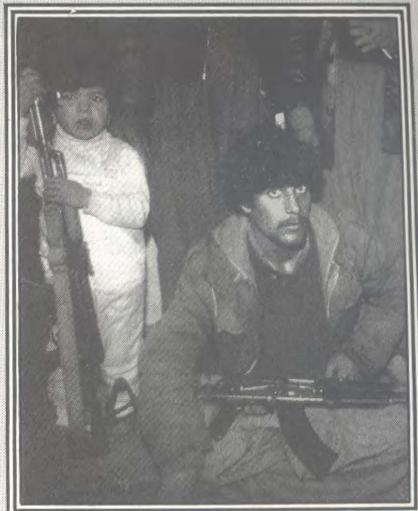


CLASS STRUGGLE

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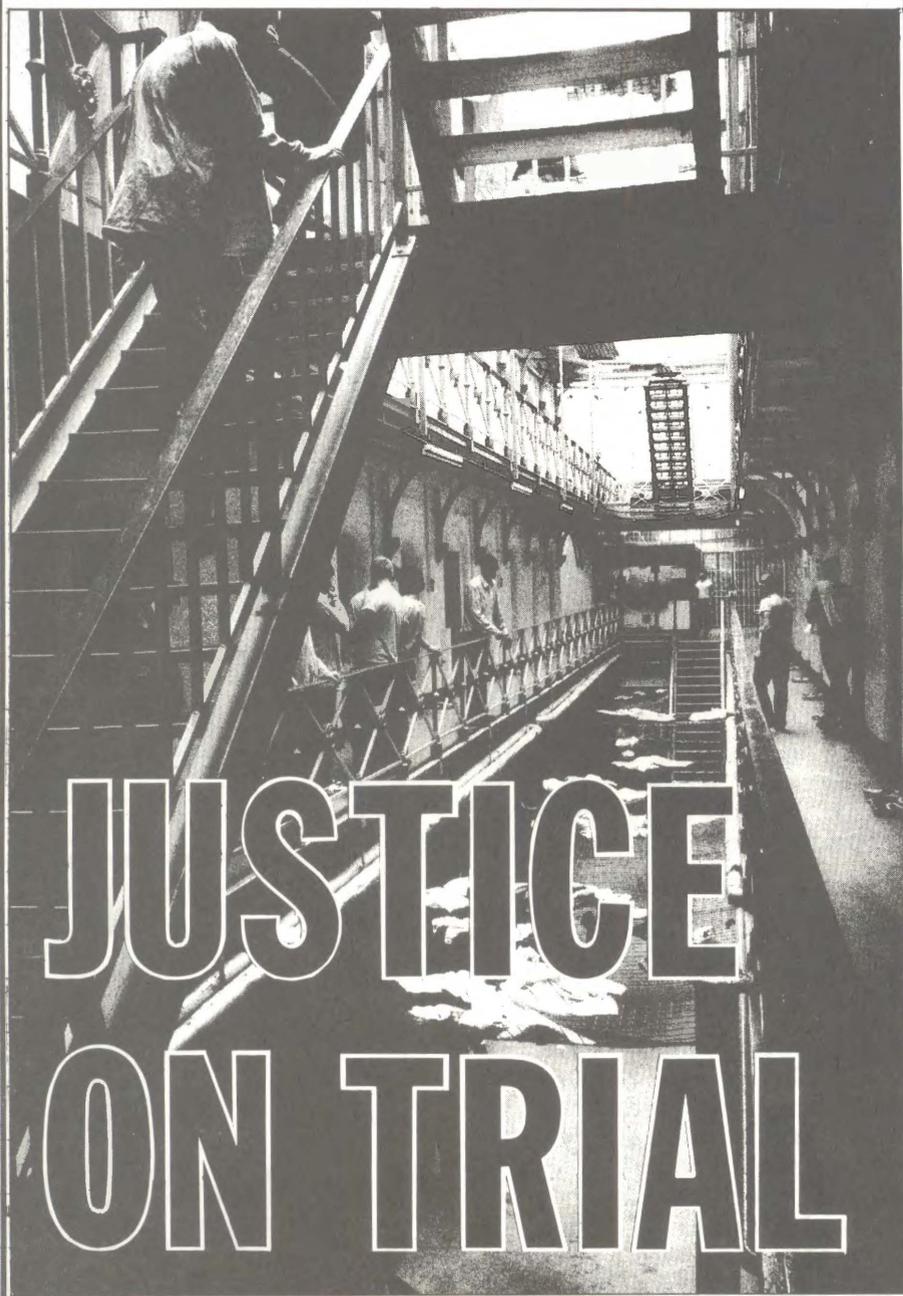


FREE, INDEPENDENT
& UNITED – VOICE
OF KURDISTAN

INSIDE

Rebellions
with good
causes –
youth rise up

What's in a
name –
understanding
patriarchy



JUSTICE ON TRIAL

THE HOSTAGES HELD BEHIND BRITISH BARS

PRISONERS OF BRITISH INJUSTICE

At the end of September, President Bush announced massive unilateral arms cuts to American stocks. Bush said that the USA would destroy all its ground-launched, short-range nuclear weapons. He also pledged to remove cruise missiles from ships and submarines. He offered to open talks with the Soviet Union on the elimination of all long-range missiles with multiple warheads.

NATO unsurprisingly welcomed the cuts. Tom King, the Defence Secretary in Major's government, said that Britain would scrap its short-range battlefield nuclear weapons and will cease to carry nuclear depth bombs aboard navy ships. The multi-million plans to replace Polaris with Trident remain, as do plans to develop an air-launched missile to replace the WE-177 nuclear bomb.

While we welcome any moves towards nuclear disarmament, Bush's announcement was not the great step forward to world peace it was build up to be.

Firstly, the USA can get rid of all the short-range nuclear weapons without diminishing its capability to destroy the world with nuclear weapons, many times over. One paper reported: "Experts have agreed for some time that the short-range weapons are militarily useless." US spokesmen made it clear that the short-range weapons were considered "surplus to requirements".

Secondly, the US economy is in crisis and needs defence cuts badly. Spending on the MX missile and Midgetman projects have already been cut. Spending on "Star Wars" and the B2 project have not been cut. The cuts are at least partly aimed at the coming US election, in particular cutting the ground from the Democrats.

Thirdly, the USA is concerned about who controls the short-range nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union. The USA aims to persuade the Soviet Union to scrap them before they fall into "the wrong hands".

Fourthly, most importantly, the USA no longer sees the Soviet Union as the major threat. The war against Iraq showed that nuclear weapons are not necessary in putting down future challenges to US domination. The USA has made it clear that it this kind of "regional conflict" that it sees as the main threat in the future. Funds will still be available for the development of "conventional" weapons.

POLITICAL
PAPER OF THE
REVOLUTIONARY
COMMUNIST
LEAGUE

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Meadow Well Versus The System



Outside the burnt out community centre on Meadow Well estate. It was the death of two 'joy-riders' in a police chase that sparked off the fighting.

Were they riots or uprisings of the most downtrodden people in some of the most socially deprived parts of Britain? Or were they the work of a few outsiders bent on causing trouble or the activities of a few hardened criminals?

Certainly, the recent events in the North East in Newcastle's West End and Elswick, and at the nearby Meadow Well estate in North Shields, soon attracted a lot of media attention, as journalists flocked to the area.

Suddenly the problems of the area were being discussed at great length on the TV. Columns were written in the papers, often by people who did not know (or maybe did not want to know) that the problems had been there for years. Neither did they seem to understand that the same problems are found on similar estates in almost every town and city throughout the country. Or that these problems have been getting steadily worse over many years.

VICTORIAN VALUES

Many explanations were given for what happened. In broad terms, they could be put into one of two camps. On the one hand, there was the expected response from the authorities. Major blamed it on hoodlums, saying there was no excuse for such behaviour. Kinnock called on the police to pursue the ringleaders. A local vicar blamed it all on the wickedness within the hearts of his parishioners and the

local MP said it was due to hardened professional criminals of a very nasty nature. Lord Griffiths, new Chairman of the Schools Examination and Assessment Council, and former policy adviser to Thatcher, blamed the riots on the neglect by some schools of leadership and character building qualities.

He wanted a return to Victorian values and moral background.

POOR ESTATES

On the other side, there were many who sought in different ways to link the events in the North East with the poverty and deprivation of those involved.

It used to be common to talk of the North-South divide within England. But in many respects this is insufficient. In many parts of the south, there are growing areas of 1990's style poverty while in the north many enjoy high living standards. This is an example of the tremendous polarisation that has been going on over the last few years.

The process of the restructuring of the British economy, accelerated by government policies, has led to many becoming richer and richer from tax cuts, privatisation and share handouts, stock market dealings etc.

GROWING DIVIDE

There has been a sharp growing divide between the employed and the unemployed; between those who have been able to hold onto steady and reasonably paid jobs and those who have been forced into living off state benefits, or who are little better off working for pittance wages.

Places such as Meadow Well estate in North Shields are typical of where many people in this situation find themselves. In parts of the area unemployment is over 89%. Children there are brought up in an environment where they have little prospect of a job, and in homes where their parents may not have had a proper job for years. Such children and young people are typical of hundreds of thousands of others who live

in Britain today. Schools, healthcare and local facilities are bad or non-existent.

Anyone who tries to ignore the impact of these conditions on those who are brought up in them, must surely be a fool.

There were, of course, many working class people on Meadow Well who criticised the young people for what they did. "We were poorer in the past. But we never went to this extent" is a common comment. Two responses can be made to that view. If there had been more

active and organised protest in the past when things were bad, perhaps the course of history would have been changed for the better. Also, the wealth and the luxuries that capitalism can produce for a few are daily displayed before those who cannot have them. Billboard hoardings and TV adverts show big houses, fast cars, expensive jewellery and fashionable clothes, and encourage people to want them, even when they do not have enough to buy the basics. Is it surprising that many young people are not prepared to meekly accept that such goodies are not for them?

'Joy-riding' around estates in a stolen car at high speed can only be described as anti-social. Similarly, burglary and petty theft often damage most the people in their own communities.

But when the young people take on the police, they are turning their anger against a system which has little to offer them. Fine-sounding phrases like a property-owning democracy do not hide the reality of class exploitation. The recent events were an expression of working class rebellion against this system. They have much in common with the street demonstrations and fights in Eastern Europe that have so often been acclaimed by the media here.

Justice For All!



Sharon Raghip pictured above with her son, Don.

On 16th September, a well-attended public meeting organised by Liberty (formerly NCCL) heard Paddy Hill (Birmingham Six), Sharon Raghip (Tottenham Three) and Ann Whelan (Bridgewater Four) expose the true workings of the British "justice" system.

The meeting was part of a national speaking tour by the 'Justice For All' campaign.

Although the three speakers talked about specific cases in which they or relatives were victims of miscarriages of justice, several themes were common. All three were quick to point out that although their cases had received media attention, there were hundreds of other innocent victims in prison. They are campaigning for all who have been wrongly imprisoned by a so-called justice system.

Whether it is in the case of political cases such as the Birmingham Six and the Tottenham Three, or criminal cases such as the Bridgewater Four (murder of newspaper boy, Carl Bridgewater), media hysteria put great pressure on the police to get someone arrested. Media coverage convicts innocent people in advance of the trial.

Lack of evidence, sloppy investigations, disregard of evidence etc. do not stop the police from going for a conviction. A few days of being held in a police cell

and being subject to intense interrogation is too much for most people. After such treatment, they will confess to anything, even if they are totally innocent. Threats to their families by the police put extra pressure on defendants.

Juries are at a disadvantage. They can only make a decision on what is put before them. They are not experts in law and can be influenced by judges.

It was clear from what the speakers said that the appeal system is no safeguard against wrongful conviction. Defendants need to find new evidence before an appeal will even be considered. The Appeal Court only looks at part of the case. The process is long and drawn out.

CLASS JUSTICE

A clear problem is the class nature of the judges. They have no idea about the reality of ordinary people's lives. They cannot believe that the police can lie. They are not interested in justice. They are more concerned with protecting the system from criticism. Appeal courts are critical of anyone who criticises or challenges the system.

All the speakers pointed out that they recognised a need for a police force and that there were guilty people who

should be in jail. Equally, they stressed that police involved in framing innocent people should be brought to account. In their experience, both police and judges involved in such cases, far from being brought to account, were usually promoted.

SERIOUS CRIMES

How the police can systematically break the law was explained by Tim Kaye, author of 'Unsafe and Unsatisfactory', an independent report on the now disbanded West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad. In a review of 67 cases between 1979 and 1989, several patterns emerged.

Whoever was taken by them to the police station was systematically denied access to legal advice. Legal representation was only allowed when the police had got the confession they wanted. With a lawyer there, the police stopped their interrogation.

Statements were made up, all in the same Brummie dialect, irrespective of the sex or nationality of the defendant. They all contained the same dialect phrases.

Sweating, being agitated or stomach rumbling were taken as signs to look for indicating guilt. It was ignored that these were signs that anyone, however innocent, would show after endless hours of interrogation.

Once they thought that you were guilty, they would do anything to "prove" it.

They were an elite squad that did not bother to investigate crimes properly. They were warned about being disbanded because their success rate was dropping.

They went after previous offenders and if they could not get a confession out of them, they would try and fit up anyone. They used "supergrasses" who were prepared to frame anyone to get themselves off the hook.

DEMANDS

Mr Kaye called for an independent body to investigate the police. The current system of the police investigating the police was flawed. The new body should not only investigate individual cases but have the powers to make wider reviews.

The 'Justice for All' campaign has two demands:

An immediate end to conviction based solely on confessions.

A standing judicial inquiry to look at cases where there is serious doubt as to the safety of the conviction.

Sooner or later there will be a general election.

Traditionally, the 'left' has either called for a vote for Labour, as the lesser of two evils, or has argued that a vote for any party is irrelevant to the needs of the people.

Clearly, all three major parties - Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat - put forward policies to make the existing system work better. All argue that this is the only way to improve the lot of ordinary people. This is, of course, false. The system is based on the exploitation and oppression of the vast majority of the people, both at home and abroad. To survive and prosper, the system must do so at the expense of the people.

The reality is, however, that the majority of the people have illusions in the system and will vote in the next general election. What should we be advising them to do?

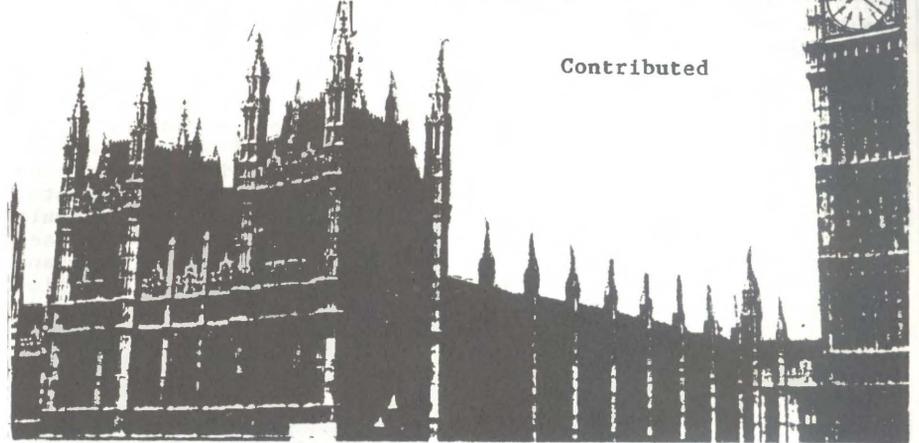
Although there are aspects of Labour's policies that are preferable to what is likely to be on offer from the Tories, they do not advocate any fundamental reforms that are in the long-term interests of the people. All they offer is more or less of the same that they have put forward before.

EXTENDING DEMOCRACY

Whereas, in many ways, the Liberal Democrats are a more overt capitalist party than the Labour party, there is one area in which they are advocating fundamental reform, albeit in order to enhance their own chance of being elected.

GREATER DEMOCRACY?

Contributed



In terms of extending formal democracy, the Liberal Democrat policy can be considered progressive. They call for proportional representation in elections and separate assemblies for Scotland and Wales.

The current electoral system is blatantly undemocratic. A party can gain a big parliamentary majority whilst at the same time only receiving a minority of the total votes cast. In fact, the total votes cast for the other parties can be much larger than the party winning the parliamentary majority. This can in no way express the will of the people.

Proportional representation would give the people the

chance to test the question: If the election were more representative, would we get a fairer system?

NATIONAL RIGHTS

Although separate assemblies for Scotland and Wales would fall far short of giving the peoples of those nations the national democratic right to run their own affairs, it is a step in the right direction. Once again, it would be a test of how far formal democracy in Britain is real democracy.

On balance, given that people will take part in the next general election, there is a case for saying to them that they should vote Liberal Democrat with a view to extending formal democracy.

Scottish Nationalist Challenge

On Wednesday, 18th September, the Scottish National Party (SNP) launched its annual conference with two slogans: 'Change now for a Better Life' and 'Scotland Free in 93'.

With the polls currently giving the SNP 19% of the vote in Scotland, the SNP looks as though it is preparing to make a strong challenge to Labour, in the run-up to the next election.

The SNP has two main themes on which it is campaigning. It poses a challenge to both Labour and Tory with its platform for independence for Scotland within the framework of the EEC. The resources of Scotland, such as oil and the land, have long been appropriated by the English government or private capitalists from England and

other countries. But the question of national independence within Europe has a high profile now. What is practical for the Baltic countries can also be seen as practical for Scotland.

Margaret Ewing, one of the five current SNP MP's, said: "The Kremlin and Westminster had a lot in common, although the latter is probably now the arch proponent in the world of Big Brotherism - making the Kremlin seem like a new version of Amnesty International... I am angry that Scotland is relegated to be an eavesdropper on the councils of the world..."

Combined with its call for independence, the SNP has also posed a more radical challenge than the Labour Party. In recent years, this was

probably posed most strongly in the anti-poll tax campaign in which the SNP took a strong 'Don't Pay' line. Now party leader, Alex Salmond and ex-Labour members such as Jim Sellars, are accusing Labour of having sold out on any of the principles they once held. In particular, they are calling for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

To round off their conference, the SNP announced cabinet appointments to act as a government in waiting.

Whereas a truly independent Scottish government is not likely to be on the agenda for some time, there is no doubt that Scottish nationalism is a force to be treated seriously and one that will mobilise increasing numbers of people in that country.

Understanding Patriarchy

What is meant by 'patriarchy'? Why do women emphasise the importance of domestic labour? Is women's sexual oppression the basis and key link to their wider oppression? Should the fight against pornography involve a legal ban?

These are just some of the questions raised and discussed at meetings on women's oppression held by the League over this summer. The discussions were based on our draft line on women's oppression and enabled members to strengthen this by voicing their own experiences as well as deepening their understanding by further discussion.



Chilean women demonstrate against army brutality.

MALE DOMINATION

The term 'patriarchy' has been widely used in the women's movement. But we were unsure of its precise meaning. Two possible definitions were suggested. In the strict anthropological sense, societies are described as patriarchal, matriarchal, matrilineal, etc. However, this is a specialist use. To use the term in a more general way, it can be seen as a description of how society is set up so that women will almost automatically suffer oppression and exploitation in all aspects of their lives. One definition was offered as follows: "Patriarchy is the institution of social

hierarchies based on gender roles where men occupy dominant positions, both through unconscious socialisation and deliberate collusion." Whatever structures arise in society, they will be influenced by male domination.

One example in action is the trade union movement. The experience of most women of trade unions is that they do not serve their interests. Meetings are held at difficult times. They are organised with an intimidating and obscure formality. Part-time workers are often ignored. Women's issues are not taken seriously. Most officials are men. These issues are a

reflection of the fact that trade unions are a product of a male-dominated society and they grew up in defence of a male-dominated system. Historically, the unions only reflected women's interests when they were women-only unions in the early part of this century, and in this way challenged patriarchal influences. More recently, there are examples of unions changing their practices as a result of women consciously struggling against male domination.

Thus, patriarchy means that even progressive structures and organisations will be male-dominated and oppress women within themselves,

unless an ongoing and conscious battle is waged against this. The meeting discussed how women in the League experienced this and how it could be changed.



SEXUAL OPPRESSION

The discussion on this question raised many important points. It was acknowledged that many women see their sexual oppression as fundamental to other aspects of their oppression. By being denied their natural sexuality, women are denied part of their very being, their humanity and much of their strength. The violence and ideology which maintains their subjugation is largely expressed as men sexually abusing women in both individual and profit-making ways. In early societies, it was women's loss of control over reproduction that marked the beginnings of their violent oppression in all spheres.

The importance of gender roles was also discussed, and that a secondary aspect of women's sexual oppression is the effect gender roles have on men. Further study on women's sexual oppression, started in the last issue of 'October', is obviously something that we need to follow up in the coming period.

The meetings will help the League to strengthen its line on women's oppression, as part of our work in producing a programmatic document in the near future and in encouraging all members to combat women's oppression wherever we meet it.

Whilst we acknowledge that our small size limits our knowledge and practical involvement, we recognise that an understanding of the world that encompasses the three main areas of oppression - class, women and nation - is the only way forward to a revolution which will qualitatively transform society into a new system.

Mandy's Diary



Fay Bland, Carnival Queen and bricklayer.

Sept 3rd: We had a lovely holiday last month. Two weeks by the seaside in a little place called Seaton in Devon. So you can imagine my surprise when I opened the paper today and saw "Miss Seaton's" picture in it. But that is not all. Not only is the carnival queen a bricklayer, she is also a bodybuilder and a motorbike enthusiast.

Sept 10th: Some councils are starting to provide play facilities for children after school and during the school holidays so that their parents can go out to work.

Haringey Play Service, for example, offers "after school clubs" for children living in the borough aged five to eleven at £1.80 per session. They arrange to collect the children from school, give them a snack and let them play until their parents collect them.

London Housing Unit has issued a new guide to help housing organisations respond to cases of sexual harassment. The chairperson, Margaret Meran, said: "Harassment, either at home or work, causes untold misery to thousands of women and has been treated as a bit of a joke for too long. This publication, 'Cutting it out - Sexual Harassment' gives some concrete examples of what we

can do about it."

Sept 12th: A fashion designer who was sacked while on maternity leave won a claim for unfair dismissal yesterday. She accepted £4,000 compensation, but when asked if she would return to the firm, she said: "Not likely."

In her first month of maternity leave, she had received a redundancy notice without warning.

"They got rid of me because I was on maternity leave," she said. "If I had still been working, they wouldn't have done it."

The fact that she was replaced by a man proved her point.

Sept.13th: A nightclub has opened in Birmingham for women only. It's a place where women can go just to have fun and not have to worry about fighting off the attentions of unwanted men. So far it seems very successful and all kinds of women arrived on the first night including teenagers, punks with orange hair and middle-aged married women. Lesbians are welcome but the club is not exclusively for lesbians.

Sept 15th: There has been a lot of talk about breast cancer this week, following a statement by Sir Donald Acheson, the government's retiring Chief Medical Officer, that self-examination is not effective in detecting it. This may well be true. But it does not follow that women should therefore stop examining their breasts. For one thing, regular screening is only available to women aged 50 to 65, although mammography (breast X-ray) on demand is available to all women. But how are women to know whether or not they need it, unless they are aware of the signs?

Breast cancer is the second biggest killer of women in this country, after heart disease. It affects one woman in twelve and kills on average 15,000 women a year. It is therefore important that women are on the look-out for signs of it. In fact, nine out of ten of the lumps women find turn out to be harmless.

Doctors have made huge advances in the treatment of breast cancer recently, and expect to save the lives of

100,000 women across Europe in the next five years. There has been a fundamental shift away from surgery towards chemotherapy and other drugs.

A contraceptive pill which prevents breast cancer is being developed and could be available within two years. This is good news for women under fifty who are not eligible for regular screening.

Sept 16th: The number of pensioners with incomes below half the national average trebled between 1979 and 1988.

In 1979, 18% of married pensioners had incomes below half the national average. In 1988, it was 34%.

For single pensioners, the figure rose from 9% to 43% in the same years.

One of the reasons for this is that the value of the state retirement pension has been eroded.

Sept 17th: According to a recent Public Attitudes survey, 80% of women still expect men to open doors for them, and 82% of men still think they should. Well, I don't know where all these men are hiding, because I haven't seen a man specifically open a door for a woman unless he was going through it himself, for at least ten years. I think it is common courtesy when walking through a doorway, to hold the door open for someone coming along behind you, whatever the sex of that person. It is also helpful to open a door for someone who is carrying heavy bags or a baby, or pushing a pram or pushchair, and this person is more likely to be a woman. The custom apparently originated because, due to the prevalence of dry rot, doors once tended to fall off their hinges and land on the head of the opener. All the more reason why the sort of men I meet are more likely to leave the job to me! But where there isn't any danger, opening a door for someone does imply that you think them incapable of doing it for themselves.

Sept 18th: At long last the Magic Circle has now voted to admit women magicians. When it was formed in 1905, its earliest members included women. The men-only clause was introduced in 1911.

KURDISTAN AND



Spontaneous uprisings followed the Iraqi army's chaotic retreat from Kuwait. First in the south of Iraq, where Shia Arabs rose up against the hated Saddam regime. Then the Kurds in the north seized their opportunity. The imperialist war had been transformed into a revolutionary war against Baghdad.

Although bloody and damaging, the uprisings did not prove fatal to the Iraqi regime: firstly, because the main armoured formations of the Republican Guard were allowed to escape unscathed and, secondly, neither Bush nor Major was prepared to countenance the overthrow of Saddam by the Kurds, and certainly not the Shias.

Imperialist policy favoured the replacement of Saddam by a general who would hold Iraq together but pursue a less belligerent foreign policy. Anything else would have been vigorously opposed by the Turkish and Saudi regimes, not to mention NATO. So while Shia workers and peasants died in their thousands, George Bush contented himself with playing golf.

Having secured the south, Saddam turned his armour and artillery on the Kurds. As their resistance crumbled, and recalling the massacres of 1988-89, the Kurdish people abandoned their homes and headed for the mountains. Here again Bush was exposed. Instead of arming the Kurds with heavy weapons, opening the frontiers and organising a massive operation to give food and medical aid, the imperialists turned their backs on the Kurdish people. They shut Turkey's borders and used their military power to create a Kurdish version of the West Bank. They called it a 'safe haven', but it did little to allay the fears of the Kurds and even less to intimidate Saddam. As a result the Kurds now live in a limbo-land of speculation and insecurity, facing the prospect of sudden attack and constant surveillance.

Independence - not autonomy

Kurdish Solidarity Committee

The end of the Cold War has seen powerful nationalist movements emerge throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR. But the most powerful and eloquent manifestation of this universal trend towards the creation of new independent states and the unshakeable will of a people to defend their culture and identity must surely be the spontaneous uprising and subsequent exodus of the Kurds of Southern Kurdistan in March to April 1991.

Brutally oppressed and cynically betrayed for seventy years, the Kurds have bewildered the imperialists and alerted the whole world to the awesome fate which awaits them under Baathist rule. As one US government official put it: "Some of our war-end scenarios predicted civil unrest... but none of the policy papers or briefing papers suggested that the whole of Northern Iraq would rise up and move out." (Sunday Times, 21.9.91)

Despite the terrible suffering and tragic loss of life experienced by the Kurds in this historic trek, their cause remains invincible. They have lost another battle but they have not lost the war.

PEOPLE'S WAR

More important, this defeat, unlike the previous defeat of 1974 and the gassing of Kurds in 1988, takes place in the context of an ongoing guerrilla war in Turkey embracing a majority of Kurds and involving in its leadership for the first time, the Kurdish working class in Turkey.

This struggle which began as a sporadic guerrilla war led by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and ERNK (Kurdistan National Liberation Front) in the remote areas of Northern Kurdistan and was characteristically dismissed by Turkish and Western media, has now, after six years of intense resistance and brutal and sadistic repression by the Turkish authorities, grown into a protracted people's war

THE GULF WAR

affecting nine out of eleven Kurdish provinces.

In March 1990, the long-suffering Kurdish people whose culture, language and national rights had been systematically suppressed and abused, finally threw in its customary fear and caution to the wind. They demonstrated in town after town, defying the bullets and rifle butts of Turkish troops and police. Since then the demonstrations have gathered strength while hundreds of Kurdish youth have gone off to the hills to join the ARGK (the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan). Kurdish nationalism, in short, has witnessed a rebirth unprecedented in scope and intensity.

AN INDEPENDENT STATE

Throughout its history the goal of the Kurdish people has been the creation of an independent Kurdish state. But faced with yet another catastrophe, many people are urging more "realistic" ambitions:

"Clearly the much romanticised dream of a United Republic of Kurdistan, combining the territories presently shared among the five countries of the region is not an attainable option and has to be shelved, at least for the time being. The Kurds have a just cause and they will not help it by asking five sovereign states to voluntarily give up substantial chunks of their territories. The military option is also not viable....The military muscle of the Kurds, even if united, could not withstand any military onslaught by the central governments.

"Besides, the fact is that decades of systematic Turkification, Arabisation and Persianisation have taken their toll and changed the character of the Kurdish nation as a whole. It is doubtful whether one can talk any more of a Kurdish nation ...

"A recognition of the Kurds as a nation, albeit without a country, with sensible cultural and political autonomy, each integrated into federated political systems, would be the key to any just, lasting peace settlement..." (Mohammed Malik, New Left Review, 1989)

The Kurdish Workers Party takes quite a different view to the current situation,



arguing that to accept autonomy would entail greater disasters in the future:

"As long as we do not smash the slave states and artificial borders imposed on us, then it is inevitable that we will have the sort of genocide that no person or people would tolerate. Like every nation in the world, the Kurdish nation has the right to live on its own land, in a free, democratic and independent country."

Far from being the "key to a

"Let us change the 'safe haven' into a zone of resistance"

Kurdistan Workers Party

As a people our history is full of misery and massacres. Today, we are suffering another genocide and our people in Southern Kurdistan, whose uprising has been crushed, have once again been made refugees in their own country. The USA approved Saddam's murderous offensive because the defeat of the popular Kurdish movement is in their own interests. They now have the impudence to play the role of 'rescuer and protector' of our people with their policy of 'safe havens'.

The colonialist Turkish state welcomes this policy and the presence of US and European military forces in the area. Turgut Ozal, the Turkish leader, has repeatedly expressed the opinion that the uprising of the Kurdish people under the leadership of the PKK was a threat, not only to his government, but to all western imperialist interests.

We should therefore ask what end the 'safe haven' will serve.

It is clear that the civilians

will be cooped up in wire-fenced camps as in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. They will be held as prisoners cut off from a productive existence and will eventually be ruined.

It will be a refuge of hopelessness and despair. Their aim is to create a community completely dependent on outside material assistance, even for the most basic necessities of life.

It is to prevent them getting organised and being kept under daily military control. It is to make them act against their own interests. In this tiny protectorate, the well-fed tribal leaders and their collaborators will create a 'buffer zone' which will divide north and south Kurdistan.

Their aim is the liquidation of the continually intensifying armed popular resistance and in a wider sense the destruction of the modern leadership of the Kurdish people and the national liberation struggle throughout Kurdistan.

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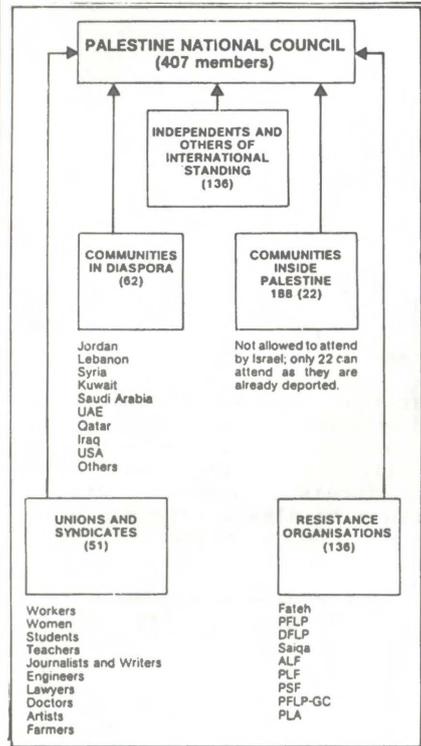
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What Peace Conference?

As 'Class Struggle' goes to press, the Palestine National Council (PNC), Palestine's parliament which decides PLO policy, is still in session. This PNC had a specific job to do: to produce a policy towards the proposed Middle East peace conference which would have the broadest possible Palestinian support.



not be represented at the conference, that Palestinian representation should be confined to participation within a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, whose Palestinian members should be approved by Israel, and that the talks will not lead to the creation of a Palestinian state. This was in spite of an opinion poll conducted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in September that revealed that 95% of Palestinians were not prepared to accept any settlement which did not give them an independent state.

DEBATE

Prior to the peace conference, there was widespread debate among Palestinians about what attitude they should take towards the conference. A large minority, including supporters of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestinian Communist Party, one faction of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a section of Fatah and the Islamic fundamentalist group, Hamas, were opposed to any participation in this American-inspired "peace process".

A tiny minority argued that the PLO was in a weak position, and that the Palestinians had to take part in the conference on the terms they were being offered or get left stranded. A slight majority favoured setting out terms for Palestinian participation and arguing over them, but avoiding being put in the position of taking the blame for any failure to reach a peace settlement. Backed by the majority of Fatah, the largest PLO grouping, as well as the other faction of the DFLP, this is the position which looked most likely to prevail at the PNC, in essence.

There can be no real prospect of peace without the implementation of the Palestinians' national right to self-determination constituting the core of any settlement. The Palestine/Israel conflict is rooted in the denial of that right by Britain, the USA and Zionism, and must be resolved through the Palestinians' national aspirations being met.

In theory, the peace conference should convene in October, although the continuing differences over fundamental issues between Israel and its eastern Arab neighbours placed a question mark over whether, even if a first session took place, anything would come out of it. After all, the crucial issue for Syria is the recovery of the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in 1967, while Israel is adamant that it will not give up any of the territory which it now holds. Israel has nothing to offer Jordan, which says that the West Bank should be part of an independent Palestinian state, and that it has no claim over that territory. Still, the Palestinians needed to act upon the assumption that something would happen, and that was why the latest PNC meeting was convened at the end of September.

The Palestinian objections to the proposed conference are clear. Israel and the USA have agreed that the PLO will

Melville Fletcher: lifelong anti-imperialist & communist

As we go to press, we have heard of the death, at the end of September, of Melville Fletcher, lifelong activist in anti-imperialist and communist politics.

As a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP), in the late 1950's Melville was active in union work, particularly in the textile industry. He was, for a time, held as a political prisoner.

During the struggles in the international communist movement in the early 1960's, Melville belonged to the small group of anti-revisionists who broke with the SACP. Over the years, his criticisms of the SACP became more intense. Initially, he had been highly critical too of the Pan-Africanist Congress, seeing it as a purely nationalist and anti-communist organisation. But he came to see the justice of many of their criticisms of the SACP and recognised that the SACP had a strong streak of racism in it and that the African people had to be their own liberators.

Melville became a political exile from South Africa. Once in Britain, he participated in the Marxist-Leninist movement. He joined the Communist Workers' Movement in 1977 and became a member of the Revolutionary Communist League when the two organisations merged. He was a member of the industrial sub-committee of the RCL for several years.

During a troubled period in the RCL's history, Melville left the organisation over political differences although these never took the form of personal antagonism. He remained a supporter of the PAC and Black Consciousness Movement to the end of his life.

Relaunching The Struggle

The following report is of a meeting held in June this year to commemorate the Soweto Uprising of 1976. In September, another meeting marked the anniversary of the death of Black Consciousness leader, Steve Biko, on 12th September 1977. While our newspapers and televisions tell us that apartheid has been reformed, the message from these meetings is different:

REARRANGING THE FURNITURE?

"Mr DeKlerk is not a man of integrity," Strini Moodley, Publicity Secretary of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) told his South London audience. "Mr DeKlerk is a liar and a cheat. Mr DeKlerk is parading his velvet glove. It covers a mailed fist. Mr DeKlerk is looking for a comprador class."

Comrade Moodley was speaking at the Black Consciousness of Azania meeting commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the "revolutionary outburst" at Soweto, on June 16th, 1976. He shared the platform with Itumeleng Mosala, former President of AZAPO (now visiting professor at Cambridge) who reiterated the BCM's analysis that: "The Azanian revolution has been betrayed... One person, one vote will not liberate us ... It hasn't liberated oppressed people in the world ... The people who offer us 'one person, one vote' hold power at other levels."

The commemoration of the Soweto Uprising was the day before the abolition of the Population Registration Act that effectively marked the death of statutory apartheid, fifteen years after its death rattle was first heard in the school children's resistance to Afrikaans as the language of instruction in schools.

With the removal of apartheid's laws, with the Separate Amenities Act scrapped in June 1990 and the Group Areas and Land Act in the weeks before the Population Registration Act, the main pillars of legalised racism are gone. But as speaker after speaker pointed out, racism is still entrenched. The situation in South Africa is that the settler regime cannot rule in the old way and DeKlerk sees the need to adapt and oversee the semblance of a transfer of power to safeguard the reality of power.

"We are not going to have an economically liberated Azania.



Black people in South Africa are not going to have their land returned to them," said former AZAPO President.

While on the one hand concessions are made, the regime has also intensified the counter-revolutionary war, using divisions within the broad liberation movement. That counter-revolutionary war has fed on the political intolerance and sectarianism encouraged and practised within South Africa despite the BCM's condemnations.

The BCM speakers all echoed the contribution of the experienced African revolutionary, A. Babu, who warned of the dangers of "sham independence" and "African leaders corrupted by money and fame" where power does not reside in the people. All speakers were agreed: the oppressed cannot negotiate from a position of weakness. They are ineffective "with no bargaining chips".

As Comrade Mosala said, negotiations have to be between equals. But DeKlerk wants to draw up the agenda, be the man with the whistle and rule what is permissible in the talks. The BCM graphically rejected what DeKlerk is offering: "We do not need the furniture rearranged in our country. With our country back, we'll rearrange the furniture."

The former Robben Island detainee, Strini Moodley, issued the call to revitalise the struggle to support the fight within Azania. Mosala informed his audience: "The BCM is studying ways for the

revolution to be relaunched." The sacrifices made by a risen people, such as Zolile Hector Pietersen murdered by police in June 1976, were honoured at the commemoration. But it was also pointed out that more sacrifices would need to be made in the long struggle for a free Azania.

* * * * *

The League delivered a message of solidarity to the meeting. The following are extracts from this message:

On this historic anniversary, we salute the heroic struggles of AZANIA and the BCM...

In the revolutionary struggle today, there are no outside authorities to be looked to. This is healthy. Revolutionaries can only take their own struggle and the support of the masses as their point of reference. In particular, the old pro-Soviet trend which was so influential in Azania has lost out. This may be the reason why certain forces which used to rely on Soviet assistance have found themselves obliged to rush into unwise negotiations with the regime. On the contrary, those forces which are used to being self-reliant will not be disturbed by such developments. At this very moment, revolutionary forces are triumphing in Ethiopia and Eritrea...

We are certain that in the struggle for socialism and for a new world order in the interests of the masses, the freedom fighters of the BCM will continue to play a vanguard role in the coming period....

An Empire Breaks Up



A crowd outside the Moldavian Parliament show their support for independence.

The television has lost interest in what we used to call the Soviet Union. There are no more dramatic pictures of toppling statues or unarmed civilians standing in front of tanks in Moscow. We are left with the impression that the people may be near starvation this winter. But communism has been defeated. The people are free. Minor problems can be sorted out by a few international phone calls to Major or Bush.

It is, of course, true that the failure of the attempted coup in Moscow signalled a decisive defeat for the old "communist" system. In Russia itself, power was transferred to the Russian government, led by Yeltsin. In the Baltic states, the struggle for independence was so advanced that in the aftermath of the coup, they seized the opportunity to consolidate their sovereignty.

But Russia is greater than Moscow or Leningrad (now renamed St Petersburg). And the former Soviet Union is a vast land stretching over Central Asia. An immensely complicated process is going on, following the destruction of the power of the central Soviet state. Most Western journalists are not used to travelling outside the big cities of European Russia. As a result, we only have a sketchy picture of what is going on.

MANY NATIONS

The Soviet Union, or the Union of Sovereign States, as it should now be known, is made up of 15 union republics.

These republics in turn contain 20 autonomous republics; 8 autonomous regions and 10 autonomous districts. 130 different nationalities live in this land, stretching over eleven time zones.

The early days of the Bolshevik revolution promised the different nationalities freedom and self-determination. But this process was reversed and by the period after the Second World war, the Soviet Union became a reflection of the old Tsarist empire, a prisonhouse of nations.

As one journalist explained: "Expressions of nationalist sentiment were ruthlessly suppressed by the KGB. Churches and mosques were destroyed, local cultures emasculated, traditions and education "Sovietised". But the longing for self-determination was never eradicated..."

The struggle for national rights came out into the open after 1985. It was probably the nationalist movements that were the main force responsible for undermining the central Soviet state to the extent that they were unable to re-impose central control, even though the final events took place in the heart of Russia itself.

In many areas, the struggles continue round the control of the independent republics, with the political forces involved being complex.

In Tajikistan, for example, a state of emergency has been

declared. The parliament ousted the acting president and restored to power the former "Communist" Party leader. In Georgia, popular opposition to president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, is likely to turn into armed confrontation. Gamsakhurdia was elected to his position on an anti-communist platform and is now himself accused of being dictatorial.

In Azerbaijan, the president, Ayaz Mutalibov, was re-elected in a vote boycotted by the opposition, the Popular Front. The opposition said the election was rigged. Scarce goods such as sugar, sausage, sweets and biscuits were put on sale at polling booths to attract voters.

CENTRAL POWER

Such struggles are taking place in the context of the destruction of the prestige, if not always the power, of the old ruling "Communist" parties. In some places, former "Communist" party bosses have changed their colour and are now some of the more extreme nationalists. It will be up to the popular movements to determine whether this is opportunism or a genuine commitment to the principles of independence and national self-determination.

Another struggle is going on to determine the form of federation or central unity that will maintain links between the independent republics. The old Union Treaty, due to be signed at the time of the coup, has been thrown out. A later plan, drawn up by Yavlinsky, has been rejected on the basis that it represents a threat of Russian domination, by a meeting of the republics held in Tallinn in September. A further meeting is to be held in Alma Ata and an October 5th deadline has been agreed to sign an Inter-Republican Economic Agreement.

A further strand in this complex situation is the struggle for power going on between the State Council (made up of the republics' leaders) and the Committee for the Management of the National Economy (the former Soviet power).

The form that the independent republics will take, both internally and in their relations with each other is far from clear at present. The old prison of nations has been torn down. But the shape of their future home is still to be determined.

Dealing with the West

Many people have pointed out that there is little new about the "new world order" heralded by George Bush. Imperialism continues to exploit and oppress millions of people around the world.

What is new however, is that the USA is now centre stage. In the past, the power of the USA on a global scale was balanced to some extent by that of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union changed, from being the world's first socialist state, to the second greatest imperialist power in the world. This was reflected in its economic relations with Third World countries as well as military aggression, for example in Czechoslovakia or Afghanistan.

But internally, the state-controlled economy stagnated. Massive military spending was a drain on resources and living standards fell. Both Krushchev and Brezhnev tried and failed to revitalise the economy. Gorbachev too, tried and failed to reform the economy from the top down.

Although Gorbachev was unsuccessful in bringing in effective reforms, he did signal a change in direction. The old-style Soviet economy was state-controlled and was a self-sufficient system, outside the western imperialist-dominated economy, although it shared common features with it.

JOINING THE WEST

Gorbachev tried to reverse this as he believed that the Soviet system needed injections of western finance to modernise it.

In order to achieve this, Gorbachev was prepared to make deals with the West. This led to "regional deals" between the USA and Soviet Union over disputed areas, for example, Afghanistan, South Africa and Mozambique. Another result was the massive migration of Soviet Jews to Israel and most clearly, the Soviet Union's abandonment of its former allies in the Middle East. What was "new" about the war against Iraq was not only its ferocity, but that the USA carried out the war in the name of the United Nations, with full support of the Security Council, including the Soviet Union and China.

The result of the failed coup has been to speed up this process on different fronts. The loss of power by the old "Communist" Party will mean the speedier introduction of an openly capitalist system.



Yeltsin and Gorbachev will be key figures in making economic deals with the West

When James Baker visited Moscow in September, Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of troops from Cuba and an end to aid to the Najibullah government in Afghanistan. (He had not informed Castro of his intentions in Cuba.) In recent negotiations with the Japanese government, it has also been made clear that the disputed Kurile Islands will be handed over to Japan. This was seen as the main obstacle to aid for the Soviet Union from the Japanese government.

Western governments, particularly the USA, are now preparing to admit the Soviet Union to full membership of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund which are likely to provide the main sources of funding to the economy. This signals the subordination of at least large parts of the former Soviet Union, to the western imperialist economy. At the same time, Bush has announced further cuts in the USA's nuclear stocks. Emergency food and medical aid have been promised to stabilise the situation in the short-term.

POLITICAL STABILITY

For all their talk of peace, freedom and democracy, the USA and other western powers are only prepared to invest when they see profits for themselves. They would have preferred a centralised Soviet state, which promised more stability and greater profits than the present situation.

Behind the many political struggles and moves to independence, lies the reality of the Soviet economy and many questions are still unanswered. The West is

particularly concerned about what will happen to the Soviet foreign debt of \$65 billion. Discussions are going on between republics about how to divide up the debt as well as the assets of the Soviet state. Reserves of gold, diamonds and hard currency are still centrally held. Nor is there agreement on the future banking system or in what currency the republics will trade with each other.

In the meantime, western companies are beginning cautiously to make deals with the separate republics. About 200 British companies are estimated to be investing in joint ventures or other arrangements, including ICI, British Gas, British Airways, Littlewoods and John Brown.

Because of the breakup of the power of the central Soviet state, it is difficult to predict the precise form of future relationships between the West and the Soviet Union as a whole. But one factor that will play an important part is the relative wealth of European Russia and the Ukraine, with the Baltic states probably playing an intermediary role.

The fate of the impoverished regions of the Central Asian republics is less clear. One possibility is a split between the European and Asian regions of the old Soviet Union. The European part would become integrated to and subordinate to Western imperialism. The future direction of the Central Asian republics will have an impact not only within the Soviet Union but in China and the whole of the Middle East as well.



"What was distinctive about the Akhtar Ali Baig march, and later the Newham 8, was that everyone came out, young and old, men and women, Asian and Afro-Caribbean. As friends told me later, it was actually their mothers who got them all up early and said, 'Come on, we've all got to go on the march'."

Akhtar Ali Baig was 29 when he was killed by a skinhead gang, on East Ham High Street, London, in 1980. The police denied this was a racist murder and the black community in Newham reacted with marches, protests and strikes. This community reaction ensured that: "The case was no longer against the skinheads alone; the racism of white society was in the dock."

Many people will remember hearing about or taking part in protests about the death of Akhtar Ali Baig, the trial of the Newham Eight or other people such as the Virk brothers. A recent book, 'Newham: the Forging of a Black Community', relates the stories of these and other campaigns and puts them in the context of the growth and development of a black community in Newham, East London.

Black people settled in the area from the 1950's onwards, attracted by employment in the big factories near the docks, such as Tate & Lyle, Courtaulds, Unilever etc., as well as nearby Fords, in Dagenham. In many parts of the area, particularly in the north, black people make up a majority of residents.

The book shows how black people encountered racism in different aspects of their lives and how they organised to combat this. As time went on, the issues at the

forefront changed and different patterns of organising have emerged. The result has been the "forging of the black community" at least in the north of the area. In the south, black people are still more isolated and subject to racist attacks of different kinds.

HOUSING

One of the early forms of racism encountered by black people was in housing. Newham's Labour administration colluded with white tenants' associations to bring in new 'length of residence' rules to ensure that black people were kept out of council housing. The result was that black people were forced into overcrowded, bad quality Victorian-terraced property. They were then criticised for overcrowding and slum property.

Access to buildings also affected social, cultural and religious activities. When people clubbed together to acquire a building to use, for example, as a mosque or gurdwara, they found the buildings closed down. The churches and pubs often operated a straightforward colour bar.

Different organisations grew up such as Muslim Welfare groups or in the case of Afro-Caribbeans, island associations. But by the late 1960's and early 1970's, the threat of the immigration laws led to organising with national groups against the threat to their families.

EMPLOYMENT

Another chapter describes racism in employment and the failure of the trade union movement to support black workers. Patterns of employment changed as large-scale industry declined or moved away. The unions generally moved away too: "The old, large trades unions based in manufacturing industry were declining. For the local trades union movement to remain relevant in Canning Town, it needed to forge joint union-community campaigns... taking up issues of low pay and racism..." The unions failed to make themselves relevant.

ORGANISED RACISM

The book links the failure of the trade unions and the Labour Party to challenge racism with the organised growth of fascist organisation in the area, particularly the National Front. The increase in racist attacks and violence was linked with this. It is contrasted with the 1930's, when there was an organised anti-fascist movement within the white working class,



particularly among the dockers.

The Labour Party only reinforced racism through the local council. It not only failed to meet the needs of black people through council provisions or protect them from racist attacks, but it left the door open for the spread of fascist and racist ideas among the white working class.

COMMUNITY ORGANISES

Black people organised in different forms to meet the threat of racist violence. The books recounts the different campaigns and shifting patterns of organisation. The new feature was the growth of a younger generation of activists who consciously organised as black people against racism. Links were made between Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups. The campaigns moved on from defence of individuals to taking on the range of institutions, police, courts, judges etc. who reflected the racism of white society.

The Newham 8 campaign originated in attacks on school students and was noted for the school strikes that took place, as well as mass community involvement, including shops closed down, workers on strike etc. As the quote at the beginning of this review noted, the whole community took part. While this book leaves many questions open, it makes clear once again that it is the black community that has fought back against all the different forms of racism.

One of the important questions left open is put like this: "...another important lesson.. was that it was not white individuals who were the problem but white society as a whole. Anti-racism has also to speak to the problems of the white working class, who we have to live cheek by jowl with, and can't get away from." How to go about this is a key question indeed.

Britain's Hostages

After the release of Jackie Mann, it was revealed that he had been kept for over two years, without seeing anyone, in a dark room. 'The Independent' in a front page article explained the effects on a human being of this form of 'sensory deprivation'.

The media has reserved its sympathy for Jackie Mann and the other western hostages. Little is said about the treatment of Arab prisoners in Israeli hands. Even less about the treatment of Irish prisoners-of-war in British prisons.

In 1974, the Belfast High Court awarded thousands of pounds in damages to two men, Pat Shivers and Gerry McKerr, who had been detained in Castlereagh, for 'false trespass, false imprisonment, assault and battery, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment'.

In subsequent investigations and an Amnesty International report that followed, it became clear that the British army had deliberately used the techniques of sensory deprivation to confuse and disorientate internees.

There is another group of prisoners, regularly subject to cruel and inhuman treatment in British prisons. Much publicity in recent months has been focussed on innocent Irish prisoners, wrongly sentenced for activities in which they were not involved. There are also at present thirty two Irish republican prisoners held in British jails. These prisoners do not dispute that they were involved in activities against the British state. Their only "crime" has been to fight for Irish freedom. For this "crime", however, they are regularly subjected to long years of cruel treatment.

In an article in 'An Phoblacht/Republican News', September 26th, a republican prisoner, John McComb, outlines some of the ways that the British prison authorities treat republican prisoners. He focusses in particular on one prisoner, Roy Walsh.

Roy Walsh, Paul Holmes and Billy Armstrong are the three longest serving Irish republican prisoners. Arrested in 1973, for bomb attacks on New Scotland Yard and the Old Bailey, they are now in their nineteenth year behind bars.

18-YEAR ODYSSEY

In a chart, headlined '18-Year Odyssey', the history of Roy Walsh being moved from prison to prison is detailed. In the course of this, '20 weeks solitary', '4 weeks solitary', '8 weeks solitary' etc. occur frequently. Solitary confinement is only one of the methods used to degrade and humiliate Irish prisoners. Also frequently occurring is 10/74 solitary. 10/74 is the prison rule used to punish prisoners despite their not having infringed prison rules. It entails a move - 'ghosting' - to a punishment block in another prison to be held usually for 28 days. It is renewable every 28 days.

The article comments: "Looking at the list of prison moves to date... should be ample to give the reader an insight. By itself, the list is frightening but what cannot be seen are the beatings; the hatred; the bureaucratic indifference; the isolation, the disruption of family contact; the disorientation; the neglectful medical treatment, the gross acts of deprivation and humiliation and the mental scars etched forever in the minds of prisoners."

FAMILY VISITS

One of the main demands of the Irish prisoners and those campaigning on their behalf is that they are moved nearer to their families, to prisons in the north of Ireland. The other way round, prisoners are transferred from the north of Ireland to Britain, whether they are British army personnel, loyalists, armed

robbers to drug smugglers. But this is not allowed to Irish republican prisoners.

Not only do the families have a long and expensive way to travel to see their relatives. But they are regularly harassed and prisoners are often moved - 'ghosted' - away just before a visit. It is impossible for the family to find out where they are. The visit is lost.

The family of Republican prisoners are currently taking cases to the European Court of Human Rights seeking an end to their ordeal.

Relatives of Martina Anderson, currently being held in Durham Jail, have now been barred from any visits. When they travelled to see Martina in late September, a toy gun was found among clothing intended for Martina. At the time, this incident was not treated seriously as the toy had accidentally been placed there by a child. Subsequently, however, all visits have been stopped by the prison authorities.

The Committee for the Transfer of Irish Prisoners said: "The committee feels that the suffering inflicted on the Anderson family could easily have been averted if someone had applied a little common sense in their dealings with the issue....In the absence of humane and decent treatment of relatives visiting prisoners, the committee once again calls on the British Home Office to transfer all Irish prisoners to prisons closer to their families and put an end to unnecessary suffering and hardships."

IRISH HUNGER STRIKE 10TH ANNIVERSARY MEMORIAL LECTURE

1991

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BIRMINGHAM

INVITED SPEAKERS SINN FEIN IBRG TPLF

KWA LABOUR MOVEMENT Hunger striker relative

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In the current 'October', we are pleased to reprint an English summary of a book by a leading comrade in the Norwegian Marxist-Leninist Party (AKP-ML). The AKP (ML) has for many years been active in the Women's Front in Norway. The contribution by this comrade, Kjersti Ericsson, is therefore based firmly in both theory and practice.

The article on 'Feminism and the Left in India' also shows how active women have been. The article makes it clear that the role of women and the women's movement is being debated and discussed at many different levels within the Left.

The basic position of the RCL is that we have to apply the scientific method of Marxism to the question of women but that many of the positions held by the Left on women are a crude economist version of Marxism.

In this issue of 'October', we try to take this debate forward by looking at some of the arguments around the basis of women's oppression, an important question if we aim to build a society which removes the basis for oppression as a pre-condition for moving to full liberation. We look at the question of reproductive rights, a key aspect of women's oppression. And we try to put the struggle for women's liberation within the context of the overall struggle against imperialism.

We hope that this journal will take the debate forward. We look forward to hearing the views of our readers and receiving contributions from you.

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