the seriousness of its conclusion on the present conditions for political prisoners in the F.R.G. by 'documenting' the suicide-inducing character of these conditions of isolation. Amnesty tries to prove this with the case of Ingrid Schubert, relying on a letter found in her cell after she died, and used by the authorities to 'prove' that she must have committed suicide because she was depressed.

However there are many remarkable facts and contradictions which Amnesty did not take into account. For example:

- Ingrid Schubert was not kept in isolation at the time, until exactly one hour before her death;
- Dr. Lange, in her official report to the director of the prison concludes 'that from a medical point of view no suicidal intentions have been observed';
- there were other letters that she wrote shortly before her death in which a vivid interest in philosophy was demonstrated, lots of books were ordered, and plans for the future revealed.

But Ingrid Schubert was not the only prisoner who died while kept in isolation. Before her, in 1976 Ulrike Meinhof was found dead in her cell. Immediately the authorities declared that she had committed suicide. An independent International Commission, the International Commission of Enquiry into the Death of Ulrike Meinhof, stated in its final report published in January 1979:

"The results of the Enquiry suggest that Ulrike Meinhof was already dead when she was hanged, and that there are disturbing indications of the intervention of a third party in relation to her death".

Amnesty International has not mentioned or considered the conclusion of the report of the Commission.

We have already stated above that in relation to the deaths of Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ennslin and Jan-Carl Raspe, the explanation of suicide has never been satisfactory. Their lawyers were supposed to have passed them the guns. In a long declaration at their trial the lawyers defended themselves against the accusations, and revealed a lot of facts to prove that the authorities deliberately planned to liquidate these prisoners, in a secret service operation which had to make it appear as if they had committed suicide out of desperation.

Amnesty has not reported on the death of these prisoners, nor considered any relevant information. Stating openly one's doubts about the official version given for these deaths, is presently prosecuted as a crime in the F.R.G. By completely neglecting this pinnacle of the repression of these prisoners, Amnesty is tacitly supporting the version presented by the state.

In its critique Amnesty goes no further than what has already been said by the authorities themselves. For instance, the Senator of Justice in Berlin has himself described the isolation wing in Celle prison as 'inhuman'.

The Situation Today

New systems of detention have already been developed. The new wing in Berlin was put into use in January 1980 when 11 political prisoners were moved there. The wing consists of 27 cells, split up into smaller units of so-called 'living areas', one of 7 cells, 4 units of 4 cells each, and 2 of 2 cells. This combination is variable by a system of movable walls designed to disappear into the floor. The whole wing is electronically supervised, with microphones in each cell and intercepting devices in each 'communication area', where association takes place. Trained personnel keep all the prisoners under constant supervision, in order to put into effect a carefully worked out programme of psychological control. We know from direct reports of prisoners who have been in these conditions for some time, that in the end result conditions have been aggravated:

"The artificiality of the surroundings and the stress of isolation are the prerequisites for creating tensions among prisoners. These tensions are noted by the controllers and increased through manipulation. Programmes of privileges and punishment are devised to fit each prisoner, noting every nuance of the prisoner's behaviour. This is an attempt to gain an influence where they have so far failed - our mind, our political identity, our will to resist, our consciousness: to destroy it all. Therefore we call it brainwashing."

The authorities are using these new isolation-wings as an alibi to the public, saying that they are not in total isolation, that they have association in groups and therefore quite a lot of freedom. Yet this 'freedom' exists under conditions of total technological control and psychological manipulation, which still pursues the same aim - the total destruction of those inside..

The International Commission

The International Commission will resist these developments, and will support the demands of the prisoners for viable groups of not less than 15 political prisoners, as independent medical experts have recommended, and for conditions according to those guaranteed by the Geneva Convention.

The perspective of the Commission is that it should be engaged on behalf of all prisoners who are part of the anti-imperialist resistance in Western Europe. It is motivated by the consciousness of its members of imperialist strategies, dominated by the U.S.A., at the present time: that is, the increasing unification of European states, with the Federal Republic of Germany as the model, with the two-fold aim: within Europe to break up and nullify every form of fundamental opposition, and in the Third World to create more effective and concerted forms of intervention.

The Commission calls now for support for the demand of an international Commission of control over the conditions of political prisoners in the Federal Republic of Germany.