

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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## ASYLUM SEEKERS

# Fortress Britain slams the door



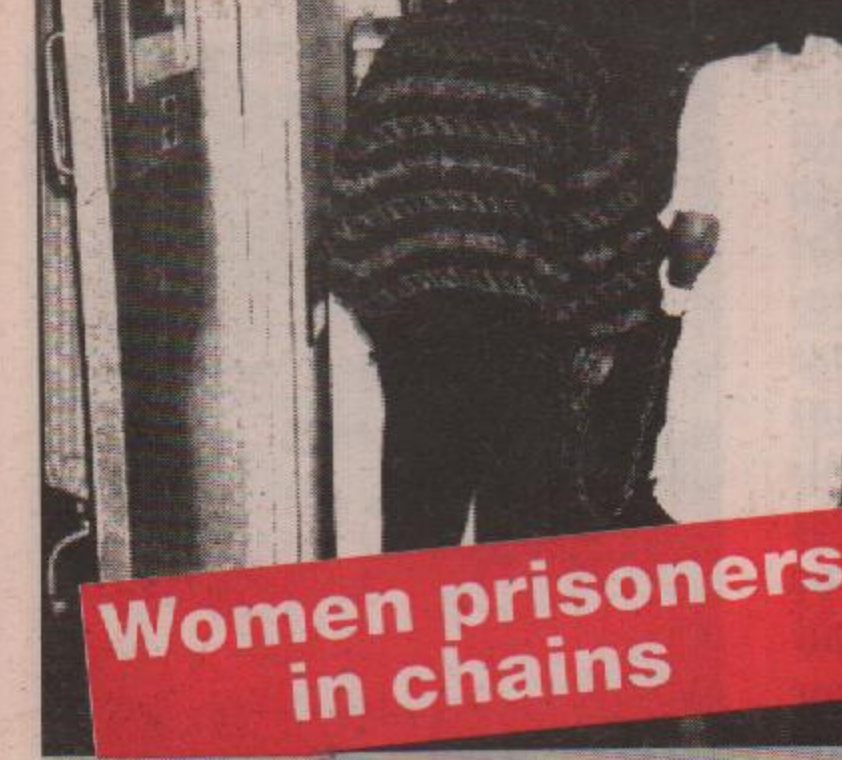
**CUBA:**  
Nuestro Tiempo  
Brigade reports



**Labour:** a rotten  
racist history



**Scargill's SLP:**  
is it progress?



**Women prisoners**  
in chains

# Kick the racists out

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# Socialist Labour Party: taking us forward?

On Saturday 14 January 1996 Arthur Scargill, declaring that the Labour Party had 'abandoned socialism' and 'embraced capitalism and the free market' announced the formation of a new party - the Socialist Labour Party (SLP). In an article, Scargill wrote:

'Many on the left argue that it (the Labour Party) was never socialist, that it was at best social democratic and that people like me were deluding ourselves in thinking we could campaign for socialism effectively within it. I now accept that argument and believe that New Labour can no longer be a "home" to socialists.'

In contrast to the overwhelming majority of the left, and as an organisation which has argued since 1979 that a break with Labour is necessary, we welcome this split. Our only regret is that it has taken so long. The left, in and outside the Labour Party, has condemned Scargill and his comrades as 'lunatics', 'irresponsible' or 'tactically inept' - on the sole grounds that the SLP may weaken and harm the Labour Party's electoral chances. The most hypocritical response has been that of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

'Arthur Scargill is absolutely right in his assessment of Tony Blair's New Labour' claims the SWP. So the SWP will 'support an SLP candidate in Hemsworth ...' But its support for the SLP is qualified by the SWP's concern for the Labour Party's electoral needs. 'It would be a mistake for the SLP to stand in every constituency, especially in marginal areas where Labour is challenging the Tories.' Despite agreeing 'absolutely' with Arthur Scargill's assessment 'Socialist Worker will still be urging a Labour vote in most areas at the next election.' The SWP will vote against the SLP which defends the welfare state and vote for the Labour Party which is committed to undermining it. A perverted socialism this.

In our view any political development which weakens the Labour Party is a very welcome and wonderful thing. If the SLP mounts an electoral challenge to the Labour Party in defence of the welfare state and in defence of the working class and the poor we can only applaud and support it. Socialists can have no time for and no interest in the Labour Party's electoral fortunes. The Labour Party is an instrument for the ruling class and will be used to attack the poor, the marginalised, the 'outsider' - that is, a large section of the working class. It is a disgusting party and it is a good thing that some in the Labour Party have seen this and are leaving it.

The SLP sets out on its course with some positive features. It hopes to give political expression to sections of the working class which feel angry at being 'disenfranchised by New Labour'. Beyond traditional working class constituencies, the SLP also wants to become a 'natural home' to campaigners for peace, animal welfare and the environment.

Through organising these forces in the struggle for socialism, the SLP believes it is possible to 'create a peaceful, environmentally protected world and bring about fundamental changes in society so that work, a place to live, health care and education are rights that can be experienced by all.'

The formation of the SLP is part of a process of disintegration and reconstitution taking place across the left. To hope to succeed in building a socialist movement requires a commitment to open and democratic political work. Only this can ensure the inclusion of and express the views of dozens of working class, community, socialist, communist, anti-racist, environmental and other organisations fighting on many fronts. The SLP's contribution to this process will be determined by

are not unionised and indeed the unions do not want to be bothered with them. Trade union membership has fallen dramatically in the past fifteen years. It has increased in the white collar, technical and managerial fields and the outlook of the unions reflects this Blairite constituency. Many young people have no work and no prospect of work. Trade unionism means nothing to them - a fighting youth organisation would mean a great deal more.

Secondly there is the question of Labour's past. In a discussion paper 'Future Strategy for the Left' Arthur Scargill argues that: 'At the time of its formation, the Labour Party had both a Constitution and policies which projected a socialist philosophy, policies and programmes.' The right wing always, but unsuccessfully,

there can be no serious socialist movement which does not unite with the working class internationally. And such unity cannot be achieved without opposition to imperialism, to racist immigration controls and Britain's multinationals leeching off the poor of the world.

Equally disturbing are the indications of an undemocratic internal structure. The SLP's constitution was drawn up not by its own members, but by a group of lawyers. On the grounds of putting an 'end to internal wrangling and sectarian argument' differing political trends and tendencies will be prohibited. Such undemocratic procedures are inimical to the urgent need for unity among anti-Labour socialists.

These issues are of concern, for they reflect the ideological and organisational influence of the opportunist and bureaucratic left wing of the British Labour movement. It will require more than a formal organisational break from Labour to prevent their old ways of thought and old political methods from winning the day in the SLP.

If the SLP relates to the interests of the impoverished working class, to black people's and women's struggles against oppression, to environmental and community activists it will be forced to abandon Labour's reactionary legacy and will play a positive role in the British socialist movement. If it acts as an organising force for such struggles it will draw in people who will have no time for Labourite ideological and organisational prejudices designed to thwart, subvert and destroy working class struggles. It will then become part of the process of building a new working class movement to destroy capitalism and imperialism and build a decent society for all.

The SLP is only one initiative which is taking place. At present the RCG along with several other organisations is working in the Independent Working Class Association to create the basis for a fighting working class movement. At the same time we would have no difficulty, for example, in supporting and canvassing for Brenda Nixon, the SLP's Women Against Pit Closures candidate in the Hemsworth by-election. Our view on the SLP and any such future organisations is determined by the practical needs of the working class. ■



1984-5 Miners' Strike: Scargill on the platform with the trade union leaders who helped the Labour Party to betray the miners

how it relates to the political reality of the 1990s - a working class divided between a relatively well-off, employed, virtually middle class section and a poor, casually employed, low-paid or unemployed section, 15 million of whom are surviving on means-tested benefits. If the SLP relates to the concerns of the poorest sections and if it supports and includes those already fighting and taking direct action against injustice, environmental destruction, racism and poverty then it will take a healthy direction.

This will however require an ideological and organisational break with the past of enormous magnitude. And the first SLP published documents show that it has not yet discarded the Labour Party's reactionary ideological and organisational legacy - a legacy which will drive away the very forces the SLP seeks to win.

Firstly, the constitution of the SLP emphasises that members must, where appropriate, be trade unionists. Its initial supporters are predominantly trade union oriented. The expectation appears to be that political leadership will come from workers organised in trade unions. This does not reflect the reality of working class life today. Most of the jobs available to the poor sections of the working class

sought to dilute Labour's socialism. But with the arrival of Blair and the ditching of Clause 4 'we have seen the current Party leadership systematically dismantle Labour's commitment to Socialism.'

This is unfortunately an apology for a Labour Party which throughout its whole history has been pro-capitalist, racist and imperialist and anti-working class. The Labour Party has never been socialist. To claim otherwise can only help to justify the incorporation of Labour Party anti-socialist ideas and ideology into the new party.

During the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, tens of thousands of miners took militant action and faced sustained attack from the state. From their struggle emerged a great advance in political consciousness. The struggle threw up links with the Irish people's fight for freedom, the black people's struggle against racism and the police and an identification with international struggles against imperialism. The SLP's programme seems to have taken a step back from such vital positions. There are no clear statements of opposition to British multinationals' plunder of the Third World, of opposition to Britain's illegitimate occupation of Ireland and its racist immigration controls. In this era of global capitalism



## Public sector strikes shake France

'France's Red Hot Winter', 'How workers stopped the country', 'Anything is possible here' - such were the headlines in the British left press as it reported the public sector strikes last December in France. Indeed, in the first two weeks of the month, France appeared to be on the brink of enormous conflicts as public sector workers engaged in a whole series of strikes and demonstrations. Yet despite the militancy of the movement, a sordid deal between the trade union leadership and the French government was able to snuff it out before it had achieved its principal aim - the withdrawal of a plan to impose drastic cuts on the French social security system.

French imperialism is in a deep crisis which no amount of nuclear posturing can disguise. Between 1973 and 1992, its manufacturing output grew by 16.5 per cent compared with the 32.1 per cent achieved by neighbouring German imperialism. At the same time, it has had to sustain a level of public sector spending which outstrips all its major competitors - 55 per cent of GDP versus 43 per cent for Britain. Its expenditure on social services is also the highest for any major capitalist country, and currently stands at 23.3 per cent of GDP versus 17.7 per cent for Germany with Britain a lowly 13.9 per cent after years of Tory attacks.

Quite apart from the fact that it presents a grave obstacle to meeting Maastricht criteria for participating in the single European currency, such state expenditure represents a net drain on the profits of the French ruling class, and its high level weakens French imperialism as it tries to compete in a world economy against much stronger rivals. If it is to restore its overall profitability the ruling class has to drive down the wages of the working class, and to do this it must savagely cut levels of social security benefits and other state welfare expenditure. This is the strategy that has been chosen by the new right-wing government under Jacques Chirac's presidency.

The first step was the announcement of a public sector

pay freeze in September last year. Public sector workers responded with a national one-day strike on 10 October which was accompanied by huge demonstrations. However, these did not deter the government, which announced on 14 November proposals to restructure the French railway system which would cost 30,000 jobs, and a plan to completely reorganise the social security system - the so-called Juppé plan after the French prime minister. The main objectives of Juppé's plan were to remove the



### COMMUNIST FORUMS

A series of public discussions of communist politics introduced by Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!'s Editorial Board.

Sunday 11 February 2.30pm  
Cuba Vive! Report-back from Nuestro Tiempo brigade to Cuba

Sunday 10 March 2.30pm  
No place but the struggle - a celebration of International Women's Day

Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1 (Holborn tube). £1/50p  
Creche available on application.

Tel: 0171 837 1688 for details



£15.6 billion deficit accumulated by the social security system over a three year period, an increase in workers' contributions towards the fund, and drastic cuts in a whole series of benefits including pensions and family allowances. Critical was his proposal to end the independence of the fund, and to bring it under direct government control so that such deficits could no longer occur.

Within 10 days, railway workers had voted to go on strike to get the restructuring plan withdrawn and the three main trade union confederations, which between them organise about 2 million workers mainly in the public sector, called a one day strike for 28 November. In the meantime students also put forward their own demands for extra expenditure, pointing to the chronic over-crowding and under-funding of the university system, and initiating a whole series of occupations. Millions of workers and students joined the 28 November action whether they were unionised or not. Demonstrations were vast: some 500,000 in Paris, 200,000 in Marseilles. A second one-day strike on 12 December was equally well supported. Meanwhile, post office workers joined the railway workers on unlimited strike. The whole situation was threatening to get out of hand unless the trade union leadership could find some compromise with the Juppé government.

Such compromise was indeed forthcoming: in early December, trade union leaders started to signal offers by suggesting that they would negotiate the content of the plan rather



ment to a complete halt. Once again, they had exposed the limits of the sort of spontaneous trade unionism which the left in this country regards so uncritically.

So what of the future? The trade union movement in France organises only a tiny minority of the working class – some ten per cent, mostly in the public sector. Its three main federations, the Confederation General de Travailleurs (CGT), the Confederation Française Démocratique de Travailleurs (CFDT), and Force Ouvrière (FO), with altogether some 1.5 million members, have little tra-



than the reject the whole concept. The government responded by agreeing to a summit on 21 December, and withdrawing the plan to restructure the railway system. In the week following 12 December, railway workers started to vote for a return to work, and by the day of the summit, only transport workers in Marseilles remained on strike. As for the summit itself: nothing came of it. The union leaders failed to notice that Juppé's invitation mentioned only job creation and unemployment as the subjects to be discussed, and excluded the social security plan. The day before, the French parliament voted in favour of the plan with some minor concessions. Once again, trade union leaders had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory and brought the move-

dition of co-operation. Indeed, some leaders of the CFDT openly welcomed aspects of the Juppé plan. Outside of the unions are millions of workers whose conditions are similar to those in Britain: black and immigrant workers forced to work in squalid conditions for poverty pay in the service sector, workers in manufacturing industry constantly threatened with closures and redundancy. In practice, trade unions exclude such workers and cannot safeguard their interests. New forms of organisation are needed which, in advancing the interests of the most oppressed sections of the working class, can represent the interests of the working class as a whole, and begin to move beyond the limits of trade union spontaneity. Robert Clough

## The grim reality of Labour's plans for working class education

JIM CRAVEN

Chris Searle, headteacher at Earl Marshall Comprehensive School in Sheffield, has been sacked by the Labour-controlled LEA. His supposed 'crime'? Refusing to throw kids on the scrap-heap by expelling them. His prosecutor? David Blunkett, Labour's Education Shadow Secretary. Throughout his work in education, Chris Searle has always tried to base learning on 'the lives, experiences and achievements of our own international working class communities', to use his own words. Earl Marshall School has won the National Curriculum Award for curriculum innovation and community involvement. Its students have published several acclaimed anthologies of poetry and prose. Chris has worked tirelessly, here and in the third world, to give a better deal to working class kids and against racism and imperialism. He has always tried to 'find paths of progress together' and refused to use authoritarian methods.

This is a courageous path to follow, especially in a school such as Earl Marshall, sited in one of the most deprived areas of Sheffield.

It is not an example the Labour



In 1991 parents and children fought to keep the school open

Party wants to succeed when they are tripping over themselves to be tougher on discipline and even better than the Tories in perverting education to the needs of capitalism. Labour wants submissive kids and submissive schools.

So, when Blunkett received complaints from some members of the NAS/UWT teachers' union, he was only too pleased to cuddle up to them (especially after his hostile reception at the NUT conference) and used this as an excuse to target Searle. And Blunkett went about getting Chris in the most underhand manner.

Following a letter from Blunkett to the Director of Education in Sheffield and communications with the DEE, Earl Marshall school received two inspections in the space of two months. After

the inspections, Chris, his staff and governors devised an action plan for improvements, just as every school is required to do. They soon made progress but were not allowed to show that they had. Before receiving any feedback from the LEA, without consultation and within three months of the inspections, Chris was sacked. Even then it wasn't done openly. Neither Chris nor the governors were allowed to see any of the correspondence between Blunkett, the LEA and the DEE. The LEA first suspended the governing body which supported Chris and then sacked him.

These were the last acts of the Director of Education on the very day she took early retirement! The sheer, bloody-minded political vindictiveness of this action is highlighted by the fact that Chris was due to retire

anyhow in a few months' time.

Not surprisingly, the reaction from the kids and the community has been swift and militant in support of Chris. The kids have organised school strikes and boycotted classes. The situation at the school has been described as 'very difficult'. The governors have made four demands to the LEA:

- the retention of their powers
- to see all the relevant correspondence
- the restoration of Chris' public integrity
- a full role for the governors in the appointment of a new headteacher after Chris's retirement. They are also seeking a judicial review.

A public meeting is organised for Wednesday 14 February at the Afro-Caribbean Association (SADACA), the Wicker, Sheffield, starting at 7pm.

The lesson of these events is clear. Labour intends to be every bit as ruthless as the Tories in crushing any alternative to their vision of schools as fodder factories for the capitalist economy, especially if that alternative smacks of independent working class organisation. If you are fed up with Tory education, don't expect anything better from Labour. They serve the same masters.

Anyone who stands against the system had better watch out. If they get Searle, they'll be coming for you next. Organise action and protests at your schools, colleges and workplaces. For more details and to send messages of support, contact Abdul Shaif (Chair of Governors), c/o SUMES, Springfield Centre, Broomspring Lane, Sheffield. ■

## Education notes

### Let them eat cake

In the very week when the news broke that Harriet Harman, Labour shadow Minister of Health, has chosen to send her son to a selective grammar school 10 miles away the results of the first national tests for 11-year-olds came out. They show that more than half of children in their last year of primary school only manage to achieve the literacy and numeracy skills of the average seven to nine year old. The two news items are closely connected of course. The systematic underfunding of the schools sector by the Tory Government has deprived working class children of basic educational skills. Spending on education has not only been cut, it has also been allocated as money-per-pupil: away from the fundamental requirement of sufficient teachers in the classroom. This has resulted in over-subscribed schools in middle class areas and an increasing number of poorly funded schools in working class areas. There is no parental choice for the majority of parents. Instead there is selection of pupils by examination or interview (suitable parents!) by well-resourced schools.

Blair and Harman have exposed themselves. They have chosen privilege, academic narrowness and greedy ambition in predominantly white schools for their children on the grounds that this is superior to comprehensive neighbourhood education. They are unashamedly perpetuating the increasing polarisation of the education



Harriet Harman

system and the death of the comprehensive school.

The hypocrisy of these New Labour creatures must be weighed against their ambition. To get into power they will say one thing and do another. Blunkett has been forced to speak out against selection in the secondary sector because the effects of the cuts in funding for schools and teachers combined with the middle class rush into privileged schools is having a disastrous effect on the overall level of education. More and more parents are dissatisfied with the education on offer at local poorly-resourced schools. Major has tried to meet the rising demands of the middle class by offering to expand the 'assisted places scheme' by allowing places for 15% more children. Blunkett is attempting to muddle through by promises of 'not tolerating failure'. Neither party has the least intention of providing a decent education system for the country as a whole. The results of the

National Tests show clearly that it would need a revolution in financing and attitude to bring the general level up to a reasonable standard. As long as New Labour continues to support League Tables and to measure schools by A Level results we know they will change nothing. As long as they have no shame in finding individual solutions to their personal problems, they will change nothing.

### Generally Not Very Qualified: the GNVQ trick

Meanwhile the Tory government has been busy trying to devise a cheap alternative to a decent education for all. Under the banner of Vocational Education they have introduced a system of certificates to be used in schools, colleges and at work.

National Vocational Qualifications, NVQs, are the Government's 'National goals for Education and Training'. What does this jargon mean? It means the introduction of vocational, or work-related qualifications throughout the country which can be gained in the course of work or training. The government wants all employers to join in the scheme. Those who do so will be called 'Investors in People'.

Targets have been set: by 1996, 50% of the workforce to be aiming for NVQs; by 1997, 80% of young people to reach NVQ1; by 2000 50% to reach NVQ3 (two 'A' levels or equivalent) and 50% of all medium to larger organisations (200 or more employees) are to join in the scheme. These 'Targets' don't have a snowball's chance

in hell of being realised. So far only 7% of employers are using the scheme and these are mostly in the public sector like the Health Service. Businesses and industry are concerned with cash investment not 'Investment in People'. British firms are characteristically interested in short-term profits and they have devised their own way of dealing with the workforce, usually by offering short-term contracts and low-paid, part-time work.

Vocational education is a valuable idea which has been cheapened by the government. Relevant, useful education which draws upon skills and social purpose should have a central place in any school system. But in Britain it remains the poor relative of academic qualifications, an underfunded alternative to the grammar school education fought over by the middle classes and supported by the New Labour Party for themselves.

### No careers for Grand Met

The last issue of Education Notes carried an account of the bid by Grand Metropolitan to take over South Thames Careers Service. With ten weeks to go they have pulled out, leaving students and young people up to nineteen years in the lurch as far as this service is concerned. Why did this mega organisation suddenly decide not to go ahead with its latest acquisition? They are not saying so we can only assume that Careers Officers are not prepared to accept the level of wages that Grand Met pay workers in their Burger Bars.

Susan Davidson



**On the night of 13 December the streets of Brixton blazed after police attacked a demonstration, called to highlight the death in custody a week earlier of 25-year-old Wayne Douglas. Windows were smashed, shops and cars set on fire and missiles hurled at riot police. The *Evening Standard* reported the presence of 'police carrying semi-automatic carbines and shotguns... as firearms were openly deployed for the first time during a riot in mainland Britain'. Wayne's death came just six months after that of another black man, Brian Douglas (no relation); both had been beaten with the new US-style long-handled batons.**

By the next morning the police propaganda machine had sprung into action, deliberately shifting the focus away from their responsibility for the death of Wayne Douglas onto the supposed responsibility of speakers at the demonstration, in particular Rudy Narayan, for the burning, smashing and looting which followed. There was much talk of charging Narayan with incitement to riot, precious little of charging any police officer with assault on Wayne Douglas, let alone with murder.

#### Death of Wayne Douglas

Wayne Douglas was arrested in the early hours of 5 December 1995. Police claimed they used long-handle batons to disarm him of a knife but local residents told *Caribbean Times* a different story:

'We looked out of the bedroom window and saw a black man facing several police officers. The police were shouting, "Put it down and you won't get hurt" and I heard the black man telling them "sod off and leave me alone".'

'I could see a shiny object in his hand and I saw him throw it down. As soon as he did that they all jumped on him. They dragged him into the park and beat the shit out of him... jumping on him, kicking him, hitting him with their batons. Some of them were sitting on him.'

On arrival at Brixton police station shortly before 3am, Wayne is recorded as having 'complained of difficulty in breathing'; nonetheless, he was put in a cell without any medical attention. His custody record then states 'the subject spoke to officers and was answering coherently', a little later that he had 'blood coming from his mouth' and finally, at 3.31am, that he was making a noise. Police officers say they then went into the cell and found Wayne's heart was still beating but he had stopped breathing. An ambulance was called and took him to hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Two post-mortem reports have been commissioned: one by the police, the other by Wayne's family. The police claim that the cause of death was a heart condition and interim reports appear to confirm this was a major factor. But this does not exonerate them. Heart conditions are always exacerbated by extreme stress, and what could be more stressful than being violently arrested, imprisoned and, when you begin to visibly suffer, being left to die?

#### Brixton - the reality

The way in which Wayne Douglas died exposes the complete contempt with which the Brixton police view the local population, the same contempt they showed for Cherry Groce, whose shooting

# Black deaths in custody - Brixton fights back

led to the 1985 uprising. The resurgence of open resistance demonstrates that oppressed communities are not as easily battered into submission or bought off as the various politicians who have claimed to 'solve the problem' by one method or the other would have everyone believe.

After the 1981 and 1985 Brixton uprisings, money trickled into the area under the auspices of the Brixton City Challenge and other 'regeneration' schemes but, although a few entrepreneurs have done well out of it and a few jobs been created, for the majority nothing has changed. Lambeth is still among the ten most deprived areas in Britain with 14 per cent unemployment among white people and 29 per cent among black. While up-market shops and trendy wine-bars are evident on the high street, behind the facade the picture is quite different. On the Stockwell Park Estate, for example, the shops have long been closed and boarded up, the doctors' surgery has closed and moved to a separate site and many of the flats, which are in a poorly lit warren of concrete corridors, are also boarded up. Lambeth Council, which is notorious for its corruption and inefficiency, admits being a year behind in paying Renovation Grants for hot water, heating and other essential repairs. The public image of a new, yuppified, prosperous Brixton is a sham; for the black working class nothing has changed: unemployment, racism and police brutality are still the norm.

#### Deaths in custody

'It is our experience that black people are markedly over-represented among those who die after violent incidents involving the police... many of these deaths occur after the use of excessive, unlawful and unnecessary force.' *Inquest*, 18 December 1995

Brian Douglas and Stafford Soloman were stopped by police on the night of 2 May 1995 as they were driving along

Clapham High Street in south London. Police officers attacked the two men with their brand new long-handled batons, issued just weeks earlier. Stafford put his hand up to protect himself and received a broken arm; Brian was struck on the head. They were taken to Kennington police station where Brian collapsed and became unconscious. He was not moved to hospital until 3pm the following day where he was put on a life-support machine and died on 8 May. The two officers involved were given compassionate leave.

Shiji Lapite died at the hands of Stoke Newington police on 16 December 1994, having been stopped for 'acting suspiciously' by two plain-clothes officers. The post mortem revealed bruising, abrasions to the body and that his voice-box had been crushed. Cause of death was ascertained to be asphyxia from compression of the neck consistent with the application of a neck-hold. On 25 January 1996 an inquest jury returned a verdict of 'unlawful killing'.

Figures vary, particularly as the Home Office conveniently produces no proper statistics of its own, but it is estimated that since 1969 50 black people have died in police custody, another 50 in prison and at least 12 in psychiatric care. The Metropolitan Police has a particularly bad record of deaths in custody of both black and white people, with over 300 deaths between 1970 and 1985, and 37 deaths in 1989, as opposed to 36 that year in the whole of the rest of England and Wales.

But this does not mean that it is only in London that the police murder with impunity. In 1987 Clinton McCurbin, a black man from Wolverhampton, died while being arrested in a shopping centre. In 1990 Oliver Pryce was grabbed by Middlesbrough Police and bundled into a van. Both men died from asphyxia and a verdict of 'unlawful killing' was returned at the inquest on Pryce. For the first time

ever the police admitted liability and paid compensation but no officer was ever prosecuted.

Following the Pryce verdict, the Association of Chief Police Officers issued guidelines on the use of neck-holds, stating they should not be used if at all possible. The subsequent deaths of Shiji Lapite and Irishman Richard O'Brien graphically demonstrate how meaningless such 'guidelines' are in reality.

O'Brien died on 4 April 1994 after being pinned to the ground by five policemen in Walworth, south London. He sustained 31 separate injuries, including cuts, bruises, a broken tooth and fractured ribs, and died of asphyxia. His 14-year-old son was slapped and arrested while pleading with police to be careful with his father. The inquest was told that O'Brien begged the police officers to get off him, shouting 'Let me up, let me up. I can't breathe. You win.' To which one of them replied, 'We always win.'

As in the Oliver Pryce and Shiji Lapite cases, the inquest jury returned a rare ver-

#### Eyewitness account - 13 December

I left the Old White Horse on Brixton Road around 9pm and began to walk towards Brixton Tube station, as the buses didn't appear to be running. En route I met a young black man, who told me of his experiences since the introduction of Operation Eagle Eye. His home had been raided three times, the police supposedly looking for drugs. He was arrested on suspicion of a burglary he hadn't committed and put in the newly issued 'snap-cuffs' which are designed to tighten in a struggle. The police put him in the back of a car and twisted the cuffs tighter causing severe pain, while verbally abusing him to try and force him to confess to the burglary.

As we reached Brixton town centre there were at least two fire engines (the crew having just put out a fire in the 7-11 Store next to the station) and about six ordinary police vans. A police Land-Rover with a sealed back (presumably an armed response unit) arrived at the same time as I did. I met with a line of riot police who would not let anyone pass in front of the station but forced me across the road. Windows had been smashed in shops and in Pizza Hut. Police in riot gear were at every junction. There were motorcycle police on the island at the junction of Acre Lane and Brixton Road. The police were simultaneously charging groups of people in all the road junctions and along Brixton Road causing chaos. I was caught up in a charge from which I only narrowly managed to escape without injury. There were squads of them, visors down over their faces, rushing people with their shields, batons drawn, hitting out indiscriminately.

# RACIST

#### Deaths in police custody

*Black deaths involving the Metropolitan Police 1985-1995*

- 1985 - **James Hall** - Lavender Hill Police Station
- John Mikkelsen** - Hounslow Police Station
- Cynthia Jarrett** - house raid by Tottenham police
- 1986 - **Stephen Bogle** - Thames Magistrates' Court
- Caiphas Anthony Lemard** - Kensington Police Station
- 1987 - **Nenneh Halloh** - Marylebone Police Station
- Mohammed Parkit** - Marylebone Police Station
- Tunay Hassan** - Dalston Police Station
- 1988 - **Femi Adelaja** - Old Bailey cell
- 1989 - **David 'Duke' Daley** - Marylebone Magistrates' Court
- Vincent Graham** - City Road
- Jamie Stewart** - Holloway Police Station
- 1991 - **Vandana Patel** - Stoke Newington Police Station
- 1993 - **Joy Gardner** - immigration raid, Tottenham
- 1994 - **Kwanele Siziba** - Hackney
- Joseph Nnalue** - Stockwell
- Oluwashiji Lapite** - Stoke Newington
- 1995 - **Brian Douglas** - Kennington Police Station
- Wayne Douglas** - Brixton Police Station

Information from Inquest, Alexandra National House, 330 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2PJ, tel: 0181 802 7430

dict of 'unlawful killing'. Such verdicts have been brought in against the police on only about six occasions. Mr O'Brien's family now plan to sue the police for damages.

Families trying to uncover the truth about deaths in custody face massive obstacles. They can be legally represented at inquests but cannot obtain legal aid. In contrast, unlimited public funds are available for lawyers to represent the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the Police Federation provides legal representation for individual officers involved. Following the death of Shiji Lapite there was an extensive police inquiry, during which 85 witness statements and 57 other documents were gathered, including medical and forensic reports, photographs, tape-recorded interviews and police pocket notebook entries. Lawyers representing the Lapite family formally requested disclosure of relevant documents but met with a blanket refusal.

The police will go to any lengths to avoid being exposed as murderers, and do not hesitate to fit up innocent people for their crimes, such as Malcolm Kennedy - serving 9 years for the manslaughter of Patrick Quinn in Hammersmith Police Station - or Gary Mills and Tony Poole - serving life for the murder of Hensley Wiltshire in Gloucester in 1989. Wiltshire died in police custody and the autopsy revealed 60 per cent more injuries at the time of death than noted when he was first taken in. Mills and Poole were nowhere near the police station or hospital where Wiltshire spent his last hours but to avoid responsibility for yet another racist murder, the police bought off witnesses and fabricated evidence to make an earlier fight between Gary Mills and Wiltshire appear to be the cause of death.

#### Every right to be angry

In the light of such consistent brutality and corruption, those who demonstrated outside Brixton police station following the death of Wayne Douglas had every right to demand justice and those who fought back when the police attacked had every right to defend themselves and to vent their anger at a system which consistently treats black, Irish and working class people like vermin.

Nicki Jameson and Pam Robinson



# BRITAIN Fortress Britain slams the door

**The government's Asylum and Immigration Bill will remove the few remaining rights of asylum seekers in Britain. It, and the associated removal of social security benefits from most asylum seekers, will ensure that not only are even more asylum seekers deported but that those who remain whilst their cases are heard have no means of support. With this law, Fortress Britain will have finally slammed the door on those fleeing persecution in other countries. MAXINE WILLIAMS reports.**



## Tightening the screw

Tory social security minister, Peter Lilley, received delighted applause from the Tory Party conference last year when he announced a campaign to cut payments to 'bogus' asylum seekers. Home Secretary, Michael Howard, also argues that his new Asylum Bill is designed to deter 'bogus' asylum claims. Both back up their argument by referring to the fact that three quarters of asylum claims are now refused. In fact, three quarters are refused because in 1993 the government introduced new rules making it almost impossible for those claiming asylum to prove their cases.

Thus, for example, of 12,455 asylum seekers from the vicious conflict in former Yugoslavia, only 50 have been granted refugee status. Since 1993 over 9,000 Nigerians have claimed asylum in Britain but of these only four have been granted refugee status and a further 15 given leave to remain. More than 99% of asylum claims from Nigerians are now refused despite the overwhelming evidence - remember the fate of Ken Saro-Wiwa - of a brutal and repressive regime in Nigeria which tortures, imprisons and kills its opponents.

Last year the Home Office deported Abdul Onibiyo, a Nigerian who had lived here since 1964 with a break of six years spent in Nigeria. Since his deportation nothing has been heard of him and his family fears for his safety. Despite this, on 19 January, his son Ade had his appeal against refusal of political asylum rejected by the High Court. In refusing his claim, the Home Secretary had argued that his father's disappearance and the worsening situation for opponents of the Nigerian regime did not constitute new grounds for asylum. The High Court

agreed. Other members of Ade's family are also under threat and Ade has been imprisoned, along with hundreds of others, in Campsfield Detention Centre. Campsfield has been the scene of hundreds of detained asylum seekers going on hunger strike to protest at their prolonged detention and the appalling conditions which they face.

This is the situation under existing immigration laws. The new laws will tighten the screw still further.

## 'No serious risk of persecution'

The new Asylum Bill introduces the concept of 'safe countries', known as the White List. Rather than considering asylum cases on their individual merits, the Home Secretary will simply draw up a list of countries where he considers there is 'no serious risk of persecution.' People who come from these countries will automatically go through the so-called fast-tracking procedure. They will be given little time to prepare their case and will find themselves speedily deported. This list includes Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Poland, India and Romania. Countries may be added to this at the Home Secretary's discretion and he needs to give no justification for his decisions. As the recent case of Mohammed al-Mas'ari makes clear, political and economic motives will govern the choice of safe countries. Mohammed al-Mas'ari, a Saudi dissident, was ordered to be deported from Britain simply because the Saudis - lavish arms buyers - put pressure on the British government.

Alongside the 'White List', a separate list of countries is to be kept by the Home Secretary. Special short procedures will apply to asylum seekers from these coun-

tries. Algeria and Nigeria are on this list. Once again, asylum seekers will have only a few days to produce evidence that their fear of persecution is genuine. If their application is unsuccessful, as it is likely to be, they will be deported having a right of appeal only from outside Britain. If they are deported back to the country in which they faced persecution, they are unlikely to have the opportunity to make such an appeal. They may be imprisoned or dead.

A further provision of the Bill is the limitation of grounds for seeking asylum to fear of persecution by the government. Many of those seeking asylum are indeed fleeing repressive governments. But many others, such as Algerians, are forced into exile by the activities of opposition groups. In Algeria, hundreds of women, journalists, socialists have been murdered by fundamentalists and near civil war rages. Algerian asylum-seekers might now find that their very realistic fear of being murdered is not enough to gain asylum.

## Forced into destitution

Alongside this new law are new rules designed to deny social security and other benefits to immigrants and asylum seekers. The rules have been carefully framed to be as damaging as possible. Unless an asylum seeker applies for asylum at the port of entry they will get no benefits. At present the majority of asylum applications are made from within Britain, often within days of arrival. Some people are simply too disorientated to make an immediate application or do not understand how to do so. Others know that if they make such an application at an airport they will face harsh treatment at the hands of the immigration officials and a very real chance of being either locked up or deported.

Initially these new rules were to be made retrospective from October 1995 and it was thought that 13,000 people including children would be immediately left without income. Lilley was forced to back down on this as, for example, the Churches and various charities publicised their plans to set up emergency shelters for the thousands affected. However, it remains the case that from 5 February the rule change will hit new asylum seekers - the majority of them will have no rights to benefits. Up to 40,000 people per year will be rendered destitute, many of them people who have already been subjected to great trauma in their country of origin. In addition those existing asylum seekers with a right to benefit will be unable to claim new benefits, such as Disabled Living Allowance, if their circumstances change after 5 February.

Asylum seekers currently receive a lower rate of benefit than others but are entitled to claim housing benefit and council tax benefit. All entitlement to benefit will simply disappear for the majority of new asylum seekers no matter if they are elderly, young, ill or disabled. They will be on the streets with no means of support.

This loss of benefit will also apply to those appealing after 5 February against having their claim for asylum rejected. This can take more than a year. Clearly the aim of this is to starve people into dropping their appeals and leaving the country. For, at the same time, the government is imposing a duty on employers to check the immigration status of its workers. Fines of up to £5,000 can be imposed if an employer takes on a worker whose status does not entitle them to work. Some employers will thus become unofficial immigration officials. Many employers will simply not bother to make checks, they will just not employ anyone with any kind of immigration status.

Further cuts in benefit rights affect both asylum seekers and wider groups of immigrants. The new Bill will create a large category of people - 'immigrants' - who will lose their right to public housing and Child Benefit. This threatens many groups of people who are legally settled in Britain and who have paid taxes and National Insurance contributions. It will also involve civil servants and local authority employees directly in checking the immigration status of applicants for housing and benefits. A large group of second-class citizens is being

**'More than 99% of asylum claims from Nigerians are now refused despite the overwhelming evidence - remember the fate of Ken Saro-Wiwa - of a brutal and repressive regime in Nigeria which tortures, imprisons and kills its opponents.'**

created who do not have the rights normally associated with residence and tax payment in this country.

The government has pressed ahead with its benefit cuts to asylum seekers in the face of condemnation from its own Social Security Advisory Committee which has called them 'potentially racially divisive' and 'putting at risk of destitution many people who are genuinely seeking refuge in this country.' The United Nations has warned the government that it is violating its international treaty obligations and exposing 'large numbers of individuals, including particularly vulnerable groups, to the worst effects of impoverishment.' Clearly in targeting welfare cuts on asylum seekers and immigrants the government agenda is crudely political. With so few electoral aces, it is hoping to successfully play the race card.

New Labour is, predictably, keeping the lowest of profiles on these measures. Labour wishes to maintain a racist consensus on immigration with the Tories. In answer to letters specifically asking him if Labour would oppose the cuts in benefits to asylum seekers, Tony Blair replied: 'Labour opposes bogus applications and fraud and recognises the need for fair asylum controls.'

Thus Labour, although voting against the cuts, will make no pledge to restore these benefits should they be elected to government. Moreover on the new asylum measures, Labour merely quibbled about Parliamentary controls as to which countries should be on the White List. Thus they have entirely conceded the principle that asylum cases need not be judged on their individual merits.

Those Labourites, such as Dianne Abbot, who are taking a prominent role in the campaign against the new Asylum Bill, talk a lot but do nothing. Abbot, for example, opposes the call for local authority and civil service trade unionists to refuse to implement the new race checks.

Local Labour councils, with a few exceptions, have failed to make a commitment to provide free school meals for the children of asylum seekers denied income support. In fact both practical and political opposition has come most

strongly from asylum seekers and their communities and the church/charity bodies working in this field. It is they, not the Labour movement/left that are organising the practical support that will be of vital importance in the future.

## Racist rich world

The poor and oppressed nations of the world have seen their conditions worsen drastically over the past decade. Fragile political systems have collapsed, civil wars have broken out. As the poverty of tens of millions has increased so has the rich West increased its backing for the dictatorial regimes which keep the people down and the multinationals' profits up. These are the causes of the increased numbers of people wandering the world in search of sanctuary. There are currently more than 25 million such refugees.

The word which has gone out from Europe to these millions is Keep Out. In France, Chirac announced immediately after his election that plane loads of illegal immigrants would be deported each week with a target of 24,000 such deportations annually. The French police routinely harass black people under laws allowing them to demand papers proving right of residence. Germany has tightened its asylum laws and in January the wave of attacks on immigrant hostels continued with an arson attack killing 10 Africans. In Italy, asylum seekers are denied benefits and forced to live on the streets.

The British government's new Asylum laws are part of this European-wide policy of keeping out immigrants from the poor nations and subjecting those already resident to greater control and attack. There are those today who ask how in the 1920s fascism could have been allowed to triumph in European countries. They need only study current developments. A similar political atmosphere, a poisonous victimisation of minorities, is now on the march. The defence of asylum seekers, the rejection of racist immigration laws and the fight against the creation of second-class citizenship for black people are urgent tasks for all democrats and socialists.

## New Police Powers - More Deaths?

The new Asylum and Immigration Act will further increase police powers to harass black people. It gives them new powers to make arrests and house searches of those suspected of immigration offences, their relatives and employers. Search warrants will be available for their houses, workplaces, colleges and social clubs. The police and immigration service already in practice conduct sweep searches for 'illegal immigrants'. They already feel powerful enough to gag and tie up immigrants, killing them as in the case of Joy Gardner. The police already operate on the streets as racist thugs. This was vividly shown by the inquest verdict of 'unlawful killing' against Stoke Newington police, who had throttled and beaten Shiji Lapite, an asylum seeker. Mr Lapite had 45 separate injuries including a fractured voicebox. He had been bitten and kicked in the head by police officers. What will they do with new powers?

## Demonstration Against the New Asylum Laws

Saturday 24 February  
Assemble Embankment 11am  
Campaign against the Immigration and Asylum Bill

The Refugee Council is co-ordinating information and emergency provision and shelter.

Telephone them with offers of help

0171 820 3063



In brief

**How many bad apples make a barrel?**

Former Metropolitan policeman, John Young, has been gaoled for demanding £30,000 to nobble a jury. Young, a police officer for 24 years, approached the sister of one of the defendants in a robbery trial and offered to give her the names and addresses of the jury. The jury was under 'police protection'.

Young was caught. However, the police officer who supplied him with the names and addresses remains unidentified and still in office. Young's mistake presumably was to retire from the Met but continue acting as though he was still a police officer.

The Metropolitan police have been severely criticised in the House of Commons for failing to prevent the theft of £5m of police funds by one of their civilian employees. The money was stolen from a secret fund set up to investigate international crime. Anthony Williams simply used the millions at his disposal to fund his lavish lifestyle including the purchase of a whole Highland village, where he was known as Lord Williams. His luxurious lifestyle caused no suspicions in the Met. Perhaps they all live like that.

The Metropolitan police have paid out (ie taxpayers have paid) £90,000 in damages and costs to three people arrested in Soho and assaulted by police officers. One of the three was throttled, handcuffed and forced to the pavement with a policeman's foot holding his head down. He almost suffocated. None of the officers involved has been suspended or even disciplined.

**Too poor to qualify for assistance**

The Social Fund was set up to provide loans to claimants to finance large purchases previously met by discretionary grants. Claimants borrow money to buy such incredible luxuries as shoes or cookers and then have to pay back the loan at around £5 per week out of their meagre benefits. The loans are often refused because the Fund has run out of money. But in the past three years 250,000 applicants have been refused a loan because they were considered too poor to repay it.

Perhaps the Duchess of York, currently pleading poverty, should apply for a loan to pay her butler's wages.

**One Nation - Ha ha ha**

Whilst British Gas boss, Cedric Brown is earning £475,000 a year, (probably quite a low figure compared to the earnings possible in the Met) new figures show that 37% of adult full-time workers in Britain earn less than the European decency threshold. In some parts of the North and Wales this figure rises to 45%. In 1979 the lowest-paid tenth of men earned 43% of the wage of the highest-paid tenth. Today they earn 30% of the highest-paid tenth. Women still only earn 75% of male earnings and Britain's pay gap between the sexes is the worst in Europe.

For the millions of unemployed the picture is worse. Mortality rates are 37% higher for the unemployed than the employed. Unemployment is also a major factor in mental illness: five times as many unemployed women suffer depressive illness; 20% of unemployed men and 38% of unemployed women suffer from neurotic disorders. The prevalence of the poorest people amongst the mentally ill no doubt accounts for the present community care arrangements: ie you're given your tube fare to the nearest park bench.

Meanwhile the nation is gripped by the mystery of what were the seven words that Princess Di said to Miss Piggy Tiggy-Winkle. The only seven words we want her to say are: 'Take my money - I have swallowed cyanide'.

**Ireland: Major creates new obstacle to talks**

SARAH BOND

Last November, John Major's 'peace' talks ground to a halt because of his insistence that the IRA decommission its arms prior to all-party talks. Then, with US President Clinton about to arrive in Ireland for a high-profile tour, a compromise was found - the so-called twin-track approach, with the establishment of a commission, headed by former US senator George Mitchell, to consider the question of decommissioning while political negotiations continued alongside. All-party talks would begin by February. John Major could now be lauded by Clinton as 'a man of peace'.

Two months later, the promise of all-party talks by February has vanished, despite the findings of the Mitchell commission which concluded, 'The paramilitary organisations will not decommission any arms prior to all-party negotiations. That is the reality with which all concerned must deal.' One obstacle to all-party talks having been thus removed, the government's response was to create a new one: the election of a Stormont-style 'forum' whose members will conduct the negotiations.

This proposal is favoured by Loyalists because it would mark a shift towards a purely internal Six County settlement. It would marginalise the role of Dublin in



Talks with Dublin

the negotiations and therefore weaken the nationalists. Loyalists remain numerically dominant and this would be reflected in any electoral body.

With the adoption of this proposal, Major has given up all pretence of seeking to accommodate nationalist concerns. With his majority in the Commons reduced to five by backbench defections and therefore dependent on Loyalist MPs to remain in power, he is keen to make concessions to the Loyalists.

The central purpose of Major's initiative has always been to destroy the revolutionary opposition of the nationalist working class to British rule. Seventeen months after the IRA ceasefire, the government hopes that new wrangles over its 'forum' proposal, which will effectively postpone all-party talks indefinitely, will demoralise and disorganise the movement. No doubt this is why Major's proposal has met with complete support from

Tony Blair.

The proposal has met with fierce criticism from Sinn Fein. The SDLP and the Dublin government have also been unenthusiastic, preferring the Mitchell Commission's proposal that participants in all-party talks should accept six principles as the basis for any settlement. (The principles include commitments to disarmament; non-violence; opposition to punishment killings and beatings).

Meanwhile the British government's men of violence in Ireland remain. There are 30,800 British army personnel in the Six Counties, more than there were in 1991, and only 1285 less than just before the ceasefire. The army has confirmed that it has 'no plans to give up any bases'. Of 160 permanent checkpoints on the border, only three have been opened since the ceasefire. The RUC has promised to make no cuts in personnel.

The police and armed forces of the northern Ireland statelet remain almost exclusively Loyalist. Of the 8,500 Royal Irish Regiment (formerly Ulster Defence Regiment) troops on the streets of the north of Ireland, 97.5% are Protestant. The RUC is 92% Protestant.

For communists in Britain, there can be only one 'precondition' for peace in Ireland: the withdrawal of British troops and the destruction of the sectarian statelet which they defend. ■

**Turkey: elections and Customs Union solve nothing**

TREVOR RAYNE

With the help of many Labour Party MEPs, the Turkish financial elite and the western multinational corporations won the 13 December European Parliament vote for Turkey to join a customs union with the European Union.

The 24 December general election produced no outright winner, and one month on the quarrelling leaders of the two parties favoured by the West are still unable to form a common block against the pro-Islamic Welfare Party. Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's True Path Party and the Motherland Party together won approximately 40 per cent of the vote, but separately were outvoted by the Welfare Party with 21.3 per cent. The Turkish ruling class and its international backers do not trust the Welfare Party to carry out the IMF-dictated policies. The Welfare Party polled well among sections of the Istanbul working class and among Kurds. With 84 per cent inflation no end is in sight to the deteriorating conditions of the mass of people. The Welfare Party in power would come under tremendous pressure from its supporters to resist the international bankers.

The People's Democracy Party (HADEP) gained 1,170,699 votes and emerged as the leading party in six predominantly Kurdish provinces and the second party in several others. This should have won them 24 MPs but they are excluded from parliament under a rule which bars parties with less than 10 per cent from taking part. HADEP advocates lifting emergency rule and a peaceful solution to the war in Kurdistan. HADEP's votes were won in the face of arrests and torture of its workers, intimidation of voters and gerrymandering.

The Labour, Peace and Freedom Block, which included HADEP and SiP (a socialist party) fared disappointingly in the big western cities. This was in part due to the success of the Welfare Party, but also vast numbers of Kurds who have fled from the east are not registered to vote and much of the Turkish working class is infected with a chauvinistic attitude towards the Kurds.



While HADEP is denied a seat in parliament and four Kurdish MPs remain in gaol, Unal Erkan, former state of emergency governor of the Kurdish provinces, and other figures associated with the war against the Kurds have entered parliament as MPs for the True Path Party.

The Turkish state has rejected the unilateral ceasefire called by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) before the elections and continues its policy of burning down villages and forced population evacuation.

Stung by a set of photographs printed in *The European* newspaper in January which show Turkish soldiers posing with dismembered Kurds, the Turkish military sought to strike back at the PKK. Eleven people were burned alive in a vehicle in Sirnak. The Turkish government at once blamed the PKK. *The Independent* and *The European* ran this story uncritically. The PKK disowned the action. Investigation by the Diyarbakir Human Rights Association reveals that the 11 dead came from a village that voted for HADEP, that the villagers had been persecuted since the election and some had joined the PKK.

A Gendarme Intelligence (JITEM) officer interviewed by a Turkish newspaper revealed how people detained by JITEM are treated: 'Those that refuse are either formally arrested two months later or killed.' He explained that JITEM received training from US and British officers on technological, practical topics and on the PKK.

Customs Union will open Turkey up to be plundered by the multinationals; jobs will go, the state sector will be privatised and prices will be pushed up. The Welfare Party cannot defend the poor and the mass of workers. If the Turkish working class wants to resist the fate being prepared for it then it must rid itself of chauvinism towards the Kurds. ■

**Palestine - genocide continues**

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

On 20 January the Palestinian population in the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza went to the polls to elect 88 members and a President to a new legislative assembly. In reporting the elections, the media have been willing accomplices to what amounts to a criminal conspiracy to conceal the reality of politics in occupied Palestine - relentless Israeli colonisation of Palestinian land and the destruction of the Palestinian nation.

The *Guardian* termed the elections as 'historic', whilst a *Daily Telegraph* headline claimed that 'Arafat lays the foundation of Arab State'. International observers, including ex-US President Jimmy (Peanut) Carter, declared that, with minor qualifications, the elections were free and fair. The press spoke of the 'realisation of a 50-year-old Palestinian dream' of independence.

In reality, the Assembly has nothing to do with statehood or freedom. The scope and powers of this council are determined, by the colonial occupier - the Israeli state. The council has no jurisdiction over 70% of the West Bank and Gaza. It cannot have any foreign policy or issue passports. It has no authority over defence, nor can it stop Israel pumping scarce water out of the West Bank and Gaza. It has no jurisdiction over Israeli settlements which occupy the most fertile land. The Israelis must be notified of all decisions. The Assembly is a glorified local council. It can allocate frequencies for radio and TV, and issue postage stamps. It does, of course, as Palestinian revolu-

tionaries predicted as long ago as 1988, have powers to 'collect garbage and exterminate mosquitoes'.

The Assembly has one decisive function for the Israelis and their international backers: 'internal security'. Arafat's Fatah organisation is responsible for organising a repressive apparatus to control and suppress opposition to continued Israeli rule which is costing the ordinary Palestinian worker and peasant their lives, lands and livelihoods. In exchange for such work, Arafat and his bourgeois allies are given a chance to enrich themselves by pocketing international aid money, jobs in the repressive apparatus and a tiny degree of freedom for an increasingly desperate Palestinian business class.

Predictably Arafat, supported by the Zionist establishment and funded by the UN and other imperialist agents, was elected President with some 80% of the vote. His Fatah organisation, whose candidates were screened, to exclude critics of Arafat, only just secured an overall majority with some 56 seats despite massive rigging. The remainder went to independents, many of whom were rebel Fatah candidates selected by their local districts but deselected by Arafat.

Whilst this charade of 'democracy' unfolds, the Zionist colonisation of Palestine continues. Zionist land confiscations are daily events and settlements continue to expand. A massive road building programme by-passing Palestinian areas, is linking together these Settlements, guarded by Israeli soldiers, around what are planned to be four Pal-



Israeli repression behind the facade

estian enclaves in the West Bank and two in the Gaza. Living standards in the West Bank and Gaza are falling dramatically. In the Gaza over 50% are unemployed and over 30% live below the poverty line of \$470 a year. The situation is daily aggravated by the closure of the Israeli border shutting out tens of thousands of Gazans dependent on work in Israel.

The aim of the exercise is to eliminate all possibility for an independent Palestinian state. The US and European Union collaborate in concealing this reality. Israel remains their trusted agent in the Middle East; trusted to violently destroy popular opposition to its control of the region's vastly profitable oil and its strategic economic and military routes. An independent Palestine would undermine Israel's function for imperialism, so it has to be destroyed. Whilst the Israeli state remains the main agent for the destruction of Palestine, Yasser Arafat and the institutions born of the 'peace process' are its auxiliaries, helping to repress any protest against what is in effect genocide. ■

**Kani Yilmaz**

TREVOR RAYNE

European representative of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) Kani Yilmaz was seized by Metropolitan Police on 26 October 1994 outside Parliament on his way to address a meeting there. He has been imprisoned in Belmarsh since then. His appeal against extradition is postponed until March; no date has been fixed. In December Category A prisoners in Belmarsh were told they would have to speak in English during social visits. Kani Yilmaz protested against this. The prison authorities told him if he paid translation costs of £36 an hour plus travel expenses for

interpreters he could speak in another language. Kani Yilmaz objected, refusing social visits.

Kani Yilmaz is also denied the means of learning English: textbooks and language classes. The prison authorities answered protests by saying: 'We only have your word that he does not speak English.'

As well as an attempt to stop his visits, social phone calls are restricted to 15 minutes per week and the authorities charge him £26 per call. He is repeatedly harassed while making calls.

When the appeal date is set, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* calls on its readers to support any demonstrations in support of Kani Yilmaz. ■





# CUBA VIVE!

**In December 1995 the FRFI-initiated campaign, Rock around the Blockade, took a brigade of 30 people to Cuba. This group, ranging in age from 18-71, included students, workers and unemployed people, from different political perspectives but united in our desire to give solidarity to the Cuban revolution. We took with us a sound system for a youth centre in Ciego de Avila, as requested by the Cuban Union of Young Communists (UJC) – bought with money raised over the previous year. We spent two days in Havana and 12 days in Ciego de Avila, following a programme of work, visits and recreation organised for us by the UJC. On the following pages, Nuestro Tiempo brigadistas describe their experience. Below we print an interview with UJC representatives.**

## Organising youth in Cuba

Julio Martinez Ramirez is First Secretary of the UJC in the province of Ciego de Avila. He is also on the National Committee of the UJC, and on the Provincial Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Elio Rodriguez Barrios is responsible for political and ideological work in the municipality of Ciego de Avila and a member of the Provincial Committee of the UJC.

### The work of the UJC

J: The UJC works intensively with all young Cubans but is, specifically, an organisation of vanguard youth aged 15-30, selected in their workplace or university. We are the first level of the Communist Party of Cuba. We are a Marxist-Leninist organisation and defend the principles and the conquests of socialism. In this province we have over 20,000 cadre organised in 1,600 grassroots committees.

E: As well as young workers and soldiers and those working in science and technology, we work with students of all ages, from the FEU [union of university students] to the Jose Marti Pioneers Organisation [children aged 7-14]. We prioritise political and ideological work with all young people, whether UJC members or not.

J: Amongst our projects, we have a computer technology programme for children and young people, which is essential for developing the skills of a new generation. In the recreational field, we have an important project called 'campismo popular', developing rural camps for our youth, to encourage direct contact with nature. They spend 3-4 days living in cabins, swimming in the rivers or the sea, riding horses and building camp fires. Because of the special period, we also organise 'Technical Youth Brigades' to develop new technology linked to solving problems in factories and industries – for example, creating substitutes for spare parts. We also mobilise the youth to work in agriculture.

### On the need for recreational facilities

E: Recreational activities for young people, particularly in the special period, are limited by the lack of facilities and equipment we need, especially musical equipment. In our municipalities, as is the case more or less throughout the country, there is a dearth of such facilities. Yet

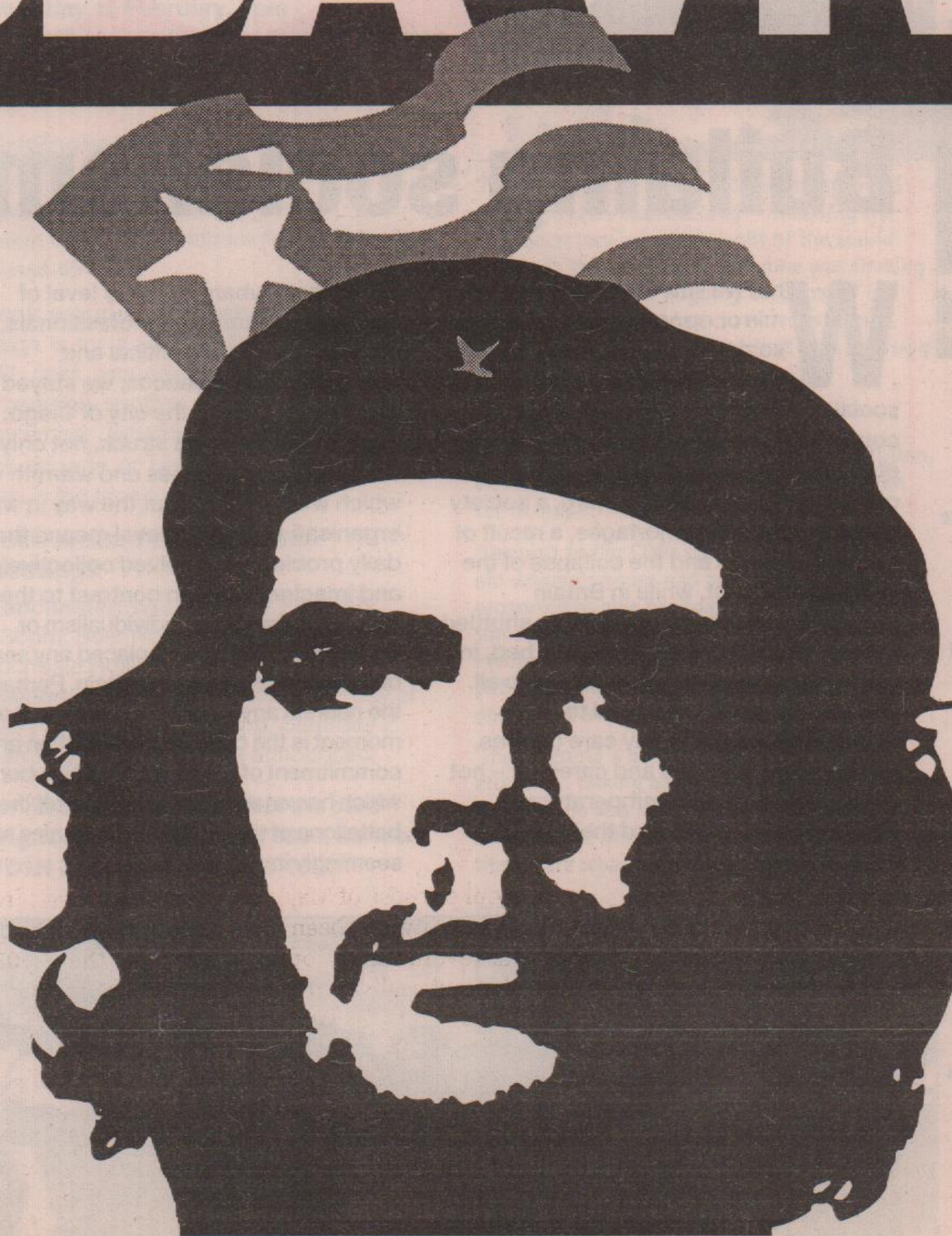
these are indispensable for young people – to dance, to listen to music from round the world, as well as Cuban music. Cubans love dancing and music and acquiring the necessary facilities has been very difficult. The aid brought by the Nuestro Tiempo brigade plays an important role in involving young people in our work. With your help, we've been able to create a new recreational centre in Ciego, which will be used by over 100 people every day – so a significant number will benefit. It's a wonderful gesture you have made, and will help us a lot.



Julio Martinez (fourth from left) and Elio Rodriguez (far right) at a farewell supper

J: The people of Cuba today lack many material things, but they still need to enjoy themselves. A disco system allows our young people and workers to do so in a collective atmosphere. It is one more way the UJC can enable the youth to confront the difficulties we face. Because this sound system is not only for our own cadre – we have to emphasise it is for everyone, whether our members or not. It has been for us one of the most important things we've been able to achieve for the youth in the recent period. This new disco will help the young people here to share in a healthy way, day by day, the best times of their lives.

E: It's not enough just to look after people physically and mentally with health and education if we don't also take care of their spiritual needs. And the atmosphere that has been created in Ciego de Avila with news of this disco, of your wonderful gesture of support, has meant hundreds of people phoning our office



and our homes, coming up to us in the street, asking when it'll be open, how much it will cost to get in, when can they come. It's created a wave of interest and enthusiasm throughout Ciego.

J: And because of the sound system, the provincial government decided to donate a new venue to the UJC. So the youth

gained both the equipment and a new venue. We'd thought a lot about where we could install the sound system. As the date when the sound system would actually arrive approached, we discussed with the party leadership and the local government and they gave us this venue. So we had to mobilise hundreds of young people to work there. It was all voluntary work – we didn't pay anyone one centavo. Young people, students, construction workers, UJC cadre, provincial government and party workers worked day and night for a month to ensure that when you arrived the venue would be ready. In fact, we only just finished the night before the inauguration. But that was also great, because lots of you saw us working, painting, repairing and we can say in all sincerity that the youth of our province did this work with great love.

What was especially important was for the young people of Ciego to see, at the inauguration ceremony, how young people from Britain, from a distant capitalist country, could create a political movement to raise money, to bring music to Ciego de Avila. I think that was the most

important thing. The quality of the system, in one sense, is immaterial compared to the fact of having achieved this donation. And that political movement, in your country, is tremendously important to us. This achievement also helps the UJC gain even more respect amongst the youth because they can see that the UJC is growing in this province – that we are able to offer more in the way of sound systems, recreational facilities etc to every young person here. That is the most important of all.

### On the new economic measures introduced by the government

J: I believe that all the measures our government is taking in the present period have a single goal – to defend the gains of socialism. However, the UJC has to consider how we can adapt and target our work in these new conditions. Tourism, for example, has generated a number of problems which complicate our work further. With over 70% of tourism workers under 30, this a concrete task for our youth, and I am pleased to say a large percentage of these people work with the UJC.

A bigger problem of the special period is self-employment, which is a new thing for us. Many young people don't have all the work options they would like and so work for themselves. We have to give considerable attention to these comrades, because such work can create a different consciousness to that which the rest of us have.

With the special period, it's no longer the case that all students can now go on to university as they used to be able to do. The number of students able to go to university has decreased. This has created problems; we have had to develop our work to maintain the consciousness of such students. We also have to encourage university students to direct themselves to subjects most essentially linked to agricultural production and to look for jobs in appropriate areas. Those are the three areas that have most affected our daily work.

E: There are a number of phenomena which are new for our society, for our

*continued on page 10*

## Gracias a todos

Todos los participantes de la campaña Rock around the Blockade y los brigadistas Nuestro Tiempo ofrecemos nuestras gracias calurosas a todos de ellos aquellos nos dieron la inspiracion durante nuestro tiempo en Cuba. En particular:

el departamento de relaciones internacionales de la UJC

el buro provincial de la UJC de Ciego de Avila

y todos los nuestros compañeros y amigos en el campamento Eduardo Garcia Delgado y en Ciego de Avila

No hay palabras para expresar nuestra agradecimiento, camaraderia y amor. Pagaremos esta deuda en la mejor manera que podemos – lucharemos con mas fuerza en este año, no solamente para defender a Cuba, y contro el bloqueo criminal, pero tambien para desarrollar un movimiento socialista aqui. Su lucha es nuestra lucha, y nunca los olvidaremos.

### Tune in to Radio Havana Cuba

The frequency for Europe is: 21.00-22.00hrs UTC on 9550 KHz (31 metre band) Each broadcast begins with 17 minutes of international and national news. For more information contact: Radio Havana Cuba, English Department, PO Box 6240, Havana, Cuba or e-mail radiohc@tinored.cu



Left to right: Ken, Amelia and Hannah out in the fields

**'Before the revolution, life was terrible – no schools, hospitals or medical attention. In the morning you would find dead bodies in the streets. Children went to work hungry. Nowadays, children have the right to study, and to look forward to the rest of their lives, as doctors, teachers – whatever they want. Everyone can develop themselves to play a full role. We are happy, thanks to the triumph of the revolution. We live as revolutionaries and as Cubans. I came here five years ago, as a volunteer, to help found the camp. It helps us work together against the US blockade.'**

Amelia Gonzalez Rodriguez, 42, a volunteer on the Eduardo Garcia Delgado agricultural work camp



# Our times – Brigadistas’ Diary

22 December – day 1

'Visited Revolution Square and the Museum of the Revolution'



The Brigadistas assemble in Revolution Square

'We travelled down that evening to the Eduardo Garcia Delgado camp, where we were to stay for ten days. The welcome we were given was amazing – music blasting out, people singing, cheering and clapping – and it was 2am!'

23 December – day 2

'Pouring rain turned the camp into a sea of red mud. Our meeting with local dignitaries ended up as an informal huddle in a room, having a really good discussion, lots of questions and answers.'



Ken sings songs from the struggle in Ireland and his own songs. 'How great it felt to be playing live political music to a live political audience.'

'Football – an incredible game with both teams determined to win played with a fun, friendly and comradesly spirit. Young Cubans 1, Brigadistas 1, Cubans won 1-0 on penalties. Everyone won friends and gained from the experience.'

'Most of the workers on the camp were young Cubans, all volunteers. I asked one why he'd volunteered – because he was a revolutionary. Why? Because the revolution was important for all the Cuban people.'

'Dancing and music till the early hours – don't the Cubans ever sleep?'

24 December – day 3

'Just after 5am the music started again – time to get up, wash in cold water and have breakfast before we all gathered for the ceremony of raising the flag while the Cuban national anthem was played. To me, witnessing it for the first time, it was very moving.'



'Machetes in hand, we marched out with the Cubans to the banana plantations. The work, though quite hard, was one of the most satisfying and pleasant parts of the whole experience – I'd have been happy to do more. To

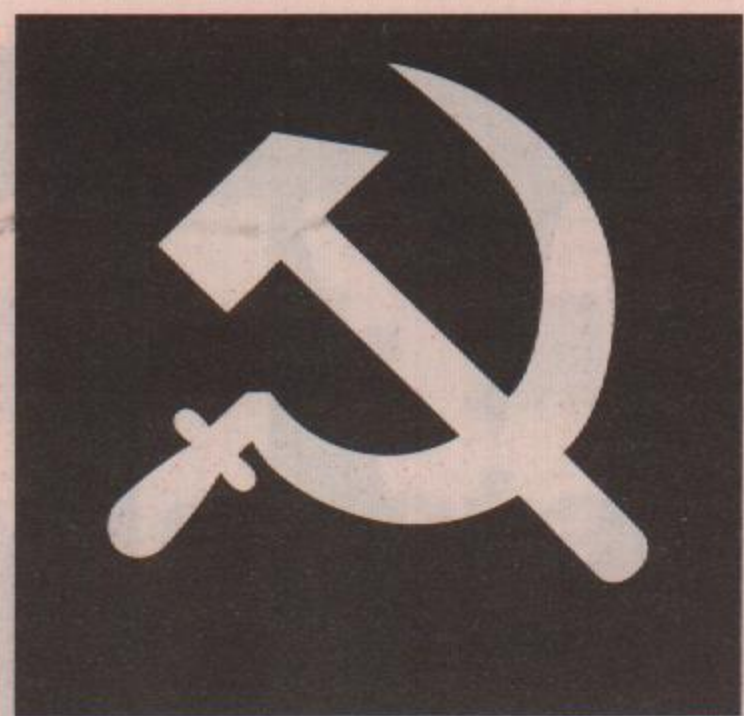
those who think they're too old, I can only say that Len managed – and he's 71 and recently had a triple heart bypass.'

25 December – day 4



'Before going back to the banana plantations after lunch, Fajardo from the UJC Provincial Committee addresses one of our brigade meetings on democracy in Cuba.'

'Two of us spoke at an RCG/FRFI meeting about "Unequal Britain": the dining room was packed with Cubans and brigade members, even the second secretary of the UJC Provincial Committee came. A tremendous experience – in spite of inevitable translation problems – a real sense of internationalism.'



# CUBA VIV

## Building socialism in Cuba and Britain

What we saw in Cuba was a mirror opposite of the capitalist society we live in – and shows what is possible under socialism, even in the most difficult conditions. In contrast to Britain's excess of consumer goods, Cuba is still, in spite of a welcome economic upturn, a society beset with material shortages, a result of the US blockade and the collapse of the socialist bloc. Yet, while in Britain hospitals are closed and patients shuttled around the country in search of a bed, in Cuba health provision is available to all. Education, equally provided to all, begins with infants in day care centres. Old people are valued and cared for – not left to die in sub-zero temperatures because they can't afford their heating bills, as they are here.

We met Cubans at every level of society – workers and professionals, representatives of political and grassroots organisations; we stayed with ordinary families in the city of Ciego. Everywhere we were struck, not only by the sincerity, openness and warmth with which we were met, but the way in which organisation at every level means that daily problems are solved collectively and imaginatively – in contrast to the cynicism, alienation, individualism or indifference that have replaced any sense of community in most of Britain. Perhaps the nearest anything here comes to it at the moment is the courage, imagination and commitment of the warriors of Newbury which has enabled them to hold off the battalions of the big road companies at seemingly impossible odds.

What, then, are we to learn from this experience?

The US blockade is crippling Cuba, and we must step up our activities against it.

The measures introduced to combat the crisis, while bringing economic improvement, are also unleashing political and social forces that can undermine the gains of the revolution, and we must continue to support those, like the Union of Young Communists, who are in the forefront of combatting those effects.

But in the final analysis, unless we at the same time build a socialist movement here in Britain, such solidarity will be useless. Unless we learn from the Cubans that organising collectively against injustice and the obscene inequality

between rich and poor that exist in Britain – where one spoilt and wealthy woman can squander £100,000 on a holiday while other women are gaoled because they cannot pay their gas bills – then we will have learnt nothing. Such a movement must be an international movement, giving solidarity to Cuba and building links with communists in other countries. The involvement of a comrade from the revolutionary movement in Turkey in our brigade was a small but real step towards this.

Only a movement for socialism, to achieve here in Britain the very real gains for the working class we witnessed in Cuba can achieve this, while giving the Cuban revolution the real solidarity it needs and deserves.

Bob Shepherd and Cat Wiener



Cuban women on the Eduardo Garcia Delgado Camp join in the party on New Year's Eve

## People's power

A highlight of the brigade was meeting with activists at grassroots level. Cuba's socialist structure encourages participation by its citizens in all aspects of life. The community we visited in an area called Venezuela was a prime example of the way Cuba's socialist policies bring everyone into a framework of collectivity.

We met with committee members, activists and families of the local Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). The CDR is a grassroots organisation formed from local residents and open to everyone from the age of 14. The structure begins on the block in a street. There one resident is elected by other members on the block to be their Block Representative on the CDR Committee. From this committee, members are nominated onto the Municipal Committee and so on right up to the government. At each stage of the elections from municipal committee upwards, all citizens over 16 have a right to vote, and the turnout is about 97%. If any representative, at whatever level, is not seen to be performing in the best interests of the community, they can be voted out and replaced.

The CDRs include Communist Party members and non-members. They work closely with other organisations in the community – the Women's Federation (FMC), the UJC, the trade unions and of course the Communist Party – to ensure that every voice is heard and problems aired and resolved without exclusion of any citizen. In effect, the CDR is the voice of the working class of Cuba.

The brigade split into six groups and we were all invited into the homes of CDR committee members. My group was welcomed by the president of the local CDR, a woman in her mid-50s who had been involved in the CDR for 25 years. The whole family was there – from a 6-year-old cousin to a grandmother of 92. She explained how the CDR brings citizens together, organising residents on a voluntary basis to patrol the district, preventing crime and anti-social behaviour. They act as a resource for the local doctor – checking on the elderly, distributing medicine etc – and encourage young people to take an interest in their community. They impart information and get feedback from the community through discussions at local meetings and block committees.

A rota of members to patrol the community throughout the night is a main function

'I am black, and before the revolution I would have been discriminated against. Now all children and youth and elderly are equal. Your colour, age or gender, do not determine your fate. We have the same medical attention, free schooling, we work at what we want to, because we study for it. This is our revolution. This UJC contingent teaches us to maintain our youth, our strength and, above all, our revolutionary credentials forever. Before everything, we are revolutionaries.'

Angel Rene Sayas  
Martinez, 24, Eduardo Garcia  
Delgado camp



of the CDR. Our host's daughter said that on occasion she might be at work at 7am, attend a union meeting after work, do housework, and then go onto a night patrol into the small hours of the morning – then up again at 6am for work.

The CDR also mobilises its members to help in the economy, especially since the break up of the socialist countries. Volunteers regularly do unpaid manual labour, for example in sugar or banana plantations, to increase production for the country as a whole. The volunteers, who may go straight to a plantation after work or a CDR patrol nightshift, are young and old, women and men, manual and professional workers. The sense of comradeship in this community and wherever we went, was so strong and genuine, with everyone proud of their role in maintaining the gains of the revolution.

The reality of Cuban socialism is alive and kicking in Ciego de Avila. If you don't believe me, join the next brigade and experience it for yourself.

Kathy Fernand

## Health for all

As a doctor, I was eager to visit a family doctor's surgery. The 'family doctor programme' aims to achieve a ratio of one doctor to 120 families. The average GP list in Britain is 1,800-2,000 people. The doctor and nurse we met currently serve 528 people, and so are able to build up close relationships with their patients. They visit pregnant women and babies every day, often on an informal basis; problems are tackled early, whether directly medical, or to do with diet or housing. Pregnant women are given a card which allows them to go to the front of any queue.

When asked how long you have to wait for an appointment with a doctor, the Cuban doctor stared blankly, and we had to repeat the question. Eventually she understood and said: 'In Cuba, if you want to see the doctor, you see the doctor that day.' Waiting time for a hip replacement in Cuba is six weeks; in Britain, up to two years.

The Infant Mortality Rate in Cuba in 1995 was 9.4 per 1,000 live births – the third consecutive year it has been under 10. In 1959 it was 60. Comparable figures for Haiti are 74, Nicaragua, 49 and Mexico 27.

Cuba has a population of 11 million. There are about 46,000 doctors, with 4,000 graduating every year, 75,000 nurses, and 300,000 health workers overall. In Britain, the number of nurses and midwives in the

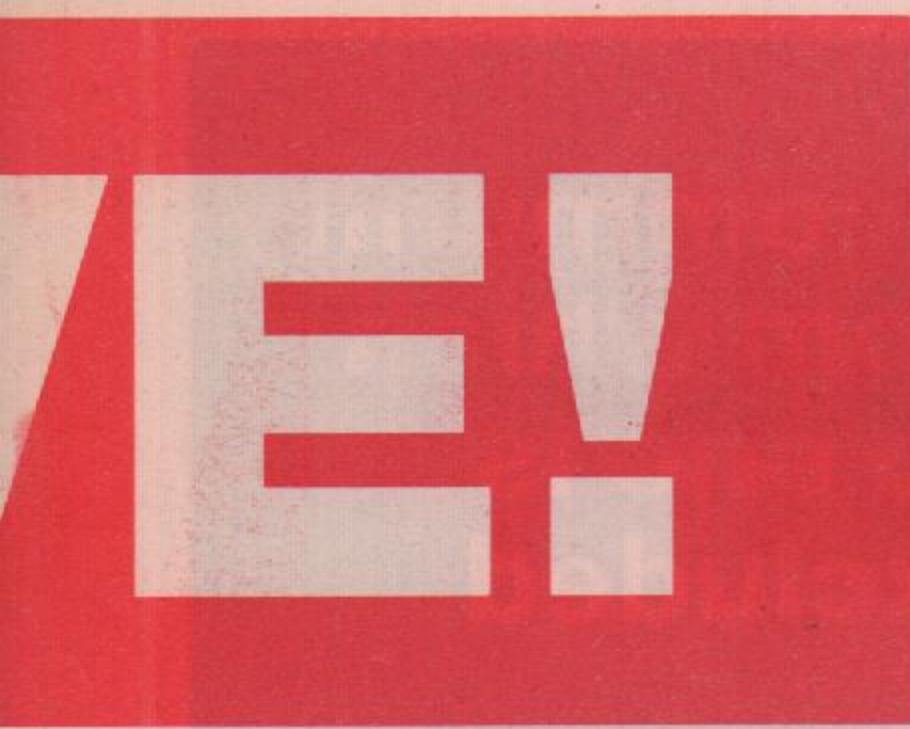
NHS was cut by 13% between 1989 and 1994, – a loss of 50,000 nurses and midwives – while the number of managers rose by 400%. The number of nurses in training was cut by 31%.

The only underlying health philosophy from the British government is the need to meet financial targets by cutting costs. No one will address the direct relationship between poverty and ill health. On the Special Care Baby Unit where I work, there is usually irritation if a patient's discharge is delayed because of housing problems – most health care workers do not think this is their problem. No matter that a premature baby has been nurtured to full size and health, only to go home to a hostel bedsit with no heating and a single electric ring.

At the Special Care Baby Unit in Ciego, I was introduced to all the staff, including the cleaner. They explained that hygiene was of paramount importance, and without the cleaner, the unit could not be kept open. Contrast this to the treatment of domestics and porters in Britain, now employed by the lowest bidding private firm contracted to NHS hospitals. They are treated like replaceable machines, ignored as people, paid less than a living wage and their contribution is never recognised. In a Cuban hospital, the pay differential from top to bottom is 3:1, in Britain it is around 14:1.

Hannah Caller





# Federation of Cuban Women

It was a privilege to meet with the Executive of the Federation of Cuban Women (FCW) of Ciego, and engage with them on many issues affecting women in Cuba today. They were very honest about their struggle against Cuban 'machismo', but were confident that through their education programmes for women both in the workplace and in the home attitudes were changing. The FCW are involved in the family programmes on welfare and education which the schools and daycare centres have introduced, and visit the families of young children in their homes with leaflets about child development where children are unable to attend the day centres.

Kathy Fernand



Tug-of-War on the camp

## PUBLIC MEETINGS:

### London RCG Communist Forum

**Cuba Vive!** A report-back from members of the Nuestro Tiempo brigade to Cuba. **Sunday 11 February, 2.30pm**, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)

### Manchester report-back

**Thursday 15 February, 7pm**  
Salam Chamber, Manchester Metropolitan University, Student Union Building, All Saints, Oxford Road, Manchester

### Birmingham

**Viva Cuba!** Report-back meeting **Thursday 22 February, 7.30pm**  
Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Selly Park (buses 45 + 47)

**Rock around the Blockade's 1996** campaign is for a mobile disco system which will cost around £6,000. We are also organising another brigade to Cuba next December. Whether you want to come on the brigade or help with the campaign - now is the time to get involved.

### Rock around the Blockade meetings

**Manchester:** Wednesday 7 February, 7.30pm, Beer House, Angel St, off Rochdale Road, Manchester.

**London:** we meet on the first Saturday of every month. Next meeting, Saturday 2 March, 3pm, venue to be announced.

For further details, contact the campaign c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel: 0171 837 1688.

## 26 December - day 5

'Knocked off work early to visit the local school. I was struck by the pictures of Che Guevara and Fidel on the wall - compared to the Super Mario and Princess Di posters you find in Britain! Later, visited local cooperative farm.'



'The entire UJC Provincial Committee turned out to meet us that evening - including the First Secretary, who'd thought of the sound system in the first place. Everyone was shaking us by the hand and hugging us. Some of us unpacked the sound system - overwhelmed with pride and relief, for the first time realising we'd done it, we'd actually done it.'

## 27 December - day 6

'After a talk on the history of Cuban revolution, we heard Che Guevara's letter to his children set to music.'

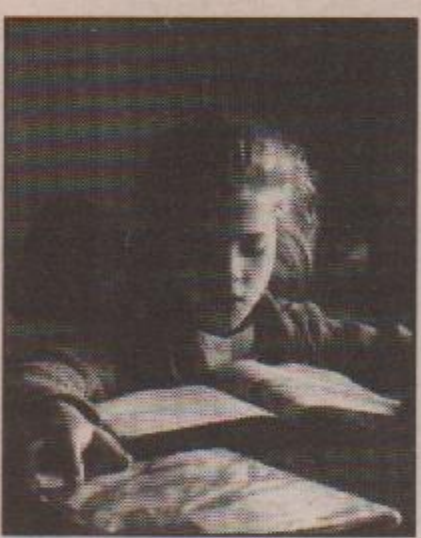
'The visit to the CDRs struck me the most. An old woman's house had burned down and they organised to give her soap and shampoo and somewhere to stay. They told us about their involvement with children's truancy and street patrols to check everyone was all right. We don't have anything like this in Britain.'

'That evening a group of children gathered around us talking and laughing. I gave a biscuit to one, who was seven or eight. He shared it out with the others. That's what they are like - they share what they have, even the children.'

## 28 December - day 7



'What I remember most about the old people's home in Ciego was how lively and political and engaged all the old people were. As we asked questions, one 78-year-old woman stood up, raised her fist and shouted, "Viva Fidel!"'



'After we'd been shown round Ciego's school for children with visual disabilities, all the children came out onto the balconies and some sang for us. I've never heard such moving singing from a group of 6- to 7-year-old children.'

'My work takes me into many nursery schools, but never have I seen a group of children socially interacting and using with such care the toys produced for them by the community as I witnessed at the circulo infantil in Ciego.'

'The executive of the FMC invited us to present our material aid to the workers' representative who would ensure it was distributed to the most needy women in the community. It was a proud moment to stand shoulder to shoulder with these sisters of the revolution. Strength to the FMC!'



## 29 December - Day 8

'A comrade from a revolutionary organisation in Turkey talked about their struggle to brigade members and Cuban workers at a rural camp for Young Pioneers.'

'All the leadership of the UJC Provincial Committee attended a meeting for us to ask any questions we wanted - from attitudes to homosexuality in Cuba to the UJC's ideological work.'

## 30 December - day 9

'At the Ecological Centre at Caya Coco they told us they'd allocated only 4% of land for tourist development so as not to affect the local ecology.'

'The meeting with the tourist workers was enlightening - the recognition that dollars equals problems, their openness about the fact there were problems, but recognising that how to overcome the problems was open to debate. Discussion amongst brigade members went on for hours afterwards.'

## 31 December - Day 10

'All 30 brigade members stayed with families from Ciego in their homes which ranged from rural wooden houses to old colonial town houses and apartments. The warmth and hospitality shown to me had to be experienced to be believed. I felt part of the family and will never forget them. What they wanted in return was for me to tell people in England and help break the blockade.'



'An amazing New Year at Cuba's biggest sugar cane factory at Ciro Redondo. It was night, the flames from the furnaces looked like something out of Zola; there was sugar in the air; you felt like you were walking through snowy slush but it was sugar. We saw the centrifuges spinning and smelled molasses. We were given a tremendous welcome - lights, fireworks, fresh flowers thrust into our hands, cards with Che's image on them. Workers filled their hats with sugar and offered it to us to taste. There were flags and banners, including ours; we stood amongst the workers for a brief ceremony before a guided tour.'

## 1 January - day 11 The anniversary of the revolution

'All of us stood up in that disco, wearing our campaign t-shirts, talking about what Cuba and the campaign had meant to us. We sang songs of the other struggles we'd been involved with - from South Africa, from Ireland. But the most amazing moment was when we sang the Internationale, and slowly, as they realised what it was, the entire audience rose to their feet, arms raised, singing. If our whole experience, if what the last twelve months' political and campaigning work signified, could be encapsulated in one moment, that was it.'

## 2 January - day 12

'As we gathered with our Cuban families at the UJC offices before leaving for Havana, everyone was crying and hugging each other, promising we'd come back, knowing each of us had a home in Ciego we could call our own.'

## Last thoughts:

'The hospitality we received was overwhelming. Our solidarity was greatly appreciated, yet the Cubans gave us far more than we gave them. They showed us socialism can provide, in spite of the US blockade, a health and education system far superior to the British system; a legal system that for example, re-educates juvenile offenders and reincorporates them into the community. The Cubans showed us what can be achieved in a society based on the needs of the people rather than profit. They reaffirmed my commitment to fighting for socialism in Britain.'



'What has been most inspiring is that Cuba has achieved so much with so little. It makes me very optimistic for the future.'

'I've met the most wonderful and political young people I've ever met in my life. Talking to them made tears well up in my eyes. They made me realise the importance of changing the world, of being part of something good. And going on all the visits made me realise how good socialism is for all the people.'

'Thank you for the best two weeks of my life.'

'Thank you for opening my eyes.'



Compiled by: Bob, Cat, Dave, Len, Hannah, Francis, Val, Jenny, Richard, Ken, Kathy, Zoe, Pete, Helen, Susan



# Visit to an AIDS sanatorium

The Cuban government has been attacked for its policies towards people with AIDS. Medical and government officials have admitted mistakes in the past, but there has always been much to admire in Cuba's quality of treatment of those infected and the number of lives saved by containing the virus. Clinical trials of an AIDS vaccine will begin on humans this year. AIDS campaigners in this country need to rid themselves of prevailing anti-Cuban prejudices and take on board recent developments to ensure that, if the results are promising, the US and other countries hostile to Cuba are not able to prevent access to the vaccine. Jenny Wight visited an AIDS sanatorium in Ciego de Avila, and spoke to patient Carlos Manuel Cela. 'We can go out of the sanatorium, which is the rule here, but I also have family in here. My family and friends visit, and I am satisfied with the treatment I receive. I've lived here three months, and haven't experienced any discrimination from comrades at school. The government policies on peo-

ple with HIV and AIDS are very positive these days, in trying to prevent the spread of AIDS.' Aida Heriandez Rebore, a psychologist who has worked for two years at the sanatorium, provided the following information. • Drugs, some imported and some, such as Interferon, produced in Cuba, are supplied by the Ministry of Health. Recent research has resulted in multi-drug treatment including AZT, DDI and Interferon. The Institute of Tropical Research is involved with joint projects with other countries. • Patients are advised about the benefits of living in the sanatorium, given more information about AIDS and how to look after themselves and protect others. When they are adequately prepared, they can go back to their homes. If they become more sick, they can return to the sanatorium for medical treatment. • Record numbers of tests - all voluntary - have taken place. The AIDS prevention team includes those who are HIV+, who

visit schools and community centres. • Cuba is making great efforts to buy in condoms from abroad, because they are not manufactured in Cuba. The health authorities produce educational leaflets about safe sex. • Homosexuality is handled the same way as heterosexuality by the health authorities. There is no discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. • The first recorded case of AIDS in Cuba was in 1986. Little was known about AIDS, and patients just went into sanatoria. Now there is more information, and after receiving the necessary treatment patients return to their normal lives. The sanatoria's main objective is to prevent the spread of AIDS. • The AIDS rate in Cuba is very low compared to the rest of the Caribbean. The total number of HIV+ people as at April 1995 in Cuba was 1,122 with sexual transmission (where known) 53% heterosexual, 44.8% homosexual. Jenny Wight and Richard Roques





# CUBA VIVE!

**A community from which no one is excluded**

## Veteran of the Cuban Revolution recalls 'the bright awakening'

**S**ergio Bosque Icardos is 64. A member of the Cuban Communist Party, he says 'I have worked in every area of the revolutionary struggle where I have had the opportunity, to defend the revolution, even at the cost of my life.' Although retired, he joined the Eduardo Garcia Delgado work camp 15 months ago at the request of the Party. Here, he talks about the history of the Cuban revolution.

'In the 1950s, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano Autentico was in government. A senator, Rene Chibas, split from the party to form El Partido Pueblo Cubano Ortodoxo, to campaign against government corruption. Their motto was 'Shame against money'. After Chibas' public suicide, his young followers, including Fidel Castro, intensified their campaign against the government.

Fidel understood the only way to liber-

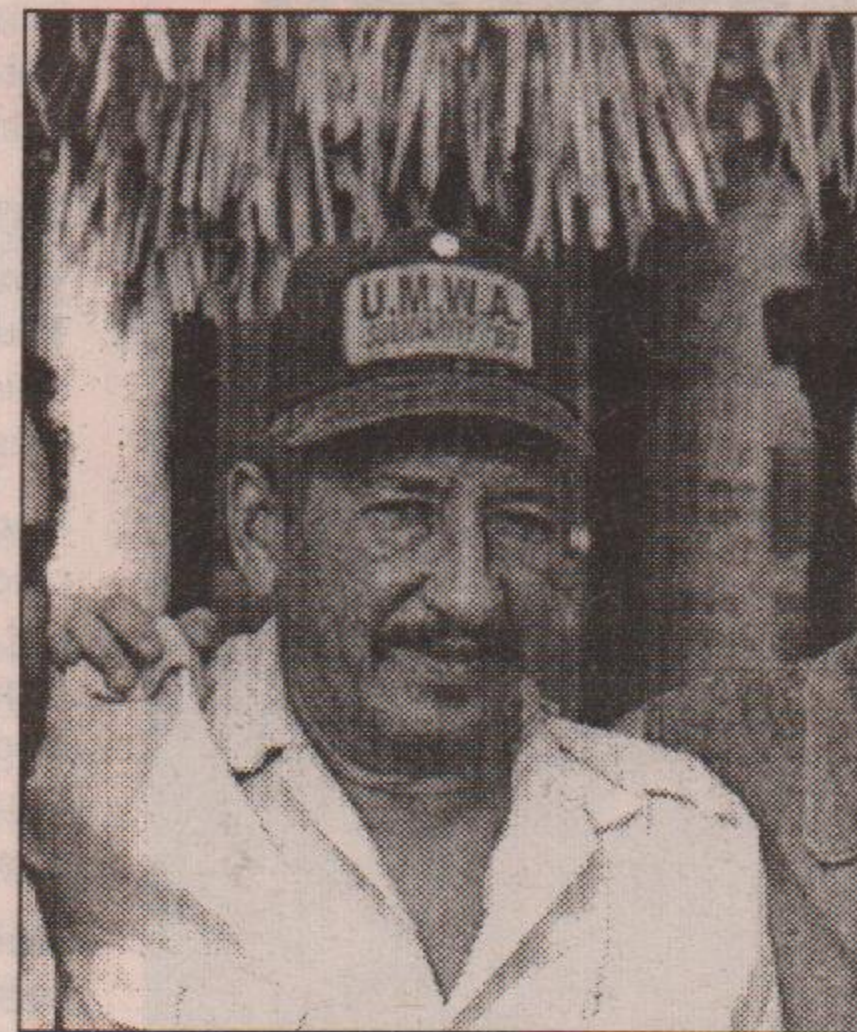
ation was through the armed struggle. A group began to prepare themselves for that struggle, training in secret to use arms in Pinar del Rio and planning the attack on Moncada, the second most important military garrison on the island. The attack would be at dawn on 26 July 1953; after they took Moncada, they would call on the people to rise up and join them for the final assault.

But tragically on the morning of the assault they were discovered and had to start shooting, waking everyone at the barracks. The unequal struggle began - the rebels had only small guns and few bullets. They resisted for a while, but there came a point where Fidel ordered withdrawal to the mountains. 72 comrades were caught, tortured and massacred.

Fidel was captured a little later and, alongside other comrades, sentenced to

25 years on the Isles of Pines. His famous speech from the dock, 'History will absolve me' was smuggled out from gaol and used to raise people's consciousness and unite the 26 July Movement with other sections of the struggle.

Popular pressure forced Batista, then President of Cuba, to declare an amnesty and release many political prisoners. Harassed by the authorities at every turn, Fidel went into exile in Mexico to launch a new stage of the struggle. There he was joined by other comrades, including an Argentinian doctor, Che Guevara. People have said Che was just an adventurer: this is not true. When I met Che I was deeply impressed with him, his ideals and the way he expressed himself. He was dedicated to the liberation of Latin America. He promised his total and unselfish support to the Cuban revolutionaries, and together they organised the *Granma*



Sergio Bosque Icardos

expedition, setting sail from the port of Tapan with just 82 comrades. They were discovered and engaged in battle - the first fight of the Rebel Army. They were dispersed and many were massacred. Eventually, just 12 of them were reunited. Fidel looked at them and said, 'With these 12 comrades we will win the war.'

I was working with a group affiliated to the communist youth organisation within the Communist Party, and to the 26 July Movement. We worked in the underground movement. In this period, 25,000 young activists were assassinated by the Batista government. It got to the point where it became impossible to carry on, even underground, so we joined the guerrillas in the mountains. The groups leading the struggle at this time included the 26 July Movement, the 13 March Revolutionary Directory, the Popular Socialist Party and the 2nd Front of Escambray. Che and Camillo Cienfuegos had the task of forming two columns to carry the struggle from the east to the west of the island, marching hundreds of miles to Santa Clara in the middle of Cuba. On 31 December 1958, Che took Santa Clara after a long battle. The country was now divided geographically, with half of it under rebel control. Batista and his cronies fled the country. This was the bright awakening of the dawn of 1 January 1959.

Today, we face a US blockade that has been in place for 35 years. The collapse of the socialist bloc, its support and trade at fair prices, has brought us great hardship. But we will not give up. It is up to every country to establish their own struggle for liberation. It is only this fight that can help eradicate the existing problems in the world, which in one way or another are caused by imperialism. You can only succeed through a long and sustained fight. The youth have the right to fight for their liberty and ideals. As for us, we Cubans prefer to die on our feet, rather than to live on our knees.'

As an unemployed person from Britain, I was impressed by how in Cuba all the people are given every opportunity possible to be involved in all spheres of society. Even those who are or have been involved in minor criminal activity like prostitution, delinquency etc are encouraged to participate in community life, and aren't judged on past misdemeanours. During the hard times of the special period, the vast majority help to overcome the problems together, and ensure that no one is left to fend for themselves.

In Britain meanwhile we're told that there aren't enough resources, so only the wealthy and privileged can get the best services in such basics for a decent life as education and health care. In Cuba, street parties are organised where there's dancing and cheap refreshments to which everyone is welcome; in Britain, it's often impossible to go out to meet friends because of lack of money for transport, let alone a pint. As for going out dancing or other cultural entertainment, it's way beyond our means. The poor have no political voice: we are seen as being outside 'normal' society - something for which we ourselves are blamed.

David Howarth

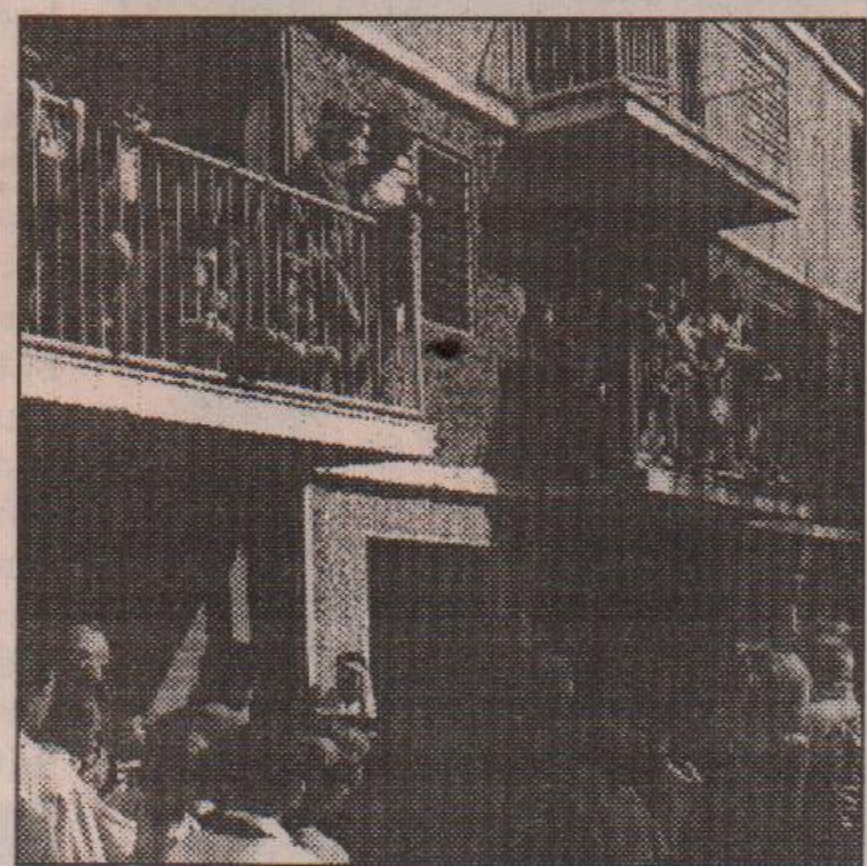
## Treating people with disabilities with dignity

I am blind, and had asked to visit a school for the visually impaired in Ciego, taking some Braille material aid with me.

There are 14 schools for visually-impaired children in Cuba. From 14 on, most children complete their education in high school. The Carlos Fonseca school we visited is in the centre of a residential area, so the children grow up together with others who are not visually impaired. Of the 60 enrolled children, three are totally blind. Only 15 are residential and they go home for four days every ten days. Britain has only 24 schools for the visually impaired, with an age range of three to 19. Most are fully residential, and the children are not integrated with the local community.

An on-site ophthalmologist and doctor diagnose and monitor the sight level of all the children. There is no waiting-list for treatment. However, the special period has created many shortages. For example, these schools can provide lenses for glasses, but sadly, do not have sufficient frames, and have problems replacing broken strip lights, particularly the bulbs.

In Havana, I met Jose Monteagudo Gonzalez, Vice-President of the Cuban National Association of the Blind - which now has over 19,000 members - and First



The sight of children at the Carlos Fonseca school is monitored regularly

Vice-President of the Latin American Blind People's Union. The National Association is a non-governmental body which supplements state programmes in many areas. For instance, through the Ministry of Culture, all provincial libraries are stocked with Braille and large-print literature and talking books; the national sports body provides training and equipment for blind athletes. It campaigns for improved access to buildings and full integration.

The Cuban athletes were champions of the last three successive Latin American games for the visually impaired. A music and drama festival is held every two years; and there is an annual convention for visually-impaired writers and poets.

As a blind person who had to leave home in Panama where there was no school for the visually-impaired at the time, and experienced residential schooling in Jamaica, then England, I know how much these gains mean for the people of Cuba. They must be defended!

I asked what we in Britain can do. Jose said, 'Education, access to information and mobility are three important factors for anyone with a disability in attaining their independence, and to be a fully integrated member of society.' You can help by donating material aid - or funds to buy aids - such as Braille writing equipment and paper, white canes, frames for glasses, strip light bulbs, etc. Join our next brigade to experience the feelings which words cannot express, of being part of a society where we are treated with unpatronising dignity.

For further information, write to me at BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. You can send material aid to Visual Aids Appeal for Cuba via the Co-ordinator Steve Binns at Liverpool City Council tel: 0151 227 3911 or contact Jose Monteagudo Gonzalez at Asociacion Nacional del Ciego, Calle 1 No.201, esquina a 11 Vedado, La Habana 4, Cuba.

Ken Bodden



continued from page 7

youth and for our organisation which we've had to deal with in the recent period. For example, a phenomenon associated with tourism is prostitution, 'jineterismo'. It is not an organised prostitution, but many young people who are not involved in studying or regular work succumb to this deviation from normal behaviour to acquire the material things young people lack these days. So they sell their bodies for money, or for clothes. It's a problem we've been confronting in the recent period. We discuss with these young men and young women; we give

prioritised help to the UJC branches in these areas, to try to involve these young people in our work; a lot of work is being done. The party and the government are still discussing various other measures to deal with what is a recent anomaly associated with tourism. These are things our organisation has not really had to deal with before, although they've existed in capitalist countries for thousands of years. So in these new times we have to work with new ideas and new methods, adapting and improving our work to meet the real conditions to ensure the youth do not go down that road. We think, however, that our young people still accept the leading role played by the UJC in every sphere of political life of the youth of our country.

### Priorities for the future

J: Our main priority is the economic battle, mobilising the youth behind the main tasks that confront the revolution, especially for the sugar harvest and the food programme. That involves, for example,

youth brigades on camps like Eduardo Garcia Delgado, where you stayed, and supporting other forms of agriculture in Ciego, which has some of the country's most important production. The youth of the UJC must be in the forefront of this work.

Our branches also discuss economic shortages in every workplace. Our economy is growing at the moment, but it has gone through an intense crisis. We must ensure that everything is done as economically as possible, with the minimum resources, but maximum efficiency.

Our other priority is ideological work with the youth - how we can influence them, and the rest of the population politically, to maintain Marxist and socialist ideas, to maintain at a high level the gains we have achieved. We carry out intensive work in political campaigns. We also work to improve the internal life of the UJC, so that our branches can develop a political atmosphere favourable to discussing problems, bringing people together, ensuring our cadre have an active

life at a branch level. We have an important event in July when our Pioneers, including the very youngest, hold their congress - this will be important for directing the work of the children throughout the rest of the year.

We are also expanding vital work in science and technology and are working towards the self-financing of our organisation. In brief, these are our main priorities for 1996.

### On the Rock around the Blockade project for 1996

E: Our new project is to be able to take music and lights to all the municipalities, communities, barrios and rural areas of the province, via a mobile disco system. It will mean we can take music and lights to places where music doesn't reach - the rural areas and communities, the isolated municipalities, the mountain areas. We'll be able to bring modern music from the whole world to hundreds of young people, including places which don't have electricity. With a generator, we can bring

a sound system and disco lights to places where there is no light.

J: It's a new idea - an experience which the youth of the barrios don't have at the moment and which would be a really valuable resource. This new project won't be only for the city of Ciego de Avila but would benefit the whole province and indeed everyone in the country if it became used on a national level. Ciego de Avila is in the centre of the island, so we could take it to other parts of Cuba.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the comrades of your group, in the name of all the youth of Ciego de Avila, for this wonderful gesture, for what you've done for us, and to assure you all that we will never betray the trust you have placed in us. We will work intensively to develop and to maintain the commitment of our youth to defending our party and defending our socialism and to defending the gains we have achieved in the last 37 years of revolution.



# Rationing the NHS: imposing a two-tier system

## Don't use the r-word

**U**p and down the country, NHS staff are being warned: don't use the r-word if they speak to the public. There's no such thing as rationing: it's 'setting priorities'. So up and down the country, health authorities are 'setting priorities': 40 out of 129 have decided not to purchase treatments under one or more headings. Whilst some have stopped purchasing operations that have dubious clinical value such as insertion of ear grommets or D&C scrapes, eight have stopped screening for brittle-bone disease and one, North Birmingham, has stopped screening for aortic aneurysm (rupture of the main blood vessel for the heart) and for colonic and rectal cancers. Another, North and Mid-Hampshire, has restricted access to abortion for under-18s in a move which will particularly penalise young working class women. Meanwhile, GPs are forcing women to pay for cervical smears if they have them more frequently than once every five years. 'Setting priorities' also includes intensive care beds: expenditure on intensive care per head of population in the UK stands at £5.90 each year, compared with £26 in New Zealand, £44 in Japan and £54 in France. No wonder there are now so many reports about patients being moved all around the country to find an available bed.

'Rationing' is definitely here to stay, and it is the working class who will suffer from it. Before the introduction of the internal market, rationing certainly existed in the form of the waiting list system. But there was at least a minimal level of equity about it. This new form of rationing is quite different. Never mind the smokescreen about clinically ineffective treatments. Everyone knew that grommets and D&C were of doubtful value. But only now, when the NHS is being squeezed into a two-tier system, are their merits being questioned. Cutting out useless treatments is a prelude to cutting out effective ones, and that is what we are beginning to see.

In truth the new form of rationing came with the ending of any commitment to continuing care within the NHS. Until then, elderly people did not have to contribute to their treatment provided they occupied an NHS bed. But Care in the Community offered cash-strapped hospitals a way out: they could shunt their patients out into nursing homes where they would become a local authority responsibility. And the local authority could means test such patients, and if they had more than £8,000 assets, including their home, they would have to pay for their care, and pay until they had no more than £3,000 left. The increases in these thresholds announced in the Budget do not change the substance of the point.



### Too many old people...

Yet it is still the elderly who are allegedly responsible for the crisis in the NHS at the moment. The argument is crude: there are too many of them, there are going to be even more in the future, and they cost the NHS too much. This notion is now so widespread that even Help the Aged can announce that 'It is perfectly obvious that there is not enough money to fund the care needs of today or tomorrow', and propose a new 'care tax' of £300 per year per person. The fact that this used to be called 'national insurance' does not appear to have dawned on these dim-wits.

So what are the real figures? The number of elderly people will rise, but in a very predictable and undramatic way. Thus it may be that the number of over 90s will rise 5-fold in the next 60 years, but they will still only number 1.25 million, equivalent to an annual rise of 20,000. And if the number of over-65s increases from 9 million to 13 million during the same period, that is still only 80,000 more each year – a growth rate of less than 1 per cent. But this modest rise does not prevent a report on funding options for the NHS by Healthcare 2000, a drugs industry front, from claiming that 'there is likely to be a disproportionate increase in demand for residential care, homecare and other health and social services.' The funny thing of course is that the biggest rise in the numbers of the elderly has already taken place. In 1901,

there were 2 million people over 65, and still only 3.5 million in 1931. So in the last 60 years, the number of elderly has grown by 5.5 million, in the next 60 years it will grow by 4 million, and this will make it a crisis?

### Too much new technology...

Sometimes the argument takes a different tack. New medical technology increases cost, it is argued, and increases patient expectations, creating a new demand. This is completely bogus. New medical technology may be expensive when it is new, but it has contributed to a massive increase in productivity over the lifetime of the NHS. It is no different from improving technology in any other sphere of activity: there is an initial cost, but as its use spreads, it becomes cheaper to employ than the old technology. New scanning techniques such as MRI or new biotechnology can all help to improve treatment and reduce cost. An example of the latter is the development of a technique to strengthen artificial hip joints by encouraging real bone to grow back on them. Introduced over the next three years, it is expected to reduce the number of repeat operations that follow a failure



The old and the poor bear the brunt of NHS cuts

of the artificial joint by 20 per cent – a saving of £80 million. As its pioneer, Professor Bonfield says, 'huge advances are being made in the field of bio-materials and implants that will contribute significantly to a more cost-effective service and a better quality of life.'

In fact, the argument that new technology is a cost pressure on the NHS rests on three assumptions: first, that the rate of medical technology outstrips the rate of general technological advance; second, that improvements in medical technology do not lead to an improvement in productivity; and third, that taken together these have so altered circumstances since 1948 that the NHS is less affordable now than it was

### So sod the poor...

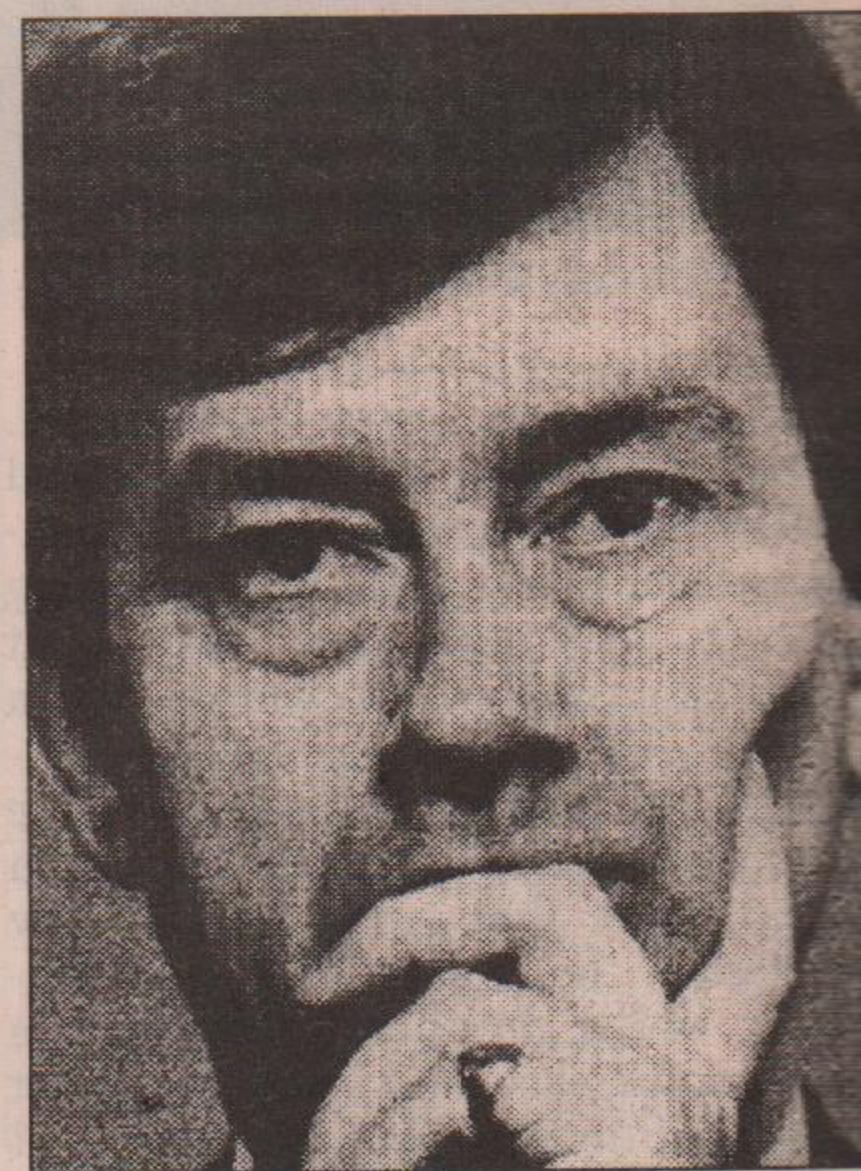
So 'priority setting' is a prelude to establishing a threadbare 'safety net' system for the poor – the old public hospitals of the 1920s and '30s. During the boom there might just have been some credibility to the argument that the NHS was necessary for a healthy workforce because of full employment. Now who needs a healthy working class? If a worker is sick, it is as easy to fire him or her and find a cheaper replacement. That is the new 'mobile labour market' beloved as much by New Labour as the Tories. A universal health care system free at the point of delivery is no longer necessary. Introduce charges, and encourage private finance to invest in the NHS as the govern-



ment is doing through its Private Finance Initiative, and soon there will be spanking new private hospitals funded by those who can afford the charges. The new private wings that many hospitals have built over the past five years are a foretaste of the future.

### The middle class is being hit in the pocket...

The fact is that in the past the NHS was financed by the working class and in particular its better-off sections. That is no longer the case. The rise in unemployment and in part-time and temporary working and the growing proletarianisation of the old labour aristocracy mean that the burden has fallen increasingly on the middle class. This has happened despite the fact that the poorest 20 per cent pay more of their income in tax – 39.3 per cent – than the richest 20 per cent – 35.2 per cent. But the middle class is beginning to object. They are having to pay all sorts of new insurance and private pensions to compensate for the collapse in the welfare state. On top of that, fewer and fewer of them can expect to work beyond 55. They want a better service, and as the Healthcare 2000 report puts it, there are many who 'will wish to spend a growing proportion of their income on healthcare'. So the report suggests some discretionary charging: you pay a bit more, and you get a bit more. One tier for the rich, another for the poor.



Minister Stephen Dorill

Thus socialists reject 'rationing' or 'priority setting' as a camouflage for the progressive destruction of the NHS. Nor can we expect a New Labour Government to make any changes. They will not increase funding of the NHS. They are equally committed to 'priority setting' even if they talk about cutting out dubious treatments. It is but a short step from supporting grant-maintained schools to the introduction of an equally overt two-tier system in the NHS. It is only a matter of time before they take that step openly. Robert Clough



# Labour: a rotten, racist history

## The Ambiguities of Power: British Foreign Policy since 1945

by Mark Curtis, Zed Press 1995 £14.95.

Introducing his book, Mark Curtis writes 'Since 1945, rather than occasionally deviating from the promotion of peace, democracy, human rights and economic development in the Third World, British (and US) foreign policy has been systematically opposed to them, whether the Conservatives or Labour (or Republicans or Democrats) have been in power.... The central features of British foreign policy in the Third World have included brutal military interventions, large scale abuse of human rights and opposition to economic development benefiting the poor.'

What follows is a scathing exposure of the foreign policy of Britain as a major imperialist power, during the course of which Curtis makes many telling points. Arguing that 'in the first few years after the end of the Second World War the essential framework of international politics in the post-war world, and Britain's place within it, was established', he shows how this took place under the direction of the 1945-51 Labour Government. He picks on two aspects of this process: first, the plunder of both formal and informal Empire, usually under the guise of 'development', and second, the establishment of British imperialism as a junior partner to the US in policing the new world order.

and 1951 Britain exploited those dependencies that were politically unable to defend their own interests in more ways and with more serious consequences than at any time since overseas colonies were established.' In that period, whilst total investment on so-called Colonial Development and Welfare amounted to £40.5 million, the Sterling balances held in London which were no more than cheap forced loans from these colonies increased by £250 million.

Without this massive intensification of colonial exploitation the post-war reconstruction of imperialist Britain would have required a major attack on the conditions of the British working class with the associated risk of political instability. As it was, practically full employment had been achieved by 1951, and the NHS had been established for over two years. It is the one major weakness of the book that Curtis fails to make any connection between British foreign policy and the political position of the British working class, and how it has been mediated by the Labour Party throughout this period.

was too strong – it accounted for half the world's manufacturing capacity at the end of the war – and Britain too over-stretched militarily. But the US also had to make concessions and abandon its immediate post-war strategy of breaking up the old colonial empires because of the threat this would pose to stable European reconstruction. By 1950, the Foreign Office could state that 'there is basic agreement on the long term objectives of colonial policy as conceived by the United Kingdom and the United States', and the US agreed on a foreign policy aim of 'the advancement of the economic and, where suitable, the strategic advantages to France and the United Kingdom of their colonies and trust territories' – provided the US was allowed 'equal economic treatment'.

This world order was to survive for nearly half a century. Ideologically bound by anti-communism, Curtis shows how it enabled the plunder of the Third World to continue throughout this period. Challenges were seen off with the utmost brutality, starting with the Labour Government's ruthless suppression of the Malayan freedom movement from 1948 onwards. From then on there existed a brotherhood of imperialist powers: the US helped the French in Viet Nam, whilst the British supported the US in Korea. The US supported Britain in Malaya and later in Kenya and British Guyana, whilst British imperialism reciprocated with unconditional support for the US in Viet Nam. Later, British imperialism was to call in favours for its war in the Malvinas, and the US duly obliged. Both worked hand-in-hand in the lead-up to the Gulf War and during it, bringing the maximum of diplomatic pressure to bear on German and Japanese imperialism on the one hand, and client regimes in the Middle East on the other.

In light of the present campaign against the sale of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia, Curtis' book makes enlightening reading. He cites Michael Stewart, Labour foreign secretary in 1967, who visited Indonesia a year after the 1966 massacres which claimed the lives of over half a million communists and peasants, and who found the Indonesian Foreign Secretary Adam Malik a 'remarkable man' who was 'evidently resolved to keep his country at peace'. The military regime itself was in Stewart's opinion 'harsh and tyrannical but not aggressive'. Malik was later a prime apologist for the massacres in East Timor following the invasion in 1975

– but then so was the Labour Foreign Secretary of the day, David Owen, who defended the first Hawk sales in 1978 on the grounds that '...we believe that such fighting as still continues is on a very small scale' – precisely when the war of genocide

enquiry. Even so, he could have said a lot more about the role of the Labour Party. In a lengthy section, Curtis illustrates the crucial role the media plays in legitimising British foreign policy, sanitising it and pretending it respects human rights, development and so on. However, sometimes this media consensus threatens to unravel as it did over the Malvinas following the Argentinian invasion. Thatcher was on the rack, deeply unpopular, personally culpable for the blunders in imperialist policy which



1945: Labour came to power on a rising tide of working class expectations

was reaching its peak. Since then, RTZ, BP and British Gas are amongst the British companies which have moved in to take advantage of Indonesia's enormous mineral wealth, not to mention the oil reserves around East Timor itself.

Curtis shows the human cost of this world order: millions dead in wars of intervention, a massive increase in world poverty that accompanied the debt crisis of 1980s. 'Since 1960', he writes, 'the countries where the richest 20 per cent of the world's people live have increased their share of gross world product from 70 per cent to 83 per cent, making these states sixty times better off than those where the poorest 20 per cent live' (p 230). Structural adjustment programmes and the recent GATT agreement are just two ways in which the stranglehold of the imperialist powers over the people and resources of the Third World has been intensified, allowing a small number of transnational corporations to dominate the world trade of food and raw materials.

Towards the end of the book Curtis argues that 'improving the lot of the subject peoples of the Third World requires fundamental structural change within Northern societies' although a proper treatment of the issue lies outside the scope of his

had let the Argentinians move in unopposed. The ruling class was in disarray. Had Labour opposed the Task Force in the House of Commons debate, it could not have gone whatever the press wanted. Labour's role was critical. This was not the only occasion. Curtis shows that British diplomacy was crucial in setting up the alliance to prosecute the war against Iraq and that without this effort the US could have been isolated. This could not have been possible if Labour was not egging the government on in terms that were even more bloodthirsty than Major's.

Is this important? Yes, because there is a view that Labour foreign policy has been determined either by reactionary foreign secretaries (Bevin, Owen to name but two) or by Foreign Office mandarins pulling the wool over more well-meaning eyes. Curtis almost certainly does not subscribe to this view, but he makes no attempt to assess the particular relationship of Labour either to the British working class or to imperialism. Yet this is the only significant blemish, and the book stands as a well-documented indictment of the inhumanity of British imperialism and its political representatives. It deserves the widest possible audience.

Robert Clough



Kenya 1954: mass arrests and internment camps

The plunder was unashamed. Bevin as foreign secretary regarded Africa 'as a valuable source of manpower and raw materials' pointing out in particular that 'two great mountains of manganese are in Sierra Leone... US is very barren of essential minerals and in Africa we(!) have them all.' A Foreign Office report in 1950 notes that such African raw materials 'both earn and save dollars', whilst Southeast Asia was 'a substantial economic asset and a net earner of dollars', 'Malaya alone had a surplus of \$145 million in 1948' – \$7 billion in today's terms – whilst the oil reserves of the Middle East were of 'paramount importance' and the oil produced was 'essential to the United Kingdom and earns commodities from other countries which might otherwise cost dollars'. The government set up the Colonial Development Corporation to 'promote... the production of foodstuffs, raw materials and manufactures where supply to the UK or sales overseas will assist our balance of payments.' As one historian cited by Curtis, DK Fieldhouse, comments, 'The basic fact is that between 1945



Protests against bloody repression in East Timor



Soweto 1976: for Britain it was business as usual



# Barbaric treatment of women prisoners

Holloway prison in north London first hit the headlines on 19 December 1995 when the new Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, pulled his team out midway through an inspection, disgusted at the squalor of Britain's largest women's gaol. **NICKI JAMESON** reports.

**R**amsbotham's reaction must have come as a shock to the Home Secretary, who undoubtedly expected the ex-military man would give him an easy ride, in contrast to the eight years of criticism which the Home Office and Prison Service had been subjected to by the previous Chief Inspector, Judge Stephen Tumim.

Among the things which particularly horrified Ramsbotham and his team, were massive rats inside the gaol, piles of rotting faeces, food and tampons thrown from cell windows and women with head-lice who could not obtain medicated shampoo.

More fundamentally, the inspectorate witnessed the degrading treatment of mentally ill prisoners, victims of abuse and some of the many foreign nationals who end up in Holloway. They also blew the whistle, and not a moment too soon, on the treatment of pregnant women, particularly regarding the barbaric practice of chaining them, and any other prisoner attending the nearby Whittington Hospital.

I went to the Whittington myself in June 1995 to see a friend who had just had a baby. In the corridor outside the maternity ward I saw a woman who was chained to two male screws and accompanied by another female one. She had given birth to her child three hours earlier and was subjected to this medieval rigmarole in order to have a cigarette. It was a gruesome spectacle and to me at the time a measure of public indifference that nobody else passing by appeared to be shocked.

But shocked and outraged the public at large has certainly been since the full extent of the practice of shackling has been revealed. The normally anti-prisoner (but also anti-Tory) *Daily Mirror* ran a photo-montage of Home Office Minister Anne Widdecombe, depicting her chained to a hospital bed, with a 'How would you like it?' headline, the day after she publicly defended the practice



on 'security' grounds. Both Alan Howarth MP, who defected from Tory to Labour in July 1995, and Emma Nicholson, who switched from Tory to Lib-Dem in the midst of the Holloway furore, cited their horror at the chaining of women prisoners as a deciding factor in their change of allegiances. Indeed, the revelations of barbarity were too much for most of the British middle classes to stomach, far too close to the sort of inhumane practices they condemn in other 'less civilised' countries, and (no doubt with half an eye to gaining a few more Tory wets in the process) both Labour and Lib-Dems were forced to speak out against chaining in uncharacteristically strong terms.

There followed a series of slightly bizarre discussions about whether midwives should go to the prison instead of prisoners to the hospital and when exactly labour begins, culminating finally in a government climb-down.

Welcome as this reversal must be to any women faced with the prospect of giving birth in custody, the real question remains as to why anyone in their right minds would want to send pregnant women or those with tiny babies to prison in the first place.

## Who are these dangerous women?\*

The female prison population is very small in comparison to the male one; however, it too is growing. On 30 June 1995 the number of women in prison in England and Wales reached a record 2,002; 7 per cent more than the previous year and 24 per cent more than on 30 June 1990. In comparison the male prison population has risen by 5 and 12 per cent respectively.

A high proportion of female prisoners are on remand: 27 per cent on 30 June 1994. Many women remanded in custody do not ultimately receive prison sentences. Only 26 per cent of women remanded in custody in 1993 were subsequently sentenced to imprisonment, compared to 41 per cent of male remand prisoners.

Approximately half of all sentenced female prisoners are gaoled for either theft, handling or deception charges, or for drugs offences. Thirty-six per cent of women sent to prison in 1993 were fine defaulters. In 1994 260 women were gaoled for not having a TV licence. In a report into Risleigh prison in 1994, the Chief Inspector of Prisons noted that up to 60 per cent of sentenced women there were fine defaulters and that

the numbers had 'doubled over the past three or four months'. Approximately 40 per cent of sentenced women prisoners have no previous convictions (compared to 17 per cent of men). A quarter of women prisoners are black or from other ethnic minorities; many of these are foreign nationals arrested for drugs importation and deported on completion of their sentences.

## So has the chaining ended?

For women in labour or attending antenatal classes hopefully the ordeal of chaining is over. The government has, of course, left itself a get-out clause whereby women will be handcuffed on the way to hospital, unshackled in a waiting room and remanacled before they leave, 'unless there is a particularly high risk of escape'.

For other prisoners attending hospital, even in extreme circumstances, there will be no change. In 1994 Kurdish prisoner Cafer Kovaycin was chained to a hospital bed while receiving treatment for 40 degree burns, following a violent attack on him; Irish POW Patrick Kelly was similarly treated following an operation for skin cancer in 1995. Such barbarities will continue against both male and female prisoners.

\* Facts and figures from NACRO Briefing on Women in Prison, September 1995.

FRFI planned to publish an article on Holloway by Clare Barstow, a long-term prisoner now in HMP Durham, who has spent a considerable amount of time in Holloway. Her article was posted to our office twice and on both occasions mysteriously never arrived.

## POWS' BIRTHDAYS

Nick Mullen MR0639, HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR  
2 February

Liam Quinn 49930, HMP Whitemoor  
6 February

Joe McKenny L46486, HMP Frankland, Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YD  
7 February

Pat Hayes EN1978, HMP Frankland  
27 February

Pat McGlynn EN1946, HMP Frankland  
25 March

## STOP PRESS

Seven prisoners have been paid £4,500 each by the Prison Service in an out-of-court settlement as compensation for the stress and trauma they suffered when the 1990 Strangeways revolt began, and prison staff abandoned the gaol. Other prisoners are now expected to pursue similar claims.

# US - National Campaign to stop Control Unit prisons

Over 20 years ago the first Control Unit was created in an American prison at the United States Penitentiary in Marion, Illinois. This unit, with forced drugging, beatings and physical and mental abuse, was meant to crush the will of a prisoner and make him into a vegetable or corpse. And the unit, far from being designed to control the most violent prisoners, was instead designed to get rid of critics of the prison system, revolutionaries, Islamic militants, prisoner unionists, jailhouse lawyers and others whose only offence was to believe in and struggle for human rights for prisoners. Originally concentrated in Marion, these Control Units, and now entire Control Unit prison facilities, have spread to 36 states, and the conditions have become even more oppressive. The case of one such prisoner will serve to explain this crime of imprisonment.

In the state of New Jersey a man named Ojore Nuru Lutalo is being held in a sensory deprivation unit, a place where people go mad, in the name of law and order. The Management Control Unit (MCU) is located in the State Penitentiary at

Trenton. It is a long-term isolation unit, where prisoners are only let out of their cages for two hours within a 48-hour period, for exercise. There are virtually no privileges, limited telephone use, controlled visitation and censored mail.

Ojore has been confined to the MCU run by the New Jersey Department of Corrections since February 1986. Not because he has killed anyone or sought to rebel in any way, but because the administration wants to silence his voice from the prisoner population and society at large. Ojore is an outspoken New Afrikan prisoner who protests the racism, draconian conditions and the politics of imprisonment through his writing and teaching. So, for ten years, he has been confined in a cage not much bigger than a bathroom. Clearly America has concentration camps, and this is one of them.

Ojore says: 'I'm encased in a cage of steel and concrete, surrounded by high prison walls topped with gun towers and rows of razor wire... the silence is eerie... and a lot of prisoners can't cope with the constant lockdown. They deteriorate mentally.' These Control Units are torture chambers and we must do something about them.

We are targeting the Governor of New Jersey, Christie Whitman, as well as Commissioner of Corrections William Fauver, for a short-term,

international protest campaign, which will run 1-28 February 1996. We want to institute a one month blitz of postcards, telephone calls, faxes and letters throughout February. Our demands are for an investigation into the amount of time that New Jersey prisoners endure enforced isolation in the MCU and for the development of a definite exit criteria. Once in the Control Unit, how do people 'earn' their way out? So far, in New Jersey, there is no way.

Write, fax or call: Governor Christie Whitman, State House, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, USA. Tel: 001 609 292 6000. Fax: 001 609 292 3454 and Commander William Fauver, Department of Corrections, CN-863, Trenton, New Jersey 08625. Tel: 001 609 292 9680. Fax: 001 777 0445.

Bonnie Kerness

Bonnie Kerness is the Coordinator of the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons, 972 Broad Street, Newark, New Jersey 07102, USA.

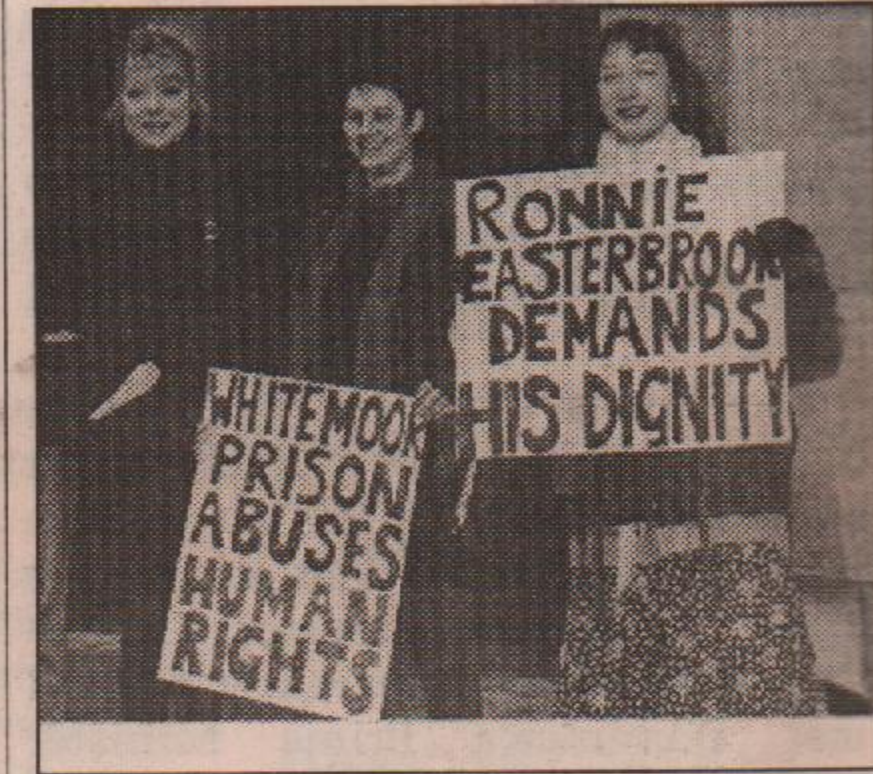
Please send copies of faxes/letters of protest to the campaign or a letter telling them what you have done.

# Dirty protests

On 15 December friends and supporters of 64-year-old life-sentence prisoner Ronnie Easterbrook, who has been on dirty protest in the block at Whitemoor since March 1995, handed in a 500-signature petition to the Home Office, demanding Ronnie be moved out of the dispersal system to a prison with more humane conditions.

And in the maximum security unit at Belmarsh, Paul 'Dingus' Magee has spent his second Christmas on protest. A recent delegation from the Fine Gael party (not renowned for its support for Republicanism) visited POWs in Full Sutton, Frankland and Belmarsh and told a press conference that:

'A recent medical report from an independent medical officer indicated a marked deterioration in the health of prisoners in Belmarsh, where five out of the six are ill and one, Danny McNamee, was recently hospitalised. Eighteen months into the peace process there is no justification or sense that conditions for the prisoners continue to deteriorate. We call for an immediate reclassification of these prisoners. This would resolve the worst of their conditions and would bring the dirty protest to an end.'



## Prison cuts announced

The government has announced it plans to make a 13 per cent cut in the prison budget over the next three years, resulting in 3,000 job losses and other reductions, including a mooted 30 per cent energy cut in prison kitchens. The announcement comes as the prison population continues to rise at 100 per week and Howard's latest lunatic idea, to remove all automatic remission, comes under serious discussion in Scotland.

First jobs to go will undoubtedly be in the already savaged areas of prison education and probation but there are not enough of these left to make a sufficient cut. The POA therefore feels its members are threatened and has issued predictable panic statements about the likelihood of riots. At the same time it has made a pitch for prison officers to take over the remaining probation and counselling jobs, not a prospect which appeals to many prisoners.

New Labour has rushed to attack the government and declare itself the true party of law and order which will safeguard not the human rights of prisoners, the preservation of remission or the use of non-custodial alternatives, but screws' jobs.

## Poole and Mills appeal

A new date for the appeal hearing of Gary Mills and Tony Poole (see page 4) has been set. The appeal will be held at the High Court, Strand, London, WC2 from 13 to 16 February. Gary and Tony's supporters will be present both inside and outside the court on all days. For further information telephone 01452 371116.



# Laws for sale

**That the British state is but an executive arm of the multinational corporations is starkly demonstrated by the decision to deport Saudi Arabian 'dissident' Mohammed al-Mas'ari. Mas'ari's proposed banishment to the Caribbean island of Dominica to secure £5 billion of arms sales is reasonable enough in a country where governments and laws are bought and sold. TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

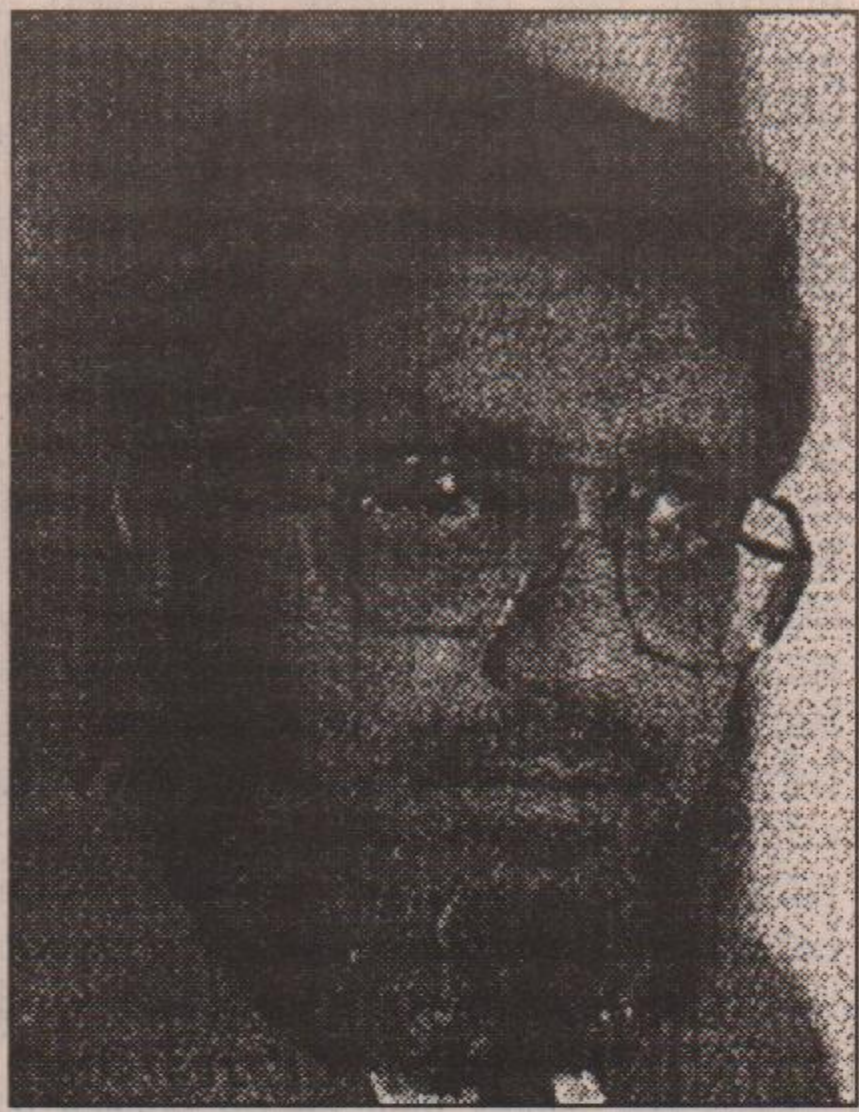
**A**l-Mas'ari heads the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR). His views on women, punishment and a theocratic state are obnoxious medievalism. However, it is not for these that the Saudi government wanted Mas'ari out of the way. The CDLR campaigns for the release of political prisoners in Saudi Arabia, against government corruption and for freedom of assembly, speech and accountable leadership. Al Mas'ari was imprisoned and allegedly tortured in Saudi Arabia in 1993 when he was one of over 20 intellectuals seized by the regime. He escaped to Yemen and then Britain, where he continued to campaign. 'It was made clear to him that if he would keep a bit quieter, there was every chance that nothing would happen... But this guy went over the top,' a ministerial source explained. Mas'ari campaigns chiefly by faxes beamed into Saudi Arabia, thereby breaking the Saudi government's grip on local news.

Members of the Saudi royal household told directors of Britain's main arms firms to get the British government to remove al-Mas'ari or see arms contracts disappear. On 18 December Foreign Secretary Rifkind met Dominica's Prime Minister Edison James in Whitehall. Rifkind assured James that aid would be £2 million for the next two years, up 300% on the 1994/5 total, while the rest of the aid budget is cut by 5.4%. Dominica had its banana harvest devastated by two September hurricanes and James agreed to take the potentially expensive Saudi liability off British hands. Dominica's opposition denounce the deal saying their country should not become a dumping ground for unwanted people.

The Home Office announced al-Mas'ari's deportation using a formula not tried before, 'If the secretary of state is satisfied that there is a safe country to which an asylum applicant can be sent, his application will normally be refused without substantive consideration of his claim to refugee status.' John Major, casting off any civilised responsibilities, was happy to shoulder this one: 'Mohammed al-Mas'ari is a threat to stability in the Gulf and an illegal immigrant... if they... seek to create an unsettled relationship with our allies, I don't believe we should tolerantly look to one side.' This is an implied threat to Kurds, Turks, Tamils and others sheltering here away from the bombs and guns British firms have sold their persecutors.

Labour's Home Affairs spokesperson Doug Henderson confined the British Opposition's response to seeking assurances 'that proper procedures have been followed.' The leaders of the arms industries' trade unions, whose members are among the highest-paid workers in Britain, supported al-Mas'ari's deportation. Al-Mas'ari has turned to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal.

An inspection of the executives who lobbied to have al-Mas'ari thrown out reveals names who featured in the Pergau dam scandal, for



Mohammed al-Mas'ari

instance. The British government gave £234 million aid to Malaysia and in return Malaysia agreed to buy over £1 billion worth of British arms. This deal was arranged by the then Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and chief executive of British Aerospace Dick Evans together with Sir Colin Chandler, chairman of Vickers, and Mark Thatcher's Lotus patron Alan Curtis.



Members of the Saudi ruling elite

Chandler wrote a leaked memo about his discussions with Evans on what to do about al-Mas'ari and on the CIA's interest in him.

A tight network of powerful and unaccountable men is directing British foreign policy.

Behind all the scheming and conniving are the al-Yamamah arms deals of 1985 and 1993 worth some £20 billion. About £5 billion worth of contracts are still pending, chiefly for British Aerospace Tornados and Hawks and Vickers' Challenger tanks.

Upon the announcement of al-Mas'ari's deportation, shares in these two companies leapt up the market. Some of the contracts are arranged through counter-trade agreements whereby Saudi Arabia provides 600,000 barrels of oil a day to British oil companies who sell the oil and deposit the income with the British Ministry of Defence. The Ministry then pays British Aerospace from the account. This is worth £2 billion a year to British Aerospace. The direc-

torships of Shell and BP are interwoven with the major British arms producers.

While the rest of British manufacture is left to dwindle in the spirit of free markets, not so arms producers. In 1989 the British government agreed to guarantee a £2 billion loan to ensure a deal was carried through when Saudi Arabia was forestalling on payments. Overseas arms purchasers are also subsidised by the special £1 billion fund offered by the Export Credit Guarantee Department of the Department of Trade and Industry - a form of free insurance.

Eleven of Britain's 20 biggest industrial companies engage in arms production. Since 1945, British forces have engaged in at least 93 military interventions overseas. 26 of these have been in the Middle East. Militarism and war are the life-blood of parasitical and decaying capitalism and there is seldom a bigger spender on weapons than Saudi Arabia. Britain's banks and arms manufacturers survive on recycling Middle Eastern oil revenues through arms exports. The heads of the arms companies run the British government and take government posts for themselves.

The current Under Secretary at the Foreign Office responsible for Middle East affairs is Andrew Green. Green is also a director of Vickers and will become the new ambassador to Saudi in March. Sir Colin Chandler left British Aerospace to head the Ministry of Defence's Defence Export Sales Organisation. Having helped secure al-Yamamah he joined Vickers. David Hastie, to whom Chandler sent the leaked memo as his international relations director at Vickers, also left British Aerospace to join the Ministry of Defence. In 1989 there was a supposed arms embargo on Iraq. En route to a Baghdad arms fair, Hastie's status was changed from a government official to being on secondment to British Aerospace. On returning to Britain his status miraculously reverted back to government official. A marvellous encapsulation of how this country is run. People think governments are elected. They aren't, they are bought. ■

## REVIEWS

### SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

■ *Social Democracy: The Enemy Within* Harpal Brar, available from EJ Rule, 14 Featherstone Rd, Southall, Middx. UB2 5AA, £10.

This is a welcome contribution to the current discussion of the Labour Party and the trade union movement.

As the title suggests the Labour Party, the TUC and their left followers have been the most effective enemies of the working class and socialism throughout this century. It is a long book, drawing on articles that appeared in the paper *Lalkar* recently and as far back as 1974.

Harpal Brar traces the history of the Labour Party from its antecedents to its formation in 1906, showing the correspondence between its emergence and the consolidation of a privileged strata of the working class - a labour aristocracy. Considerable use is made of Engels' and Lenin's analyses. The book is valuable for compiling this source material for further reference and for a clarification of Lenin's much misrepresented position on membership of the Labour Party. It also details evidence on much of the left's apologies for the Labour Party over the years.

Perhaps significantly, the author introduces the concept of the labour aristocracy into his more recent material, when it is absent from the earlier work. What Engels and Lenin showed was that social democracy and opportunism were not simply ideological distortions or vituperative epithets, but were the necessary political expressions of a section of the working class that is tied by its material interests to capitalism in the era of imperialism. The extensive

coverage given to the 1984-85 Miners' Strike demonstrates this recognition trying to break out, but it remained dormant, both among the miners' leaders and in the author's text. Harpal Brar cites Robert Clough's *Labour: A party fit for imperialism* and we hope that it contributed to the development of Harpal Brar's later position.

There are some fine nuggets from 1974 where the IS (forerunner of the SWP), the WRP, IMG and CPGB



are savaged for their calls to vote Labour, and they are still doing it! More recently the New Communist Party is awarded 'The prize for the most open... cringing, creepy, servile and shameful... defence of, and capitulation to, social democracy...' for its 'Voting Labour - a communist strategy.' The author

correctly defines the positions of the Trotskyists and the opportunists of the CPGB and the NCP by their stances on the Labour Party.

All most satisfying, but what are we to do? The need for a clear socialist polarity that can represent the interests of the growing mass of poor working class in this country and which will begin to attract the best of their fighters to it is overwhelming. The collapse of the socialist bloc removes the luxury of postures and poses so prevalent on the left and so repugnant to anyone who really wants to struggle and win for once. This book is helpful in exposing the enemies within, but the difficult task of fighting them and their left allies remains. We must establish this polarity, give the theoretical recognition an organisational form, make it approachable, accessible, democratic, something that can win. This book should presage a search for that polarity on behalf of the author and those in agreement with it.

Trevor Rayne

### Voices of resistance

■ *Schnewsreader* Published by Justice?, PO Box 2600, Brighton, BN2 2DX, tel: 01273 685913, price £3.99, cheques payable to: Justice? (Schnews)

In this day and age of political reaction and torpor it is a minor miracle to start a radical weekly newsletter and get beyond issue two. Continue to produce one for over a year and we're beginning to talk bread into wine, dividing the Red Sea and bending bits of cutlery. But Brighton anti-CJA group 'Justice?' have done just that. And what is more, if you missed issues of the *Weekly Schnews*, haven't kept them or have never until now heard of its existence, you can buy the brand new, bright orange *Schnewsreader* paperback and get the whole year's worth in one go.

The *Schnewsreader* is a compilation of all issues of the *Weekly Schnews* published between November 1994 and November 1995. Over that year Justice? reported resistance to the CJA as it took place, providing a week-by-week activists' guide to what was going on and where, with listings of events, contact addresses and a regular update on numbers of people arrested under the CJA, not to mention 'Crap arrest of the week', featuring gems such as 'Person nicked for pointing at dead sheep on lorry' or 'For handing leaflet on aromatherapy to Prince Charles'.

It is all too easy for 'serious communists' to use this whackiness to dismiss a project like the *Schnews*.



FRFI has not done so and writers for our paper have over the year contributed material on subjects including prisons, the tenth anniversary of the miners' strike and the erosion of the right to silence. Indeed, from opposition to the draconian provisions of the CJA,

the *Schnews* has developed into a voice of opposition to capitalist repression in all its forms. FRFI readers may remember Greenpeace activist Al Baker's gripping inside story of the occupation of the Brent Spar oil rig, which we reprinted from the *Schnews*. If for no other reason, buy yourself a copy of the *Schnewsreader* to catch up on Al's further daring exploits as he and ex-Foreign Legionnaire Matthew Williams mount a kamikaze (well almost) attack on the Mururoa Atoll, while the French military prepares to detonate its latest nuclear test.

And finally, for the very efficient who already have every single copy of the *Weekly Schnews* neatly filed away somewhere, there is still a reason to buy the book, as it contains 60 pages of wonderful cartoons by Kate Evans, including brilliant stuff such as the one entitled 'Good Memories - When I was 11 and my sister was 13 and my mum was 37, then we went to Greenham Common...' Greenham veterans confirm the pinpoint accuracy of the drawings, claiming they can recognise individual women and particular pieces of fencing!

Nicki Jameson



## Reactionaries attack Che Guevara

On Thursday 21 December, Channel 4 broadcast a *Secret Lives* programme which launched an all-out assault on Che Guevara. It claimed that Che was not a man of principle and ideals; that his intellectual legacy is of no value; that he was neither brilliant military leader nor uncompromising revolutionary and that his reputation rests on an 'exercise in myth-building' by Fidel Castro who, struck by Che's good looks, recognised the 'propaganda value in creating a legend'.

*Secret Lives* tells us Che was a ruthless killer who authorised the execution of 200 counter-revolutionaries. What the programme failed to mention was that those 200 people had on their hands the blood of over 25,000 people massacred in Batista's Cuba. Killing is a nasty business. But, as Georg Büchner wrote: 'To punish the oppressors of mankind is mercy; to pardon them is barbarism.'

*Secret Lives* 'reveals' that Che negotiated with US imperialism on behalf of the Cuban government, as if this in some way detracted from his anti-imperialist credentials. It accuses him of being a failure as a military leader - yet Che, at the head of the Rebel Army, played a decisive role in the victory of the Cuban revolution. And, while recognising his mistakes, revolutionaries around the world acknowledge the value of his writings on guerrilla warfare and his experiences in Cuba, in Bolivia and Zaire.

The programme told us nothing new about Che Guevara, but everything about the self-serving prejudices of a bunch of middle-class hacks who, too privileged to lift a finger on behalf of the working class in their own country, have nothing better to do than sneer at a revolutionary who dedicated his life to the liberation of the working class. To their ranks, we can add Mike Gonzales, Latin America 'expert' of the SWP, who condescendingly stated:

'Che Guevara's life as an example of sacrifice and heroism is an important and fine example. But the ideas that informed that battle and that activity were naive, sometimes wrong and didn't actually offer a model on how to make and rebuild a revolutionary movement. Che Guevara didn't leave behind a method of how to change the world.'

This failed guru of the left has clearly never read Che's writings, his Marxism, his profound analysis of the difficulties of the transition to socialism, his internationalism. His ideas have been applauded by thousands in the struggle for justice, and he helped change the world. One cannot say the same for the SWP which has not led a single significant anti-capitalist struggle and whose model for change appears to be to repeatedly call for a vote for the Labour Party.

It reflects no credit on Paul Foot of the SWP or *New Left Review's* Robin Blackburn that they participated in this shabby programme.

Eddie Abrahams

## CHOOSE THE

# RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British Labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative - **Join the RCG!**

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

## RCG COMMUNIST FORUMS

Sunday 11 February 2.30pm

**CUBA VIVE! REPORT BACK FROM NUESTRO TIEMPO BRIGADE TO CUBA**

Sunday 10 March 2.30pm

**NO PLACE BUT THE STRUGGLE A celebration of Women's Day**

Both at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC2 (nearest tube Holborn) Creche available on application

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

## RCG PUBLIC MEETINGS

**Cuba Vive! Report backs from Nuestro Tiempo brigade to Cuba**

### MANCHESTER

Thursday 15 February 7pm

Salam Chamber, Manchester Metropolitan University, Student Union Building, All Saints, Oxford Rd

### BIRMINGHAM

Thursday 22 February 7.30pm

Union Club, 723 Pershore Rd, Selly Park (buses 45+47)

## LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

# Labour Party could shatter

The President of the NUM Arthur Scargill has launched along with other trade unionists and activists an initiative for a new political party in Britain - the Socialist Labour Party (SLP). Much of the preparation for this seems to be taking place in semi secret, but some things are clear. The move stems from Scargill's disappointment at the defeat, at the October Labour Party Annual Conference, of a NUM/BAFWU motion to defend the original Clause IV which had been changed unconstitutionally by a Special Conference of the party in April 1995. The NUM had successfully obtained a High Court ruling forcing the party to have the matter debated at an annual conference.

It should come as no surprise that Left Labour MPs have repudiated the Scargill initiative. Former Labour cabinet minister Tony Benn is not a Marxist and therefore does not comprehend historical materialism. The Labour Party is the creation of the epoch of imperialism as characterised by Lenin. The epoch began around 1890-1895, and ended with the

collapse of the USSR in 1991. The new phase into which we are now passing is called by Leon Trotsky in his work *In defence of Marxism* the period of neo-barbarism.

Clause IV, which has been in operation since 1918, has kept the Labour Party together, but now, like the USSR, the time is over. For Marxists, there can be no future for New Labour. It has now gone past the point of no return. Marxists should therefore welcome the NUM President's initiative and be organising discussion groups around the nine-page discussion document which was issued in a November London meeting of 40 activists.

Media coverage suggests that problems have arisen in the course of drawing up a constitution for the SLP with the Militant Tendency. The NUM president and others clearly and correctly want to avoid any possibility of sectarian takeovers of a newly-founded SLP by laying down strict rules for trade union activity and for SLP membership. Scargill's background as a former

YCL member suggests the advocacy of a reformist parliamentary road. Revolutionaries must fight alongside these comrades to demonstrate that such a path is flawed and will provoke a backlash of huge proportions from the bourgeoisie. The SLP could achieve a majority in Parliament. To do so it will require as a prerequisite the full backing of the NUM at all levels.

The balance of forces in Britain currently would point rather to the prospect of a victorious right-wing Tory breakaway from Major if the Labour and Liberal Opposition is perceived to be divided.

A total splintering of the Labour Party cannot be ruled out, mirroring the party's formation at the turn of the century by a number of disparate groupings such as the Social Democratic Federation and others. A number of signs could herald a total internal fallout in the Labour Party.

JOHN HAYBALL  
Chessington

# Lebanese state builds up its forces

At the present time the Lebanese government holds both the political and military means to suppress any popular national resistance and protect the interests of world imperialism, Arab reaction and Zionism within the country.

It is currently building up its military institutions to make them even more powerful than prior to the outbreak of the civil war, with the aim of building a force of 40,000 soldiers. At the same time, the United States and France have demonstrated an undisguised eagerness to supply the Lebanese army with the equipment it needs.

The army is preparing to impose a reactionary, exploitative hegemony on the Lebanese masses, to prevent the emergence of any revolutionary forces, such as those which emerged at the start of the civil war, and to bind Lebanon inextricably to Western imperialism.

In addition, the influence of the Lebanese security apparatus is being strengthened and expanded, while its powers are being increased to enable

it to infiltrate the Lebanese masses and protect the interests of the state.

Within the government leadership, the most sensitive posts are held by the country's leading feudal figures, leaders of the sectarian religious parties and the so-called 'heroes' of the massacres carried out against the Palestinian people.

Meanwhile, the fascist Phalange party not only remains in the political arena but is strengthening its relationship with the state and the intelligence apparatus.

The leftist and socialist parties do not have a say in parliament. They are harassed and repressed by the state's security forces to prevent any left-wing threat from reemerging in Lebanese political life, as it did in the 1970s. The religious parties, on the other hand, are given free rein, because they use their following among the masses to ensure the people do not revolt against the exploitative, repressive state.

Name withheld

# Asian youth worker victimised

Ranue Bibi is a youth worker, employed by the Labour-controlled London Borough of Camden, specifically to work with young Asians in the Drummond Street/Regents Park Estate area of south Camden. She lives in Drummond Street herself and has a long-standing connection with the militant Drummond Street Asian Youth Association (DSAYA).

In February 1995 Camden Council received a complaint about Ranue from the police, following the arrest of Sham, another Asian youth worker, on a trumped-up charge. According to three independent witnesses Ranue asked the police reasonably and politely why Sham was being arrested, but the council initiated disciplinary proceedings against Ranue. These were only dropped when the police decided they could not appear as witnesses because Sham's case was sub judice.

While this was going on the head of Camden's Youth Service asked Ranue not to work full-time in the Drummond Street Area 'for her own safety' from the police. The police had a clear interest in harassing both Ranue and Sham who were working with the same young people the police were 'investigating' in connection with the murder of Richard Everitt in summer 1994.

Once the disciplinary procedure had been dropped the Youth Office told Ranue she was still not permitted to work in Drummond Street/Regent's Park, due to a 'conflict of interests' with her voluntary involvement with DSAYA.

So, having been employed specifically to do youth work in the area around Drummond Street, with nothing in her contract to imply she might be asked to do otherwise, Ranue Bibi was told that she must now work in a completely different part of the borough. She refused, which the Youth Office deliberately misinterpreted as refusal to do her job and stopped paying her, at the same time refusing to meet with either Ranue or her union representative. She has not been paid since July but cannot claim benefit as she is still employed; her union, CYWU, has established a support fund.

Donations can be sent c/o Graham Good, Winchester Project, 21 Winchester Road, London, NW3 3YN (payable to CYWU, marked Ranue Bibi on back).

# A US prisoner writes

After a rather harrowing five years, I have been moved to what I can only describe as an 'old cons' yard. Many old friends and associates from days past, years between, hardships of yore.

I'm in full strength after my hunger strike, which actually devastated my body worse than I'd expected when I went into it. But I did get moved, and my dietary needs are now being met after the judge issued an injunction against the state. A victory in part, but the case is not won yet.

Indeed, I haven't written you of late so you don't know, but I've received my paperwork letting me know that I'm going to be certified eligible for parole in August this year. That will allow me to go to my next sentence, which is a short one of about five months. However, I am able to give a definite release date of between January and May 1997. Very good news. Later in the year I will be sending out requests for letters to the parole board. If all goes right, I may

see the light of day in January next year!

My current 'residence' is a double-bunked room that is a bit small for two, but the yard is open most of the day so we don't get in each other's way. But my cell mate and I are both veterans of hard time and get along very well. I'm not doing much aside from legal work and some small writing. Mostly I'm taking some time to enjoy this rather laid-back situation. It's quite a relief from what I've been through.

The guards always wonder when I get FRFI, and ask about it. I tell them if they read it they may lose their virginity and so to be careful when censoring... My friends say, 'But they're communists!' I reply, 'Ah, yes. But they do it well.' They agree that's all that's necessary.

AVI NAFTL  
Arizona State Prison, Santa Rita,  
10,000 South Wilmot Rd,  
Tucson, AZ 85777, USA

## Rock around the Blockade Meetings

Open to all those who want to get involved in the 1996 campaign

### MANCHESTER

Wednesday 7 February, 7.30pm  
Beer House, Angel St, off Rochdale Rd

### LONDON

We meet the first Saturday of every month. Next meeting Saturday 2 March, 3pm, Telephone the campaign on the number below for venue.

For further details of any of the above events, tel: 0171 837 1688

## DEMONSTRATIONS MEETINGS & EVENTS

Sunday 4 February, 5pm

Kurdistan Solidarity Committee Meeting

**STOP TURKISH ARMY ATROCITIES! FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE KURDISH QUESTION**

Kurdistan Workers Association, 11 Portland Gardens, London N4 (Manor House tube)

Wednesday 14 February, 7.30pm

### SOUTH LONDON CSC MEETING

to launch 1996 Container for Cuba appeal. Javier Dominguez (ICAP); UNISON Assistant National Officer; Cat Wiener (Nuestro Tiempo brigadel); Kennington Enterprise Centre, Braganza St, London SE17

**NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION BILL**

Saturday 24 February

Assemble 11am Embankment Rally Trafalgar Square

Thursday 29 February 7.30pm

**BENEFIT FOR SATPAL RAM DEFENCE CAMPAIGN**

London premiere of Banner Theatre's new show *Criminal Justice* at the Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7. Waged £5/£3

### SAOIRSE EVENTS

Sunday 11 February 1-3pm

**AN CUMANN CABHRACH/SAOIRSE PICKET OF BELMARSH PRISON TO COMMEMORATE FRANK STAGG**

HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Thamesmead SE28

Thursday 29 February

8pm-midnight

### SAOIRSE SOCIAL

The Victoria pub, Holloway Rd/Liverpool Rd, London N7 (tube Highbury & Islington)

Sunday 17 March

**CAVALCADE THROUGH IRISH AREAS OF LONDON - FREE ALL IRISH POWS NOW!**

Contact London Saoirse for details on 0181 985 8350



Third  
battle of  
Newbury

**FIGHT  
RACISM!  
FIGHT  
IMPERIALISM!**

# DIRECT ACTION STATIONS

'The first week was totally amazing and exhilarating but people didn't get any sleep. People are now getting tired and we desperately need fresh energy and imagination. We've got away from the "let's just cost them loads of money" idea.

We want to stop this road, and with the preparation and organisation we've got, we can.'

The battle to stop the building of the Newbury bypass – or the Third Battle of Newbury, as it has become known – has well and truly begun. Protesters, aware of the EU Directive banning the felling of trees during the nesting season that starts in March, are determined to prevent the route being cleared by then. If the protesters are successful in stopping the road being built, a major battle will have been won against the government, the roadbuilders and the earth-destroying car culture (ie capitalism) that they represent – and it will have been won by direct action.

**F**or months activists have been preparing to take on the roadbuilders along the nine-mile route of the bypass. Fourteen protest camps have been built – treehouses line the route of the proposed road and Viet-cong-style defensive tunnels have been dug to stop the constructors. The phoney war between protesters and roadbuilders ended on 9 January when contractors, defended by hundreds of security guards and police, tried to start hacking down trees in preparation for the road building. They were met with protesters blocking the only access road with two 25-foot tripods which successfully stopped work that day.

Since then, hundreds of protesters have been taking on the roadbuilders. Chainsaws have been demobilised, coaches stopped from operating and every possible hindrance put in the way of site clearance. Hundreds of local residents spent the first Sunday of the battle planting silver birch trees to replace those felled by contractors. So far, over 300 people have been arrested (including two dressed up as a pantomime cow!), mainly under the 'Aggravated Trespass' section of the Criminal Justice Act – legislation brought in specifically to stop effective protests of this kind. As well as arresting protesters, there have been threats to withdraw dole money from anyone involved in the protest – a worrying attempt to destroy the already limited right to protest of the unemployed.

Millions of pounds are being spent to ensure the defeat of the protest. The Chief Constable of Thames Valley police has said that his force cannot afford the bill – latest estimates £12 million. On top of the police operation, there are 500 private security guards, put up for free on the farm of a local Tory politician. According to *Construction News*, the bypass could be cancelled because of soaring costs that have already pushed the estimated cost from

£60m to £80m. Subcontractors are said to be reluctant to take on any work associated with this road because of the imaginative and costly activities of the protesters.

If built, the A34 Newbury bypass will do nothing to relieve congestion in Newbury – even the government's own figures show that if the bypass is built traffic will be back to the current levels within five or ten years. It would plough through three sites of special scientific interest, 12 archaeological sites, a registered battlefield and an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. So why is the government so keen to ensure that the road is built? The usual reason, of course – money. Road building and the car culture are central to capitalism's need to 'grow' at any cost – including the destruction of the planet. Recently the campaign received a faxed message of support from the Ogoni people in Nigeria who know all about the destruction that capitalism causes in the name of 'progress'.

A wide range of groups are opposing the road, from Road Alert! to English Heritage, from EarthFirst! to local businesses and even aristocracy. Some 'socialists' use the existence of this cross-class alliance to condemn the battle as 'middle class' or 'irrelevant'. In fact, those at the forefront of the battle are determined, courageous and clear-minded about what they are doing – and in terms of tactical ingenuity and contempt for legality have a lot to teach anyone.

As with any struggle, those involved in it will determine its character – an argument for revolutionaries to be more involved, not less. For instance, Friends of the Earth, who have frequently refused to support road protests in the past, are very involved in Newbury and, with their significant resources, are desperate to play down the success of direct action by protesters. They have condemned 'deliberate damage' by protesters and encourage a 'positive relationship' between protesters and the police who are arresting them.

This reactionary nonsense does not represent what the most determined protesters think – and can be successfully challenged by more working class involvement in the campaign. As one activist puts it,

'We don't need any more lunched out hippies, we need people who are prepared to get up very early and take the battle to the contractors before they get near the site. We need people who are organised and are willing to get arrested to stop this madness. We need hundreds of them and we need them now.'

There is much talk amongst communists, socialists and anti-fascists at the moment about the need for *unity in action* as a way of beginning to build a fighting working class movement in Britain. That talk could be turned into very practical activity if socialists started getting down to Newbury. As the *SchNEWS* newsletter puts it:

'All the main parties would have us wrapped up in endless debate and passing round bits of paper whilst the Earth's support systems collapse around our ears. Forget writing to your MP – get on the direct action tip, get down to Newbury and stop this insane road scheme in its tracks ... Laws? You make 'em, we break 'em – a single gesture of defiance is worth more than a thousand angry words.'

Colin Thorn

#### HOW TO GET THERE

If you live in London phone Reclaim the Streets on 0171 281 4621/0171 249 9144 (transport leaves London Monday to Friday, £4 each way). If you live in Brighton phone Justice? on 01273 685913. If you live somewhere else, phone Third Battle of Newbury 01635 45544/ information line (answering machine) 01635 550552. Go prepared with pen and paper, food and water, warm clothes and sleeping bags, cameras and camcorders.



Guardian reporter John Vidal managed to get himself recruited as one of the private security guards – backing up the huge police operation – at Newbury. He described the shocking conditions of the guards – recruited mainly from the ranks of the unemployed in the southeast. Billeted in an old RAF camp, the guards, paid £4 an hour, are fed cold food for which they queue for three hours. Living in filthy and brutal conditions (seven days on, three days off) they are encouraged to act violently towards the protesters who the security operation organisers called 'the enemy.' The guards describe the protesters as 'smellies', 'mental' and 'animals'. Vidal describes the pervading atmosphere of violence: 'Can we go and kick the crap out of them now?'; 'Remember a kidney punch doesn't leave bruises'. A huge fight breaks out in the security guards' camp, leaving several people injured.

By such means is the Newbury bypass being constructed – a section of unemployed people being brutalised and used as cheap hired thugs.