

Transcription of original document

This was a handwritten transcription from a document in a private collection outlining the history of

The Women Prisoners' Defence League

The Women Prisoners' Defence League was started in August 1922, informally outside the gates of Mountjoy Jail, Dublin, by the mothers, wives and sisters of Republican Prisoners. Outside the gaol gates were crowds of women endeavouring to obtain news of their missing sons, husbands and daughters, or to bring food and clothing to those whose location they had discovered. No visits were allowed, no information supplied. One woman was shot through the leg while trying to get news of her husband outside Wellington Barracks [Griffith Barracks/Griffith College]. One young lad was killed outside Mountjoy Jail, while accompanying a woman who was seeking news of her son. Terrifying stories, but too tragically confirmed later, of the beating and torture of prisoners for information, circulated. The constant sound of firing in the jails and wounding of prisoners made the need of a Prisoners' Defence League obvious and urgent. The League was formally confirmed and a committee appointed of which Mrs Despard was president and Maud Gonne MacBride secretary at a mass meeting of women in the Round Room of the Mansion House.

Its objectives and efforts

Its objectives – to obtain the release of Republican Prisoners and pending release, prisoner of war treatment, and help to families to get news of their relatives in jails. In furtherance of these objectives the League held weekly meetings in the war ruins of O'Connell Street, where all prison news was pooled and given out. It organised meeting in other places and poster parades, street painting etc. It sent deputations to the Dublin Corporation and to the Red Cross. It obtained the setting up of a sworn inquiry by the Lord Mayor, into the treatment of Republican Prisoners, the enquiry was banned by the Irish Free State Government on the third day of its sittings. On the closing of the internment camps and the release of most of the prisoners who were ill; some from the effects of hunger strike; more from ill-treatment in the Glass House and other prisons. These had to be got into hospitals and, in conjunction with the released prisoners committee, the League worked indefatigably, taking up the meetings of trains, visiting hospitals and billeting. The work was hardly over when, from all parts of the country, Republican prisoners were re-arrested as they left the Internment Camps and were sent to Dublin for trial.

Need for Publicity

Then the League organised a service for watching the courts and provision of food to Political Prisoners in the Bridewell. No proper provision is made for feeding prisoners in the

Bridewell and those sent from the country who have no relatives to look after them in Dublin, and no money to buy food, single great hardships. The League also looks after the provision of parcels to political prisoners on remand and see to the laundry of their clothes. The necessity for publicity is now greater than ever, to ensure that none of the remaining Irish prisoners shall be forgotten and the League continues to publish lists and leaflets concerning to the bad conditions prevailing in Free State jails. All the work of the League is voluntary.

Appeal for Funds

As money is badly needed for parcels to remand prisoners, for supplying meals at the Bridewell, for helping friends to visit prisoners, and for the publication of the facts about prison conditions which the Daily Press, under British control refuses to do, we ask you to contribute to the Funds of the League, in order that it may continue to do its good work.

All subscriptions may be forwarded to Mrs Despard or Madame MacBride, Roebuck House, Clonskeagh, Dublin.

This document copied in 1990s was found in 47 Parnell Square sometime in the 1970s.