

The History of Political Internment in Northern Ireland. Mass Arrests without Trial

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The story of Internment in 1970s Northern Ireland is a sore and beleaguered one, mass arrests and imprisonment without charge or trial, of citizens opposing the absence of their civil liberties and endless discrimination at the hands of the state, of allegations of brutality from state forces, ranging from the physical to the psychological, a rather familiar sight today for Palestinians at the hands of Israeli troops in the Occupied West Bank.

Cait Trainor still remembers as a child her family home being raided by British soldiers and her father being hauled off for questioning, she does not identify with a the mainstream media narrative that events in Northern Ireland are a kind of catholic emancipation exercise, instead, she sees her struggle as a republican fighting for the removal of British occupation.

She has spent the last four years working on the Martin Corey release campaign. Martin Corey was imprisoned for four years without charge or trial mirroring the internment era in Northern Ireland.

Cait recognises that like Palestine, the Northern Ireland conflict was and is often represented in the media as one of balanced diametric warfare and divide rather than one of occupation where a powerful entity disregards the rights of an oppressed people, where internment rather than recognition of rights became the course of action.

Its result, not making society more peaceful as its claimed intention, but firing the flames of tension and turning hopes of justice into an oblique mirage of endless despair, where those fighting for their rights become entrapped in a perpetual state of violence with the almighty state.

In 1973, during a time of active conflict, Corey, an Irish republican, alongside two accomplices, was involved in the ambush and murder of two RUC officers, Constable Raymond Wyle and Constable Robert Mc Cauley. Corey was handed a life sentence for his role in the killings, and served almost twenty years in prison.

He was [released on license](#) from notorious [Maze Prison](#) in June 1992, which also housed the majority of men detained during the internment years and was ill famously the place where Bobby Sands member of the British Parliament and IRA hunger striker died.

Eighteen years of freedom followed until he was imprisoned again in 2010 on the basis of secret evidence linking him to involvement in supposed dissident republican activities.No

evidence was provided for this claim leaving Corey and his legal team in the dark and unable to examine evidence and mount any kind of defense for what it is he was accused of.

When he was imprisoned it was claimed he was a leading member of the Continuity IRA having been involved with the group since 2005, although this claim was laid without making evidence available to Mr. Corey, his lawyers and the public. Cait told me

“Martin Corey has consistently denied being a member of the IRA, I believe that in order to justify to the public their incarceration of a 60+ year old man without evidence, they had to throw in these allegations so as to avoid questions, people are less willing to question arrests of this nature. His internment for 4 years without trial or charge was and remains a case of injustice and a clear cut case of a human rights abuse. The Campaign for Martin’s release has reiterated time and time again, if there is any evidence please present it, to keep someone locked up without charge or evidence is a severe infringement on a person’s civil liberties and right to life.”

The British government and the Secretary of State in Northern Ireland undertook the decision to imprison him effectively denying Mr. Corey his basic fundamental rights and his right to [due process](#). He spent four years in prison without charge or trial and was only released last month for reasons as obscure as the ones which landed him in prison in the first place.

The decision by the Parole Commissioners to set him free follows four years of legal battles which resulted in a number of unsuccessful hearings at High and Supreme Court level that without his release could have resulted in his case being taken to the European Court of Human rights.

His supposed newly found freedom is not guaranteed or protected, under British law; prisoners that are released from a life sentence are subject to a “life licence” for the rest of their lives.

I spoke to Colin Murray, Lecturer in Law and researcher on national security law from the University of Newcastle:

“This means that the UK authorities can recall such individuals to prison whenever they are considered to pose a threat to the public. In the case of Martin Corey, his recall to prison took place fully 18 years after his release in 1992, at a time of increasing threat from dissident Republicans in Northern Ireland.”

“Recall is particularly controversial as there is no need for a trial to prove any criminal wrongdoing against a released life prisoner, although in Northern Ireland the decision must be upheld by a panel of independent Parole Commissioners.”

The conditional basis of his release from prison ambiguous in that he cannot pose a risk or be deemed to be a danger to the general public which is open to a wide and variant interpretation by the governing authorities. In addition, he is not allowed to return to his native home place.

Cait highlighted the restrictive nature of his release conditions:

“Not allowing him to return to his home place is a tactic used against political dissidents during Stalinist Russia and apartheid era South Africa, the fact that he cannot speak to

the media is political censorship of the most serious kind. During Martins four years internment at no time were charges brought against him, and so to put conditions on him, with his release is an exercise in intimidation by the British Government”.

She also condemned the internment process:

“The British Government, secretary of state and all those involved in the internment of Martin Corey showed contempt for human rights and were involved in a despotic policy of ruling by decree”.

As part of his release he is not allowed to talk to the media, a denial of his right to the freedom of expression which could be challenged in the courts; it also detracts the media from finding out the facts of the case, his treatment in prison and his own personal opinions and views on his case.

Effectively he not afforded an absolute freedom outside of prison under these conditions and he will be under constant surveillance.

His solicitor, Peter Murphy, said:

“It’s like internment all over again in the sense that he hasn’t been given the chance to defend his position. In any criminal court you can meet your accuser, you have a chance to cross-examine them, and you have a chance to defend yourself because you’re given the detail of what the allegations are against you”.

Brian Gormally, Director of the Committee of Administration of Justice in Northern Ireland:

“We are not opposed to the release of life sentence prisoners on reasonable conditions and the revocation of their licence if there is clear evidence that they are a threat to the public. However, Mr Corey’s licence was revoked, and he spent four years in jail, on the basis of secret intelligence that could not be challenged by his lawyers even in the private Parole Commission hearing. This kind of secret process is unacceptable and conflicts with the right to a fair trial.

Furthermore, if reports that Mr Corey and his lawyers are prohibited from speaking to the media by the conditions of his release are correct, this would be a disproportionate restriction on the right to freedom of expression. The Parole Commission is duty bound to explain why this restriction is legal, necessary and proportionate.”

Depriving an individual of their liberty on the basis of secret intelligence that cannot be challenged in an open hearing is unjust. The European Convention of Human Rights says nobody should be detained without a proper court hearing.

Secret, closed material proceedings are not proper court proceedings and this case sets a dangerous precedent in that without adequate protections enforced anyone individual in Northern Ireland is now liable to plucked from the streets on the basis of secret evidence and interned and the state does not have to justify its actions.Cait said

“I believe the British Government have consistently made politically motivated arrests to deter dissent from their occupation and instil fear into the Irish People. Martin Corey was arrested because of his political view and nothing else, in Ireland in 2014 it proves that the British Government are intent on maintaining their grip of occupation on

Ireland through any means necessary and that any political opinion contrary to theirs will be dealt with in a despotic manner.”

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