

CLASS STRUGGLE



Political Paper of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

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25P

NO FORCED LABOUR.....FIGHT FOR

A DECENT JOB FOR

ALL

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT
Unemployment Benefit Office



Towards the end of May, the government announced the "good news" that unemployment has now dropped for the 21st month running. According to the Employment Secretary, Norman Fowler, there are "only" 2.45 million people out of work in Britain, today. The number was 2.53 before being "adjusted for seasonal factors".

These figures mean that nearly nine people out of every hundred (8.8%) are out of work. Most of these people face cuts in their benefits due to the recent Social Security changes, at a time when inflation is on the increase.

It would be bad enough if the figure really was 2.45 million. The reality is worse. Numerous changes have taken thousands out of work to enable P&O to cut costs. There is evidence too, that many of the jobs available are part-time, casual or temporary. Wages and employment conditions are being driven down.

CHANGES AT WORK

Unemployment means a life of poverty and often hopelessness for over three million people. At the same time, the fear of unemployment is being used to force through changes of work for those still in work:

* At the Selby coalfield in Yorkshire, the new technology means that 7 men do the work done by 35 at an older pit.

* The basic question in the dispute between P&O and the seamen is the intensification

of work to enable P&O to cut costs.

In case unemployed people should think of refusing such jobs, the DHSS is using stricter procedures to force people into jobs they do not want, by cutting off benefit if someone refuses "suitable" employment or leaves a job.

* In Huddersfield recently one individual had her benefit stopped because she wrote on the Job Centre form that she would work for £80 for a 40

hour week. Officials consider this wage too high. They said she should be prepared to work for £40 for 40 hours.

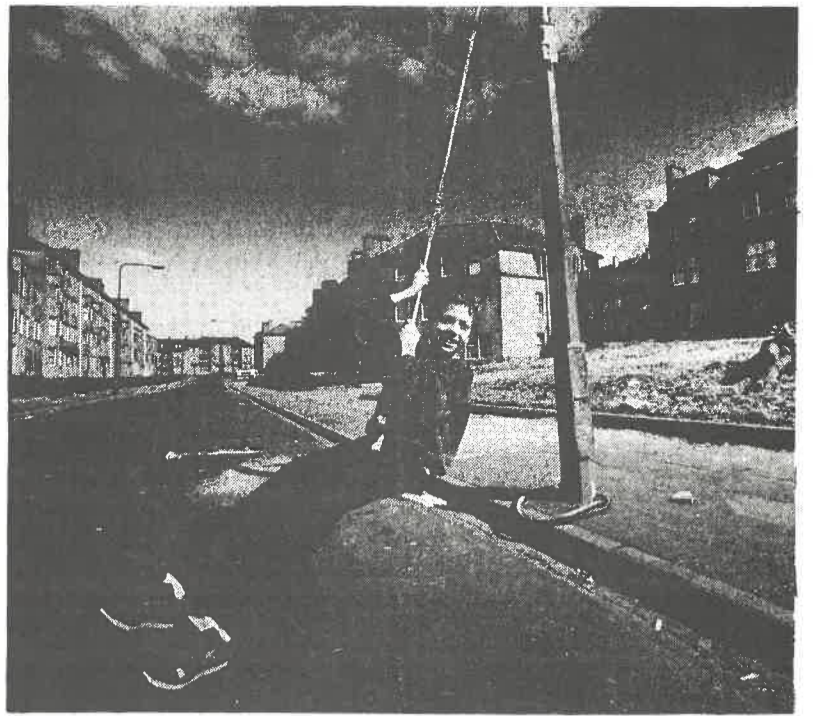
* Stephen Delaney of Bradford was reported to be worried that his benefit would be cut. At a Restart interview at the Job Centre, he was "encouraged" to apply for work as a drug guinea-pig at a local, private, drug-testing centre.

THE RIGHT TO WORK

In the last few weeks there has been discussion of plans to privatise British Ship-Building, British Coal and now British Rail. This will only accelerate the huge jobs losses already experienced in these industries over the last 20 years.

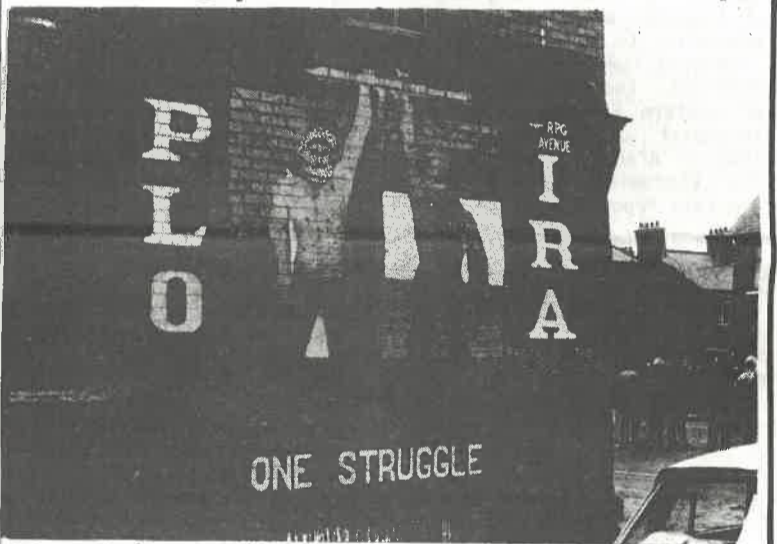
United Biscuits have recently announced record profits and the closure of a factory in Halifax. 1,000 workers, mainly women, will lose their jobs.

It is clear that most ordinary working class people are suffering so that others' profits may increase. We need to fight back on many fronts. But the right to work must be one of our demands, and the right to work for a living wage for all.



Hanging on a thread Housing in Britain.....P3

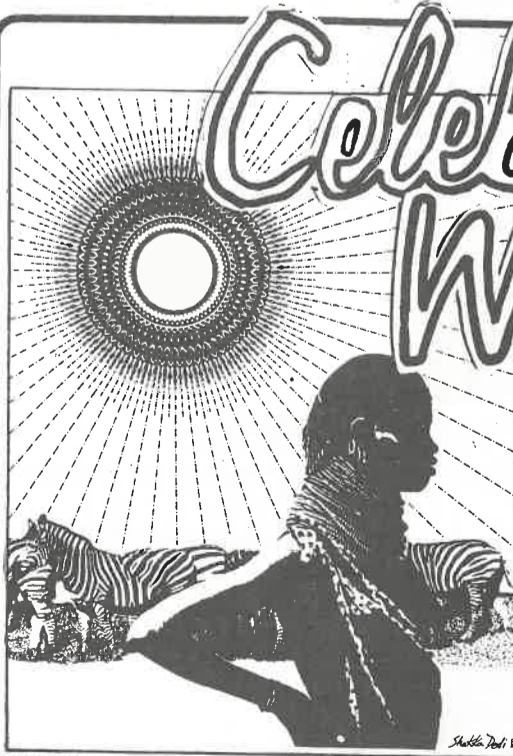
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Celebrate Women

Part 4



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CLASS STRUGGLE



EDITORIAL...EDITORIAL...EDITORIAL...EDITORIAL...EDI

On May Day, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) and the Political Economy Study Group (PESG) held a rally in London.

About 80 people heard speakers from the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCM); All-African People's Revolutionary Party, (AAPRP); Western Sahara Campaign; PESG and RCL, among others.

The speeches were interspersed with music, songs and poetry from Pula Arts Kommune and the Balsa choir, which impressed everyone. All too often, when politics and music are mixed, it seems forced. But that was not the case with these groups.

Two of the most heartening speeches came from representatives of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), who are fighting the Ethiopian regime for the right of their peoples to decide their own future. The EPLF speaker described how, on March 19th, the Eritreans had won their greatest victory in 27 years of the liberation war.

GREATEST VICTORY

For nearly 10 years, the main battlefield between the Ethiopian army and the EPLF had been a 75-mile long network of trenches and tunnels in the mountains to the east of the liberated town of Nacfa. This defended the liberated zone of western Eritrea. 65 miles southeast of Nacfa lies the town of Afabet, which has been the Ethiopian command centre for this front since 1979.

In the middle of March, Eritrean forces surrounded Afabet without being detected by their enemies, and then launched their attack on March 17th.

Within 48 hours, Afabet had been captured and the entire Ethiopian force based there (18,000 men in all) had been killed or captured. These troops were among the best in the Ethiopian army, and made up a third of the occupation forces. The Eritreans captured 50 tanks and over 100 military vehicles, as well as taking many different types of guns. Three Soviet advisers were also captured, and one was killed in the attack.

This operation resulted in the collapse of the Nacfa front and great advances for the Eritrean forces.

In neighbouring Tigray, the TPLF has won a number of victories against the Ethiopian army this year. But, following the Afabet battle, it was able to build on these by a series of attacks which resulted in the liberation of the whole of Tigray except for three towns.

'68 RECALLED

RCL SPEECH

One of the most irritating features of the last few months has been the programmes and newspaper articles in which ageing and prosperous veterans of 1968 western political movements have paraded their criticisms of the "follies" and "mistakes" they and others made in 1968. Of course, both existed. Revolution was never just around the corner in Europe in those days. Students could not provide a revolutionary vanguard for the working class, as some thought they would. But the positive things about that year count for a lot more than what was wrong.

1968 was an important year for our political trend, the Marxist-Leninist one. The Marxist-Leninists, Trotskyists, New Left and Anarchists all rejected, to one degree or another, the reformism of parties like the British Labour Party and Communist Party, and the events of 1968 seemed to confirm that the views of those who criticised reformism were right. With thousands of workers joining forces with students in Paris in May 1968, and on the move against the French state, the French

Communist Party refused to mobilise its membership to join in this movement. In Britain, the Labour Party had held office for four years, and had proved a good manager of the capitalist system, but had given the working class nothing - least of all, power. Furthermore, in 1968, it was to pass another racist immigration act.

INTERNATIONALISM

Developments such as these were in the forefront of most of the far left's consciousness and when people who used to belong to it in those days reminisce about 1968, it is clear that the events which are uppermost in their minds are those which took place in Europe.

But the Marxist-Leninist trend was a more internationalist one. For us, what happened in Asia, Africa and Latin America was important, and a lot of it was inspiring, too. There were vigorous revolutionary movements in the Third World, without reformist illusions and free from that suffocating, bureaucratic socialism or liberation "from above" approach, which was so typical of the pro-Moscow communist parties.

The Argentinian revolutionary, Che Guevara, had been killed fighting for Bolivia's freedom in October 1967. But in half the states of Latin America, guerrilla movements influenced by his example and the Cuban experience, were fighting corrupt pro-US dictatorships. In January 1968, came the Tet offensive in Vietnam. For the past couple of years, the USA had claimed to be making steady progress in wiping out the national liberation forces. But in the Tet offensive, Vietnamese liberation fighters struck in towns and villages across south Vietnam, liberating most of the ancient Vietnamese capital of Hue, and even reaching the American embassy in Saigon.

On March 21st, 1968, Palestinian fighters put up a hard fight against an Israeli attack on the town of Karameh, in Jordan. Their success brought thousands of volunteers to the liberation movement's fighting forces, and paved the way for the independent Palestinian organisations to gain control of the PLO.

1968 was also the year when FRELIMO in Mozambique, opened up a new guerrilla front in Tete Province. Before that, it had been basically confined to the country's two northernmost provinces. Tete was where the Portuguese were building the Cabora Bassa dam, intended to provide power for much of white-ruled southern Africa, and in fact, a project which

was meant to be a lynchpin of white racist rule over the whole region. The opening of the Tete front eventually led to the frustration of this scheme, and played a major part in the collapse of the Portuguese fascist regime.

In 1968, too, China was at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Whatever errors may have been made, however it is assessed in China today, it is still the case that it was important for our movement. It brought quite a few people here, and in the rest of western Europe, into Marxist-Leninist politics.

No doubt in the polemics of the time, much of our movement was sectarian and oversimplified issues. But I think many of us did learn to be analytical in our approach to problems, to grasp the essential points at issue. We also saw the central importance of political line, and the necessity for a Marxist-Leninist party.

At the end of 1968, the Communist Party of the Philippines was founded in the course of a struggle against revisionism of the old party. This party is now at the core of what US intelligence analysts have identified as the fastest growing insurgency in the world.

Over here, we had a real sense of being part of a world revolutionary movement, on the offensive against colonialism. That movement has since suffered some setbacks. But it has had its successes too, notably the victory of the Indochinese peoples in 1975, and those of the peoples of Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique, and later, of Zimbabwe.

We must work to build and reinforce the world revolutionary movement. Imperialism still dominates the world, and, as a system, it not only stands in the way of advance for the workers, peasants and oppressed peoples of countries where there has not been a revolution, but also traps and hampers countries where there has been one, restricting their independence and imposing at least some of its rules.

Breakthroughs can be achieved, and some will obviously come earlier than others. But the task for all is eased by the development of many fronts against imperialism, so that the resources of the imperialist powers are stretched, and it is more difficult for them to concentrate their strength against the revolutionary forces and pick them off, one by one. Now is an appropriate time to remember and act in the spirit of Che Guevara's call in 1967: "Create two, three, many Vietnams!"

LETTERS

Dear Friends,

Some leaflets have recently been circulated bearing the name of the 'Campaign for Palestinian Rights'. We had not heard of this organisation before, and when we asked other groups working in solidarity with the Palestinians whether they knew anything about it, they said that they did not. Neither did the London office of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

It has now emerged that this group has been set up by the National Front. In the April issue of 'National Front News' it is claimed that the 'CPR' is a broad organisation.

"The National Front has been approached and has joined with an association of groups and individuals in Britain, under the umbrella - The Campaign For Palestinian Rights'.

NFN does not name any of the organisations or individuals involved, so that we have no evidence at present that this is anything more than the NF under another name. Either way, it is an organisation which no genuine supporter of the Palestinian people's liberation struggle will welcome.

There is a genuine co-ordinating organisation of pro-Palestinian groups, called the Interim Joint Committee for Palestine. If the NF ever asked to join that group, it would be rejected by all participants. But by claiming that the 'CPR' is a broad front, it is giving ammunition to those who would seek to discredit the solidarity movement in Britain by hinting (as a 'Daily Telegraph' article did on May 17th) that genuine solidarity organisations are working alongside the NF.

The PLO seeks a non-racist solution to the Palestine problem, and as a solidarity group, PSC has always opposed racism and fascism.

....Yours in solidarity,

Palestine Solidarity Campaign



LONDON:

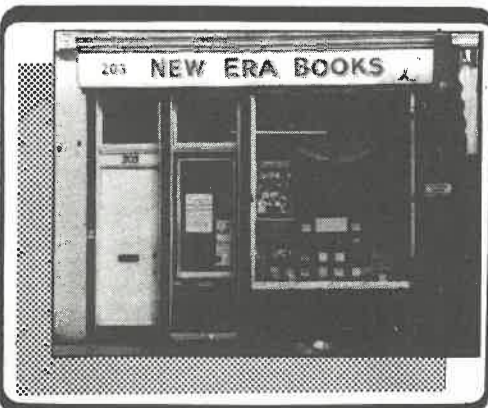
MARCH FOR PALESTINE

On May 15th, the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Zionist state, about 3,500 people marched in London in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The march was organised by a coalition of groups, the Interim Joint Committee for Palestine. The Palestinian community in Britain was well represented there, as was the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Pakistan Workers Association.



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PEOPLE DESERVE A DECENT PLACE TO LIVE

News Correspondent

In this article, we will look at some of the issues affecting housing in Britain.

What changes have occurred in how people find a home to live in?

Did the slum clearances of the 1950s and 1960s solve the housing problem?

What is the reality behind Thatcher's "property-owning democracy"?

Will the government's new Housing Bill improve matters?

So why was it that in 1966, Shelter, The National Campaign for the Homeless, was formed?

Build quick, never mind the quality, was the philosophy behind the building firms who got rich in the post-war period. Massive profits were also to be made from lending money to councils for house-building. It is estimated that 500,000 council houses built then now need major repairs or demolition at a cost of £5 billion.

A similar repair bill is needed to do something with the inhuman tower blocks built in the 1960s and 1970s. In Birmingham alone, half of the 400 tower blocks

its equivalents of Birmingham's Castle Vale and Chelmsley Woods. Stuck at the end of bus routes and lacking any feeling of community.

More recently, the policy of stopping council house building has not kept pace with people's need for more houses. The private sector has just not found it profitable to make up the shortfall. Shelter estimates that 800,000 houses which were needed were not built over the last 12 years.

HOME OWNERSHIP BRINGS ITS OWN PROBLEMS

That housing is gripped in a

have assets greater than the annual spending on the NHS. Their market value is estimated to be greater than that of the Midland or Lloyds Bank.

Estate agents who take a percentage of the selling price have a vested interest in pushing up house prices as much as possible.

Increasing numbers of people are priced out of the housing market. The number of people having their house repossessed by the building societies for non-payment of the mortgage has increased over the last few years. By 1986, it was estimated that 300,000 house-

The council's role of providing a social need in housing will be reduced. Those least able to pay will suffer.

Councils will be left still paying interest on loans for houses they built but will no longer receive rent from them. Their reduced income will affect the services they can provide for their remaining and future tenants.

3. **Bigger role for Housing Associations.** Their role as cheap-rent, charity housing is to change. In the future, they will lose their government grants and have to raise loans



BLACKBURN - Rows of pre-war terraced houses, all ready for coming down.

Although we are only looking at housing within Britain, it has to be put into a world-wide context. Homelessness and poor housing in the Third World is a massive problem affecting many millions of people on a scale that is difficult even to begin to understand if you live in Britain. Imperialist domination is the cause of the problem there. Britain is part of the imperialist heartland: housing problems here are a direct consequence of that same exploitative system. As in any class system it is the poor, the old and black people who bear the brunt of bad housing. These days, however, it is much larger sections of the population who suffer, as house prices spiral ever upwards beyond the reach of many ordinary people.

TO BUY OR TO RENT? THE CHANGING PICTURE

In 1914, 90% of the population lived in privately rented accommodation. This dropped to less than 40% by 1960. Today, only 10.7% of homes are privately rented.

Council housing for rent was a product of the 1919 Housing Act, passed because the private sector did not find it profitable to build houses after the First World War.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a similar expansion of council house building. At one time, there were up to 6 million council house tenants. By 1987, one million of those had bought their homes from the council.

In 1966, over half the population lived in rented accommodation. Today, it is estimated that over 60% live in privately owned accommodation.

HAS THE BAD HOUSING PROBLEM BEEN SOLVED?

The 1950s and early 1960s saw a massive slum clearance programme and rebuilding programme after war-time bomb damage. This was during a Tory government. During the next decade, 1965-75, successive governments (Labour-Tory-Labour) reduced their commitment to housing as a priority. By 1976, the then Labour government cut public investment in housing. These cuts have continued under successive Tory governments.

are in need of major repairs.

The traditional problems of no bathroom or indoor toilet, hot and cold water, etc. may be less of a problem these days. (Although there are still 440,000 pensioner households with no bathroom and/or toilet). However, some problems still remain:

- * 900,000 people living in illegal overcrowded housing.
- * 1.2 million unfit houses
- * 4 million sub-standard homes

mad spiral of price rises (like the 1970-73 period) is evident to everyone.

The high rate of house ownership, the net shortage of houses and the cutback in council house building forces people into house purchase as the only option and pushes up prices.

The policy of tax relief on mortgage payments carried out by both Labour and Tory governments, subsidises house purchase at the tax-payers' expense.

holds had serious mortgage arrears. Many people are finding that mortgage repayments take a large slice out of their incomes, leaving not enough to cover the rest of their expenses.

That is the reality of Thatcher's so-called "property-owning democracy". Far from freeing people from the worry about where to live, it has created a nightmare of financial worry.

WHAT ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW PLANS?

The government's 'Housing: the Government's Proposals' (September 1987) and Ridley's Housing Bill (November 1987) have been unveiled. What will they mean?

There are three main proposals:

1. **Deregulating the private rented sector.** Ridley argues that if you make it easier for private landlords, then an extra half a million homes could become available.

The reality is, of course, that the security of tenants becomes less. Racist practices will continue and more people will get the chance to live in poor conditions at very high rents.

More accommodation may be made available for those that cannot afford to buy houses. Even that is in doubt. The last time the rented sector was deregulated in 1957, there was a big increase in the number of tenants evicted as landlords took advantage of the relaxed rules to sell off houses for a quick profit. With house prices increasing at such a rate, this is likely to happen again.

2. **The breaking up of council estates.** Housing Action Trusts will be set up to take over rundown estates, do them up and pass them on to private landlords or Housing Associations. Also, council tenants will be able to choose a different landlord from the council.

These changes will create no new houses and rents will go up under the new landlords.

The marketplace will decide who gets what housing and at the highest rent possible.



LIVERPOOL - A post-war block of flats, ready for coming down.

Some problems are getting worse:

- * Homelessness has increased from 13,000 people in 1966 to 250,000 in 1987.
- * The number of houses requiring at least £2500 worth of repairs steadily increases as the housing stock gets older.

New problems have been created by the post-war building programme:

* No-one should have to live in the inhuman tower blocks. They need re-housing.

* Many of the new housing estates built to rehouse those moved by slum clearance lack facilities and humanity in their design. Every major city has

Competition between building societies and, since the late 1970s, the banks, to lend money for house purchase has contributed to house price inflation.

The building societies have partly lost out to the banks and other financial institutions. Their share of the mortgage market has dropped from about 96% in 1977 to less than 60% in 1987. There were 900 building societies in 1944. The number has steadily dropped since then. The most dramatic reduction has been over the last 20 years. There are now only 141 left; the top 20 of which control 90% of the market. Two of the biggest, the Halifax and the Abbey National, now

from the private sector to build and renovate housing. Those loans will have to be paid for by increased rents from their tenants. Once again, it will be the poor that will suffer.

There is no guarantee that the Associations are up to their new job. Indeed, they are already saying that they are in no position to replace council housing on any scale.

While the majority of people in Britain today no doubt have access to better housing than 100 years ago, housing for the majority still leaves much to be desired. Decent housing, at a reasonable price, is one of the basic needs for a decent life. Once again, in this society, we can see that it is not the needs of the people that determine policy, but profits for the few.

"The playgroup organised a week away for us and our children. I came back to my hotel room and I just sat and cried. I just couldn't bear it. After a week away, to come back to these four walls, with nowhere for Lucy to play."

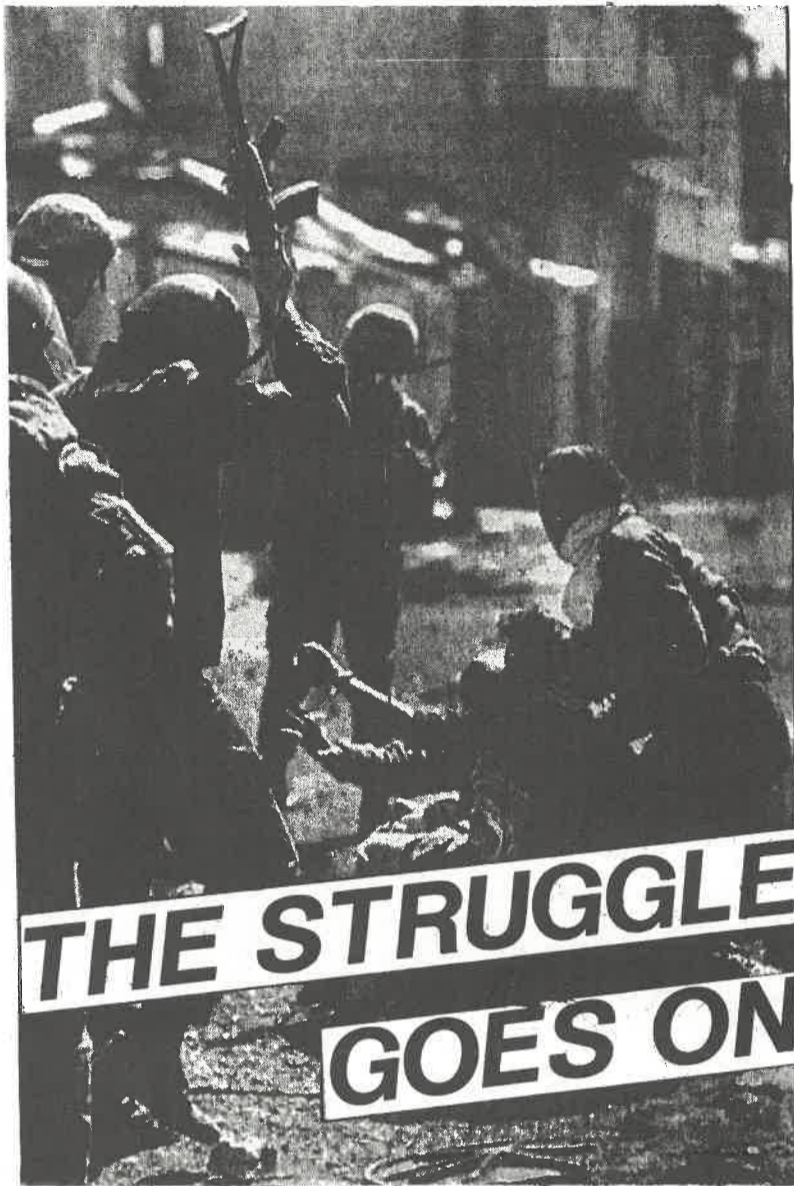
"Homeless families seem to suffer more from under-nourishment, skin parasites such as scabies and bed bugs, feverish illnesses such as coughs, colds and measles, and all the illnesses related to poverty including anxiety and depression."

"My child can't walk and speak like she should and the doctor says it's because she's been cooped up in that tiny room. I feel so angry."

These quotes are taken from the booklet 'Families in Bayswater Bed and Breakfast', produced by the Bayswater Hotel Homelessness Project, which was set up in 1984 to advise and help homeless families.

The booklet was produced in February 1987, when there were a staggering 1,500 families "living" in Bayswater hotels. Today, the situation is even worse.

'THEY CAN HURT US, BUT THEY IN PALESTINE....



**THE STRUGGLE
GOES ON**

THE BEST TRADITIONS

by David Evans

Since the early days of the Palestinian Uprising in the Gaza Strip and West Bank areas, the Unified Leadership has issued regular leaflets commenting on recent events and calling on the people to take certain actions.

In March and April, there was a drive to persuade those employed by the Israeli authorities, such as police and tax officials, to resign. Within a few days of the first call, half the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the whole VAT department in Gaza had resigned.

Collaborators were also called upon to give up their activities and join the Uprising. Most did so. The normal thing for them to do was to go to the mosque on Friday or the church

on Sunday, confess their crimes before their communities, ask their forgiveness and swear upon the Quran or Bible not to collaborate with the Zionist authorities again.

The desire for national unity has been such that no-one who has made their peace with their people, no matter how bad their record, has been harassed or harmed by their community, though giving up collaboration meant surrendering the weapons that the Israeli authorities had given them for self-defence.

UNITE!

On April 30th, the Unified Leadership issued leaflet number 15, headed "Workers' Appeal". It had a particular message for the Palestinian working class:

"On the occasion of May Day, the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising salutes our heroic workers and calls upon

them to launch a total boycott of work in Zionist settlements and to return to work on the land. We also call upon workers not to waste opportunities for alternatives to working across the Green Line (Our note: the old border between Israel and the other parts of Palestine which it occupied in 1967 was marked on maps in green), and to continue their commitment to the struggle. We urge workers to form united labourers' committees and to work for the unification of the labour movement."

The workers' protest actions have so far been very effective, hitting hard at the sections of the Israeli economy where Palestinian migrant workers are concentrated - construction, textiles, sub-contracting, services and agriculture (not least, orange-harvesting).

Since the late 1970's, there has been a rapid growth in trade union organisation in the West Bank. But the effectiveness of the unions was impaired by political divisions between different labour bodies for much of this time.

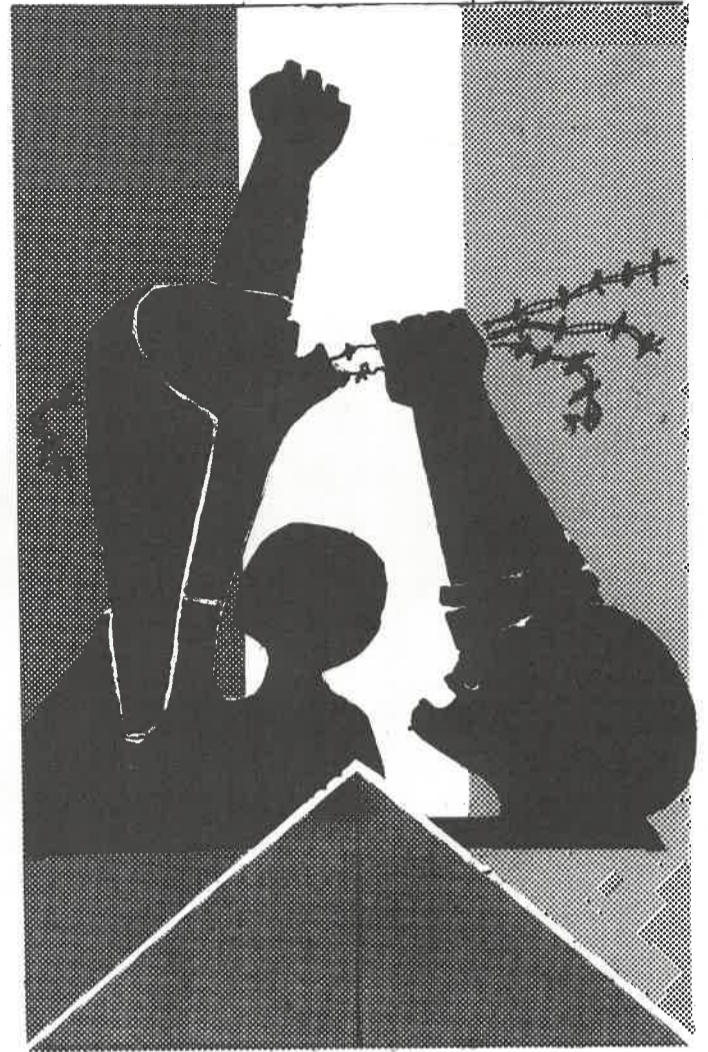
There are two main labour organisations, the larger one sympathetic to the politics of the Palestine Communist Party, the smaller to those of Al-Fatah, the largest group within the PLO. Two much smaller blocs of unions sympathise with the views of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP & PFLP). Over the past two years, relations between them have gone from being frosty to being warm, particularly at rank and file level.

The call to form unified labourers' committees involves workers in every locality getting together, whichever union grouping they belong to, and even if they do not belong to any union at present. This will strengthen the unity of the Palestinian workers at the base level. The call of the Unified Leadership for the workers to try to unify the labour movement will give a big push to efforts to unify all the unions into one federation.

MAY DAY

The Unified Leadership calls for specific actions on different days. Concerning May Day, it called on the Palestinians:

"To devote May 1st, which will be designated a national



occasion, to confrontations with the racist occupation forces and the holding of marches and demonstrations in cities, villages and refugee camps. We urge you to raise the Palestinian flag on this day and paint slogans against the occupation on the walls of your communities. We call upon all employers to consider May Day a paid vacation for their workers."

What was planned, happened. In the violent Israeli response to the protests, one Palestinian was killed - the only person in the world killed this year during a May Day event.

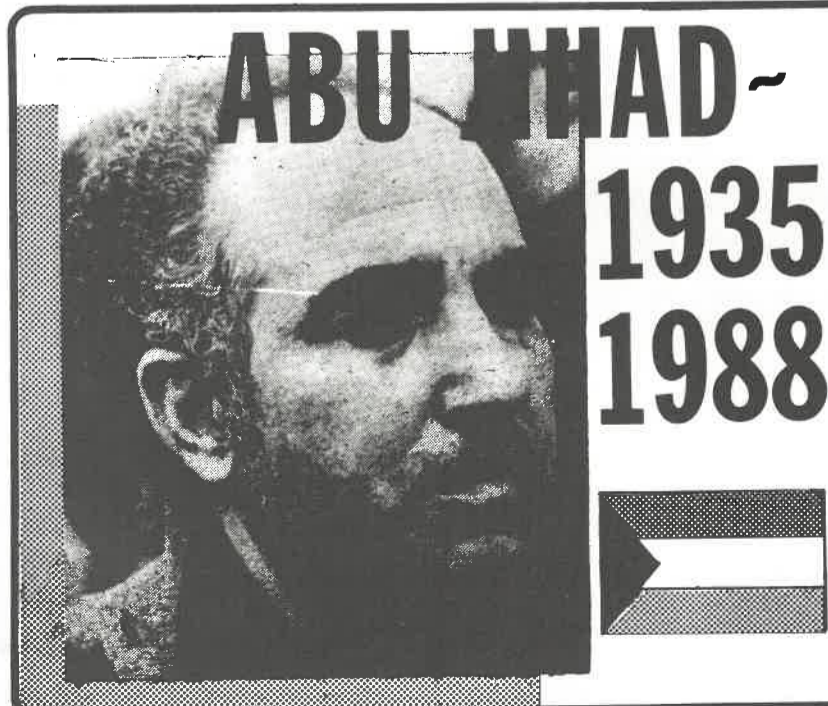
Palestinian determination remains strong, although food is short and the death toll is well over 200. In the week before May 15th, which Palestinians remember as the day the state of Israel came into existence, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, paid a surprise visit to Hebron with a group of reporters in attendance, to show that the situation was returning to

"normal".

This exercise was a failure. Reporters witnessed Israeli soldiers on the rooftops along the route which Shamir took through Hebron. Palestinians did not disguise their feelings towards him, in spite of the heavily armed thugs who escorted the unwanted visitor.

When Shamir beamed at one Palestinian for the cameras, and said that he came in peace, the man replied: "After you've shot our people, I'm glad you come in peace."

When Shamir barged his way into a shop and insisted on shaking hands with the shopkeeper, a young customer told him to "Get out". These responses bear out the words of a recent visitor from the West Bank, who told 'Class Struggle': "We used to be afraid of the Israelis, and that's how they were able to control us. Now we have lost our fear. They can hurt us. But they can't control us any more."



Khalil al-Wazir, more widely known by the name Abu Jihad, (which he adopted while doing illegal nationalist work in the 1950's), was born on October 10th, 1935, in the Palestinian town of Ramleh. At the age of 12, in 1948, he became a refugee, along with nearly all of Ramleh's people, when the town fell to the Israeli army. Al-Wazir's family ended up in Gaza, where he soon became involved in nationalist activity.

Abu Jihad was a founder member of Al-Fatah, the Palestine National Liberation Movement. Like the rest of its founders, he had come to believe that the Palestinians could not depend upon anyone else to liberate them: they would have to organise themselves to fight for liberation.

Shortly after the 1967 war, the Palestinian guerrilla organisations were able to expand

their strength quickly, following their success at the Battle of Karameh in March 1968. Next year, they gained control of the PLO, previously dominated by Arab governments.

Yasser Arafat was elected Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee, as well as being in overall charge of the PLO's military forces. But it was no secret that Abu Jihad, who was made Deputy Commander of the armed forces, in fact handled most of the military affairs of the Executive Committee. He undertook this responsibility until the day of his death, playing a leading part in organising the defence of Beirut against the Israeli army in 1982 and of Tripoli against Syrian forces and their puppets in 1983.

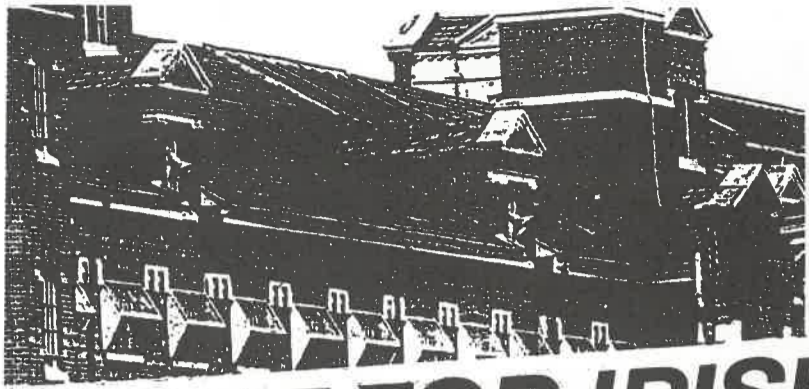
On April 16th, Israel assassinated Abu Jihad. The attack involved Israeli air and naval

forces as well as a landing party of around thirty people. Abu Jihad's two bodyguards were caught by surprise and quickly killed with silenced guns. The raiders broke into his house. Hearing some sounds downstairs, Abu Jihad snatched up a pistol and started off downstairs to investigate. He managed to fire one shot in his defence before being cut down by his assailants' machine gun fire.

If Israel's leaders thought that the murder of Abu Jihad would weaken the Uprising, they were very much mistaken. The weekend of his death saw the fiercest clashes so far between the Palestinians and the occupation forces, and the Uprising is still going on now a month and a half after Abu Jihad was gunned down.

★ ★ ★

CAN'T CONTROL US ANY MORE IN BRITAIN....



FIGHT FOR IRISH P.O.W.'s RIGHTS

REPATRIATE
IRISH PRISONERS OF WAR!

The right of Irish POWs to serve their sentences in Northern Irish gaols has been the central of the five demands of the Republican POW Campaign since it was launched more than four years ago.

On Saturday, April 30th, hundreds of people, led by eight Republican flute bands, marched through Wakefield in support of this demand. The demonstration, organised by the Republican Bands Alliance and Clydeside Troops Out Movement, was also called in support of the two Irish POWs currently serving their sentences in Wakefield's top security prison.

Like others before them, Noel Gibson and Billy Armstrong have suffered continuing ill-treatment at the hands of the prison authorities. Noel Gibson was transferred to Wakefield in mid-September. He has since spent most of his time (including his birthday and Christmas) in solitary confinement on a trumped-up breach of "good order and discipline".

DOUBLE STANDARDS

At the rally held after the demonstration, a speaker for the Republican POW Campaign drew attention to the marked contrast between the treatment of these and other Irish prisoners, and the way British soldiers are treated after being convicted of serious offences in the North of Ireland.

Republicans serve twenty years in Victorian hell-holes and solitary confinement, hundreds of miles from their families. Often - as in the case of Frank Stagg, who died on hunger strike in Wakefield protesting against prison conditions and for repatriation to a prison in the North - this is for vague offences such as conspiracy.

Meanwhile, British soldiers are automatically repatriated and released after serving only a fraction of their sentences. Private Ian Thain - convicted for killing an unarmed Irish youth - did not need a campaign to obtain a transfer to a prison near his home. Nor did his family face harassment at ports, fears of being arrested under the PTA, being strip-searched and having their children taken into care. Neither did they have to cope with being followed by Special Branch, or the hardship of saving money for the yearly visits. Instead, Thain's family had the active support of a Conservative MP in their efforts

to secure an early release for their son.

REPATRIATION ON REQUEST

In concluding his speech, the representative of the POW Campaign called on the British government to repatriate the prisoners, immediately on request. This was not for their sake, as they will remain in prison whether it be in Britain, or in Ireland. The prisoners should be repatriated, he said, for the sake of their relatives and families, who have not been convicted of anything, but who are also made to serve a sentence nevertheless.

SUPPORT

A letter of support from Ella O'Dwyer and Martina Anderson was read out. It urged the prisoners in Wakefield to "be strong, be persistent and above all be together". It was followed by a speaker from Durham National Union of Mineworkers, who described how the mining communities, when they were invaded by paramilitary police and had their homes smashed up in the course of their year-long strike, experienced something of what the nationalist people had been suffering in the North of Ireland for years before. It was then, as they began to fight back, that they also realised who their real friends were: not the so-called working class leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC, but the people who came forward to support their struggle when these "leaders" were busy condemning the "violence on the picket lines".

The speaker ended by recalling the words of Norman Willis, at last year's TUC conference. Speaking about South Africa, Willis had said: "Let those who suffer choose the means of their own liberation".

The speaker remarked that if this fine-sounding principle is true for South Africa, if it is true for the people of Nicaragua and Chile, then it is true for Ireland. His words echoed those of the representative from the Republican POW Campaign who called on the British working class and the British Left, to give their full support to the prisoners and the struggle for British withdrawal.

"You have as much in common with the people of Ireland as you do with the people of Nicaragua and South Africa. It is your duty and in your interest to support the Irish people."

★ ★ ★



Relatives of Irish POWs in Wakefield prison, hand in a petition to Downing Street, in August 1987. The petition pointed out: "...given the apparent inability and unwillingness of your government to ensure decent visiting conditions or to enforce its own regulations, the only solution to this matter is the immediate transfer of Irish political prisoners to prisons near their homes."

WAKEFIELD GAOL - A NOTORIOUS HISTORY OF ILL-TREATMENT

The treatment of Billy Armstrong and Noel Gibson fits into a long and notorious history of ill-treatment of Irish prisoners and their families at Wakefield.

In the mid-1970s, Wakefield operated a special control unit, located in its F-Wing. Sensory deprivation and the most extreme form of solitary confinement were used (6-12 months, instead of the usual 2 days of solitary). Like the strip-searching of women prisoners, these methods are used as psychological weapons, intended to isolate the prisoners and break their spirit.

In February 1976, 27-year old Frank Stagg died on hunger strike, protesting against prison conditions and for repatriation to an Irish gaol.

In more recent years, Republican POWs have been forced to stage protest after protest against conditions at Wakefield. In May 1986, Paul Norney (PRO of the Republican POWs in Wakefield) wrote an open letter describing visiting arrangements "... Our families, already under the strain and burden of having to travel hundreds of miles to see us, have on seeing us to undergo a humiliating and intimidating experience because of the visiting arrangements.

"The visits are held in a small room, 12 feet by 10 feet, two tables end to end are in the middle of the room, chairs are bolted to the floor at either end of the tables. The visitor must sit at one end and the prisoner at the other end. No physical contact is allowed during the visit. (An embrace is allowed at the beginning and the end of the visit.) All through the visit, two prison officers are in the room, one sits behind the visitor and the other sits behind the prisoner. Before and after the visit, the prisoner is strip-searched...

"... We see the visiting arrangements here as designed to isolate Republican prisoners from their families by making normal communication impossible. We see this as part of a continual policy adopted by the British Home Office, over 13 years ago. However, we also recognise that the visiting arrangements are peculiar to this prison and must therefore be regarded as an indication

of the vehement anti-Republican attitudes prevalent amongst prison officers at this establishment. We are refusing to accept these visiting arrangements. But we have informed the governor that we will not go without our visits."

PRISON PROTESTS

Last year, Hugh Doherty and Nat Vella refused to accept visits, wear prison uniform or do prison work until these punitive conditions were changed. As a result, they were transferred to other prisons and on their return to Wakefield, sentenced to 56 days (8 weeks) solitary plus 84 days loss of remission. At the end of the punishment period, both men returned to their cells and once again were forced to protest against the unchanged conditions. So the cycle begins again ...

Complaints at their situation by relatives to the governor of Wakefield drew the response that he is merely obeying Home Office instructions. Yet the Home Office claim that visiting conditions were left to the discretion of the governor. This, together with the fact that the sentences imposed on Hugh Doherty and Nat Vella were four times those imposed on a group of British prisoners who staged a protest in March last year, would seem to indicate the responsibility for their brutal treatment lies

with the prison governor, Mr Gadd. However, the complete indifference of the British government towards the issue would suggest otherwise.

In August last year, a petition from relatives of both prisoners was handed in to Mrs Thatcher at Downing Street. It pointed out that the visiting conditions imposed in Wakefield showed "utter contempt" and were in "complete contradiction" to the Home Office's own guidelines that proper respect and sensitivity be shown for the maintenance of family life.

But, as the petition pointed out: "...given the apparent inability and unwillingness of your government to ensure decent visiting conditions or to enforce its own regulations, the only solution to this matter is the immediate transfer of Irish political prisoners to prisons near their homes."

Together with the strip-searching of women prisoners, this unwillingness on the part of the British government to ensure decent visiting conditions or to enforce its own regulations indicates that the treatment of prisoners at Wakefield is part of a deliberate policy. It is authorised and co-ordinated by Downing Street, in the same callous way as the murders of Mairaid O'Farrell, Sean Savage and Dan McCann.

A conference on repatriation, earlier this year, was told of the case of Chrissie Keenan, a mother of five who was arrested on a visit and held in Brixton for six months on a trumped-up charge before being found innocent.

Cases were also reported of forced strip-searching endured by women under threats of having their children put into care if they did not consent. Fear of such treatment and the hardships of raising money to make the journey compare with the cost of a visit to Long Kesh - a 50p bus ride.

"The history of families travelling from Ireland to England to the gaols is peppered with abuse, degradation, humiliation and disappointment. It is a route lined with fears, tears, crying and hungry children.

Yes, we know the emotional content as it is written upon their faces at the end of the yearly visit." (Irish POW)

Noel Gibson is currently in solitary confinement in Wakefield, after being accused of placing an incendiary device in the prison library. He had only been in the prison one week when the charge was brought and at that point had not visited the library. When he pointed this out to the governor, Gibson was told:

"Well, then, you had the book taken from the library, assembled the incendiary device, and then had it placed in the library."

All taken from Tiocfaidh Ar La - No.5.

★ ★ ★

GLIMPSES INTO HERSTORY... PART 4

SEX AND REPRODUCTION

Of all the aspects of being a woman in society, sex and reproduction must be the most ignored by "politics", whilst being at the core of womanhood. The unique contribution of women to the world economy is the reproduction of the people themselves, although the possibility of giving birth does not alone define womanhood.

WOMEN'S WORK WITH BREAST AND WOMB

The whole process of pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing - a process that determines twenty years of their life for many women - is placed in a separate category of "nature" or "biology". It is not viewed as productive work, not included in political economy and not mentioned in political manifestos.



In rejecting this view that such labour is purely a function of "nature", we need to recognise that men and women have different bodies which interact with nature in different ways. They use their bodies to interact with nature and to change it (sometimes called the appropriation of nature). It is a conscious human and social activity.

Marx defined work in its broadest sense as acting on the external world and changing it. In this way, the labourers' hands are his "means of production". But we do not hear of women's breasts, or womb, being her means of production. Indeed, the actual process of childbirth is called labour, but not really thought of as "work", although any mother can testify to the fact that it is!

WOMEN'S TRADITIONS

Throughout history as we know it, women have acquired knowledge which helps them to choose and control their reproductive activity. Breeding is not just a natural activity but is a form of human work which reproduces the human race in a socialised way.

There is evidence that the ancient civilisations of Africa and Asia had much knowledge about conception and childbirth, such as herbal remedies, an understanding of body rhythms and diet, which enabled them to control to an extent their productive forces. We certainly know that many societies under threat can increase or decrease their population and women have wielded this as a power in fighting colonial battles.

Much of this knowledge was systematically destroyed or hidden from women in the last few centuries in capitalist and imperialist societies.

Independent free-thinking women were seen as a threat to the rising bourgeoisie in Europe and, more recently, fat profits have been made by making knowledge into commodities, for example through drugs, contraception or food.

All this has weakened women and marginalised their labour. Their bodies have been turned into commodities. Women have lost sight of their identity: the fact that female productivity is a pre-condition for male productivity. It is no accident that the history of early societies is hidden: societies where women were the producers of children, the gatherers of food and the early agriculturalists, whilst men went hunting for the luxury of meat and slaves. That is the history of women using their bodies as means of production in a different way to men, but a way which must be publicly reinstated as productive labour.

DEBATE IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Although much of this has been ignored by political movements, it has been at the very centre of much of the women's movement both here and world-wide. The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, in this country and America, was fired by demands for abortion on demand, control over their bodies and sexual freedom, among other demands.

FREE CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION ON DEMAND

'Free contraception and abortion on demand' was one of the original demands of the women's movement in the West in the 1970s. At an early stage, the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign included 'an end to forced sterilisation' in its campaign.

In 1975, however, the National Abortion Campaign was launched with the sole purpose of defending the 1967 Abortion Act. This campaign was successful in defeating a series of Private Members' Bills and also in spurring the trade unions and TUC into taking action.

When some 80,000 women and men marched in October 1979, it was the largest trade union demonstration for many years for a cause which lay beyond the traditional scope of collective bargaining and was also the biggest ever pro-abortion march. For the feminists who had done the years of work, however, it was a bitter pill - the TUC insisted on heading the march with Len Murray and General Council members - almost all men.

Reproductive Rights

Effective though the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) had been in defending the 1967 Act, it had completely missed out on the wider implications of "a right to choose". Its white, middle-class background had blinkered it from seeing the importance, for black and working class women, of the issues of forced sterilisation, the use of injectable long-acting contraceptives such as Depo-provera, and the whole 'other side' to reproductive rights.



Reproductive rights means the right to have children as well as the right not to have them.

In 1983, NAC split into two separate campaign groups: one, continuing on the single issue of abortion rights and the other, a reproductive rights group.

The reproductive rights group has publicised the history of the birth control movement and its involvement with eugenics and the ideology of the need for birth control in order to carry on and strengthen the white race. This racist basis has been carried on to the present with working class and black women being forced into sterilisation and experimented on, with new and long-acting contraceptives.

Campaigns such as those around Depo-provera have united women from many third world countries. Organisations such as Gabriela in the Philippines have played a leading role. Population control and "aid" to third world countries from the West are of enormous repressive significance to third world women. Any campaigns for reproductive rights in this country must clearly acknowledge this, and further links between women world-wide on this issue.

REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The 1980s have also seen the rapid growth of "reproductive technology". Science, unfortunately in the hands of imperialism and patriarchy, is completely changing reproduction. Like other scientific and technological knowledge, it is not right or wrong in itself, but dependent on to whose advantage it is used.

The new reproductive technology has the potential to bring immense pleasure to infertile couples, and to prevent the birth of babies with severe congenital handicaps and diseases such as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis. However, the potential is also there, and at present being used, to determine the sex of the embryo and hence to bring about the abortion of female babies. In India alone, it is estimated that between 1978 and 1983, around 78,000 female foetuses were aborted after a sex determination test.

The benefits of the new technology can be closely controlled by the state and offered to the "perfect" couple in order to have the "perfect" baby. In these hands, in many ways it increases the powerlessness of women and brings alienation even to conception and childbirth.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Women's sexual needs and pleasures are not only ignored and suppressed by the whole state and religious machinery, but women world-wide are exploited and violated sexually. Within marriage in this, and most countries, rape is not an offence. Pornography and sexual violence against women are promoted in advertising, films and videos, so that women's bodies become commodities themselves.

The total degradation of third world women by western men on sex tours is growing big business. Sex tours provide the second or third most important source of foreign exchange in Thailand and the Philippines, where Americans, British and Australians go. Women are "bought" in advance from brochures. Every Sunday, a planeload of men leave Amsterdam for a sex tour in Bangkok. The women used in this way get a tiny fraction of the fee and are in great danger from violence and drugs. This is an example of how sexist and racist oppression often double up.



Torchlight procession to defend abortion rights.

Sex, Race and Class

Also complicating the issue of sexual violence against women, is the racist ideology that it is black men who are violent to white women. This lie has been used historically and in the present, to attack black men, often through lynching.

Historically, there are many examples of how white women's vulnerability to physical violence from men has been used to bring in oppressive legislation. For instance, in 1926 a White Woman's Protection Ordinance was passed in Papua (New Guinea), then under British rule, which introduced the death penalty for the crime of rape of any European female.

In a similar way, class has interacted with sexual exploitation, in that working class and peasant women have been considered "fair game" for seduction or rape by upper class men. Such men can use their social and monetary power to force women to comply and suffer no reproach from society afterwards. Similarly many, many women suffer sexual harassment at work, from bosses and supervisors: ranging from verbal remarks, through touching and mauling, to outright blackmail or intimidation.

Female Sexuality as Strength

Female sexuality does not belong to a private sphere which floats free from economic and political affairs. Nor is it simply an expression of economic relations - it does hold a fundamental challenge to patriarchy.

Feminists have challenged powerful myths in our society: such as that sex is purely a natural phenomenon and therefore apolitical; that the natural expression of sexuality is what we know as heterosexuality; and that a woman's sense of her own sexuality is natural rather than constructed by social and economic factors.

In 1975, came the women's movement's sixth demand: 'An end to discrimination against lesbians, and for a woman's right to determine her own sexuality'. This was the beginnings of a positive commitment

to female eroticism, as something powerful and autonomous, which is shared by heterosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals, and breaks down barriers between them. Femininity could then be celebrated rather than shunned. It could be positive and strong as well as sensual, desiring as well as desirable. It would not necessarily deny men, and it certainly would not rely on them. It would be what women wanted to be, not what men decreed.

also internalized values = symbol of status inversely the eroticism attraction in what form.

SOVIET UNION: STILL A SUPERPOWER

"There are no bears left in the Soviet Union," British Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, is reported to have said recently. There have, indeed, been many changes in Soviet foreign policy. Over the last year, we have seen the signing of the treaty on the elimination of intermediate range nuclear weapons. Hard on the heels of this treaty, we saw the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan and subsequent troop withdrawals. More recently, there have been diplomatic initiatives in search of a political settlement in Angola.

The Soviet Union has been putting pressure on Cuba to take part in the negotiations about Angola. Soviet aid to Cuba, totalling an estimated \$4.6 billion in 1985, has been reduced. Vietnam has also been warned "that Soviet generosity has its limits."

of the state of Israel: the same principle that the Zionist state has always used to crush the Palestinian people. The Soviet government paper, Izvestia stated:

"To put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Soviet Union favours an international peace conference ... A close inspection of our proposals will show that they do not encroach on the rights and security of Israel ... The existence of the state of Israel cannot be debated at an international conference."

In January this year, the Soviet Union announced that an Israeli delegation would be welcomed in Moscow to discuss the resumption of diplomatic relations. The Soviet Union has established a consulate in Israel.

It is no accident that the Soviet Union is seeking greater contacts with Israel in the midst of the current Palestinian Uprising. In his speech, on

he explained: "... We are not going to infringe on somebody's interests and we are not going to interrupt international trade and economic relations. We are pursuing our own interests too. It is not only the capitalist world which suffers from an economic crisis. The socialist world also suffers.... We should take into account the global problems and the global consequences of our behaviour in every part of the world."

SUPERPOWER POLITICS OR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE?

On another level, we can understand aspects of Soviet foreign policy as simply making a virtue out of necessity. It has presented its planned withdrawal from Afghanistan as evidence of its willingness to settle other regional conflicts.

Soviet policy is justified in the name of peaceful co-existence. In the context of the agenda set at the 27th

In the present situation, the Soviet Union is limited in its freedom of action, by past economic mismanagement and the burden of military expenditure. The well-known stagnation of the economy has to be halted. The priority being given to this internal re-structuring has become greater. "The problems that have accumulated in society are more deep-seated than we thought," Gorbachev told the Central Committee last year. If oil revenues and vodka sales are excluded, the Soviet GNP stood still in the ten years before Gorbachev assumed office. Efforts have to be concentrated on solving these internal problems.

Paradoxically, this has in turn led to an increase in foreign policy activity. Costly foreign commitments are being cut down. Part of this policy is to seek an accommodation with the USA. Gorbachev recently wrote that: the Soviet Union recognises how important "the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, other Third World regions and also South Africa are, for American and West European economies, in particular as raw material sources. To cut those links is the last thing we want to do, and we have no desire to provoke ruptures in historically formed, mutual economic interests."

PARTNERS IN THE WORLD ENTERPRISE

At the same time, the official Soviet position rejects the dependency argument that the neo-colonial domination and exploitation of the Third World by the industrialised world is the principal cause of its economic underdevelopment.

Instead, traditional socio-cultural differences between North and South are offered as the cause of the failure to modernise.

Viktor Sheinis, of the Soviet Institute of World Economy and International Relations, argues that the choice between different roads of development in the Third World is an illusion, and that it is pointless to talk about by-passing capitalism.

An argument gaining ground is the view that methods traditionally associated with capitalism are merely "a mechanism, appropriate to the development of the modern productive forces and ambivalent in terms of its relationship to capitalism and socialism".

Such views only cover up the acceptance of the poverty of three-quarters of the people in the world. They endorse this poverty by not challenging the unequal relations imposed by the world economic system. This, Gorbachev stated clearly:

"While we do not approve the character of the current relations between the West and the developing countries, we do not urge that they must be disrupted."

Or, as he told one time US Presidential candidate, Gary Hart,

"The US can do much to build new inter-state relations, and lose nothing economically in the process."

All the Soviet Union asks, is to be part of that process. The 'new thinking' in foreign policy circles reflects a refined form of long-established objectives. To misquote from Lenin, it is a case of one step back, two steps forward. A period of detente, of superpower collusion allows for retrenchment at home. Such an offer may prove attractive to the US, knowing that it is the world's largest debtor nation. It is not too fanciful to characterise the coming period as the calm before the storm.



This warning to Hanoi may well indicate Gorbachev's determination to establish good relations with China. The withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan removes one of the three obstacles to improving relations. Another, troops reductions on the border between the Soviet Union and China, should not present major difficulties. The third condition laid down by China is an end to Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea.

Hanoi must be worried about these warnings from the Soviet Union. There is plenty of evidence from the past that Soviet foreign policy towards the developing world is characterised by opportunism. The determining factor has always been the strategic considerations of the Soviet Union not the needs of the Third World country concerned.

In this respect, fundamentally there is no change in the relations between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world. This article will attempt to show that recent changes in Soviet foreign policy have been determined by the changing internal needs of the Soviet Union. There are plenty of bears still in the Soviet Union.

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East provides a good example of what Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, means when he promised US President, Ronald Reagan, that he would help promote "regional stability" in key areas of the world.

Soviet proposals stick firmly to the principle of the security

the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution, last November, Gorbachev argued that the forces for national liberation are waning. He said: "... the impulse essential to the new, current stage of the Third World's development... is only nascent."

SEEKING SETTLEMENTS

Such an assessment of the national liberation movements is at odds with the growing strength of the oppressed people in Eritrea, the Philippines, Palestine, Azania and Ireland, to mention only a few places. In foreign policy terms, it means a reduction of support for those movements that the Soviet Union has courted.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

On the question of Soviet support for the African National Congress (ANC), the Deputy Director of the Institute of African Studies, Victor Goncharov, recently pointed out that military support from the Soviet Union depended on the prospects of the armed struggle. "If we think that it is useless, we won't give anything," he said.

Soviet thinking on Southern Africa reflects the dominant trend in current foreign policy, which is to avoid confrontation and seek a common approach with the USA: "for the Soviet Union and the USA to settle this problem."

Essentially the same point were made at last summer's conference on Zimbabwe. Goncharov said that the Soviet Union had no "vital interests" in the region. In the search for a settlement,

Congress, it was called a "policy of learning and mastering the art of long-term existence side-by-side". However, in practice, the policy is closer to Khrushchev's deals with the USA than with a truly Leninist policy of peaceful co-existence. Gorbachev's "Perestroika - new thinking for our country and the world" is based on the premise that "we are a superpower".

Part of the new policy on foreign affairs is a recognition that the Soviet Union has over-extended itself. New ways of winning influence in the world are being examined.

MILITARY OR ECONOMIC POWER?

The reliance on providing military aid to the Third World is now seen as a major weakness in courting allies. With 96% of the emergency aid received by Ethiopia coming from the West, the Soviet Union was shown up as unable to match western aid. It can supply the war material to try and stem the advance of the Eritrean and Tigrayan struggles, but not the development aid needed to build the nation.

Gorbachev represents the trend that sees that a firm base for Soviet influence in the Third World can be laid only by economic assistance. Again, this change is not determined by the needs of the developing world but by those of the Soviet economy. A leading Soviet specialist put it bluntly: "It is almost impossible to ignore the fact that for socialism, the expansion of its zone in the underdeveloped world can lead to an increase in the burden...."

BOOKNEWS

THE COERCIVE STATE: the decline of democracy in Britain

Hillyard & Percy-Smith

Behind the rhetoric of democracy lies the machine of government. The authors examine the steady growth of state power. They show how both Labour and Tory administrations have contributed to the greater effectiveness with which our lives are watched and the ever-growing demand for greater non-accountable powers of classification, categorisation and intervention. 352 pages.

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THE EUROPEAN TRIBE

Caryl Phillips

This book recounts the novelist Caryl Phillips' encounter with pan-European racism in 1984. It is part-travelogue, part-autobiography, part-polemic as he travels from Morocco to Moscow "to come to terms with what it is like to feel both of, and not of, Europe." 129 pages.

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LAND OF LOST CONTENT: the Luddite Revolt, 1812.

Robert Reid

A country already stretched by the demands of the war against Napoleon, was shaken by a series of violent demonstrations across the North of England. The smashing of the new machinery of the woollen industry was known as Luddism. This book is the story of the rise and suppression of that protest. The North was virtually annexed by troops and 17 leaders of the revolt hanged. 334 pages.

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FREEDOM FOR IRELAND



HUNGER STRIKE MARTYRS REMEMBERED

C.S. CORRESPONDENT

The speech of the Sinn Fein spokesperson was the high point of the 3rd Birmingham rally organised by the Irish Hunger Strike Commemoration Committee on Saturday 14th May.

The speaker said that Sinn Fein saluted the achievements of the 12 Irish men who died on hunger strike and of all Irish men and women who gave their lives to uphold the right of the Irish people to self-determination. He commemorated the families who had lost their loved ones, and had been insulted, abused and pressurised by the establishment in the six counties, the 26 counties and Britain. This included the pressure from the Catholic Church. But they showed their true strength, and were an inspiration to all.

The British attempt to criminalise the struggle had failed. They tried to criminalise whole communities, to impose this solution on the whole of West Belfast. But they are the criminals. They tried to make it look like a policing situation. But it is not policing. It is war. The Irish people against British imperialism.

The speaker told the rally to remember the sacrifice of the Irish men and women who had died, especially over the last year, in the struggle to build the united, democratic, socialist Republic, where people can combine with people and their services can be geared to the needs of the people and not of the state. The men and women who died could have stood back and ignored problems like the SDLP and the 26 county government. But instead they risked their lives to better those of their communities by taking on imperialism. There was no reward for them. The only reward will be a united Ireland and socialist Republic.

DECIDING THE FUTURE

Sinn Fein was calling for British withdrawal within the lifetime of one government and the release of all the prisoners. Representatives from all sections of the community would be called to a conference to decide the future of Ireland. To those who said there would be a loyalist backlash, Sinn Fein said that withdrawal would bring about a change in loyalist intransigence. They will see the chance to better the lives of their own people. The Shankill people are as badly off as the nationalists. They will unite against the British state. They will have freedom for their religion and their demonstrations.

But the British government will never go by their own will, but only by force - that of the public opinion and determination of a people in struggle; the force of the Armalite and SAM missile will drive the British from Ireland.

The speaker said that the Hillsborough agreement was not aimed, as the politicians said, at ending discrimination against the nationalist people. It was aimed to smash the Republican movement. And it



had resulted in more deaths and more Loyalist and British collaboration.

The last few months had showed the true nature of British democracy. The deaths, the Stalker-Sampson cover-up, the arrests in Wiltshire, the continued imprisonment of the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, Judith Ward - all political hostages. This was the type of justice to be expected from Britain, which is not a democracy but a fascist state. Their hypocrisy is shown up every time a person is killed by them, or arrested under the PTA. The killing of the three volunteers in Gibraltar was an example of British justice. And it showed the subservience of the 26 county state.

STRUGGLING FOR FREEDOM AND PEACE

They can put us in jail, said the speaker, torture and oppress us. But we will always be there struggling with the people against oppression and justice.

Enniskillen was something that should never have happened. But Mrs Thatcher should be aware that she will be visiting more airports, meeting her dead unless Britain disengages. The Irish people want peace. There would be no Enniskillen, no IRA, no war, if the British were not there. But Irish men and women would continue to assert their right to self-determination by armed struggle. They would uphold the Hunger Strikers and all who had given their lives for freedom.

Twenty years ago, the demand was for reform of the six county state. The people were beaten up and learnt the lesson that the British would not listen except by force. This is the last phase, said the speaker, and we are going to win this time. If not, what have they all died for? We must unite together so that we can win.

RALLY AND MARCH

The Sinn Fein speaker followed speakers from the Hunger Strike Campaign, Chile Democratico, Oliver Lynch, brother of Hunger Striker Kevin Lynch and the Irish POW campaign. Messages were also read from Republican prisoners in Gartree, Albany, Maghaberry, Long Lartin, Leicester and Durham jails.

The rally followed a march of 700 people through the streets of Birmingham, led by a Republican flute band from Scotland. The militant demonstration of solidarity with the Irish people was marred at the end by attacks from joint fascist-loyalist gangs and random arrests by Birmingham police. Twenty marchers were arrested and held for up to eight hours before being charged with public order offences. Most of the arrests were arbitrary - the only "offence" being shouting slogans at the fascists. It seems likely that the police were instructed that a certain number of arrests was expected of them, in a vain attempt to prevent pro-Republican marches in Britain.

COMMEMORATION DAY



JAMES CONNOLLY



BOBBY SANDS

BRITISH WITHDRAWAL

A packed Conway Hall heard Sinn Fein's Richard MacCauley speak on the Irish struggle for independence and re-unification, in London on May 8th.

The rally, organised by the Wolfe Tone Society, a Republican support group, was attended by over 500 people throughout the day at various workshops, video showings and musical contributions.

Addressing the main rally, Sinn Fein's Director of Publicity for the occupied six counties, spoke of the patriots the rally was commemorating: James Connolly and Bobby Sands:

"It is important to remember that they were not the products of events in one single generation, but were the combatants in the longest colonial struggle in history. A struggle which we, in this generation, intend to bring to a satisfactory conclusion."

Speaking on the subject of Sinn Fein's vision of a future Ireland "free of poverty, unemployment, emigration and sectarianism", Richard MacCauley said that the civil and religious rights of northern Protestants would be safeguarded, and appealed to the loyalist working class to work for the only possible solution: a united Ireland.

Remembering the sacrifices and losses, especially those of the 1981 Hunger Strike, he expressed the dedication of the Republican Movement to resolve the struggle. He noted that "the military struggle is a political option" and if the British state announced a quick and speedy withdrawal of its forces, then the better the opportunity to establish reconciliation.

Also addressing the rally were Maura McCotter, of the Relatives Committee for the Repatriation of Irish Prisoners, and Claire Keating, of the Irish Prisoners Appeal group. They spoke of the plight of Irish Republican prisoners and their relatives that stems from the criminalisation policy of the British state. During the rally, the Campaign for a Free Ireland presented £2,000 raised for a minibus for prisoners' relatives in Strabane.

Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn, defied party policy in sharing a platform with a Sinn Fein speaker. Mohammad Arif, of the British Afro-Asian Solidarity Organisation and Harpal Brar of the Indian Workers Association, also spoke at the rally.

C.S. CORRESPONDENT

The Longest Colonial Struggle