

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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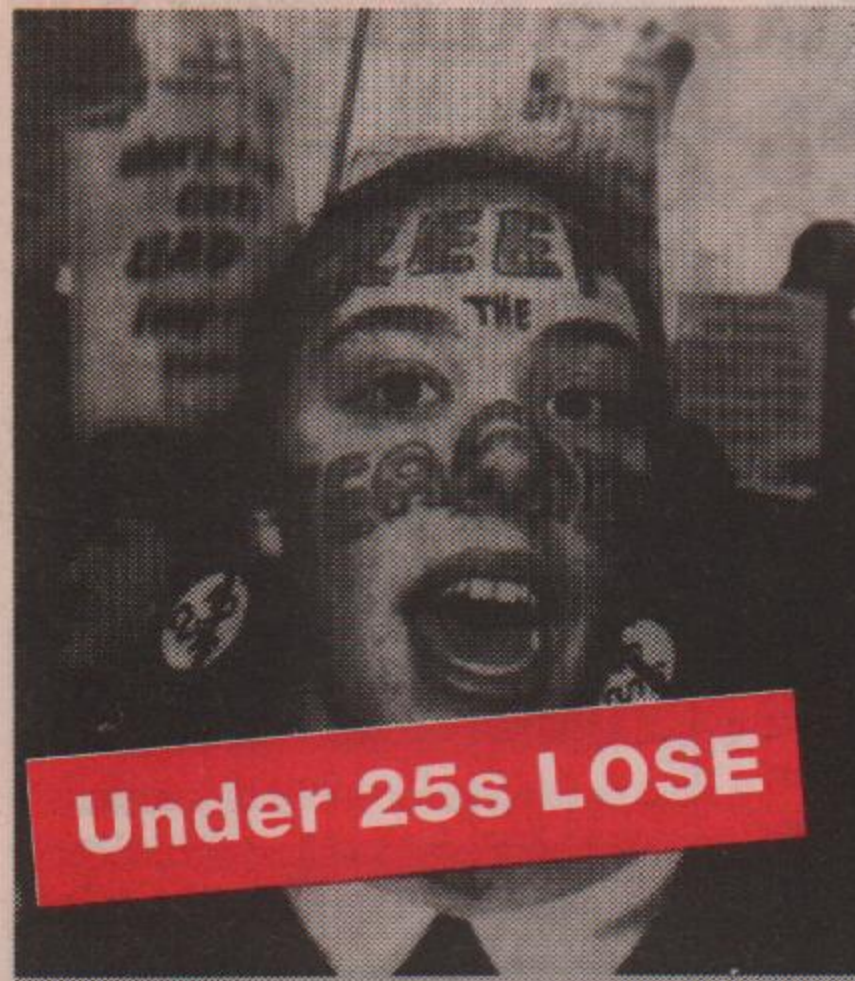
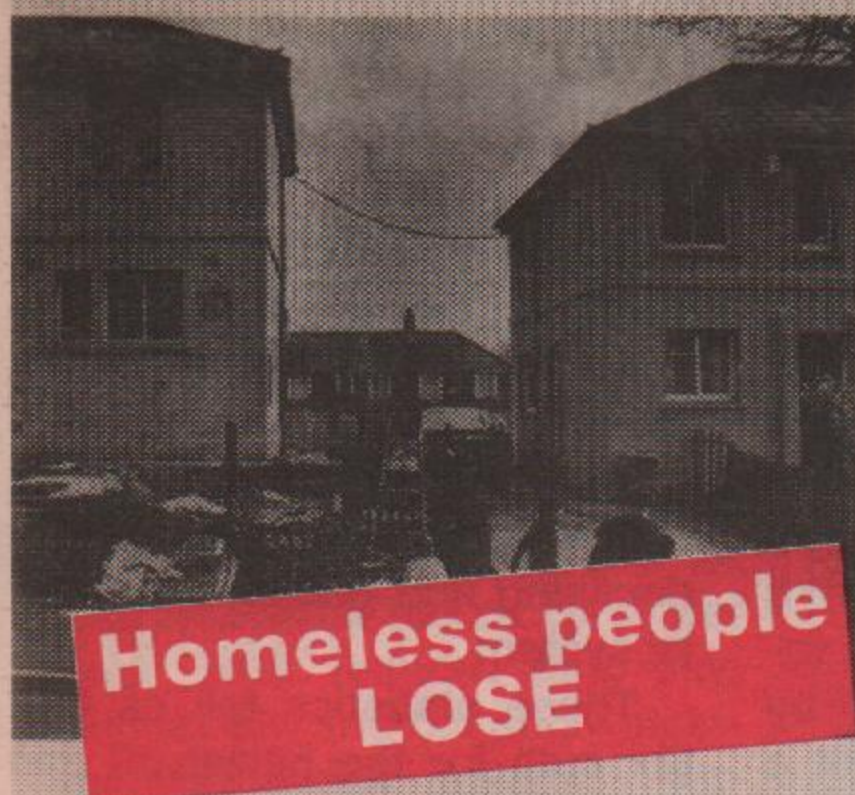
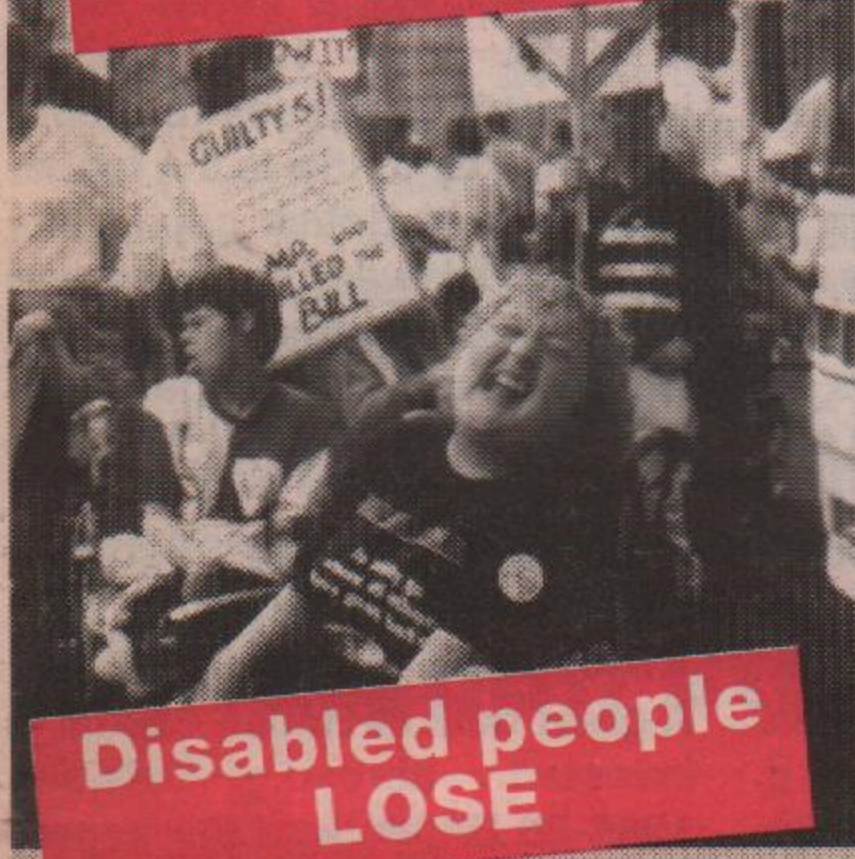
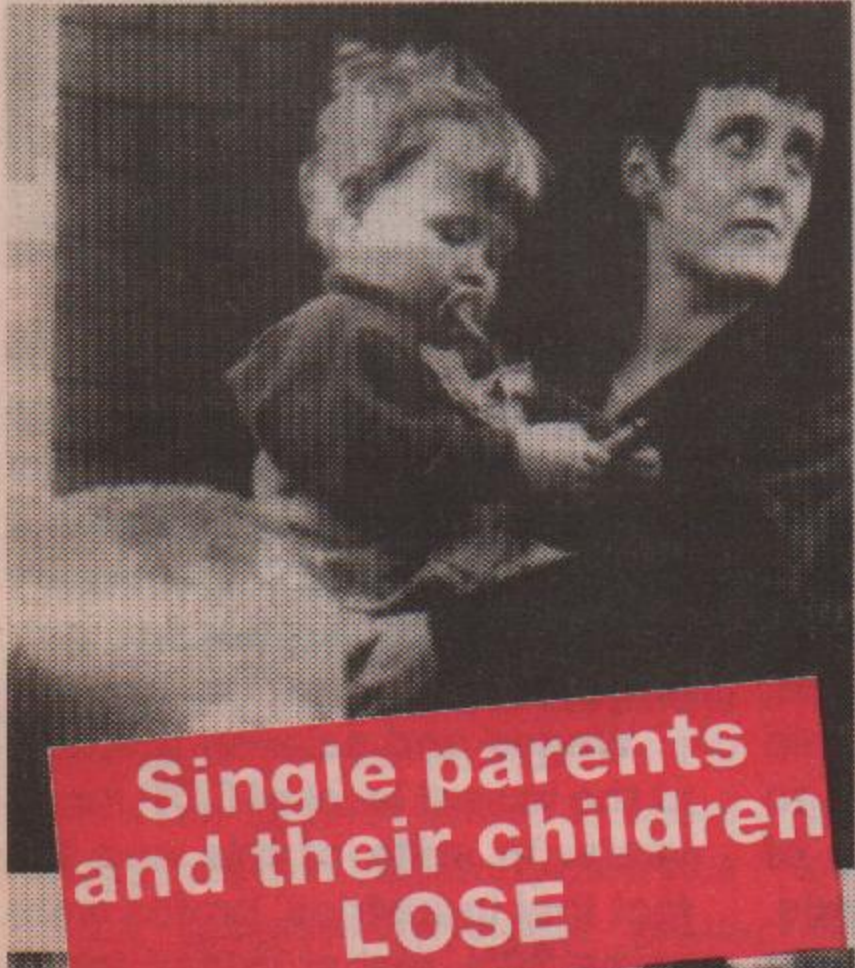
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Chancellor lines his pockets

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UNEQUAL BRITAIN

Inside: EDITORIAL: a budget for an unequal society p2 • TURKEY - turmoil on the eve of elections p5 • ICWA - a break with the past p6/7 • CUBA VIVE - Rock around the Blockade, Letter from Cuba p8/9 • LAND AND FREEDOM - a distortion of history p10 • WHAT FUTURE FOR CAPITALISM? p11 • PRISONS - NO SUPERMAX HERE - the brutality of top security prisons p12 • SHELL - The fires of hell p16

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

A budget for an unequal society

At first sight, the Budget did not appear to be of much economic or political significance. The poor state of the economy limited the tax cuts to the better off which the Tory right-wing demanded. The possibility of a General Election in the coming year ruled out further sizeable cuts in the growth of public spending. A little tinkering here and there was all that seemed to take place as calculating politicians said and did what they thought necessary to retain, or, in Labour's case, get their hands on the trappings of political power. Yet within the budget measures, and the pages of words and statistics supplementing them, lies a stark reflection of the unequal, class-ridden society and parasitic economic system under which we live.

Statistics in the service of class society

Underlying the pages of words and statistics produced as background to the budget is the ideological standpoint of the New Right, the dominant section of the ruling class in Britain at the present time. Its prejudices determine which statistics are important and how they are to be interpreted. They consist of such dogma as: 'high public spending undermines enterprise and leads to dependency'; 'tax cuts for capitalist businesses and the rich enhance enterprise and lead to faster economic growth'; 'lower wages are necessary to reduce unemployment' and 'the growth of social security spending is unsustainable' - the latter position shared with the Labour Party. Behind them is a class-theoretical view of how the capitalist economy works, a view which serves the interests of this dominant section of the ruling class. That such a view has little relation to reality can be seen through an examination of one of the crucial statistics in the budget - the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR) - the difference between the government's spending and incoming receipts.

The need for a balanced budget - PSBR equal to zero - is another dogma of the New Right. Given such a target, an accurate estimate of its size over time is crucial to determine the type and extent of measures needed to reduce it, measures which will have an important impact on the lives of millions of people. Yet predictions of its size have turned out to be hopelessly wrong. For example in 1995-6 the PSBR is estimated at £29bn, 4% of GDP, £7.5bn higher than last year's budget predictions. In fact over the

next four years PSBR targets in this year's budget are £30.5bn higher than the previous year's targets. For a government that places so much weight on balancing the budget and which will drastically cut back social services to achieve its aim, such a state of affairs would be derisory if it did not have such serious consequences for so many people.

The reason why the PSBR is so much higher than the government expected is due to the fall in expected taxation receipts. In 1996-7 alone they will be nearly £14bn lower than predicted in the previous year. This is the inevitable result of the government's so-called 'free market-enterprise promoting policies'.

Corporation tax will be some £4bn lower than estimated for 1996-7 despite the fact that company profits have soared since the end of the recession of 1991-2. British company taxation is amongst the lowest of the major capitalist countries as a result of Tory policy. Tax on business is 5.9% of GDP in Britain compared to 10.4% of GDP for the main G7 countries. In addition Britain's multinational companies use tax havens, transfer-pricing policies and many other techniques to disguise their taxable profits. Enterprise for these companies means paying as little taxation as possible on their ever-increasing profits.

VAT receipts are down by a further £5.2bn and income tax by £4.8bn on previous expectations. This reflects the real state of the British economy as opposed to the optimistic gloss put on it by the government propaganda. VAT and tax receipts are not as high as expected because millions of full time jobs have disappeared, and workers, in line with New Right theory, have been forced into part-time, insecure jobs with real wages falling, especially for lower-paid workers. This looks likely to continue. In the year to September 1995 real earnings suffered the biggest drop in 13 years. Average earnings rose by 3.25%, while the increase needed to compensate for higher prices and taxation was 4.3%.

Finally, even this year's budget predictions are based on the 'heroic' assumption that GDP will grow by 3% in 1996, when many economists have not ruled out the possibility, that without interest rate cuts soon, the British economy could face another recession. The reality is that New Right economists are no more capable of understanding the workings of a capitalist economy nor of predicting future developments than the Keynesian economists before

them. Yet millions of working class people are forced to suffer deprivations justified by economic policy based on such ignorance.

Robbing the poor to pay the middle classes

The outcome of elections in Britain is determined by the votes of the better-paid working class and what is loosely called the middle class, the majority who live in the Tory heartlands of southeast Britain. Within constraints determined by government policy to reduce the PSBR, all the measures taken in the Budget were designed to win the allegiance of these voters. The tax reductions made were regressive, favouring the better-off, particularly the 1p reduction in the basic tax rate, the £1,200 rise in the amount

that can be earned before the higher rate of tax has to be paid, and the increase in the threshold for paying Inheritance Tax to £200,000. In general, the higher your income, the more gains were made, with the richest 10% getting around £6.50 a week. Two-income couples who were higher rate tax payers made the maximum gains. Middle to high income earners and pensioners with savings also did well. However those in the bottom third of the income distribution, mainly people dependent on benefits, did not gain anything with the bottom 20% suffering a fall in income once indirect taxes were taken into account. Couples on benefit with children lost money. The Budget reinforced and widened inequality.



Chancellor Clarke: robbing the poor to pay the rich

Cuts in public spending were aimed at the working class. Planned spending on social housing will be cut by over £400m over the next two years, leading to 4,000 fewer homes being built each year. The continued freeze on the public sector wage bill, if continued until 1998, will lead to a loss of some 300,000 jobs without a significant

fall in the real wages of public sector workers. 62,000 jobs will be lost in the Civil Service over three years with the planned 12% reduction in running costs. The government thought it expedient to increase spending on education and health to meet the growing concerns of sections of the middle class at the rapid deterioration of those services. But even here the impact will be negligible and will do little to halt the decline. £774m of the £878m increase in education spending will be part of local authority funding. Councils estimate they will spend £18.07bn on schools this year. The government, using its own 'standard spending assessment' figures for what it thinks councils should be spending, is allowing only £17.87bn in its grant to local

authorities for next year. This represents a cut. So to fund the increase in education spending councils will be forced to cut other services and raise council tax by an estimated 7-10%, wiping out any gains from income tax cuts made in the budget. In addition to this, Further Education colleges are expected to increase student numbers by 50,000, while having their budget cut by £53m. There will be a freeze on university places until 1998-9 and funds will be cut by £102m. Students grants will continue to be cut and students will be forced to take out ever higher loans. The impact of these measures is to deny access to higher education to working class students.

The increase in the health budget of £1,300m will only cover the costs of growing numbers of old people, medical technology and the higher rate of inflation in the health service. The NHS capital budget is being cut by 6.5% as part of privatisation plans to involve private capital. Should this capital be forthcoming, the NHS will face further cuts to service the

higher profits of the companies involved in the new projects.

The pernicious character of the New Right, however, is perhaps best demonstrated by those cuts in public spending, devastating for those affected, but of little overall economic impact, designed to appeal to the reactionary prejudices of voters in the Tory heartlands. One-parent family benefit is to be frozen at £6.30 a week as is the £5.20 a week paid to lone parents claiming income support. This will save £40-50m in the first year. The aim is to phase out these benefits. Housing benefit for under-25s is to be cut, limiting state help to the cost of shared accommodation. The most vulnerable young people will face homelessness. Disabled people will have their mobility allowance of between £12.40 and £32.65 a week cut if they spend more than four weeks in hospital. Children will have theirs cut if they spend 12 weeks. Cuts will take place in school milk subsidies for secondary school children and school catering saving £6.5m a year. Overseas aid, already at a record low level, will be cut by £124m - equivalent to 16p a week off the income tax bill of a person on average earnings. 16p would save the life of a child with diarrhoea. All together the savings made by these vicious cuts are about a third of the £1,600m given to the better-off through the 1p cut in income tax - a tax cut which the Labour Party refuses to oppose. Finally the government will set up, as a pilot project, a work experience scheme for the long-term unemployed. People who refuse work will lose benefit. The New Right - with Labour not far behind - is determined to return us to the brutal conditions of 19th century British capitalism.

Profits up - investment and wages down

British capitalism can no longer sustain state welfare at an adequate level while producing the high returns to investment, the high rate of profit, demanded by private capital. Investment in the British economy has fallen to levels only seen 40 years previously, falling from 18.5% of GDP when the Tories came to power in 1979 to 14.6% of GDP in the first quarter of 1995. Nearly six years after the beginning of the last recession investment is still some 10% below the previous peak in 1989. Last year's budget predicted a 5.75% increase in fixed capital investment in 1995; this year's budget has reduced that to 1%. With public investment due to fall by 6% in 1995 and a further 11% in 1996 in line with

New Right dogma, the 4.25% predicted increase in overall investment for 1996 looks increasingly unlikely and with it the 3% rise of GDP necessary to finance any further tax cutting plans.

Wages and salaries are now at the lowest level of GDP for 40 years. In spite of this and the fact that industries' profits were some 30% higher in real terms in 1994 than 1990, capital investment continues to stagnate. The key to this is the rentier character of British capitalism. The split between invested and uninvested income in company expenditure has changed from 50:50 in 1979 to 30:70 in 1995. Dividends are at the highest level for 30 years. Between 1979 and 1995 they rose from 1.5% of GDP to 5.2% of GDP.* A great deal of British capital is invested abroad. Between 1986-88 Britain was the largest outward direct investor, with a 20% share of world direct investment flows. These flows declined during the recession but have rapidly recovered to £16.4bn in 1994 (£20.8bn in 1988), an amount equivalent to 123% of total capital investment in manufacturing industry in Britain in 1994. These are the characteristic features of a declining and parasitic capitalist system.

These statistics tell us that tax cuts for the better off can only be achieved with the impoverishment of a greater number of working class people. Future budgets - whether under a Tory or Labour government - will be the same.

There was however some good news which accompanied the budget. The post-budget briefing to Tory MPs was interrupted by 80 members of the Welfare State Network protesting at the cuts in housing benefit for the under-25s. Clarke was forced to change his venue. A good response to a nasty budget.

* Statistics on investment and dividends taken from the *Socialist Economic Bulletin*.

COMMUNIST FORUMS

A new series of public discussions of communist politics introduced by the Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Editorial Board begins in February.

An eyewitness account from Cuba A report back by members of the *Nuestro Tiempo* brigade

Sunday 11 February 2.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube). £1/50p Creche available on application.

Tel: 0171 837 1688 for details

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit - that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority live in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people - women in particular - trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population - the majority women and children - lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. *The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.*

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. *The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.*

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice Act have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. *The RCG opposes the Criminal Justice Act and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.*

► The richest 20% of the world's population consumes 83% of its wealth and resources. It is the capitalist system which consigns billions to poverty. Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. *The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.*

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. *We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.*

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. *The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.*

► Who will defend the interests of the working class? In Britain, it is clear the Tories defend only the rich and corrupt - but the Labour Party won't defend the working class either. It wants middle class votes in the next election - and has approved many anti-working class laws, including the Criminal Justice Act. The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. *The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.*

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry. *We support the rights of the working class regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or disability.*

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally.

The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688

The run-down of the NHS

ROBERT CLOUGH

Winter is upon us, and that means that health authorities are running out of cash to pay for routine surgery. Hospital trusts are having either to cut back, or offer preferential treatment to the patients of GP fundholders. A favourite at this time of year is to close operating theatres over Christmas to reduce the need for Christmas cover on surgical wards. At the Royal Free, Christmas for its theatre staff will last a full three and a half weeks.

Whilst bed numbers continue to fall, the number of emergency medical admissions has risen and risen - and no-one knows why. The number of emergency admissions has been rising continuously since 1981, and now averages 3% per annum - 13% between 1991-94 alone. In some hospitals this has amounted to a 40% increase over the same period. It is independent of age, of diagnosis, or of geography. Hospitals have had to re-open closed wards, and one, Aintree Hospitals in Liverpool, has had to build a 75-bed unit to cope. Research into the problem has revealed a number of possible

causes:

- GPs trying to beat the waiting lists;
 - Fundholding GPs trying to avoid paying for their patients by sending them to casualty;
 - The rise in unemployment and poverty that has taken place particularly since the mid-1980s.
- It now means that every winter up to half the hospitals in the country have to close to new admissions at one time or another because there are not enough beds. Expect a major bed crisis this winter.

Meanwhile the budget has ensured that the NHS will be run down further. Capital spending - on new hospitals, major refurbishments, expensive new technology - is set to fall by 17% this year from £1.8 billion to £1.54 billion. Some of this will be made up by private finance, but even if all the proposed schemes are expected, overall capital spending will fall by 6.5% and a further 3.7% the following year. In the meantime, private companies will start to demand a greater management role in the NHS in exchange for their investment - creeping privatisation. Or, as is equally likely, the investment will just not take place at all. ■

Support the Hillingdon strikers!

HANNAH CALLER & DAVID HOWARTH

On 2 October a picket was started outside Hillingdon hospital by over 50 women domestic workers, the majority of them Asian, sacked for refusing to sign a new contract imposed by their bosses Pall Mall.

The firm has cut cleaners' wages by 20% (£35 per week) and introduced a flat rate of £3.19 per hour, with reduced sick pay, holiday pay and London weighting. Hillingdon hospital's services have been contracted out since 1986; Pall Mall have been employed by the hospital since summer 1994: their profits go to the Davis Service Group. Pall Mall employs 1,200 people countrywide, and had a turnover of £71 million last year, while the average wages of their employees has hardly risen over the last three years (£3,317 pa).

Comrades from FRFI joined the picket on 27 November on the first day of the official strike called by UNISON following a ballot of all porters, caterers and domestics in favour of action. However, only two of the caterers came out and joined the sacked Asian women who have been picketing for over 12 hours a day, seven days a week for eight weeks. Food and tea was offered to all supporters and turns taken to chant and make speeches. There is strong support from the community and the local temple, whose van brings the women in the morning, and helps providing food.

There is constant police presence, but the women will not be moved down onto the road, despite the male UNISON representatives' concern at the level of megaphone noise. UNISON representatives are on the picket and while we were there, a letter of support from Ealing



Health Branch was delivered to the picket. Pall Mall brought in staff from a prison, and all outside portering work was being done by unknown staff.

UNISON representatives went to see the catering staff but returned to announce the caterers were not coming out. The picketers were not convinced that the UNISON representatives wanted to encourage them to come out. When asked what would happen to UNISON members who didn't come out, given the ballot, the UNISON reps refused to answer.

FRFI spoke to the women picketers. One woman had worked at Hillingdon for 28 years. She told us the picket was for workers' rights - what Pall Mall was doing was slave labour. They are receiving £62.50 per week dispute pay. Since the picket began, all caterers and porters have received a lump sum each, plus an increase per hour of 50p for caterers and 70p for porters. There has been no support from other Pall Mall workers elsewhere.

There is a fortune to be made by firms from government-imposed contracting out of NHS services using cheap labour. With the increase in contract

Racist Britain - immigration controls

From 8 January, thousands of black and ethnic community members will lose their rights. To get a job, get benefits, enrol children at school, they will have to prove 'their right to be in Britain'. They may have to live on the streets without any rights to housing, money for food or employment. The government will demand people inform on each other - increasing the racist atmosphere. The government is also introducing a new law next year taking away rights of appeal - rights they had only introduced two years ago.

This is the start of a new government attack on all working class people. Everyone will face cuts in benefits and jobs if this goes through.

- From 8 January, all black and ethnic people may have to prove their 'right to be here' at work, at school, at hospital, at benefit offices
- From 8 January, there will be no jobs and no benefits at all for all immigrants awaiting a Home Office decision, no matter how compassionate their circumstances
- Only a minority of new refugees will be entitled to any benefits

- There will be no benefits during appeal
- Many appeals can only be made from outside Britain
- A 'white list' of countries the government claim to be safe has been prepared. All refugees from those countries will be automatically refused asylum.
- Employers will be charged with a criminal offence for hiring anyone without official status. All black and ethnic people will face increased racism with many employers refusing to employ them, and with their immigration status being checked.

Are you going to put up with this? If not, then resist!

Events planned so far to stop race immigration checks:

16 DECEMBER Demonstration from Hackney Town Hall. Assemble 1pm.
Action at places that will carry out race checks

19 DECEMBER: Lobby of Parliament and rally 1-5pm

13 JANUARY: Rally in Holborn

Coordinating meetings: 13 December, 10 January, 24 January, Colin Roach Centre, 56 Clarence Road, E5, 7.30pm.
Tel: 0181 533 7111 for further details.
From a leaflet issued by the Colin Roach Centre

Boycott JJ Foods

HANNAH CALLER AND RENGIN

On 31 October, 45 workers, mostly Turkish and Kurdish, were sacked from JJ Fast Food Distribution in north London for joining the TGWU to fight for better pay and conditions.

They hold daily pickets and are demanding reinstatement of all unionised workers, all workers to have contracts and be unionised, holiday and sick pay, introduction of two shifts for freezer workers who work at -30 degrees, the end to workers paying out of their pockets for parking fines, damage to trucks etc, warehouse workers to have lunch and tea breaks.

Comrades from FRFI attended the picket and spoke to one of the sacked workers who had worked for the company for six years.

'Before the strike there were 78 workers, working 60-70 hours per week for £130-240. No sick pay, no holiday pay, no overtime. Mustafa Kamil (the boss's nephew) was a manager who was always harassing us. At first ten workers joined the TGWU. One of the workers who didn't join, reported to the employer that workers were joining the union. On 28 October, the employer phoned the

shop steward (Ali Erding) and said he was sacking him.

'In the morning of 31 October, the official representative of the TGWU came to the factory to meet the employer. The employer's response was to sack all the other workers.

'The sacked workers stayed in front of the factory without obstructing the gates. The employer called on fascists (who work for JJ Fast Food), and may have paid them, and they beat us up. Four of us were injured and one had to be treated in hospital. On the second day of the picket, six workers were arrested. JJ Fast Food has Kurdish, Turkish, Russian and Cypriot workers. The employer said the workers were PKK members trying to get money for the PKK, and that he sacked them to protect other workers.

'Mustafa Kamil has met with the TGWU, but no solution has been found. The TGWU is paying us £35 per week. New workers have been employed.

'We have appealed to the courts on the count of unfair dismissal. We want compensation payment. No court date has been set yet.

'Ten of us have established a committee, and a support group involving 18 different organisa-

tions meets every Tuesday.'

The picket was a lively show of solidarity and strength. About 40 people shouted slogans in Turkish and English. There is a constant police presence, and the Territorial Support Group and police videos have been used.

The remaining workers are being bribed with double wages and holiday pay and sick pay. However, many lorries and vans are leaving only half full as the boycott of JJ Fast Food produce takes effect. Production is down 30%, and schools and fast food outlets are refusing their produce.

It is in the interest of the whole of the working class to unite behind such struggles, otherwise we will all be picked off one by one.

Support the sacked workers!

- Join the picket at Mill Mead Road, off Ferry Lane, behind Tottenham Hale. 6am daily, 8-10am on Saturdays.
- Come to the Locked-Out Workers Support Group meetings, Tuesdays 7.30pm, Tottenham Community Project, 628 Tottenham High Road.
- Boycott Jenny's Burger Bars which are franchised to JJ Fast Food. Pickets of these burger bars are held every Saturday from 2pm, look out for your local one. ■

Support Liverpool Dockers

PAM ROBINSON

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company dismissed 80 young dock workers at the end of September in order to introduce casual labour. This was done by a company with a turnover of £130 million and profits exceeding £35 million.

The 80 dockers went on strike immediately. The company sacked a further 500 for refusing to cross the strikers' picket line.

The company has brought in Drake to provide scab labour to break the strike. They have been bussing in scabs from as far afield as Kent. Drake were used against dockers in earlier strikes in Southampton and Tilbury.

The dockers have won the support of their local community with regular demonstrations attended by thousands,

national support of rank-and-file trade unionists, including the miners, and international support from dockers in France, the USA, Canada and Australia who have agreed not to handle cargo on ships out of Liverpool.

This strike takes place in a climate of increased industrial unrest including both official and unofficial disputes at Fords, Vauxhall, the Post Office, the Fire Brigade, the Employment Services, the Lord Chancellor's Department, and many locally-based campaigns around the health service and education. Yet the sacked dockers do not have the support of the TGWU/TUC or the 'New' Labour Party.

To support the dockers contact J Davies, Secretary/Treasurer Merseyside Port Stewards, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS. ■

EDUCATION NOTES

The Great British Education Bazaar

Privatisation means that every aspect of the education system is up for grabs. Dismantling the social democratic state combines well with money-spinning enterprises.

1995 has been the year of the Great Careers Service Bazaar. This followed the well-established format. Services are put up for 'bidding' and Government departments choose their preferred clients. Careers Enterprise Ltd, formerly Surrey County Careers, has moved into Kent and North Bucks and has now won Islington Careers Service.

In the inner cities the Careers Services range from education and guidance in schools to helping young adults with applications for jobs and claiming allowances. It is a bit mysterious at first to see where the money is to be made, but money there must be. A top private enterprise manager is alleged to have spoken of the need for redundancies to secure his own mortgage repayments. Private suppliers of everything from paper to premises will cluster round the successful bidders as they spread around government money. There is no doubt that money is to be made or why should Grand Metropolitan Trust, the hotel and catering giant, have successfully bid for South Thames Careers Service? This notorious employer of young people, paid £1.60 an hour in its burger bars, is not in the caring business.

What about those other league tables?

With 11% of Secondary School pupils now in private schools and 10% of pupils who were entered for exams leaving without a single GCSE, the results of dismantling and privatising the British education system are clear to see. 74% of all pupils gaining 5 GCSEs at Grade C or above are at private or selective grant-maintained schools. It is no surprise that the four poorest regions in the country gained the four poorest results. Great at the top, rotten at the bottom, the British Education system is lousy in the middle. Britain's social spending on the welfare state overall puts it 17th out of a league table of 21 major capitalist countries. At just over 20% of GDP, the UK is just above Portugal but way down on Sweden's 30%.

When it comes to the Spending on Education League the UK does worse on every count than either France or Germany. The number of teachers per 100 pupils is: Germany 7.2 France 7.1 UK 5.7. Capital expenditure on education per head of population (in ecus) is: Germany 66 France 66 UK 32. As a result of this, again no surprises, the attainment of 16-year-olds reaching equivalent of GCSE grades A-C in maths, national language and one science is: France 66% Germany 62% and UK 27%. The numbers of 17-year-olds in full-time education are: Germany 92.8% France 87.2% and UK 55.3% (1992).

Susan Davidson

Satpal Ram appeal - racist verdict

NICKI JAMESON

On 24 November the Court of Appeal rejected Satpal Ram's appeal against his 1987 conviction for murder. Satpal killed a racist who attacked him in an Indian restaurant in Birmingham. He has always insisted that he acted in self-defence and has fought a campaign to have the conviction overturned.

At this year's Tory Party Conference and elsewhere, Michael Howard and friends have been harping on about the 'rights of the victims of crime to protect themselves'. It is clear that they are talking about the right of middle class white people to defend their property, not the right of black working class people to defend their lives. This was confirmed in Satpal's appeal, where three old, white, upper class British males ruled that a young Asian under attack from a drunken racist thug has no right to defend himself.

When they finished reading their judgement, the judges were given the benefit of Satpal's opinion on their prejudices, as he was dragged out of court by two Securicor guards.

Outside court Satpal's supporters demonstrated, as we have done at every hearing. When the verdict was announced



The RCG joined court pickets demanding the release of Satpal Ram

protesters held up the traffic in the Strand, before being shoved off the road by the police who, rather bizarrely, chose to push them back up the steps of the High Court! Loud chanting ensued on the steps, until the police changed tack and pushed people back down again. There were two arrests.

Before the hearing Satpal was being given a very hard time by Full Sutton prison officers; they will be delighted that he lost his case and will no doubt step up their persecution. After being taken back to Full Sutton Satpal was held in segregation and has been effectively prevented from speaking to his mother; the

prison authorities say he is allowed to telephone her, provided he speaks only in English and not in her first language, Punjabi.

- We urge all readers to send cards and messages of support to: Satpal Ram E94164, HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York, YO4 1PS
- Pete and Ed who were arrested outside the Appeal Court will be tried at Bow Street Magistrates Court on 22 December.
- The Satpal Ram Defence Campaign can be contacted at 101 Villa Road, Birmingham, B19 1NH; telephone 0121 507 1618.

Pensioners Notes

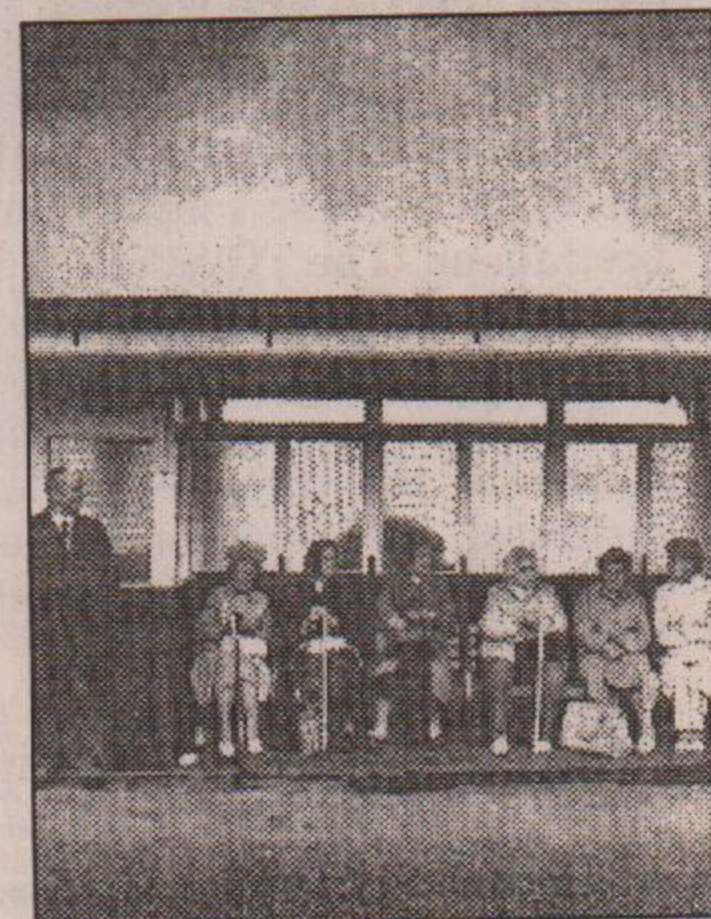
RENE WALLER

During the past weeks, pensioners have continued to collect signatures on the streets, in meetings and from their homes in defence of the welfare state, and the attacks made on it, such as hospital closures and the introduction of the values of the market economy when making decisions regarding health care, for example.

We are resolutely opposed to means testing wherever it is introduced or even proposed. Thousands of signatures against it have been collected and taken not only to Downing Street but brought to the notice of the Trade Union Conference and the Labour Party. These bodies have been urged to give their unqualified support.

The Labour Party has

increasingly avoided giving any commitment with the excuse that they want a 'free hand' so as to be able to take into account the current economic position of the country. Well, one thing's certain: it will never agree to share the wealth with working



State pensioners out in the cold

people who create it. When Britain was the leading capitalist nation, with practically no foreign competition, it was often stated that the country would be ruined if there was any attempt to limit the working hours of children, let alone legislate to see they got a living wage. Concessions have been won only when campaigning was so vigorous that our rulers feared to provoke more.

So I believe it's a question of forcing the establishment of priorities and seeing to it that our opponents know what ours are. We then have to rely on our supporters to stand firm in the face of threats and remember that whilst our opponents are ruthless, they may well want to avoid a showdown with pensioners - there are many easier targets.

David Ewin - murdered by the Met

NICKI JAMESON

On 28 February 1995 David Ewin was shot by Metropolitan Police Constable Patrick Hodgson in Barnes, southwest London. Ewin died in hospital 17 days later.

PC Hodgson was commended by Met Chief Sir Paul Condon for his bravery and the police issued a totally fabricated account of events, centred around Ewin driving at high speed with Hodgson clinging to the bonnet, fearing for his life, warning Ewin to stop and when he did not do so, shooting him. Even more implausibly, the car, with its fatally injured driver, is then supposed to have come to a

standstill without bumping into anything and the police officer got down and walked away uninjured.

Unfortunately for the police it was a busy afternoon and lots of people saw what really happened, that the car moved about three feet from the kerb and Hodgson stepped back, aimed and deliberately fired through the window. Many of these witnesses told the television crews who arrived on the scene after the incident what they had seen and both Newsnight and Newsroom South East reported the discrepancies.

Despite all this, it looked as though David Ewin's death was going to be just one more case

where the police kill with complete impunity, until on 17 October the Crown Prosecution Service announced Hodgson would be prosecuted for murder, the first such case ever brought against a police officer on duty.

The struggle for justice is not yet over, though. British policemen charged with crimes committed 'in the course of their duty' are rarely convicted. The Colin Roach Centre in Hackney has been working with David's widow, calling for the Met Police Commissioner to withdraw the commendation and for a full public inquiry. For further information telephone 0181 833 7111.

Action on Ogoni executions

HANNAH CALLER & DAVID HOWARTH

On 31 October, responding quickly to the news of the death sentences imposed on Ken Saro-Wiwa, Saturday Dobe, Barinem Kiobel, John Kpuinen, Baribo Bera, Felix Nwate, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura and Daniel Gbokoo, in Ogoniland Nigeria, Reclaim The Streets orchestrated a very successful action at the Nigerian High Commission.

Walls and windows of the High Commission were splattered with red paint, windows smashed, people D-locked themselves across the entrance and, dramatically, three people scaled up to the ledge above the main door to erect a banner. The rest of us, about 40 people, chanted, held placards and a banner that

read "Abacha - Shell, murderers!"

This storming took the police by surprise and was a totally appropriate response to the outrageous activities of Abacha's Nigerian regime and Shell. Peaceful protest is not sufficient. There were about 13 people arrested, charged initially with Breach of the Peace and Criminal Damage, later changed to Section 5 of the Public Order Act.

Since the executions, the witch-hunt of MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni people) has been intensified and 19 more people face judicial murder.

Information can be obtained from the Ogoni Community Association, 3-4 Albion Place, London W6 0LT or tel 0181 563 8614

Critical Mass against Shell

HANNAH CALLER

Critical Mass on 24 November was very big despite the bad weather. Hundreds of cyclists toured the streets of London for over two hours. First stop was the South Bank Shell building where cyclists filled up the central paved area and hooted horns, rang bells and chanted against Shell's actions in Nigeria. Then, via Westminster Bridge and Whitehall to the Strand where all cyclists packed into the forecourt of Shell-Mex House, again tooting horns and shouting slogans, amidst the flashing lights of hundreds of bikes.

Critical Mass finished on Upper Street at the Shell garage. The forecourt was occupied by moving cyclists chanting 'Boycott Shell don't buy Shell'. One bemused driver, hemmed in by the bikes, got on her mobile phone to call 999! But the police were already there, they had been with us all the way, and were unsure how to deal with this bicycle situation. Their only recourse was to abusive language and thuggish

behaviour. They began to push and shove people into each other and off their bikes, in an attempt to clear the area. One woman was pushed to the floor. She turned round to protest at her treatment and was brutally arrested by four police officers who held her face down on the ground. They took her to Islington police station, followed by cyclists, who entered the station on bikes. She was released without charge within fifteen minutes.

For Critical Mass to improve conditions for cyclists, they are forced to take on the multinational car and oil companies and will inevitably have to unite with others struggling against these forces. Join Critical Mass! Tell your friends about it! There is no danger from traffic cycling with 500 other cyclists. This exhilarating show of strength must grow. Critical Mass: meet last Friday of every month at 6.45 pm outside the National Film Theatre, first Friday of every month outside the Windmill Pub on Clapham Common. To contact Reclaim the Streets tel 0171 281 4621.

Badrul Miah - carrying the can for racism

NICKI JAMESON

On 31 October Badrul Miah, aged 20, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of 15-year-old Richard Everitt in Somers Town, north London last summer.

The judge was aware that neither Badrul, nor his co-defendant Showkat Akhbar, who was sentenced to three years for violent disorder, had actually stabbed Everitt, but made it clear that as no-one else was on trial at this stage, they were 'left carrying the can'. Like the victims of so many other notorious miscarriages of justice including the Tottenham Three, the Casement Park accused and, in South Africa, the Sharpeville Six, Miah and Akhbar are victims of the insidious law of 'joint enterprise'.

Badrul Miah plans to appeal. On 16 November a public meeting was held to launch a campaign to achieve the release of the 'Kings Cross Two'. The meeting was attended by 120 people.

The vigour with which the police attempted to track down and prosecute the killers of Richard Everitt is in sharp contrast to their indifference when black youth are murdered. Stephen Lawrence's family was forced to take out a private prosecution to ensure the case ever got to court.

Supporters of Badrul Miah and Showkat Akhbar will be organising a demonstration in the New Year. For details tel: 0171 388 3259. You can write to Badrul and Akhbar c/o Drummond Street Asian Youth Association, 58 Hampstead Rd, London NW1.

RED RAG

Food and the single mother

Whilst the government prepares to cut Single Parent Benefit, a new survey has found that it is impossible for pregnant mothers on benefit to eat well enough to ensure their own or their baby's health. The minimum cost of a sufficiently nutritious diet for a pregnant woman is just over £18 per week - almost half the income support for 24 year olds on benefits and 65% of the lower benefit paid to 16-17-year-olds. The poor diet of mothers on benefit is directly linked to low-birth weight babies and many illnesses and developmental problems.

There is one single mother, entirely dependent on state funding, who has no financial cares. We speak of course of Queen of Our Hearts, Princess Diana. Indeed, she can afford so much food that she has to keep vomiting in order to keep her svelte form in shape. She felt obliged to share the revolting details of her personal problems with millions of TV viewers. Apparently the response of the rest of the Royal Family - clearly not into '90s therapy culture - was to accuse her of 'wasting food'.

More mad cows

As the figures for the human form of BSE (mad cow disease) continue to rise, claiming young people as well as old, the government continues to reassure us that beef is safe to eat. This despite recent proof that infected meat from BSE cows gets into the food chain. They have only now banned the use of meat from round the high-risk spinal area. It is of course poor people who are likely to eat the riskiest beef products. Government scientists continue to claim that there is no risk. They also claim that there is no connection between poverty and poor health; poverty and crime; radiation and leukaemia. So you can be sure they are telling the truth.

More liars - Westminster

The Conservative Party's once-flagship council, Westminster, continues to generate scandals by the bucketful. The latest is that in 1989 they moved 100 homeless families (including 150 children) into tower blocks known to be contaminated with asbestos. The asbestos problem was confirmed in 1989 when the council's own environmental health department found the deadly substance throughout the flats. Nevertheless, Westminster, as part of its gerrymandering scam designed to socially engineer a permanent Tory majority, went ahead and housed families there. In 1990 the flats were re-examined and declared 'unsafe.' Families remained there until 1991. Aside from selling off cemeteries, gerrymandering, and individual corruption, a District Auditors' report is soon likely to confirm that Westminster leaders acted unlawfully under its Tesco hearse leader, Lady Porter. In a decent society, those who knowingly moved people into death-trap flats would be charged with attempted murder. Don't hold your breath.

Living Marxism?

Living Marxism editor, Mick Hulme, interviewed in the boys' own computer section of *The Guardian*, revealed his TV viewing habits. 'The Box is another interesting channel. All it is, all day and night, is black American rap groups whose videos consist of big women in bikini thongs, so it's pretty compulsive viewing'; and on TV in general: 'I've always been into sex and violence anyway so I don't think watching it will change me'. What a pity that such a trashy little man should link his name with Marxism. ■

Turkey in turmoil on eve of December general election

ELIF MUTLUAY

It has been an eventful few months in Turkey. There have been strikes by public sector workers and the collapse and reformation of the ruling coalition in government. Now there is to be a general election at the end of December.

The strikes in the public sector ended last month. What has been confirmed is the pathetic shape of the trade union leadership. The biggest trade union confederation, Turk-is, will hold its own leadership elections shortly and tried to use the strikes as proof of its militancy. However, the Government, very well aware of this charade, sat tight until the union gave up.

Turk-is called for a mass demonstration in Ankara on the same day that a coalition, led by the largest party, True Path, sought a vote of confidence in parliament. The demonstration did panic the state because a few hundred thousand workers demonstrating very close to parliament was too close for comfort. Roads to Ankara were blocked. There were clashes between the police and the workers on the highway going into Ankara. The new government could not gather a majority and shortly afterwards formed the very same coalition with the Republican Peoples' Party (social-democrats) that had collapsed in September.

With the formation of the government, the trade union leadership agreed an 18% wage

increase - inflation is again heading for more than 100%.

The workers were willing to fight against the police and take militant action, but they are led by a bankrupt trade union leadership.

Elections

The state of the Turkish economy and of Turkey in general means that the ruling class doesn't have any choice about the path it takes. What we are witnessing is a cut-throat competition between the parties for a small reward for implementing the programme of the Turkish ruling class and the IMF. Any pretense of ideological difference is wearing off and naked self interest becomes more visible as deputies transfer back and forth between parties and all parties compete to sign-up star performers.

The list of bureaucrats who have resigned from their posts to stand in the election is revealing: Necdet Menzir - Istanbul Police Chief in a city where deaths in custody and point blank executions are commonplace; Mehmet Agar - Turkey-wide Police Chief, as above; Hayri Kozakcioglu - Governor of Istanbul, previous Governor of Provinces under State of Emergency (Kurdish areas), where villages were and are burned, people were and are kidnapped, tortured and killed; Ünal Ekran, current Governor of Provinces under State of Emergency, also previous Istanbul Police Chief.

It was only during the last

week of November that it became clear that the elections would go ahead. There are only a few weeks left for nominations and electioneering and many voters have been unable to register because of the rush. Transport is very difficult in many areas of Turkey in the winter months, and practically impossible in the East. Out-of-date population records have been used which means that the

shop-keepers and artisans who are squeezed by the advance of the big capitalists whom they identify with westernisation.

Different sections of the Turkish population think that the Welfare Party will answer their problems: conservatives (especially in rural areas) who support it for religious reasons; university students who view the Islamic ideology as an alternative to degeneration and



Turkish workers behind the barricades

numerous forced immigrants from Kurdish areas will not be able to vote.

The pro-Islamic Welfare Party will probably make important gains from this election. Prime Minister Çiller constantly states that if Turkey is not accepted in the European Customs Union, the Welfare Party will come to power and Turkey will become yet another Iran. Actually, the Welfare Party is not the same as the Iranian Mullahs or the Algerian FIS. It is a coalition of petty-bourgeois

decadence; and immigrants from other parts of Turkey trapped in ghetto-like slums in big cities, unable to integrate into urban life.

This mixture is ruled by Erbakan, the chairman of the Welfare Party, who is filthy rich. The Welfare Party is not in any way against capitalism; in power it would find it very difficult to fulfil the wildly differing expectations of its supporters.

The left parties have produced two different strategies. An alliance has been formed of

HADEP (the pro-Kurdish party, successor of DEP, which boycotted the previous elections because of the anti-democratic measures and attacks), SIP (a socialist party which also boycotted the previous elections), BSP (a coalition of six factions which has placed emphasis on human rights rather than socialism) and DDP (a left liberal party). The alliance, calling itself a 'Labour, Peace and Freedom Block' has declared:

'The regime is restructuring itself in a militaristic manner and is trying to expand the war front and strengthen its stance against the oppressed and exploited. In these conditions, the duty of all democratic forces is to support the Labour, Peace and Freedom Block.'

...We are calling all oppressed, democrats, progressives, intellectuals, youth and women to support the Labour, Peace and Freedom Block and to vote for HADEP.'

Another strategy, supported by various groups, holds to the boycott position. An example of what they argue is that: 'Fascism is a fact of the State, and is not identical to the Nationalist Movement Party [the ultra-nationalist, fascist party]. The state mechanism is arranged for fascism and the political parties cannot escape this mechanism. Identifying fascism with NMP is accompanied by "stop the rise of fascism" theories and calls on the masses to support bourgeois parties...[But] fascism can be beaten by the revolution. The duty today is not to make the rotting Parliament once again a source of hope, but to struggle to bring down fascism.' (*Kurtulus*, November 25, p3) ■

Bosnia partitioned

MAXINE WILLIAMS

US might - its ability to bribe and threaten - has brought about a deal in the Bosnian war. Portrayed as a 'triumph' for peacemaking, the Dayton deal splits Bosnia in half and will require 60,000 NATO troops to enforce it. Initially the troops will be there for one year but this could be extended. Although the NATO force will be multinational, with 13,000 British troops, political and military control rests with the USA.

Under the deal, Bosnia is divided between a Muslim-Croat federation and a Serbian controlled state. In other words, it is partitioned between Croatia and Serbia which has all along been the imperialists' favoured solution. Croatia, the US/German client state, has won much of the territory it conquered earlier this year when 200,000 Serbs were forced to leave Croatia. Serbia too has done well, holding the gains it made when it 'cleansed' Srebrenica and Zepa and regaining some territory lost during the recent Muslim-Croat offensive. President Milosevic, architect of the greater Serbia plan and the hidden hand behind much slaughter, will see sanctions lifted and his rebirth as a statesman on the world stage.

Formally, the deal allows those forced out of various regions by Serbia and Croatia to either return or be compensated. In practice this is highly



The US will have political and military control

unlikely. Likewise although provision is made for the prosecution of war criminals, President Tudjman has been happily promoting the guilty men to high office. In addition, serious rearmament is permitted. Indeed the USA has for some time been training and equipping the Croatian army. Various imperialist powers will vie to arm their particular favourites in the region. It is thought that the USA has agreed to supply arms to the Bosnian government who would otherwise have taken their opposition to the Dayton deal further than they did.

The European imperialists (except Germany) have been humiliated by the US deal.

Indeed when the signing agreement was to take place the European powers found that their flags and chairs had been removed from the top table. They complained that US negotiators constantly reminded them that 'America was taking over'.

The Dayton deal is only one stage in the process of asserting US (and German) domination of the heart of Europe. It is only one more sign of the intense rivalry between imperialist powers that has fuelled the conflict in former Yugoslavia. It is therefore unlikely, to say the least, that it has alleviated the threat of war either in that region or, in the longer term, the world. ■

Ireland: get the troops out

SARAH BOND

As the British government continues to use the 'peace process' to weaken the republican movement, the Labour Party has announced its absolute support for government policy.

In a November edition of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, Labour's spokeswoman on Ireland Mo Mowlam fell over herself to agree with Tory Secretary of Sectarianism Patrick Mayhew: 'Like us, he wants all-party, round-table talks... Like us, he firmly believes that to get all parties round the table we need to establish the necessary trust and confidence... And like us, he recognises that the issue of decommissioning must be addressed as part of establishing that trust and confidence'.

The government's insistence on decommissioning recently appeared to bring the whole process perilously close to collapse. But a compromise was found in time for US President Clinton to hail John Major a 'man of peace' and proclaim the defeat of 'the men of violence' on his trip to Belfast. Aside from winning votes in the USA, his aim was to sustain pressure on the Republican leadership. Meanwhile, Major and Irish Taoiseach Bruton have agreed to disagree about when arms will be decommissioned, so that they can hold out the carrot of all-party talks by February.



Mo Mowlam

It is significant that the one area in which they have been forced to make a gesture is in relation to prisoners: 50 per cent remission for all prisoners has been reinstated. A number have been transferred to Irish prisons. Mo Mowlam declares that Labour has 'taken a lead' on these issues. British politicians, Labour and Tory, recognise the crucial role played by the prisoners and their families in the nationalist struggle over the last 25 years. If their grievances can be addressed, it is hoped that this bedrock of working class support for the Republican movement will be eroded.

Meanwhile the British government is strengthening its own armed activities in the north of Ireland, with the return of the hated Paras for an initial six months. Socialists in Britain must continue to demand the withdrawal of these and all other British troops from Ireland as a precondition for peace. Will Labour's Mo Mowlam join this demand? Is Ian Paisley a Catholic? ■

New Labour: new attacks on the working class

Fresh from its October conference, New Labour has been making news with new ways and means to attack the working class when it wins the next general election. Not that the conference was without its own gems. Quite apart from its support for grant-maintained schools to educate the middle class, there were a series of votes on defence which showed New Labour's commitment to maintaining the armed might of British imperialism. First was a large majority in support of Trident – 55.8 per cent against 44.2 per cent. Next was a vote against a motion to end government support for the arms trade. Last was a vote against a debate on calls for cuts in arms expenditure. Perhaps one AEEU delegate caught the mood best in the Trident debate when he said 'Defence has been the Achilles' heel of the Labour Party for too long. Now is the time to turn defence into attack'. So New Labour now supports the policy of first strike?

Since the conference there has been lots of new policy. First in the roll call is trainfare, a new version of workfare. Workfare is forced labour in return for income support. Trainfare is not a right to travel on BR, but enforced training in return for income support. New Labour is to get tough on those feckless youth who think that there is little point in going on a training scheme if there is no job at the end of it. New Labour proposals say that young people have a responsibility to seek work and to train, and that a life on permanent benefit is not an option. To be sure it isn't – it is forced on youth by the lack of any meaningful jobs.

But this was just a foretaste of Tony



Blair's new policies for the CBI. No sirs, no more 'penal' rates of taxation. And no return to those awful days when trade unionists had certain rights. And just to make sure they got the message, he revised earlier New Labour commitments to the European Social Chapter, making it clear that New Labour had no hard and fast commitment to it since it meant 'we may in future agree to the import of inefficient practices to Britain'. Doubtless we will soon see New Labour opposing European directives on maximum working hours as a particularly pernicious form of inefficiency.

What else can New Labour do? Well, having shifted to a point where the Tories were a couple of years ago, they now find they have got to move further to the right to chase the middle class vote. And having set up the Commission on Social Justice to end their commitment to state welfare, they now find that even that is too left wing. And so Tony Blair has told the party that the Commission is old hat, and they have to find something new to replace it. Come in Frank Field, your time has come.

Robert Clough

On 1 July nine organisations, including the RCG, attended a meeting to discuss setting up an Independent Working Class Association (IWCA). On these pages we reprint the IWCA's founding leaflet and MAXINE WILLIAMS and EDDIE ABRAHAMS explain the political background to our support.

A break with the

'Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes.'

KARL MARX

The most striking political fact of the past fifteen years has been the absence of consistent, organised working class opposition to the vicious attack on its living conditions and rights which has taken place. Only on three occasions were the powers that be seriously worried by protests. Those were the 1981 uprisings in inner cities; the 1984/85 miners strike and the 1990 Poll Tax resistance. These were all characterised by the involvement of tens of thousands of working class people in direct conflict with the British state and, even in the case of the miners strike, with the Labour Party and trade union leadership.

Yet powerful though they were, none of these three struggles led to the emergence of a durable, organised political expression for working class interests. While bitter anger ferments in working class communities at their increasing poverty and unemployment, and sporadic struggles erupt, the working class has disappeared off the British political agenda except for debates on the need to discipline them through even greater welfare cuts and bigger police and prison programmes. Indeed in the past five years more radical and active opposition has come on environmental issues than on the growth of working class poverty.

How can it be that the strength of oppositional feeling demonstrated in the three major struggles of the 1980s, has today no organised expression? So that each time a person, often a black youth, is killed in police custody a campaign has to begin from scratch as though such an event has never happened before. Or that the anger expressed at the Poll Tax is not carried over into action to stop the extensive operations of bailiffs and prison sentences for non-payment of its replacement, the Council Tax? Or that the newly privatised public utilities can shed hundreds of thousands of workers without protest.

The Labour Party - against the working class

In part the answer is obvious – the Labour Party or, as we know it today, New Labour. It isolated, attacked and supported the repression of all the three large scale struggles mentioned as well as other smaller, local battles. Whilst Labour in the post-war period represented the most active and better-off sections of the industrial working class, it has never represented the working class as a whole, particularly its poorer sections. During the post-war boom this fact was partly disguised as living standards rose across the whole population. Over the past fifteen years the working class has been recast in a new mould dictated by the decline of British industry and mushrooming of the service sector. The low paid, and what is now sneeringly referred as the 'underclass' are in fact the working class as it existed prior to the post-war boom.

At no point in the past 50 years has the polarisation in the working class been more clear. At one end,

employed in clean, well-paid, high-tech jobs whose conditions often merge with those of the middle classes and at the other end, either no jobs or low-paid, insecure and dirty jobs. Fifteen million people in Britain now claim means-tested benefits. One third of all East End of London households have an annual income of £4,500 or less, whilst the average Labour Party member earns

IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS MORE RADICAL AND ACTIVE OPPOSITION HAS COME ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES THAN ON THE GROWTH OF WORKING CLASS POVERTY.

more than £18,000 per year. New Labour represents the middle class and upper working class in British society and is actively hostile to the rest of the working class. In a ghastly symbol of this reality, Labour leader Tony Blair's wife, partly makes her living prosecuting or teaching others to prosecute Council Tax defaulters.

The conservative left

The poorer sections of the working class have no political representation whatsoever. In such a situation, it might have been expected that the British 'left' would have a role to play. Indeed their sole function should have been to connect with

Often this support has led them to outright condemnation of the more militant activities of the working class. For example, the SWP condemned the 1981 uprisings as a lumpen outbreak and the miners 1984 'hit squads' as a substitute for 'mass struggle'. With monotonous regularity they call for the return of a Labour government. This has the effect of increasing the alienation of the working class from socialism. For in many areas, particularly those with local Labour councils, the hatred for the Labour Party has reached unprecedented levels.

What can a single mother in a Labour-council controlled area make of this reality? Her flat drips with damp and rot, her Council Tax mounts and court cases ensue, her child's education (such as it is) is threatened by Labour-imposed cuts and nationally she hears the Labour Party call for reduction of her meagre benefit. Socialists then turn up on her doorstep urging her to vote Labour! Small wonder that in many areas white workers have turned to the fascists and black youth to religious fundamentalism. These reactionary movements manage to appear more radical than the left. The IWCA leaflet refers to these sections of the left quite correctly as the 'conservative left'.

Purity through impotence

The smaller left groups, whilst sometimes not supporting Labour, have fared no better at making connections with the working class. It has been a consistent pattern in the post-1945 left, to ignore the existing working class and to mouth dogmatic programmes of exquisite political orthodoxy directed usually at members of

Unions, on council estates, local campaigns and pressure groups – these have no national or political reflection and are largely ignored by the left.

Dogmatic left slogans and conceptions have been not a means of approaching the working class but a substitute for doing so. Had the activities of the left succeeded in getting a single gain for the working class its reputation might now be something other than that of dinosaurs and eccentrics.

Divorced from the working class, these groups transformed Marxism-Leninism into a religion and a rather inefficient one at that. Politics became the realm of ideas alone and the ideas themselves were never tested in reality. Instead the only test of success recognised by left groups is marginal increases in membership or paper sales. Whilst political organisations have a perfect right to strive to build themselves, they do not have a right to confuse their own interests with those of the working class movement.

Underlying their emphasis is the belief that the revolutionary party will be built by the growth of their own group rather than, as historically demonstrated, by the marriage of real working class political struggles and revolutionary ideas carried by a wide range of political organisations. To be a member of these sectarian groups often has meant a thorough divorce from the struggles of working class people and thousands of leftists have retired disillusioned by this fantasy world of false vanguardism.

A way forward?

The strength of the IWCA document is that it recognises some of these



Opposing the Criminal Justice Act: at every turn Labour has blocked real opposition to Tory rule

and give voice to the needs, interests and hopes of the disenfranchised working class. Not only have they failed to do this but they have not, by and large, even tried.

The larger organisations of the left – the SWP, the Communist Party (as it was up to the 1980s) and Militant – have all, at crucial moments, slavishly supported the Labour Party.

other left groups. General strikes, workers councils, soviets, dictatorship of the proletariat, vanguard party, socialism in one country – we've had it all. And the striking fact amid the clouds of polemical hot air has been that the working class has meanwhile sunk deeper into impoverished isolation. In areas where the working class does organise – Credit

realities and consciously seeks to break with a past that has abysmally failed. Firstly it sets its face resolutely against the Labour Party, recognising it as an anti-working class party. But it goes further than that. It also recognises that trade unionism is not a viable strategy for the working class. Thus while it supports trade union struggles it recognises that

past



Ollerton, 1984: Scargill and the miners on strike

they do not embrace the majority of the working class. Hence its emphasis on working class community-based struggles. Secondly it acknowledges the gulf that separates the left and the working class and the danger that results from this in terms of a right-wing populist manipulation of working class discontent. We have seen the signs of this in electoral successes of fascists in Labour-controlled, poverty stricken areas. Hence the urgency of creating a political movement that is openly for the working class and allows them to both defend and spread their struggles whilst formulating their own programme of demands. Its potential lies in the fact that, while not restricting the freedom of individual organisations within it, it does not seek to impose a 'revolutionary' programme on the working class. As Marx, that least dogmatic of Marxists, wrote to Engels in 1877: 'Had we from 1864 to 1873 insisted on working together only with those who openly adopted our platform - where would we be today? I think all our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our distinct position and even organisation.'

The first stage of the IWCA's activity has been an alliance of different left groups who recognise the urgency of the situation. It has succeeded thus far in producing a common statement that is anti-Labour and in agreeing to work together to make connections with the working class. It is a small but promising beginning and, if it moves forward to embrace working class militants, could seize opportunities which will undoubtedly arise given New Labour's utter rejection of the working class.

Others have also recognised that we are entering a new period. Arthur Scargill, whose past role as miners' leader demands respect, has called for the setting up of a Socialist Labour Party. For him, as for Militant, it has been less a question of rejecting Labour than of being

rejected by Labour. The rubicon has been the dropping of Clause 4 and the trade union links that for militants like Scargill, were the 'soul' of the Labour Party. It remains to be seen whether this new SLP will come to recognise the limitations of a

IT IS A SMALL BUT PROMISING BEGINNING AND, IF IT MOVES FORWARD TO EMBRACE WORKING CLASS MILITANTS, COULD SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES WHICH WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ARISE GIVEN NEW LABOUR'S UTTER REJECTION OF THE WORKING CLASS.

movement that is trade-union based. That said, if it encourages debate about the Labour Party (and it can hardly fail to do so if it keeps to its pledge of standing candidates in most constituencies) and acts as a rallying point for people engaged in struggle, it may play a role in the rebirth of a movement. The crucial issue for any organisation today is to espouse the cause of the poorest sections of the working class. If their needs, concerns and hatred of the present system are not reflected in these new organisations then the most urgent task of the day will have been shirked.

The IWCA has called for sponsorship and support from all anti-Labour leftists, individuals and organisations. It is taking a path fraught with difficulties and with little recent tradition of democratic, united and cooperative socialist endeavour. It will need much support if it is to move forward to the major task it has set itself - that of putting the working class back on the political agenda.

The Independent Working Class Association

'The Independent Working Class Association has been established to promote and celebrate the political independence of the working class and to pursue the political and economic interests of that class, with no consideration for, and regardless of consequence to the existing political and economic structures.'

Founding statement
21 October 1995

In June 1994, the media reported that Labour had recruited only 6,000 trade unionists from the 4,000,000 political levy payers offered a vote in the leadership poll. Since then Labour has recruited well in excess of its 80,000 target figure. But if they are not trade unionists, who are they? Activists within the Socialist Workers Party who will be campaigning for Labour at the next election already know the answer. 'All the indications are that the electoral support and possible membership emerges from the thoroughly rattled middle classes and not from the working class at all.' Former deputy leader Roy Hattersley concurs: 'we live in the age of the almost universal middle class and what they want from a political party is prudent compassion. The near unanimous support for cautious altruism is an electoral blessing.'

Labour, a middle class party for middle class people. This is the moment of truth for the entire British Left. Will it continue with the pretence that Tory v Labour represents the very essence of class conflict, while bemoaning the fact that 'socialism' has been abandoned or take advantage of that fact? It's make your mind up time.

Lesser evil

Like the Left the working class is increasingly split into pro and anti-Labour camps. And as with the working class only the former are organised. The first step toward reaching the unorganised working class is to organise the unorganised anti-Labour Left. Many working class people are increasingly alienated from Labour. The strategy of the far right is entirely reliant on this alienation. However it is not the job of working class militants to mend this relationship. On the contrary, the task is to make the break permanent. Labour's arrogant contempt in regard to its former constituency is based on the belief that there is no possibility of an alternative to them, and so the working class will be forced to vote for them as the 'lesser evil' regardless. 'The least advantaged and in some ways the least attractive members of society will undoubtedly vote Labour whatever the party does.' (Roy Hattersley April 1994)

Conservative Left

One consequence of this analysis is that their left flank is glaringly vulnerable. Many organisations to Labour's left defend their repeated failure to attack this flank on the grounds that a) Labour is a step to the left b) 'we are too small to stand against them' c) 'we are the socialist alternative'.

While such organisations present themselves as radical, they are on the wrong side of this natural demarcation line. The one consistent mes-

sage of the conservative Left is that a politically independent working class is not only impossible but undesirable.

As sponsors of The Independent Working Class Association we disagree. Now more than ever what is

THE IWCA WILL BE A CLEAN BREAK WITH THE PAST AND WILL BE SEEN TO BE SO. TRADE UNIONISM AS A STRATEGY FOR TOTAL SOCIAL CHANGE IS NO LONGER VAGUELY CREDIBLE.

needed is a politically independent working class organisation. The setting up of such an organisation is the only practical response to the situation we are faced with: the total



abandonment, even as a concept, of the working class by Labour.

For without organisation the working class has no voice. Without a voice there can be no resistance. Without resistance, the British working class fulfils the role ordained for it by the establishment and becomes politically extinct.

THE ONE CONSISTENT MESSAGE OF THE CONSERVATIVE LEFT IS THAT A POLITICALLY INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS IS NOT ONLY IMPOSSIBLE BUT UNDESIRABLE.

Clean break

The IWCA is distinct from anything that exists in Britain now or in the recent past. A working class organisation not only independent, but hostile to Labour. It will seek to absorb and unite groups (without demanding that they abandon their distinct positions or organisations) and accommodate individuals on the basis of that platform, while aspiring to be a pole of attraction to the tens of thousands of working class militants who long despaired of the Left ever doing anything worthwhile.

The IWCA will be a clean break with the past and will be seen to be so. From the outset it will be clear that we have rejected entryism and the prospect of reform, be that reform of Labour or the economic system. We will not orientate or seek solace from the official 'labour movement'. Trade unionism as a strategy for total social change is no longer vaguely credible. Instead the IWCA will be community orientated and in time community based. It will be led by the working class but not limited to the working class. Essentially it will be a 'can do' organisation; an organisation that can make things happen or prevent them happening. Membership will be openly available and its activists will join with those fighting to achieve immediate results in the interests of the working class.

Self determination

At the heart of the IWCA lies the concept of working class self determination. Therefore the question of a political programme does not arise as this would mean the collective will of the sponsors being imposed in advance. In time, following an appropriate period of common activity, a programme will be hammered out in day to day confrontation with the practical needs of the class who will in turn play a key role in the development of that programme. Initiating a dialogue with local working communities will in many cases determine the immediate priorities.

The Labour Party has arrogantly thrown the gauntlet to the working class and the Left. We are aware of our responsibility in picking up that gauntlet. The gulf between the working class and the Left is enormous. The size of the task is a daunting one, but the challenge is nothing compared to the political consequences of our failing to act.

Resistance

One possible post election scenario is that some sections of the working class, finding themselves in confrontation with a 'socialist' government, and hungry for real change, end up sharing common ground with the radical right out of sheer desperation. The Left has an obligation to offer the working class something other than the choice between New Labour and a resurgent far-right. Labour are forcing the working class into a fight. As we see it, the alternative to resistance is either capitulation or collaboration. The setting up of an independent working class organisation is something that has to be done. New Labour have themselves provided us with the opening. So, let's get on with it.

Initial sponsors

Anti-Fascist Action. Communist Action Group. Colin Roach Centre. Open Polemic. Partisan. Red Action. Revolutionary Communist Group. Socialist Parent.

If you require further information, or have suggestions on how the IWCA could best serve the political interests of the working class, contact: BM IWCA London WC1N 3XX. Affiliates: Organisations £5, Individuals £1. Donations welcome. Make cheques and postal orders payable to IWCA.



CUBA VIVE!

Letter from Cuba

FThe revolution in Cuba is more than just a memory: it is still very much alive. During the last month in Cuba we have met many people eager to discuss their society, how it was and how it will be.

We participated in a discussion with Cuban students studying English at Havana University. It was immediately obvious that they had a selective image of capitalism. We offered them startling facts of unemployment, homelessness, the Criminal Justice Act and the closure and neglect of social services and facilities. This provoked a lively discussion of the pros and cons of Cuba's "compromised" socialism. They illustrated the many social and economic problems faced by the Cuban people at present. They told us that although their situation had improved in the last year, it was still not as good as before the special period, when students had a relatively high standard of living. They acknowledged the benefits of Cuban socialism but saw the introduction of capitalism as a means of regaining the circumstances they had lost. When they look towards capitalism, they look towards Europe and the USA. However, the example they should look to is the brutal capitalism of the third world and especially that of Latin America. The students told us they were very confused, tempted by the barrage of capitalist propaganda and tourism. Although this dissatisfied and saddened us, it was important for us to understand the problems and grievances in the present period in Cuba.

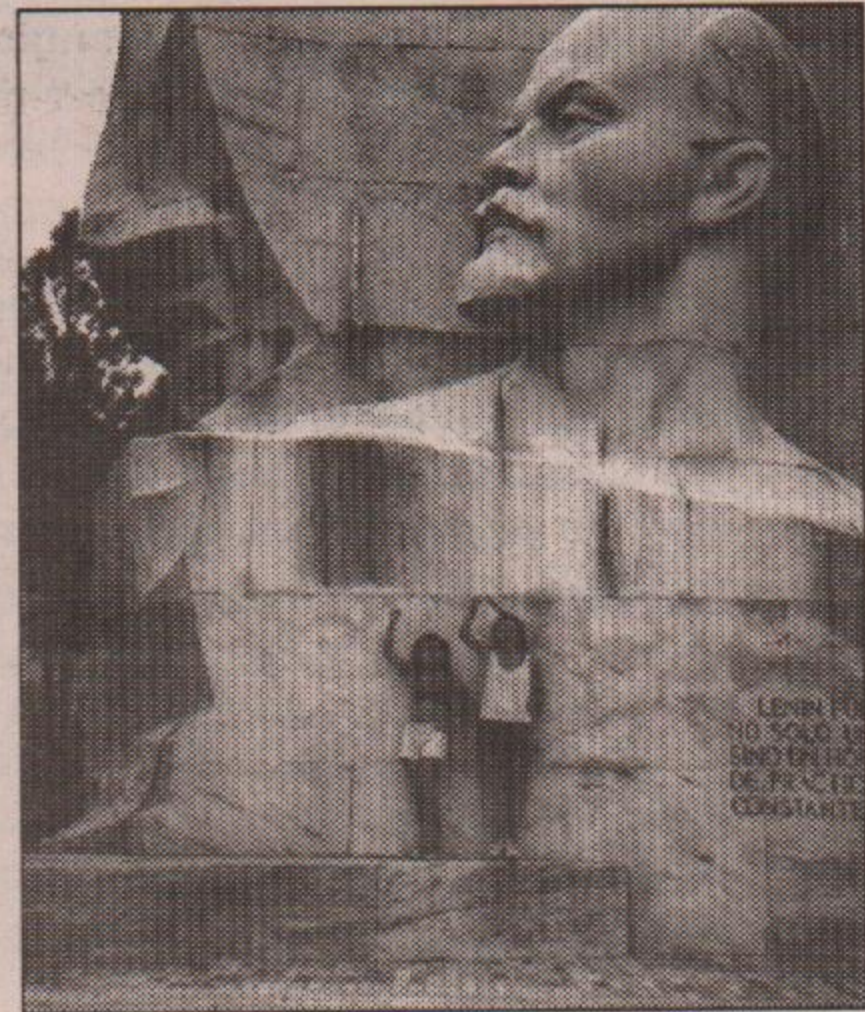
This despondent attitude was not shared by the young workers we met in the Coppelia ice-cream factory, situated in the Boyeros municipality outside the centre of Havana. Before the special period all the ice cream produced here was sold to the Cubans in pesos. Since the introduction of the dollar into the economy, all the ice cream is sold for hard currency: dollars. However, the government buys 12,000 litres daily to sell cheaply to Cubans in the huge Coppelia ice-cream parlour in Havana. This industry has benefited from the introduction of dollars. But the manager told us, "We have to use our gains so as to invest in our workers... we have an opening in our market based on the socialist principles." He went on to emphasise that in Cuba education is still free, public health is still free. "These are the principal achievements of socialism in Cuba. This will never change." While he acknowledged that only some Cubans had access to dollars, he was adamant that they would never permit the emergence of a privileged class. "I am 53 and I lived in capitalism in Cuba, and I didn't like that society. That society killed people by hunger. Some could, others couldn't. In socialism, everyone can eat. Maybe you don't have a lot of food, but the minimum of the essential elements you can have. But in the capitalist society, you know it's not this way. If you don't have money, you can't buy, you couldn't find a job.



Before they left for Cuba, Susan and Helen took part in the October CSC demonstration: they are pictured here on the 100-strong FRFI/Rock around the Blockade contingent with Kenia Serrano, student leader from Cuba

Here in Cuba, we don't let people down. That is the reason I say socialism will never change in Cuba."

Later, when we spoke with some of the young workers in the factory, we asked them if they were prepared to accept capitalism. They told us they were not because they would lose everything - their jobs, social provisions and their dignity. One female engineer of 26, the head technician in the factory of 167 workers, told us: "I



Susan and Helen at the monument in Lenin Park

don't want capitalism, not even as a gift!" When we asked this group about their experiences of racism they laughed and said that everyone was equal here.

The head teacher of a primary school in the same municipality also believed that Cuban socialism was about equality. She said the most important thing about the economic crisis is that "the few resources we have are always shared equally between everyone." The school holds 80 students and seven teachers. The classes we saw had no more than 15 students. In the last five years the school has suffered from a scarcity of resources. For example, next semester they will not have all the notebooks they minimally need. This is the effect of the economic blockade. However, the head teacher was proud to point out that "not one school in the country has been closed, and educators have tried to only move forward... to elevate the quality of

education." Despite the hardships, all children are educated from a very early age. Teachers visit the homes of children who do not attend daycare centres to prepare them for kindergarten.

We visited a daycare centre for children of working parents and orphans. At this institution there were 89 children (28 living there) and 63 workers, including a doctor and two nurses. This daycare centre also suffered from shortages of resources because of the blockade, and the doctor told us that solidarity and donations from other countries were extremely important. "We are blockaded but not isolated." The workers from the daycare centre told us that they believed the "majority of Cubans will continue fighting so as to preserve and save all the gains of the revolution and freedom we have now and the freedom we enjoy."

The structures of socialism have not been lost in Cuba, merely adapted to circumstances. The agricultural cooperatives are an example of such practical remedies to the crisis. The cooperative we visited had 1,000 hectares of sugarcane plus 50 hectares of land for the workers' own subsistence use. The state owns the land, but two years ago it was given to the workers, and the cooperatives were set up. The bank lends the farm money to buy materials cheaply from the state. After the harvest, the workers sell their produce to the government, pay back the bank and 50 per cent of the profits are shared out among the workers with consideration made for the workers' contribution and efforts. The directors of the farm then discuss with the workers their ideas for social projects using the other 50 per cent of the gains. This money is used to aid workers with difficulties: the priority is housing. Social activities are also planned for workers and their families. Last summer, these included beach holidays and trips to the Malecon, Coppelia ice-cream parlour and museum in Central Havana. They described the cooperative law as the third agricultural reform. The first was in 1961, the second in 1963/4; this implies the new measure is still

Helen and Susan Yaffe are supporters of FRFI who are spending a year in Cuba. Susan is a geography student at Sussex University and Helen will be studying social and economic history at Bristol University next year. Both will be joining the Nuestro Tiempo brigade at the end of December.

about the progression and development of socialism. They told us that this was a permanent measure by the state. It was a way in the special period to resolve the problems of low sugarcane harvest. "Some people thought that because of the changes, Cuba would leave socialism. But this is a real revolution and real independence." Every worker at the cooperative takes home one free bottle of milk every day; this is also provided for workers who are unwell and absent. The cooperative also plans to be able to give all its workers food to take home to their relatives. This will be on top of the state ration already provided. Women have six months paid maternity leave and the cooperative also provides free lunches for the local primary school.

Even in this economic crisis the principles of socialism are vigorously upheld. However, in areas of Cuban society, there is clear evidence of the introduction of the market economy. We saw it clearly at the site of an international trade fair to be held in February 1996. Most of the Cuban goods here are state goods. Such events are only recent in Cuba and reflect the government's need to set up trading links with other countries. The organiser denied that this signified the introduction of capitalism - rather a counterattack against the blockade and economic war being waged by the USA against Cuba. He

said it was merely a temporary measure. "These are firms who make agreements with the Agricultural Ministry." It was not individualist entrepreneurship. A lot of work was being done to prepare the site of the fair. We questioned the lavish use of resources, but were assured that they always aimed for quality with minimum expenditure. After the fair, the site would be used for a youth recreation centre.

Throughout the current year, the national economy has grown by 2.3 per cent (*Granma International*, 15 November). Life in Cuba has begun to improve. Through our visit we have seen the determination of most of the Cuban people to overcome the current crisis and accept these changes in order to preserve the gains of the revolution.

They gain strength through the knowledge of growing worldwide support, as shown in the United Nations General Assembly on 2 November 1995. They emphasise the importance of Cuba's determination being backed up by socialists and communists all over the world. One of the workers at the cooperative farm sent a message to the Revolutionary Communist Group and the Rock around the Blockade brigade: "We really appreciate your support. Our doors are open to all the people who offer to help us."

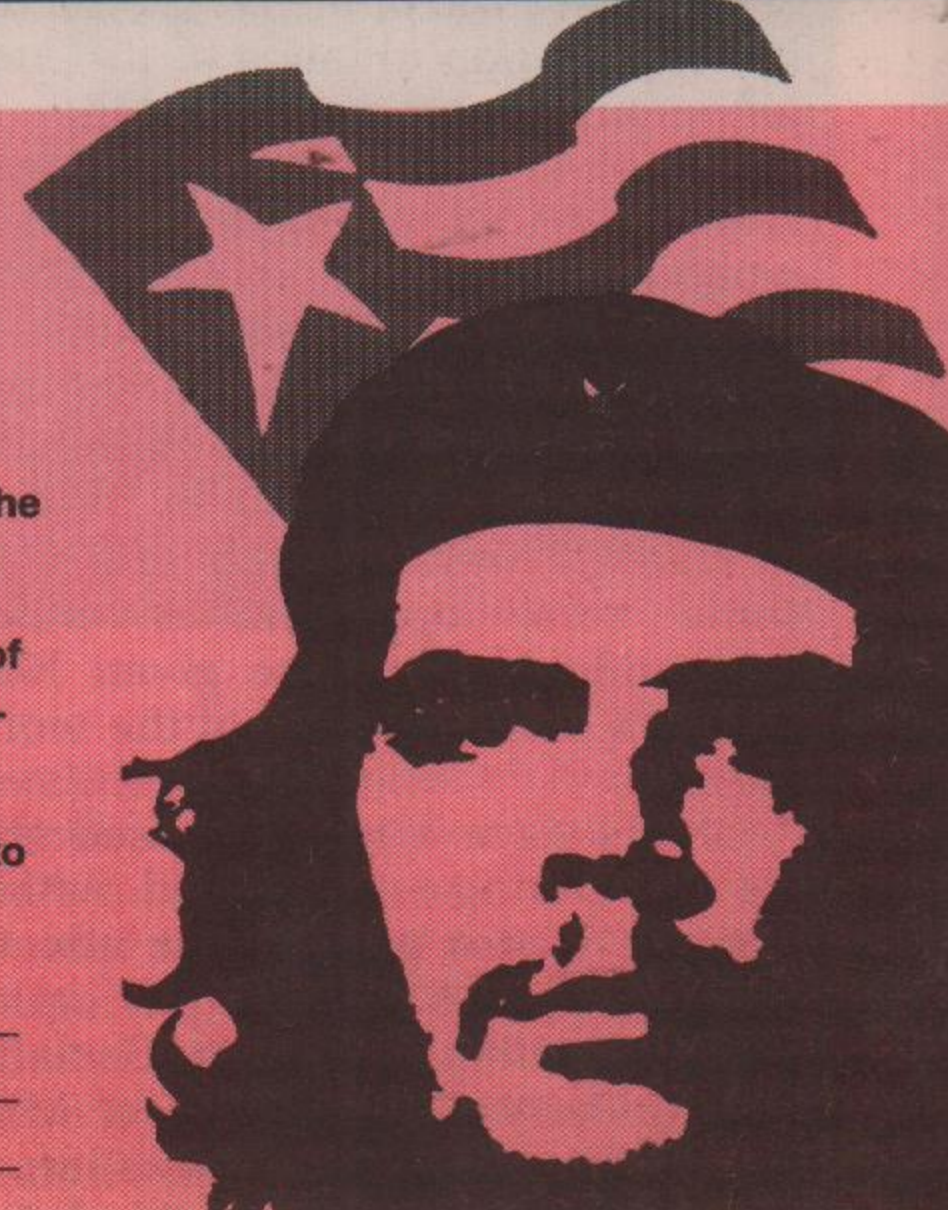


The day care centre for young children

Dreaming of a Red Christmas?

Why not celebrate New Year and the anniversary of the Cuban revolution with a stylish campaign t-shirt? High-quality Fruit of the Loom cotton, white, with a red and black design of Che Guevara and the words 'Viva Cuba' on the front and a quote from Che ('A true revolutionary is motivated by feelings of great love') on the back. Available in XL only, price just £7. Please make cheques/POs payable to Rock around the Blockade and return to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

Name _____
Address _____
Postcode _____



Rock around the Blockade

On 21 December, the 30-strong Nuestro Tiempo brigade will arrive in Cuba, bringing with us a donation of a sound system and disco lights for a youth centre in Ciego de Avila. Ahead of us lie two weeks of agricultural work, visits, and discussion with young Cubans. The brigadistas - the majority young, many of them low-waged or unemployed - will have spent nearly a year campaigning to raise thousands of pounds for the sound system and their own fares, while vigorously putting across the case for solidarity with Cuba and the defence of socialism.

Socialism and youth

The campaign, Rock around the Blockade, was initiated by *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* in January 1995 in support of the Cuban Union of Young Communists (UJC). As communists, we wanted to campaign actively in defence of Cuban socialism, and in doing so win young people in Britain to an understanding of the importance of socialist ideas for the struggles we face here today. Young people in Britain are increasingly under attack from a brutal and racist government hell-bent not only on driving them into poverty with reduced benefits, slave wages and student loans but on removing even the right to enjoyment - to party and listen to loud music - with the Criminal Justice Act. Many related instantly to the problems faced by Cuban youth who, while well-provided for in terms of education and social welfare, have few luxuries or recreational facilities as a direct result of the US blockade. Raising money for a music centre provided the ideal link.

The UJC is in the forefront of confronting the consequences of the economic measures the government has been forced to introduce as a result of the blockade. Part of the battle against, for example, prostitution and black marketeering, is to provide young people with collective forms of entertainment despite current hardships. Our sound system is a small contribution towards that battle.

Campaigning around the country

That enough money has been raised to cover all our costs is a tribute to the hard work of all the brigadistas. Around the country, in Dundee, Derby, Manchester, Lincoln, Bir-

mingham, London and Brighton, we have held street meetings, petitioning against the US blockade and selling t-shirts and badges. We held stalls at the Reading and Edinburgh Festivals, visited colleges in Bradford and Blackburn, and spoke at schools and community centres. In Lincoln, regular boot sales, a sponsored walk and stalls at the local peace festival raised the full costs of the brigade for two unemployed activists; two 60-mile sponsored bike rides, from Manchester to Blackpool and from London to Brighton, raised nearly £1,500 for the campaign. In addition, sponsored walks in Dundee and Manchester, two highly successful 'Nights for Cuba' in London, with bands as diverse as The Kissing Pigs, Feel, The Other Brothers and Blow Crazy, and collections outside cinemas during the Latin American Film Festival kept the money rolling in.

Throughout all the fundraising, we remained clear that our first priority was a political defence of Cuba - winning people to a greater understanding of the achievements of the revolution, the importance of socialism and the need to campaign tirelessly against the US blockade, and all our publicity material reflected this. In the summer, in response to a constant stream of anti-Cuban propaganda, we held a picket of the *Independent* offices in Canary Wharf. We held many meetings, including video showings of the film *Strawberry and Chocolate* to discuss Cuba's much-misrepresented treatment of homosexuality and AIDS; Network First's *Inside Castro's Cuba*, which provides a context in which to understand the raftier exodus of August 1994; and a discussion of Che Guevara's relevance today. On 15 October, a militant Rock around the Blockade contingent of 100 people joined

the Cuba Solidarity Campaign national demonstration. In November, Rock around the Blockade activists joined the Cuba Solidarity Campaign to picket Downing Street during Clinton's visit. Later, our comrades leapt in front of the Clinton motorcade in Trafalgar Square, brandishing placards condemning the US blockade. On 17 December, we will be holding a dayschool: Viva Cuba! Viva Socialism! End the US blockade!

Building for the future

We hope the brigade will consolidate the work initiated so far, helping deepen our understanding of the Cuban revolution and inspiring us to redouble our efforts next year. During the brigade, as well as working on the UJC's Eduardo Garcia Delgado work camp in Ciego de Avila, we will be meeting with workers in a sugar factory, in the tourist industry and on a cooperative farm, as well as speaking to doctors and Committees of the Defence of the Revolution. We will visit an environmental research centre and have an opportunity to discuss with the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC). In Havana, as well as visiting the Museum of the Revolution and Revolution Square, we have the rare privilege of a meeting with Alfredo Guevara, a founder of the original Nuestro Tiempo, the radical cultural wing of the revolutionary movement for which our brigade was named. We will celebrate New Year and the anniversary of the revolution in Ciego with the workers from the sugar cane harvest and the Provincial Committee of the UJC, and look forward to another year of campaigning and the possibility of building a second brigade for 1996.

Cat Wiener

We asked some of the Nuestro Tiempo Brigadistas to talk about why they were taking part...

'As a doctor, seeing what is being done to the health service in Britain, I want to see for myself - and talk to the people involved in - a health system where, despite material shortages, the health of all the people is still the number one priority.'

Hannah is a doctor in a London hospital



'I support all socialist countries. This brigade is a way of giving solidarity to the Union of Young Communists, who are playing a leading role in the defence of socialism in Cuba.'

Dave is unemployed

'As a communist, I feel we need to learn directly from the experience of the Cuban working class about building socialism - to help us build a communist movement here in Britain.'

Adam is a teacher in Birmingham, and is active in Birmingham CSC



'Originally, I just wanted to go to visit Helen and Susie. But when Susie said she was going on the brigade, I read about it, and thought it would be more constructive to do something useful for Cuba than lie on a beach. It'd also be good to learn about a different society because this one has so many flaws.'

'I'm studying environmental science, so I'd like to see what they're doing in Cuba where, because of the blockade, they're having to do lots of recycling.' Jenny is a student at Sussex University



'As a musician, it was important to me to take part in this campaign because I wanted young people to be involved, and for all people to see that music is an integral part of a revolutionary fervour, and a part of sustaining that commitment, and for them to understand that the music and the politics go hand in hand.'

Ken is a singer/songwriter

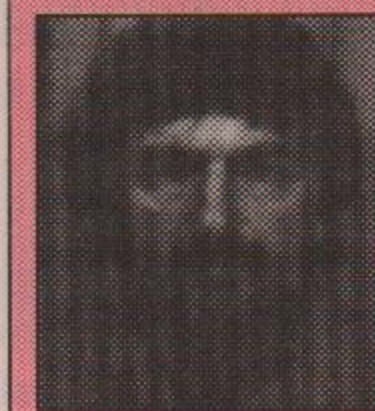
'I want to see and feel what it's like to be in a Communist country, and be able to tell people here about how Cuba is a living example of the potential of socialism for the mass of humanity, understand the privations brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the blockade and play a part in recording our trip in photographs and in words.'

Peter is a laboratory assistant in Blackburn



'This is the trip of a lifetime. To support Cuba and Castro's revolution is a socialist dream come true.'

Rob, from Lincoln, was made redundant after a takeover of his engineering works. He now studies part-time at a local college.



'I believe that by supporting the Cuban revolutionaries, I am backing a cause that could smash sets of viewpoints instilled in us. As for the brigade and sound system, the young revolutionaries of Cuba have the same needs as any other young people - music, dance, and so on.' Val helped start the Lincolnshire Cuba Solidarity Group earlier this year. A former art student, she now works as a barmaid.

Imperialism steps up the pressure

Just as the Cuban people together with Cuban communists are making strenuous efforts to defend the gains of their socialist revolution, they are being subjected to intense pressure by the capitalist states of the European Union (EU). Urgently in need of finance and credit to bring the economy out of crisis, the Cuban government has recently met with European Union envoys who, according to the *Financial Times* 'have made it clear that they see political reform and human rights as issues that cannot be ignored. The EU is also likely to press for faster and deeper economic reforms.' 'Political reform and human rights', as evident from the experience of the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe, is no more than a euphemism for destroying the Cuban Communist Party and putting in its place pro-capitalists openly supportive of international capital and totally unresponsive to the needs of the Cuban people.

Whilst Cuba has been forced to open its economy to international capital, Cuba's Communist Party has sought to retain some degree of political control over the growing numbers of foreign investors. By means of such control it has been able to sustain the world-renowned Cuban health and education provision and prevent the type of appalling social inequalities, mass poverty and immiseration now seen in large parts of the former socialist bloc. It is this political control that the imperialists are set on destroying.

Every time there is a meeting between Cuban and foreign government officials one hears, added to the calls for 'political reform', the demand for 'faster and deeper economic reform'. Foreign firms whilst

happy to siphon off large profits from Cuba are straining at the leash. They don't want just a portion of profit. By means of 'deeper economic reform', they want to seize all of the wealth Cuban workers produce. That Cubans will then suffer hunger, poverty or illness is immaterial to them.

Unfortunately for the capitalists Cuba is today in a much better position to resist pressure 'to open up Cuba's political system or embrace a fully fledged market economy.' (*Financial Times*) Over the past two to three years, the Cuban economy has shown consistent improvement. In 1995 it is expected to grow by some 2.5 per cent as compared to 0.7 per cent in 1994. The Cuban Central Bank notes that its current account

deficit has been reduced from \$371.6m in 1993 to \$81.3m in 1994. The Cuban peso is substantially stronger, exchanging at 25 to the US dollar.

Through the participation of the Canadian-based Sherritt International, nickel and cobalt production is expected to reach 40,000 tonnes this year compared to 26,772 tonnes in 1994. The number of foreign banks - from Spain, Mexico, Canada, Holland and Lebanon - represented in Cuba now stands at 11 and some agreements have been finalised to finance Cuban sugar, nickel and rice production and for food imports.

These positive developments result, to a significant extent, from success in attracting foreign capital to

Cuba on Cuban terms despite the US blockade. Politically Cuba's position was also strengthened by a 2 November UN General Council vote calling on the US to lift the blockade.

On a recent trip to China, Fidel Castro noted that Cuba has indeed been forced to adopt reforms that include 'unquestionable elements of capitalism'. But the Cuban people, having witnessed the 'disasters that have happened in the countries of the former Soviet Union', are determined 'to save the revolution and socialism'. Saving the revolution will be an arduous and difficult task. The flood of foreign finance into Cuba has generated social inequalities which are now well known, and is beginning to produce a wealthy class hostile to socialism.

But as the article from Cuba by Helen and Susan on the opposite page shows, the heart of the revolution keeps beating. It is a healthy beat which the capitalists, pro- or anti-blockade want to stop. We must do whatever we can to contribute to the strengthening and to the revitalising of a social system which, despite horrendous difficulties, continues to perform miracles for the people and is an example to the poor across the world.

Eddie Abrahams

Events

**SUNDAY 17 DECEMBER
ROCK AROUND THE BLOCKADE
DAYSCHOOL**

Viva Cuba! Viva socialism!
End the US blockade!
10.30am-4.30pm, Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square, London WC1
(nearest tube: Holborn)

Speakers: Professor Theodore MacDonald, author 'Hippocrates in Havana'; Comrade Mancebo, First Secretary of the Cuban Embassy; Rock around the Blockade; Jose Delarra, Cuban sculptor and artist (invited); Eddie Abrahams; Editorial Board FRFI; Cuba Solidarity Campaign (invited). Workshops on health, art and culture, campaigning against the blockade, the 'special period' in Cuba, and music. £3/£1.50 concessions.

**SATURDAY 16 DECEMBER
STREET STALL IN DERBY**
11am-2pm outside St Peter's Church,
St Peter's Street

THURSDAY 21 DECEMBER 8-11pm

BENEFIT GIG - DERBY
Love Isaac's Reggae Maha
Victoria Inn, Midland Place.

£2 waged/£1 unwaged
• If you'd like to hear about the brigade's experience on their return, come to the RCG Communist Forum on Sunday 11 February, 2.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 for an eyewitness account of developments in Cuba.

Land and Freedom – a distortion of history

Loach's aim is to offer an interpretation of the revolution which places responsibility for its failure at the foot of the Communist Party of Spain and the Soviet Union. The argument unfolds through an account of the experience of David a young, working class, Communist Party member from Liverpool who goes to Spain to fight Franco. There he joins up with a unit of the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification). As the plot develops, Loach treats us to an interpretation of the clashes between the POUM and the Spanish Communist Party which drive David to tear up his Party card in disgust at the Communists' apparently anti-democratic and anti-socialist politics.

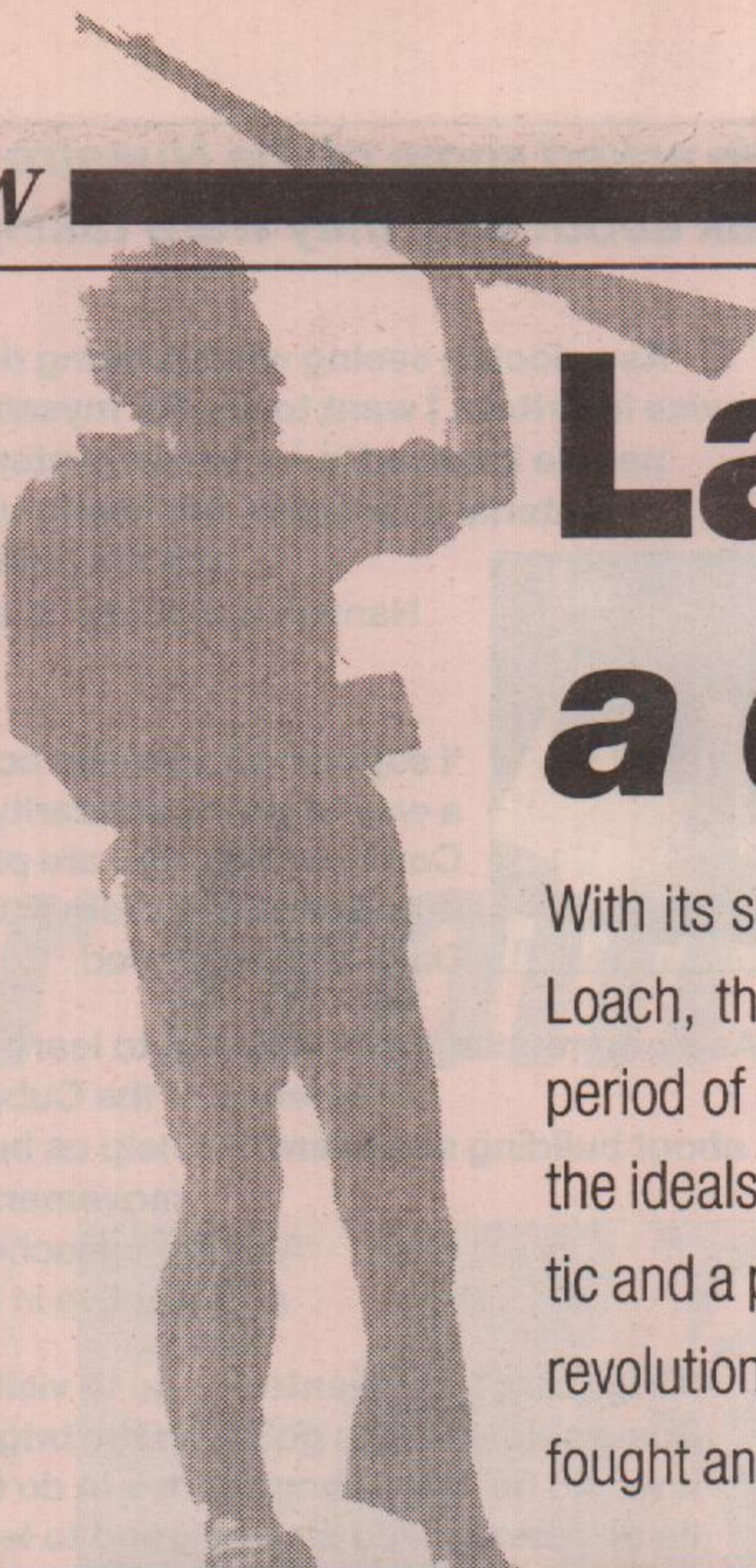
To placate the 'democratic' capitalist powers – Britain and France – and the Spanish 'democratic capitalists', the Communist Party opposes the collectivisation of the land, eliminates the democratic, popular order generated by the revolution, forces women out of the trenches back into the kitchen, reintroduces a bourgeois hierarchy in the army and monopolises all political power. Thus the Communists destroy the living forces of the revolution and therefore the revolution itself. This at any rate is Loach's story, a story that alas does not go beyond the dogmatic sloganising one was familiar with in Trotskyist pamphlets of the 1970s.

As a 'film from the Spanish Revolution' *Land and Freedom* is from the outset distorted by its focus on the POUM, a relatively minor force. It was the Anarchists, massively influential, who were the Communist Party's main opponents and they hardly feature. One cannot object if Ken Loach wants to argue the culpability of the Spanish Communist Party. Communist Party supporters can argue back. But not to acknowledge and honour the thousands of rank and file members of the Communist Party who remained faithful to their party and died in the cause of the revolution is an uncalled for insult to their memory.

With a predetermined, a priori and forced political message it is hardly surprising that the result is artistically flawed. The characters and the plot are one-dimensional and lifeless – mere messengers for Loach's one-sided political argument against 'Stalinism'. The 'good' are good without qualification, while the 'evil' are evil beyond any redemption. Neither life nor good art can be so simple. For good measure but bad art, the leader of the 'Stalinists' happens to speak with a broad and arrogant US accent. In between the good and the evil is a patronising English middle class invention – a rather confused and intellectually simple British working class militant.

The POUM activists, few of whom appear to be Spanish, seem not to suffer the ravages of civil war and revolution. Despite winter in the trenches their bright and colourful clothes are neither tattered nor worn. They are all young and healthy and remain so. War and revolution ages and wears one down. But not our POUM militants who are fresh faced and beautiful to the bitter end. It looks as if they never missed a meal. They are rarely touched by the harshness, the hunger, the weariness or the maiming of war. The titanic human endeavour of the Spanish revolution leads to no personal, intellectual, psychological or emotional development. A flat, wooden, stilted depiction of historical and social truth.

In a work of art, the roots of the tensions and the hatreds of life, the roots of suffering and harshness must emerge from the actual development of the plot. If they are tagged on as assertions they cease to be genuine and fail to inspire thought, feeling or action. Such is the case with this



A Republican militia shoots at a statue of Christ outside Madrid. The Church was hated for its wealth and collaboration with the landowning aristocracy.

film. Besides some text at the opening of the film, it has no living historical or political context. The peasantry's appalling poverty is not shown. It is asserted, but only in dialogue between healthy looking POUM militants. One gets no feeling of the violent exploitation and savage poverty which drove the peasants and small village populations to violent revolution.

The film depicts scenes of violent anti-clericalism but does not suggest its causes. The Church's enormous wealth while preaching poverty and its integral bond with the hated landlords is not even hinted at. Victorious POUM forces execute the local priest who collaborated with fascist defenders of a small village. But why the peasants, instead of taking over the Church, set about destroying it and desecrating statues of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary is left inexplicable.

Having emptied the revolution of real life, the politics of the revolution is reduced to an exchange of slogans. Natural language is replaced by wooden didacticism. A central scene in the film is the political debate on the question of land collectivisation. The POUM are presented as eager supporters, whilst the Communist Party opposes collectivisation – so as not to alienate the revolution's bourgeois supporters. In this debate conducted in the hackneyed language of British Trotskyist pamphlets – the POUM is seen targeting not the great local landlords, the Church or the big peasantry but a genial, gentle local smallholder who doesn't want to form part of a collective. Serious socialist debate about land and political power would not categorically oppose collectivisation to non-collectivisation. It would take into

account the need for an alliance with the small, impoverished peasants who don't want collectivisation, the relation of forces in different regions of the country at different times and the tactical alliances necessary for defeating the main enemy – the

bourgeoisie and their imperialist allies. The film's 'discussion' of collectivisation touches on none of these issues.

Ultimately, despite Loach's intentions, *Land and Freedom* serves an anti-socialist and anti-communist purpose. The POUM is used merely as a vehicle to expose the great evil – Stalinism. The POUM's identity and character as a self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxist organisation dedicated to the destruction of capitalism leaves no imprint. Its militants emerge as no more than a group of young idealists dedicated to a socialism and democracy so vaguely defined that even the Blairite Labour Party can applaud. Opposed to the POUM are the totalitarian, anti-democratic, brutal and nasty Communists whose Marxism is not concealed. In one of the last scenes of the film, Communist military forces, headed by the US accent, are ranged on a hilltop, in almost Nazi-like formation, looking down, guns at the ready, at the helpless young things of the POUM.

No political force was innocent of errors in the Spanish revolution. The Communist Party, given its dominant position, must clearly bear central responsibility for the fate of the revolution. But not to acknowledge its role in sustaining the war against

Franco is puerile sectarianism. It was guilty of serious political errors which demand historical study. But this film isn't a contribution to this task. Furthermore, to overlook the Anarchists in favour of the marginal POUM and also ignore the POUM's own large bag of political and military stupidities and gross errors is plainly ridiculous.

The film makes no mention of the perfidious role of European Social Democracy. As effectively as the German and Italian fascists aided Franco, and the 'democratic' capitalists isolated the Republicans, European Social Democracy displayed a studied indifference to the fate of the revolution and indeed collaborated with imperialism. Meanwhile the Soviet Union did actually send weapons to Spain. None of this is touched on, leaving the film both artistically and politically remote from real life.

Film goes wanting to see a good film which deals with the question of Stalin and the problems of socialism should go and see *Burnt by the Sun*, a Russian, post-Soviet, film directed by Nikita Mikhalkov. Infinitely superior and more satisfying than *Land and Freedom*.

**Land and Freedom* – 'a film from the Spanish revolution' directed by Ken Loach

A British communist remembers

Rene Waller, now 82, was a young Communist Party militant during the 1930s. Here she gives her own assessment of *Land and Freedom*.

When reviewing a film about the Spanish Civil War and discussing who was responsible for the defeat of the Spanish republic, the overall international situation must never be forgotten.

The Spanish government was democratically elected, and entitled to be recognised as legitimate. It should therefore have been able to trade normally with other governments and buy arms for its defence. Not only was this right denied, but the fascist powers in Germany and Italy were left free to support General Franco, and did so, incidentally taking the chance to test their bombers and other weapons in readiness for the wider world conflict so clearly coming.

Despite all the odds and the disunity in the republican ranks, plus the treachery of the social democrats throughout Europe, the Spanish republican government withstood the fascist onslaught for three years, affording anti-fascists in Britain a chance to organise and mobilise. We in Britain should be particularly grateful, for I can personally testify that in 1936 there was no organised anti-fascist movement here, and the Communist Party was but a tiny sectarian group discussing Marxism in an

academic way, and more interested in staying 'pure' than recruiting. All that changed quickly and dramatically when the urgent need to support Spain was perceived. Young people were soon



looking for ways to show their support.

Like the young people later on, on the City Group Anti-Apartheid picket, we had a serious objective, but the fascist brutality made us angry rather than sad. Despite official bans, the movement became more and more united and finally a number both from the rank and file and leadership joined the International Brigade and slipped across the frontiers to continue the struggle by force of arms. In some circles, it is now alleged that Communist Party members

did not do so with the approval of their party. I'm sure this is a libel: there couldn't be recruiting calls in the *Daily Worker*, but no one doubted whom to approach.

Well, the Spanish people were defeated and paid a terrible price, but their resistance enabled the anti-fascist forces to get together. However, were we wrong to seek allies and strive to isolate the most openly reactionary forces? Should we have done better to say splits in the ruling class are unimportant and we do not want any temporary and unreliable allies? Well, it would certainly simplify our tactics, but would it help us to get socialism? Lenin ridiculed the idea that the working class would not be capable of understanding the need for tactics and frankly, how can it be sensible not to take advantage of the constant rivalries that lead capitalists to shoot each other?

I believe the Communist Party of Spain was correct to see this. The failure was not due to its effort to maintain unity but to the failure of the movement outside Spain to prevent open racist intervention and to secure for the republican government its normal rights.



Grinding poverty in Ethiopia

A future for Capitalism?

In a recent book, *Why Socialism Failed*, veteran of the US left Irwin Silber argues that socialists have exaggerated the decaying character of capitalism. He claims they have failed to account for capitalism's ability to continue 'to revolutionise society's productive forces not once but many times over'. Commentators on the fall of socialism in eastern Europe and the rise of capitalism in South Korea or Taiwan similarly conclude that 'Marx got it wrong'.



Saying No! to destructive world bank projects

Productivity and profit

The 'productive forces' of society are the human labour and the tools and equipment used by it to produce the means of sustenance and development of its members. Like all class societies, capitalism depends upon the capacity of these forces to produce more than is necessary for the subsistence of the labourer and therefore to sustain a class of non-labourers. But unlike other modes of production, capitalism produces for exchange and the exchange-value of its products is determined by labour-time. Capitalism is only possible when the productivity of labour is sufficiently high to yield its own value (determined by the value of the labourer's subsistence requirements and received by him in the form of a wage) in just a part of the working day. This part is given over to what Marx calls necessary labour. The rest of the day is devoted to surplus labour which produces surplus value for the capitalist. This is the basis of his beloved profit.

So the capitalist's wealth 'consists directly in the appropriation of surplus labour-time' (G p708).² To increase his wealth, he sets about increasing this time 'by all the means of art and science' ie by further development of the productive forces. In particular this development is the means to increase the production of what Marx calls relative surplus value - surplus value produced by reducing necessary labour time and therefore increasing the time spent working for the capitalist. Marx explicitly describes this most important form of surplus value production as 'production... based on the increase and development of the productive forces' (G p408).

Poverty for the many, wealth for the few

Yet for all its technological advances, capitalism still rests upon the extraction of the surplus that the worker produces over and above his 'necessities'. Clearly, what are his 'necessities' vary according to social and political conditions. But nevertheless, it remains the case that as capitalism has developed the productive forces and expanded wealth, the amount that has gone to the workers has not increased at anything like the same rate. It may even fall, as increased productivity in production of the worker's items of consumption cheapens them and so decreases the value of his labour-power. Everywhere it goes - South Korea, Taiwan, the former socialist countries - capitalism recreates this essential relation: wealth at one pole, subsistence at the other. Meanwhile the conditions of life of the reserve army of labour remain below those of the working population; not to mention the impoverished masses of the Third World whose livelihoods are destroyed by big capital's cheap commodities and who do not even rank as part of its reserve army of labour.

In this way, Marx shows that no matter how much capitalism develops the productive forces, it still cannot solve basic problems facing humanity. The enormous productivity it develops floods the market with cheap goods and, in order to sell them and realise the surplus value contained in them, fosters an almost

psychotic consumerism in which people become mere appendages of their material possessions. Yet it cannot provide basics such as decent housing, food, health care. At the same time, it sucks in vast amounts of energy and raw materials and spews out dangerous waste, with appalling environmental consequences.

The limits of capitalist expansion

But capitalism is not only limited in its ability to provide for humanity. It is also a violently destructive system which periodically lays waste to industries and even entire countries through crises and wars. Marx shows that this destructive tendency arises from a fundamental contradiction at the heart of capital: 'The means - unconditional development of the productive forces of society - comes continually into conflict with the limited end, the self-expansion of the existing capital.' (CIII p250)

The reason for the conflict is that in increasing the productive power of labour, through greater investment in machinery, capital diminishes as a proportion of its whole the very element which effects its self-expansion - living labour. The machinery will impart a portion of its value, determined by the dead labour embodied in it, to the value of each commodity produced. But only living human labour creates fresh value and, because it produces more than its own value, expands the value invested in it by the capitalist. The increase of machinery per labourer will reduce the rate of expansion of the total value invested. It will increase relative surplus value and therefore the mass of profits, but the rate of profit will fall. Hence '...the development of the productivity of labour creates out of the falling rate of profit a law which at a certain point comes into antagonistic conflict with this development and must be overcome constantly through crises.' (CIII p258).

This law is not some technical formula. Capital is a social relation within which there is room for counteracting tendencies, which can compensate for the falling rate of profit and therefore cushion its effect upon the expansion of production. Today's politicians are busy illustrating this: reducing deductions from profit by



Fighting back against poverty in South Korea

lowering taxes; attacking working conditions, reducing wages and lengthening the working day; shifting production to areas where labour-power is cheaper or less productive.

But in certain periods, political and social conditions mean that the only solution is crisis. The rate of profit is simply too low. Capital pulls out of production. Crisis ensues, halting the development of the productive forces, effecting their partial destruction, throwing businesses to the wall and workers onto the dole queue in order that profitability can be restored and accumulation recommence. As David Yaffe and Paul Bullock argue, the crisis is 'the strongest counteracting tendency to the long-run tendency of the rate of profit to fall' (RC3/4 p22). The 'momentaneous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great part of the capital violently lead it back to the point where it can go on.' (G p750)

The growth of monopoly capital

Marxism also explains the massive concentration of capital that takes place as it accumulates, leading to its monopoly or imperialist phase³ and threatening crises of an ever-more destructive character. The rise of monopolies is a direct consequence of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. As relative surplus value is expanded by increasing the productivity of labour, the levels of investment required on machinery exclude all but the biggest and strongest capitals. At the same time, it is only large enterprises that can lay claim to a suf-

ficient portion of the dwindling mass of profits and thereby compensate for the falling rate of profit. Crises only accelerate the trend towards concentration and monopoly as capitals that survive the crises pick the bones of those that do not.

Lenin describes how in this stage of capitalist development, there is 'a tendency to stagnation and decay'. To secure their share of surplus value, monopolies seek to subordinate whole areas of the economy to their profit-making, fixing prices with their rivals, agreeing production levels with all the precision of the planned economy they profess to hate. Hence '...even temporarily, the motive cause of technical and, consequently, of all other progress disappears to a certain extent and, further, the economic possibility arises of deliberately retarding technical progress'. (IHSC p240)

Lenin also explains the parasitic character of the monopoly phase of capitalism. Because of the difficulties of competing with the monopolies and the low rate of profit in industrial production, a whole strata of the bourgeoisie ceases direct involvement in the productive process. As Marx observed, for the capitalist 'steel-making is simply a pretext for surplus-making' (CI p250) and if stocks and shares or the money markets will yield a 'surplus', a return, more reliably than industry, the capitalist will shift from steel to stocks. It is this trend that gives rise to the class of what Lenin calls 'coupon-clippers'.

The increasing importance of the activities of this section of the bourgeoisie is a notable feature of the imperialist economies. Yet they provide a precarious basis for the production of wealth. Marx describes capital's 'tendency to forget and abstract from' the laws governing its self-realisation and expansion. This tendency is even more marked amongst the coupon-clippers. The fact that their sphere of operation is several steps removed from the source of actual value-creation - the labour process - only eases the abstraction from and forgetfulness of the laws governing value-creation. When these laws reassert themselves, it is discovered that the paper wealth - the share certificates, the loan agreements - cannot call up the value stamped upon them. History is littered with the debris that results,

from the Wall Street Crash to the Barings Bank collapse. As Dickens observed, 'A mania prevailed, a bubble burst, four stockbrokers took villa residences in Florence, four hundred nobodies were ruined.'

Greater growth, greater collapse

Silber claims that 'central to Lenin's framework... was the view that its monopoly character inevitably "retards" the further development of the society's productive forces.' (p63) In fact, Lenin warns the opposite: 'It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency to decay precludes the rapid growth of capitalism. It does not. In the epoch of imperialism, certain branches of industry, certain strata of the bourgeoisie and certain countries betray, to a greater or lesser degree, now one and now another of these tendencies. On the whole, capitalism is growing far more rapidly than before.' (IHSC p259) Lenin points to the dominance of Britain as a stabilising factor for a period of the last century. In the post-war period, dominance by the US has played a similar role.

But Lenin argues that the development is uneven, rendering monopoly capitalism prone to crises even more destructive than those of its earlier phase. Its far greater concentration threatens a more devastating collapse. When a younger capital emerges, expanding at a greater rate than its older, monopolistic rivals, it forces them to adapt to its more productive practices or die. The competitive struggles that result subject humanity to a scale of barbarism unseen in human history, forcing it to pay an ever higher price for the restoration of profitability and the resumption of capitalist production. In this century alone, two world wars and fascism have been necessary for capitalism to secure little more than two decades of post-war prosperity, and that limited largely to the imperialist world alone.

So the Marxist tradition argues that capitalism is a historically determinate system. It can continue to develop the productive forces, but the laws governing it mean that 'development' will also bring destruction and devastation. This does not mean socialists believe in what Silber called 'capitalism's looming encounter with extinction' (p64). Whether or not capitalist crises will lead to socialism is a political question. A working class movement is required that is conscious of the trends and contradictions in the system and is organised to prevent the resolution of those contradictions at its expense. Lenin's theory of monopoly capitalism and the labour aristocracy spawned by it explains why in the imperialist countries such a movement is so hard to build. But the task to build it remains and, as increasing sections of the world's population find themselves exposed to the barbarity of the capitalist system, it is more urgent than ever. ■

(1) For a full exposition, see 'Inflation, The Crisis and the Post War Boom' D Yaffe and P Bullock *Revolutionary Communist* 3/4, in particular pp17-27
(2) Abbreviations: C = Capital; G = Grundrisse; IHSC = Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism; RC = Revolutionary Communist
(3) A longer article would deal with the consequences of this stage of development for the Third World

Ever since the attempted escape from Whitemoor in September 1994, there has been speculation about the building of a 'Supermax' top security prison. The Learmont Inquiry, which examined both the Whitemoor escape and that from Parkhurst in January 1995, recommends the construction of two new gaols: a High Security Prison and a Control Prison. The former is to contain prisoners rated as extremely dangerous and likely to attempt escape; the latter to act as a punishment block for the entire system, run on a 'bad behaviour gets you in; good behaviour gets you out' ethos, with:

'several regimes (three or more), starting with minimal privileges, restricted movement and little or no association with other inmates. Progress to other levels would be earned until, finally, the prisoner would have privileges more akin to a standard prison. A decision would be made at this stage about whether they should rejoin the mainstream.' [Learmont p145.5.50]

As well as being in tune with the introduction of incentive-based regimes throughout the prison system, this proposal recreates the structure of the Wakefield Control Units, a 1970s experiment based on sensory deprivation and behaviour modification. It also echoes the chilling regime of United States Penitentiary (USP) Marion, Illinois, which until this year was the worst custodial fate the US could offer its politically 'subversive' inhabitants.

Marion

'USP Marion comprises nine living units, B through I and K... D, E and F prisoners are let out of their cells one and a half hours each day... [This] is usually spent in the narrow hallway immediately outside the cell... One hour of outdoor recreation in a fenced area is offered once a week in winter and three times a week in summer. The only chance prisoners have to take showers is during the exercise period. The cell itself measures six by eight feet. Meals are taken through the bars and eaten in the cell... Beds are concrete slabs with pads laid on top of them. At each of the four corners of the bunk is a ring so that the men can be strapped down whenever prison authorities think it is appropriate. Jackie Leyden from National Public Radio reports that "guards have the power to chain a man spread-eagled and naked to a concrete bunk". Prisoners have reported being chained like that for days at a time.

'No-one makes any pretensions about rehabilitation... Prisoners may take correspondence courses, but only one at a time. The prison feeds educational tapes into the cells via closed circuit TV but no instruction, discussion or group classrooms exist. There are no large-group religious services. Prison officials tamper with letters and legal mail... Visitation rights are severely restricted and no contact visits are ever allowed...

'Prisoners in C-Unit spend slightly more time out of their cells, and are considered for transfer to B-Unit. B-Unit serves as an "honour unit", the last stage before transfer out of Marion. Here prisoners can spend all day outside their cells [and] eat meals in the dining room... They also work seven hours a day in the prison's factory for 22 cents an hour (which makes the monthly labour bill for 50 prisoners less than \$2,000), during which period they make \$250,000 worth of electrical cable for the Department of Defence...

'At the other end of the spectrum... are G, H and I-Units. In these units, what minute breathing space exists in D, E and F-Units is further restricted. Cells contain only a toilet, sink and concrete bed. Prisoners

spend only one hour a day out of their cells, are strip-searched before and after exercise periods, are allowed only one phone call per month and three showers per week, and are put in both handcuffs and leg-irons and escorted by three guards, one holding their handcuffs, when they are out of their cells.' [From Alcatraz to Marion to Florence', Fay Dowker and Glenn Good, in *Cages of Steel*, Ed: Churchill and Vander Wall, Maisonneuve Press, 1992]

The authors point out that 'progress' through Marion's system is entirely dependent on the whims of prison guards and governed by no statutory rules. There is 'apparently no rhyme or reason as to why prisoners get sent to Marion, nor how and why they leave'.

Marion opened in 1963, the year Alcatraz closed. Alcatraz had become known as the 'end of the line' in the US prison system, infamous for its brutality. Marion was designed as a modern replacement but the planned regime was not introduced immediately; instead it was phased in over a number of years, by means of deliberately increasing repression to provoke a response from prisoners and using that response to justify further restrictions. Following work strikes in 1972-3, 60 men were locked into

segregation and the Control Unit established. In 1983, after the killing of two guards, the entire gaol was 'locked down' and has remained so ever since.

The public justification for Marion was always that it housed the 'worst of the worst', violent uncontrollable prisoners, unmanageable at other establishments. The truth is far different. A 1985 Congressional committee concluded that 80 per cent of inmates did not deserve the level of security at Marion. Dowker and Good point out who the prison was really designed for:

'Prisoners have been transferred to Marion for writing "too many" lawsuits, for protesting the brutality of the prison system, or for angering prison officials in some other way. In addition, among the many political prisoners who have been in Marion, American Indian Movement leader Leonard Peltier, Sekou Odinga, member of the Black Liberation Army, Alan Berkman, Tim Blunk and Ray Levasseur were sent directly to Marion from court, thereby disproving the claim that prisoners at Marion have been violent at other prisons. According to Ralph Arons, former warden at Marion: "The purpose of the Marion Control Unit is to control revolutionary attitudes in the prison system and in the society at large".'

Even the repression at Marion became insufficient for the land of 'three strikes and you're out', judicial lynching, boot-camps and chain-gangs. In 1989 the Bureau of Prisons (BoP) announced it was constructing a purpose-built Control Unit Prison at Florence, Colorado. This new torture-chamber would not need to be screwed down bit by bit; the regime would start from day one.

Mountbatten, King and other friends of Supermax

In Britain, whether to concentrate all the country's 'most dangerous' prisoners in one place or not has been debated since the 1960s. In 1966 the Mountbatten Report, commissioned by Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, following the escapes of train-robbers Ronnie Biggs and Charles



Superthug: Howard recently visited the US to study new methods of repression in gaols

Wilson and Soviet spy George Blake, recommended the building of one 'super-prison'. The government rejected Mountbatten's proposal, commissioning a second report by Sir

tech, high-security prison, modelled on Oak Park Heights, Minnesota:

'a well-designed earth-sheltered "new generation" facility... built into the natural contours of the landscape so that it is surrounded by blank walls which in turn are surrounded by earth. With each living and working "complex" facing inwards over its own exercise yard and thence to the central communal sports-field, would-be escapers find that their only means

ators of such prisons and is certainly not the reason that Learmont and Howard are interested.

Oak Park Heights

Michael Howard is said to be keen on Oak Park Heights as a model and has visited the prison recently. Canadian prison struggle magazine *Prison News Service (PNS)* reports that Oak Park Heights prisoners are forced to wear nylon face masks when being moved between units or to and from recreation. These masks have holes for eyes and nose but not mouth; the pretext for this humiliation being that prisoners might spit at guards.

Florence - the new end of the line

Florence is a complex of four federal prisons in Fremont County, Colorado, an economically depressed area where imprisonment is the only growth industry. Even before the new complex opened, there were nine state prisons, employing one in ten of the local workforce. The announcement that the USA's harshest punishment unit would be built in the area was welcomed by residents, 1,000 of whom attended a barbecue hosted by the BoP. The prison is five miles from a uranium milling company and the area has been extensively radioactively contaminated.

The Florence complex cost \$150 million and has an annual payroll of \$44 million. It contains 168 video surveillance cameras and 1,400 electronic gates. There are 416 cells in the Administrative Maximum (Supermax) prison, each measuring less than 9' by 10'. They contain a bed, desk, stool and shelf of reinforced concrete, a toilet and a shower, reducing to the minimum the need to leave the cell and the possibility of contact with other prisoners. Furthermore, while it is virtually impossible to purchase a black-and-white TV in the USA in 1995, Florence has them in all cells. Television is a useful form of sedation and control but colour might give the public the impression prisoners were being pampered!

The first prisoners were moved into the Supermax earlier this year, most of them flown in from Marion under heavy security. They report that whenever moved for any purpose they are handcuffed and surrounded by guards. One prisoner sums up the intention of Florence as 'geared to do exactly what Marion has done for years, bring out the worst potential of those it forces into its dungeons. The expressed plan is to break our spirit.' [PNS May/June 1995]

Supermax UK?

The only thing preventing the British government from immediately building its own 'Supermax' (which it would no doubt run alongside the dispersal system, not instead of it) is money, with the Treasury unprepared to fund such an expensive project. Howard is now touting for private finance although Learmont was against such an option. Two possible sites have so far been identified, one near Nottingham, the other in Staffordshire.

In the USA there is a small but growing network of groups campaigning against Control Unit Prisons. In Britain, although prison issues are still very difficult to mobilise around, there is increased awareness among some activists, particularly those confronting oppressive laws such as the CJA. If Britain does go ahead with a Supermax prison, it will be vital that the movement which has actively fought the building of roads and the destruction of the environment puts its talents and experience to work to oppose construction from the very start.

Nicki Jameson

NO SUPERMAX HERE!



Armed guard at East Jersey state prison - control unit-style prisons have proliferated throughout the US

Leon Radzinowicz and accepting his recommendation for seven 'dispersal' prisons for 'serious offenders'.

The 'concentration versus dispersal' argument has resurfaced many times since, usually following acts of defiance by prisoners, such as the 1983 Albany rooftop protest or 1987 Gartree helicopter escape. A variety of inquiry teams have deliberated on the subject, including the May Committee (1979), which recommended continuing the dispersal system, and the Control Review Committee (1984), which recommended concentration. And, although today's loudest exponents of the 'Supermax' come from the Tory right, 'concentration' has always had its fans on the so-called 'left' of the penal policy debate.

A few weeks after the Whitemoor breakout, *The Guardian* carried an article entitled 'Breaking down the bars' by Professor Roy King. King was on the Control Review Committee and is a strong advocate of concentration. His article put the case for a high-

of egress from the living units draws them inexorably deeper into the prison.' [The Guardian 12 October 1994]

The main 'liberal' argument put forward in support of concentration is that putting all the 'worst' prisoners in one place is fairer to the rest of the prison population. Leaving aside the question of who decides which prisoners are 'dangerous' or 'subversive' and according to what criteria, there is no evidence to suggest that the building of one or two extremely secure and repressive prisons would lead to a relaxation at other gaols. The US experience indicates the exact opposite, with Control Unit prisons proliferating throughout the system.

There is a subsidiary, and even less credible argument, that massive external security would permit a more humane regime inside the Control Prison itself. This may be theoretically possible, but was obviously far from the intentions of the US cre-

Full Sutton strikers attacked by riot squad

On 15 November E-wing, Full Sutton, saw violent scenes as 200 baton-wielding riot screws attacked prisoners engaged in peaceful protest.

Jade Jackson describes the build-up to the protest, as over the preceding months every entitlement prisoners thought they had was removed, with no organised response, until finally they could stand no more:

'...it started with new procedures for a cell search. You would be strip-searched, then told to wait outside

with the door closed, while the screws searched your cell. Then it moved on to you being stripped and locked in another cell while they searched yours, so if a screw planted something it was too bad, guilty on adjudication...

'Confident this didn't stir up trouble, they moved onto censorship of all prisoners' mail. Then they decided to stop us having things sent or handed in, and that meant everything, including Christmas and birthday presents. Everything we wanted, we had to get cash sent in and buy through the canteen. Still no trouble, so onto 'volumetric control' whereby all your personal belongings had to fit in two boxes... Next on the agenda was to be the 'incentives scheme', a three-tier divide-and-rule scheme that categorises the prisoner into Basic, Standard or Enhanced Performance. Basic can only spend £2.50, Standard £10 and Enhanced £15 private cash per week.'

The 'Incentives and Earned Privileges' system is being phased in throughout the system and due to be fully operational by the end of the

'A "pin-number" system, where we hand over all our phone numbers and personal details of everybody we phone, so the prison can put them on computer and when we want to phone we punch in our designated pin-number and the computer tells us if we can phone that number, depending on whether it has been passed by security.'

On Monday 13 November Full Sutton prisoners took strike action against the increasing repression. Four wings refused to work, nothing

unless they resumed work they wouldn't be paid for the previous week. E-wing prisoners refused to return to their cells until this decision was reversed as they had already earned the money. George Dault takes up the story:

'At 5.22pm riot squads, about 200 of them, entered the upper and lower levels of E-wing and took out with force anybody on the landings. Seventeen of us managed to get into cell and when they reached it, they said if we didn't come out they would take the door off. They did try but couldn't get in. After a while we said we would come out if a governor and doctor were there. This was arranged. We were told to come out one at a time and were cuffed behind our backs and told if we made one false move we would get hurt.'

George, Jade and another four prisoners were moved that night to The Wolds, and in total between 26 and 60 (figures given out vary tremendously) Full Sutton prisoners were moved to other gaols. Those at The Wolds have not been charged with anything but are held in segregation, allowed one half-hour visit per fortnight and are not even receiving the £2.50 'Basic' pay. Full Sutton refuses to send on their property and the prisoners suspect it has been destroyed.

FRFI sends solidarity to all Full Sutton prisoners victimised for standing up for their rights. We are keen to hear further accounts of what took place and how those suspected of involvement have been treated since.

Nicki Jameson



Prison workshop - in Full Sutton production was at a standstill for three days

year. Prisoners at Swaleside, one of the first gaols to bring it in, have instigated court action to judicially review the new regime.

With the incentives scheme looming on their horizon, Full Sutton prisoners learned of another measure to be implemented in December:

was made in the workshops and the prison had to employ staff to replace kitchen workers. Tuesday was the same and Wednesday looked set to be the same again, but the governor decided to try and break the strike.

Wednesday was E-wing's pay-day and prisoners there were told that

Inhumane conditions at Durham H Wing

We write in connection with recent changes on H Wing. Many of these discriminate against foreign nationals and those who do not have regular family support or visits due to distance or circumstances.

Private cash has been limited to £15 a week, inclusive of food, tobacco, phone cards, clothing and all other items. Out of 45 women, only two have family locally, so phonecards are very expensive, especially for foreign nationals. Many women cannot afford the contact they need with families, friends and legal teams.

Secondly, we have to put all our property into two boxes. Surplus items must go to central property and we

can only change items once a year.

All prisoners here are long-term with ten years and over. Durham is a high-security prison and we don't have the freedoms others enjoy. It is a repressive atmosphere, as we can only get off the wing on exercise and there is no grass even there, only concrete and more walls.

The new privilege system is open to discrimination and certain officers are already threatening those they do not like, or who they feel educationally inferior to.

Sandra Pereira

on behalf of the women on H Wing, HMP Durham, Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HU

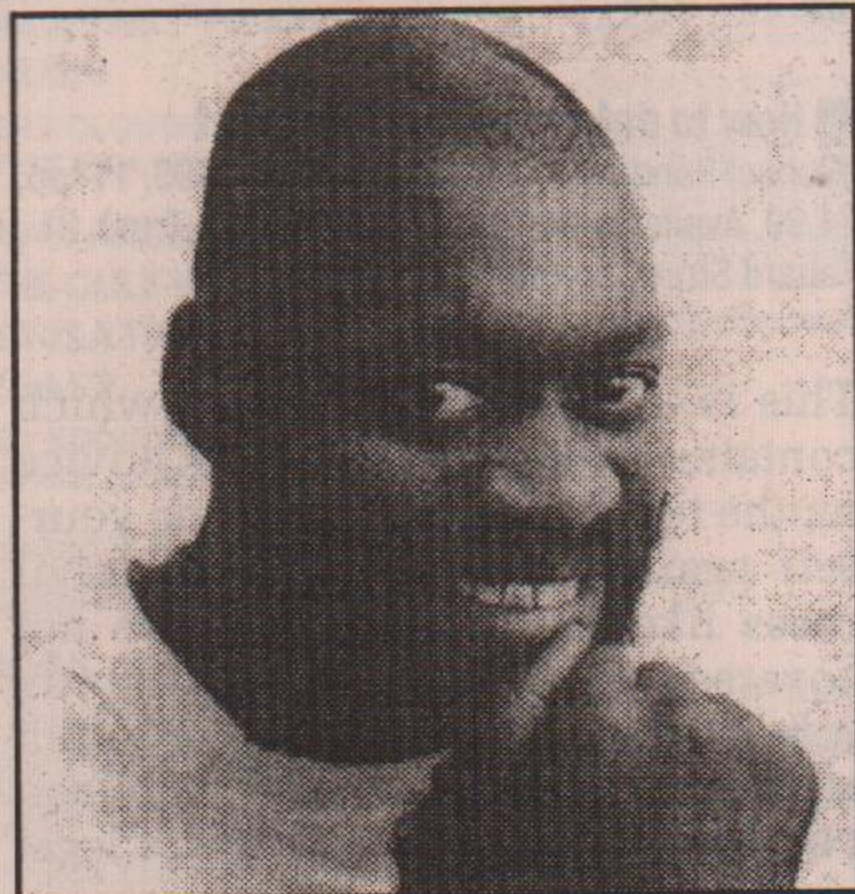
FREE POOLE AND MILLS

Having prepared themselves to have their appeal heard from 12-15 December, Gary Mills and Tony Poole have now been told it has been adjourned on the request of the prosecution. They were convicted in 1990 of the murder of Gloucester drugs dealer Hensley Wiltshire. Their appeal will hear shocking pathology evidence indicating that the real murderers were the local police who had Wiltshire in their custody for the seven and a half hours before he died.

WINSTON SILCOTT - 10 years too long

Winston Silcott has now been a prisoner for over ten years. Together with Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite, he was convicted of the murder of PC Blakelock at the Broadwater Farm uprising in 1995. All three subsequently had their convictions reversed by the Court of Appeal and Engin and Mark were released in 1991; Winston remains in gaol, serving another life sentence for the killing of Anthony Smith in 1984. That Winston was on remand for the Blakelock killing clearly affected his trial in the Smith case and there is

strong evidence that Smith attacked Winston, who then acted in self-defence; however, the Home Secretary refuses to re-open the case.



Winston Silcott

Throughout his years in gaol Winston has always helped and advised other framed prisoners. Tony Poole recently told FRFI: 'When we started out, we had no idea what to do or who to contact. We were fortunate to meet Winston Silcott at Gartree. He gave us names and addresses and said, "Write to everyone and keep on writing until they take notice".'

Winston Silcott (B74053) is in HMP Maidstone, County Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1UZ. The Winston Silcott Defence Campaign can be contacted via PO Box 6796, London, N15 4PB. ■

Update on Whitemoor protests

Prisoners in the Special Security Unit and the segregation unit at Whitemoor continue to protest, both by litigation and by direct action.

The SSU now houses five prisoners, at least two of whom are taking or planning litigation against detention in maximum security conditions. POWs Michael O'Brien and Patrick Kelly had also been planning court action, to challenge their security classification but the Home Office chose to head off another potential High Court defeat and declassified them from 'Exceptional' to 'High' Risk, allowing the Prison Service to move them from the SSU and save face.

In the segregation unit the dirty protest by Dennis Prescott and Ronnie Easterbrook continues. Ronnie Easterbrook wrote to FRFI:

'I am 64, have only one functioning lung, have arthritis, and have been "high risk" category for the whole of the eight years I have served of the politically motivated four discretionary lives I was sentenced to.

'Whitemoor block is not conducive to good health or the prolongation of life at the best of times. On protest one is limited to two pints of water a day, the worst of the food - both contaminated in obvious and traditional ways on occasion - no furniture, a bed on the concrete floor of tired foam, reading material and all possessions banned other than envelopes, paper, stamps, pen, glasses, shoes and copper rheumatism bracelet. Bedclothes, below statutory minimum, as in all blocks I've visited. Recently I was informed by a governor, "You are one of a select group who will never be released". This was no surprise. I defended myself as my barrister maintained he could not put forward a defence that was political in tone. My reading out the full report of the Amnesty International investigation

into the shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland, and my contention that Maggie Thatcher had caused it to be implemented in England as a potential deterrent to robbers, and I had been "set up" to be such a victim, ensured I would be the recipient of all the venom our system of "justice" was capable of spewing out.

'When I was brought down this block in March I went on protest due to oppressive and unnecessarily hostile treatment. Over the next seven weeks there was the usual oppression, plus, for a 12-day period, the unusual one of flooding my cell with water from the sewage system. They were able to utilise a partially blocked pipe to cause overflow, which was directed into my cell by a dam of sheets and towels. My mattress became a giant sponge and I would try to "bail out" with my vest and paper cups to dry a patch of floor to lie on at night. Naturally, this affected both my chest and arthritis and several times the doctor asked me to go to the health care for a rest. After seven weeks I went. Some eight weeks later five or six staff came to my door. One said "You are going back to the seg." I went back on protest.

'In recent weeks I have been asked to go to health care "for a rest". It has finally dawned on me what this is all about. The conditions of the block, together with deteriorating weather - not to mention the "special treatment" I and Dennis Prescott, enjoy - leave me physically vulnerable, and by establishing a pattern of abuse and temporary remission, they ensure that when my health breaks I die in hospital, and what more natural and ordinary than a man of my age passing away of, say, pneumonia

in hospital? But a man of 64 dying down the block after x amount of months on protest over conditions might strike a sour note!

Michael O'Brien is now at Full Sutton. Patrick Kelly is still at Whitemoor and suffering the effects of his brutal treatment. Following a skin cancer operation at an outside hospital, he was returned to Whitemoor to convalesce in a cold, dirty segregation cell. The cancer has now recurred.

FRFI asks readers to show solidarity with Patrick Kelly (EN1194) Ronnie Easterbrook (B88459) and Dennis Prescott (CF0338) by writing to them at HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR, and by sending letters of protest about their treatment to the Prison Service Cleland House, Page Street, London SW1P 4RP. Friends of Ronnie Easterbrook will be handing in a petition and letters of protest to the Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 at 12 noon on 15 December. ■

Deaths in custody

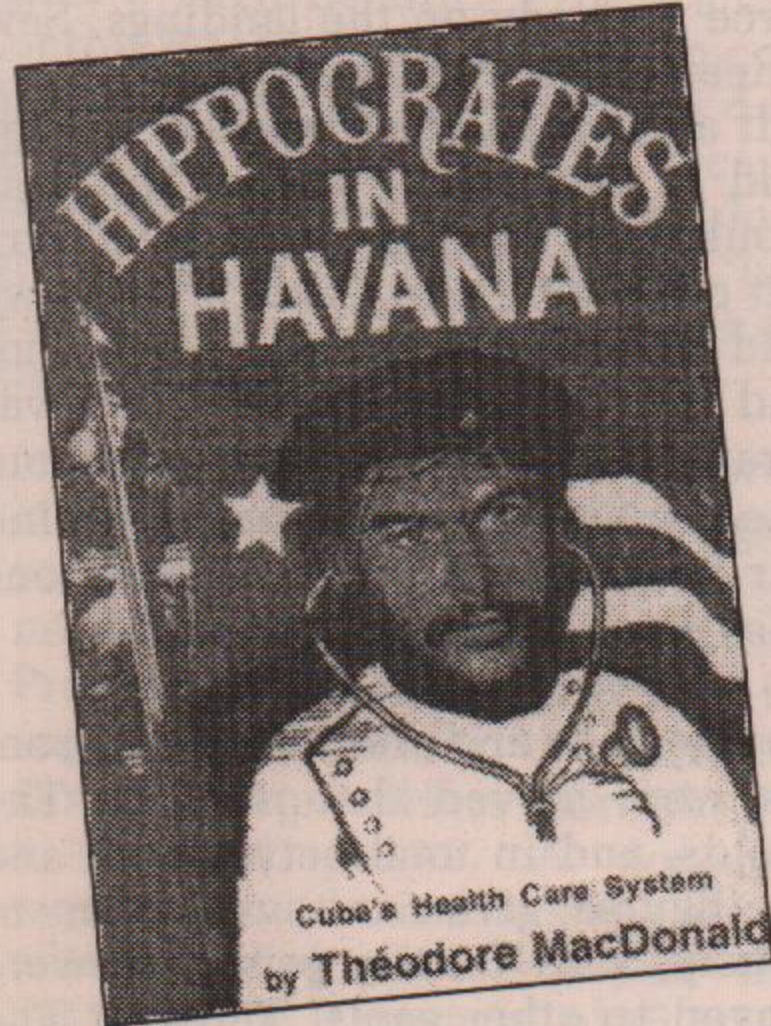
Self-inflicted and other non-natural deaths in prison in England and Wales 28 September-26 November 1995

Shaun McGinley, 26, HMP Preston
Christopher Greenaway, 16, Stoke Heath
David Giles, 28, Bullingdon
Raja Khan, 24, The Mount
Garry Bland, 30, Grendon
Christopher Lace, 23, Moorland
Dennis Stevens, 29, Dartmoor
[Dennis was found dead in a punishment cell, still held in a body-belt. Cause of death said to be choking on his own vomit.]
Darrel Tester, 19, Dover
Keith Mountford, 37, Blakenhurst
Peter Davies, 26, Erlestoke
G Atkinson, 30, Full Sutton
Frank Whelton, 28, Whatton
Garry Britton, 30, Frankland
Lee Coleman, 19, Low Newton
Kevin Stevenson, 35, Exeter
Stewart Ball, 21, Lincoln
Clair Boseley, 34, Holloway

[Information from Prison Watch]

Hippocrates in Havana

■ **Hippocrates in Havana: Cuba's Health Care System**
 Théodore MacDonald, published in English and Spanish by Bolivar Books, 1995. Available from Able Publishing Services, 13 Station Road, Knebworth, Hertfordshire, £9.95



This book is an account of the health system developed in Cuba from the Revolution in 1959 to 1995, written by someone who worked as a teacher and a doctor in Cuba.

Historically, significant medical successes have more to do with social policy than medical expertise. This is well illustrated in this book which, mirroring reality in Cuba, addresses health issues in the context of the social and educational set up. In Cuba, the work of the Ministries of Health, Education, Social Welfare and the FMC (women's movement) is coordinated.

In describing and analysing the health system, MacDonald shows the importance of Cuba's struggle to empower people and involve them in their society. Cuba doesn't just happen to have produced a population whose Standardised Mortality Ratios, Infant Mortality Figures, Maternal Morbidity Figures and life expectancy are similar to or superior to the richest industrialised nations; it has

been able to do this against a continuous and worsening US blockade, precisely because of the ideological and moral commitment to enhancing human dignity.

The book begins with a stark account of conditions in pre-revolutionary Cuba – the poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy – followed by a political overview of the lead-up to the 1959 revolution. As MacDonald points out, 'winning a revolutionary victory over reactionary forces and unpopular government forces is nowhere near as difficult as winning the revolutionary peace afterwards.'

On 1 January 1959, the first three revolutionary priorities that Fidel Castro announced were agrarian reform, universal access to education and comprehensive health care. Emergency measures were immediately taken to recruit staff for schools and the literacy programme, hospitals and rural clinics; for example, prostitutes were retrained as medical staff and teachers.

The schooling system in Cuba plays an integral role in forming the medical and paramedical personnel, from infant daycare centres onwards. The selection procedure for medical school reflects Cuba's attitude to health and education and responsibility to society. Students need to attain a certain academic standard, but a report from their local Committee for the Defence of the Revolution and a record of their socialist labour projects throughout school carries as much weight. The aim is to avoid producing doctors who are academically capable but who lack the people-orientated qualities necessary for proper health care.

Great emphasis early in the revolution was put on public health, mother and child welfare, and the role of the FMC, who also pushed forward legislation for the family law code of 1974, was central to this.

The effects of the continuous US

blockade, described as a tightening noose, and Cuba's internationalism are a constant background theme. The book examines, too, how Cuba has addressed issues ranging from HIV/AIDS to community medicine to pharmacological and biotechnological initiatives.

The book is illustrated throughout both by statistics on health indices and by personal accounts from the author and others, with an appendix from the Ministry of Public Health in Havana 1990 on demographic data. This makes the book an enjoyable and moving read while providing important facts and figures.

The book concludes with two important discussions. The first regarding the balance, under present conditions in Cuba, of high tech research and interventionist procedures versus primary health care. This is linked to the second discussion comparing the health care systems in Britain, Canada, the US and Cuba and addresses issues of health care costs and health as a commodity.

This book gives an inspiring account of 'how a third world economy manages to produce first world health care statistics'. It is not sufficient for us to admire Cuba's statistics, we must recognise that they have been achieved by an ongoing commitment to socialism against all odds.

By weaving together Cuba's revolutionary history, its education and social policies into the story of health care, Théodore MacDonald does justice to the statistics, as real solidarity with Cuba is recognising the gains of socialism and taking those ideas forward. He concludes:

'If all of this achievement should be destroyed by socially reactionary forces over which Cuba has no control, ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for all of us.'

Hannah Culler

Some basic rights for women

■ **Social Focus on Women**
 Central Statistical Office 1995, £25

If a society is to be judged by the position occupied by women within it, then this collection of statistics offers a glaring indictment of Britain today.

It follows on from the UN survey of sexual equality in August, which put British women near the bottom of the European league in terms of child-care and equal pay. Women make up 44% of the workforce, yet earn an average of £100 a week less than men. Overwhelmingly concentrated in low-paid work such as secretarial and clerical jobs, health, sales and personal services (eg hairdressing), full-time women employees in Britain work longer hours than other European countries. 45 per cent of women in employment work part-time. A third of women working full-time earn £190 a week or less, compared with only 13% of men. While almost half of secondary school teachers are women, only three in ten secondary school heads and deputy heads are women.

For a small, privileged elite of young middle-class women, life has improved. There are now, for example, more women than men solicitors under 30. For the majority, income has fallen. Women make up the majority of the poor in Britain today – particularly single mothers and single pensioners. While in 1993 only just over one in ten of all women received income support, it was

received by seven in ten lone mothers, and a quarter of women pensioners living alone.

Black and Asian women, in particular, are disproportionately disadvantaged. They are not only more likely to be unemployed than white women, but overwhelmingly more likely to be long-term unemployed. In spring 1994, one in five of all mothers was a lone parent; more than half of black mothers are lone parents. With the recent announcement of cuts in benefit to lone parents and all parties gearing up for a pre-election crusade against them, one of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in our society will find itself plunged into yet greater hardship.



In 1993, there were 8,000 incidents of domestic violence against women – half of all incidents of violence against women were domestic violence. Over a third of the women

involved had been subjected to three or more assaults. Although the recent Family and Domestic Violence Bill, scuppered by the 'pro-family' right, is now being reintroduced in modified form, there is little reason to suppose that this situation will improve.

The data provided is irritatingly patchy for a £25 publication – a lack of comparative statistics, for example, or any consideration of how measures such as the Child Support Act have affected women. We hear about women's fear of rape, but are given no figures on their experience of it. Nevertheless, the message is clear: if you are a woman, particularly if you are a single parent, black and/or elderly, then it is time to fight back

against this racist, hypocritical, thieving government for a decent standard of living and some basic rights.

Cat Wiener

Amazing Gertrude

■ **The Suspect Generation**
 Text and graphics by Gertrude Elias, illustrations by Kaethe Kollwitz, Mahmoud Sabri and Julian Motau. Published by London Voices, £7.95



This autobiography is a desktop publication and that is appropriate to the story. All her life Gertrude Elias, book jacket designer, illustrator, cartoonist and political activist, has been at the centre of left-wing politics but at the edge of society. The 82 years of her life are described in a dizzying rush; postwar Austria, the short-lived Viennese welfare socialism of the 1920s, the growth of fascism, the agonies of the Second World War. Then straight into the youth culture of America in the 1950s with the accompanying anti-communism of McCarthy and parallel to this the rise of the liberation struggles of colonised peoples.

The major events of this century are present not as background but as intertwined with the life of Gertrude. Never a passive onlooker, she is herself a progressive element in the triumphs and defeats of the working class and anti-imperialist movements of her times.

This autobiography tells about those who took up the debate and organised around questions like women and the medical profession, women and mental health, the conditions of immigrant workers in Britain

and in the Palestinian refugee camps. The reader is constantly reminded that nothing good just happens. Ordinary people, or rather people in ordinary circumstances make it happen. This is the story of one such woman who never gave up, and always moved on.

One detail in particular fascinates. In January 1941 Elias designed eight full-page colour cartoons depicting the rise of the fascists and sent them

to the Minister of Information which was dealing with anti-Nazi propaganda in Britain. George Orwell's anti-communist satire *Animal Farm* was published in 1944. The similarity of Gertrude Elias' Nazi swine listening to their Führer in the beer cellar in Munich and the composition drawn for the cartoon film of *Animal Farm* in 1952 is too great to be coincidence. No acknowledgement was ever made and the fates of the two animal creations could hardly have been more different. Gertrude's Nazi pigs were rejected and ignored for many years while Orwell's work was translated into 14 languages, selling 9 million copies in 25 years, having been made compulsory reading for school children and students of English. *Animal Farm* was also used as a weapon against the Soviet Union in the Cold War and was influential in the restoration of the Conservative Party in Government in 1954.

Gertrude Elias has dedicated her life to the progressive movement worldwide. We are glad to see her at *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* forums where her lively contributions are always welcome.

Susan Davidson

How to defend yourself in court

■ **How to defend yourself in court**
 Michael Randle, Civil Liberties Trust, 1995, 114pp, £4.99. Available from The Civil Liberties Trust, 21 Tabard Street, London SE1 4LA

This is a useful little manual which contains some very sensible advice on the techniques of defending yourself against criminal charges (civil cases like the McLibel trial are not covered). Perhaps more importantly it helps you to decide whether or not to defend yourself at all – if indeed you have a choice in the face of legal aid restrictions.

Randle has, of course, first hand experience. After long experience of civil disobedience in the peace movement, Michael Randle and Pat Pottle were tried at the Old Bailey in 1991 for their part in the escape of George Blake, a Soviet spy, in 1966. Blake was serving a 42 year sentence in Wormwood Scrubs; Randle was serving 18 months in the Scrubs for a direct action demonstration at a US base.

Randle and Pottle defended themselves and were acquitted despite the judge's ruling that their defence of necessity could not stand in law.

This was one of those wonderful occasions when a jury ignores the judge's directions, and so proves itself much more alive to justice than judges. The law calls such decisions 'perverse acquittals'. The Pottle case (1985) would be another example.

If you are facing political charges then there can be very good reasons for defending yourself: you can argue that your actions were reasonable or necessary even if on the face of it you broke the 'law' – arguments which a barrister or solicitor would not be able to put. This book gives some good examples.

However, for anyone facing criminal charges, even if you decide not to defend yourself, having a clear understanding of what is going on and taking an active part in your own defence is a very good idea. It is not your solicitor's or barrister's future which is being determined, it is yours. This book will help you to understand what is going on rather than being just the passive (and usually frustrated) subject of the proceedings in the dock!

Carol Brickley

CHOOSE THE

RCG

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I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG

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RCG COMMUNIST FORUMS

A new series of communist forums begins on Sunday 11 February with a report back on their recent visit to Cuba by members of the Nuestro Tiempo brigade. 2.30pm Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube Holborn). £1/50p concessions. Creche available on application.

Other forums in the coming months will be held on Sundays at the same time and venue on 10 March, 14 April, 5 May and 9 June

For further details contact the RCG at BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel: 0171 837 1688.

POWs' birthdays

Hugh Doherty 338636
HMP Full Sutton, York,
Y04 1PS 7 December

Noel Gibson 879225
Full Sutton 11 December

Liam O Duibhir MT2485
HMP Belmarsh, Thamesmead,
London, SE28 0EB 14 December

Derek Doherty EN3887
Full Sutton 31 December

Liam McCotter LB83693
Belmarsh 2 January

Jan Taylor EN1877
HMP Whittemoor, March,
Cambs, PE15 0PR 18 January

Paul Magee BT3783
Belmarsh 30 January

LETTERS write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

Birmingham Cuba Solidarity

I write on behalf of Birmingham Cuba Solidarity Group in response to the article Adam Sherwood that appeared in the October/November issue of FRFI ('Six months of CSC activity in Birmingham'), and which is factually inaccurate.

1. No one in the group opposed the Container Appeal in any way. The group made a substantial contribution to the appeal. No one was excluded.

2. No one attacked the 14 October demonstration either. The group conducted leafleting, addressed Birmingham TUC, organised a meeting with Kenia Serrano to build the demo. The group organised a contingent of 20 people for the demo itself.

3. It is not accurate to use the plural 'we' when describing RCG activity in the group.

4. The article makes derogatory, untrue remarks about named group officers and the Communist Party of Britain.

It is conceivable that some honest friends of Cuba might think less of the group, its officers and the CPB as a result of reading Mr Sherwood's article. In order to avoid any loss to the group, its officers or the CPB and the need for further correspondence of whatever nature, I request that you print this letter and a full retraction of Mr Sherwood's unsupported allegations in the next issue of FRFI.

MARTIN HOARE
for Birmingham CSC

I should like to answer the following points raised by Martin Hoare.

1. Hoare did argue in one of our meetings that we should not support the Container Appeal as it was not supported by the Cubans. After the Container's departure, I was thanked in a meeting by a member of the group executive for continually arguing for its support. Hoare did nothing.

2. Despite his denials, and as we reported at the time (see FRFI 125), Hoare declared that he was proud to have voted against the demonstration at the AGM and further attacked it saying, 'we don't necessarily have to do what the AGM decides'. The majority of CSC leafleting to build the demo was done by the RCG and attacked by the group's officers. It is true that a meeting was held with Birmingham TUC - this was set up at the RCG's suggestion. The meeting with Kenia Serrano was in fact organised by Third World First. The group had refused to hold a public meeting. At this meeting, Martin disgraced himself by throwing a tantrum in front of Kenia. Who then is giving the CSC a bad name in front of honest friends of Cuba?

3. Lastly, as a member of a collective organisation with a number of supporters and sympathisers, I find it appropriate to use the term 'we' as I do not act as an individual.

It is quite fitting that this letter should come from someone who has never attended a stall, any Container activities or the national demonstration.

Adam Sherwood

FRFI apologises that, because of the number of pressing issues covered at length in this issue of FRFI, we have been unable to print the article on the political thought of Frederick Engels advertised in FRFI 127. The article will appear in FRFI 129 in February 1996.

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Disability rights now!

On 7 November, the Disability Discrimination Bill was read in Parliament. Disabled people from all over the country came to express outrage at this legislation that in effect legalises discrimination.

It was a fantastic demonstration/direct action, with people on foot and in wheelchairs defying the police and their barriers to get onto the road, bringing the traffic to a standstill in several areas repeatedly around Parliament Square.

Don't rock the boat

As a member of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and local group member in Birmingham, I have to comment on how the local group executive mirrors the national executive - from playing down socialism to doing as little as possible with regards to organisation. What is the purpose of all this? Is it because no one wants to upset people who might otherwise be sympathetic to the plight of poor old Cuba? Is it because the executive believes that in not doing much about organisation the local groups will somehow work it out for themselves? Or is it the case with the Birmingham group that somehow the ordinary members will get it together themselves? I think not. What we are seeing with the CSC is labour movement philosophy at work

- ie don't rock the boat. Such a philosophy of course can be applied to other political persuasions. But it is most devastating when it comes from the labour movement. As history continues to show, such a philosophy destroys revolutionary zeal.

I joined the CSC precisely to work against such negative forces. My disappointment is that those same forces are now taking over a solidarity movement which offered so much hope. Or perhaps the CSC was infiltrated from its inception. Whatever, the need is to seriously look at the national executive and ask it some serious questions.

DEREK BILSTON
Birmingham

The CPGB, Bosnia and 'ethnic cleansing'

In the October/November issue of FRFI, James Tait states categorically that the CPGB is in favour of ethnic cleansing in ex-Yugoslavia. May I state equally categorically on behalf of the CPGB that it is not true.

I do not know what grounds he has for his claim, but suspect he may be confusing our call for the right of self-determination for all the peoples in the region to be respected as a carte blanche for the majority to expel the minorities. It is nothing of the sort. It is an attempt to suggest a way in which working class values can be introduced into the situation and a beginning made in re-establishing trust between workers in the area.

Comrade Tait is not interested in independent working class politics but is content to tail bourgeois forces in a vain hope of preserving a lesser evil against a greater.

PHIL KENT
Communist Party of Great Britain

The police were brutal, grabbing people out of their wheelchairs, trying to unplug the batteries of electric wheelchairs, until eventually, frustrated by their inability to contain the demonstration they closed off the west side of Parliament Square, redirected the traffic and refused to allow people out under a section of the Criminal Justice Act which allows people to be held somewhere if they are thought to be liable to act unlawfully.

KEN BODDEN
North London

IN MEMORIAM

Terry O'Halloran

It is now six years since the death of Terry O'Halloran. His early death robbed the communist movement of a powerful intellect, a storehouse of knowledge on the Irish question and an active campaigner for the rights of prisoners. His contribution to FRFI since its earliest days was that of an instinctive journalist and ruthless sub-editor. Such a comrade is irreplaceable.

Never more so than today when the questions facing the socialist movement today are such difficult ones. We live in a world in which capitalism has gained unprecedented ideological supremacy. The voices of revolutionary movements - whether anti-imperialist or communist - have become muted. The issues of how to rebuild a communist movement, to encourage working class organisation, are urgent ones. Especially so in the face of the environmental devastation being wreaked on the earth, the resurgence of fascism in Europe and the poverty and wretchedness being inflicted on workers throughout the world.

Terry, born of an Irish working class family, took the long-term view which the Irish people have needed in their bitter struggle. He would have seen the small beginnings of change that are emerging: the growth of a radical protest movement against environmental problems which sees the root of these in the imperialist multinationals; the beginnings of a left break from a Labour Party that no longer even pretends to be for the working class; the growing inability of capitalism to provide the basics even in the rich imperialist countries, an inability bound to arouse opposition from the working class.

In memory of Terry, the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund was established to send books and publications to prisoners. Contributions to BCM Box 5960, London WC1N 3XX.

A memorial ceremony at Karl Marx's grave in Highgate Cemetery will be held in January. Details available from the Fund or from FRFI.

Rock around the Blockade Events

Saturday 16 December 11 am-2pm

DERBY

outside St Peter's Church,
St Peter's Street.

LONDON

Street meeting in Ladbroke Grove
(tel: 0171 837 1688 for meeting place)

Sunday 17 December

DAYSCHOOL

Viva Cuba! Viva socialism!
End the US blockade!

10.30am-4.30pm, Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square, London WC1
(nearest tube Holborn).

Speakers: Théodore MacDonald,
author *Hippocrates in Havana*;
Comrade Mancebo, First Secretary
of the Cuban Embassy;

Rock around the Blockade;

Jose Delarra, Cuban sculptor
and artist (invited);

Eddie Abrahams, Editorial Board FRFI;
Cuba Solidarity Campaign (invited).

Workshops on health, art and culture
in Cuba, campaigning against the
blockade, the 'special period' in Cuba,
and music. £3/£1.50 concessions.

Thursday 21 December, 8-11pm

BENEFIT GIG

Love Isaac's Reggae Maha
Victoria Inn, Midland Place, Derby.
£2 waged/£1 unwaged.

EVENTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

JUSTICE? DAYSCHOOL - DIRECT ACTION!

Saturday 9 December

Speakers, discussions, workshops,
conscious cinema, stalls. Party after!
All DA groups and interested persons
welcome. Ring *Justice?* on the day for
details of central Brighton venue:
01273 685913

Ukenya Public Meeting PAMBANA: STRUGGLE FOR PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY IN KENYA

Saturday 9 December, 6.30-10pm

Speakers: Ngugi wa Thiong'o,
Maina wa Kinyatti, John la Rose,
Abdilatif Abdalla.

International Students House, 229
Great Portland Street, London W1N.

Demonstration

STOP RACIST

IMMIGRATION CHECKS!

Saturday 16 December

Assemble 1pm at Hackney Town Hall,
north London. Action at places that
will carry out race checks.

RCG Christmas Social

Saturday 16 December
8-11pm

Celebrate the festive
season with music,
raffle, food, politics

The Hemingford Arms,
158 Hemingford Road
(off Offord Road),
London N1
(5 minutes from Highbury
& Islington tube).

**FIGHT
RACISM!
FIGHT
IMPERIALISM!**



SHELL the fires of hell

'In Nigeria, we are one of the lowest - if not the lowest - cost operations within Shell.'

Brian Anderson, Managing Director, Shell Nigeria, *Financial Times*, 26 May 1995

'I accuse Shell and Chevron of practising racism against the Ogoni people... I accuse the multinational companies which prospect for oil in Ogoni of genocide.'

Ken Saro-Wiwa

Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) were hanged for allegedly murdering four fellow Ogoni. MOSOP challenged the devastation of the Niger delta by oil multinationals and the Nigerian ruling class. Saro-Wiwa accused Shell of ecological war against the Ogoni. A writer and former regional government official, he was not a socialist, but a bourgeois who wanted more oil wealth for the Ogoni. However, his work and his sacrifice have brought Shell's exploitation of Ogoniland out of the shadows. TREVOR RAYNE reports.

This measured appraisal is done in the icy waters of financial calculation. The Pearson group, which owns *The Economist* and *Financial Times*, is a major shareholder in Shell and Lazards bank, which has interlocking directorships with Shell. Shell is at the heart of British capitalism: here meet the handful of bankers, industrialists, soldiers, politicians, and bureaucrats who run Britain.

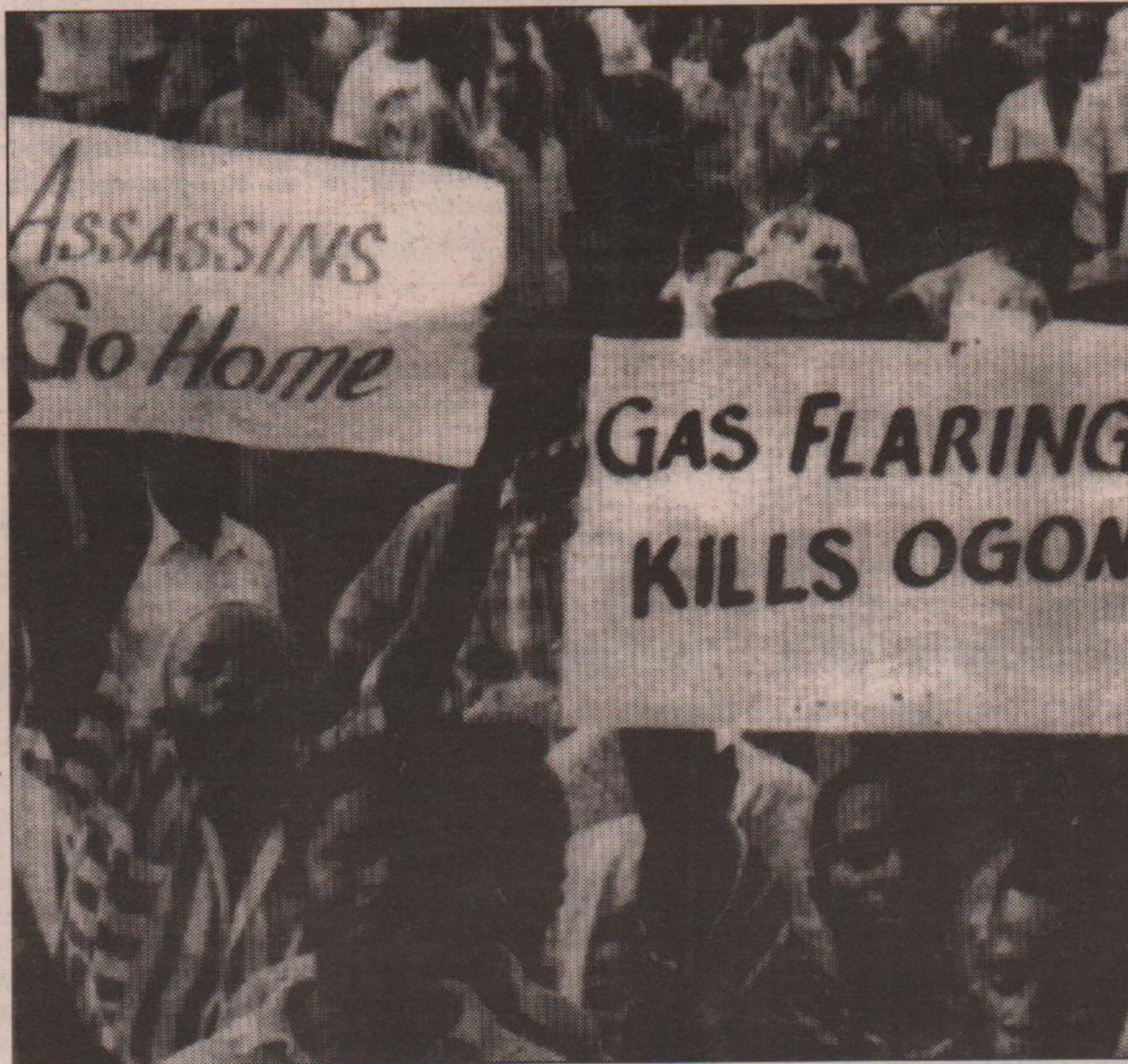
We're going Shell...

Royal Dutch Shell was formed in 1907 from the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company and the Shell Transport and Trading Company. The combination of Shell's Russian and US oil trade with Dutch East Indies' supplies was to compete with Rockefeller's Standard Oil. Rothschild's bank funded the new company. Sir Henri Deterding, first head of Royal Dutch Shell, 'ended up a megalomaniac and a convinced Nazi, and the company now tries to bury his memory: no biography has been written, no records revealed.' (Anthony Sampson)

Shell's history is too vast for this article, but glimpses give an idea.

Weetman Pearson, later Lord Cowdray, spent £5 million on land concessions in Mexico. Huge reserves were found in 1908. Mexican oil played a key role in Britain's First World War and it made Lord Cowdray one of the richest men in the country. Today the Pearson group extends into Penguin Books, Madame Tussauds and Royal Doulton. Cowdray sold into Shell in 1919.

Shell developed Venezuelan oil production. Workers lived in company towns with appalling conditions. Early demands were for running water and sanitation. A union was formed in 1931, then crushed with its leaders imprisoned a few days before an intended strike. At a 1956 Caracas international oil conference a Dutch labour delegate spoke out against the repression of the workers. The conference was immediately suspended and Venezuela withdrew from the International Labour Organisation, sponsors of the event. Shell transported Venezuelan oil to refineries in the Caribbean. In 1969 oil workers in the Dutch Antilles protested; troops were



dispatched from the Netherlands to suppress them.

Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced sanctions against Unilaterally Declared Independent Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1965. Shell had no intention of observing them. The then British head of Shell, Sir Frank McFadzean, argued for resumed arms sales to South Africa. Shell's Maputo terminal was used to smuggle oil to the Rhodesian racists. By 1974, when it was clear that FRELIMO would win in Mozambique, Shell organised bogus intermediary firms and swap deals with the French company Total to keep the Smith regime supplied via South Africa. This was done with Whitehall's assistance.

Disregarding the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries' (OPEC) boycott and UN sanctions against South Africa, Shell and British Petroleum kept oil supplies running. South Africa imported over 80 per cent of its oil. Shell was integral to apartheid's military potential.

Before becoming National Coal Board Chairman in 1983 Ian MacGregor was a director of Lazard Freres in New York, a position he

retained throughout the 1984-85 miner's strike. Lazards in London and New York are financially interwoven. Before the strike Shell, tied to Lazards and Pearsons, lobbied in London and Washington for increased coal imports into Britain.

Shell has derecognised the TGWU at its Essex Shell Haven refinery and opposes unions on its North Sea rigs. It has built roads across the Amazon and taken out concessions on Crow Indian land in the USA.

Shell Nigeria

The search for Nigerian oil began in 1908. It became systematic after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956. British Middle East oil supplies were endangered so alternative sources were sought. Shell Nigeria's first oil exports came in 1958. The oil was high quality and cheap, being close to sea terminals.

Today, oil accounts for 90 per cent of Nigeria's exports and 80 per cent of government revenue. Shell produces half of Nigeria's oil. In 25 years Nigerian oil exports have been worth \$210 billion. \$30 billion has been pumped out of Ogoniland, most of it

by Shell. 1.1bn cubic feet of gas is flared daily in the Niger delta, hence the endless fires. Land, air and water are poisoned, yet hardly a cent of compensation has been paid by Shell.

Nigeria represents 14 per cent of Shell's worldwide production and is its third largest oil source. \$500 million had already been spent on technical appraisals and four ships to carry liquefied natural gas from the Niger delta to southern Europe. The scale of Shell's commitment to Nigeria meant it could not easily pull out of the gas project, despite embarrassment at the hangings.

You can be sure of Shell...

Shell knew its Nigerian operations could turn into a public relations nightmare. In the 1950-60s Shell produced classroom posters showing fauna and flora of the English counties. Its British television advertisements have rabbits and foxes running through buttercup fields beneath which runs a Shell pipeline: 'Can we develop the industry we need without destroying our countryside? You can be sure of Shell.' This company builds sponsorships and charity donations into its annual marketing budgets as public relations exercises.

Shell is busy on the environmental discussion circuit; befitting its considerable contribution to the greenhouse effect. Shell and other oil, coal and car producers, fund the plausible sounding Global Climate Coalition to stop any measures which limit the use of fossil fuels. Shell supports the Business Council for Sustainable Development, an alliance of 43 multinational corporations. During the 1992 Rio Earth Summit its representative told Brazilian television that all the oil on the planet could be burned with impunity.

Shell must anaesthetise people to the damage it does. Its motto is 'never apologise and rarely explain' - never be seen at the scene of the crime, pay someone else to do it.

'Princes should devolve all matters of responsibility upon others, take upon themselves only those of grace.' (Machiavelli) And as fine an aristocracy of money as you could buy anywhere graces the boards of Shell. Not here Major Paul Okuntimo, but rather Robert McNamara, former US Secretary of Defence, former President of the Ford Motor Company, former President of the World Bank and then director of Royal Dutch Shell.

Interlocking directorships express the concentration of capital into very few hands and the fusion of banking and industrial capital. Directors of the British arm of Shell include directors from Rothschilds, Lazards, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Sun Life Assurance, BAT Industries, RTZ, Hawker Siddeley, Booker plc, Inchcape etc. Also present are the former head of the diplomatic service, the former head of the civil service, the Professor of War Studies at All Souls, Oxford and the Provost of Eton. These and many more titles are the domain of just nine men. They are the ones who requisition the weapons supplied by Britain to the Abacha regime. They are the ones who order the British and Dutch governments to veto European Union moves to impose sanctions on Nigeria.

This is finance capital, the monopolists who rotate their careers through officer high command, boardrooms and government departments. For them the British, US and Nigerian governments are but executive committees. They are enemies of workers and poor people everywhere. They must be exposed, their machinations must be nailed and finally they must be fought and overcome. *Saving the planet means fighting the multinationals - fighting imperialism. Boycott Shell!*

Reports on demonstrations in London and by Critical Mass in support of the Shell boycott can be found on page 4.

We're going well...

Shell is the world's leading oil and gas producer with more reserves than any other company. Its 1994 sales of \$131.5 billion exceed the national product of all but 23 countries in the world. Shell operates 1,500 subsidiaries in 128 countries, including 35 in Africa. Shell has a monopoly in oil, gas, chemicals and seed production.

The Economist's 18 November editorial was indignant: 'The current gang, under General Sani Abacha, are the worst: repressive, visionless and so corrupt that a parasite of corruption has almost eaten the host. These days the main activity of the state is embezzlement.' No word that much of the money is laundered through British banks charging 20 per cent commission, but strong stuff. However, says *The Economist*, 'Shell is the wrong target' for protests; an international effort must be made to construct a viable alternative to the Abacha regime. Similar sentiments echo in the *Financial Times*.