

Women in Prison

Supporting and
campaigning for
women affected
by the criminal
justice system

The Women In Prison Manifesto

[This is the original manifesto of Women in Prison, taken from the book *Criminal Women* (Pat Carlen, 1985).]

Why Women In Prison?

During the last decade the number of British women prisoners has increased by 65 per cent. The average daily population of women in British prisons in 1981 were 1,407 in England and Wales and 135 in Scotland. In 1980 the average daily population of women in Prison in Northern Ireland was 69. As prisoners, women suffer the same deprivations, indignities and violations of civil rights as male prisoners. Additionally as women in prison the suffer from sexist and racist discriminatory practices which result, for instance, in them receiving fewer leisure, work and educational opportunities, closer surveillance and much greater control by drugs than male prisoners. Yet women prisoners have been largely ignored by prison campaigners, prison writers and officials in the penal and judicial systems. Women In Prison therefore seeks to unite women of all classes, ethnic background and sexual orientation in a campaign which whilst highlighting, and attempting to redress, the injustices presently suffered by Britain's hitherto neglected women prisoners, will also contribute to the wider campaigns for democratic control of the criminal justice and penal systems.

Women In Prison – campaigning for WOMEN PRISONERS – demands:

1. Improved safety conditions, particularly in Holloway Prison where women have been burned to death in their cells.
2. The introduction of a range of facilities (e.g more visits, including family and conjugal visits in relaxed surroundings, more association with other prisoners, fewer petty rules) aimed both at reducing tension and, subsequently, the number of drugs prescribed for behaviour and mood control rather than the benefit of prisoners.
3. Improved, non-discriminatory and non-paternalistic education, job-related training, leisure and work facilities.
4. Improved training and supervision of prison officers, aimed at reducing their present discriminatory practices against women from ethnic minorities and lesbian, disabled or mentally or emotionally disturbed women.
5. A mandatory and non-discriminatory income entitlement to meet the basic needs of women prisoners.
6. Improvement of the existing child care facilities in prisons together with the introduction of a whole new range of child-care facilities for mothers receiving a custodial sentence (e.g. new centres specially for mothers and children; contacts with local nurseries and parent's groups).

7. Improved medical facilities in general and specialized facilities for women during pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation.
8. Dismantling of the punitive disciplinary structure coupled with the development of official recognition of prisoner participation in the organization of the prison.
9. Non-discriminatory sentencing of women.
10. Unrestricted access to the Boards of Visitors for representatives from women's organizations, community, ethnic minority and other minority (e.g. Lesbian) organizations.

Women In Prison – campaigning for ALL PRISONERS – demands:

1. Democratic control of the criminal justice and penal systems with: suspension of Official Secrets Act restrictions on the availability of information about prisons; public accountability of the Home Office Prison Department for its administration of the prisons; public inquiries replacing Home Office internal inquiries into the deaths of prisoners, injuries and complaints in general together with Legal Aid to enable prisoners' families to be represented at any such inquiry.
2. Reduction in the length of prison sentences.
3. Replacement of the parole system with the introduction of half-remission on all sentences. Access to a sentence-review panel after serving seven years of a life sentence.
4. Increased funding for non-custodial alternatives to prisons (e.g. Community service facilities, sheltered housing, alcohol recovery units) together with greater use of the existing sentences alternatives (e.g. Deferred sentence, community service order, probation with a condition of psychiatric treatment etc.), with the aim of removing from prisons all who are there primarily because of drunkenness, drug dependency, mental, emotional or sexual problems, homelessness or inability to pay a fine.
5. Abolition of the censorship of prisoners' mail.
6. Abolition of the Prison Medical Service and its replacement by normal National Health Service provision coupled with abolition of the present system whereby prison officers vet, and have the power to refuse, prisoners' requests to see a doctor.
7. Provision of a law library in prisons so that prisoners may have access to information about their legal rights in relation to DHSS entitlement, employment, housing, marriage and divorce, child-custody, court proceedings, debt, prison rules etc.
8. Improved living and sanitary conditions together with a mandatory income entitlement to meet basic needs.
9. Non-discretionary rights to call witnesses and to full legal representation of prisoners at Visiting (internal) Court proceedings together with the abolition of the charge of 'making false and malicious allegations against an officer.'
10. A review of the existing methods of the recruitment and training of prison discipline staff.