

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 100 April/May 1991

(unwaged 30p) 50p

# FREEDOM is what we fight for!

## INSIDE

### Editorial

British capital – little room  
for manoeuvre.  
No choice for  
British electors page 2

### Gulf War and its aftermath

Premeditated murder  
of a nation page 3  
How Saddam crushed the  
Communists page 4

### Kurdistan: seizing the opportunity

Interview with Kurdish National  
Liberation Front member page 6

### Woolf Inquiry

Prisoners must fight for  
humane conditions page 10

### Communists & the National Question

Imperialism and War page 11  
The Soviet Union and  
Baltic nationalism page 14

### Poll tax bites the dust

The end of a pernicious tax page 16

## Birmingham Six free at last!

Exclusive interview with  
John Walker on the eve of the appeal

centre pages

SOLIDARITY  
PRICE £1



# British capital—little room for manoeuvre

It is no coincidence that the two imperialist powers whose economies have entered a severe economic recession were the most determined to wage war against Iraq. The US, facing a challenge to its economic supremacy from a resurgent Japanese and German imperialism, seized the opportunity offered by the collapse of the socialist bloc to use its immense military might to reassert its dominant position internationally. Britain, a rapidly declining imperialist power, brushed aside all economic constraints to take on, perhaps for the last time, a world imperial role as a partner of US imperialism.

Thatcher must have deeply resented missing the opportunity to take the world stage as the partner of US imperialism during the Gulf war. She would have cared little for the economic disaster she had left at home while she relished the glory of imperialism's destruction of Iraq's social and economic infrastructure and the brutal massacre of hundreds of thousands of Iraq's soldiers and civilians. What had been proved impossible for Britain in the economic domain could, it appears, be achieved in the military one.

## A WORLD OF COMPETING POWER BLOCS

After the war was over, Thatcher, from her self-imposed exile in the US, used its outcome to argue for her vision of a 'new world order', for a new imperialist military and economic alliance in which European interests are subordinated to those of the United States within a strengthened Nato. 'Nato must not be discarded... It is in the interests of Europe that the US continues to play that dominant role in Nato to which we have become accustomed. Only one nation has the power to defend freedom and security in the world. That is, and will remain for the foreseeable future, the United States.' She warned against the creation of a European superstate which would almost certainly develop interests and attitudes in conflict with those of the United States. 'We would thereby move from a stable international order, with the US in the lead, to a more dangerous world of new competing power blocs.'

Thatcher, to the very end of her period of office, refused, and still refuses, to accept a subordinate role for Britain in world affairs. A European federation in which Britain's imperialist interests are subject to those of an ever more powerful German capitalism is anathema to her. So she clings to the belief that Britain would have far more chance to give expression to its imperialist pretensions in a new Atlantic alliance of European states under the domination of the United States.

It was the harsh economic reality of Britain's economic decline which drove Thatcher out of office. It will be the same factor which will force British capitalism to accept a subordinate role in a European imperialist bloc whose economic and political

interests, as the Gulf war indicated, inevitably will conflict with those of the United States.

Immediately the war was over Major and Hurd set about repairing the damage done to Anglo-German relations by the jingoist attacks on Germany by many sections of the British press and some politicians. Major made a great deal of the 'constructive' discussions he had had with Chancellor Kohl at their recent meeting in Bonn and of the moves towards a consensus on the controversial issue of economic and monetary union. He knows he has little choice. It was only Britain's entry into ERM which staved off a massive attack on the pound. Britain needs European, and particularly German support, if the present British economic recession is not to turn into a much deeper economic slump with very serious political and social consequences.

The inter-imperialist rivalries which began at the turn of the century, resulting in two world wars and fascism, were not finally resolved until one imperialist power, the United States, dominated the capitalist world economy after the Second World War. Today once again we are seeing the reemergence of equally matched imperialist power blocs—a necessary product of post-war economic expansion. The major forces involved this time have changed. US dominance of the world economy is being challenged by Japan and a European imperialist bloc, itself dominated by German capitalism. Britain's relative economic decline has continued, its economic challenge diminishing most rapidly throughout the Thatcher years.

## THE PRICE OF SOCIAL CONSENSUS

The restoration of capitalism after the Second World War was achieved at a political cost to capital. Worldwide this was expressed by the advance of the socialist countries and revolutionary anti-capitalist regimes. In countries like Britain the maintenance of a relatively full employment, the rising level of social expenditure and rising living standards were the price capital had to pay for the political integration of the working class in the immediate post-war period. The balance of class forces after the war necessitated this.

This consensus between capital and labour remained until the mid-1970s. Conditions for worldwide capital accumulation were deteriorating with the challenge to US economic supremacy from German and Japanese capitalism. The devaluation of the dollar in 1971 heralded this new period. The contradictions of the capital accumulation process reasserted themselves as the rate of profit began to fall in all the major capitalist nations. In Britain the rising consumption institutionalised in the Keynesian welfare state became a barrier to the accumulation of capital as the overaccumulation of capital increased the pressure on profits.

The growth of state expenditure



Thatcher in self-imposed exile in the US — delusions of Downing Street and a new world order

ure and the expansion of credit which had sustained the accumulation process throughout much of the post-war boom now only produced rising prices with unemployment rapidly growing as private capital investment slowed down. Stagflation was the name given to this new phenomenon. This crisis of Keynesianism signalled the end of the social democratic consensus between capital and the working class. The ruling class went on to the offensive and used the state to restructure capital and attack the working class. The balance of class forces had to change. Thatcherism represented the only consistent ruling class strategy to carry out this change.

## THE DEMISE OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC STATE

It was the Labour government under Callaghan which laid the foundations for Thatcherism. With the end of the post-war boom the social democratic consensus came apart precisely because the economic demands of the trade unions were no longer containable within Labour's electoral programme. The

government demonstrated this by setting monetary targets, wage cuts and public spending cuts all in the context of an IMF loan to defend the pound. In a sense then Thatcherism was not something new—the policies were started by Labour and led to the 'winter of discontent', 1978-9. But in another sense it definitely was.

What was new was the impossibility of continuing with the social democratic consensus—it was no longer economically feasible. That is the materialist basis underlying Thatcherism. The strategy was inevitable in the context of halting Britain's economic decline while sustaining Britain as a major imperialist power.

The Tory government intended to use the drive against inflation through a tight monetary policy as a cover for a rapid increase in unemployment, an attack on working class living standards and for drastically cutting back state expenditure. The aim was to restore the rate of profit on private capital by massively transferring wealth back to the private sector.

Today everyone is clear that this strategy has failed and to a

certain extent it was never consistently maintained. State expenditure rose in real terms throughout the whole period although after the first few years it fell a few percentage points as a proportion of GNP. The present recession will see it rise again both absolutely and as a percentage of GNP. In other words the Tories were not prepared to risk the social consequences of their own programme and this was especially true as elections drew near.

There have been two periods of recession since the Tories came to power but there have been also two periods of credit-financed mini-booms both started in the run-up to general election periods. In other words, in order to win elections Thatcher was forced to draw back from the full implications of her own programme. It is impossible to be elected to power in Britain without winning the allegiance of a sizeable section of the skilled and better off working class and middle classes. Thatcher's strategy for doing this was different to the state-spending-induced booms of earlier post-war years. It was through a credit-financed housing boom, tax cuts and privatisation that she bought off and subsidised that section of the working class and middle class which determines the outcome of elections.

Her period of office saw a dramatic redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich as she steadfastly bought the political allegiance of the better-off. In the process she ran down essential social services, driving a significant minority of working class people into real poverty. But this layer does not significantly determine the outcome of elections. She forced the political spectrum to the right and she destroyed all the pretensions of state and municipal 'socialism' as its social democratic proponents lost their nerve or found their careers better served elsewhere. After she had defeated the miners, restrictive legislation was sufficient to keep the law-abiding trade unions in check. But it was all to little avail. Her overall economic policy far from halting Britain's economic decline accelerated it. The stagflation which heralded the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s has returned as harbinger of the crisis of 'free' market capitalism in the 1990s.

## LITTLE ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE

These developments have had interesting political consequences. They have forced all the political parties to move back to the political centre ground and put forward almost identical policies to win the support of the voters that matter in parliamentary elections—the better off sections of the working class and the middle class. So Labour's 'shadow budget' promotes an £880m package of training and employment measures, a one percentage point cut in interest rates and increased capital allowances for industry. The Liberal Democrats would invest in education, training and trans-

port and reduce the tax burden on industry by £1bn. They will take measures which will allow cuts in interest rates. The Tory budget which will be announced soon after we go to press will almost certainly lead to cuts in interest rates and give some boost to industry, education and training. All parties will get rid of the poll tax.

In 1975 two competing economic programmes were put forward for reversing Britain's relative industrial decline—that of a state induced national programme of investment (Tony Benn/Labour left) and a 'free' market/private capital led renewal of British capitalism (Sir Keith Joseph)\*. The first represented the political interests of a rapidly declining section of the British working class—the traditional skilled industrial working class, the old labour aristocracy. It would have the support of those workers whose economic livelihood depended on a secure job in the state and local government sectors. It was a utopian programme in that it flew in the face of the widespread crisis of Keynesian state intervention in the economy. The second, the standpoint of a growing right-wing trend in the ruling class/Tory Party, was to appeal to a quite different set of workers—a white labour aristocracy—employed in advanced engineering and electronics, in the financial sector and to other tradeable services and to some extent in the consumer-orientated industries which depended on these sectors. Neither programme, as real economic developments have conclusively shown, had an answer to British capitalism's continuing relative economic decline.

The growing crisis, therefore, leaves the bourgeois political parties, Tory, Labour or Liberal Democratic without a seriously viable economic programme and with little room for manoeuvre in the run-up to the general election. Once the euphoria of the Gulf war has dissipated this economic reality will be driven home.

This situation opens up opportunities for socialists to start the process of rebuilding the working class movement in this country. We have to build that movement not among the privileged layers of the working class who determine the outcome of bourgeois elections. We have to build that movement among the more than 10 million people in work who earn less than the Council of Europe's 'decency' threshold, among the unemployed, the old and poor of this country who have long had no political party to represent their interests. We have to build among the Irish and black working class and the many immigrant workers in this country who have long suffered racist repression from all Britain's mainstream political parties. Such a movement will be built in defiant opposition to all bourgeois political parties whether Labour, Tory or Liberal Democrat.

\*See 'Inflation, the Crisis and the Post War Boom' in *Revolutionary Communism* 3/4. Larkin Publications £1 + 40p p&p.

## An economy out of control

GDP rose by 0.05 per cent in 1990. This masks the decline in the second half of the year. GDP fell by 1.3 per cent in the third quarter of 1990 and a further 0.9 per cent in the last three months of the year. The British economy is in a recession.

Companies' gross trading profits fell by 10 per cent in 1990. Higher interest payments and falling profits increased the financial sector deficit of companies to a record £27bn. Business failures increased by 35 per cent in 1990 to 24,442.

Unemployment increased by 85,628 in February to over two million, the highest total for two years. In December 1990 only 37,000 working days were lost in industrial disputes—the lowest for 50 years.

In the last three months of 1990 investment in manufacturing sank by 15 per cent compared with the same period a year earlier. For the first time since records began, manufacturing industry employs fewer than five million people. Fixed capital spending in British industry at £2600 per employee is £1000 less than in France and Germany and £4000 less than in Japan.

Wage rises at 9.25 per cent are barely keeping pace with inflation at 9 per cent, yet are some 5-6 per cent higher than in Britain's main competitors. In manufacturing in the third quarter of 1990 unit labour costs rose by 10 per cent compared to one per cent in Germany and Japan and zero in the US. There is already much talk of income policies as part of an attack on wages after the election.

Household debt as a proportion of disposable income almost doubled to 112 per cent in 1989 from 62 per cent in 1981.

The balance of payments deficit in January increased to £1.2bn. In 1990 the yearly deficit was estimated at £12.8bn (£19.9bn in 1989) with a trade deficit of £17.9bn (£24bn in 1989). The stock market is approaching an all-time record high.





**VICTORY TO PALESTINE!  
VICTORY TO KURDISTAN!**

US soldiers dig pits that are filled with the mangled remains of numberless retreating Iraqis burned and dismembered in that final holocaust on the Kuwait-Basra highway. Iraqi families await the return of sons, brothers, husbands and lovers who will never come back. They wait for them in devastated cities where cholera, typhoid and hepatitis seep out of the ground to kill the young and old. The work of decades has been reduced to rubble. 'They have bombed us back to the stone age.'

What words are adequate to describe this crime in an era when language itself has been polluted by the doublespeak of war? The frying alive of men inside a metal tank coffin is a 'surgical strike'. The systematic pulverisation of thousands of men in cars and lorries is 'a turkey shoot'. A shelter for men, women and children is a 'command and control centre'. The bombing of trucks of soldiers as they bent in prayer at the roadside is a 'fun mission'.

Military theorist Clausewitz wrote:

'The invention of gunpowder, the constant progress of improvements in the construction of firearms, are sufficient proof that the tendency to destroy the adversary which lies at the bottom of the conception of War is in no way changed or modified through the progress of civilisation.'

The day by day destruction of Iraq certainly revealed the limits of civilisation in the West.

British bishops searched their theological vaults to discover means of calling this carnage 'justifiable'. Journalists acted as pimps and propagandists for the war machine. Warm, safe, well-fed politicians and intellectuals blithely called for sacrifice from young British men too poor, stupid or amoral to find any other trade than killing. And the Labour Movement, whose 'progressive' nature is talked of only amongst small groups of Trotskyist visionaries, clapped its hands and counted up the new jobs to be had in arms production.

Few questioned the right of imperialist nations to impose their will by force on the Arab world.

#### THE MURDER OF A NATION

And what was the imperialist will? General Norman Schwarzkopf said: 'There is a lot more purpose to this war than getting the Iraqis out of Kuwait.' Indeed so. Saddam Hussein is the usual vicious anti-working class and anti-communist tyrant lovingly nurtured by the USA. But he made the fatal error of displaying independent bourgeois ambitions in a region which the USA believes it alone should control. Oil wealth and a massive army threatened to allow



An Iraqi soldier burnt alive on the road to Basra, killed by the clean surgical weapons of the US airforce

# THE GULF WAR — premeditated murder of a nation

**'Then this civilisation and justice stand forth as undisguised savagery and lawless revenge... A glorious civilisation, indeed, the great problem of which is how to get rid of the heaps of corpses it made after the battle was over' (Karl Marx)**

**After 40 days of war there are not heaps but mountains of Iraqi corpses. 200,000 Iraqi people are dead or mutilated. The imperialists lost just 131. This statistic starkly reveals the one-sided savagery of the war. 1000 Iraqi lives for each Western one. 28 countries, including the richest and most powerful, against one nation of 18 million people. An imperialist army of terrifying technological killing power against a conscript army equipped with second rate weaponry. An air force that could pound Iraqi towns and troops without fear of airborne challenge until pilots complained there was nothing left to bomb. EDDIE ABRAHAMS and MAXINE WILLIAMS analyse the war and its aftermath and argue that those not shamed and disgusted by this spectacle have forfeited their humanity.**

the realisation of these ambitions. The USA was not prepared to even contemplate an Iraq capable of dictating terms about oil prices and regional power. So on 17 January they began the demolition of Iraq's economic and military power in order to eliminate this threat. In the process they hoped to unseat Hussein himself if a safe alternative could be found.

Proof that this, rather than the liberation of Kuwait, was their aim came on at least three occasions. On the eve of war, Saddam Hussein told UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar that withdrawal from Kuwait was negotiable. This being the last thing the USA wanted to hear, it was kept secret by the UN, and the bombing began. On the eve of the ground war the Soviet government negotiated a peace plan committing Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. The US answer was the thunder of artillery. And even after the Iraqi government accepted all UN resolutions and the decimated Iraqi forces were fleeing Kuwait, the US response was to bomb the helpless retreating men, occupy parts of Iraq and step up the bombing.

The reconquest of Kuwait did not demand the destruction of Iraq's industrial and social infrastructure. But Iraq's roads, railways, bridges, airports, electricity generating plants, water pumping and purification plants, telecommunications, oil refineries, factories, schools, health services, research institutions and government buildings lie in ruins. The estimated material damage amounts to \$200bn. Reconstruction will take decades.

Also in ruins is the Iraqi army, first armed, and now destroyed, by the imperialists. It has lost 3,500 of its 4,200 tanks, 2000 of its 3,000 artillery guns and 2,000 of its 2,700 troop carriers.

Just as the imperialists willed at the beginning of this conflict, the costs of reconstruction and the threat of reparations will ensure that for years to come Iraq will be unable to challenge imperialism.

The outcome of this war is a devastating setback for human progress, socialism and communism. For in the destruction of Iraq, the US-led imperialists have issued a warning to all the poor and oppressed nations of the world: the wealth of the world belongs only to us, dare to question this and you will be cut down as Iraq was.

#### THE TIDE OF REACTION

Now we see the reality of the world in which the socialist bloc has collapsed. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev's pro-imperialist leadership cannot stay the hand of rich and powerful nations as they plunder the world. This Nobel Peace prize winner, who has brought the Soviet Union to the brink of political collapse, was bribed by the imperialists to support the war. His peace effort was merely a cynical response to internal anti-imperialist pressure. Nor will the UN, however much Tony Benn *et al* pretend, act as anything other than the rubber stamp for the US. Although the war was fought under its auspices, the UN Security Council did not even meet during hostilities. In this war the United Nations has been the hand-wringing Archbishop of imperialist diplomacy.

The new world order to which Bush and Major plan to subject the world is the bloody dictatorship of imperialist capital. It will be the world order of rich nations who live at the expense of those who have nothing. Already the imperialist plans for the Middle East are unfolding and they are grim indeed.

#### THE SPOILS OF WAR

The post-war Gulf is being shaped. First US priority was to restore the feudal al Sabah family in Kuwait. After kissing the soil its next act was to start shooting its democratic opponents. Palestinians in Kuwait are being tortured and terrorised. Second priority for the US is to engineer a satisfactory outcome to the violent contest for power taking place in Iraq. The US is carefully weighing its options but it is clear already from its actions around Basra and its silence on the Kurdish uprising that it would prefer a tame Ba'athi/army alliance without Saddam Hussein to an altogether unpredictable outcome.

And what of the Middle East as a whole? The major Middle East governments are to be compliant client regimes. Syria, clutching Lebanon as its war booty, needs US and Saudi money to survive. Egypt has long been on the US payroll. Saudi Arabia is the payroll. At a meeting of the Gulf states, Syria and Egypt provide the Arab cover for US policing of the Gulf. In return they will receive a large part of a \$15bn development fund to fend off the threat of economic disintegration and revolution.

As ever, these political arrangements are designed to safeguard and multiply the mighty dollar. Hundreds of foreign firms have converged like vultures expecting to reap enormous profits from Kuwaiti reconstruction estimated at \$50bn. British capital also expects a cut for services rendered. 'Prizes are still to come as far as British industry is concerned', said one businessman, especially as Kuwaiti officials 'know who their friends are.' The oil companies are now plotting to reverse the process of nationalisation of the oil in-

dustry in Arab countries and thus enhance their already giant profits.

The table is laid for the victory feast but the guests are already fighting over the choicest dishes. A French proposal for a UN conference to discuss a new world order for the next 10-15 years has been shunned by the US. It hopes to use its military ascendancy to fashion a world in which its interests reign supreme. However the Japanese and Germans are resisting these designs and threatening to withhold billions of dollars of subsidies they promised to the US. The Japanese want to use some of this money to make profits for themselves out of reconstruction contracts. With the recession biting deeper in the US and economic complications mounting in Germany and Japan there will be no easy ride for imperialism.

#### PALESTINIAN AND KURDISH SELF-DETERMINATION — A DIFFERENT STORY

In his post-war speech a triumphant Bush pledged to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such words sent a cold shiver down the spines of all Palestinians. The threat is that another generation's hopes for self-determination and statehood are to be buried. For occupying Kuwait, Iraq suffered death and destruction. For occupying the West Bank and Gaza, Israel receives unwaivering support. During the war it kept all the West Bank Palestinians under a five-week 24-hour curfew. Human rights, like self-determination, is a very flexible concept. Israel has now been advanced another \$650m with another \$10bn being negotiated. These funds will be used to settle hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews and will be the first step in the displacement of all Palestinians from the Occupied Territories.

During the war much was said about Saddam Hussein's suppression of the Kurds. Afterwards a deathly silence fell. Kurdistan was not to be on the agenda for the post-war settlement. As the first uprisings began in Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan the imperialists kept a cool distance confident that their fascist ally, the Ozal regime in Turkey, was ready to crush any potential independent Kurdish state.

*continued on page 7*



# How Saddam crushed the communists



**VICTORY TO PALESTINE!  
VICTORY TO KURDISTAN!**

Comrades who want to place events now unfolding in Iraq in their proper historical and class context will profit by reading this excellent book – **Iraq since 1958 – From Revolution to Dictatorship**. It outlines British imperialism's role in the founding of modern Iraq and meticulously records a frequently overlooked tragedy – the destruction of the Iraqi communist and workers' movement at the hands of the Baath Party.

## THE CARVE-UP OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE BIRTH OF IRAQ

In 1920, General Edward Spears wrote that:

'... the French and the British ... satisfied each others' appetites after the First World War, by serving up strips of Arab land to each other.'

Until the First World War, the Arab world fell within the domain of a decaying Ottoman empire. This oil-rich area became a battleground as Germany, Britain and France fought to replace Ottoman rule. In their struggle, the French and British won Arab support with promises of democracy and independence. But in secret they concocted the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, which gave Lebanon and Syria to the French while the British got Palestine and Iraq. With Germany's defeat and the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the victorious allies were free to carve up the region.

Between 1915 and 1921 British troops 'liberated' Baghdad and Basra provinces from Ottoman rule and completed their new territorial unit by attaching to these Arab provinces the oil-rich Kurdish province of Mosul. Their hopes of imposing direct rule after the fashion of the 'Indian Raj' were dashed by nationalist opposition. The British therefore altered tactics and prepared to rule indirectly. They created a dependent ruling class from among the most backward sheiks, landlords and tribal leaders.



General Qasim, popular leader of the 1958 revolution

These elements were bribed with enormous tracts of land which had hitherto been state property. They were provided with a state, a civil service, an army and, of course, a team of British 'advisers' who had powers of veto. In 1921 the British authorities engineered the election of King Faisal to lead this ostensibly Iraqi government. Anglo-Iraqi treaties ensured the safety and security of British interests both before and after formal independence in 1932. Thus was born modern Iraq.

Between 1932 and the revolution of 1958, Iraq's British-imposed ruling class ruled the roost making massive fortunes from collaboration with British capital. They did so, however, amidst the increasing impoverishment of the Iraqi peasantry, a growing class polarisation and the birth of an Iraqi working class.

By 1958 one per cent of landowners owned 55 per cent of all land held in private hands. At the other end, 64 per cent held just 3.6 per cent of all cultivated land and 600,000 rural heads of households were completely landless. Hundreds of thousands of dispossessed peasants flooded into slums circling the main cities in search of food and work. Thus grew in the construction industry, small factories and most significantly in the oil industry, a small but militant working class. And by its side a larger, impoverished petit-bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, artisans, teachers, civil servants and professionals.

## THE IRAQI COMMUNIST PARTY

Formed in 1934, the Iraqi Communist Party drew its support from these classes and became a significant force by the early 1940s. It built its influence by uniting the social struggle for better wages, conditions and housing with the national struggle against British control. It targeted for strike action numerous British owned economic interests and oil in particular. Thus it succeeded in harnessing the ambition and anger of the urban poor – working class and petit-bourgeois. Equally significantly the ICP developed a widespread following in Kurdistan with its policy of autonomy based on self-determination. It was the first Iraqi political

party to develop a progressive position on the Kurdish struggle and ICP members edited the first Kurdish political paper.

In the late 1940s, the Party came into its own during a massive nationalist upheaval against the infamous Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The so-called Portsmouth Agreement was being renegotiated during 1947 and 1949. When the terms of the treaty, prolonging it for a further 20 years, were announced, Iraq exploded into the al-Wathba, the leap, the great national uprising. The ICP was a 'fundamental force' in a series of massive strikes and demonstrations which led to bloody street battles. Government soldiers massacred 300-400 protesters. Hundreds of communists were arrested and in 1949 two leading Party members were hanged in public. Their bodies were left dangling for several hours 'so that the common people going to work would receive a warning'.

## THE 1958 REVOLUTION AND THE DEFEAT OF COMMUNISM

For ten years these class contradictions intensified and then exploded into a massive political and social upheaval. On 14 July 1958, the Supreme Committee of Free Officers led by Generals Abd al Salam Arif and Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the British-installed monarchy. The coup unleashed enormous pent-up social energy which almost overnight created mass organisations, trade unions, political parties and popular militias. Rapidly General Qasim became the acknowledged leader of a popular revolution.

The revolution succeeded because it was able to unite two distinct anti-imperialist forces. On the one hand, the working class and oppressed whose social and economic conditions spurred them on to a social as well as national revolution. On the other hand, a whole strata of the new urban bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie whose nationalism pitted them against the monarchy and the British but who remained hostile to socialism.

With its militant record, its links with the working class and its underground organisation, the ICP effec-

tively took command of most trade unions and mass organisations. It set up its own militia to defend the revolution. It also took the leadership of the Students Union, the Youth Federation, the Women's League and the Engineers', Lawyers' and Teachers' Unions. The masses flocked to it. In January 1959 the ICP was forced to announce that it could not accept any more new members as its administrative machinery could not cope. The Party and the masses controlled the streets of Baghdad and with demonstrations of up to 500,000 began pressing for fundamental social and economic change, and in particular for land reform.

The spectre of communism began to haunt the imperialists. CIA-boss Allen Dulles stated that the situation in Iraq was 'the most dangerous in the world'. The threat of a genuine social revolution led to a split in the alliance which carried through the revolution. At a governmental level this expressed itself in the rift between Abd al-Karim Qasim who relied on communist support and Abd al-Salam Arif who unfurled the banner of Pan-Arabism and anti-communist nationalism.

Central to the programme of Pan-Arabism was the call for the political union of all Arab states. However the populist and radical rhetoric was but a cover for a systematic struggle against Arab communism. Nasser, the outstanding exponent of Pan-Arab nationalism had by the end of 1958 launched an all-out attack against Arab communist parties, and the Syrian and Iraqi parties in particular. Arif and his supporters, calling for union with Egypt, hoped to deploy Egypt's anti-communist laws against the Iraqi Communist Party and thus strengthen the hand of the anti-communists.



Nasser, nationalist and ideologist of Pan-Arabism

But these measures promised no immediate return. The communists still controlled the streets. Something more decisive and forceful was required to stem the advance of the working class. At hand and ready to wield the cudgel for the Iraqi and imperialist bourgeoisie was the Baath Party and the less significant Nasserite and other nationalist organisations.

The Baath Party in Iraq was formed in 1951 and developed support from the anti-communist elements of the Army. It was tiny compared to the ICP, never enjoying the latter's support and popularity. It did not need any popularity, its main function being to provide the counter-revolution with a base in the army and with gangs of thugs and killers.

From late 1958, the Baath Party, with the help of the police, organised systematic murder and terror against communists. In October 1959, a gang of Baath Party assassins carried out an unsuccessful attempt on General Qasim's life. The leader of the gang

was Saddam Hussein who subsequently rose to the top of the Party. By 1961 the ICP reported that 286 Party members and supporters had been murdered and thousands of families forced to leave their homes. By such means the Baathists slowly pushed the communists off the streets.

These actions however failed to eliminate the ICP or destroy the working class movement which remained a force to be reckoned with. The Baath Party therefore plotted and prepared for its total and thorough destruction. In 1963, in alliance with other nationalist army officers, it organised a successful military coup. Its single-minded purpose was to finish off the Iraqi communist movement. To quote from the authors:

'The months between February and November 1963 saw some of the most terrible scenes of violence hitherto experienced in the post-war Middle East. Acts of wanton savagery and brutality were perpetrated by the Baath and their associates ... (as they) set about the physical elimination of their rivals.'

Party members were shot in the streets, or herded into concentration camps, tortured to death or executed after mock trials. For nine months during which the Baath remained in power the killing and the torture continued. In this struggle the Baath received lists of communist names from the CIA. These massacres marked the effective demise of the largest and most popular communist movement in the Arab world: a movement which could have acted as a vanguard for socialism in the entire region.

One disappointing aspect of the book is the rather sketchy discussion of the strategy and tactics of the ICP during the period of the 1958 Revolution.

A thorough examination of inner party debates which led to a decision not to seize power in 1959 would throw a great deal of light on its relations with the Qasim government, on the role of the USSR, and on opportunist trends within the party itself.

The subsequent history of Iraq, the consolidation of the Baath Party, its transformation into a vehicle for the enrichment of an Iraqi bourgeoisie, its relations with imperialism and with the Soviet Union and its bloody war against the Kurdish people are all considered at length. An account of the country's economic development helps explain the material basis for the expansionist and imperialistic ambitions of the Baath Party. The story is brought up to date with a date with a chapter on the invasion of Kuwait which eventually led to the destruction of these ambitions.

Edie Abrahams

*Iraq Since 1958 – From Revolution to Dictatorship* by Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett (IB Tauris, 1990, 346pp., £9.95)



Britain had the weakest opposition to the Gulf war of any western country. There were three main reasons: the first was that the leaderships of the Labour Party and the unions, hopelessly compromised by their slavish adherence to US imperialism, shut off the avenues through which a mass movement could have been built. It was difficult in the short period of the war for activists in local branches to overcome the usual 'loyalty' arguments - especially in a run-up to a General Election.

Second was CND's paranoia about the left. The Committee Against War in the Gulf was so split and the CND bureaucracy so determined to keep anti-imperialist politics out of the campaign that it failed even to maintain the momentum of the growing weekly marches in London, let alone mobilise for other forms of action.

The third reason was the most decisive of all: Britain had the weakest and most compliant media. Every national paper took a pro-war editorial line - and only two (the *Mirror* and the *Guardian*) allowed individual columnists to protest.

As for TV and radio, they willingly submitted to the military propaganda and the thrill of high-tech weaponry to the extent of abandoning completely their critical faculties. The BBC, as it always will in wartime, switched into 'Ministry of Information' mode. Again, at the liberal end of the spectrum, anti-war heads were allowed to talk freely after midnight on Channel 4, when it was safe, but that was the limit of opposition on the airwaves. It would be wrong to call this censorship. It was not. It was self-censorship. There was much media discussion of the Ministry of Defence's and other rules for war coverage, but this generally failed to point out that none of the restrictions were imposed: they were agreed to by editors.

The MoD rules were entitled 'guidance'; they worked on the principle that if a medium had a story that the military might not like, they approached the MoD for 'guidance' - that is, to be told not to run it. This is actually how official secrecy always works in Britain: it's the D-Notice

# Self-censorship, deceit and half-truths from Britain's journalists

**An NUJ activist explains why Britain's media meekly bowed to government-imposed censorship and also imposed its own censorship**



Dead civilians from a Baghdad bunker claimed to be a military target by Britain and the US

principle. The BBC had even harsher rules which laid down even the language to be used. No-one imposed these on the BBC: they sat down and wrote them themselves. They said that reporters must obey the instructions of their 'minders' and censors, and that stories could be 'withheld' indefinitely for military reasons; when this had happened, programmes should 'indicate' this 'in general terms', but reports from Iraq, the guidelines said, must be announced as 'rigorously censored'.

These rules were toughened up further after the bombing of the Amariya air-raid shelter in Baghdad. After the crude 'Saddam propaganda' charges of right-wing Tory MPs, both BBC and ITN, which had operated to less stringent rules, caved in to government pressure and presented all

material from Iraq as totally censored. In fact, as some of the reporters in Baghdad tried to explain, there was actually far less direct censorship imposed in Baghdad than in Saudi Arabia. You'd never have known that from the British media.

The treatment of these reporters was a real give-away. In interview after interview, BBC reporters Alan Little and Jeremy Bowen were persistently bullied into saying the shelter was a military installation. (It has now been conceded by coalition top brass that it was not.) These reporters, clearly upset by the carnage they had seen, stood up bravely to the interrogation. They were not among the journalists heaped with praise at the end of the fighting.

All the media co-operated meekly with the '48-hour news blackout' im-

posed with the announcement of the land invasion, which achieved its purpose: images of the massacre in Kuwait and on the road to Basra were almost entirely confined to dead vehicles. The few pictures of dead bodies were not used - except for one in the *Observer*, which stirred up a terrific row.

Even in other coalition countries the media showed more spirit. In France, TV networks labelled American film from Saudi Arabia 'material submitted to the United States military authorities'. Even one US network started doing that. It is inconceivable that any British TV broadcaster should follow suit. Four of the five French networks boycotted all Gulf footage for 24 hours on 18 February in protest against military demands for control of filming. In the US, a group of papers tried to sue the government over the reporting restrictions. And there were differences in the reporting. At US military briefings, for instance, all parties use the word 'coalition' for the US-led forces. In Britain, the use of the word 'allied' was universal and unquestioned. 'Allied', of course, means the same to everyone: World War II - the desperate fight for national survival in the face of fascism. There was a deliberate attempt by politicians to whip up the same sort of national spirit, with Saddam Hussein as Hitler and so on. The press collaborated completely. The BBC rules stipulate not just 'allies' but 'Allied' - the capital 'A' presumably requiring a more portentous tone of voice!

And the most intensive bombardment of a people in world history was reported approvingly on the grounds that it 'saved allied lives'. ■

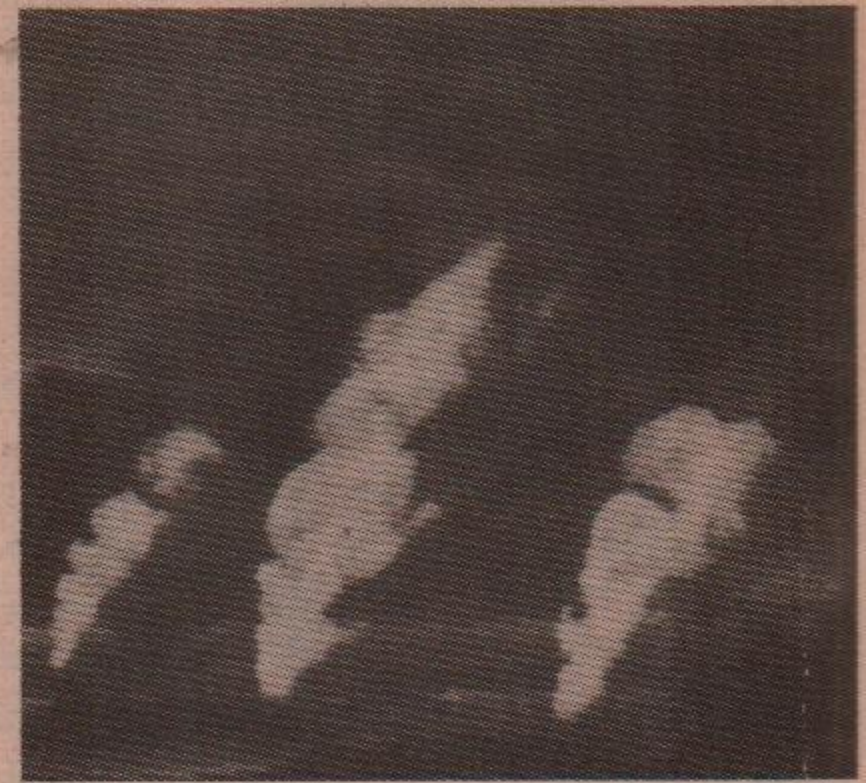


VICTORY TO PALESTINE!

VICTORY TO KURDISTAN!

## The ecological catastrophe is happening

It is impossible to accurately gauge the extent of the environmental catastrophe wreaking havoc in the Gulf. Huge oil slicks, some 30 miles wide and as long, continue their movement southward from Kuwait, killing marine life and vegetation, and threatening anything dependent on it. The fires now raging at nearly 900 oil wells could take a year or more to extinguish. They are pumping hundreds of tons of toxic soot and smoke into the air affecting climatic conditions and temperatures.



## Turkey prepares to reap benefits

**Despite its substantial economic links with Iraq and despite the fact that it lost up to \$3.6bn as a result of sanctions the Turkish bourgeoisie was a willing ally of the imperialist coalition. From bases in Turkey the imperialists opened a second front against Iraq. In addition, the Turkish government deployed 200,000 troops in occupied north Kurdistan (eastern Turkey) for a possible invasion of Iraq. As the war ended, Prime Minister Turgut Ozal said: 'If I had had enough power and authority I would have sent troops to join with the allies in the fight against Iraq, and our air force in particular would have gained great experience.'**

The reasons behind the Turkish bourgeoisie's role are not difficult to uncover. Turkey is suffering a severe economic crisis with living standards falling sharply as a result of IMF prescriptions. In exchange for its services Turkey expects greater economic aid, the cancellation of some debts and a relaxation of credit. More importantly it will demand that its long standing request, repeatedly turned down, to join the European Community is now granted.

Furthermore, the prospect of war against Iraq whetted Turkish bourgeois appetites. They have long coveted the south Kurdistan regions of Mosul and Kirkuk, now occupied by Iraq, which are rich in oil and nurture ambitions to restore Turkish rule. A Turkish Foreign Ministry official declared that Turkey was ready to fight with the imperialists because at 'the victory feast it wanted to sit at the table rather than be on the menu'.

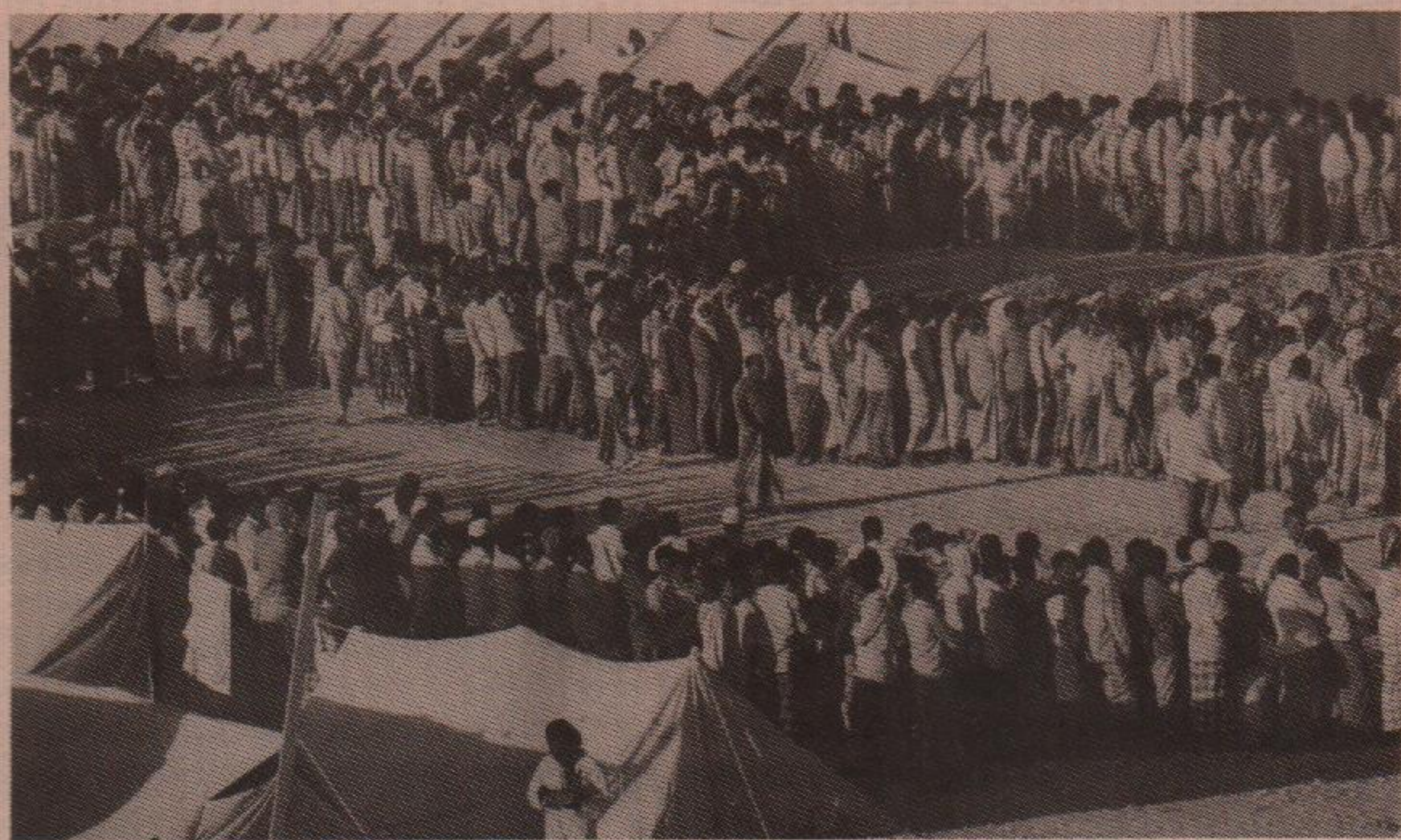
Using the pretext of possible war against Iraq, the Turkish government intensified repression against the Kurdish liberation movement led by

the PKK. Hundreds were killed, many by 'mistaken' imperialist bombings of Kurdish villages. As the war ended uprisings began in both north and south Kurdistan. The Turkish government repeated its categorical refusal to countenance an independent Kurdish state. Today its 200,000 troops are poised to intervene if Kurdish successes bring nearer the possibility of self-determination.

The Turkish bourgeoisie, threatened by economic crisis and a Kurdish uprising also face a growing and confident working class. Despite 10 years of fascist repression the Turkish working class is witnessing a major revival with significant working class economic and political action. In January 1991 miners in Zonguldak went on strike and received massive support in Turkey and Kurdistan. The struggle which started with economic demands rapidly took on a political character with slogans such as 'Stop the War! Down with Ozal! Down with the Government!' These struggles will now accelerate. ■

Can

Gavin Scott



Refugees from Iraq and Kuwait who have lost everything

## Imperialism profits Third World losses

Whilst imperialist multinationals line up to reap enormous reconstruction profits as a result of the Gulf War, 40 Third World nations suffered the equivalent of a natural disaster. A document produced by six charities notes that they lost more than 1 per cent of their GNP, the UN benchmark for a disaster, amounting to at least \$12bn.

Many countries suffered enormously from a drop in trade and a loss of remittances. Jordan and Yemen lost the equivalent of 25 per cent of GNP. Sri Lanka lost 3.7 per cent, Pakistan 2.1 per cent, Jamaica 2.4 per cent, Botswana 3.2 per cent. In many cases remittances from their workers in the Gulf proved crucial to keeping Third World economies afloat. For example,

40 per cent of Sri Lanka's income is accounted for by remittances. Pakistan and India earn respectively \$2.2 and \$2.5bn from remittances.

Hundreds of thousands of workers from Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Thailand and elsewhere have had to flee 'abandoning their savings, possessions and livelihoods'. The document adds that millions who were dependent on remittances will now see their poverty deepened. Riches for the few, poverty for the many - a new world order indeed! ■

*The Economic Impact of the Gulf Crisis on Third World Countries* is available from Oxfam, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ.



#### ORIGINS AND AIMS OF THE PKK

Comrade Botin began by explaining that the PKK was formed on 27 November 1978 with the aim of establishing a united, free and independent democratic Kurdistan. The guiding ideology of the organisation is Marxism-Leninism.

Unlike other Kurdish organisations such as the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) which says 'we are the KDP of Iraq', or the 'KDP of Iran', the PKK does not claim to represent a particular colonised region of our country. We are not the PKK of Turkey. Rather we are the Workers Party of Kurdistan, all of Kurdistan and we are revolutionary too. The PKK was set up in North West Kurdistan, that is Kurdistan occupied by Turkey, and is best organised there. But this does not mean that the PKK only wants to liberate this part of Kurdistan. It wants to liberate the whole of the country which is occupied by Turkey, Iraq and Iran. The PKK is the first Kurdish organisation to be based in Kurdistan that wants an entirely united and independent Kurdistan.

#### THE PKK ON THE GULF WAR

Saddam Hussein's government proved to be a naughty boy: it was financed and equipped by the West but then it turned around and bit its master's hand. Turkey has a long-standing dream of invading Kirkuk and Mosul. Iraq had a similar dream of invading Kuwait and seizing its rich oil resources. Possession of these would ensure Iraq an important place in the world.

The ERNK is against the occupation of Kuwait. This occupation has been carried out by Saddam Hussein's army and not by the Iraqi people. We however also oppose the occupation of Iraq. The imperialists want to suppress anything which disrupts the status quo and their exploitation of oil. On the pretext of punishing Saddam they are preparing to occupy the region anew or exert even greater pressure and burdens on the peoples of the region. The imperialists are out to silence the creature of their own creation and carve up the region among themselves.

**FRFI: Can you tell us if the PKK undertook any actions during the war, actions which advanced your own struggle?**

**Comrade Botin:** The war has created a big opportunity for us to organise again, to organise the forces in south (Iraqi occupied) Kurdistan. The problem for us is not the armed struggle. This we can always maintain. Our big challenge is to organise our people and to turn the imperialist war into an anti-imperialist war, a national uprising. In the meantime we carried out many operations against the Turkish army shooting down helicopters and killing hundreds of fascist officers.

**Some Kurdish organisations limit themselves to only calling for autonomy, within Iraq for example. What is your response?**

This situation today gives us an opportunity we may not get in years. In 1917 the war between Germany and Tsarist Russia gave the revolutionaries an opportunity. Something like that is happening now in the Middle East and Kurdistan. I don't think the Kurdish people only want autonomy. Such views are peddled by the media and people who want to divide the Kurdish people against each other. We can however say with confidence that the Kurdish people are uniting on an ever greater scale. To prove this in practice the PKK has called all other organisations to participate in a national congress. It will be a big development internationally. All Kurdish organisations will be represented there: the petit-bourgeois, communist, all of them. It will be a truly national congress like the Palestinians have, a united front.

**Some British Trotskyists would condemn this, saying that a working class party must not unite with bour-**

# Kurdistan seizing the opportunity

**Over the years *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* has given regular coverage to the struggle for an independent Kurdistan. At the outset of the Gulf crisis the Revolutionary Communist Group put forward, among its central slogans, the demand for 'Self-Determination for Kurdistan!' With the end of the Gulf war and the beginnings of a Kurdish intifada, the Kurdish liberation struggle assumes a decisive significance and along with the Palestinian struggle will determine the future of the progressive movement in the Middle East. On 1 March 1991, EDDIE ABRAHAMS and TREVOR RAYNE from FRFI interviewed COMRADE BOTIN who comes from North West Kurdistan. He is a representative of the ERNK (National Liberation Front) which was formed by the PKK (Workers Party of Kurdistan).**

geois or petit-bourgeois political groups.

Our cause is a national struggle. First we must achieve national liberation and then the liberation of the working class and socialism. We have to get all classes and sections of society oppressed by imperialism and colonialism. We follow the experience of the revolutions in Vietnam, Mozambique, Bulgaria. Marxist-Leninists must be in the leadership of the movement, but the movement must unite everyone. This is the position that distinguished Lenin and the Bolsheviks from the Mensheviks.

#### IMPERIALISM AND THE KURDISH LIBERATION STRUGGLE

**Most imperialist governments, and indeed even the USSR are committed to guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Iraq. Why does imperialism oppose the Kurdish liberation movement?**

The reason is geopolitical. Kurdistan is rich in resources - oil, water and fertile plains. Our country occupies an important place in the Middle East. Historically it is the place where goods are transhipped from China to Europe, from Africa to the Soviet Union. Many nations have therefore sought to dominate this place. This is why the Kurds have never been an organised nation.

We have always been used by other countries in their conflicts. As the PKK General Secretary has said, no other people have served for so long as soldiers for other nations. Kurds have fought for Islam, for Iraq, for Iran, for Turkey, but never for Kurdistan.

During the Gulf war, Iraq, Iran and Turkey wanted to use the Kurdish

#### Kurdistan

Approximate surface area 500,000 square kilometres, ie: over twice the size of Britain. The territory was divided between Turkey (North West Kurdistan - 48 per cent of Kurdistan), Iran (East Kurdistan - 27 per cent), Iraq (South Kurdistan - 8 per cent) and Syria (South West Kurdistan - 8 per cent) by the imperialist powers at the Treaty of Lausanne 1923. There are more than 25 million Kurds: 12 million in Turkey, 6 million in Iran, 4 million in Iraq and 1.5 million in Syria. The USSR has 0.5 million Kurds, and about 0.5 million are spread across Europe and Canada.

people again. So they manoeuvred to do this with talk of blocs, alliances and concessions. The imperialists in this process want a bourgeois section of the Kurdish movement under their control. But now the war is finished they don't need the Kurds anymore and therefore cease to talk about our demands.

#### THE KURDISH STRUGGLE AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOCIALIST BLOC

**Has the collapse of the socialist bloc which has made imperialism more barbaric and confident in its attempts to redivide and recolonise the world had an effect on your fight?**

We agree with you. Now the imperialists can do what they want. The collapse of the socialist bloc means nothing is standing in their way. During the Iran-Iraq war they didn't do things like they have today done in the Gulf because then the bloc had not collapsed.

We don't however think this means the death of socialism. The people who wanted to block socialism, the bureaucrats, they are dead, not socialism. Marxism-Leninism is alive, among other places, in the practice of the PKK today.

**There are Kurds in the Soviet Union. What is their position?**

There are about 500,000 Kurds in the Soviet Union. There is no national question there because they are in a minority and no part of Kurdistan is in the Soviet Union. Kurds live mainly in Yerevan, Armenia. They have, as Kurds a lot of rights. They have radio stations, schools and newspapers.

#### MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALISM

Muslim fundamentalism does exist in Kurdistan. But it is a small problem. It could however hold back the struggle if not dealt with correctly. Many people in Kurdistan after going to Mosque go to the streets and demonstrate. But they don't shout 'Long live Islam'. They first say 'Long live a free and independent Kurdistan'. We believe that we must first solve the national problem before we can solve the problems of culture, language or religion.

In the Middle East Islam is a big problem for the movement. Some organisations just ignored the question of religion, threw it out. This left it to be used by the bourgeoisie. This is a bad way of dealing with the issue.

**How does the Kurdish struggle relate to the struggles of the working class and oppressed in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran?**

We know that in struggling against the Turkish government we have to unite with the Turkish working class. We need each other. We are doing our duty in fighting, in our uprisings in our own country. This is the most beautiful solidarity we can offer the Turkish working class and the English working class too. Besides this however, many Kurdish people have fallen fighting side by side with the Palestinians and the people of Lebanon and Turkey.

You cannot compare the Kurdish revolution with Vietnam, Mozambique or Cuba because Kurdistan is carved into four. We are fighting on four fronts so we have contacts with four different peoples. If we set up an independent Kurdistan it means that four other nations advance towards freedom. So, it is a very major internationalist struggle.

The Kurdish revolution can play the same role as the Russian revolution of October 1917, it can trigger new revolts and change horizons. When we hold our national congress we want to meet with all the Marxist-Leninist organisations internationally and forge strong links. We are looking to this for the future. It is more important than ever, now that the socialist bloc has collapsed, that we strengthen international ties between revolutionaries. ■

## Serhildan (uprising)

Kurdish revolutionaries have seized the opportunity of imperialism's victory over the Iraqi army to intensify the liberation struggle. Combinations of popular uprising and guerrilla struggle have secured towns and territory from both Iraqi and Turkish occupation forces.

In the second week of March a Turkish government delegation met representatives of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. This is the first time in sixty years that the Turkish government has held an official meeting with Kurdish organisations. Both Kurdish groups are headed by semi-feudal and bourgeois elements from Iraq. They have restricted their demands to 'an autonomous Kurdistan

in a democratic Iraq'. After the meeting the Turkish government announced support for 'national rights for Iraqi Kurds within an Iraqi framework' and provision of aid to liberated areas within Iraq. At this stage such a move is difficult to interpret: the Turkish government may want to use the Kurds as a cat's paw for their ambition to take Mosul and Kirkuk, or hold them as an instrument of pressure against the Iraqi ruling élite. The move comes after discussion among the major Kurdish organisations including the PKK, the KDP-Iraq, the KDP-Iran and the Patriotic Union to organise a Kurdish National Congress. By drawing Kurdish groups from Iraq closer to it the Turkish government will hope to

undermine the growing influence of the PKK and ERNK (the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan) with their demands for unity, nationhood and socialist programme.

The current mobilisation of resistance has produced tremendous determination to fight in the face of murderous repression by the Turkish and Iraqi armies. It offers revolutionaries great prospects for organisation among the people which will limit the ability of feudal and bourgeois elements to ally with imperialism through one or the other of its colonial placemen. The next issue of FRFI will carry a feature on the history of the Kurdish struggle.

Trevor Rayne



**VICTORY TO PALESTINE!  
VICTORY TO KURDISTAN!**



Pictures from the top: Cadres of the PKK; victims of Saddam Hussein's gas attack on Halabja in March 1988; a Kurdish fighter executed by a Revolutionary Guard in Iran.



## Imperialists manoeuvre for domination

There is little prospect of a rapid restoration of stability in Iraq. Kurdish and Iraqi opponents of the Saddam Hussein regime seized upon its defeat to launch armed uprisings in Kurdistan (northern Iraq) and in southern Iraq. Kurdish fighters have liberated large parts of their country and are now threatening the decisive oil town of Kirkuk. In the south, an alliance of Shi'ite fundamentalist and secular forces have sustained resistance despite assaults by well-armed Republican Guards.

Despite their anti-Saddam rhetoric, the imperialists have kept their distance from these forces. Their preferred option is not democracy, which could unleash too many uncontrollable political forces, but a military coup replacing Saddam Hussein with a strong, centralised but pro-imperialist government. Not yet sure of the relative strengths and reliability of the forces clashing in Iraq, the imperialists are biding their time.

But they are also making contingency plans for further massive intervention if developments go beyond their own designs. On 15 March they moved 30 miles deeper into Iraq to seize control of important southern communication routes. From these positions they hope to be able to dictate a better outcome for themselves.

Meanwhile the imperialists are hatching new plans to try and foist on the Palestinians a bourgeois solution short of self-determination. During the Gulf war 1.7 million Palestinians were imprisoned: subjected to a 24-hour curfew. For five weeks they endured enormous hardship. A 24-year-old woman was shot dead as she fed her 15-day-old baby in the front yard of her home. Another man was shot dead outside his house. Sari Nuseibeh, a prominent Palestinian, was detained for allegedly spying for the Iraqis.

Following their victory the imperialists and Zionists are more confident than ever. The Palestinian people are suffering unprecedented isolation in an Arab world, where anti-imperialist forces have suffered a severe setback. The Zionists have rejected all calls to implement UN resolutions calling for their withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and are indeed accelerating colonisation of the area.



Citing imperialism's overwhelming might and its crushing victory, the PLO's right wing is preparing even greater concessions in the hope of some imperialist favours. A PLO aide has indicated that a Palestinian state could be demilitarised and that Israel need not return to its 1967 borders. Despite US bombast against the PLO, Secretary of State Baker met with PLO-sanctioned West Bank Palestinians in order to nurture such trends. Significantly, with the exception of the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, all trends within the PLO supported this meeting.

The imperialists and Zionists will not, however, succeed. With poverty and repression intensifying and with the threat of total expulsion from their homeland, the Palestinian people will fight back. For them the struggle is literally a matter of life and death. So it was no surprise that as soon as the curfew was lifted on the West Bank and Gaza Strip the Intifada returned with a vengeance. ■



# Gulf war: failure of the British movement

**In six weeks the imperialists used more explosives against Iraq than used by all belligerents put together in World Wars I and II. The column of Iraqi conscripts retreating from Kuwait was blasted by greater explosive power than dropped on Hiroshima. The British working class remained silent and, even worse, applauded. The British left proved its total irrelevance as a political force. At best it was reduced to sloganising. JENNY SUTTON examines the failure of the British 'left' to oppose war-mongering imperialism.**

Throughout the carnage the Labour Party and TUC stood shoulder to shoulder with the Tories. To what depths does 'organised labour' sink? When the ruling class resorts to barbarism it does so to defend its position as a ruling class, to defend its wealth and its ownership of the means of production. 'Organised labour' in contrast supports the incineration of tens of thousands of living human beings for the sake of a house, a car, a TV, video and the chance to get drunk in Spain - for these effectively are the crumbs offered them by the ruling class in return for their services.

Even before imperialist troops left for the Gulf, Labour called for 'a complete quarantining of Iraq' and attacked the government for being 'slack, lax and negligent'. At the end of the war a depraved Kinnock defended the slaughter of retreating Iraqis:

'Unless there is evidence of troops departing from their vehicles and laying down their arms, the assumption has got to be... that they are intent on aggression.'

Behind the Labour Party stood the TUC. On 23 January, the General Council declared:

'... the full support of British trade unionists for the allied forces in pursuit of a just outcome and the removal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait... The responsibility for the war and its terrible potential lies with the Iraqi regime.'

But what of the Labour left, CND and the Green Party who constituted themselves into the Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf (CSWG)? From the beginning they sought to secure peace on the terms of the imperialists. At no point did they challenge the right of imperialism to intervene in the Arab world. They took issue with the method, not the principle, demanding sanctions instead of war. They all feared that a war would lead to a massive Arab movement against imperialism and thus undermine the basis of their own comfortable lives. Tony Benn warned:



'the consequences of the war in the Gulf could be... the Arab nations solidly united against the West.'

And CND is now worried that:

'The Gulf war and the resentment it has caused between Arabs, Mus-

lims and the West... will hinder lasting stability.'

The Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf expended most of its energy attacking those who called for a withdrawal of British troops. They sought to silence anti-imperialist voices. CND leader Marjorie Thompson wanted to get rid of the 'bacteriologically unsavoury groups' who argued for troops out. She bemoaned the fact that there was no way of keeping them off demonstrations.

CND and the Labour left drew up a 15-point programme supporting sanctions and calling for an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait as a means of excluding even the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) from the Committee. At marches and meetings these lovers of democracy systematically refused to give a platform to anti-imperialists. In a shameful episode on 26 January, they diverted a march away from Hyde Park so it would not meet up with a Troops Out of Ireland demonstration to commemorate the British murder of 14 unarmed Irish people in 1972.

The CSWG acted to subvert any possible challenge to the Labour Party. Nothing more could be expected from them. But what of the SWP who claim to be Marxists? Desperate to be part of the 'respectable', 'legitimate', 'labour movement' they willingly provided the footsoldiers for the Committee and gave it some 'revolutionary' credibility.

At the height of the crisis and the war, when more than ever it was necessary to challenge Labour imperialism, the SWP balked. In words it called for the withdrawal of troops from the Gulf. In practice it argued against the Committee adopting the slogan and accused those arguing in favour of being 'sectarian'. In words the SWP attacked the Labour Party for its pro-war stand. In practice, it urged its supporters to vote for Labour in the event of an election. Now that the war has ended the SWP has executed a quick turn and called for people to break from Labour. Do not be deceived!

In 1914, when German social democracy voted to support imperialist war, Rosa Luxemburg called it a 'stinking corpse' which needed to be buried before it poisoned the entire working class. The same words can be applied to the Labour Party today. The job however cannot be left to the SWP or the myriad of other Trotskyist groups whose equally miserable record is too insignificant to even mention. A new revolutionary organisation needs to be built. ■

**VICTORY TO PALESTINE!  
VICTORY TO KURDISTAN!**

## THE GULF WAR premeditated murder of a nation

*continued from page 3*

### CAN ANYTHING STEM THE TIDE?

As the imperialist victory parade marches around the world it faces obstacles and challenges. US military dominance in the area by no means secures it against social and political upheavals whipped to exploding point by poverty and humiliation. Foremost amongst these are the decades-long struggles of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples. They have shown a will to continue the struggle that surmounts setbacks and defeats. As the Intifada continues, a new Kurdish uprising breaks out.

But isolated, they face a terrible situation. The crushing of Iraq has increased the odds against them enormously. Throughout the Arab world communist and revolutionary nationalist forces have been gravely weakened. Muslim fundamentalism, funded primarily by Saudi and Kuwaiti money and cloaking its bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ambitions in the language of the poor, is poised to exploit and manipulate the mass movement to its own ends. Today more than ever, the Palestinian people, like all oppressed nations fighting for freedom, need the solidarity and support of an international anti-imperialist movements. This exists amongst workers in oppressed nations. In contrast, the working class in the imperialist countries has demonstrated no political existence independent from its imperialist masters.

In the face of the most massive assault on an oppressed nation the British working class proved itself either impotent, or worse, an enthusiastic accomplice to the imperialist crime. At all stages the Labour Party stood solidly behind the war effort. Colonel Kinnock shamelessly defended the Basra-Kuwait City highway slaughter. Like the Conservative Party, the Labour Party is committed to destroying any challenge to imperialism's control of the region.

Seventy years ago Lenin said that the choice facing humanity was socialism or barbarism. Imperialism has inflicted barbarism on most of the world's population with the passive or active acquiescence of large sections of the imperialist nations' working class. How and under what conditions any forces in imperialist countries can begin to forge a movement to undermine imperialism from within remains the great unanswered question of the epoch. Only if anti-imperialists address this question can there be a way forward. ■



## The Royal Commission and the Right to Silence

As soon as the Birmingham 6 walked free from the Old Bailey, the search for a culprit began: Lord Lane? Lord Bridge? Lord Denning? . . . The entire West Midlands police force? . . . The choice is very wide. As we go to press Lord Lane looks like the favourite. They should all go - all of them knew at the original trial that the men had been brutally beaten and, a few years later, that the forensic evidence was unsound. But have no illusions - if you get the judicial sack (retirement?) it will not stop innocent men and women going to gaol.

Home Secretary Kenneth Baker has announced the setting up of a Royal Commission to review the criminal justice system. The scramble to limit the damage done by the collapse of the third major Irish case in two years has begun.

But beware: Baker's announcement contains already the seeds of a cover-up. Royal Commissions, and more importantly, subsequent legislation, have a habit of being hijacked. The terms of reference of this Commission include an examination of the right to silence.

The defendant's right to silence is at the heart of the British criminal law system; it stems from the presumption that you are innocent until proved guilty. The police, who judge their own success by the rate of convictions not by the quality of justice, have long been anxious to dispense with the right. The Tories have already abolished it in the north of Ireland.

But what has the removal of this right got to do with the miscarriage of justice in the Birmingham 6, Guildford 4, Maguire 7 cases - or indeed any other miscarriage of justice? Absolutely nothing! The problem for the defendants in the Irish trials was that they were in no position to exercise any rights, let alone the right to silence. They were subject to nothing short of physical and psychological torture in the police stations; the evidence at their trials was perverted by the police; the judges wilfully ignored both their evidence and their civil rights; and Parliament introduced the PTA, curtailing everyone's rights.

We do not require any further evidence that entirely innocent people confess, or can be forced to confess, to crimes they did not commit. Timothy Evans, the Confait juveniles, the Guildford 4, the Birmingham 6 - they are just the tip of the iceberg. Removal of the right to silence will not prevent even one miscarriage of justice.

All the ingredients which ensured the convictions of the Birmingham 6 will recur: as they did at Tottenham in 1985 and the Poll Tax riot in March 1990: public and politicians baying for revenge; the police with the opportunity to vent their basest prejudices; and the courts only too willing to prostitute themselves to their political paymasters. In such circumstances we can only do one thing - fight for our rights - and the right to silence is fundamental to our defence against a rotten regime.

Carol Brickley

## Systematic injustice a message from Winston Silcott

I am ecstatic that the DPP have finally conceded and will no longer sustain the unlawful force used to railroad the Birmingham 6.

The six men should have been released at once when the DPP announced that there was no longer a case against them; they should not still be languishing in the penal dustbin to appease the three judges who are sitting on the appeal hearing. When the men have finally gained their freedom and their innocence is declared, the three appeal judges will be applauded by the media etc. But what have the judiciary really done for 'justice'? A sense of justice and common sense from the six men, their families, campaigners and supporters has led to the laboriously hard work of exposing the Birmingham 6's plight of injustice.

The general public may feel that the judicial and legal system are slowly changing for the better. One should not believe that there will be a massive explosion of media interest in the many other injustices that hold many innocent women and men incarcerated in the penal dustbins for crimes they didn't do.

What I want is everyone to realise is what happened to the Guildford 4, Birmingham 6, me, Engin, Mark and the Bridgewater 4 is a systematic process. So, please, always give a thought to the many other penal hostages whose cases are not in the public's eye or are not well known. The kind term, 'miscarriages of justice' will always occur until racial and sexist discrimination and classification by class are scorned by the judiciary.

My regards to all at FRFI

Winston Silcott  
HMP Gartree



## BIRMINGHAM SIX

# Free! At last!

**On his release Paddy Hill summed up the character of the British judicial system - rotten to the core. The collapse of the case against the Birmingham 6 exposed the enormity of the cover up over which 11 judges had presided. Without them the intricate web of lies and deception woven by prison officers and 25 police officers, including former Police Superintendent George Reade, could not have withstood the repeated challenges of the Birmingham 6 and their solicitors. LORNA REID examines the biggest political, judicial and police conspiracy in the annals of 'British justice'.**

Before the final appeal the Director of Public Prosecutions announced he no longer relied on forensic evidence, or on the evidence of the police officers involved, to support the convictions.

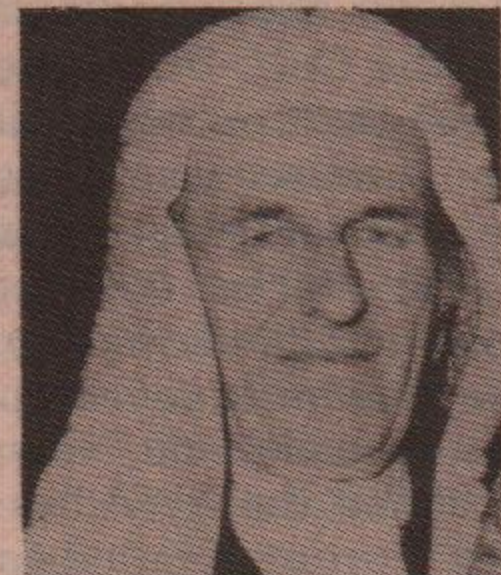
It has been argued by the British establishment and media that the convictions were unsafe because of the discovery of new evidence. If this were true it would exonerate the judges. In fact, the evidence which forced the High Court to release the Six had been put to the court in 1975: the confessions were fabricated and the forensic evidence was unreliable.

Mr Justice Bridge (now Lord Bridge) did not allow the 1975 jury to look at the transcripts of the confessions: the jury would have spotted that they were not worth the paper they were written on.

Bridge rubbished the evidence of Dr Black who testified that the tests carried out by Dr Skuse would have given a positive reading from hands which had been in contact with playing cards or tobacco. Skuse, who was '99 per cent' sure the men had been in contact with explosives, was retired in 1985 on grounds of 'limited efficiency'.

Bridge summed up the trial by saying if the defendants were telling the truth,

### THE GUILTY MEN No. 1



Lord  
Bridge  
1975

**'You have been convicted on the clearest and most overwhelming evidence I have ever heard in a case of murder.'**

**'I am entirely satisfied, and the jury by their verdicts have shown that they are satisfied that all the investigations were carried out with scrupulous propriety.'**

this was: 'The greatest conspiracy in the annals of criminal history.' A great conspiracy is exactly what the case against the Birmingham 6 amounted to.

### THE JUDICIAL CONSPIRACY

On a further five occasions the Birmingham 6 went through the judicial system to prove their innocence and each time their pleas were rejected.

- In March 1976 Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, Lord Lawton and Mr Justice Thompson dismissed their appeal. Lord Widgery concluded there was no evidence that they had been beaten 'beyond the ordinary'.

- In June 1976 Judge Swanwick acquitted 14 prison officers of assaulting the Six at Winson Green prison. He claimed the men had made 'lying accusations against the police at Lancaster [the venue for the 1975 trial] in order to try and wriggle out of their true confessions.' He did not say who beat the men, although it was accepted they had been beaten.

- In November 1977 the Six sued for injuries inflicted by the police at Morecambe and New Street, Birmingham. In January 1980 Lord Denning upheld a police appeal for the action to be struck out as an abuse of process. Justifying his decision he said: 'If the six men win, it will mean that the police were guilty of perjury, that they were guilty of violence and threats, and the convictions were erroneous . . . This is such an appalling vista that every person in the land would say: "It cannot be right that these actions should go any further".'

- In January 1987 Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary, referred the case back to the Court of Appeal and ordered a new inquiry by the Devon and Cornwall police after Granada TV's *World in Action* questioned the reliability of the forensic evidence.

In January 1988 the appeal was dismissed by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, who said: 'The longer this hearing has gone on the more convinced this court has become that the verdict of the jury [in the 1975 case] was correct.'

- In April 1988 the Six were refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords. Lord Denning said: 'It is better that some innocent men remain in gaol than the integrity of the English judicial system should be impugned.'

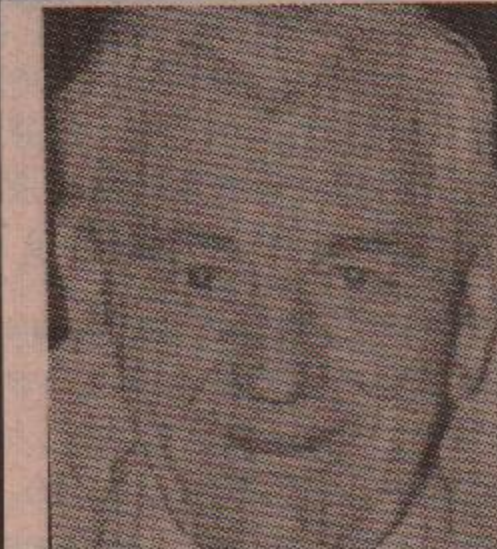
### THE GUILTY MEN No. 2



Lord  
Lane  
1988

**'The longer this hearing has gone on the more convinced this court has become that the verdict of the jury was correct.'**

### THE GUILTY MEN No. 3



Det.  
Supt.  
George  
Reade

**Responsible for the police 'investigation': brutality, intimidation, false confessions**

At every stage of the Birmingham 6 case, the state has concerned itself with keeping the lid on its box of lies. Each time new evidence came forward to discredit the original judgement the source and/or the witness were ridiculed and defamed.

Dr Black was scorned by Lord Bridge. Tom Clarke, an ex-police officer who came forward in 1986 to say the Six were subjected to intimidation and violence at the police station, was branded a liar. Likewise Joyce Lynas, an ex-police officer who, despite being threatened, testified at the men's appeal in 1987/1988 that they had indeed been beaten up by police officers was considered by Lords Lane, O'Connor and Brown as 'a witness who was not worthy of belief.'

Dr Janet Drayton who assisted Dr Skuse in carrying out the forensic tests gave evidence at the 1987/88 appeal and contradicted Skuse on more than

**'I don't think the people have the intelligence to see through the never mind dispensation of Paddy Hill outside the Old Bailey,**

one occasion. She said she discovered 'possible' nitroglycerine present on one of Paddy Hill's hands. Lord Lane in his summing up, wilfully turned the 'possible' into a 'definite' and four of her testimony was 'fatal' to the appeal of the Six.

Graham Boal, counsel for the Prosecution at the latest appeal, made a last attempt at proving the six men's 'guilt' he suggested that the judges might consider the convictions could be upheld as satisfactory, but still safe! And, seeing that the court was unimpressed by the desperate logic, he accused John Walker of being 'if not a brigadier, a quarter master' in the IRA!

In 1990 Lord Denning was involved in a row with *The Spectator* over an interview in which he suggested that the community would not have worried had the Birmingham 6 hanged. After the DPP made it clear that the men's convictions could not be regarded as safe and satisfactory, Denning made a pathetic attempt to make amends: 'A look back, I am very sorry because I always thought that our police were splendid and first class and I am sorry that in this case it appears to be the contrary.'

The British judiciary is as unrepentant today as it was in 1975. If it thought it could get away with it, the Birmingham 6 would still be in gaol. It has been forced to release the men because of an ever growing public lobby.

### THE POLITICAL FRAME-UP

The British state has only been able to pursue the frame-up of the Birmingham 6 to such an extent because for years precious little political opposition was mounted outside the forces mustered by the men's families and a few political organisations.

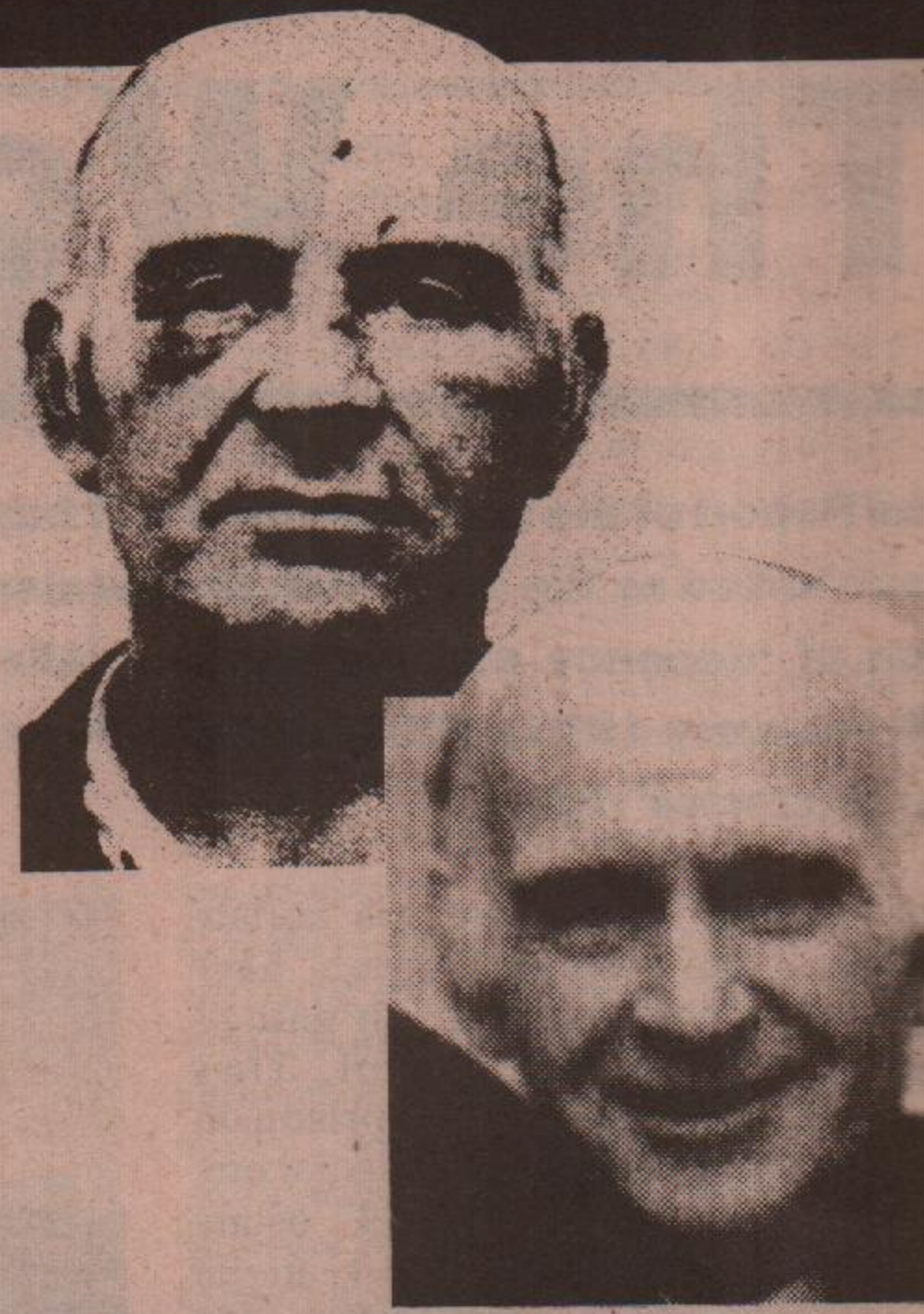
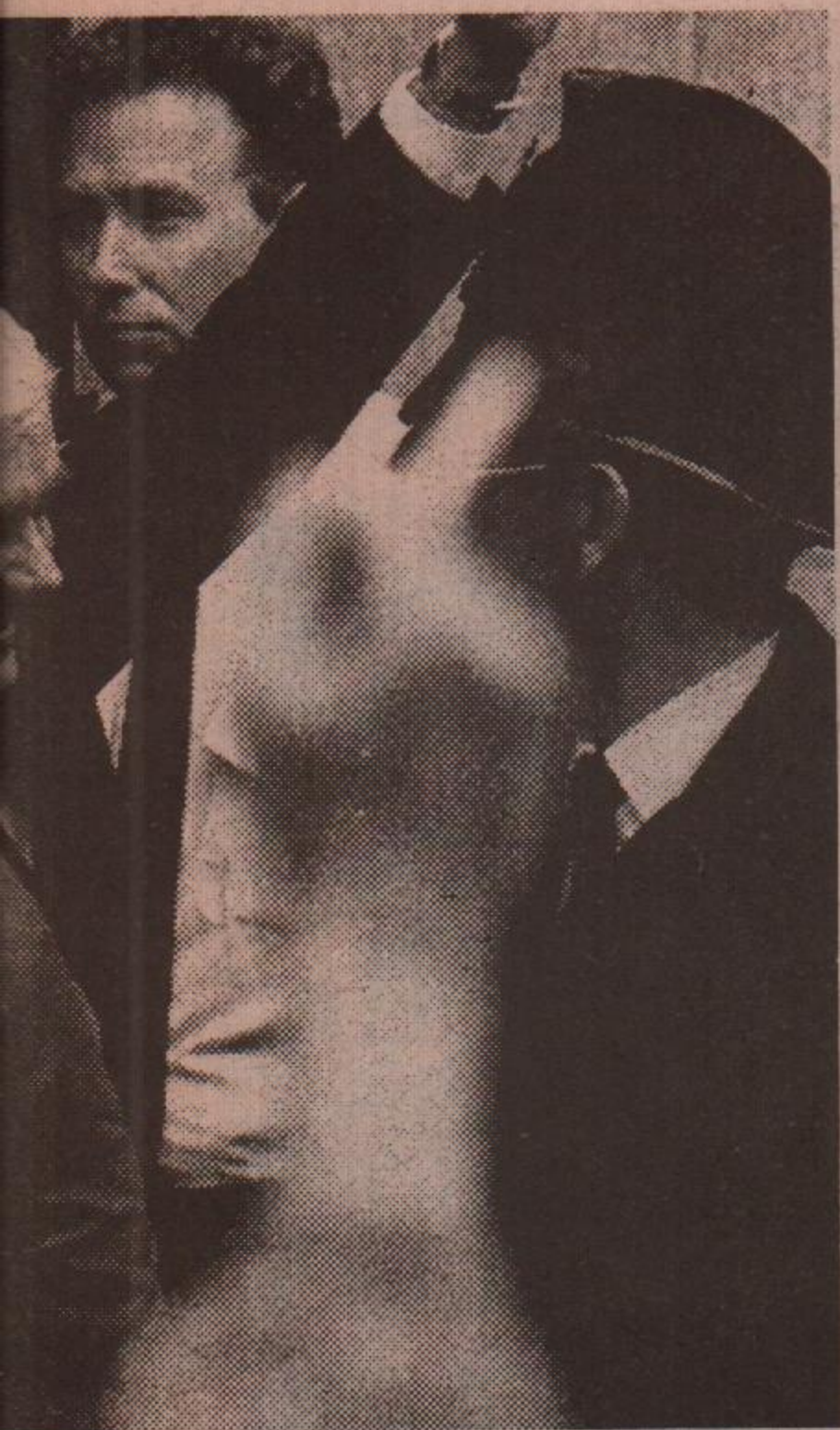
In particular, the Labour Party has gone along with the conspiracy. This is hardly surprising given it was a Labour Government which oversaw the men's arrests and trial.

On the day the Six were released Roy Hattersley, Shadow Home Secretary said he felt 'relief that so grotesque miscarriage of justice has at last been righted . . . anger that it had ever happened at all, and that it was allowed to continue for so long.'

This hypocrisy stinks. The day after the bombings in November 1974 the Labour Government rushed through Parliament the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Roy Jenkins, then Home Secretary said the Government's opposition to the IRA would mean 'substantial but necessary limitations in personal freedom.'

The deployment of British troops in the streets of the North of Ireland, the building of the H-blocks, the denial





# 'I wouldn't extradite a dog to this country'

## FREE ALL THE FRAMED PRISONERS

### THEN AND NOW

**John Walker in 1974 bearing the marks of police brutality: Free at last outside the Old Bailey, March 1991**

...ple in there have got  
...bell the word justice,  
...e it. They're rotten!

14 March 1990

political status to Irish prisoners of war - all carried out under a Labour administration - not to mention the thousands of arrests and detentions of Irish people under the PTA, demonstrate how far the Labour Party has gone to 'limit' the freedom of the Irish.

The Labour Party went along with the conspiracy and did nothing to secure the release of the Birmingham 6. In a speech in March 1983 during the Parliamentary debate to renew the PTA, MP Kevin McNamara (now Labour spokesperson on Northern Ireland) said: '... ordinary decent coppers using ordinary decent police methods apprehended those responsible for the Birmingham outrages.'

In December 1987 Gerald Kaufman MP, Shadow Home Secretary, refused to sign a declaration calling for the immediate release of the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 on the grounds that it would undermine his position.

As late as 1988 the Labour Party NEC (National Executive Committee) refused to add its support to claims that the Guildford 4 were innocent.

It was not until after the DPP's announcement not to contest the new appeal that Neil Kinnock called for the release of the Birmingham 6.

The case of the Birmingham 6 holds valuable lessons. Roy Jenkins' denial of democratic rights in his rush to introduce the PTA in 1975 was echoed by Margaret Thatcher when she introduced the broadcasting ban in 1988: 'To beat off your enemy in a war you have to suspend some of your civil liberties for a time.' The concept of an enemy within, for that is how the Irish community in Britain is regarded, has since been extended to include the black communities who resisted police harassment in 1981 and 1985, the striking miners of 1984/85 and, more recently, anti-Poll Tax protesters.

For as long as the British state, its judges and police, remain unchallenged in their war against the Irish people the British working class cannot successfully execute its own struggle for democratic rights.

On their release the Birmingham 6 called for the release of Judith Ward, the Tottenham 3 and the Bridgewater 4 and other innocent prisoners. Who will work for their release? Not the Royal Commission whose agenda will be quite different. Not the police, the judges or the politicians who imprisoned them in the first place. It is the task of the working class to ensure that the ruling class conspiracy to gaoil our people, to take away our hard won civil liberties, is exposed. The Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4 are free. Now free Judith Ward, the Tottenham 3, Bridgewater 4 and all framed prisoners. ■

**JOHN BOWDEN is a prisoner in Long Lartin and a regular contributor to FRFI. Three days before the final appeal of the Birmingham 6 he managed to record this interview with JOHN WALKER inside the prison.**

He began by asking John Walker how he felt on the verge of release after 16 years false imprisonment.

Well, to be honest, I still don't trust them. If I had my way, I wouldn't go near the Court of Appeal. These last 16 years have been very hard but prisoners have been very good to me. I know that I had no chance of going home unless my case just collapsed and it's collapsed all around. Now it's just very hard to click into the present moment.

**And what sort of memories will you take with you from prison?**

That's a very funny question because I'm going to take some great memories with me from prison. You meet some fantastic people and it's very hard to explain this to people on the outside but what friendship means in prison is 100 per cent friendship.

**How much of a significant influence do you think that the Birmingham 6 campaign has had and also the pressure that your family has brought to bear in this case?**

It really took off six years ago. I'm not a great religious man but when Cardinal O'Fiach came over here and went back to Ireland and told the people that there were innocent men in prison, the campaign just snowballed. And Chris Mullin, and John Farr and people like this really took an interest in our case. In the very early days of our case nobody wanted to know us; we were just lepers. But our families have been great and we've just built it up over the years. Our wives took over and then our children took over and now it looks as though our grandchildren are starting to campaign! It's taken nearly three generations to get this campaign and if our release does come then we owe it to these people.

**While you've been in prison you've met a number of other prisoners who are clearly innocent.**

The first case that comes to my mind is the Carl Bridgewater case. I've lived with these people over the years: Vinny Hickey, Michael Hickey and the other chap I never had the privilege of meeting, Mr Robinson. These people are completely innocent. And then there's the Tottenham 3.

**You think the Tottenham 3 are in a similar situation to yourself**

Certainly, but it's up to the people in Tottenham; it's up to these communities to come out and help them. It's the same as the Irish community. The Irish community must fight for justice for Irish men and Irish women. There's a young man in prison now whose name is Dessie Ellis. He was extradited over here. In my opinion the word 'extradition' should be taken out of the dictionary and burned. I wouldn't extradite my dog to this country. That Mr Ellis came over here under a charge; things collapsed and the man is still in prison. Is this justice? You must be joking. And as far as the Irish judges that handed this man over, they're just as bad as over here. Somewhere along the line someone in Ireland must stand up and say 'No more extradition'. How

about a little bit of repatriation?

How about the three young men who have done 17 years and are still rotting in the prison? Paul Holmes, Billy Armstrong and Roy Walsh. These young men are still Category A prisoners. Nobody was actually killed by them, but they're Irish. It's the same old crack. If you're black, you're black; if you're Irish, you're Irish; you're going away and that's the end of the story.

**Can I ask you about the Prevention of Terrorism Act?**

This came out after we got done and Irish people travelling to this country have got to go through all this hassle, police, brutality and all this. But if I walk out of prison some time next week, what happens to this law? Do they just wipe it off the face of this earth or does it still go on? As far as I'm concerned when we walk out, we've got to take it out with us.

**After your release will you devote any of your time to highlighting issues such as extradition, the PTA?**

I promise you right now in this cell, after I come to know my wife and family again and my grandkids, I will go and help any innocent man in prison. The Tottenham 3? You need me? I'll be there. Vinny Hickey? Micky Hickey? And the other lad - one hundred per cent behind you, lads. I will give all my time until these men are released. And something must be done with the West Midlands police. They were the law; they took the law into their own hands and they fitted people up.

**What do you think needs to be done about the British legal system to prevent further 'miscarriages of justice'?**

Nobody can take a policeman's word anymore. Lord Denning said himself a couple of days ago that he was conned also. He said the police told him lies and he took the policeman's word against our word and now that man has come out and said we are innocent persons. The Appeal Court doesn't seem to be working; then they must find something else to take its place. These judges, lords, whatever they want to call themselves, they're dinosaurs, they just wake up in the morning and somebody looks after them until they go to bed at night. They don't know the real world.

**What do you think are the failings of the British legal system which led to your conviction?**

If a policeman gets up and says I've done something, they're going to believe him 99 per cent, I've only got one per cent left. We're talking about forensic and 16 years ago people didn't even know what the word meant. Now, I remember that morning very well. Paddy Hill was taken out before me and they started coming the heavy and I heard the policeman say, 'You've got more explosive on you than Judith Ward'. Well, that must be a joke now, because Judith Ward was done by the same bloke, Skuse, and they sacked him at 52 years old.

**Do you think that they realised soon after you were taken into custody that**

**you didn't plant the bombs in Birmingham? Do you think you were deliberately fitted up by the police?**

Certainly I was. In Birmingham Irish homes were getting wrecked, Irishmen couldn't go to work and things like this. We didn't know about it - we were stuck in prison - but we found out about it after. I think anybody would have done that night. We happened to be at the right place at the wrong time. We're Irish and we come from Birmingham. But we never told them lies. Everything they asked us, we told them the truth. And I'll tell you another thing: I was never arrested. I was asked to come and help the police with their inquiries and 16 and a half years down I'm still in prison trying to help them with their inquiries.

**What about the trial?**

What trial? There was no trial. We just sat there, six little monkeys in the dock. Way above our heads; we're only working class people. We never stood a chance.

**And you were received into the prison system defined as 'terrorist prisoners'. How did that affect the way you were treated?**

When I came out, somebody called me a Cat A, then somebody told me I was Cat A plus. When I wanted to go to the toilet, four screws went with me. I was branded - the Birmingham 6, the bombers. And any time anything happened in this country we were just treated like animals again. After the Hull riot, 1976, what they did to the Irish prisoners and the black prisoners was just disgraceful. I was listening to the radio and some prison officer came out in favour of the cons and he spoke about two prisoners who he'd seen beaten and I happened to be one of them and the other was a black man. I was told afterwards that the man was sent to Coventry.

**What do you feel about the British prison system?**

Excuse me for laughing! You could do with about 50 Lord Woolfs coming in here every week and bringing out new White Papers every week because these places are corrupt. There's brutality; they transfer you from one prison to another one and you get it there. If you stand up for yourself you get a bad name and no matter where you go after that, they make sure you pay. If you fight them once, you fight them all through your sentence.

**How do you think the prison system in this country should be reformed?**

How they go in Europe. They work over there. The trouble is this is fifty years back in these prisons. You've got shops in here where they make stuff and then they take it out and throw it in the North Sea. Mailbags. There must be some fish in those mailbags out in the North Sea. **Here at Long Lartin you're considered a bit of a father figure. How have you managed to endure 16 years as an innocent man in high-security captivity?** For the first five years we were the scum of the earth. I was down the block at Wakefield. It's a very famous place, F-

wing. And the weight just peeled off me. My sister came over and took one look at me - I was like a matchstick - and she went back to Ireland and I think she caused a bit of trouble. Next thing I was moved to Long Lartin. I spent a year at Wakefield and out of that year I was 11 months and two weeks in the block in solitary confinement and I think that if I hadn't have got out of there I wouldn't have lasted. No chance. I spent a long time in the block after the Hull riot too.

**How do you think you'll cope with life outside?**

I get great support from my family. My sister will keep an eye on me. I'm a wee bit frightened of going home, though. I've been away from Ireland a long time.

**Will you ever come back to Britain?**

I'll come back to visit prisoners but I'll live in Ireland; that will be my base. I'll come over to see a few of the lads over here. I promised them and when I make a promise I keep it.

**I would like to ask you about Judith Ward who is presently in Durham prison.**

Well, the Judith Ward case - we know that the wee girl's not involved in all that. And the campaign that we had will carry on and I know that there are people who are going to start a campaign for Judith Ward and they're going to try and get young Judith Ward where she should be, back home.

**What are your feelings about the situation of Irish people in this country?**

If anything happens in this country - if a bomb went off - and they can't get the people who did it, they'll just get some Irish person and they'll do exactly the same thing. It'll keep on going until the people of Ireland get together. ■

### Now free all framed prisoners!

**JUDITH WARD** was falsely convicted in November 1974 for the M62 coach bombing and is serving 30 years.

**MICHAEL HICKEY, VINCENT HICKEY, JAMES ROBINSON and PAT MOLLOY** (who died in prison) were framed in 1978-9 for the murder of paper-boy Carl Bridgewater.

**WINSTON SILCOTT, ENGIN RAGHIB and MARK BRAITHWAITE** were gaoled for life in 1987 for the killing of PC Blakelock on Broadwater Farm in October 1985. The police officer in charge of their interrogation has since been found guilty of misconduct in relation to the treatment of a juvenile tried for the same killing.

**These are the cases now coming under public scrutiny, following the release of the Birmingham 6. There are many, many more innocent people in British gaols. John McGranaghan was mentioned by Billy Power outside the court. Then there are Alan Lee Byrne, Qayyum Raja, Tony Pereira, Tom Curtis, Roy Ivers, Martin Foran and many more...**



# The Woolf Inquiry

The Report of the Lord Justice Woolf Inquiry into Prison Disturbances 1990 has been published. It has been hailed as the most radical appraisal of the prison system this century, a blueprint for the restoration of 'decency and justice into jails where conditions had become intolerable' (*The Guardian* 26 February 1991). NICKI JAMESON examines the Woolf Report and its implications for the struggle for prisoners' rights.

Lord Justice Woolf and his collaborator, Judge Stephen Tumim, have been extremely thorough in gathering material for this Report. They wrote to every prisoner and prison officer in the country with especial emphasis given to six 'target' establishments where the most major disturbances took place. These six are Strangeways, Glen Parva, Dartmoor, Cardiff, Bristol and Pucklechurch.

Dartmoor is a 'training' prison infamous for its harsh regime; the others are local or remand institutions typical of the 1990 wave of protest which took strongest hold in these overcrowded 'dustbins', rather than like previous prison uprisings, in the long-term dispersal gaols.

Woolf's remit is riot prevention; how to reform the prison system into a smoother-running machine and minimise the possibility of further breakdowns. The Report has similar implications to those of Lord Scarman's 1981 report into the Brixton uprisings. It represents a recognition by an influential section of the ruling class that naked repression is not working and it is time to call in the 'nice policeman'.

This said, any improvement in prison conditions is a step forward and a victory for all those prisoners who took part in last year's protests. The struggle now will be to force the government to act on Woolf's advice.

The Report itself is fascinating and meticulous. Woolf received 1,300 letters from prisoners and 430 from prison staff and many excerpts are appended to the Report. Despite this thoroughness the Inquiry gives far more weight to the opinions of prison officers, governors and 'experts' than it does to those of the prisoners whose views are often prefaced with qualifying disclaimers. At the five public seminars in London two or three former and no current prisoners were present. The Inquiry did make an effort to hold further seminars in prison to meet and discuss with prisoners but we have been informed that attendance at the main prison seminar, in Lincoln, was 'fixed' by prison officers. At Long Lartin a similar attempt was made but prisoners got wind of it and ensured that representatives of their choice attended and not those handpicked by the staff.

Many interesting details are revealed in the Report. For example, at Strangeways:-

'There were six bathhouses for the whole prison. Each bathhouse had



12 showers and one bath (Showers were also available in the gymnasium)... Sometimes prisoners had to go without socks or had to wear secondhand shoes which were the wrong size or a shirt without buttons or trousers which were far too large.' (p49 3.61)

The regime at Dartmoor is castigated and 'drastic action' is called for in order to give the establishment its 'last chance'. The report on Pucklechurch reveals horrific details of the treatment of surrendering prisoners who were stripped and whose clothing and property were never returned to them but left in plastic bags, drenched from hosing, to moulder in the corner of a workshop.

The Inquiry makes 12 'central recommendations' which form a programme for substantial reform of the prison system. The intentions of this reform are made clear:-

'The Prison Service must set security, control and justice in prisons at the right level and it must provide the right balance between them. The stability of the prison system depends on the Prison Service doing so.' (p17 1.148)

Woolf envisages a system where the gaols are small (not more than 400 inmates), divided into 'manageable' units (50-70 maximum) and where there is respect and trust between staff and prisoners. Instead of the 'legally enforceable minimum standards' which many campaigners have argued for, Woolf comes out in favour of a system of 'accreditation' whereby a series of national standards would be established which prisons would strive towards in order to gain 'accredited status'. The incentives to gain this status are not clear and the standards would not become legally enforceable until they had actually been achieved!

Within this scheme each prisoner would be given an individual 'contract or compact'; in this arrangement lies the whole crux of the Woolf

approach:-

'As an extension of the 'contractual' arrangement which we recommend should exist between Ministers and the Prison Service and which already exists between Area Managers and prisons, the prisoner should receive a "compact or contract" from the prison at which he is held...'

'If the prisoner's expectations were not fulfilled, he would be entitled to enlist the aid of the Board of Visitors or to invoke the grievance procedures to ensure that the prison did not unreasonably depart from the "contract". As a last resort, the "contract" could provide a platform for judicial review. If the prisoner misbehaves then, as a result of disciplinary proceedings, he could be deprived of certain of his expectations under the "contract".' (p23 1.183/4/5)

The implications of this are clear: a well-ordered prison population taking a full and active part in its own incarceration and benefiting from increased 'justice', more access to information, less censorship and generally more humane conditions. Prisoners will be allowed TVs in their cells. Prison officers will wear 'less militaristic' uniforms and will lose the infamous, slashable, peaked caps. And there will be 'incentives' and 'disincentives' towards good and bad behaviour. These are virtually indistinguishable from the old 'privileges' and 'loss of privileges' but appear to give the prisoner a more active role in deciding whether or not to conform. As is made clear in a section on 'Justice Within Prisons':-

'It is not possible for the Inquiry to form any judgement on whether the specific grievances of these prisoners were or were not well-founded. What is clear is that the Prison Service failed to persuade these prisoners that it was treating them fairly.' (p226 9.25) (Woolf's emphasis.)

That is, it is less important that justice be done than that justice be seen to be done. Hence the improved grievance procedure, the independent complaints adjudicator (long overdue) and the recommendation that in future reasons for decisions previously shrouded in secrecy (transfers, segregation under GOAD, parole knock-backs etc) be given to the prisoner, 'as soon as is reasonably practicable'.

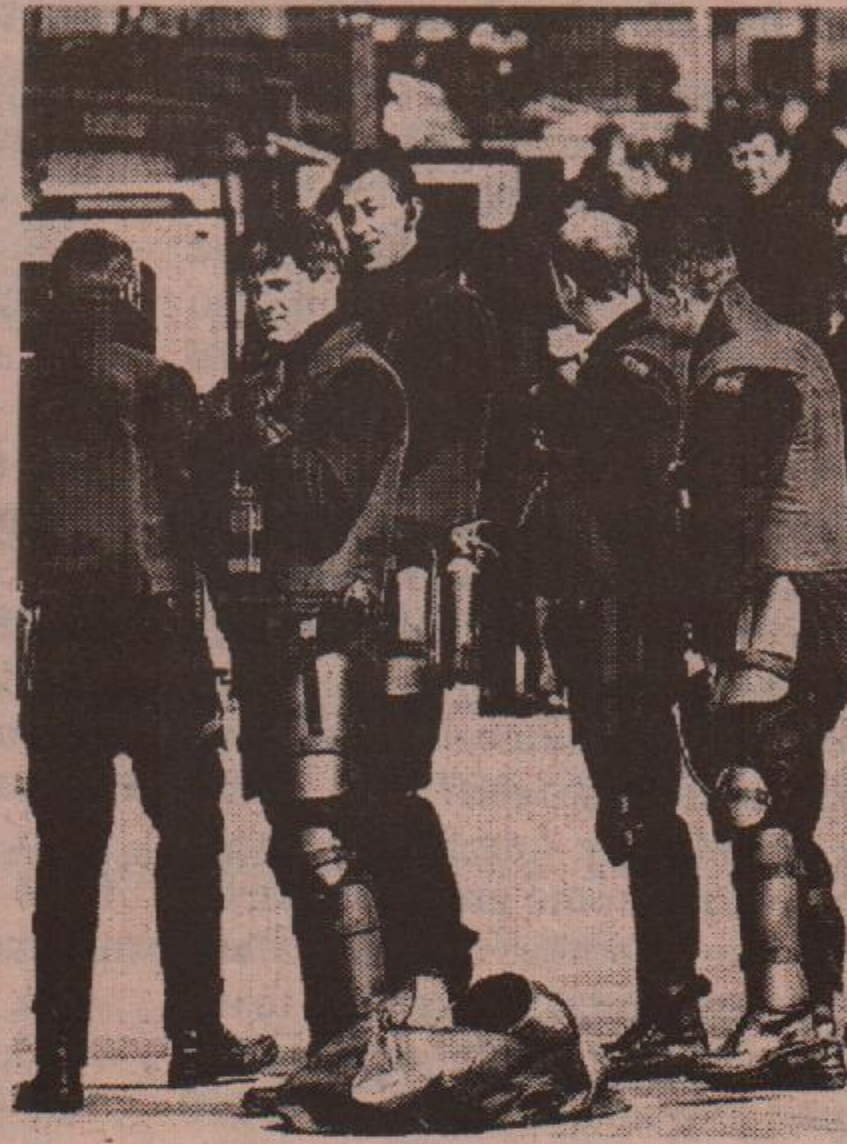
By these methods the now discontented majority of prisoners will become contented; those who would not instigate but would join a protest are neutralised. All that remains is to deal with the trouble-makers. Here there is nothing new. All the well-worn techniques: Rule 43 GOAD, CI 10/74 (now 37/90), transfer from a Cat C to a local prison and transfer to a special unit, are examined and although Woolf's advice is that these be 'used sparingly', he does not advocate any significant change.

Regarding control of future protests, Woolf unashamedly advocates increased use of water cannon and the continuation of Control and Restraint techniques.

One of the most glaring omissions in the Report is that of any commitment to scrap the Prison Medical Service and bring prison hospitals



Strangeways 1990. Far left: Prisoners on the roof. Above: 'No Dead' banner in answer to press lies. Left: police in riot gear stand by.



## Don't forget the prisoners on trial!

26 men were committed for trial on 13 March on charges of riot, conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm and, in four cases, murder. (See letters page)

1 April 1991 is the first anniversary of the Strangeways uprising. A picket will take place outside the prison at 12 noon. Manchester RCG is holding a meeting: 'Stop the brutality in British prisons - Drop the charges against the Strangeways prisoners' Tues 9 April, 7.30pm, Bridge Street Tavern, Bridge Street, off Deansgate, Manchester.

within the NHS. Although there is a passing reference to a 'full-time medical officer' at Strangeways who, 'when giving evidence, quite inappropriately suggested that drugs could be used for controlling prisoners when they were no more than a nuisance,' and the Report also states that, 'there existed among prisoners a suspicion that largactyl was being used too frequently "down the block" for control reasons rather than medical reasons,' no concrete recommendations at all are made for dealing with this nightmare situation.

Nor does the Report in any significant way address the question of the Prison Officers' Association (POA). Woolf talks of an 'enhanced role for prison officers' with more training but he places allegations of brutality firmly outside his remit, within the realm of legal action and therefore does not address an important problem. Prisoners are not only discontent because they are cooped up in squalor; many, especially young offenders, are being victimised and beaten and they are very frightened. And the POA, whose members in essence run the gaols, are a big block to radical change. Without their co-operation reforms may be passed but will not be implemented.

Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, responded to the Woolf Report with a commitment to end slopping-out by 1994, the standard delaying tactic of a White Paper later this year and a list of measures to deal with future protests including the introduction of a new offence of mutiny which will carry a maximum sentence of 10 years. He also accepted Woolf's recommendations for more visits, phonecalls and home leave and the abolition of routine censorship.

Baker will now come under pressure from reformers to implement the Report in its entirety and in the spirit in which it was written. He is likely to do his utmost to resist that pressure and whilst publicly embracing unavoidable measures like the end of slopping-out, will do little or nothing

to alter the fundamental nature of British prisons. Even the much-vaunted sanitary improvements look set to be delayed and obstructed because of the expense and disruption they will cause. Like Douglas Hurd's solemn promise to end custody in police cells, Baker's pledge to provide a toilet for every cell by 1994 may remain at the level of rhetoric. The simple truth is that if Britain did not lock up more people than any other country in Europe, did not consistently goad for petty offences and ceased to rely on remand in custody as an alternative to housing the homeless and caring for the mentally ill, this appalling and insanitary situation would not exist.

The overwhelming majority of Britain's 48-50,000 prisoners are working class. 14 per cent of male and 23 per cent of female prisoners are black compared to four per cent of the population as a whole. The squalor and the brutality in the gaols shows the contempt which successive governments have felt for these people. When a Gerald Ronson or a Lester Piggott is gaoled their treatment is quite different. No slopping out for them; straight to Ford Open Prison with days out to London for business meetings and Harley Street health checks.

Nothing is handed to the ordinary prisoner on a plate. It took all last years uprisings and turmoil to force the commissioning of a serious report. Woolf is no revolutionary; his proposals are designed to contain and control and to prevent future disturbance but they set out a basic level of humane treatment which ought to be the right of every human being in or out of prison. There are vagaries and there are omissions but the proposed improvements to living conditions would be a big step in the right direction. How many more rounds of protest will be needed to ensure that some of the basic humanity which the Ronsons of this world are able to take for granted becomes the right of all? ■

## Strangeways suicides continue

On 10 February remand prisoner Mark Tyler, 22, became the second man to commit suicide since Strangeways was reopened on 3 December. He used his shoelaces to hang himself in his cell on K-wing.

K-wing was the first to be used since the uprising last April and prisoners have complained about the conditions there. 'Prisoners here still suffer the indignity of the slop-out system and only seeing family and friends for 20 minutes a day, regardless of how far they travel or how many children there are...', remand prisoner, Michael Showers wrote to the *Manchester Evening News* the week before Mark took his life.



First, the position of revolutionaries vis-à-vis any war depends on a concrete analysis of the political content or substance of that war. How do we disclose and define the substance of a war?

'War is the continuation of policy. Consequently, we must examine the policy pursued prior to the war, the policy that led to and brought about the war... The philistine does not realise that war is "the continuation of policy", and consequently limits himself to the formula that "the enemy has attacked us", "the enemy has invaded my country", without stopping to think what issues are at stake in the war, which classes are waging it, and with what political objects.' (Collected Works (CW) Vol 23, p33)

In other words, Marxism requires

'... an historical analysis of each war in order to determine whether or not that particular war can be considered progressive, whether it serves the interests of democracy and the proletariat and, in that sense, is legitimate, just, etc.' (CW Vol 23, p32)

Lenin often quoted Clausewitz's famous dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means. In fact, he took it a step further, saying 'War is not only a continuation of politics, it is the epitome of politics', (CW Vol 30, p224), to emphasise that it was not a break from the norm of political struggle, but quite the opposite, especially in the imperialist epoch.

Second, in analysing the substance of any war, communists needed to determine what class aims were at stake:

'The social character of the war, its true meaning, is not determined by the position of the enemy troops... What determines this character is the policy of which the war is the continuation ("war is the continuation of politics"), the class that is waging the war, and the aims for which it is waging this war.' (CW Vol 25, p362)

In other words, the military and political issues involved cannot be separated.

Third, such analysis would establish that some wars – those for national liberation, for instance – were completely justifiable, and had to be supported by socialists. Lenin particularly dealt with the slogan of 'defence of the fatherland' advanced by the open opportunists of the warring imperialist powers during 1914-18. Concrete analysis determined that 'the war is being waged for the partitioning of colonies and for the plunder of other lands'. (CW Vol 21, p185) Further, applying Clausewitz's dictum on war as the continuation of politics:

'You will see that for decades, for almost half a century, the governments and the ruling classes of Britain and France, Germany and Italy, Austria and Russia have pursued a policy of plundering colonies, oppressing other nations, and suppressing the working class movement. It is this, and only this, policy that is being pursued in the current war.' (CW Vol 21, p304)

Hence the war was an 'unjust' war, since it was a war for the continued enslavement of the working class and oppressed nations. 'Defence of the fatherland' in this context meant the defence of the right of one imperialist power to oppress colonies at the expense of another imperialist power. However, socialists recognised the existence of just, legitimate wars, wars to overthrow feudalism, absolutism and alien oppression. Lenin again:

'I am not at all opposed to wars waged in defence of democracy or against national oppression, nor do

# Imperialism and war

The brief span of the imperialist war against Iraq rekindled some interest in the Marxist position on war, especially as it was developed by Lenin during the first imperialist war.

ROBERT CLOUGH examines Lenin's position and contrasts it with the positions advanced by the British 'left' during the Gulf War.



I fear such words as "defence of the fatherland" in reference to these wars or to insurrections. Socialists always side with the oppressed and, consequently, cannot be opposed to wars whose purpose is democratic or socialist struggle against oppression. It would therefore be absurd... not to recognise the legitimacy of wars of oppressed nations against their oppressors, wars that might break out today – rebellion of the Irish against England, for instance, rebellion of Morocco against France, or the Ukraine against Russia, etc... (CW Vol 23, p196)

Such wars, of the colonial, oppressed nations against their imperialist oppressors would be completely legitimate.

'irrespective of who would be the first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory "Great" Powers.' (CW Vol 21, p301)

Lastly, socialists in the oppressor nation, in siding with the oppressed, would have to fight those who supported that oppression, in particular, the privileged labour aristocracy and its political representative, the bourgeois labour party:

'The fact is that "bourgeois labour parties", as a political phenomenon, have already been formed in the all the foremost capitalist countries, and that unless a determined and relentless struggle is waged all along the line against these parties – or groups, trends etc, it is all the same – there can be no question of a struggle against imperialism, or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement.' (CW, Vol 23, p118)

These then are some of the relevant principles for socialists to understand if they are to adopt a principled approach to any war that 'their' imperialist power carries on.

## THE WAR AGAINST IRAQ

The trigger for the war against Iraq was the latter's invasion of Kuwait. This was a dispute between two factions of the Arab bourgeoisie over the price of oil. Iraq needed a high price to rescue its economy from complete collapse, while the al Sabah family in Kuwait wanted a lower price so as not to upset the imperialist economies in which it had enormous investments. In this dispute, the war aims of either party were entirely reactionary.

However, the Iraqi invasion upset the network of alliances which US and British imperialism had established to sustain their control of the Gulf and its oil in the post-colonial era. A greater Iraq could be a threat to the Zionist state, it could threaten the Saudi state. It might provide an avenue through which Japanese or German imperialism could obtain a foothold in the Gulf and undermine the stranglehold of the US and Britain.

Hence the war aims of Britain and the US were very simple: destroy the Iraqi war machine, re-establish the al Sabah family, and use this position to reassert complete supremacy over the Arab people. In this aim, they were quite happy to bribe the Egyptian bourgeoisie and allow Syria a free hand in northern Lebanon in order to co-opt them into their designs. Democracy in Kuwait, Syria, Turkey, or freedom in Palestine or Kurdistan were completely irrelevant to their designs.

Hence socialists supported a defeat for British and US imperialism for a very concrete reason. Yet they could not by the same token extend that to a call for a victory for Iraq, because the war aims of Iraq were also reactionary. Some sects sought to distinguish between a military victory for Iraq (which socialists could support), and a political victory (which socialists couldn't). But this distinction is sophistry. A military victory for Iraq was always an impossibility; even if it were not, it could only mean a political victory for Saddam, with the

continued enslavement of the Kurdish people and the Iraqi working class as its consequence.

The Iraqi war aims were then the war aims of the Iraqi bourgeoisie alone. And the turn the war took proved that beyond a doubt. The Iraqi army collapsed, not just because of the terrible pounding it took from the imperialist forces, but because the conscripts that made it up did not want to fight a war in whose outcome they saw no interest. 'Victory to Iraq' sounds very hollow when we see that the hatred of the Iraqi army for Saddam was much greater than for the imperialists Saddam had summoned them to fight.

As we have shown, there is another aspect to the struggle against imperialist war, and that is the fight to expose those in the working class of the oppressor nation who support the imperialist war aims – the 'bourgeois labour party' Lenin referred to.

From the outset, Labour declared its support for British war aims. They needed no encouragement; indeed, Kaufman as Shadow Foreign Secretary boasted at the Labour Party conference that he had called for Iraqi reparations fully one month before Thatcher took it up. As the economic war turned into military war, and the wider war aims of imperialism were made public, Kinnock and Kaufman did not hesitate to support them. Most despicable of all, in the slaughter of the last 24 hours, not one word of protest was uttered, as Kinnock echoed the call for an unconditional Iraqi surrender.

If Labour fulfilled its role as defender of imperialism to perfection, we must not forget the part played by the Labour left and its admirers. Lenin argued that in a period of revolutionary crisis, when the working class becomes disaffected with the 'bourgeois labour party', a trend appears which seeks to reconcile the working class to that bourgeois labour party. During the first imperialist war, Karl Kautsky, a prominent leader of the pre-war international socialist movement, was such

a conciliator. Kautsky argued that socialists should oppose the war by calling for a democratic peace; that since the war was in his view a interruption to normal politics, he fact that German Social Democrats openly defended German war aims should not be held against them, and they should not be expelled from the movement. Lenin wrote:

'Kautskyism is not an independent trend, because it has no roots either in the masses or the privileged stratum which has deserted to the bourgeoisie. But the danger of Kautskyism lies in the fact that utilising the ideology of the past, it endeavours to reconcile the proletariat with the "bourgeois labour party", to preserve the unity of the proletariat with that party and thereby enhance the latter's prestige. The masses no longer follow the avowed social chauvinists... The Kautskyists' masked defence of the social chauvinists is far more dangerous.'

The Labour and Trotskyist left in their own small ways played this part to perfection. No matter how indignant Benn, Bernie Grant and other 'opponents' of Kinnock were, they were never going to break with the butcher's assistant. To the left, the SWP made sure that its formal commitment to 'troops out' never upset its friends in CND. As Lenin said:

'One of the common sophistries of Kautskyism is its reference to the "masses". We do not want, they say, to break away from the masses and mass organisations!' (CW Vol 23, p119)

How many times did the SWP plead that the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf and its associated organisations were the 'broad forces' that were the only way to a mass movement? But as Lenin argued,

'... it is not so much a question of the size of an organisation, as of the real, objective significance of its policy: does its policy represent the masses, does it serve them, does it aim at their liberation from capitalism, or does it represent the interests of the minority, the minority's reconciliation with capitalism?' (CW Vol 23, p119)

The Committee, with its support for sanctions against Iraq and its opposition to the withdrawal of the imperialist troops, expressed the 'minority's reconciliation with capitalism'. And the SWP? Its 'masked defence' of the Committee was no more than a pale imitation of Kautskyism. Truly the one point on which the left puts no condition is its support for the Labour butchers.

The peace is a continuation of the war. The al Sabah family has regained control of its private fiefdom. The Palestinian population of Kuwait who make up the labour force are being subjected to a reign of terror. Even the tame 'democratic' opposition is persecuted: within days of the end of the war, one had been shot dead and another wounded. Within Iraq, whilst imperialism hopes for a coup organised from within the Republican Guard to topple Saddam, the Kurds fight on for liberation.

As we have explained, the issue for US and British imperialism was how best to reassert their domination of the Arab people. They could only have been defeated by the people of the Middle East as a whole acting to prevent their rulers from supporting the war. 'Victory to Iraq' could not express this standpoint; by pretending a military victory for Saddam was not a political victory it sacrificed the interests of the Kurdish and Iraqi people. 'Victory to the workers and oppressed peoples of the Middle East', the slogan of FRFI, was and still is the only legitimate standpoint of communists, since it alone states what is the case – that it is the united mass of the oppressed who can defeat imperialism, not the unwilling conscripts of a bourgeois dictator. ■



# British terror

PAM ROBINSON

Tuesday 29 January, West Belfast The RUC pulled up in a Land Rover next to a man, jumped out and opened fire with a blank cartridge at the man before getting back in their vehicle and driving off.

Two AP/RN sellers, Seamus Downey and Pat McBride, were stopped by the RUC, searched and made to give their personal details. Moments later they had a fire-flash stun grenade thrown at them by the RUC who shouted after them, 'That was only a flash, next time it'll be the real thing.'

Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast Relatives of republican prisoners have been singled out for intimidation by the prison warders at Crumlin Road Gaol. One woman visitor was assaulted by at least two prison warders

when she refused to comply with a strip-search, pointing out that both she and the prisoner had already been searched. She had her mouth forcibly opened and the prison warders forced their fingers into it. In another incident Susan McCrory and her 5-month-old baby were strip-searched by prison warders who insisted on searching the baby's nappy.

Sunday 24 February, North Belfast Peter McTasney was murdered by Loyalists and his 3-year-old niece received a head injury. Two Loyalists drove up in a taxi at 9pm as he was returning home. One of the Loyalists was armed with a sledgehammer and the other with a handgun. They opened fire, hitting McTasney from outside the house, then entered the house and shot him as he lay injured. Their taxi was found abandoned in a loyalist area.

Sunday 3 March, Cappagh, Co. Tyrone Loyalist death squad members attempted to enter the Boyle's Bar in Cappagh but failed to do so because it was boarded up. Three cars drove into the car park of the bar where they were fired upon by the Loyalists. Four nationalists - Dwayne O'Donnell, John Quinn, Tommy Armstrong and Malcom Nugent were killed. The British army had been in the area all day and had left only an hour before the attack.

Monday 4 March, Belfast Malcolm Lenaghan, a taxi driver, was murdered by Loyalists after he answered a bogus call from the city centre. His murderers ordered him to drive to the Woodvale area of Belfast near the Shankhill Road before shooting him. The RUC were said to be 'keeping an open mind' on both the incidents of the 3 and 4 March. ■

# IRA strikes continue

SEÁN Ó MAOLDHOMNAIGH

Despite the tightened security because of the Gulf war, in recent weeks the IRA were able to carry out attacks on British soil that proved both highly daring and disruptive.

The British War Cabinet, luxuriating in high security splendour while plotting the mass destruction of Middle Eastern people, was sent a clear message in the form of a bold mortar attack on 10 Downing Street. Their vulnerability was exposed in the most explosive fashion when the best-laid security measures were rent apart with a trio of reminders delivered by transit van courier, special delivery, courtesy of the Provisional IRA. Having disturbed the early morning blues in Downing Street, the daring volunteers made a motorcycle getaway, leaving a flurry of police activity to deal with a burning embarrassment and a

'War' Cabinet retreating further into the concrete bunkers with their trembling stiff upper lips just about intact.

The following week the reality of Britain's involvement in Irish affairs was once again brought home to a British public sadly indifferent to the continuing situation in the north of Ireland. Devices were planted at two British Rail stations in London. At 4.20 am Tuesday 19 February, a 2lb bomb exploded in Paddington. Nobody was hurt. At 7am the IRA issued a warning to evacuate all mainline stations. A callous decision to deliberately ignore this warning led to one death and 38 injuries at

Victoria Station.

The railway bombs proved to be an exceptionally disruptive tactic by the IRA, and one which demonstrated its ability to bring the very heart of imperialist Britain to a grinding halt. The IRA are bad for capitalist business. The Confederation of British Industry said 'it was impossible to quantify the cost of the disruption.'

The message is clear, whether in the form of mortars sailing over Whitehall, or stranded commuters on railway platforms throughout London: as long as Britain maintains its brutal imposition on Ireland the Irish people will fight back. ■



Saying it with mortars

# Unjust Irish trials

SARAH RICCA

As the Birmingham 6 finally walked free, the wheels of British injustice ground on. February saw the charges against Dessie Ellis thrown out of court - charges which two months earlier had secured his extradition by a Dublin court. The charges were dismissed because they required Ellis to have been present in Britain during a period in which he was either in jail or under security surveillance in Ireland. Ellis had fought his extradition under the charges with a 36-day hunger strike. Now he

faces two new charges.

The episode has exposed the sordid deal that is the 1987 Extradition Act. In rubber-stamping Ellis' extradition warrant, the Dublin Courts obligingly overlooked holes in the charges so gaping that even a British magistrate could not ignore them. Then, instead of releasing Ellis, the magistrate swapped the charges for two others. The British government is currently seeking a patch-up job on the whole affair which would pacify the embarrassed Dublin government without letting Ellis go free.

Meanwhile a court case in

Belfast has seen Danny Morrison, vice-president of Sinn Fein, charged with false imprisonment and conspiracy to murder. His alleged would-be victim is Sandy Lynch, an ex-member of the INLA and IRA who became an informer for the RUC after they threatened to hand him over to loyalist killers. He claims that he was being interrogated about his activities and would have been executed but for the suspiciously timely arrival of the RUC and British troops. Danny Morrison and his co-accused say that they were meeting to arrange a press conference where Lynch would an-

nounce that he was an informer. The case is a significant attack on the leadership of the Republican movement. It also marks the determination of the RUC to protect its use of informers.

A French court recently recognised the 'idealistic motivations' of three Republicans caught shipping over 100 tons of arms to Ireland off the French coast. The three men received sentences of just five years, three of which they have already served in custody.

On 15 March Irish student Kevin O'Donnell convinced an Old Bailey jury that he was not guilty of terrorist activities. Immediately after his acquittal, he was rearrested in the court and held under the PTA. The following day he was served with an exclusion order and deported to Ireland. ■

## Prisoners' birthdays

Paul Jordan H22338, HMP Long Lartin, Evesham, Worcs WR11 5TZ 21 March  
Martina Anderson D25134, HMP Durham, Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HU 16 April  
Eddie Butler 338637, HMP Frankland, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD 17 April  
Patrick McLaughlin LB83694, HMP Parkhurst, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 5NX 2 May  
Joe O'Connell 338635, HMP Gartree, Market Harborough, Leics LE16 7RP 15 May

FRFI commemorates the 75th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Uprising and sends greetings and solidarity to the Irish people and all Irish POWs in Irish, British, US and European gaols. Solidarity and strength to their families.

FRFI salutes the memory of Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Ray McCreesh, Patsy O'Hara, Martin Hurson, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty, Joe McDonnell, Thomas McElwee and Mickey Devine, murdered by British imperialism in 1981. Solidarity and strength to their families.

# 'Virgin births', hypocrisy and the bourgeois family

JANE CARTER

Turning its attention, finally, from the 'just' war in the Gulf, the media switched to the vital question of 'Virgin Births' which, like Saddam Hussein, are a threat to the nation's moral health and well-being. Sounding like a Sunday Sport 'Hitler lives' spoof, even the 'respectable' dailies felt this was an 'important and timely debate' since the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is about to issue guidelines for clinics offering all forms of 'assisted conception' including artificial insemination by donor (AID).

Someone, indeed, had got their timing right in order to influence the guidelines. And guess what: all the anti-abortion lobbyists who believe that women have no right to choose not to become mothers, also believe that single women, especially 'virgins', have no right to choose to become mothers.

Nightmare vision of baby

production line' screamed the headlines; 'It reduces human procreation down to the level of farmyard animal husbandry', said Life, the anti-abortionists. All the opponents of 'Virgin Birth' (non-biblical, that is) from Dr John Hapgood, Archbishop of York, to Ann Winterton (Con MP for Congleton), from *The Guardian* to the *Sun* argue that one-parent families (and especially those not initiated by sexual intercourse) are bad for children. The *Guardian* suggested that a woman wanting a baby without the sexual act may well be psychotic and therefore 'A Bad Mother'.

This, of course, is all hogwash. None of these concerned busybodies gave two figs for the thousands of one-parent and no-parent families artificially created by the Gulf war. It was deemed 'just' by the CoFE. What they are really concerned about is the fact that the number of single-parent families (created either by choice or marital breakdown) is mushrooming. One in four children are now born outside marriage. This not only costs the

state benefits (hence the new rule which forces women to name their children's fathers), just as seriously in the case of 'Virgin Births' the male role is, to say the least, distant.

In a nation ruled by the bourgeoisie, the bourgeois family (man + wife + two children in that order) is the prescribed norm. Any alternative is deviant. Motherhood without sexual intercourse with a man is especially threatening and should be outlawed. The threat is increased by the fact that the bourgeois family - always an ideal rather than a reality - is fast becoming a fiction for the majority.

We will know that the lobbyists and media have ceased to promote hogwash when they begin to seriously promote the welfare of children. Unemployment and poverty are a far greater threat to their welfare than 'Virgin Birth' or single parents. Let's see a lobby calling for full employment with decent wages; for benefits that meet people's needs; for accessible childcare for all who want it. ■

# Rape in marriage

The Court of Appeal took two progressive steps in the second week of March (this must be a record). First it belatedly released the Birmingham 6, then it ruled, even more belatedly, that husbands could be criminally liable for rape within marriage.

Ever since the 18th century, English courts have ruled that husbands cannot be charged

with the rape of their wives. The 1976 Sexual Offences Act defines rape as 'unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent'. So the courts continued to interpret 'unlawful sexual intercourse' as intercourse outside marriage and let the rapist husbands free.

This is what the Court of Appeal described as a 'common law fiction'. The real 'fiction' of

course had always been the fear that the courts would be flooded with disaffected wives alleging rape against their innocent husbands. Many husbands are far from innocent. Rape is violent aggravated assault and evidence shows that rape in marriage is more common than in other circumstances.

There is still a lot at fault with the rape and sexual offences laws in Britain, but one obstacle that women faced in protecting themselves against violence has now gone. ■

# Defeat Clause 25

RICHARD ROQUES

7,000 of us marched on Saturday 16 February against Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

The demonstration, organised by the Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition (LGRC), was also to protest against Operation Spanner, the SM trial which resulted in prison sentences. The LGRC are demanding the abolition of the entire Clause 25, including the offences of gross indecency, soliciting, procuring and living off the earnings of a male prostitute. There were simultaneous protests against this homophobic legislation outside British embassies and consulates

from Sydney to San Francisco.

Earlier in the week Outrage held a protest outside Bow Street police station which attracted 300 people. Ten couples turned themselves in and 'confessed' to such 'crimes' as having sex together at a party with others present and to introducing two friends who subsequently had stayed the night in their flat. This, the protesters said, was 'procuring', an offence under Clause 25.

The day before the LGRC demonstration, the Government announced the amendment of the Criminal Justice Bill to delete the offences of living off the earnings of a male prostitute and procuring an act of buggery, following 'the genuine concerns

which have been expressed'. This shows that if we get out on to the streets, visibly as lesbians and gay men then we can roll back the attacks on us by a viciously homophobic and anti-working class government.

While senior Conservative MPs lobbied the government to remove the threat of prison sentences for all consenting sexual acts committed by persons aged 16 and over, the Labour Party leadership has backed down from Party policy. We cannot trust the Labour Party to defend our rights as lesbians and gay men. Nor can we allow self-appointed groups such as the Stonewall group (led by Ian McKellen) who had 'friendly and constructive' talks with John Patten, to dictate the terms of our struggle. We don't want the Clause amended, we want it scrapped. ■



## An officer and a homophobe

PC Tyson's main mistake in the witness box at Bow Street Magistrates court on Monday 18 February was to admit that he had said that I had AIDS in front of a member of the public. He was even offered the opportunity to keep his mouth shut by the magistrate who warned him against self-incrimination. Tyson told the truth; he had said I had AIDS.

On 15 June 1990 I was petitioning against apartheid and selling FRFI in Covent Garden when PC Marcus Tyson, in plain clothes, reported me for illegal street collection. A member of the public was present who had signed my petition and Tyson told her: 'This man has AIDS'. This was pretty shocking even for Tyson who has a history of harassing the picket outside the South African Embassy. The next day, Soweto Day, City AA held a rally outside the embassy and who should turn up but Marcus Tyson.

I took the microphone, pointed to him, explained what had happened the day before and finished by saying 'PC Marcus Tyson is a racist, a homophobe and a bigot.' About 15 minutes later I was approached by Inspector Ralph who charged me under section 5 of the Public Order Act for causing distress, alarm and harassment. He also alleged that I had said that Tyson had AIDS. Given that my remarks had been made over a public-address system, with at least 50 witnesses, this 'gilding the lily' was foolhardy.

Subsequently the illegal street collection charge initiated by Tyson was thrown out of court, but the police proceeded with the Public Order Act charge.

In court a veritable army of Chief Inspectors and Inspectors turned up to say how distressed they and Tyson were. But faced with photographs of themselves gathered together, writing their notes and grinning from ear to ear outside the Embassy, they became much more distressed. Chief Inspector Holmes claimed that his laughter was 'a defensive reaction'.

Star witness, however, was Tyson who not only admitted that he had said I had AIDS, he also claimed that he knew this to be a fact because when I was arrested on the demonstration against the Poll Tax in March, 'HIV-positive' had been written on 'Form 618' at Bow Street police station (I was not taken to Bow Street station).

Asked why, supposing it to be true, he had disclosed confidential information to a member of the public, Tyson claimed that I had shouted and spat at the woman and her children! Did he know that AIDS could not be transmitted by spitting? 'That's what the doctor's say'. Inexorably, my defence counsel asked why there was no mention of the spitting in his statement or notebook: 'I withheld the information to surprise the defence', said Tyson and then confirmed that he had used this ambush technique on a number of occasions!

The magistrate had no alternative, in the face of this extraordinary evidence, but to dismiss the case without hearing the defence. Even supposing that Tyson really believed I had AIDS and was so ignorant about its transmission, there is still no excuse for his behaviour. The magistrate described Tyson's behaviour as the 'gravest thing' he had heard in 30 years on the bench. His conduct has been reported to the DPP and is the subject of civil action and a police complaint (the fifth of his short career and hopefully the last). ■

## SOUTH AFRICA

# Constituent assembly at stake

**'Given the present balance of forces, a united front of liberation organisations fighting for a Constituent Assembly would be real step forward on the path to fundamental change in the country. The South African revolution is in the balance.'** (**'South African revolution in the balance', FRFI/99**) **The demand for an elected Constituent Assembly, agreed by all the major liberation movements at their conferences in December, remains the most consistently democratic demand of the movement. It would, in reality, mean the transfer of political power to the people as a whole.**

CAT WIENER

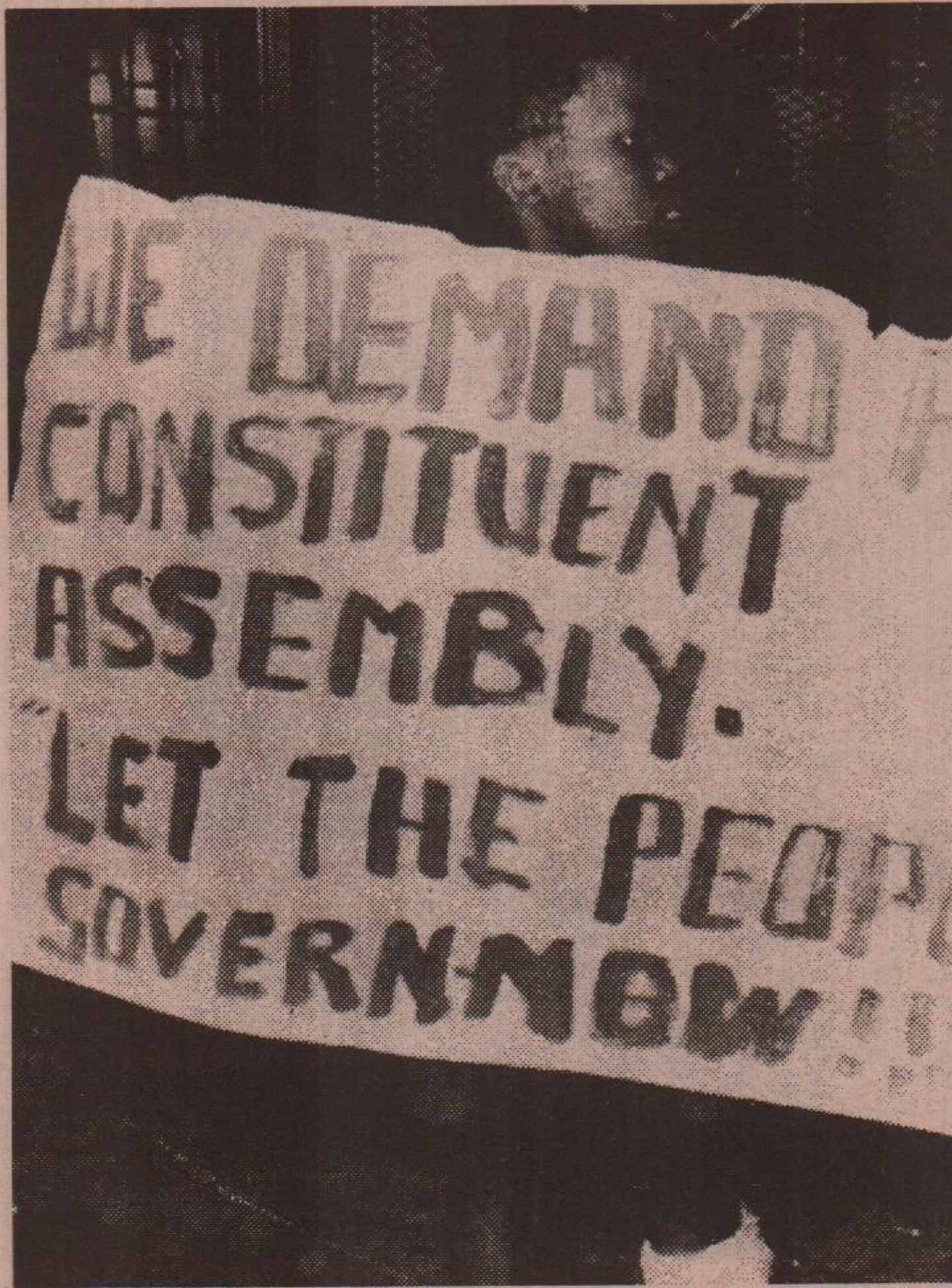
In the past few months, there have been steps taken towards achieving unity around this demand. On 1 February, the day the whites-only South African parliament opened, the PAC and ANC jointly organised mass demonstrations throughout South Africa calling for one person, one vote. On 4 February, PAC President Clarence Makwethu addressed the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on behalf of both organisations, and won OAU support for a United Front Conference, or Conference of the Oppressed, and an elected Constituent Assembly.

### 'ALL PARTY' CONFERENCE

At the same time, however, moves are afoot to derail the democratic process. The ANC 'All Party' Conference (APC) is now due to be held some time in May. On 8 January Nelson Mandela said the APC would take place once obstacles to negotiations had been removed. It would establish the broad principles within which constitutional work would be carried out; determine the make-up of the body that would draw up the constitution, and set up an interim government to oversee the transition period to elections on the basis of the new constitution. The status of such a body – and what its relationship would be to an interim government – is blurred in the ANC formulation. The 'obstacles' to negotiations – the release of political prisoners and the return of political exiles – have not yet been fulfilled.

The PAC has condemned the APC as an attempt 'to side-track the peoples' democratic demand for an elected Constituent Assembly' – a suspicion substantiated by the willingness of the Nationalist Party – which has explicitly rejected the demand for an elected Constituent Assembly – to participate in the APC. It is clear that de Klerk intends to use the APC as a vehicle to push through his agenda for a settlement in South Africa. At present, it looks as though the ANC will sit alone at the table with the Nationalist Party and whatever assortment of conservative bantustan leaders, Inkatha, discredited Indian and Coloured Parliament leaders and other reactionaries the NP can draft in behind its plans.

This is the body which the ANC suggested could continue as a constitution-making body, an interim government or both if mandated to do so. Mandated by whom? De Klerk has stated that any decisions made by the APC will be subject to white veto. The PAC has dismissed the APC as a 'constitutional talk-shop without a democratic mandate on the part of the participants' and 'a farcical manner of approaching the very real challenge of democratising our country'. The PAC and AZAPO will not be attending the APC, which looks as though its agenda is being set on the regime's terms.



### DE KLERK'S AGENDA

What is de Klerk's agenda? Since the early eighties, the apartheid regime and its imperialist backers have recognised that the writing was on the wall for apartheid, and that some kind of radical overhaul was going to be necessary to restore order and profitability. The attempts in the early eighties to co-opt a section of the black population by creating limited social and electoral reform failed. The economic crisis precipitated by the fall in the price of gold resulted in increased hardship for the black working class. These contradictions came to a head in the township uprisings of 1984-86. Imperialism recognised that apartheid had become a bad economic risk. Foreign multinationals responded to calls for sanctions from anti-apartheid campaigners. The imposition of sanctions in turn exacerbated the longer-term economic situation, as South Africa found it increasingly difficult to obtain foreign capital, and economic growth was stunted. South Africa's debt increased. Even with last year's rescheduling of the foreign debt by leading banks, South Africa's debt repayments will average \$1.7bn per year until 1995, requiring a continuing trade surplus of this order to prevent a further debt crisis (ICABA, Winter 1990). The Nationalist Party's intensive privatisation programme is being fiercely resisted by the black trade union federations and would, in any case, provide only temporary relief. What the embattled South African economy needs is an influx of foreign capital. De Klerk needs the imperialists to bail him out. They, in turn, want a profitable and stable South Africa.

They all recognise that to achieve this means abolishing the cruder manifestations of apart-

heid, which have become a political embarrassment and a hindrance to capitalist expansion.

### 'REFORMING' APARTHEID?

It is in this context that de Klerk's 'reforms' must be understood. Mandela criticised de Klerk's 1 February address to the opening of the whites-only parliament for being exclusively orientated towards the whites, and the international community, completely ignoring the needs of black people. From de Klerk's point of view, however, it was a resounding success. John Major immediately urged the lifting of sanctions and the EC, egged on by British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, went ahead and agreed to lift all sanctions once the reforms were formally tabled. The IMF has been said to have given de Klerk 'a warm, indeed encouraging, welcome' (*Financial Mail*). Yet in reality, what has changed?

On 1 February, de Klerk announced the repeal of three grotesque pieces of apartheid legislation: the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act and the Land Acts (1913 and 1936).

The repeal of the Group Areas Act gives black people the right to live in 'white' areas (and vice-versa), but in practice only the tiny black middle class can afford to do so.

The repeal of the Population Registration Act, by which all South Africans are racially classified from birth, has profound implications for the racist constitution – but given that it will only affect those born after the Act is repealed, such effects as it might have are a long way off.

The infamous Land Act gave 87 per cent of South Africa to the white minority, and the remaining 13 per cent to the black majority. In practice, only 4 per cent – mainly the most arid, unproduc-

tive land – was ever made available to black people. The remaining nine per cent was held 'in trust' by the state: ie farmed profitably by whites, like the vast Zebediela Citrus Estate (trustee de Klerk), where black labourers were forced to work for a meagre £20 per month. Black people whose land was stolen from them are now told that they can buy it back from the thieves! For the 3.5 million black people thrown off their land in forced resettlements over the past 30 years, who are being offered neither compensation nor restoration, this is adding insult to injury. Both the ANC and PAC reacted with anger to the suggestion. Given that the majority of black people lack the economic means to buy back their land anyway, the unequal distribution of land which, by denying the black population as a whole the means of subsistence, provided the guarantee of cheap black labour, will continue.

The West clamours that apartheid is now dead and is eagerly poised to lift sanctions against the regime. Yet for the black working class, nothing has changed. Attempts by the regime to channel more social spending through the budget have had little effect. Unemployment amongst the black population continues to rise at a rate of 3 per cent a year, swelling the jobless totals by thousands every week; the state of education for black children has reached crisis proportions, with schools overcrowded and under-staffed and -resourced, often lacking even the most basic sanitation. Only 35 per cent of black pupils passed their matriculation exams last year, as against a white pass rate of 97 per cent. Homelessness is also endemic: the state would have to build 600 homes a day until the end of the century to solve the problem. The regime cannot even begin to tackle the massive scale of social and economic deprivation that it has created without a massive cutback on the living standards of the white population.

Instead, the de Klerk regime is stepping up repression against the masses. Far from releasing political prisoners, they are using the Internal Security Act to detain and imprison. They continue to foster a climate of violence and terror, while presenting a face of being the only force capable of maintaining 'law and order'. This is a thin veneer for its real intentions. In February it used the excuse of a 'crackdown on crime' to round up 11,000 black people, confiscating weapons while it did so. Vlok plans to increase the ratio of police to population 4-fold, and will have trained 10,000 extra police recruits by June.

In March the regime announced that the moratorium on hanging was being lifted. 97 per cent of the prisoners on death row are black. It is clear that the regime is gearing itself up to deal with black unrest as economic hardship intensifies.

With the iron fist goes the velvet glove. De Klerk knows that the regime cannot contain opposition from a united and organised movement indefinitely. It does not want a repeat of 1984-85. And so an essential part of de Klerk's strategy is to co-opt a section of the liberation movement.

Since February 1990, the ANC has been involved in 'talks about

talks' with the regime. The ANC has made a number of concessions – most importantly the giving up of the armed struggle and related matters – in exchange for the promised release of political prisoners and the return of exiles. So far the regime has barely made even a token attempt to honour its commitments.

The ANC Consultative Conference in December, impatient with the lack of progress emanating from the 'talks about talks', mandated the ANC leadership to break off talks with the government and resume the armed struggle if these conditions were not met by 30 April. It also agreed a programme of mass action to put pressure on the regime for a Constituent Assembly, and the setting up of defence units in the face of continuing state-sponsored violence.

The militancy of the ANC membership was a blow for the regime, which responded angrily, and a pressure on the ANC to adopt a more radical stance towards the government. However, having staked everything on its alliance with the Nationalist Party, the Mandela leadership has proved more ready to compromise the demands of its membership than to fall out with the government. Faced with the need to achieve results of some kind before 30 April, and to clear the way for the All Party Conference, the ANC met the government for further discussion on 12 February. It made further concessions on the question of the armed struggle in return for further promises for the release of ANC prisoners and the return of ANC exiles. It committed '... all political parties and movements to participate in this process peacefully and without the use of force'.

De Klerk knows the ANC is under pressure from its membership to meet the 30 April deadline, and is milking the situation for all it is worth. But the more concessions the ANC makes, the more it cuts itself off both from its own membership and the movement as a whole. (The decision by the ANC leadership to buy the Shell building in Johannesburg as its headquarters for £4 million, which flies in the face of the international sanctions campaign is a telling, if trivial, indication of this.) The Mandela leadership is increasingly finding itself in a no-win situation.

But de Klerk and the imperialists are not about to have an easy ride either. Increasingly disillusioned with a negotiation process that has yet to yield them any benefits, the youth in the black townships are becoming increasingly radicalised. The PAC has given a political voice to these forces by stating, in response to the 12 February Minute: 'Neither the ANC nor the regime has any prerogative to decide or prescribe the method used by broad liberation movements to achieve freedom from oppression... The PAC remains committed to all forms of struggle. In the absence of the ballot, the bullet cannot be abandoned.'

In the absence of any real commitment to change from de Klerk, and with the ANC leadership set for compromise, the movement which raises demands in complete opposition to continuing oppression will be the one that gets support from the masses. ■



# The Soviet Union and Baltic nationalism

A nationalist upsurge in Soviet republics threatens the break up of the Soviet Union.

In this discussion article, TED TALBOT assesses the communist position on movements for national independence as it applies to the Soviet Union today.



In December 1922 the First All-Union Congress of Soviets declared the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Such a Union was necessary both to combat the threat of internal counter-revolution and external intervention. They believed that it would have been hard to safeguard Soviet power and the independence of the country, surrounded as it was by militarily strong capitalist powers. This would require uniting to the fullest extent the fraternal Republics' military, political and diplomatic efforts. The vital interests of all the Soviet peoples and the struggle for socialism demanded the formation of a united multinational socialist state.

This illustrates a contradiction for Leninists with their theoretical commitment to self-determination. Revolutions which have created the conditions in which the secession of oppressed nations is possible are liable to be irretrievably weakened if this right is immediately exercised. Furthermore, it is precisely in the midst of revolutionary ferment that an impetus to independence is likely to be strongest. In fact the Bolshevik party was clear that the right to self-determination was subordinate to the needs of socialist construction.

Let us follow up this notion of a discord between theory and practice. For example, the following retort addressed to Polish communists in a debate about the legitimacy of annexations is typical of Lenin's vociferous support for national self-determination.

'However you may twist and turn, annexation is violation of the self-determination of a nation, it is the establishment of state frontiers contrary to the will of the population.' (Lenin 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination')

In March 1920 Pilsudski's Polish army invaded Soviet territory and established a base in the raw-materials-rich Ukraine for a few months. They were driven out by the Red Army and the Politbureau had to decide whether to pursue the retreating Poles into their own territory. Rejecting Trotsky's advice, Lenin, along with the majority of the Politbureau, decided to invade Poland for the following reasons:

1. A tactical military reason - Pilsudski was unlikely to accept the territorial frontier demarcated by the Bolsheviks and was likely simply to use the time to regroup his forces.

2. A political reason - they thought that the advance of the Red Army would promote revolutionary outbreaks in Poland.

3. Poland was the bridge between Russia and Germany, and across it Lenin hoped to establish contact with Germany, imagining that Germany, too, was in intense revolutionary ferment.

It is pertinent to note that Trotsky's reservations were based not on matters of principle, but rather on warnings of an upsurge of Polish patriotic sentiment following a Red Army invasion of Poland which he received from Polish socialists in Moscow.

The Polish experience was a watershed not just in Bolshevik practice but also in its contradiction of theoretical propositions. 'It had been a canon of Marxist politics that revolution can-



not and must not be carried out on the point of bayonets into foreign countries.' (*The Prophet Armed*, Trotsky: 1879-1921, Isaac Deutscher) In short, in practice Lenin and the Bolsheviks were prepared to view national self-determination as secondary to the interests of socialism.

Today nationalist resurgence is threatening the integrity of the Soviet Union. Ten of the fifteen republics are claiming various degrees of autonomy with the Baltic states in the lead. The drive for national autonomy is inextricably intertwined with moves towards a market economy and greater ties with the West.

On Sunday 1 March two unofficial referendums in Estonia (83% turnout, 78% pro-independence) and Latvia (88% turnout, 83% pro-independence) saw huge majorities in favour of independence. Rather surprisingly, around 40% of ethnic Russians are reported to have voted in favour of independence, despite the presence of sizeable pro-Moscow organisations in the two republics which have complained of ballot rigging and intimidation of voters. For instance in Daugavpils in Latvia only 13% of the population is ethnic Latvian, yet even here a 51% vote favouring independence was recorded. A previous straw ballot in Lithuania had produced an extraordinary result of a little over 90% in favour of independence.

It is unlikely that these results will be repeated in the national referendum currently taking place. This asks whether the present national boundaries of the USSR should be maintained. Six republics are refusing to take part in the vote. Gorbachev has warned that a 'no' vote, leading to the break-up of the Soviet Union, would be 'a world disaster'.

The policy of *glasnost* has allowed a multitude of national grievances to enter the public arena. Some of these grievances may be legitimate but the secession of one republic would surely promote what Gorbachev's adviser, Alexander Yakovlev, terms a 'domino effect' which would rapidly lead to the dismemberment of the

Soviet Union.

It is fairly clear, as much as anything is clear from his contradictory statements, that Gorbachev, whether from personal disposition or due to pressure from the KGB/military etc, is prepared to allow substantial degrees of national autonomy but not to countenance the destruction of the USSR:

'Disintegration and separation cannot happen in our country, simply under any circumstances... If we start splitting, there will be a dreadful war.'

What should be the attitude of Marxists in this situation? Can the conception that the interests of socialism are superior to the concern for independence apply here also? To accept such a qualification puts one in total opposition to the overwhelming majority of Trotskyist groups (with the exception of the Spartacists), who uncritically support independence moves.

Indeed, such uncritical support for nationalism blends with the desire of the Trotskyists to see capitalism restored in the Soviet Union. Outflanking even Workers Power, the Revolutionary Communist Party outlines explicitly the hidden agenda of the Trotskyist left,

'Whatever the short-term cost of capitalist restoration in the Stalinist world, the destruction of Stalinism will remove an historic barrier to the self-emancipation of the international working class.' (Frank Richards in *Confrontation* No 5.)

Fortunately for them, it is not the RCP who are having to pay the 'short-term cost' of capitalist restoration in, for example, the former GDR or Poland, in terms of mass unemployment, loss of housing and widespread poverty. 'Short-term', in these cases, means the ruination of many people's lives. However, far from the 'cost' being 'short-term', the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe has given a tremendous boost to imperialism.

The RCP's position does at least have the virtue of being honest - if stupid - the restoration of capitalism

in the Soviet Union would be a step forward for the international working class! Socialist Outlook, as befits these clandestine Labour Party entrants, are better at dissembling:

'Some will argue that to advocate independence is in effect to advocate independent capitalist states given the nature of the Popular Fronts. Such positions reveal both a profound pessimism and a lack of clarity on how socialists should support national movements.' (Dafydd Rhys in *Socialist Outlook* 1990)

To read this article one would not imagine that a whole series of counter-revolutionary setbacks has put imperialism on the offensive, and the line is put that a 'clear space' exists for 'a common struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy and imperialism.'

How the independence movements are going to take on the world or what the consequences might be are, wisely, left implicit. Presumably the nationalist movements are going to promote a political revolution which will finally overthrow that icon of Trotskyist demonology, the 'Stalinist bureaucracy'. The Soviet Union can then become a real threat to imperialism. That would be logical, if so utterly abstract as to bear little relation to reality. However, earlier on *Socialist Outlook* gives the actual reason for supporting the independence movements: if we do not we will be isolated.

'... Socialists have to not only support but advocate independence for these countries. Any other position would leave us by-passed by events and completely isolated from a dialogue with the masses.'

This is the same argument which the Trotskyists use to justify their continuous perambulations in and around the Labour Party and just as opportunist. Marxist politics should be characterised by political independence rather than tailing popular ideological formations, and their organisational expressions. In fact, given that a dialogue between *Socialist Outlook* and the nationalists is somewhat remote, one can surmise that their real concern is to tailor their position to accommodate their Labour Party audience.

One argument against a denial of the right to independence to the Soviet republics is that it is pandering to Great Russian chauvinism. Lenin is quite clear that one's position is relativist and is governed by the



Latvian nationalists demonstrate for autonomy

nature of the regime in question and the nation one is living in. The Polish debate again provides some useful guidelines. Lenin argues:

'The Polish Social-Democrats cannot, at the moment, raise the slogan of Poland's independence, for the Poles, as proletarian internationalists, can do nothing about it without stooping... to humble servitude to one of the imperialist monarchies... The situation is, indeed, bewildering, but there is a way in which all participants would remain internationalists: the Russian and German Social-Democrats by demanding for Poland unconditional "freedom to secede"; the Polish Social-Democrats by working for the unity of the proletarian struggle in both small and big countries without putting forward the slogan of Polish independence for the given epoch or the given period.'

There are no exact parallels here from which to derive tactics. But it is clear that communists in the republics are correct to oppose independence, as otherwise they would be in 'humble servitude' to reactionary independence movements which are completely orientated towards imperialism. Communists in the imperialist countries can take note of the socialist credentials of the Soviet Union, which are under heavy internal attack but are still substantially extant, and conclude that there is a legitimacy in defending the integrity of a socialist state which would not exist in the case of an 'imperialist monarchy'. These tactical arguments do not transcend the strategic argument that the building of socialism takes precedence over the freedom to secede but they do reinforce it.

Lenin stresses the distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations. This distinction is not, at least in economic terms, a characteristic of the USSR. In fact, in an ideal world (such as the Trotskyists inhabit) it would be a useful exercise to grant the fractious republics immediate independence but without access to Soviet aid which has been extremely favourable to them. Neither is it likely that the imperialists would be prepared to pump large amounts of finance into such fragile allies. Poland has made many requests for aid but remarkably little has been actually forthcoming. Possibly the salutary lessons embodied here would lead to a voluntary reunion in the long run which would certainly be preferable to the present hostile situation. Unfortunately, such a scenario is quickly revealed as naive when the weakness of the Soviet Union relative to imperialism is considered.

To advocate an absolutist position of 'independence at any price', as most of the Trotskyists do, is also to advocate the final break up of the Soviet Union and the final destruction of the gains of 1917. No amount of mealy-mouthed talk should be allowed to suppress this fact. Such a result would be a mighty victory for imperialism, and all the more so as it would have been won at so little cost. In this situation the interests of the international working class and oppressed masses clearly take precedence over national aspirations in the Soviet republics. ■



Write to:  
FRFI, BCM Box 5909,  
London WC1N 3XX  
or ring: 071-837 1688

## Message from Brendan Dowd

Brendan Dowd, Irish POW in Full Sutton Prison, has asked me to extend greetings to your readers from him and the other POWs and to thank those who sent Xmas cards. They were overwhelmed by the huge numbers received. In solidarity  
JACKIE KAYE  
Essex

# LETTERS

## Risley 54 say thank you

This is a brief note on behalf of the Risley 54. We have been searching around for some apt and adequate way of saying thank you for all the help and support and effort that has gone into supporting our struggle and also for all the effort that is going into supporting the Strangeways struggle.

In a sense thank you sounds somewhat trite but that is all we

have at the moment and this is a profound and deeply felt thank you for all the years, not just months and weeks, that you have been supporting the prison struggle. In this respect I think you are unique. You are one of the few organisations that have taken the time out to really work with and for prisoners. You are one of the few organisations which has

been consistent in your support for the resistance of prisoners in this institution.

We would like to get it on record that in so far as Risley and Strangeways are a success then we owe that in a significant deal to your organisation. Thank you sincerely,  
WADI WILLIAMS  
on behalf of the Risley 54

## Strangeways prisoners need support

I thought I'd put pen to paper after I read the letter from an inmate at Wakefield prison who was one of the Risley 54. He wrote to thank you and your readers for their support which he said helped them through a five month Crown Court ordeal.

Myself and my pad-mate Barry Morton are charged with the protest at Strangeways on 1 April 1990. I'd like to say thanks for the support you people give us. Some of the defendants do not get visits or letters which leaves them open to abuse by the system. So you can see the good letters from readers can do for inmates.

We all expect to be committed to the Crown Court on 13 March and we have been told we could go on trial very soon after. Lancaster Crown Court seems to be the place it will be held at.

Like the Risley 54 the Strangeways' scapegoats have been split up so many to a goal. Myself, Barry Morton and Nicky Webb are being held at Preston.

As the time draws near for the trial we are feeling a twinge of nerves that today's news could

become tomorrow's history and we could all end up getting heavy sentences. But with comments from prison screws like 'We lost Risley, we won't lose Strangeways' like it is some sort of game, only gives us strength.

A poster campaign took place in Manchester where over 1000 posters saying 'No repercussions for Strangeways' appeared. But as there is no show without punch the police ripped them down.

As I got bail on the riot I'm out on 31 May this year and a few people have shown a great interest in a march for the 'Scapegoats charged' so I'll keep you informed about developments there.

To: Steve Halliday (Durham); Glen Williams (Hull); Jimmy Miller (Doncaster police station); Eric Bell, John Hughes and Alan Lord (Frankland). Keep your heads high.

As our letters never reach each other I have to send my regards through your newspaper. To the Risley 54 - your protest was not in vain. You will never be forgotten.

If anyone wants to write to me or my cell mate Barry Morton all letters will receive a reply. Best wishes to you all.  
DAVID BOWEN BP1048  
HM Prison 2 Ribblesdale Lane, Preston, Lancs PR1 5AB

## David Kitson replies

In FRFI 98 Tony Clark of Partisan has made 'a reply to David Kitson'. After synoptically repeating the contents of my article, he takes issue with me.

Although I wrote an article about Trotsky, he attacks me for one paragraph about Stalinism. Naturally I could not consider the whole phenomenon of Stalinism in one paragraph. Of course it requires careful consideration if socialism is to be properly developed in the future wherever a proletarian revolution might have been won. As Plekhanov said, 'We must study the facts of past life of mankind in order to discover in them the laws of its progress. Only he is capable of understanding the future who has understood the past.'

(G. Plekhanov, *The Development of the Monist View of History*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1980, p40)

Furthermore, Stalinism is part of a larger problem that needs study, that of Thermidor after revolution, starting with the French Revolution and considering Rakosi in Hungary, Ceausescu in Romania, Pol Pot in Kampuchea and one can think of others.

This, however, is in the past. At present, there are still people who have a Stalinist attitude, even in Britain, who must be guarded against. On the other hand, once Trotskyism was a swearword, which when used in an *ad hominem* attack would cause the mind of the hearer to boggle. Now that the Left Opposition in the Soviet Union has been posthumously rehabilitated and Trotsky may be tomorrow, a new swearword for such attacks is needed. The appellation 'Stalinist' can be used as a

swearword. One should attack an argument, if one doesn't like it, and not the person who makes it.

I think that Clark's remarks about imperialist resources are subsumed in my remark about 'the undoubted strength of the state'. In South Africa, which is what my article was about, imperialism is clearly having to make concessions. In Britain, which is Clark's concern, one might well ask, what resources has British imperialism now? Of course, world-wide imperialism is still very strong. Meanwhile the force of habit is so strong that reformist attitudes are widely maintained. For the struggle in Britain to advance these attitudes must change, regardless of what the resources of imperialism might be.

DAVID KITSON  
Harare, Zimbabwe

## Servants of imperialism

I attend an Islington college and over the past few months have been involved in an anti-war committee which was set up there. The main political force behind the Committee was the Socialist Worker Party, who have a student section based at my college.

'Democracy', and how little the US and UK knew about it or cared about it, was a topic frequently introduced by the SWP during our meetings. Yet 'democracy', it soon became apparent, was something the Socialist Workers Party had just as little knowledge of. A leaflet headed with the Committee's name suddenly appeared, yet the Committee knew nothing about it. It had been written, designed and printed by the Socialist Workers Party in complete independence of the Committee. The holding of a public debate was agreed upon, and then between meetings, by the actions of the Socialist Workers, a date was finalised and a speaker invited. But who was the speaker? A person from NUS Executive Committee, who was also, coincidentally, a Socialist Worker. And then our constitution was decided. The Socialist Worker proposal was that we simply adopt the three minimum points which a 'friend' of theirs had adopted when setting up 'her' - a Freudian slip perhaps? - anti-war committee. An objection was raised. Shouldn't the constitution be democratically decided and agreed upon by all members? Oh, of course, we weren't suggesting... well, as if!

The proposal for a Troops Out position caused an interesting debate. The Socialist Workers issued the usual 'need to be broad-based' response and then elaborated by comparing the then-current war situation to the pre-war situation. 'Before the war,' they said, 'we would not have campaigned for Troops Out, we would simply have campaigned for the troops not to do anything! Now it's exactly the same!' The absurdity of this logic was quickly pointed out: nonetheless, the servants of imperialism (ie the Socialist Workers and a few CNDers) ensured that an anti-imperialist position was not adopted. So, when the official slaughter was over, the Committee felt it could disband with its mission fulfilled. The continued unofficial slaughter of Palestinians, Kurds and other peoples of the Middle East did not concern it.

CHRIS JAMES  
City and East London College

## Subscribe to the best anti-imperialist newspaper in Britain

### FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

#### Subscription rates:

- Britain (inc N. Ireland): £4.50 for 6 issues, £8 for 12 issues
- Ireland/EEC - letter rate sealed: £5 for 6 issues, £9 for 12 issues
- Overseas—airmail PPR: £7.50 for 6 issues, £13 for 12 issues
- Library subs double individual rates

Make cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications. Add £5 for foreign currency cheques. Overseas rates given are for printed paper reduced rate and are unsealed. If you wish your mail to be sealed please let us know and we will inform you of the extra cost.

I wish to subscribe to FRFI beginning with issue \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I enclose payment of £ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ issues at \_\_\_\_\_ rate

Return this form to  
FRFI, BCM Box 5909  
London WC1N 3XX

## Join the action join the RCG

- A movement must be built in Britain in solidarity with the struggling peoples of Ireland, South Africa, Palestine. Help us to do this - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built here in Britain which stands with the oppressed fighting racism, repression and poverty. Help build this movement - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built which challenges and defeats the treachery of the opportunist British Labour and trade union movement - **Join the RCG!**

#### I wish to join/receive more information about the RCG

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tel \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: FRFI, BCM Box 5909,  
London WC1N 3XX

## FRFI Flood Fund

The FRFI office has been badly damaged by flooding from domestic flats above our office. Our office has suffered substantial structural damage and will need to be completely renovated and refurbished. Large stocks of stationery were lost and many pieces of equipment were damaged.

We have moved into temporary accommodation whilst our office is being repaired.

Although we are covered by our insurance, the insurance payout will not meet all of our expenses. In addition, we will not receive compensation for some months yet. Meanwhile we are having to spend a lot of money on repairs.

To ensure that our office is repaired as soon as possible and to help us in our political work we need to raise **£2,000** immediately.

We are asking all our readers to donate to our **Flood Fund**. Donations can be sent to Larkin Publications, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques and POs should be made out to Larkin Publications.

I/We would like to donate £ \_\_\_\_\_ to the **FRFI Flood Fund**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TEL: \_\_\_\_\_

### They

AHMED SHEIKH

They want me to sing of roses lilacs and daffodils In my land the earth has grown barren wrinkles and sinews and furrows adorn its weary face	Michael Jackson's flaking faked face Deep from his grave Malcolm X mourns the loss of an African nose
They want to house my callous hand in the softness of a velvet glove to pen, like Kipling the glory of Empire	They want Azania and Palestine to toil for those with eyes of steel Meanwhile in the stench of United Nations' vaults resolutions sit upon resolutions & suffocate
They want me to thread silk verses to span the wretched universe of their lies	They want the revolution to be televised From Gadan to Guadajara Tiannanmen Square to Tunisia from the Punjab to Pondoland Cameras zoom in eager to play their share
They want me to marvel at the cable revolution there in Soweto satellite dishes dustbin lids of the street beam back hand grenades at the transmitters of our nightmare	They want their lies to sound like music long forgotten dreams to haunt the brain of the living dead
They want me to sing lullabies to hungry and dying balloon bellied babes shot at close range for peak viewing time by Geldof's staring eyes	They want Hiroshima Nagasaki to be the final epitaph of war A Japanese microchip lodged in the tombstone of doomsday
They want to brand my poetry as they did my ancestors with an ethnic seal Courtesy of the Arts Council and the Race Relations industry	They want to tear apart and rip open this world of ours tamper with the elements and the ozone gaping sky
They want me to praise the gentle British bobby on a panda beat PC Blakelock cracked open in the battlefield at the siege of Broadwater Farm	They want women to service men's lust on a cold centrefold page on a slippery kitchen floor or in a dimly lit alleyway at the back of a police station
They want black folks to enlist No discrimination they say guaranteed financial security extra bonuses perks, hefty pension and perhaps first class travel from Northern Ireland in an oak-panelled coffin	They want the poet the poetess to sing of nothing but everything everything but nothing
They want to put my voice under house arrest when I call the names of Bobby Sands Blair Peach Cynthia Jarrett Cherry Groce and Altai Ali stabbed by white thugs at White Chapel	They want to suck at will the black juice that makes factories roar and keeps offices clean drill daggers of hatred into the drapes of our black skins
They want me to rubber stamp	We shall not let them our pen is not for sale black anger cannot be penned in our pen is not for sale black anger cannot be hemmed in.

Ahmed Sheikh is an African poet who has performed at many events for the PAC and other liberation organisations. He will be reading some of his poetry for North London FRFI at a social on Saturday 30 March at 7.30pm at The Old Farm House, Kentish Town Road, London NW5.



