

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 130 April/May 1996

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socialist

British beef
is safe!

Bastards...

We live in a
classless
society

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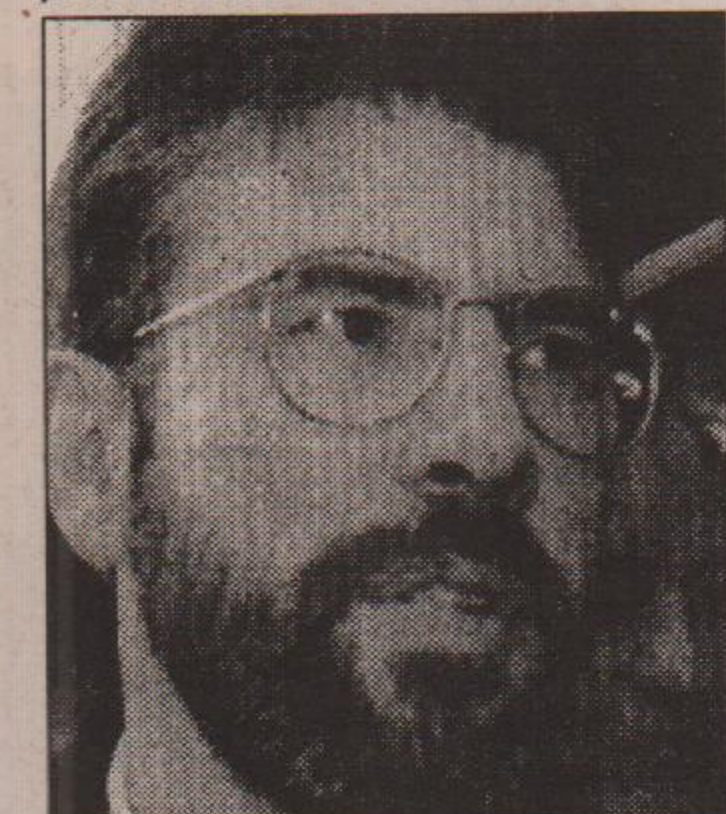
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**Mass
slaughter
may be the
only
solution**

IRA answer to phony peace

On 9 February the IRA ceasefire ended with the explosion of a massive bomb in London's Canary Wharf, causing up to £150 million in damage. Judging by the half-hearted response of the police to clear warnings regarding the bomb, as a result of which two people died, you would have thought the ending of the ceasefire was completely unexpected. Yet it can have come as no surprise to the British government. In the seventeen months since the ceasefire was announced, the government has proved that it is not remotely interested in lasting and just peace. The IRA rightly described the peace process as 'a sham whose sole purpose had become the attainment of an IRA surrender.' Developments since 9 February have shown that this remains the purpose of Major's government policy. They have also shown that he can expect the full support of the Labour Party.

Since it first launched its peace talks in the early 1990s, the British government has been determined to undermine and weaken revolutionary opposition to the partition of Ireland. Unable to defeat the Republican movement militarily, it has sought to bolster more moderate nationalist forces both north and south of the border. The Dublin government and the SDLP have emerged as increasingly stable allies as a result of economic development in the South from European and multinational investment, and increased education and employment opportunities for middle class Catholics in the public sector in the North. In bringing them as well as the Loyalists into discussions on the future of the Six Counties, the government hoped to exert pressure upon the Republican movement, drawing in any reformist elements and leaving the revolutionaries isolated. This it set about doing from the moment the IRA announced its ceasefire. Precondition after precondition was invented in



Gerry Adams

order to wear down the Republican movement and reduce its demands.

In the aftermath of the bombing of Canary Wharf, the government has shown that it will not be deterred from its current path. The muted response from politicians and media to the bomb shows the extent to which a consensus has emerged around the government's strategy. For example, the *Financial Times* argued in its editorial three days after the bomb: 'If the IRA assumed it could win concessions by

bombing London, the calculation must be shown to have been utterly wrong... Mr Major, however, must resist the calls from those who want the government to respond to the resumption of the IRA campaign by seeking an internal political settlement... Instead he should stick firmly to the three-stranded approach set out in the Downing Street Declaration, under which an eventual accord would include also a North/South and an Anglo-Irish dimension.' This the government has done. A date has been set for all-party talks with no preconditions on decommissioning as a concession to lure Sinn Fein, which has raised such talks as its central demand, back into the fold. But elections, with a complex formula that in practice favours all sections of the unionists, must take



Massive damage at Canary Wharf

place first. And even after the elections, all that is going to happen is more talk. Any real change is as remote as ever. Small wonder that the IRA has decided to reject these elections.

The consensus on government strategy naturally extends to the Labour Party. Tony Blair said in the House of Commons after the end of the ceasefire that 'whatever the political differences between myself and the Prime Minister, on this we shall be four-square together in the cause of peace'. Nothing unites Labour and Tory more surely than the interests of British imperialism. To show that the new Labour Party will be even more reliable in its defence than the old, the Labour cabinet and the majority of Labour MPs abstained on a vote on the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, ending a 13-year policy of voting against a vicious piece of legislation which has been condemned before the European Court of Human Rights. Jack Straw said 'We do not want any message to go out to [the IRA]... that there could be any excuse for the renewal of the bombing by them.'

Meanwhile, state repression against the nationalist working class, has been stepped up. 500 British troops withdrawn after the ceasefire have been re-

turned to the Six Counties. On 1 March, squads of marines, dropped by Chinook helicopters, sealed off farmland in the border area of the Six Counties for three days during an operation in which they smashed windows, broke down fences scattering animals and verbally abused local residents. Significantly, harassment by state forces in the south is also on the increase: six Sinn Fein members were recently arrested and detained for 48 hours by Special Branch officers in the Twenty Six Counties. More fundamentally, the poverty and discrimination faced by the nationalist working class remain as deeply entrenched as ever. As a confidential government report shortly before the ceasefire admitted, 'On all the major social and economic indicators Catholics are worse off than

Protestants.' As long as such oppression and discrimination continue, so will opposition to British rule.

Yet the reality remains that military activity, however courageous and effective, cannot alone drive Britain out of Ireland. The political voice of the nationalist working class, the only consistent opponents of British rule, has to be heard again. The role of socialists in Britain must be to build a movement here capable of giving solidarity to the nationalist working class in Ireland and demanding the complete withdrawal of British imperialism from a country it has shackled for so long. ■

COMMUNIST FORUMS

A new series on the relevance of classic Marxist texts and principles to the struggles we face today, introduced by members of Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!'s Editorial Board.

Sunday 14 April 2.30pm
**Their profit, our loss
 Marx's Wages, Price and Profit - its relevance today**
 Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1 (Holborn tube). £1/50p
 Creche available on application.

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BSE transmission to humans

A crime too far

CAT WIENER

'If our worst fears are realised, we could lose a generation.' Microbiologist Professor Richard Lacey, June 1990

Ten people have died of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, a teenager lies in a coma and no one can predict what the final death toll will be. This is a tragedy that could have been prevented, but for the callous greed and crass stupidity of the government, the meat industry and the food industry at large.

On 20 March the government admitted the links between human CJD and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, or Mad Cow Disease - a connection they had been at pains to deny since the first recorded instance of BSE in 1987. Desperate not to jeopardise Britain's £500m meat industry and unprepared to shell out the necessary compensation to farmers, the government failed to take early measures to prevent the spread of BSE. It took 18 months to make it a notifiable disease, 20 months to introduce compulsory slaughter and compensation schemes for infected cattle, two and half years to announce a ban on cattle offal and infected meat for human consumption and three years to provide full compensation and effective incentives to prevent infected material entering the food chain.

The failure to provide premium prices for slaughtering infected cattle early on meant that farmers stood to gain more by selling cattle in the early stages of infection, so ensuring that BSE spread rapidly across the country. Today up to half of all dairy herds and 15% of prime beef herds are thought to be infected. It is not known if cows can pass BSE on to their calves.

In 1990 the Agriculture Select Committee was already warning that the government was being 'complacent' over BSE, as then Agriculture Minister John Gummer paraded his four-year-old daughter before the cameras eating a beefburger and declared British beef was safe. But the culpability starts a long way before that.

This meat is murder

'Never before have diseased ruminants been fed to other ruminants and then fed to humans. We are in a mass experiment that is killing us.'

The British meat industry, as animal rights activists and vegetarians have long pointed out, is a sordid, disgusting but highly lucrative business, where high yield equals high profits. Cheap, plentiful meat involves intensive farming methods - where disease spreads quickly - and the feeding of 'high protein' foodstuffs to animals. In the early eighties, the government relaxed the rules on 'protein processing', arguing that 'in the present economic climate the industry itself should determine how best to produce a high quality

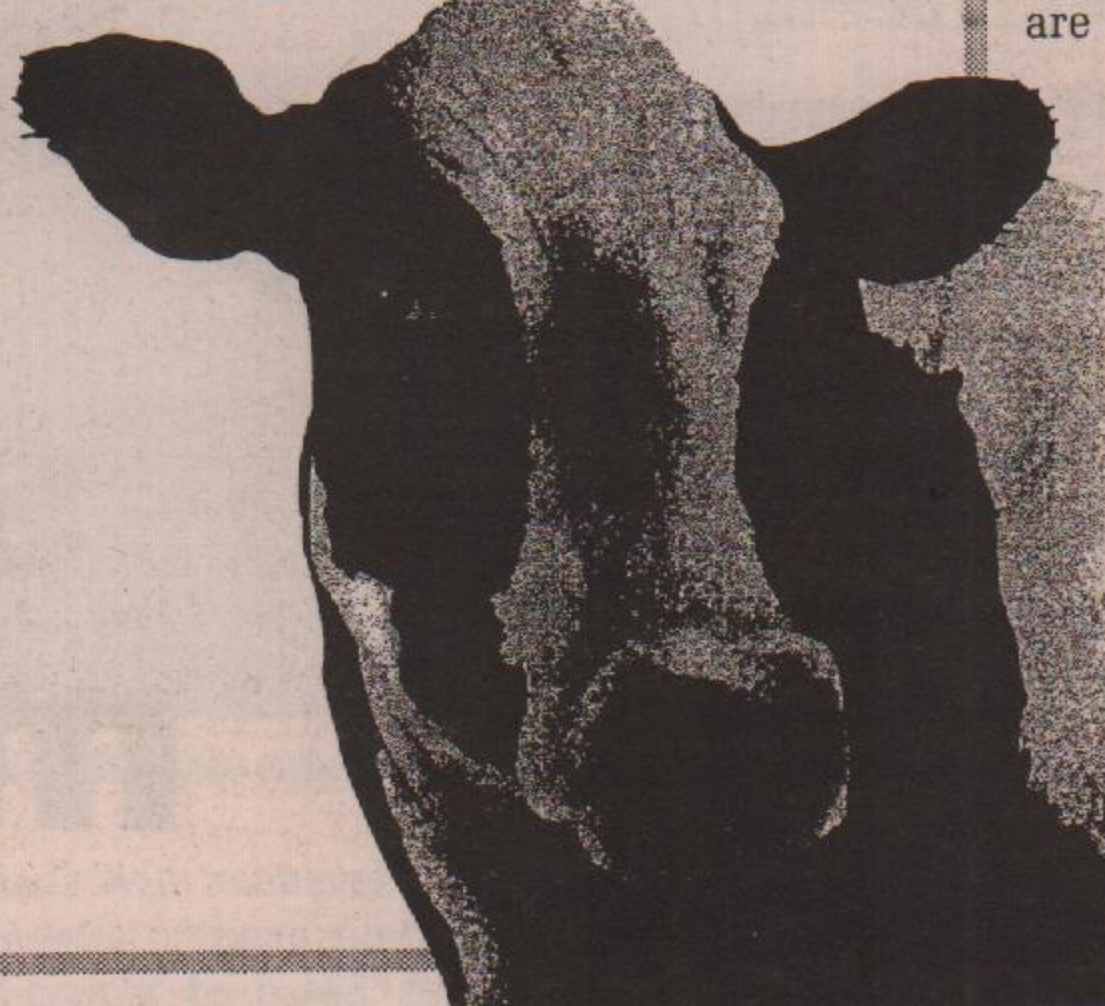


A preventable disaster

product.' Up to 1988, that high-quality feed, in the case of cattle, was a succulent mixture of sheep offal, fish meal, soya, dried blood, meat and bone meal (often from cattle) and dried poultry manure. From the early eighties, the manufacturers were given carte blanche to cut costs: standards were relaxed, allowing scrapie-infected sheep offal, seen as the most likely cause of BSE, to get into the food chain.

France, Belgium and Germany immediately banned imports of British beef following the government admission; another 17 other countries followed suit. Schools and old people's homes up and down the country are taking beef off the menu, and prices at cattle markets dropped dramatically as the news broke. The managing director of one such market, quoted in the *Evening Standard*, was clear where the blame lay: 'The whole trade is picking up the tab for the government's mismanagement at the beginning when the dairy herds first showed signs of BSE. We told them to take those herds out and kill them - but they didn't want to spend the money.' Now

'Never before have diseased ruminants been fed to other ruminants and then fed to humans. We are in a mass experiment that is killing us.'



Health

Secretary Stephen Dorrell and Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg are saying that, if necessary, all 11 million cattle in Britain may have to be slaughtered. Compensation will have to be paid in full, and we will no doubt be expected to foot the bill. Yet it is the food industry

which has raked in huge profits whilst their cost-cutting and greed has put all our lives at risk - and it is they who should have to pay.

But the real nightmare is only just beginning. CJD may have an incubation period of up to 15 years. The prion that is thought to cause it is virtually indestructible and can survive even underground for ten years. The deaths so far may be only the tip of the iceberg. Once the prion enters the food chain, it can poison almost everything we eat. The government's own chief adviser on BSE has warned that an epidemic on the scale of AIDS is possible. Yet as early as the 1990s scientists were already warning the government of similarities between some new cases of CJD and BSE. Not only were their warnings ignored: scientists found their funding mysteriously cut, and restrictions placed on their research. Microbiologist Harash Narang's car tyres were slashed five times, his flat broken into and his papers ransacked. Professor Lacey, who has been warning about the dangers of BSE since 1990, and who describes the government's use and misuse of scientific advisers as 'one of the most disgraceful episodes in this country's history', was dismissed by the Ministry of Agriculture as 'politically suspect.' He says: 'The government has been deliberately risking the health of the population for a decade. The reason it didn't take action was that it would be expensive and damaging politically, particularly to the farming community who are their supporters.'

Let them eat beef

The only good news in this appalling story is that beef remains prominent on the menu of the House of Commons, and politicians such as Blair and Virginia Bottomley have made a point of saying they will continue to eat beef. But the prime beef herds from which they undoubtedly get their cuts are less likely to be infected. It is cheaper cuts from dairy herds and sausages and burgers made from mechanically - recovered meat which are most likely to carry BSE - and which our rulers, who have been prepared to dish it out to the working class for the last ten years to protect their own interests, should have rammed down their throats.

■ A theatre attendant at a London hospital told FRFI: 'I was present at a postmortem on someone who had died of CJD before the current scare broke. After the postmortem, the instruments they had used - which cost thousands of pounds - weren't sterilised, as they'd normally be. They were bagged up and taken away to be melted.' Just how much do the doctors know about CJD that we're not being told?

Scott Inquiry

Plenty of ammunition, nobody to fire the gun

MAXINE WILLIAMS

Can you recall what the conclusions of the Scott inquiry were? Not really? Join the club. It is only one month since Scott's five-volume findings were published, yet it has already, as it was designed to do, faded into oblivion. It took nearly four years to produce the 'Report of the Inquiry into the Export of Defence Equipment and Dual-Use Goods to Iraq and Related Prosecutions', and both the length of the process and the extraordinary pedantry of Scott contributed to the final damp squib.

No minister or civil servant was sacked. Nothing other than a brief moment of awkwardness was caused for the government. The smooth business of making millions of pounds from selling weapons of mass destruction proceeded unruffled. It was, from the government and arms industry point of view, an outstanding success. And this despite the weeks of nonsense prior to the findings being published, in which Scott was portrayed as a dangerous maverick - a loose cannon at best, a near anarchist at worst. 'Good God, fella rides a bike and his son's a Buddhist monk' spluttered red-faced old colonels in their clubs. Scott was chosen



Robin Cook had a moment of glory at the DTI, then Labour allowed the issue to die

precisely because these minor eccentricities disguised a 'safe pair of hands', albeit more thorough than the government might have wished.

In February 1994 (two years ago) FRFI said of the Scott Inquiry:

'even its more sensational days do not relieve the fog of irrelevant detail and crushing boredom that has overtaken the issues. It is virtually impossible ... for the public to follow or grasp what is being done at the Scott Inquiry.'

The same is true of the final report. How many people can afford the £45 it costs or the time it takes to read and understand it? Nor were they aided by the Labour opposition. Robin Cook, lauded in the press for

the heroic feat of being able to read fast and ask questions, provided a nice performance in the Parliamentary debate and then Labour allowed the issue to die. The press certainly did not reveal the underlying issues and, if you compare the volume of material printed on the Iraq arms scandal and the Dunblane shootings, you would imagine that the latter had claimed far more lives than the former. Yet the Iran/Iraq war, that golden opportunity for British arms sellers, claimed over one million lives. But let's talk about 'monsters' and 'bogeymen' instead of talking about the very normal and respectable men whose products wreck whole continents. Let's have an inquiry into how one disturbed individual got a couple of guns

rather than how in 1987 \$45,930 million was spent on arms in the world. Or how one in ten British manufacturing jobs depend on arms sales.

But especially let us not talk about how the British government (and Labour would have done the same - after all it was they who set up the Defence Export Sales Organisation in 1966 to assist 'UK firms to sell military related goods and services to overseas defence customers') gives priority to selling weapons abroad. It uses the Ministry of Defence, the Civil Service, its foreign and trade policy to this end. When in 1980 the Iran/Iraq war broke out, the UK government claimed to be neutral and said it would not licence 'lethal equipment' sales. But at a Cabinet Committee in 1981 the government decided that while lethal arms should not be supplied 'every opportunity should be taken to exploit Iraq's potentialities as a promising market for the sale of defence equipment, and to this end "lethal items" should be interpreted in the narrowest possible sense, and the obligations of neutrality as flexibly as possible' (p154, Vol 1, Scott Report).

The spectacular results of this flexible policy were that UK exports to Iraq rose from £201m in 1979 to £874m in 1982. Arms sales to Jordan (through which arms to Iraq were diverted) rose by 3000% in the 1980s. Much of arms and other exports to Iraq were in fact paid for by the British taxpayer through the Export Credit Guarantee scheme. This extraor-

inary scheme guarantees that the British taxpayer will pick up the tab if a foreign buyer fails to pay. (But nobody talks about 'scroungers' and 'parasites' in the context of this form of state expenditure). These export credits for arms sales to Iraq amounted to £25m in 1984, £50m in 1985 and £40m in 1988. These facts, however, although revealed by Scott, do not form the substance of his inquiry. This was, narrowly, whether government departments operated in accordance with government policy.

Scott is critical of many of the ministers and civil servants involved in carrying out and explaining (ie lying about) government policy, such as William Waldegrave and Attorney General Sir Nicholas Lyell. And in the detail of the Scott Report there is buried away much information that exposes the corrupt and filthy dealings of the British government and arms exporters. It would have taken a serious opposition to push these points home, to expose the way in which powerful business interests render British democracy a fiction and to open a serious debate about these questions. Britain has no such opposition. And so, post-Scott, it's business as usual as the electric stun batons, missiles, tanks, grenades, bullets, mines and bombs roll off the production line. Efficient machines for mincing up, vapourising and shattering bodies. A great opportunity for British business. ■

Next FRFI: full analysis of the Scott Report.

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hillingdon women fight on

HANNAH CALLER

Since 1 October, through one of the coldest winters this century, over 50 women domestic workers, sacked for refusing to sign new contracts, have maintained a constant presence outside Hillingdon Hospital. The contracts, imposed by Pall Mall, would have involved a 20% cut in wages, with a new hourly rate of £2.70, and reduced sick pay, holiday pay and London weighting.

UNISON leaders were forced to back the strike and make the picket official. Porters, caterers and domestics at Hillingdon were balloted, but none have come out in support of the strike.

The women receive £62.50 per week hardship pay, but the strike fund, which is receiving donations from collections around the country, is being firmly controlled by UNISON officials.

Pall Mall won the contract for catering, cleaning and portering services at Hillingdon Hospital in October 1994. By law they had to take on the staff already employed at the hospital. Some of the domestics, mostly Asian women, had been employed for almost 30 years. Within months, cuts in pay and conditions had begun.

Pall Mall employ 1,200 people countrywide and in 1994 had a turnover of £71 million, with profits of £2.2 million. Pall Mall's profits go to the Davis Service Group, whose turnover has increased in 1993-1994 from £272 million to £322 million, and profits from £22 mil-



Hillingdon hospital workers on the picket line since 1 October

lion to £25 million. However, Pall Mall's profits have fallen since 1993, and recent figures show they are still falling. As Pall Mall attempt to increase their profits, it is the lowest paid and the most vulnerable workers who suffer the most.

Pall Mall have 17 contracts in the NHS. In 1994, the average pay of a Pall Mall worker was £5,139pa, compared to the highest-paid director who received £74,672pa. Pall Mall has never been keen to recognise trade unions; its approach in disputes has been to sack workers who refuse to work the new contracts.

Action against Pall Mall is also underway at Hairmyer Hospital, East Kilbride in Scotland, and at Orsett and St Andrew's Hospital in Essex over the cutting of pay and conditions. Recently a dispute involving Pall Mall at the Royal Southamton Hospital was resolved through ACAS.

Comrades from FRFI and

South Asia Solidarity joined the women on the picket on 15 March. They are determined to continue their fight against Pall Mall but they must not stand alone - they need support on the picket. Weekly Friday visits with transport from central London are being organised. There will be a picket of Pall Mall HQ in Brixton on 29 March and a rally outside the hospital is planned for 1 April, six months since the dispute began.

The Davis Group shareholders meeting is due to take place at the end of April: they must not be allowed to ignore the conditions of Pall Mall employees and sacked workers.

For details phone South Asia Solidarity 0171 713 7907 or FRFI 0171 837 1688. Send messages of support c/o UNISON office Hillingdon Hospital, Pield Heath Rd, Hillingdon, Middlesex UB8 3NN. Write to Pall Mall condemning their attack on low paid workers at 125 Acre Lane, Brixton SW2 5UA. ■

JJ Fast Food strikers win battle for low-paid workers

NICKI JAMESON

On Monday 26 March 11 of the 45 JJ Fast Foods workers, who had been sacked on 30 October by factory boss Mustafa Kamil, went back to work, following an Industrial Tribunal verdict which found in favour of the workers. The remaining workers decided not to return to JJs. Although the Tribunal ruled Kamil must reinstate sacked employees, give all workers employment contracts, pay compensation, recognise the union and provide sick pay and proper grievance and disciplinary procedures, knowing their boss of old, they were not convinced that these requirements would actually be observed.

The 45 mainly Kurdish and Turkish workers at JJs had fought a strenuous campaign, backed by an active support group, organising successful pickets of Jenny's Burger Bars, which are supplied by JJs, and persuading Harrow and Southwark Councils to terminate lucrative contracts with the company. It was this solidarity and organisation which clinched victory, not the actions of the strikers' union, the TGWU. Although the workers' decision to join the union in order to fight for better conditions was

what prompted Kamil to sack them, the union's support was, at a national level, to say the least, tepid. The strike was never treated as an official dispute and the workers were paid only 'hardship' money (£35 per week), not strike pay.

The JJs victory shows what can be achieved by low-paid workers and their supporters in industries which are far from the 'traditional' base of British trade unionism. Inspired by the victory at JJs, 100 textile workers at a Tottenham factory went on strike on 19 February, demanding an end to illegal deductions, proper tea and lunch breaks and decent eating and toilet facilities. Their strike lasted just three days before the boss caved in, recognised the union, conceded all the demands and more.

The North/East London Textile Branch of the T&G, which is led by militant Turkish and Kurdish workers, and is a very different animal to its moribund parent organisation, is spearheading a campaign to unionise low-paid workers in the area and push forward their demands for decent pay and conditions. The JJs support group continues to meet weekly as 'The Tottenham Picket'. Both organisations can be contacted at 72 West Green Road, London N15 5NS, telephone 0181 802 9804. ■

Police trials of CS gas spray Lethal weapons

CAROL BRICKLEY

On Saturday 16 March the police killed another black man. He was Ibrahima Sey, a Ghanaian asylum seeker who was arrested following a 'disturbance' at his home in Ilford, Essex. Witnesses say that ten police officers overpowered Mr Sey, handcuffed him and threw him in a police van. At some point later police used CS gas on their victim - he was taken from the police station to hospital where he was pronounced dead.

A rapid postmortem was carried out by three pathologists - representing the coroner, the Police Federation and the Metropolitan Police. No-one represented Mr Sey or his family. Their bald pronouncement was that he died of heart disease 'following a period of exertion'. That 'period of exertion' was being jumped on by ten policemen. Before the results of any toxicology tests or any assessment of the circumstances of the gassing, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) issued their statement that CS gas had not contributed to Mr Sey's death and that they had no intention of suspending use of CS spray: 'which had been used on more than 20 occasions so far and we are not aware of any long term adverse reactions.'

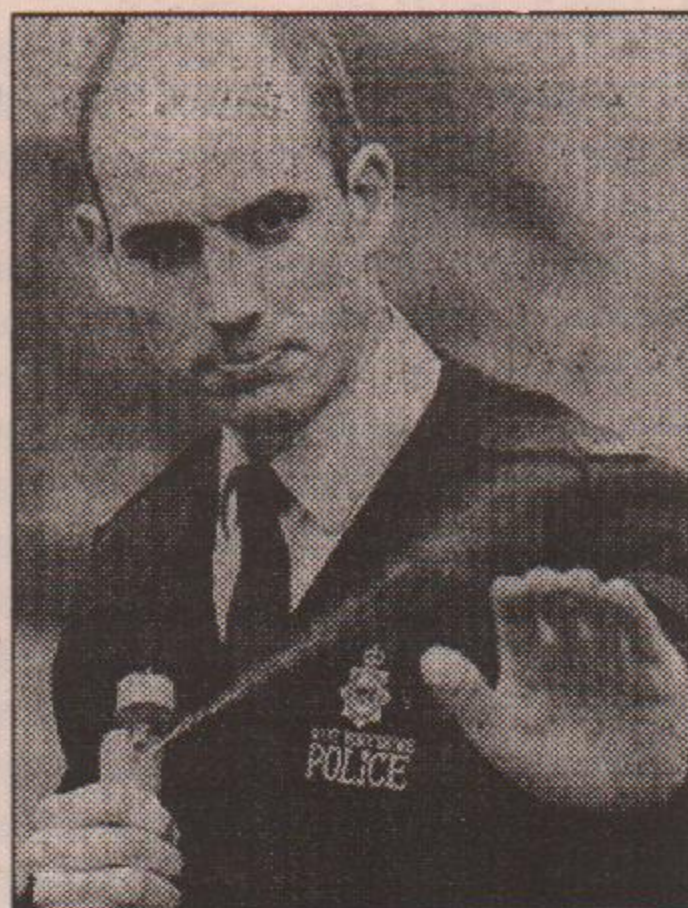
ACPO is lying. Although public trials of the gas spray have only just begun in 16 police authorities (some have refused to use it), earlier trials

using police officers as guinea pigs resulted in two cases of serious injury. One inspector is suing after suffering serious burns to his eyes. Yet there has barely been a flutter of opposition to this lethal experiment.

ACPO is at the forefront of the drive to arm the police: riot squads, long truncheons, armed response units, and CS gas are all a result of ACPO's long-term strategy to equip the police with lethal weapons. They argue that this is for dealing with 'dangerous' criminals: the reality is very different. These weapons are not deployed to deal with the really dangerous criminals who rob the poor, deal in arms which kill children, or poison the nation. Ernest Saunders will not be gassed; Darius Guppy will not have his skull split open with a long truncheon; and government ministers won't even be arrested.

Ibrahima Sey is the fourth black man to die in police custody in less than a year. Brian Douglas died in 1995 after being hit by the new US-style long truncheon during a stop-and-search on a Clapham street. Following Mr Sey's murder his sister stated: 'There was no need to use CS gas when he wasn't resisting arrest'. In fact black and Irish people are routinely subjected to police brutality and violent arrest for minor charges.

In March a young Irish man was awarded £7,500 compensation following a stop-and-search outside his house in central London. He was called an 'Irish cunt', thrown against his front door, had his hand smashed



CS spray on trial - clean image, filthy racist reality

against the wall, struck forcibly, thrown in a police van where he was hit in the face. The officers concerned were 'admonished'. This occurred in December 1992: by 1995 his skull could have been smashed by the new truncheon like Brian Douglas; by 1996 he could have been gassed like Ibrahima Sey. As it was he lived to tell the tale.

In a racist and violent police culture, black and Irish people are regarded as legitimate targets for brutality. They are the 'scum' who have no rights. In the same category are asylum seekers (remember Joy Gardner), Newbury tree dwellers, squatters, new age travellers and political demonstrators. But that is only the start. ACPO is tooling up with a specific longer-term view: a confrontation between the state and all those who resist not only police racism and brutality, but also the oppression of all working class people. ■

Amer Rafiq - blinded by Manchester police

BOB SHEPHERD

In the early hours of 21 February Amer Rafiq, a 21-year-old student and restaurant worker, was arrested in Rusholme. By the time he reached Platt Lane police station, only a mile away, he had received such a severe beating that his right eye had to be surgically removed.

That night, young Asian people had been gathering in Rusholme

to celebrate the Muslim Eid festival. It has become a tradition for Eid celebrations to centre on Wilmslow Road in Rusholme, with its large number of Asian shops and restaurants. Equally without fail, police harassment and provocation of those celebrating the festival takes place every year.

The injuries suffered by Amer have drawn a spontaneous response from the Asian community and anti-racists in Man-

chester. On 9 March a demonstration of nearly 2,000 people marched through Rusholme to the centre of Manchester, demanding an end to police brutality, and justice for Amer Rafiq. A defence campaign has begun to meet regularly and is organising for the second Eid festival at the end of April.

For further information contact Amer Rafiq Defence Campaign, c/o Pakistani Community Centre, Stockport Rd, Manchester. ■

New attack on workers' rights

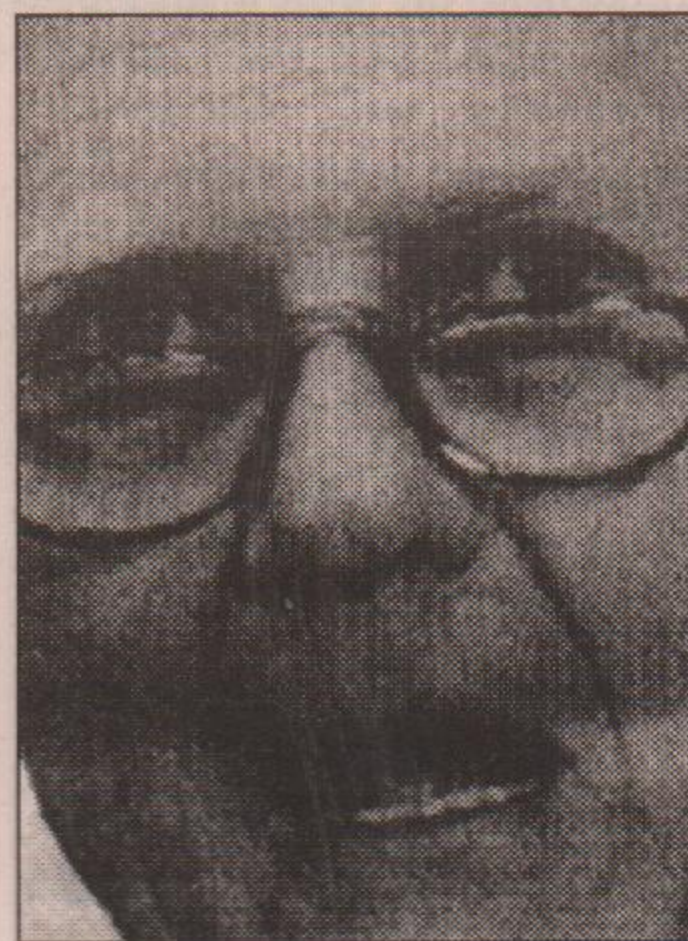
ROBERT CLOUGH

Michael Heseltine has just proposed to abolish any basic employment rights for workers in small firms with less than 25 workers.

Some seven million workers would be affected. No longer would they be covered by laws on racial or sexual harassment, equal pay, maternity rights, sick pay, pensions or health and safety. Such workers are already likely to be worse off than those working for larger companies, earning less money and working longer hours. They are also very unlikely to belong to a trade union. Hence the propos-

als would leave them without any protection whatsoever, and would be a green light for inflicting even worse conditions.

The core of the proposal is to prevent any appeal by such workers to the industrial tribunal system whose workload has trebled over the last five years. A quarter of all cases going to such tribunals are from this group of workers. The Federation of Small Businesses is of course delighted with the proposal, a spokesperson saying that 'employment regulations have been one of the worst burdens on small businesses for many years.' It shows what cap-



Michael Heseltine

italism is prepared to do as it attempts to resolve its crisis of profitability; if the attack is pressed home successfully, it will be a prelude to such rights being removed from the working class as a whole. ■

Disability rights

Action against Labour Party

KEN HUGHES

On 11 March, activists from the Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) staged a protest and six-hour sit-in at the Labour Party headquarters in the Walworth Road in London.

A spokesperson for DAN told us that at the last Labour Party conference, a motion called Composite 46 was passed, committing the Labour Party via conference to pass comprehensive anti-discrimination, pro-civil rights legislation for the disabled. DAN say that a conference motion is not enough and they want to hear it from the Labour Party leadership. Tom Clarke, Shadow Minister for the disabled, had congratulated DAN for its militant action outside parliament when the

Tories' Disability Discrimination Bill was read, but when DAN were pressing the Labour Party for a firm commitment and time scale for civil rights legislation, it was a different story, and Clarke dismissed the demonstrators as a small group of militants.

DAN are at the forefront of changing society's perception of disabled people, away from the pity of charity posters, towards the granting of civil rights and human rights for the 10% of the population who have a disability. Tory and Labour alike must be targeted for their refusal to address even such fundamental issues as accessible public transport.

DAN's national action this year will be held on 29/30 March in Nottingham. For further details of events and a list



of local organisers, contact DAN at 3 Crawley Road, Wood Green, London N22 6AN. Tel: 0181 889 1361. ■

Save King's Cross Women's Centre

On 25 March, the King's Cross Women's Centre, one of the oldest women's centres in London, is being evicted from its premises. Centre users and volunteers have been lobbying Camden Council for new premises. Camden is to decide on the evening of eviction day.

In December 1993 Camden Council sold the building to new landlord Community Housing Association (CHA) without consulting the Centre. CHA increased the rent from £2 per week to £6,000 per year and started eviction proceedings when Housewives in Dialogue, the charity that runs the Centre, couldn't afford to pay.

A multiracial delegation of Centre users and volunteers presented a petition signed by over 3,000 local people and over 100 organisations urging the Council to provide alternative premises. Though some councillors have been very supportive, others have attacked the long track record of the organisations based at the Centre, questioning its usefulness to 'local people'!

Unwaged volunteers have provided free anti-sexist, anti-racist services - legal advice, survival information and support - to thousands of women (and men) in the local community and elsewhere since 1975.

Most of these services have been unfunded and many have proved to be life-saving; all are now threatened.

The Centre's work over the last year has included:

- Winning the first private prosecution for rape in England.
- Women Against Rape, the English Collective of Prostitutes and Legal Action for Women were involved.
- Supporting women asylum seekers who have been raped, and helping women to win compensation for rape and other violence.
- A dossier of 15 cases of rape and sexual assault where the CPS refused to prosecute.
- Bringing the issue of unwaged work to the attention of local, national and international governments.
- Getting local authorities to include assessing the nature and value of women's unwaged work in their implementation of Agenda 21, the UN Earth Summit commitment on achieving sustainable development.
- Campaigning by Black Women's Rape Action Project and others to clear the name of Sammy Davis, the Ghanaian man recently returned after being deported following a wrongful rape conviction.
- Supporting Rita Porter, a black mother who is suing the Kentish Town police for assault

and wrongful imprisonment.

• Publishing the third edition of Legal Action for Women's self-help handbook on the Child Support Act, which has been key to the defence of single mothers, new partners, 'absent' mothers and fathers up against the CSA.

• Defending disability rights and benefits. WinVisible (women with visible and invisible disabilities) has opposed discriminatory legislation and been active in Incapacity Action, a coalition against new benefit cuts.

• Opposing the PENTA trials: toxic AIDS experiments on - mainly black - children conducted by the Medical Research Council.

• Defending the rights of lesbian mothers, their partners and children, with Wages Due Lesbians.

• Supporting the McLibel Support Campaign and Kids Against Big Mac.

Help save the Centre's services - with your help we are determined to continue our work. If you live or work in Camden, please write to or phone: Phil Turner, Chair of Leisure and Community Services which will decide whether to give the Centre new premises; Richard Arthur, Leader of the Council and local MPs Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson. Keep in touch for news of lobbies and other supporting actions. Send a donation or make collections for the fighting fund - please be generous. ■

The King's Cross Women's Centre can be contacted at PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU. Tel: 0171 837 7509 Fax: 0171 833 4817.

Pensioners notes

RENE WALLER

The long winter with its severe weather has at times rendered almost all types of pensioners' work impossible, especially for those of us over 80 who have enough to do to keep warm without venturing forth to attend meetings.

Nevertheless, most groups have at least held regular indoor meetings, even if the attendance has been somewhat smaller than usual. Also, the usual Christmas and New Year parties have been held successfully.

I myself, as an older pensioner, will admit that despite my wish to get out I found it

sometimes wiser to stay put. I was however delighted to know that few functions were cancelled and many were very successful, despite the adverse conditions.

I'm glad to be able to report too that I did find it possible to attend the March meeting of my group and was reassured to find it well attended and that it was planning to continue to defend vigorously pensioners' interests by lobbying MPs when required and resuming our weekly collection of signatures to support pensioners' rights. This very public activity we have always regarded as vital and believe a militant policy is more essential

than ever in a situation where politicians are reluctant to make any promises or give any binding guarantees.

Let's make it very clear we are not satisfied with vague expressions of support and that candidates should not assume that anti-Tory feeling will be sufficient to give them votes. We need candidates who will fight for a working class policy and nothing less will do. This is not merely needed for pensioners, but if we stand firm it will actually help the whole movement to regain a sense of purpose. Long live socialism. Let us pensioners put it on the agenda again. ■

Cuts in Scotland

Labour, Tory just the same

MICHAEL TAYLOR

'It is a feat unprecedented in history that even in these circumstances [in Cuba], not one school or hospital, not one home for the aged or day centre has been closed.' Fidel Castro, 1995

Faced with Scottish Office spending caps on local authority money, Labour councils have reached for the knives. 50 schools are to close, 21 in Glasgow alone. Old folks' homes, day centres for the handicapped, libraries and community centres will close across Scotland. Thousands of jobs will be lost this year and up to 15,000 over the next three years, with deeper cuts promised next year.

The poorest working class communities will be hardest hit as vital neighbourhood services close. Labour councils and the Labour Party agree there is no alternative. As Tony Blair told the Scottish Labour Conference, 'We have to be seen to be able to make the hard choices.'

Hundreds of angry parents, school students and council workers invaded council chambers in Glasgow, Dundee and

Edinburgh, chanting: 'School closures, who's to blame? Labour, Tory, just the same!' 40,000 marched in Edinburgh against education cuts as school students organised strikes and walkouts. The march was called by the teachers' union but, as the cuts are put over as 'teachers' jobs or school closures', the teachers have gone quiet.

The communities are being forced to organise themselves. In Dundee, Community Against School Closures, initiated by parents, including supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Group, opposes all school closures. Two of our secondaries and four primary schools are set to close - while the mainly middle-class state schools get new sports facilities. Don't tell us this is social justice!

'Fight or resign! Force the councils to fight! Labour should defy the cuts', say Militant and Socialist Worker. Well, they haven't fought and they won't resign - these bastards want to be the next government. Our campaign is willing to stand a CASC candidate against them -

and we'd win, such is the fury in the community. Our angry picket of mums and dads, school kids and grandads outnumbered the eight Labour members gathered at their branch. Hundreds of working class people have scorned the Labour Council's phony consultation meetings, declaring 'Labour no more!' CASC is reaching out to others across the city to unite in fighting closures. Out of these struggles, a fighting working class movement will be born.

Scottish Socialist Alliance

On 10 February, 400 people gathered in Glasgow to found the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Representatives of Labour, Scottish Militant Labour and the Communist Party of Scotland, amongst others, voted to set up the alliance on the basis of 'maximising the anti-Tory vote in Scotland'. But making Scotland a Tory-Free Zone cannot be the answer to the attacks Labour is now making on the working class. At an SSA meeting in Dundee, a speaker from CASC

warned from the platform that every Labour government had turned to the right on election. Tommy Sheridan, Scottish Militant Labour Councillor for Pollock, uncharacteristically spoke of the need for a historical re-evaluation of the experiences of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries.

He cited Cuba's achievements in health and education as an example of the planned economy, attacked Labour's implementation of the Tory cuts and forcefully exposed the madness of the free market. Progress indeed when Cuba is seriously raised at a large left meeting without provoking sneers from the middle-class left - and when no one is prepared to publicly defend Labour. This is the beginning of an independent working class point of view. If the SSA moves clearly in the direction of breaking with Labour to defend and advance the independent interests of the working class, it deserves the support of all socialists. The RCG will be arguing for this at the next SSA conference in Glasgow, Saturday 20 April, Muir Halls. ■

Education notes

The 'sick joke' of British politics

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Hardly a day passes without a new 'education' story hitting the headlines. Schools are closed, 'bad' teachers accused, 'sin-bins' for disruptive pupils are being set up (again), new organisations like FACE (Fight Against Cuts in Education) spring up, and the streets of Edinburgh see a 40,000 march of protest about schools. But all this concern about the word 'education' is a cover for something else - the growing poverty of large sections of the working class. (See 'A budget for an unequal Britain' Editorial, FRFI 128)

The working class is being squeezed on all sides. The sheer problems of living become more difficult, a reasonable diet, warmth, clothing and entertainment for children are harder to achieve. Schools in working class areas are understaffed, under resourced and dilapidated and may differ in the amount spent per pupil by £1,000. Any hope that decent schooling facilities will compensate for increasing deprivation in the home is fast disappearing. The education budget is constantly re-divided and shifted around under special interest group headings, vocational, training, post 16, academic, anything other than proper and sufficient provision for all at primary and secondary level.

Enter Shadow Education Secretary Blunkett of New Labour who pretends he is taking part in an education debate about the future of the comprehensive school and mixed ability teaching. He argues for 'diversity' for children of different aptitudes, targeting of able

pupils, accelerated learning for special groups and specialist schools. None of this is really about education. Like his party, Blunkett is worried about two electoral concerns. One is the battle for the middle class who are increasingly reluctant to send their children to the local under-resourced comprehensive school. The other is fear and loathing of the increasing numbers of unemployed young people, the so-called 'disaffected youth'.

20% of pupils leave school without maths or English GCSE. One eighth of 18 to 20-year-olds drop out of education, training or employment. This is 5% of the workforce, 12% of the unemployed and 19% of the long-term unemployed. It is estimated that this group costs £350 million a year in benefits payments and crime. Only 60,000 of the 150,000 'Modern Apprenticeship' places (a government scheme) have been filled. Despite a glossy and expensive government publicity campaign these training schemes are badly organised and of a low standard. Young people rightly see them as a dead end and a poor substitute for real training on a job.

Blunkett's real agenda on education is to underwrite support for fellow New Labour MP Frank Field, former head of the Child Poverty Action Group and Labour MP for Birkenhead who says 'controlling welfare expenditure must become the cornerstone of Labour's domestic policy' (see FRFI 126 'New Labour: Old Poor Law'). Blunkett needs a policy to attack the poor and to reassure middle class and better-off sections of the working class who do not

want their children to mix with the poor in a deprived environment that neither Tory nor Labour are prepared to improve.

Professor Michael Barber is the latest New Labour creature who finds that he cannot bring himself to send his offspring to the local comprehensive (though in this case he blames his wife). The family is considering three offers from independent and selective grant-maintained schools (how's that for parental choice!). Barber is education aide to Blair and Dean of New Initiatives at London Universities Institute of Education. Dean of what? As explained by Barber who was instrumental in closing Hackney Downs School, 'new initiatives' are an earth-shattering move, dating from 1996, to seek 'excellence for all in education and to tolerate failure no longer'. The fleshing out of these aspirations has been left to AN Other who, sure enough, comes from the Tory camp.

Ron Dearing has been called to the rescue again. He is a man of many parts, the Government's Chief Curriculum Adviser, a Director of Camelot National Lottery and admired by New Labour. A trouble shooter and a blunt instrument he proposes simplification of the whole education system by having four levels of qualification, Entry, Foundation, Intermediate and Higher. These will start at 14 years of age and can be reached via either academic or vocational 'pathways.' This means that students will be divided up to follow different courses in the third year of secondary school. We all know that to be an 'engineer' may mean anything from routine car maintenance to computer-assisted design at postgraduate level. Foundation level will be National Vocational Qualifications and lead to the first skill,

car mechanic. Higher level will be A Level maths, physics and Information Technology and lead to the second career, design engineering.

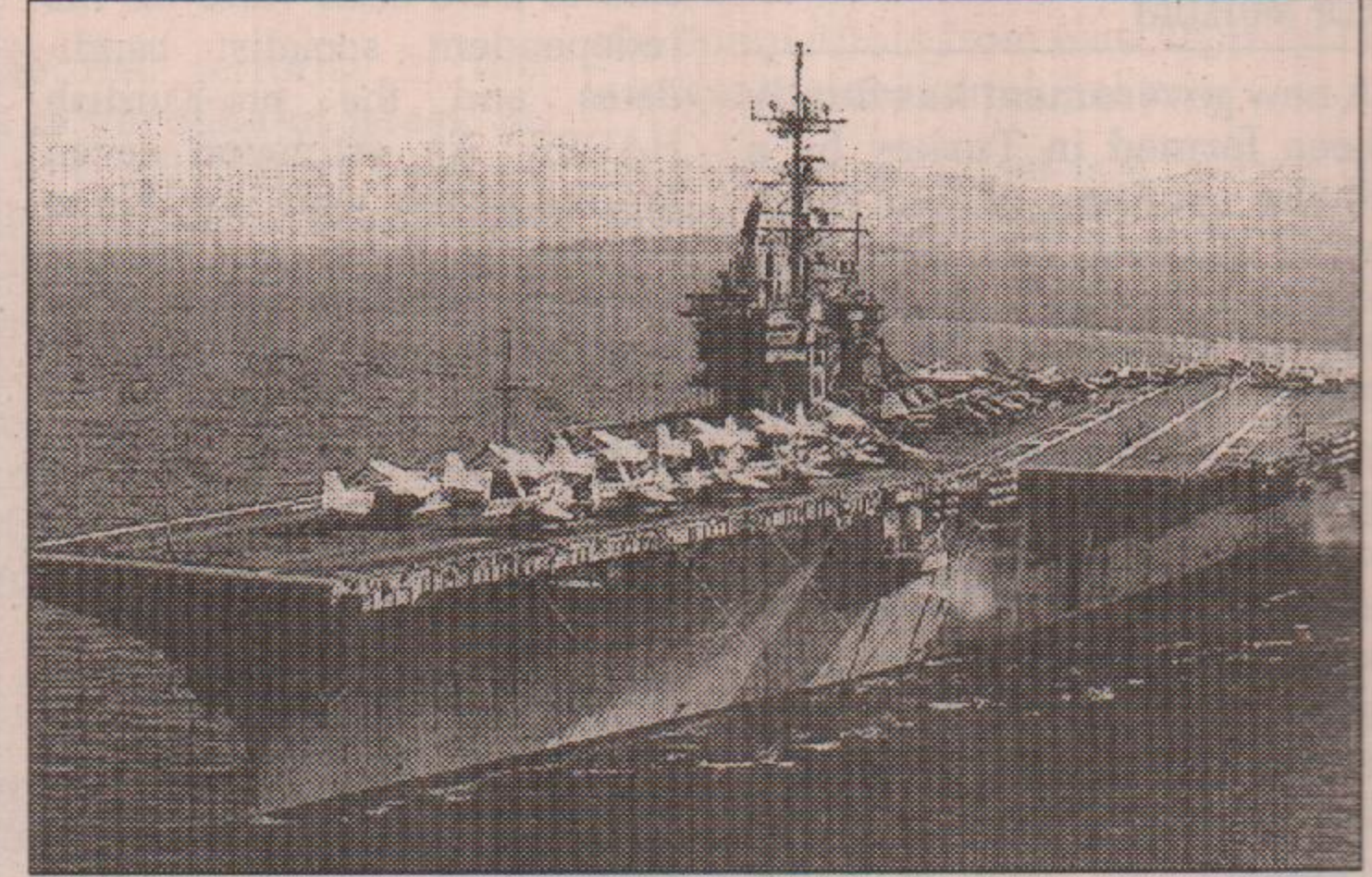
Dearing has hyped his proposals with talk of an end to cheap labour schemes and a promise of real jobs. What is really being flagged up, of course, is an end to the comprehensive school and a return to vocational training at 14 years for children destined to become low-paid workers.

Similarly New Labour's proposals are really about re-structuring 14-19 education so that students who are dissatisfied with school are kept busy with practical activities and basic literacy and numeracy. It is hoped that the offer of 'Mickey Mouse' qualifications and the promise of a real job will deal with the growing menace of thousands of 'disaffected' unqualified and unemployed youth. Many of these new courses will be offered at colleges and work places outside school (reminiscent of the day-release and community training of the old secondary modern school).

New Labour will be over the moon if Dearing's proposals are launched before they come to power. The present comprehensive school system is organised around the GCSE and A Level examination Boards which are businesses. The Tories will have to dismantle all the vested interests created by the introduction of market mechanisms into the schools. They will merely rub their hands with glee at the cutbacks in spending on schooling and benefits.

Reader, beware. In Britain if you hear politicians and their friends talk of 'education' you will be listening to those who are preparing to take the right to a decent education away from the poor. ■

Threat of war in Taiwan Straits



USS Independence rushing to defend US interests

TREVOR RAYNE

With the assembly in the Taiwan Straits of the biggest US military deployment since the Gulf War US imperialism reinforces Taiwan's role in its regional plans. The 1994 US Foreign Relations Authorisation Act installed a 'two Chinas' position, overturning a 1982 'one China' agreement. Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui visited the USA in 1995 lobbying for an independent seat at the UN.

For the People's Republic of China the liberation of Taiwan and its reunification with the mainland symbolise its opposition to colonialism and imperialism. China assessed US policy shifts and President Lee's election campaign, emphasising Taiwan's separateness, as a threat and responded with a justifiable show of force, mounting military manoeuvres close to the island.

Defeated by the communists in 1949 Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang (KMT) fled into Burma and, under US protection, to Taiwan. In 1951, as Chinese volunteers fought alongside the Korean people against a UN force of US, British and other troops, the CIA collaborated with the KMT in Burma. Three invasions of China mounted by these forces were repulsed by the People's Liberation Army. The KMT's Burma bases were funded from opium and heroin trafficking using CIA planes. The same CIA team that operated on the Chinese border helped plan the 1954 overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala and the 1961 Bay of Pigs attack on Cuba. KMT agents collaborated with the Florida mafia and Cuban exiles in countless boat raids on Cuba thereafter. By the 1970s Taiwan was a major link in the heroin trade and the KMT controlled almost a third of the world's illicit opium.

In 1954 Chiang placed 73,000 troops on Quemoy and Matsu islands two miles off the mainland coast, intended as stepping stones to a full-scale invasion. China responded by shelling them. The US Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended nuclear retaliation. The US made similar threats in 1958.

The KMT have ruled Taiwan since 1949 and until 1987 maintained martial law. The media hails President Lee's election this March as triumph for democracy; it is a triumph for treachery and deception. Lee joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1947. On 6 April 1949 Lee and some other CCP members were arrested. Lee revealed all the

CCP members he knew. As a result five were executed and ten gaoled. Lee got off scot-free to later climb the KMT bureaucratic ladder to the presidency.

Lee is willing to let Taiwan be used in US imperialism's strategy to contain China. Asia and the Pacific account for 70 per cent of all direct investment into developing countries in the recent period. China is second only to the USA as a recipient for overseas investment, almost half of all multinational corporations' investment in the Third World goes to China. The stakes are enormous. Can the Chinese government use the investment lodged in China and the region as a lever against imperialism which is vulnerable to the extent of its commitment? Can the USA maintain its regional influence by the projection of military power without taking the risky decision to invite Japan to assert its own imperialist designs?

Jonathan Cohen writes from Taiwan:

More than half the voters in Taiwan chose standing President Lee Tenghui and his running-mate Lien Chan as the best bet to maintain a precarious status quo as a materially privileged enclave outside Chinese control and backed by an unreliable US imperialism.

The Western media portrays the results as a defeat for China, on the grounds that its military exercises were intended to scare voters off supporting Lee. However, the Chinese exercises were not directed at any one person, but to show that China will not tolerate Taiwan independence or foreign interference. In an uncertain situation, it is no surprise many voters clung to the familiar ruling party.

Meanwhile the pro-independence DPP lost votes, compared to previous elections, prompting its chairman to resign. Comparative figures for the presidential and National Assembly elections show clearly that a portion of DPP voters abandoned their party's presidential candidate and voted for Lee instead.

The two clearly anti-independence candidates between them got more votes than the DPP. However, having split their resources they were no match for the KMT with its overwhelming financial power, community power structure and media control.

So, for the sake of doubtful stability, Taiwan will suffer four more years of Lee Tenghui's corruption and dithering policies. ■

Turkey geared for a fight

ELIF MUTLUAY

A new government has finally been formed in Turkey by a shaky coalition of two right-wing parties. The new government boasts a large number of fascists in its ranks. Many price increases were promptly announced and the government has promised to abolish the social security system and to carry on its aggressive privatisation programme. Workers and revolutionaries responded by taking to the streets in large numbers on two separate occasions: to resist union closures and to commemorate the first anniversary of the Gazi slum uprisings. Students have also staged mass occupations of the universities to protest against the 100 per cent increase in fees.

The December general election was intended to establish a government powerful enough to impose a new round of austerity measures on the working class to bail out the crisis-ridden economy. Certain conditions were necessary. First, the socialist and Kurdish opposition had to be kept out of parliament. Second, parliament had to be ready for working class resistance to the austerity programme. Third, the new government had to emerge with a claim to legitimacy.

The first two objectives were achieved. Five million registered voters did not vote and more than one million votes were discounted - these are

said to have been votes for the independent socialist candidates and the pro-Kurdish HADEP. An estimated seven million people were not able to register - these are mainly Kurdish peasants who were forcibly removed from their villages. Their homes were burnt down by the Turkish Security Forces on the grounds that the villagers supported the PKK. These displaced villagers could



Part-time prime minister Ciller

not register to vote. New election rules reduced the voting age from 21 to 18, but only two weeks were allowed for these young people to register, and they could only register on week days during working hours. Working class youth were effectively disenfranchised.

Although the pro-Islamic

Welfare Party was victorious at the election, it failed to achieve an overall majority. After two months of bargaining which involved all the bourgeois parties, the Motherland Party and the True Path finally reached an unstable coalition which will give them an overall majority. Under the current arrangement Motherland will rule for 10 months, then True Path for two years, followed by Motherland again for a year, with arrangements for the fifth year still to be agreed. Many fascists have been appointed to key government posts. It is an inherently unstable partnership without real credibility.

Price rises were the first priority for the new government and plans have been announced to abolish and privatise the Social Security Institution (SKK) on the grounds that it is running up huge debts and bankrupting the country. The reality is that the SKK ran a surplus of 36 trillion Turkish lira (TL) in 1994, and the employers owe a further 86 trillion TL in contributions. The government is hoping to milk the SKK funds which rightly belong to the working class to help pay its debts.

In the first few days the new government also attempted to close Egitim-sen, the union of state-employed teachers. Public employees in Turkey have a legal right to unionise which the courts usually uphold. This time the Governor of Ankara filed a court case to outlaw the union. Workers rallied at the

Court on successive days, despite police brutality, and on the final day the 'picket' was composed of 20,000 workers. Government lawyers failed to attend the court with the result that the case was dismissed. The massed workers turned the picket into a celebration!

Students are also fighting back. In response to a 300% increase in fees which is designed to keep working class youth out of the universities, students occupied buildings, staged mass demonstrations and protested in parliament from the spectators' gallery. The Open University, with many working class students, which had announced that students who failed to pay up would be excluded from exams, was forced to back down by the militant campaign.

20,000 demonstrators attended the anniversary of the Gazi uprisings when 37 people were shot down by the police last March. Police stayed away from the anniversary demonstration. But a fascinating insight into police attitudes was shown on television in the evening. Istanbul's Police Chief, Orban Tasanlar was interviewed alongside television film of the uprisings. The scenes showed many left groups at the demonstrations with banners and flags, and people shouting 'Murderer State'. Film included shots of a young woman demonstrator whose badly-injured body was kicked by the police on camera and then dumped next to a rubbish bin, left for



Police harassment of a political rally in Diyarbakir, Kurdistan

dead. She survived and was interviewed on the programme. Tasanlar couldn't take it and exploded in anger. The young

woman, he shouted, was a 'Militant' - she wasn't meant to survive and tell the truth about state brutality!

East Germany

The economic anti-miracle

ROBIN DE LA MOTTE

At the beginning of 1996, new figures provide little optimism for Eastern Germany (the former GDR) as deindustrialisation on an unprecedented scale continues apace and unemployment shows no signs of improving.

In 1989, the GDR was among the top 12 industrialised countries. Today, it is nowhere. In production terms, the country has been set back ten years. However, when the GDP of 1989 is regained, it will be with far fewer workers in industry than in 1989. Total industrial employment is down from 3.2 million to just over 600,000, and industrial employment per thousand inhabitants to 39 (compared to an average in Western Germany of about 120). At the West German level, there would be 2.2 million jobs in industry in Eastern Germany. Although the implosion in industry has been accompanied by an explosion in services such as banking, it is not enough, and the result is an unemployment rate of about 15 per cent in Eastern Germany compared to about 8 per cent in West Germany.

Unemployment has hit East German women particularly hard. Formerly used to working as a matter of course, women are now two-thirds of the unemployed. For both men and

women, working in a secure job used to be an important part of life; work used to be the basis for economic independence, a sense of self-worth, a place of communication and social interaction. Now, many jobs are insecure, and many people have no job at all. Less than a quarter of the working population has the same job as five years ago.

When the March 1990 elections in the former GDR produced a conservative government committed to abolishing the GDR as a separate state as soon as possible, old was always equated with bad. The entire social and economic system of the Federal Republic was to be transplanted wholesale onto the GDR with a minimum of transition; a short, sharp shock indeed. Legally, in fact, there was no unification, as allowed for in Article 146 of the Federal constitution; rather, the GDR acceded to the Federal Republic as per Article 23. The reason was time - it would take far longer to write a new constitution for a unified German state than for the GDR to simply accept the laws of the Federal Republic. It was the beginning of a continuous process of delegitimising the GDR and all that it stood for.

None of the achievements of 40 years were acknowledged or even considered worth saving, from the health system to the education system to prominent



German workers fight cuts in social spending

modern buildings like the 'People's Palace' in Berlin. One of the areas most fiercely taken over is the academic world. The attempt to gain ideological dominance by the West takes the form of marginalising and stigmatising intellectuals in the East. They are perceived as supporters of the 'evil' system, and are therefore expelled from their posts of influence. Two principal legal means were already laid down in the unification treaty. First, intellectual centres like the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of

Arts, the social sciences institutes at all universities and whole colleges were to be closed down. Second, a vetting process was started that amounted to a witch hunt - though it was also convenient for cutting down 'overstaffed' GDR schools and academic institutions. This vetting process consisted partly of highly demeaning and humiliating evaluation commissions (staffed by West German academics) assessing professional competence and personal integrity, and partly of highly detailed

questionnaires which included questions about former party affiliations and political opinions and activities. As a result of either answering or refusing to answer these questions, 75,000 teachers lost their jobs and are still blacklisted. The arbitrariness of the process is reflected in regional variations - in Thuringia, every ninth teacher was found politically suspect, compared to every 34th in the more politically tolerant climate of Brandenburg.

In 1989 the GDR was a highly developed industrialised country, with a standard of living greater than that in market economies such as Turkey, Greece, southern Italy, Spain, and Portugal, as well as the highest standard of living of the socialist countries. However, it was crippled by the terms of monetary union imposed on 1 July 1990. First, the currency was in effect revalued in excess of 400%, instantly decapitating GDR export markets both in the West and in the East whilst; secondly, wages doubled relative to capital, further exacerbating a lack of funds for investment.

Within ten days after monetary union, 5,000 of the 8,000 GDR state firms were unable to pay wages and buy raw materials. In a few weeks the Treuhand - the infamous state privatisation agency - was forced

to pump in 23 billion DM to prevent an economic collapse on the scale constantly predicted in the GDR in the months before the elections.

Restitution claims, over 2.2 million of them, continue to be slowly settled. Largely these are from previous owners - often Nazis fearing prosecution, or simply people who disagreed with socialism - who emigrated in the 1950s leaving their property behind. They were compensated at the time by the Federal Republic. Their former property was therefore expropriated by the GDR and rented or sold to East Germans seeking a home. Now the owners have come back, and can demand their property - quite legitimately obtained under GDR law - back. With skyrocketing rents, it is no coincidence that there are now over 50,000 homeless in Eastern Germany, starting from zero in 1989 and still heading upwards.

One of the most striking things about yearly surveys comparing the GDR with the present is that as time goes by, that which was lost is appreciated more and more. It is easy to dismiss this as mere nostalgia by a few old fuddy-duddies, but it is far more than that; it is a recognition of the achievements of the GDR. Whatever criticisms can be made of the socialism of the GDR, its achievements remain significant. More than 50% in the East think that socialism is a sound idea and was only put into practice badly in the GDR. But their views no longer count in the new Greater German imperialism.

Hamas Suicide Bombers and the Middle East Peace Process

It will make no difference to the majority of the Palestinian people if the Hamas suicide bombings in February and March, in which more than 60 died, lead to the collapse of the Middle East 'peace process'. British politicians responded with 'grave concern' and the US ambassador to Israel said the 'peace process was on life support'. The major powers took swift action organising a 'Peacemakers Summit', to sustain 'peace' against the 'terrorist onslaught'.

Yet any careful examination of even the most servile media coverage of Israel's response to the bombings revealed the utter fraudulence of the peace process. The peace process is not a positive stepping stone for the Palestinian people leading to sovereignty and prosperity. Quite the contrary.

Peace, self-determination and the reality

The *Guardian* could barely disguise its anti-Palestinian venom. Derek Brown and Jessica Berry unashamedly 'inform' us that:

'Being victims is what the Palestinians are best at...' and furthermore 'they have honed to a fine edge the arts of dissimulation and self-deception'.

Nevertheless Brown and Berry cannot help but conclude that recent events show the Palestinian Authority to be nothing but:

'...a series of splintered cantons, lorded over by the PLO but still under the Israeli thumb...'

Israel's response to the bombings demonstrated the sham nature of the peace process. In the entire West Bank and Gaza strip the Zionist colonisers still exercise powers of life and death. After the bombings Israel sealed off the Occupied Territories. No one was able to enter or leave without Israeli permission. An Israeli official even boasted:

'Arafat (only recently elected President to the Palestinian Authority) is now a prisoner in Gaza. He can't even get to the West Bank, even with a helicopter.'

The closure of the West Bank's and Gaza's borders had murderous consequences. Eight cities and 465 towns and villages are cut off from each other. Palestinians from the colonised territories could not travel to work in Israel, trade and transport of goods and food were halted. Every day of border closures results in Palestinians losing up to £2m, more than all the loans and aid promised by international donors. Even the repugnant *Guardian* journalists recognise that the Palestinians already are 'among the wretched of the earth' living in 'primeval squalor' in 'fetid' refugee camps. Border closures make things even more hellish. And the sovereign Palestinian Authority can do nothing!

Death also follows every border closure. Two babies being rushed to hospital were murdered by Israeli soldiers who detained their ambulance at a checkpoint denying them urgent medical attention. Days later another baby was murdered in similar circumstances. There are numerous other cases, reported and unreported.



Palestinian youth during the Intifada

Meanwhile repression is being intensified. Over 500 people have been arrested and detained by Israeli troops and the puppet police of Arafat's Palestinian Authority. In the village of Bura and the Al-Fawwar refugee camp, home of three suicide bombers, all men and teenage boys were arrested and detained. Israeli troops have resorted to collective punishment sealing some family homes of suspected individuals and demolishing others.

A Palestinian school teacher notes that:

'Occupation still exists, either directly or indirectly. Every day they are confiscating land. The situation is getting worse by the minute. We are in a big jail...The Israelis are still killing and will kill again in the future...'

The peace-process has brought no benefits to the majority of the Palestinian people but it has brought benefits to Israeli and imperialist capitalists and investors: and this explains why they are so eager to sustain the charade. The *Financial Times* notes that the stock market's and international investors' confidence was not dented by the bombings as:

'Investors are aware that many important benefits to Israel from the Middle East peace process have already been delivered - new trade opportunities in Asia, a trade association agreement with the European Union and the arrival of European and Japanese investors after a prolonged absence.'

To emphasise the point, the *Financial Times* reports that most business interests hope that Shimon

Peres and the Labour Party, will triumph in the 29 May Israeli elections. Even though there is little difference on economic policy between Labour and Likud, capital believes that Labour's support for the 'peace process' will make for greater stability in the region.

The 'Summit of Peacemakers'

It is only to protect the 'many important benefits to Israel' and not to enhance the Palestinian people's sovereignty and welfare that the major powers convened their ridiculously misnamed 'Summit of Peacemakers'. It resulted in a further \$100m aid to Israel and in US and European Union affirmations of support and co-operation in Israel's struggle against 'terrorism'.

After warning Hamas that 'your day is gone', President Clinton summarised the Summit results:

'The United States will immediately begin to provide Israel with additional equipment and training...Our nations will join together to develop new anti-terror methods and technologies...We will work to enhance communications and co-ordination between our nations.'

This is fine hypocrisy coming from the US which napalmed Vietnamese children, which trained and financed terrorists to murder nuns in El Salvador, which spent billions of dollars in arms and equipment to fight socialist and democratic movements in the Third World, which sells arms to Indonesia to conduct genocide against the people of East Timor. And which has supported and funded decades of Israeli state terrorism.

Indeed the real terrorist in the Middle East is the state of Israel, in comparison to which Hamas's record is practically invisible. Israel was founded on terrorism and mass ethnic cleansing. In 1947-8 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee from territories now called Israel by a combination of official and unofficial military terror. On 9 April 1948 terrorists from the Irgun gang rounded up and massacred 250 defenceless men, women and children in the village of Deir Yassin. In the village of Safsaf, 70 men were blindfolded and shot dead. In Elabun, Zionist commanders lined up the inhabitants and shouted 'You want war, here you have it!' and shot 13 dead. In Safed, Palestinian prisoners were beaten with a hoe and bled to death. It was methods such as these that forced the majority of Palestinians to flee their homes.

Ever since, Israel has been in breach of Geneva Conventions and repeated UN resolutions. The 1949 Geneva Convention states that:

'The occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territories it occupies.'

Yet just as the 'peace process' was beginning in Madrid in 1992, the then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who in 1988 said that Palestinians 'are like grasshoppers compared to us', stated:

'All the territories that we have available for construction will be populated by Jews up to the horizon's edge.'

And so it has been with some 70% of land in the Occupied Territories confiscated and settled by Zionists. Repeated UN resolutions demanding Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been ignored. And no action has been taken by the UN against Israel. Every effort to rid the Territories of these illegal occupiers has been met with the severest of terrorist violence. Between 1967 and 1987 16,000 family dwellings were demolished. In the three years of the Intifada from 1987 to 1989 the figure rose to 5,000. In the same period some 52,000 olive and fruit trees have been uprooted as part of a terror campaign to force Palestinians out of Palestine. In March 1988, at the height of the Intifada when Israeli soldiers had been instructed to break the bones of Palestinian stone-throwers, a liberal US medical team, Physicians for Human Rights, noted of Israeli repression:

'If this were a war, many of the actions whose results we have seen would be declared atrocities.'

Such fascist violence is not a thing of the past. It is daily life for the Palestinians. Even as the Israeli Cabinet was issuing declarations about their 'determination to continue with the peace process', Israeli Cabinet members, according to *Time* magazine:

'prescribed mass deportations of Palestinians. One even urged razing the villages from which the bombers came.'

A military official declaring support for collective punishment said:

'We think that in the future these guys [the suicide bombers] will think twice if they know that after they've gone, we're going to put their parents on a boat with two sandwiches and dump them on the Lebanese shore.'

The US and the other major powers are not only happy to ignore this reality, but are ready to provide Israel with the guns and money with which

to sustain their terrorism. They do so for a very simple reason. Israel, according to a leaked Pentagon document is to be 'maintained':

'as a mechanism for deterring potential competitors from ever aspiring to a larger regional or global role.'

In other words Israel is a bastion to defend US and imperialist multinational oil interests in the region. And if this requires the use of terrorism, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the murder of Palestinian peasants, then so be it.

Hamas and terrorism

This is the only context in which one can discuss Hamas. Neither Israel nor the major powers have any moral right to criticise and attack Hamas for terrorism.

Nevertheless the fact remains that Hamas is not a progressive, revolutionary or democratic anti-imperialist movement. It is committed to the defence of private property and capitalism. It harbours a savage hatred for communism and the independent, organised working class movement. It is uncompromisingly opposed to the emancipation of women and seeks to drive them out of all spheres of public life. For these reasons Hamas is both incapable of and unwilling to mobilise the inherently democratic mass, organised, popular opposition to Zionist rule which characterised the Intifada uprising.

Their attack on women was part and parcel of their attack on the mass popular movement. *Democratic Palestine*, the English language journal of the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, noted:

'Hamas supporters launched a large scale campaign against Palestinian women and their participation in the Intifada...This deprived the Intifada of about 50% of its activists.'

Indeed Hamas and Muslim fundamentalism in Palestine were financed and facilitated by both reactionary Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Israel to neutralise the mass popular movement and undermine the PLO which then did represent the Palestinian people. Haim Baram, writing in *Middle East International* in 1993, noted that:

'The Israelis pumped millions of dollars into the Muslim coffers as part of their grand design to circumvent the PLO at any conceivable price.'

Hamas's vociferous denunciations of the 'peace process' and its radical rhetoric are designed to lull the people into passivity whilst it secretly negotiates for itself a better deal with the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Its bombing operations are but a part of this strategy. Hamas is engaged in a struggle, not to destroy the Zionist state and replace it with a democratic, secular Palestine, but to secure for itself a greater share of the crumbs of power with which to advance the narrow small-capitalist class interests it represents.

The great tragedy for the Palestinian people is that the Palestinian left has accommodated itself to the discredited and reactionary peace process, has abandoned the armed struggle and failed to emerge as a credible and effective pole of opposition to Arafat. This has left room for Hamas to cynically manipulate and exploit the Palestinian working class and peasantry whose youth are ready to sacrifice their lives for the struggle against Zionism, oppression and poverty. But by dying for Hamas they are dying not for the noble cause of human and national emancipation and democracy but for the interests of a narrow stratum of Palestinian capitalists.

Eddie Abrahams

German communism and resistance in Nazi Germany

in Karl Liebknecht Haus and mass searches. This gave the KPD 'a taste of illegality' but also 'revealed how ill-prepared it was'. (Rosenhaft)

At the end of 1932 the SPD had 650,000 members; the Reichsbanner, an SPD-inspired paramilitary organisation, one million members; and the independent trade unions 5.8 million members. The KPD was smaller with approximately 360,000 members of whom 286,100 were paying dues, and the RGO (Revolutionary Trade Union Organisation) and Red unions which had approximately 256,000 members. By the end of 1932, three years after the Great Crash on Wall Street, German national income had dropped by 40%, one third of the population was unemployed - amongst male industrial workers it was even higher at 40%.

These conditions led to the continued growth of support for the KPD and the loss of two million votes by the Nazis in November 1932. This helped propel the German bourgeoisie to form a united front against the 'Red' menace. In their war against communism, the Nazis had the approval of a wide strata of German society, the state apparatus, big business and the armed forces.

The KPD's mistaken analysis of the Nazi seizure of power, an analysis shared by the Comintern, did not help prepare for illegal work. The KPD saw 'the Nazi dictatorship not as a major working class defeat but as a final desperate move of the monopoly bourgeoisie to stave off the growing threat of the workers' revolutionary movement' (Mason). The disaster for the German working class and eventually the peoples of Europe was that the Nazis did indeed break the workers' revolutionary movement.

Nevertheless whilst the KPD's analysis can be criticised, the heroic resistance of its members and supporters cannot. No matter what losses they suffered, those active communists not incarcerated or dead continued to struggle. Many Reichsbanner and social democratic trade union movements awaited the call for active resistance from the SPD leadership. It never came.

Quite remarkably, during the so-called 'seizure of power' by the Nazis, the KPD attempted to continue as before producing newspapers (two million local and district papers in the first five months of Nazi rule), collecting dues and so forth, actions which laid the remaining members open to arrest. Following the Reichstag fire in February 1933 10,000 regional and local KPD members, 'including many of those who had been designated as reserves in the event of such a ban' (Merson), were arrested.

Nevertheless at least 60,000 communists were engaged in anti-fascist activity from 1933 to 1935 - of whom 18,243 were prosecuted and tens of thousands held in concentration camps. Ten thousand more communists emigrated.

While in 1933 and 1934 SPD overtures to the KPD were rejected (in September 1934 a Comintern leader, Pianitsky, said, 'We must do everything in our power so that the Social Democratic Party of Germany, as such, should no longer be able to exist'), it must be emphasised that the average KPD member by 1925 was strongly opposed to the SPD. Events such as the Social

Democrat banning of the Berlin May Day demonstrations in 1929, leading to the deaths of 30 communists, only emphasised KPD opposition. The possibility of a united front between the SPD and KPD exists only in the fantasies of British Trotskyite sects.

When in 1935 the KPD changed its position its overtures were this time rejected by the SPD. The SPD now looked to a return to democracy and towards the bourgeois democratic parties, none of whom had opposed the Enabling Act giving Hitler dictatorial powers. By August 1935, 'the Nazis

had destroyed the above-ground KPD and sent up to 100,000 German communists to prisons and concentration camps' (Herf). Despite such losses and bearing in mind that the SPD membership was more than twice that of the KPD in 1933, Gestapo arrest figures for 1936 (KPD 11,678, SPD 1,371) and 1937 (KPD 8,086, SPD 733) show, whatever the qualifications, that the KPD was the cutting edge of the resistance to the Nazis and the Nazis knew it.

On 23 August 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a Non-Aggression Pact, followed on 28 September by a Border and Friendship Treaty. The effect of these Treaties was to isolate the KPD from the other, much less active German anti-fascist forces, as well as causing difficulties for many KPD members. SPD luminaries such as Hillferding (author of *Finance Capital*) spoke openly of 'Red imperialism'. Nevertheless, even in this total isola-

tion, German communists maintained a continuous opposition to the Nazi regime that makes the ideological defenders of German imperialism so eager to seize on any failings and errors that German communists made in the conduct of their unremitting anti-fascism.

the USSR, many being caught and executed. Within Germany itself, separate communist groups were the most active opponents of the imperialist war. In early September 1939 Heinz Kapelle, a young communist, and his group distributed anti-war leaflets in Berlin. Communists such as Robert Uhrig, released from a concentration camp in 1936, had by 1938 built up an organisation of 200. By 1940 he had contacted several other active groups in Berlin. The Uhrig organisation lasted until 1942. Such communist resistance activities were replicated in Hamburg, led by Bästlein, Saefkow and Abhagen and in Mannheim by George Lechleiter. In central Germany, an anti-fascist group organised in various factories and towns survived the war intact. Throughout, efforts were being made to form an internal leadership.

In Germany one of the two largest



Soviet troops hoist the Red Flag over Berlin, May 1945

anti-fascist organisations were the famous 'Red Orchestra', one of whose members had infiltrated the Nazi war machine so effectively as to be an adviser to Goering. The other was the Knoechel Organisation with networks in the Ruhr, the Rhineland and Berlin. They were discovered by the Gestapo just as the impact of the Battle of Stalingrad made the thought of the possibility of defeat apparent to many Germans.

Outside Germany, German communists in countries overrun by the Nazis joined the various national resistance groups, most notably in France and Greece. In the USSR German communists worked to create disaffection amongst German troops, to win German POWs in the Soviet Union to the anti-fascist cause, and took a leading role in the setting up of the National Committee for a Free Germany in late 1943, which was intended to unite all German anti-fascists and democrats, and the German Officers' League, which it was hoped could be used to prise the German army from the Nazi regime.

Whatever one's view of the former GDR, we know what its leaders were doing against the Nazi regime. Walter Ulbricht was in the trenches of the Red Army at the Battle of Stalingrad trying to get German soldiers to surrender. Erich Honecker was imprisoned from December 1935 until liberated by the Red Army in 1945. KPD activists post-1933 cannot be accused of even passive acceptance of the regime. So they are cynically attacked for mistakes made as resistants or attempts are made to discredit them by linking their resistance activities with events, especially the Wall, in the former GDR. But the reality of communists' leading role in the struggle against Nazism in Germany cannot be gainsaid.

Timothy Mason *Social policy in the Third Reich: the working class and the national community* Jeffrey Herf in Michael Geyer & John Boyer (eds) *Resistance against the Third Reich 1933-1990*.

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to 133 to 121. However the combined 13 million-odd votes they received was declining as a percentage of the electorate. Of more pressing importance was the KPD's lack of preparedness for underground life and anti-fascist activities. In February 1932 Wilhelm Pieck admitted: 'We have a situation in which fascism can come to power in Germany without the Communist Party being able even to begin a serious fight.' The killings of two police captains in August 1931 led to a two-week ban on the KPD newspaper *Rote Fahne*, the occupation of their offices

Despite the fall of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989 and the new 'united Germany', the ideological battle of the class war continues. An important element of this centres on Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in World War Two. Conservative historians now argue that it was Germany's 'right' to 'defend' itself against Soviet 'aggression'; that Hitler's attack on the USSR pre-empted a 'planned' Soviet attack on Germany.

This debate has inevitably given rise to a discussion of the role of German communist resistance in Nazi Germany with reactionary commentators seeking to write them out of history. Yet a cursory examination of the facts shows that, within Germany, members and supporters of the German Communist Party (KPD) were the most consistent and self-sacrificing of all the opponents of the Nazi regime.

To understand the KPD's role in the Resistance, its position in pre-1933 Germany must be established. The KPD was founded in November 1918 in opposition to the pro-World War I Social Democratic Party (SPD), whose leaders, supported by the armed forces and Freikorps militia, formed the Weimar Republic on the dead bodies of revolutionary workers. By 15 January 1919 the KPD's two leading members, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, had been murdered by the SPD-sponsored Freikorps. Responding to workers setting up workers' councils, SPD leader Noske declared: 'Any person found bearing arms against the government's own troops is to be shot immediately.' Little wonder that the KPD and SPD were bitterly opposed.

For the SPD, representing the better-organised and better-off section of the working class, the Weimar bourgeois democracy was a gain to be defended. The KPD was implicitly revolutionary and saw the Weimar Republic as an obstacle to a Soviet Germany. In Weimar Germany KPD and SPD hostility was deepened by the communist blood spilt by Social Democratic authorities.

The KPD 'in various ways provided a voice for the least experienced, least well-organised and most ill-paid of the proletariat.' (Rosenhaft) The overwhelming majority (almost 90% of KPD members by 1932) were unem-

ployed. The KPD was regarded as the second party of the Comintern and was an enthusiastic proponent of implementing the 'Third Period' policy which saw the Great Depression as the 'final' crisis of capitalism and the Social Democrats and Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) as 'social fascists'.

Although the KPD was the smaller of the two parties, its electoral successes seemed to confirm its positions. In the last three pre-Nazi Reichstag elections, the number of KPD deputies increased from 77 to 89 to 100 in November 1932. In contrast, the SPD dropped from 143



Freikorps in Berlin, 1920

to 133 to 121. However the combined 13 million-odd votes they received was declining as a percentage of the electorate. Of more pressing importance was the KPD's lack of preparedness for underground life and anti-fascist activities. In February 1932 Wilhelm Pieck admitted: 'We have a situation in which fascism can come to power in Germany without the Communist Party being able even to begin a serious fight.' The killings of two police captains in August 1931 led to a two-week ban on the KPD newspaper *Rote Fahne*, the occupation of their offices

THE ASYLUM BILL

Another racist law

This is the edited text of a speech by Maxine Williams given at a London FRFI forum against the Asylum Bill

The Asylum and Immigration Bill currently going through Parliament is designed to make it even more difficult to win asylum in Britain. Yet already, even before it becomes law, the odds are stacked against asylum seekers. We need only examine two examples.

A Cypriot politician applied for asylum after he had been tortured in Cyprus: he had 100 scars on his back, which a medical report called stupendous in 'number and severity'. Nevertheless, he received a letter from the Home Office saying:

'Taking into account your appalling lack of credibility, the Secretary of State considers...that these wounds were inflicted at your request in an attempt to strengthen your claim...The Secretary of State is of the view that the claimed beating is all part of a cynical attempt to circumvent normal UK immigration rules...your claim is a mixture of lies and embellishment.'

Asylum was denied.

The second case is of an African who was tortured by government forces but managed to flee captivity. The Home Office wrote to him:

'During the period of alleged torture, when not in detention, you made no attempt to approach the authorities in your country...the Secretary of State believes...it would have been an appropriate course of action for you to seek assistance from the authorities.'

Asylum was denied.

We have here the grotesque idea that someone would arrange to have himself severely beaten to gain asylum, and an asylum seeker refused because he does not complain to the government whose troops tortured him. In another case an asylum seeker was at home with his family when government troops came in firing guns, killing his brother and wounding his mother. He managed to escape but was refused asylum on the grounds that there was no evidence that the troops were aiming at him and therefore he had no reasonable fear of persecution.

So it's Catch-22 for asylum seekers. If they are tortured then their scars will be regarded as evidence of attempted fraud. If they manage to escape with their lives it is clear proof that they are not in danger. In fact the only way to meet the Home Office criteria for asylum is by being murdered.

That is clear in the case of Abdul Onibiyo who was deported to Nigeria last year having lived in Britain since 1974. Nothing has been heard of him since - he is presumed imprisoned or dead. His wife and three of his children are now threatened with deportation and his son has been in and out of detention centres for a year. Nigeria, ruled by one of the most corrupt and ruthless regimes, is said by the British Home Office to be 'somewhat unsettled' (remember Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow oppositionists hanged in November last year) but 'there is no evidence that

indicates that Nigeria is...so fundamentally unsafe as to mean that deportations to that country cannot go ahead.' As a result 99% of Nigerian asylum seekers are refused.

In 1994 only 825 people were given refugee status in Britain and 3,660 were given leave to remain. Thousands remain in the system or in detention centres for months and years on end. At least four asylum seekers have been driven to suicide in these prisons. 18 children who arrived unaccompanied by adults were detained last year. In 1994, 121 people were detained for longer than six months and 18 of them had been detained for longer than one year. Some are held in the worst of the British prisons.

Profits first and last

Why is this new Act being introduced? There has been a relentless procession of legislation by both Labour and Tory governments since the 1960s making immigration, particularly by black people, virtually impossible. This latest Bill is partly an electoral ploy by a desperate government. But there is more to it. Across Europe, national governments have agreed since 1992 to tighten up immigration controls. Much of what is the new Act in Britain merely copies policies already in force in other European countries.

So the new Asylum Bill copies Germany and the Netherlands in having a 'white list' of countries where there is 'no serious risk of persecution'. All asylum seekers from such countries will be deemed bogus unless they can prove otherwise. The Home Secretary alone will decide which countries are on the list. The first list includes Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ghana, India, Pakistan, Poland, India and Rumania. If someone from those countries claims asylum they will be automatically refused and then an accelerated appeals procedure will occur. Once refused there is no further appeal and they will be deported.

Initially Nigeria and Algeria were on this list but were subsequently removed. But in practice, there is also an unofficial white list which decrees that if the UK makes vast amounts of money trading with a country then it is automatically a great and democratic country to which anyone can be safely deported. Nigeria comes into this category as it generates £400m per year trade income.

This policy of profits first is what motivates a large part of immigration law in Britain and in Europe. Thus Germany, which has large arms contracts and trading agreements with Turkey, deals with the Kurds in Germany accordingly - it banned the PKK and allows deportation of Kurds to Turkey, where 17,000 have been killed in the past eight years. India and Pakistan are on Britain's safe list because they are large arms customers, India buying £700m worth in five years. We know that the arms makers and sellers dictate these matters because we know that Sir Colin Chandler, head of Vickers arms company, told ministers to get rid of Saudi dissident Mohammed al-Masari in order to preserve lavish

Saudi arms deals.

Western governments and banks have imposed ruinous debt payments and structural adjustment programmes on poor nations which cripple them economically and destroy them socially. The result is millions more refugees in the world as the ensuing wars and civil wars, popular resistance and increasingly violent repression take their toll. The regimes committed to imperialist interests are armed by British, European and US arms merchants. So, the Turkish government in the 1990s used US fighter planes and helicopters, British armoured cars, German armoured personnel carriers, rifles and machine guns and Belgian rifle grenades. But when the Kurdish victims turn up on their doorsteps the European powers use any trick in the book to keep them out. Europe's rulers know that the majority of the world's people must live in chaos and poverty if profits are to be kept high. So they have built a high wall to keep them out of Europe.

Starving them out

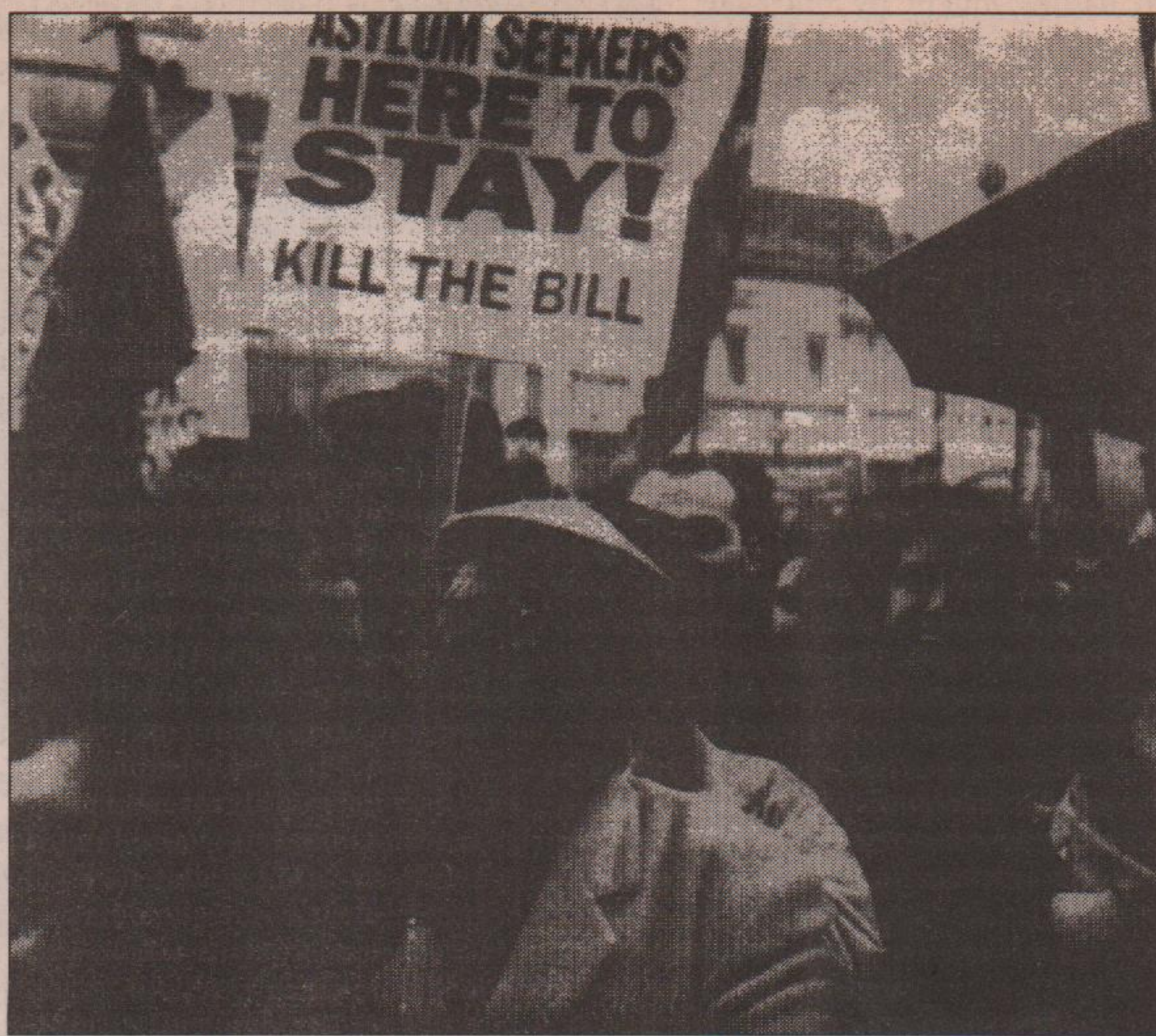
The new Asylum Bill also tightens the pincer on the financial side. It brings in a fine against employers

who employ those without leave to work. But most viciously of all it withdraws the right to public housing and child benefit from not only asylum seekers but also those groups of immigrants that the Home Secretary shall later decide. That could affect people settled here for decades. Alongside this goes the removal of income support from asylum seekers who do not apply for asylum at the port of entry (ie the majority) and from those awaiting the result of an appeal. All benefits and entitlement to housing will go.

Other European countries have led the way down this road. In Germany benefits are often paid in vouchers and in kind, not cash. In Italy asylum seekers get benefits for three months only and 76,000 immigrant workers

With friends like these...

Judging from Dianne Abbot's presence on the Asylum Bill demonstration and a message to the march (drowned by jeers) from Jack Straw, some might think that Labour was



National demonstration against the Asylum Bill in London, 24 February

opposing this Bill. In fact Labour's opposition is a fiction. Labour will vote against it in Parliament. Why not? It won't stop it being passed. But what does Labour opposition amount to? Jack Straw made it plain:

'Race relations in Britain are much better than in many other European countries but we have to tread carefully to ensure that they stay so...people must not be led to believe that immigration is out of control. If that happens, racial tension will rise...The Secretary of State says that immigration controls must be firm and fair. He is right...(but)...he has failed to achieve that balance in this Bill.'

Labour accepts 'firm' immigration controls but the new Bill is a little too

crude: 'There is no need for this measure to be controversial. There is agreement across the floor...on the need to cut abuse and delays while meeting our international obligations. The issue is how...that balance between firmness and fairness should be struck.'

Indeed, there is a racist consensus between Labour and Tory. 'The House has established procedures that could achieve the consensus that the Home Secretary says he seeks.' Straw's main intervention in Parliament was about the need to set up a Special Standing Committee (SSC) to work out details of the consensus on how to keep out asylum seekers.

A right-wing Tory MP hit the nail on the head: 'Is that not simply a rather long-winded way of saying that the SSC is a fig leaf that will enable the Labour Party to appear to be on both sides of the issue?'

Labour's 'opposition' amounts to a call not to cut asylum seekers benefits, but to expel them from Britain more speedily. Straw estimates that £160m could be saved by expelling them in three months. He thinks things are fine: 'Our system of immigration control has generally been fair, less arbitrary and capricious' than in Europe.

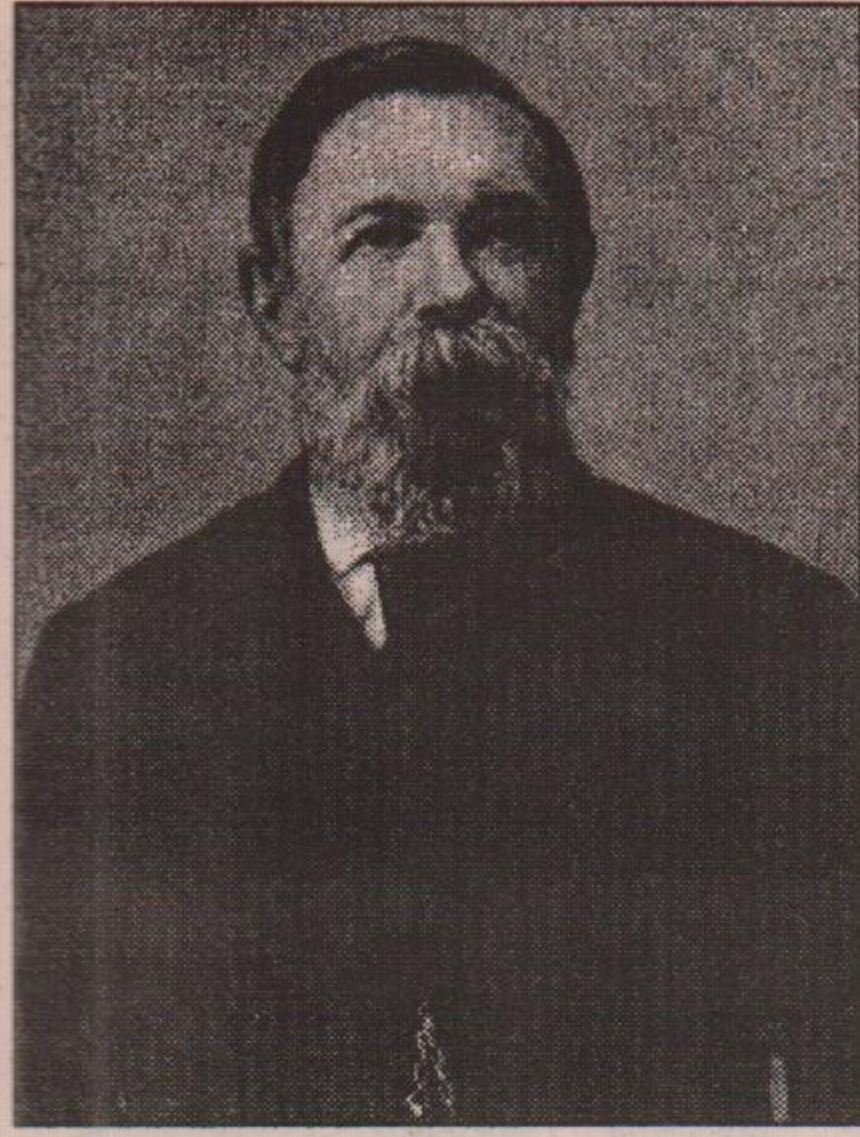
Parliamentary opposition, in so far as it exists, is led by the Liberal Democrats, who put down most amendments. Of the two put by Labour, the first calls for a register of immigration advisers and makes it an offence for an unregistered person to advise immigrants or represent them. What that would do to campaigning organisations is hard to imagine. The other was to tighten up procedures for getting copies of birth certificates to make immigration fraud harder.

Who on earth would know that this was what was happening in Parliament? The left colludes in covering it up. Every public meeting or demonstration has Dianne Abbot or some other Labour MP prancing about on the platform but never mentioning their own racist party. It is high time to say to these people - forget your little set speeches in Parliament, put your own party in order, let's see you give Jack Straw a good duffing up and then, only then, dare to come to meetings against this Act.

In the meantime let the people who want to fight this law and fight racism get on with it. Opposition will demand not just marching or picketing but practical action. The recent squatting of a building in Hackney by ARCH for asylum seekers was an example. The political fight too must be stepped up. They are wrecking people's lives - let's begin to wreck theirs a little.

Above all, let's get the truth out about Labour's actual position on these measures. Because Labour will probably be in government soon. Straw will be Home Secretary. Straw who hates the 'squeegee merchants'. Straw who thinks that there are too many working class people on juries. Straw who wants 'firm' immigration controls. Why not make his life hot in his constituency? Let's go and stand outside his surgeries and say, if British immigration policy is so fair, what killed Joy Gardner?

Maxine Williams



Frederick Engels New Unionism

'Hegel was the first to state correctly the relationship between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the appreciation of necessity. "Necessity is blind only so far as it is not understood". Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence of natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends... it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development.'
Engels, Anti-Dühring

The stirring of the great mass of workers existing in dire poverty in the slums of the East End of London gave new strength to Engels' revolutionary optimism in this period. As he put it, contrasting the political awakening of the masses of the East End to the middle class chattering about socialism:

'What I consider far more important... is the revival of the East End of London. That immense haunt of misery is no longer the stagnant pool it was six years ago. It has shaken off its torpid despair, has returned to life, and has become the home of what is called the "New Unionism", that is to say, of the organisation of the great mass of "unskilled workers".'

The New Unions, epitomised by the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union, were organisations of 'unskilled' workers, combining not to defend positions of privilege but to fight for the interests of the mass of workers. Engels described the difference between the old conservative craft unions and the New Unions as being between 'exclusive health-insurance and death benefit funds

'The woman became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production... the modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules.'

Engels, The origin of the family, private property and the state

The 100th anniversary of the death of Engels was marked in most journals of the 'left' in Britain with articles looking at his life's work and collaboration with Marx. However, none of them moved from the abstract celebration of his ideas to the concrete application of them by Engels in the last decade of his life. For the British 'left' to have done so would have meant confronting their own tired and discredited political practice.

and unions geared to organising and funding strikes'. Engels saw in the New Union movement the most important political development in England since the Chartists.

'The new unions were founded at a time when the faith in the eternity of the wages system was severely shaken, their founders and promoters were socialists either consciously or by feeling; the masses, whose adhesion gave them strength, were rough, neglected, looked down upon by the working class aristocracy; but they had this immense advantage, that their minds were virgin soil, entirely free from the inherited "respectable" bourgeois prejudices which hampered the brains of the better situated old unionists.'

In fighting to defend their own interests the New Unions came up against the interests of the labour aristocracy and their craft unions and middle class political allies. The political battles fought by the New Unions, particularly around the demand for the legal eight-hour day and the 1890 May Day demonstration, hold great lessons for the developing movement today.

Engels' political influence on the movement during this period was through the work of Eleanor Marx and her partner Edward Aveling. They were both politically active in the East End of London amongst the poorest sections of the working class. Eleanor, through her work in support



One of the mass dockers' marches through the City of London in 1889

of the great Dock Strike of 1889, became a leading member of the newly formed Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union: a union formed in 1889 with the single aim of lowering the working day from 12 to eight hours. Within 12 months it had over 70,000 members.

The first meeting of what became known as the Second International was held in Paris in July 1889. It issued a call for workers internationally to demonstrate on 1 May. 1 May was a Thursday in 1890; a further meeting of unions changed the date from 1 May to Sunday 4 May. This change of day was blamed by *The People's Press*, the paper of the New Union movement, on 'the apathy and abstention of the older and richer unions'. However, a 'Central Committee', which included Edward Aveling and Will Thorne, the leader of the Gasworkers' Union, was formed to organise the demonstration. The Central Committee approached the London Trades Council, which represented the old craft unions, to support the May Day demonstration. The Trades Council attempted to take over; it refused to meet with a delegation from the Central Committee, that included Eleanor Marx, on the grounds that she was not a manual worker. It attempted to bar the Central Committee's demonstration from Hyde Park and did not support the demand for a legally enacted eight-hour day. The Trades Council informed the Central Committee that, 'only trades unions, that is no socialist associations or political clubs, were to take part in the demonstration or carry banners'. The London Trades Council was supported in its reactionary line by the sectarian Social Democratic Federation, the largest group on the left in Britain at that time.

The Trades Council did not succeed in its attempt to take over and disrupt the demonstration organised by the Central Committee. It ended up holding its own separate march into Hyde Park. As Engels put it, 'On the one side we find stagnation represented by trade unions that have not yet completely freed themselves from

'The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and... the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought not in the philosophy but in the economics of each particular epoch.'

Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

the craft spirit, and by a narrow minded sect (Social Democratic Federation) backed by the most wretched of allies; on the other, the living free movement of the reawakening English proletariat'.

The demonstration was attended by between a quarter and half a million people, the majority marching with the New Unions and socialist clubs calling for a legal eight-hour day. Engels saw the success of the May Day demonstration against the attacks of the organisations of the labour aristocracy as a significant victory; he wrote, 'This is our first great victory in London and proves that here too we have the masses behind us... The whole East End is with us. The masses here are not yet socialist, but on the way towards it.'

The fact that the mass of the working class was moving into independent political action meant that it was no longer election fodder for the Liberal Party. Engels encouraged the

formation of an independent united workers' party; as he put it: 'The superstitious belief in the "great Liberal Party" which had kept a hold on the English workers for nearly 40 years has been destroyed. They have seen by striking examples that they, the workers, are the decisive force in England.' Then, as now, middle class socialists attempted to stop workers organising independently and tried to tie them to the Liberal Party. Writing of the Fabian Society, which preached and practiced affiliation of the workers to the Liberals, he characterised them as 'a clique of middle class "socialists" of diverse calibres, from careerists to sentimental socialists and philanthropists, united only by their fear of the threatening rule of the workers and doing all in their power to avert this danger by making their own leadership secure.'

An independent working class party was and is crucial in the fight for socialism: 'the proletariat cannot conquer political power, the only door to the new society, without violent revolution. For the proletariat to be strong enough to win on the decisive day it must - and Marx and I have advocated this ever since 1847 - form a separate party distinct from all others and opposed to them, a conscious class party.'

In the rise of the New Union movement, based on the poorest sections of the working class, the masses of the East End, Engels saw the seeds of a revolutionary movement in England. For the first time since the Chartist movement he had, as he put it, 'heard again... the unmistakable voice of the English proletariat'. The revolutionary potential of this movement was because it was based on those sections of the working class that were not infected with 'bourgeois respectability' and were 'virgin soil' for socialists.

Today in Britain, as millions of people are forced to exist on benefits, and young people are flung on the scrap heap, these are the sections of the working class that communists have to relate to and attempt to represent. Those sections of the left who are moving away from Labour need to judge new political formations by how they relate to the 'great mass' of the working class today. Not how many members of this or that union executive have joined them.

Bob Shepherd

'Let us not flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory takes its revenge on us... at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature, but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst and that all our mastery of it consists in that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.'

Engels, The part played by labour in the transition from ape to man



Bryant and May workers went on strike in 1888. In 1889 they formed their own union

Changing nature of the British working class

As New Labour has moved ever further to the right in its efforts to court the votes and support of the middle class, debates have started within the left about how it should relate to the working class. Such a debate begs a more fundamental question – what is the working class in Britain? – because how you define it decides who you relate to and how. ROBERT CLOUGH discusses the issues.



Dockers in Liverpool fighting for their jobs

started with the period of British imperialism's world domination prior to 1914: in that year, Vickers in Barrow employed over 30,000 in its shipyards, Armstrong 30,000 in its Elswick factory on Tyneside. Although the 1930s saw a shift from heavy to light manufacturing industries, this did not spell the end of these concentrations of workers: two major car factories in Cowley, Oxford employed 30,000 in the early 1970s and over 20,000 worked at Longbridge in Birmingham. In the 1940s, over 40,000 worked the Liverpool docks and 10,000 in the 1970s; now the remaining 500 are on strike in a battle over casualisation.

The fact is that the working class constantly changes with capitalism: or, put another way, capitalism constantly recreates the working class according to its changing requirements. Accumulation, as Marx said, is the independent variable. The first signs of a fundamental reshaping of the British working class came with the end of the post-war boom, when the parasitical nature of British imperialism reasserted itself. The decline in domestic profitability forced Brit-

ish capital to move abroad in search of more favourable investment opportunities. As domestic investment stagnated, employment in manufacturing started to fall. However, political conditions in the 1960s and early 1970s required the maintenance of something near full employment, and this was achieved by expanding employment in unproductive areas such as banking and insurance in the private sector, or education, health and social services in the state sector. Between 1964 and 1979, employment in banking and insurance rose from 1 to 1.6 million; and from 4.4 million to 6 million in the state sector as a whole. This compensated for the loss of 2.05 million jobs in manufacturing and industry over the corresponding period.

From 1979, these changes accelerated, with the slump of 1981 having a severe impact: 1.8 million jobs in manufacturing and industry disappeared between 1979 and 1983 as unemployment rose to over 3 million. The wholesale attack on trade union and employment rights was a further factor in restructuring the nature of working class employment.

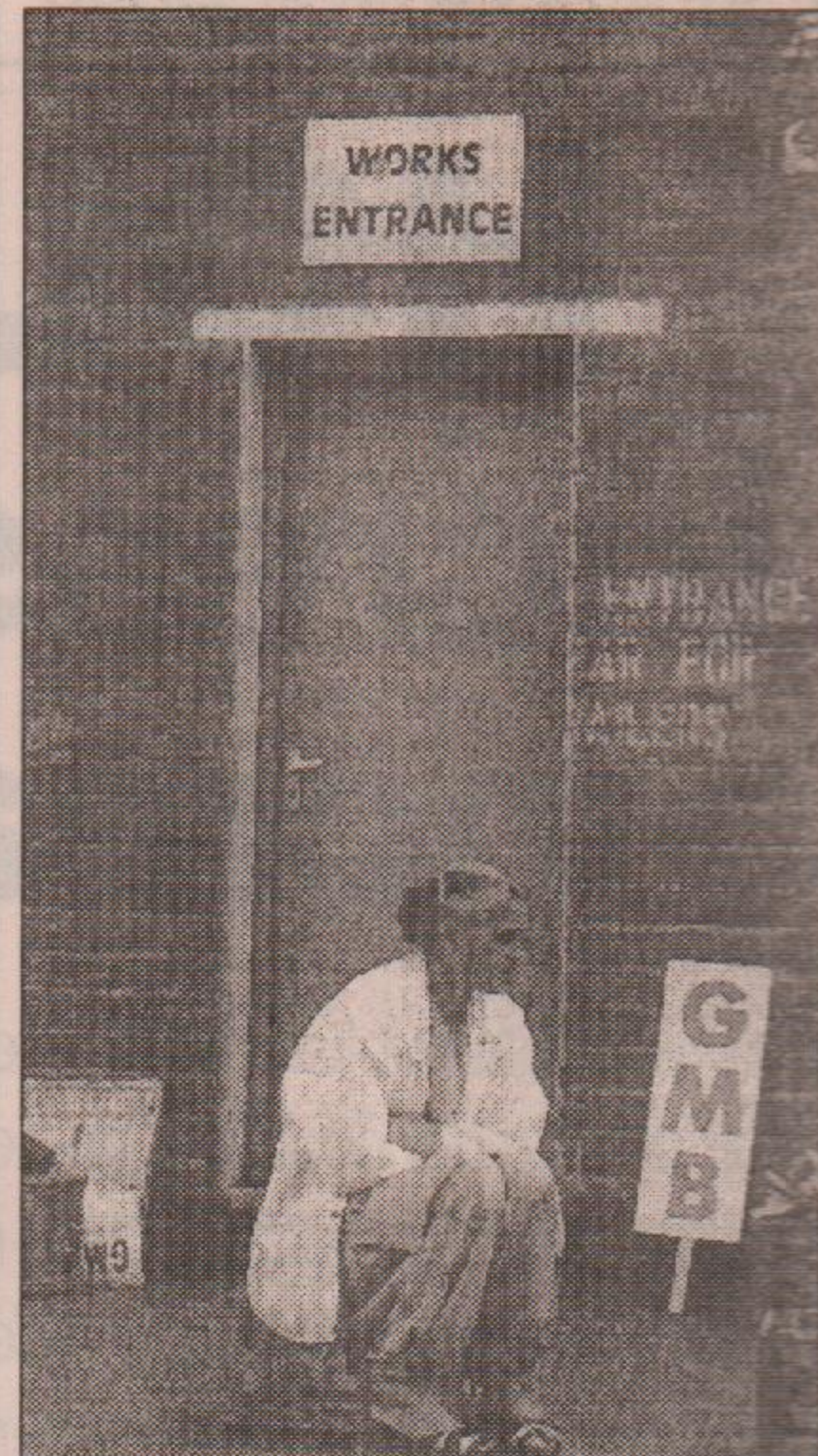
Unproductive forms of labour continued to increase, particularly in the banking sector, which went from 1.62 million to 2.55 million between 1979 and 1992. Underlying this was a steady rise in female employment. In 1964, there were just over 15 million men in work, and just under 8.5 million women. In 1995, there were 10.6 million men and 10.4 million women. Women make up just half the workforce, but as 4.9 million are part-time workers, they are also those with fewest rights.

Increasingly, then, the employed working class is female, part-time and, if they are not professionals, there is little chance that they will be in a union – at best, one in five, if they are in the manufacturing sector, or just one in ten if they are amongst the 1.5 million part-time workers in distribution, hotels and catering. Compare this with the 2.8 million 'trade unionists' amongst 7.3 million professionals, managers and administrators and one can see why trade unionists are heavily represented in Hutton's top 40 per cent. The position is analogous to that at the turn of the century, when trade unions organised and represented only the upper strata of the working class, and all but excluded the unskilled and casually (or temporarily) employed.

Nor does the resemblance to conditions 100 years ago end there. The difference in earnings between the mass of the working class and the middle class has grown to levels that existed in Victorian times. Between 1979 and 1992, the share of gross disposable earnings of the poorest 60 per cent fell from 42 per cent to 34 per cent. Had the proportions remained the same, the household income of the poorest 20 per cent would be some £3,000 per annum higher. One in three wage earners are



Women part-time workers – the lowest paid



Left outside – today's workers are not represented by the official labour movement

on poverty pay (currently assessed at £5.90 per hour). 800,000 women workers earn less than £2.50 per hour. These are the insecure: just under 5.5 million full-time workers, and 4.5 million part-time workers. Of these, nearly 1 million have to hold down more than one job; the prevalence of poverty pay explains why two-thirds of British workers work more than 40 hours per week, and a quarter more than 50 hours. Meanwhile, one in four unemployed men have been thrown on the dole at least five times in ten years; 9 million have had a spell of unemployment since the Tories were elected. And the poorest of all households are those who have no earners at all – 40 per cent in Tyne and Wear, Merseyside, South Yorkshire and Wales.

Black and Asian people continue to be disproportionately represented within these poorer sections of the working class. 83 per cent of Pakistani/Bangladeshi people are in the poorest 40 per cent; 53 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans. Thus it is not surprising that one in three households in the East End of London, where 46 per cent of the population are from ethnic minorities, have an annual income of less than £4,500, and 55 per cent less than £10,000.

In a sense it is misleading to talk of poorer and richer sections of the working class. It obscures the reality: that of the working class being re-fashioned to meet British capital's requirement for a workforce cheap enough to make the burgeoning service sector either sufficiently profitable (if it is in private hands) or to constitute a minimal drain on capital's profits (if it continues to be owned by the state). It is a workforce that needs minimal skills – hence there is less and less need to ensure it is particularly numerate or literate. And because there are so many unemployed, it does not have to be especially healthy either – there are plenty of potential replacements should one fall sick. This in part explains the increasing pressure for selection in education – only the middle class really need more than basic skills – and the steps that are being taken towards a two-tier health service.

The experience of this new working class is then one of exclusion, from education and health services, from trade unions, in fact from all forms of political and social life. Their concerns form no real part of the bourgeois political agenda, whether Tory or New Labour. They are also excluded by those who would regard the trade unions as the primary vehicle for social change or political action. Thus the tiny forces of the British left, whatever they may think of the matter, in reality have no relationship with the working class.

The prevailing position on the left, shared by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) and the new Socialist Labour Party (SLP), is that the 'real' working class are those people organised in the trade union movement. Hence their strategy is to work within the trade union movement, attending branch meetings, conferences and so on. Occasionally there may be strikes, and these become portrayed as the height of working class struggle. Indeed, their answer to any political question such as the struggle against the Poll Tax five years ago, or against the Asylum Bill today, is to make the trade unions the centre of political campaigning.

Yet such a position ignores a substantial change in the trade union movement over the past 15 years. In 1979, total trade union membership was over 12 million, with more than 10 million in unions affiliated to the TUC. Now membership is about 7.1 million – 33 per cent of those in work, with an estimated 6 million in TUC-affiliates. But over half the trade union membership have an A-level qualification or equivalent, and a third a degree or equivalent. As far back as 1991, the *Labour Force Survey* noted that 'educated, managerial, professional and associated workers' were a majority of trade union members. Even where unions have substantial numbers of low paid workers – Unison, for example – it is the better-off managerial staff who generally run the branches, and whose interests the union protects. Thus it was that the Hillingdon strikers had to occupy Unison offices to secure recognition of their strike.

Will Hutton, in dividing the British population into 30 per cent who are absolutely disadvantaged, 30 per cent who are newly insecure, and 40 per cent advantaged, has no hesitation in placing the majority of trade union members amongst the 40 per cent advantaged. So in orienting towards the trade union movement, organisations such as the SWP look to a relatively affluent and secure section of the population as the potential leadership of a new socialist movement.

So how does Hutton define the 30 per cent disadvantaged and 30 per cent insecure? In the former category he places the unemployed and those who are dependent on state benefits of one kind or another such as the majority of pensioners. In the second category are those who are in employment which is insecure – either part-time or temporary, casual or short-term employment (less than two years). These are workers without any basic employment rights who can be sacked at will, and they include, for instance, 4.9 million part-time workers. He points out that only 35 per cent of the workforce is in tenured, full time employment compared to 55 per cent twenty years ago. Although no socialist, Hutton understands that there have been profound changes in the nature of the working class, even if he himself in the end concludes that progress depends on the affluent 40 per cent.

What then are these changes? In 1964, there were 6.8 million manual workers in the manufacturing sector; today there are less than 3 million. In 1964, there were still nearly 600,000 miners, and just under 400,000 railway workers. Today there are no more than 20,000 miners and less than 120,000 railway workers. The number of construction workers has halved – from 1.65 million to 860,000. Such workers were the foundation of the post-war trade union movement, a movement which was able to thrive in a period of boom when capitalism could grant the mass of the working class secure, full-time employment.

The 1950s and 1960s represented the end of an era when the employed working class was made up of men working in huge concentrations – whether in shipyards or car factories or vast engineering works. This era

HOLLOWAY - increased security = increased neglect

We planned to publish this article in the last issue of FRFI but despite Clare's sending it to our office twice prior to our deadline, on both occasions it failed to arrive. A third attempt, after we had gone to press, was successful. Clare recently wrote an article on the subject of counselling for the new Scottish prison publication *Inside Out* (see reviews page). The *Inside Out* collective experienced no problems receiving Clare's material but, following publication, Durham prison authorities prevented Clare herself from receiving a copy of the magazine.

In 1995 the regime at Holloway prison gradually seemed to break down, owing to more stringent security measures and rules demanded by the Home Office in the light of a barrage of negative media publicity and attempted escapes from top security prisons. There were insufficient staff to support these new changes, so subsequently the women suffered greatly and the situation became untenable. Depression, self-harm, violence and other characteristics of a repressive regime increased dramatically.

I was at Holloway twice during 1995: from March to June and July to August. In March the amount of lock-up was far greater than two years previously, with 20 hours out of 24 behind the door a normal occurrence at weekends, and virtually no evening association.

On Friday nights the level of depression would increase, as women knew they would have to spend another weekend locked up. Suicide attempts became frequent, not just on the hospital wings but increasingly on normal location and Friday nights became known as 'hanging nights'. On one occasion two women on different landings tried to hang themselves, one more seriously than the other, and despair pervaded the wing to such a level that I contacted Women In Prison to see if they could do something about the situation. Chris Tchaikovsky spoke to the governor, Miss King, but she chose to ignore any advice and, as a consequence, a Nigerian woman who had just been sentenced to nine years, hanged herself on the reception wing, unable to face the nightmare that Holloway represented. Despite this, little action was taken and the lock-up was almost as severe as before. Suggestions were made of improving the counselling and other support services, particularly on the reception wing, where women first come in on remand or after sentence (unless they are medically unfit) but few changes occurred and gradually the lock-up increased still further.

In July, during a hot summer, the women became so frustrated with constant lock-up and lack of access to exercise that in the evenings they would set light to sheets and throw them out of the window, piling more lighted sheets on top until several bonfires were ablaze. Fire engines would come and the staff would run around like headless chickens but, once the fires were out, nothing was done to calm the mood of the frustrated women. Girls who had never self-harmed before would be driven beyond reason and start to cut up regularly. Some would even set fire to their cells - such was the emotional trauma they were going through.

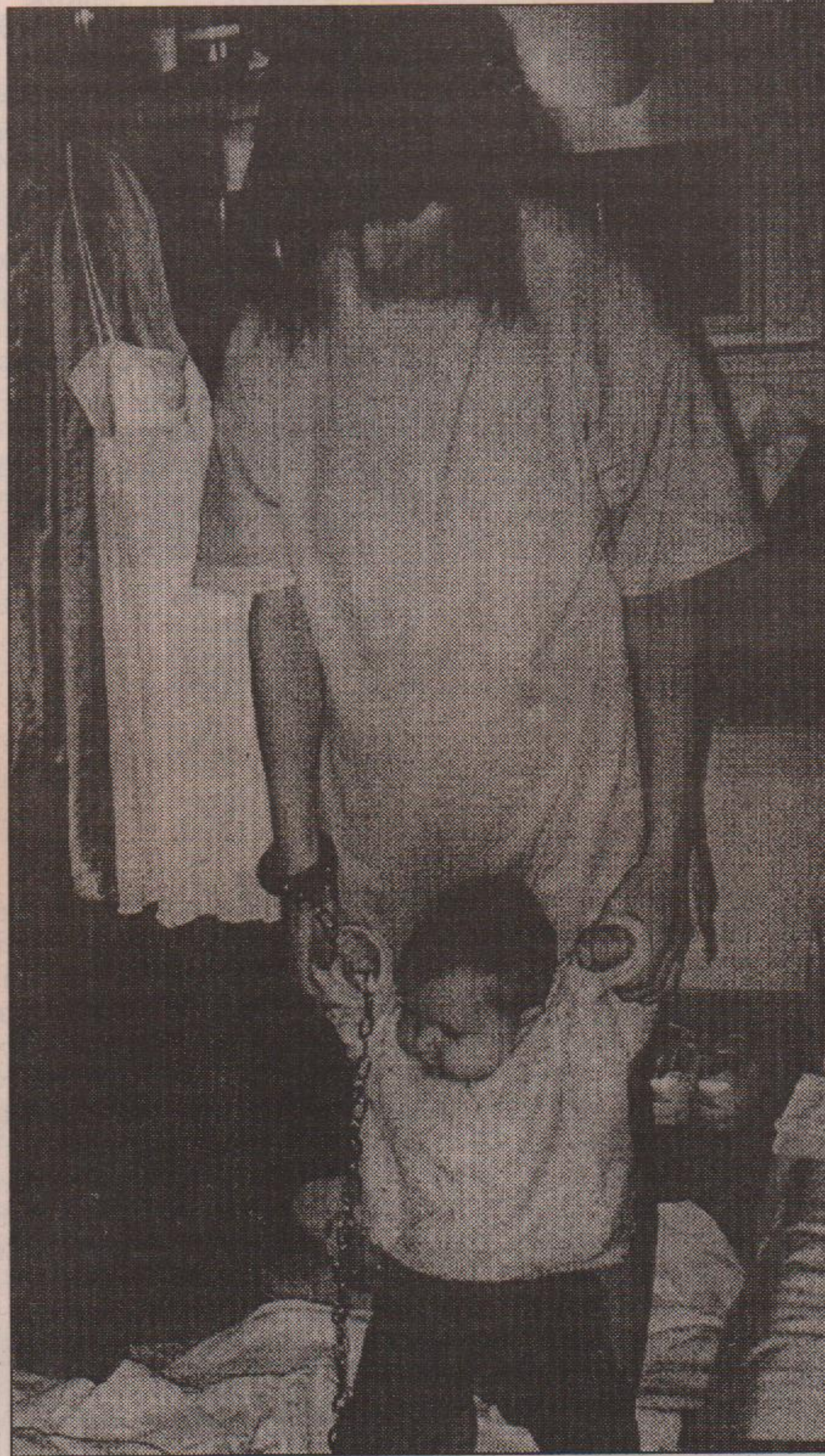
Higher security meant the staff

level dropped so severely that education and PE classes were cancelled regularly, sometimes for several days or weeks at a time. The bang-up increased to up to 23 hours a day and, as many had dependent children to worry about, this led to severe psychological abuse, as access to phones was drastically reduced. Some days the mail would not be delivered to the wings. The women began to feel isolated and ignored.

Monthly the system deteriorated and the negligence was such that in November another woman killed herself, again on the reception wing, by swallowing large amounts of tissues. Again, she was largely neglected when she came in on remand; the staff were as demoralised as the inmates so they showed no concern for others; nor did they have time to care. With four deaths in three and a half years the record is pretty poor at Holloway and obviously these statistics do not include the many near misses that occur every week.

Hygiene throughout the prison was reaching an all-time low. The grounds were infested with rats, which fed on all the food the women threw out of the windows, as they were locked in immediately after collecting their food and had nowhere else to put it, unable to bear to sleep with the stink that it left. The standard of food became worse and dietary requirements were often neglected. Food-poisoning cases became more frequent as food was witnessed to be left for several days uncovered in the heat, a breeding ground for bacteria. Health and hygiene requirements were frequently not adhered to, again through shortage of staff or lack of interest. Gardening staff were forcing inmates who worked for them to pick up the dead rats with their hands after they had been poisoned, which is very unhygienic and dangerous.

The level of medical care at Holloway is appalling. It is very rare for a woman to be examined by the doctor when complaining of a physical ailment. The remedy prescribed for everything from an abscess, flu and conjunctivitis to cystitis seems to be two paracetamol. You have to put in a Request/Complaint before you are likely to be given any other treat-

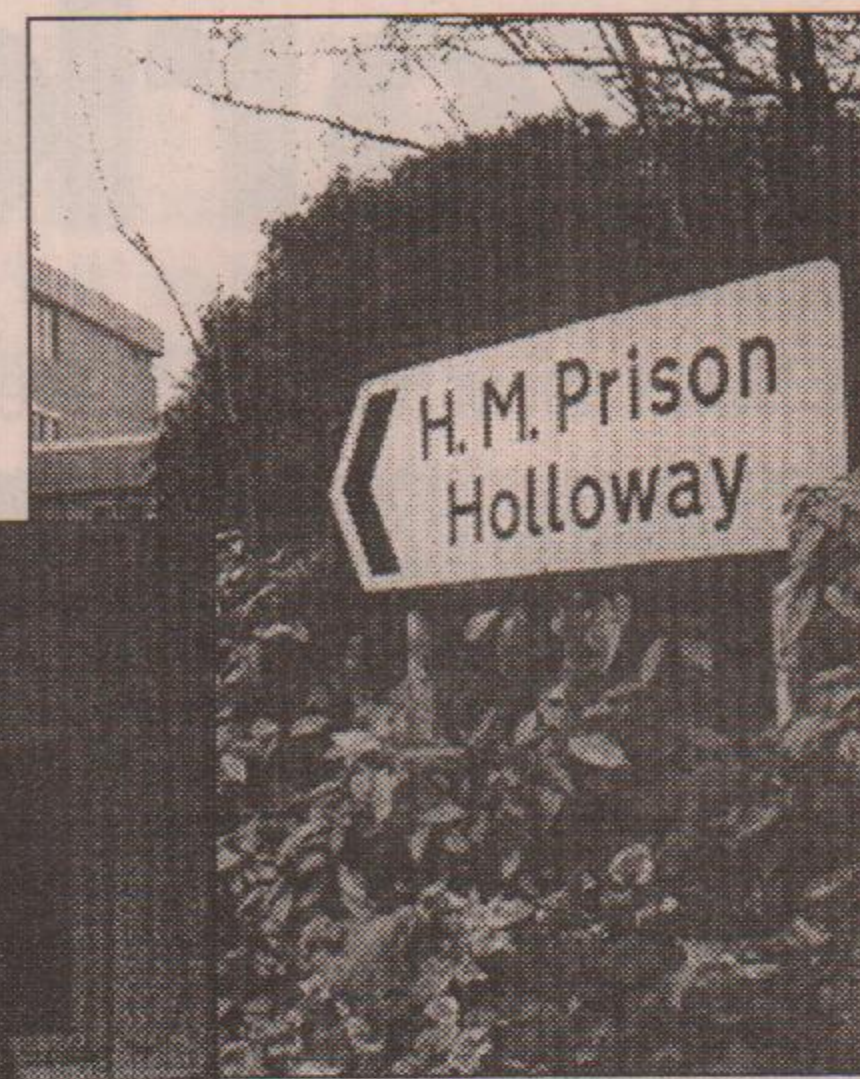


A pregnant inmate shackled while playing with her nephew

ment. The waiting list for the dentist and optician is horrendous and one woman had to suffer chronic pain from an exposed nerve and abscess in her mouth for six weeks, despite complaining daily, before she managed to see the dentist. I myself have been on eight separate waiting lists for the dentist but have not yet been called to see him in four years. I have often had to wait up to 12 weeks to see the optician. With the shortage of staff, hospital appointments at Holloway were being cancelled frequently or not being booked in the first place despite urgent need. Several women who were seriously ill and needed operations or urgent specialist treatment were denied this and consequently their health deteriorated. The staff would juggle between cancelling all association and work movement and doing the hospital escorts, or vice versa, so the women's health became a lottery.

Gynaecological care in Holloway is of a very poor standard. Many women suffered miscarriages due to the neglect there or had a distressing time. I witnessed a pregnant woman being hauled to the floor and restrained in an aggressive manner

when she became violent over her treatment. Another woman on the pregnancy unit was badly beaten by officers when she misbehaved. The pregnant women complained that they did not always receive an adequate diet. Inmates were often handcuffed and held by a restraining chain en route to hospital. Some complained of being handcuffed to the bed during operations or their stay there - the most disturbing was when it happened to a woman giving birth, despite promises from the hospital authority that it would not happen again after a similar incident at New Hall.



If a woman is depressed or badly behaved the doctors prefer to dose them up with high levels of psychotropic drugs rather than giving them individual or group therapy. Many women take a lethal cocktail of several tranquillisers such as largactyl, phrophiadine, chloryl hydrate, melarol, mogadon and valium. Turned into zombies, they shuffle around the corridors as frequently as the cockroaches do. The hospital unit D1 again has a severe record of neglect. Women who are detoxing from drugs are put in the same dormitories as those who are physically ill or who have been placed there for observation due to the nature of their crimes. On the psychiatric unit C1 the women are again drugged up to the nines and the level of self-harming is particularly worrying. There are several who really need constant care and attention and should

be in a proper hospital or receive regular counselling but it is easier for them to quieten them with tranquillisers, like sick animals.

Holloway was recently upgraded to Category A status but there is no special unit for Category A prisoners, so they are spread around the wings in special cells and locked in most of the time, particularly at weekends. Even though shadow officers were brought in to help, the Cat As would frequently find they would have to miss exercise, go without a shower, have no access to the gym or library and be late for social and legal visits. The constant strip-searches and lack of association meant that they regularly suffered from bouts of depression. Out of sight, out of mind is the most appropriate adage for this.

Thus the emphasis on security and punishment, rather than rehabilitation and care, has renegeed on many basic human rights and caused immense suffering and deprivation for the women. Unless desperate measures are taken soon to rectify the situation, the problems shown here will only escalate.

Clare Barstow
HMP Durham

PRISONERS' ART COMPETITION

The Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund is holding a competition to design artwork for a card to be produced in time for next Christmas. Prisoners are asked to submit a black-and-white drawing, on any subject (ie not necessarily anything to do with Christmas) by 15 August 1996. The competition will be judged in September and the winner announced in October.

For further details and an entry form write to the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund, BM Box 5960, London, WC1N 3XX.

The Memorial Fund also plans to research issues arising from the imposition of 'volumetric control'. As a provider of books, radios, periodicals and other items for prisoners, the Fund is concerned about the effects of this measure, which was recommended in the Woodcock Report and is in the process of implementation throughout the prison system. Prisoners with accounts of the impact of the new restrictions are asked to write to the above address.

Samar Alami

Samar Alami was born in Lebanon to a Lebanese/Palestinian family and has lived in Britain since 1984. She was granted indefinite leave to remain here in September that year. She is a student at City University and a member of Amnesty International and the General Union of Palestinian Women (UK).

Reem Abdelhadi, Mohammed Derbas, Jawad Botmeh, Mahmoud Abuwardeh, Nadia Zekra and Samar Alami were all arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act following the bombing of the Israeli Embassy and Balfour House in north London in July 1994. Abdelhadi and Derbas were discharged by Bow Street Magistrates' Court after the CPS decided there was insufficient evidence against them. The other four also strongly protest their innocence.

Samar went through the following ordeal in 1995:

17 January: arrested under the PTA at her family home by the Met Police Anti-Terrorist Branch. The home was searched for three days.

20 January: released with no charge.

22 March: arrested under PACE at her home by the Anti-Terrorist Branch and charged with conspiracy to cause explosions. The house was searched for 24 hours without any family member or legal representative present.

23 March: remanded to HMP Holloway.

10 May: committed to stand trial by Bow Street Magistrates' Court.

23 May: bailed from Holloway; conditions included the surrender of her passport.

2 June: rearrested under PACE in a street near her home.

3 June: charged with possession of arms and explosives.

5 June: remanded to Holloway.

18 August: committed for trial on new charges.

3 November: refused bail, which she had sought on grounds of poor physical and mental health. Transferred to HMP Durham, 270 miles away from her family.

Samar spent seven months in Holloway prison as a Category A remand prisoner. As such she was strip-searched before and after all social and legal visits, which were then held in closed conditions, denied regular exercise and association and often kept confined to her cell 23 hours a day. The prison regime caused such a serious deterioration in her physical and mental health that she was rendered incapable of participating in the preparation of her defence.

The Friends of Samar Alami can be contacted at BM FOSA, London, WC1N 3XX.

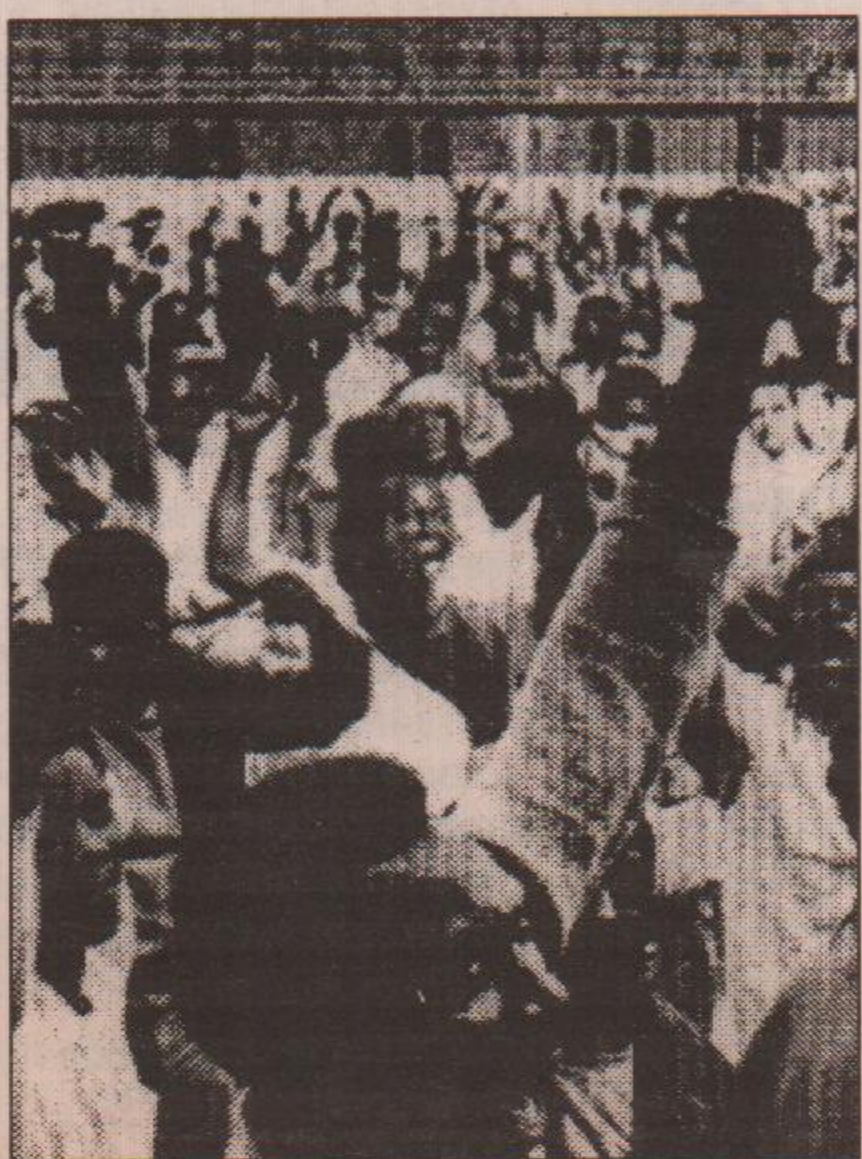
Pam Robinson

Build international solidarity against Control Units!

As I sit in this Control Unit cell, reflecting upon 12 years in Control Units, the fact that this disease of total isolation is spreading to your country sickens me, writes US prisoner JOHN PEROTTI. The New World Order encompasses mass genocide and slavery against the poor. That the United Kingdom has picked up the 'war on crime' battle-cry is no surprise, as it fits the agenda of the ruling class internationally. This is why it is so important for us to build international solidarity and network ideas and tactics to counter this disease.

Publicising human rights violations within these Units is the first step. Politicians focus on the 'crimes' of the people imprisoned to detract from the root cause of the problem. Massive education of the public should be foremost. Protests, combined with information packs detailing how prisons are tools of repression used by the ruling class, are an essential tactic in opposition to Control Units. Other tactics are direct action 'monkey-wrenching' of construction sites of Supermax prisons. Hitting the government in their pockets is extremely effective. When they allocate millions to build these instruments of torture, only to have the foundations caved in, bulldozers sabotaged and electrical systems derailed, it is a major setback as they cannot keep pouring millions into construction projects.

Here we have utilised the courts to highlight constitutional violations occurring in the Control Units. Utilising their own injustice system only brings limited results. Sometimes it works as a deterrent but always *after* the fact. The solution lies in stopping the disease before it begins. I recently won a lawsuit where the Director of the Department of Corrections and his



Mass resistance against US prisons - Attica 1971

chief legal adviser were found to have violated my due process rights in handling the trumped-up charges which got me sent back to Lucasville. A jury also ruled that a captain and two guards retaliated against me because of articles I've written which are derogatory about their 'system', setting me up on a drugs charge and putting a fake 'snitch-jacket' on me in an attempt to get others to do their

dirty work. The jury awarded me \$10,200 damages but the judge refused to order my transfer out of Lucasville, leaving me right here under the direct supervision of the same prisonrats who set me up. The state is appealing so I won't see a penny for years, if at all, and the fact that I won in court will just cause further retaliation. This has forced me to re-evaluate the use of their injustice system and its effectiveness. Overall, there is a general deterrent effect for those coming into the system, as well as the amount of money it costs the state to defend these actions, but true change comes from the public outside, who can exert more pressure on the politicians.

As I write, the last major trial stemming from the 1993 rebellion at Lucasville is going on. Carlos Sanders, known as Siddique Hasan, is charged with aggravated murder of the guard hostage and prisoner, attempted murder, kidnapping, felonious assault, assault and robbery. The state has already convicted and given the death penalty to prisoner spokespersons Jason Robb, James 'Namir' Ivere and Big George Skatzes for similar charges. Hasan is accused of being the Muslim orchestrating the uprising in response to Warden

The shape of things to come in Britain - US prison population figures

Combined local, state and federal prison population: 1980 - 493,000; 1985 - 759,000; 1990 - 1,179,000; 1995 - 1,554,000

Number of people in prison per 100,000 of the population: 1980 - 210 (approximately double the current figure for England and Wales); 1995 - 555

Incarceration rate for whites - 306 per 100,000; for blacks - 1,947 per 100,000

State expenditure (California): 1980 - Prisons 3%, Further Education 18%; 1995 - Prisons 8%, Further Education 8%

39% of Californian males between 18 and 34 are either in prison, on parole or on probation

Tate's refusal to provide alternative TB testing methods to those claimed to violate Islamic tenets. The state has got high conviction rates, due to the efforts of a special prosecution team and the use of inmate informants. The prosecution and convictions surpass any previous prison rebellion in the history of the United States.

What is the solution? International support and pressure are a start; direct action against prisonrats and their tools of repression; outside support for all of us confined to these houses of pain. Those of us who are released must witness to the public what is going on in here. Those who are released must help fund and support further resistance by their comrades outside and inside, rather than forget the injustice they suffered. Remember:

'The spirit who has seen the spectre of death cannot be scared by the faces of thieves; the soldier who has seen the swords glittering over his head and streams of blood under his feet does not care about rocks thrown at him by children on the streets.'

Pick up the battle upon release; help those still confined to break the chains. Organise resistance!

John Perotti, SOCF #A167712, PO Box 45699, Lucasville, OH 45699, USA

Letters and donations can be sent via the John Perotti Defence Fund, 45a Bedford Avenue, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Frankland

Frankland prison was locked down from 7 to 11 January, ostensibly in response to an escape attempt on New Year's Day and three other incidents during which security was 'compromised' (one involving a home-made ladder and two involving missing or copied keys).

Large amounts of prisoners' possessions were destroyed by screws searching cells and some prisoners retaliated by wrecking or burning cell furniture. Seventeen prisoners were moved out on 'lay-downs', following rumours they were planning a riot.

Over the next month there were further one-day lock-downs, including one on B wing (all the security 'compromises' were on C wing) and all High Risk Category A prisoners were moved to Whitemoor, Belmarsh or Full Sutton.

The escape attempts were used as an excuse to screw down the prison. 'Volumetric control' is now being brought in, restricting prisoners' property to what will fit in two small boxes, and prisoners refusing to work are being kept locked up all day. One prisoner who was shipped out of Full Sutton following the protest there in November (see FRFI 128) and is now at Frankland, wrote to FRFI: 'all the little things that happened at Full Sutton have already started happening here, even the little changes; it's like continuous déjà vu.'

Overcrowding

On 21 February the prison population of England and Wales reached an all-time high of 53,000, forcing the Prison Service to declare a 'state of emergency' in 46 prisons, which will have to find space for up to 10 per cent more prisoners each.

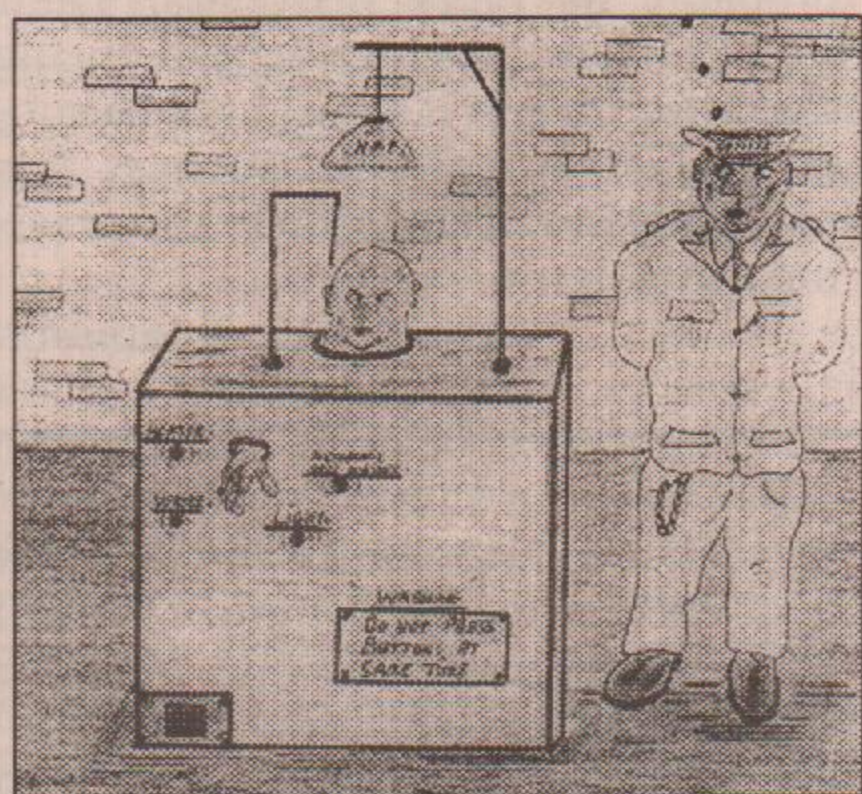
The prison population has risen by a quarter since May 1993 when Michael Howard became Home Secretary. Faced with persistent criticism and the soaring cost of rising imprisonment, Howard recently announced he would be ending imprisonment for petty fine default. However, his plans to drastically reduce remission and introduce minimum sentences will more than compensate and the prison population will continue to rise.

Inhuman and degrading punishment

Inhuman

Charlie Bronson has been moved between prisons 53 times in 34 months under the terms of the Prison Service's Continuous Assessment Scheme, 'Stage 5' in the 'Management Strategy for Disruptive Inmates' (IG 28/1993). Charlie McGhee had been moved approximately 18 times in the 12 months up to 4 January 1995 when he died of a heart attack in Frankland prison.

Prisoners on 'Continual Assessment' are inevitably held in segregation units at the gaols they are moved to, not told when or where they will be moved again and subjected to a process which can only be described as control by disorientation. The Prison Service does not pretend that constant moves are good for the prisoner, but uses the system to prevent individual governors from complaining that problem prisoners have been 'dumped' on their establishment. Even this masks the true purpose of IG 28/93, which (like the infamous CI 10/74 and CI 37/90 which preceded it) is to provide a mechanism whereby potentially 'subversive' prisoners can be gradually destroyed both physically and mentally.



No-one shall be subjected to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment

— Article 3, European Convention on Human Rights, to which Britain is a signatory.

Degrading

In the last FRFI we commented that although the chaining of pregnant women prisoners in hospital had been discontinued, other similar barbaric practices would continue against both men and women. Andrzej Jakubczyk writes from Bedford gaol:

'On 15 February 1996, prior to my statutory exercise period, I was forcibly...put into mechanical restraints which comprised two sets of handcuffs plus one and a half feet of heavy chain. I was required to exercise in these restraints; that is I was walked up and down the exercise yard like a "dog being taken for walkies", attached to a prison warden and led up and down the small yard - there were also two additional warders on the yard. It is a secure yard enclosed by a fence with barbed razor wire all round. I felt totally degraded and a number of prisoners were by the windows laughing. As a consequence I terminated my "exercise" after five minutes and declined to take any further "exercise" while at Bedford.'

Nicki Jameson

Right said Fred

It is nearly a year since Larkin Publications brought out *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance*, the only book on the subject of Britain's biggest ever prison uprising. Despite a virtual blank from the mainstream national press, the book received a favourable response from every quarter bar one. Although criminologists, lawyers, prison reformers, and above all prisoners, have heaped praise on the book, there are some who don't like it so much. Not surprisingly, foremost in that category are prison officers.

On the same day the Home Office agreed to pay compensation to seven former prisoners and one prison officer who suffered trauma and distress as a result of being caught up in the *Strangeways* revolt, FRFI heard that lawyers representing prison officer Fred Wright had written to BPCC Wheatons, who printed *Strangeways 1990*, claiming he was defamed on pages 82 and 115 of the book and asking for compensation.

Eric Allison, who wrote the parts of the book which Fred Wright claims are defamatory, is adamant that every word of his account is true and insists that if called on to do so, he can produce statements from 50 former prisoners and at least one ex-prison officer to confirm the comments he makes about Fred Wright.

Strangeways 1990 is available from Larkin Publications, BCM Box 5909, WC1N 3XX. £7.95 + £1p&p. Cheques to Larkin Publications.

Satpal Ram - abuse continues

Following the rejection of his appeal in December 1995, Satpal has been subjected to continual harassment. First at Full Sutton, where he was put on punishment for a string of petty and trumped-up reasons; then at Long Lartin, where the authorities repeatedly demanded he submit to strip-searches conducted in the most humiliating manner possible. When Satpal refused to squat during these searches he was sent to the block. On 13 March he was physically assaulted, forced into a body-belt and moved to Bristol prison.

Send letters and cards to Satpal Ram (E9416*), HMP Bristol, Cambridge Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 8PS.

Visitors get the same treatment

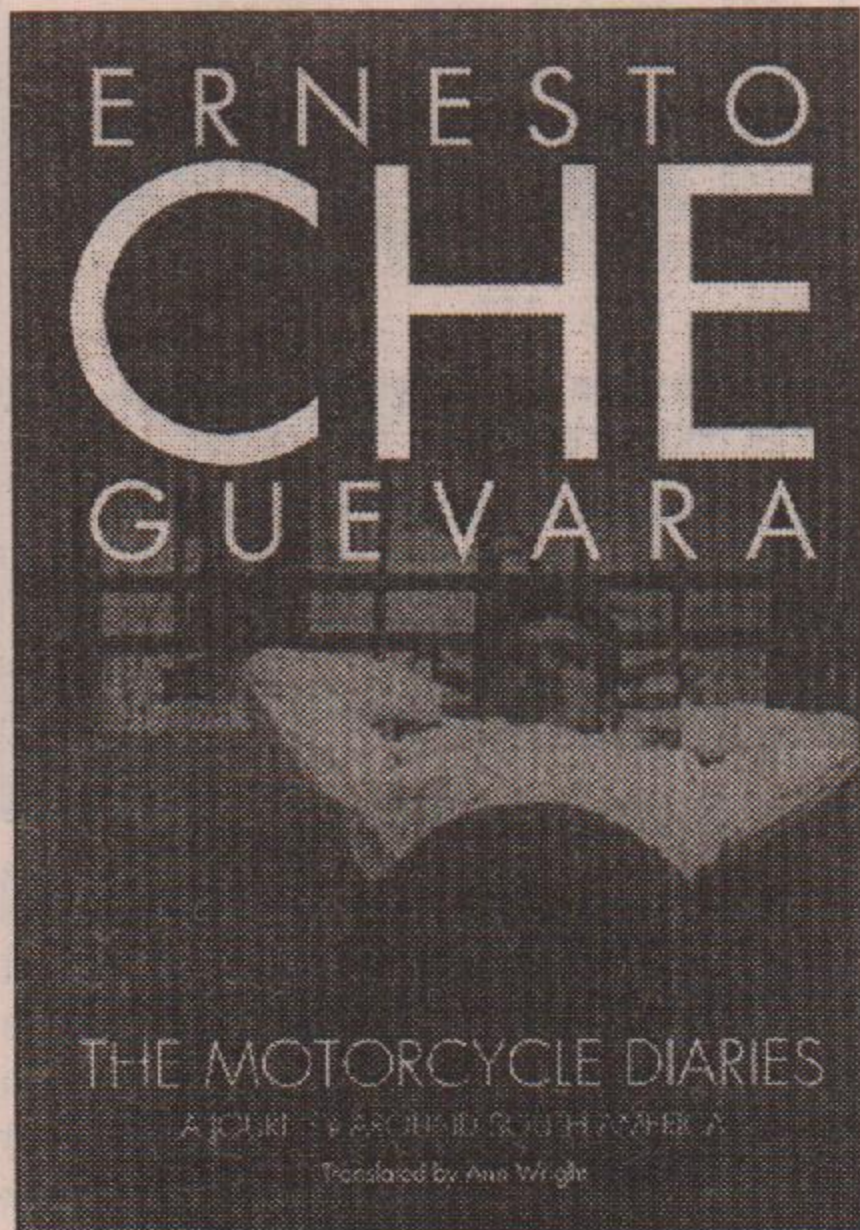
FRFI has learned of similar strip-search procedures being extended to black and Asian visitors to Full Sutton prison. Recently a young woman visitor, accompanied by her three-year-old daughter, was forced to remove her clothes, spread her legs, bend over and spread her buttocks. This is racial and sexual harassment of the most disgusting variety, with prison authorities in a position of absolute power. If visitors refuse the search, they will be denied the visit.

Che Guevara: 'The man I once was'

■ **The Motorcycle Diaries: a journey around South America** by Ernesto Che Guevara, translated by Ann Wright. Verso 1995, £8.95.

I first learned of this book from a *Guardian* review which claimed that as it was so full of politically-incorrect views, Che's supporters, including the Cuban government, had gone out of their way to ensure it never saw the light of day. Such insinuations are typical of petty bourgeois dilettantes such as those who write for *The Guardian*, but they are far removed from the facts. Nobody is born a communist, it has to be learned. It was not likely to be easy for Che Guevara, a medical student from a middle-class family in Argentina, to make this leap.

In the first half of 1952 Che and a friend travelled from Argentina to Venezuela on an ancient Norton motorbike, taking in Chile, Peru and Colombia on the way. They met a vast range of people, from Indians and copper miners to lepers, police and tourists. For the first time Che experienced at first hand the suffering of the continent's toiling masses, and their struggles - including a strike which he joined in.



In a typical passage Che notes that 'Chile produces 20 per cent of all the world's copper', and that copper is vitally important to the US companies who own most of it, as an essential component of various weapons of destruction and a source of massive profits. At the end of the

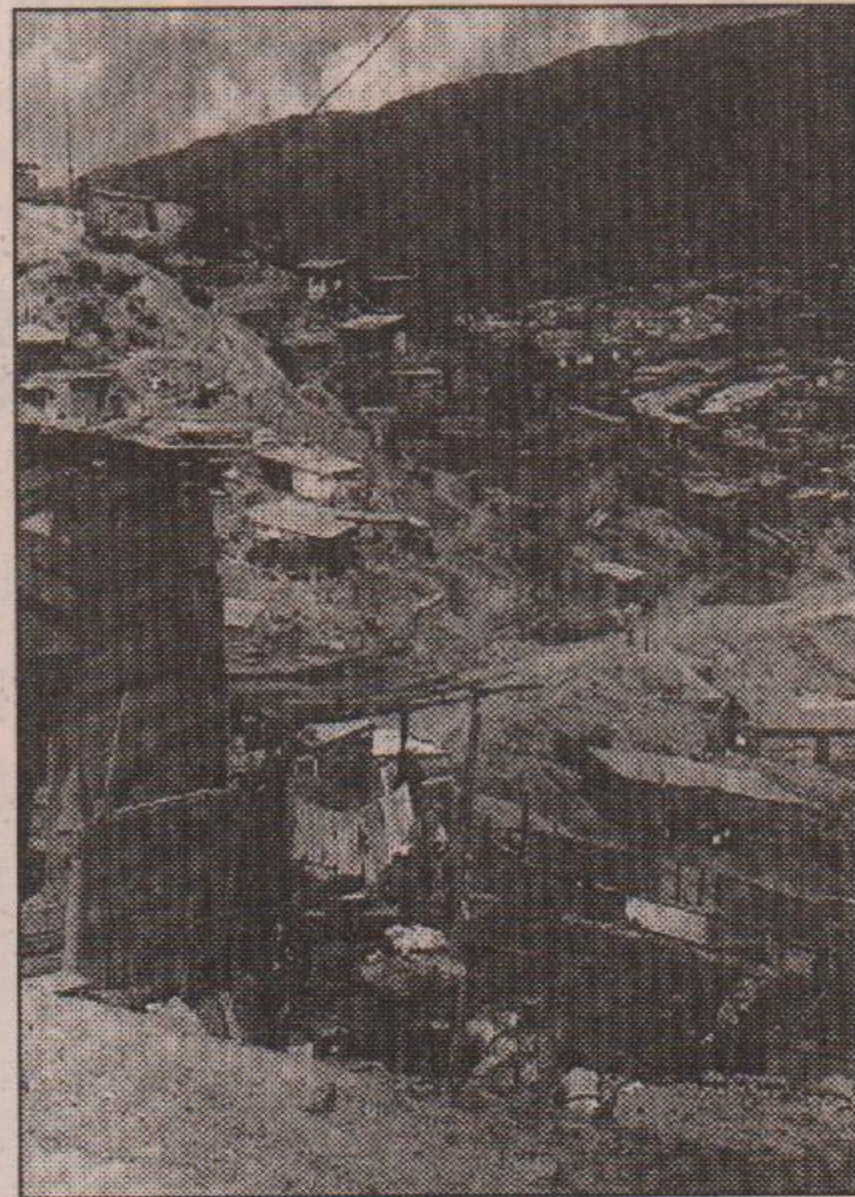
chapter Che reminds us of the costs: 'the miners' graveyards... containing but a fraction of the enormous number of people devoured by cave-ins, silicosis and the mountain's infernal climate.'

Che's comments on the plight of the Indians of Peru are unforgettable, inviting comparisons with apartheid in South Africa: '...this kind of train [to Cuzco] has a third-class carriage for the local Indians; they're like the ones used to transport cattle in Argentina, except that the smell of cow dung is much more pleasant than its human equivalent...the tourists travelling in their comfortable railcars can only have the vaguest idea of how the Indians live, gleaned from a quick glance as they whizz by our train which has to stop to let them pass.'

Towards the end of the book Che describes a conversation with 'a very interesting man' who tells him that 'the people need to be educated and they can't do that before taking power, only after', and predicts that Che 'will die with your fist clenched and your jaw tense, the perfect manifestation of hatred and struggle.' The conclusion which Che has drawn from the scenes of squalor and struggles he has witnessed is clear: 'when the great guiding spirit cleaves humanity into two antagonist halves, I will be with the people...brace my body, ready for combat and prepare myself to be a sacred precinct within which the bestial howl of the victori-

ous proletariat can resound with new vigour and hope.'

The turning point had been reached; barely a year later Che reached Guatemala, where he tried to organise resistance to a US-backed coup, and in 1955 he met Fidel



Slums on the hillside of Caracas, Venezuela

Castro for the first time in Mexico. The little-known motorcycle trip had played a part in forming the proletarian revolutionary who was to lay down his life in Bolivia in an attempt to create, as he put it, 'two, three, many Vietnams'.

Mike Webber

Release Irish prisoners of war

■ **Saoirse An Uaimh (Navan) pamphlet** by Seamus O Mathuna. Available from Alanna Nugent, c/o Metges Lane, Navan, Co Meath, Ireland; telephone 00353 46 21345. 32pp. Price £2 + 40p p&p.

Produced during the ceasefire when Saoirse branches throughout Britain and Ireland were waging a vigorous public campaign for the repatriation and release of Irish prisoners of war in British gaols, Navan Saoirse's pamphlet is no less useful now the ceasefire is over. Although it may not be sustainable on precisely the same terms, a campaign supporting and publicising the situation of Irish prisoners is even more vital today and campaigning tools such as this should be welcomed and widely used.

The pamphlet consists of a brief narrative account of 'Irish political prisoners in English jails since the 1870s': from the Fenians, such as Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, who was

'once shut up for 35 days in a pitch-black dungeon with his hands chained to his feet, day and night... not even untied for meals, hence he was forced to eat like a dog lapping his food out of a bowl on a dirty floor', through this century to the 1970s, where the medical neglect of Sean O'Connell is horrifyingly similar to that which Patrick Kelly is suffering the consequences of right now, and on to the present day when those prisoners who attempted to break out of Whitemoor are still being brutalised in Belmarsh.

There are some minor inaccuracies and errors, but by and large the material is excellent and I was particularly struck by how the role of women in the struggle for Irish liberation was stressed throughout. The pamphlet's author was active with our comrades in south London in the mid-1980s and much of the material is drawn from *Hands Off Ireland!*,

FRFI, Ireland: the key to the British revolution and from another tiny but excellent pamphlet produced in 1989 by the 'Free the Framed Irish Prisoners' campaign, in which the late Maire O'Shea was an active participant.

The pamphlet concludes with correspondence between Navan Saoirse and various prominent persons on

know Labour's record, this is no surprise, but for readers of this pamphlet who are new to the issues, it is vital to know who are your friends and who are your enemies.

There are currently approximately 24 Irish POWs in English gaols, and another 13 on 'temporary transfer' to the Six Counties, who could be re-



issues regarding Irish political prisoners. Most revealing is their reply from Mo Mowlam, Shadow Secretary for Northern Ireland. She tells them that Labour 'does not support the release of all terrorist prisoners', and that 'Labour in government has no plans to close any of the Special Secure Units'. For those of us who

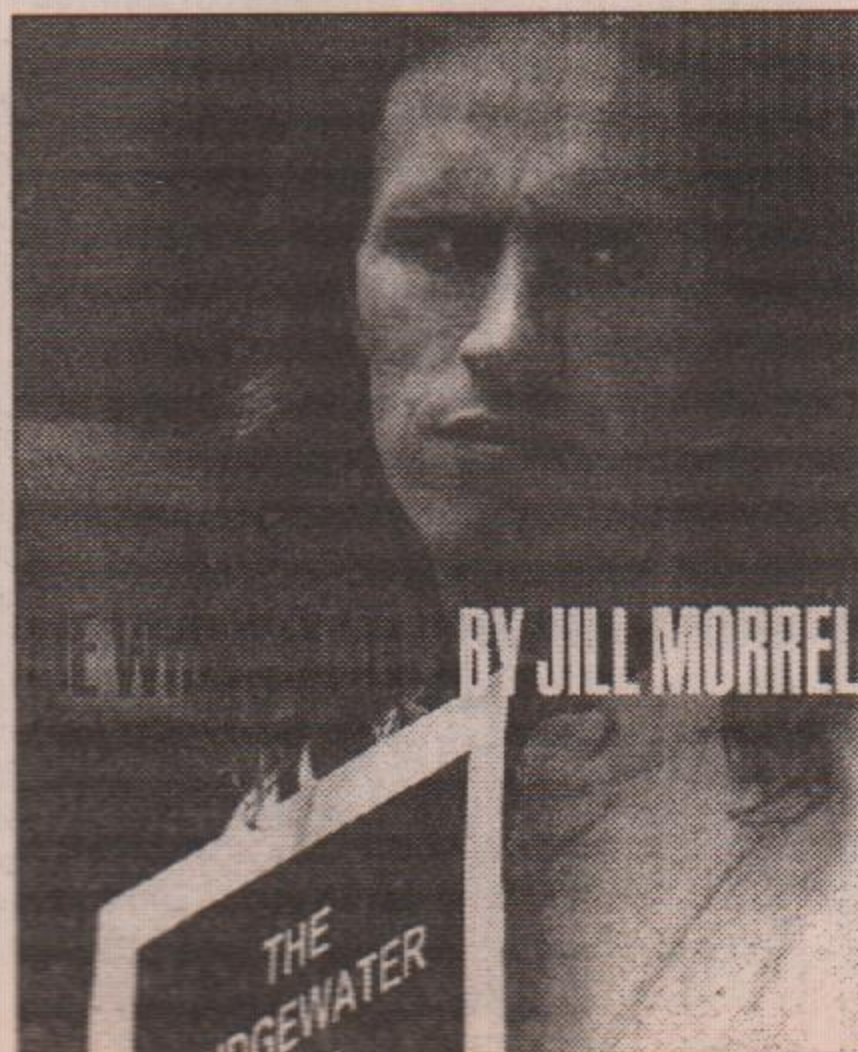
called any time. The resumption of armed struggle means there will probably be more prisoners. Their situation has been highlighted during the ceasefire and it should not be submerged now; materials such as this pamphlet are useful aids in the ongoing campaign.

Nicki Jameson

The wrong system

■ **The Wrong Men** by Jill Morell, published by the Bridgewater Four Support Group, 723 Pershore Road, Selly Park, Birmingham, B29 7NY. 44pp, £3.95 inc p&p.

There is almost nothing left to say about the case of the Bridgewater Four, other than to ask why the hell are the surviving three men not yet free. The foreman of the jury which convicted them now believes they are innocent; a friend of the now dead DC Perkins, who was centrally involved in beating the vital incriminating false confession out of Pat Molloy, has stated publicly that Perkins openly admitted doing so. And so on and so on. Over the 17 years since Pat Molloy, James



Robinson, and Vincent and Michael Hickey were wrongly convicted of the murder of paper-boy Carl Bridgewater at Yew Tree Farm in Staffordshire their supporters have amassed so much evidence that there really is no case left to disprove. But still the three men are in prison (Molloy died in gaol in 1981), because Michael Howard refuses to refer the case back to the Court of Appeal. Ann Whelan, mother of Michael Hickey, who was just 17 when sentenced, spends her life travelling the country, speaking to meetings, giving interviews, gathering support. She does a brilliant job but still the doors remain bolted.

This pamphlet is well-researched and illustrated and sets out the facts of the case clearly and accessibly. An equally useful document could probably have been produced by any sympathetic and well-versed

journalist but hopefully the fact that it is written by the same Jill Morell who campaigned long and hard for John McCarthy will force some people in this chauvinistic country to make the unavoidable comparison between innocent hostages in Beirut and innocent hostages in British prisons.

Last October Michael Hickey refused to apply for parole, saying 'I won't ever plead and grovel for something that is my right - and that's my liberty. The only way I'm prepared to come out is through the front door of the Court of Appeal, having been exonerated and completely cleared... We've had 17 years or more of injustice dished up to us, not justice. The people responsible for this know who they are, they are guilty of putting my life on hold for 17 years. We are innocent.'

Nicki Jameson

Voices from inside Scottish gaols

■ **Inside Oot** available from The Inside Oot Collective, c/o Glasgow Solidarity Centre, 3 Royal Exchange Court, 85-87 Queen Street, Glasgow, G1 3PA, Scotland, 50p.

In February the Scottish Prisoners Direct Action Support Group produced the first issue of its quarterly magazine *Inside Oot*, which provides a unique platform for Scottish prisoners themselves to articulate and communicate their views and analysis of penal repression north of the border. In fact, although collated and published by outside supporters, *Inside Oot* is very much a magazine by and for prisoners, and most of the material in the first issue reflects this very strongly, eschewing as it does any reformist or liberal analysis of the prison system or strategy for change, and instead adopting an unambiguous position of revolt and resistance, while describing exactly why the prison system is beyond any sort of meaningful or piecemeal reform. This is indeed a magazine that tells it from the prisoners' perspective and reflects their agenda for change and transformation of the prison system.

Scottish prisons are currently being operated in line with Howard's 'Get tough' with offenders approach, and regimes and conditions in most Scottish gaols are now deliberately designed to completely disempower and destroy the will and ability of prisoners to complain and protest. In Shotts prison, for example, prisoners are subjected to a regime that is Control Unit-oriented and geared towards straightforward physical and psychological repression. This regime embodies Howard's reactionary ideas on 'basic regimes' and 'austere conditions', which when translated into reality are little more than a brutal violation of prisoners' basic human rights. It is these sort of conditions that are now being im-



posed and institutionalised throughout the whole of the Scottish prison system, and no-one but prisoners themselves can effectively fight and resist the dangerous shift in the balance of power in gaols which the state is currently attempting to engineer and carry out.

The appearance of *Inside Oot* represents a very important and timely contribution to the struggle of prisoners here in Scotland and potentially the means by which a real fightback is generated and organised against the Tories' attempts to create concentration camp-type prisons north of the border.

John Bowden
HMP Perth

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No US intervention in Taiwan

When I left Britain to come to Taiwan two years ago, I had to repeatedly explain where I was going, since most British people had little idea where Taiwan is, and more often than not got it confused with Thailand. So I have been wondering whether people in Britain either know or care about the crisis in the Taiwan Straits. Now I have been told that Taiwan is all over the front pages. Indeed, Taipei is now crawling with foreign journalists, many of them looking a bit lost. I thought I glimpsed reactionary Jonathan Mirsky, the *Observer's* China correspondent, on TV the other day.

Let me guess what the papers are telling you - big, repressive China is threatening to invade small and democratic Taiwan, and shouldn't the USA quickly come to its rescue? Meanwhile, some of the 'left' papers, probably the ones that called for 'victory to Iran' when it was fighting Iraq, and 'victory to Iraq' when it annexed Kuwait, will now be chanting 'Independence for Taiwan'. Some people can be trusted to get it

wrong every time.

Let me explain that Taiwan is historically and legally a province of China. 98% of its population are Hans, the same ethnic group which makes up well over 90% of China's whole population. As for the so-called 'Taiwanese' dialect of Chinese, there are more than twice as many speakers of this tongue in mainland China than in Taiwan!

The 'Republic of China' government in Taiwan is the rump of the regime which the Chinese communists overthrew in 1949. It would have disappeared long ago had it not been bolstered by US armed intervention during and after the Korean war.

The one thing the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) had in common with the communists was the idea that there was only one China. The argument was, which of the two was the legitimate governing party? KMT 'president' Chiang Kai-shek refused to bow to US pressure to declare Taiwan an independent republic. Thus, the two parties came

to a silent agreement to live and let be, and armed hostilities eventually ceased.

All this changed with the current 'president' Lee Teng-hui. He fanned up communal sentiments and used the US- and Japanese-backed 'independence' forces to gain power over his political rivals. Then he followed the 'independence' forces in trying to 'internationalise' the Taiwan question.

You must understand that China has suffered many brutal foreign invasions and occupations. It has suffered US nuclear threats on several occasions. It is not prepared to allow any foreign power to use Taiwan as a knife in its back. Independence for Taiwan would mean that any foreign power could legally station troops there if Taiwan's rulers allowed it. China is not prepared to be fragmented into numerous weak states like the Arabs, or to become another war-torn, patchwork ex-Yugoslavia.

The Chinese government has been taking careful, measured steps to warn certain politicians in Taiwan

not to declare independence or invite foreign intervention. Not a single Taiwanese has been killed or injured by the Chinese military exercises. Can the Americans say as much for their activities as 'world policemen'? The US imperialists want to stoke up tensions in the Taiwan Straits. Tensions work wonders for US arms sales. Not since the Vietnam war has Asia seen such a big US naval fleet as that which is now in the vicinity of Taiwan. Opinion polls show that more people in Taiwan think the American intervention will make things worse than better. The US caused this problem. They are fanning the flames of war. But if a war really happens, they will run away and leave Taiwan in flames. They should get back on their own side of the Pacific now!

British communists have always supported 'self determination for the Irish people as a whole'. We would never dream of supporting an 'Independent Northern Ireland'. The same principle applies to China. Let the Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits find their own solution. No to US intervention!

JONATHAN COHEN
Taiwan

Ronnie Easterbrook: a year on dirty protest

I am writing to thank you for all the help and assistance you have given to me over the last year while I have been trying to publicise the situation of my close friend, Ronnie Easterbrook.

On 26 March it will be a whole year since Ronnie began his dirty protest in the block at Whitemoor. Since last December when we handed in the petitions to the Home Office, I have had very sympathetic support from a local newspaper, but everywhere else I have come up against a complete brick wall. I have written to MPs, Prison Service officials and governors, but they all send back the same reply, blaming Ron himself for the situation he is in.

I am not campaigning for him to be freed, just treated with a bit of dignity. Nobody goes on a dirty protest for a laugh, especially not for a year. The Lifers' prison at Kingston, Portsmouth has a special wing for men of Ron's age and over, but the Prison Service refuses to move him out of the dispersal system. We are hoping to use the fact that the protest has now gone on for a whole year to put pressure on them to finally change their minds.

JACKIE ABBOTT
South London

EVENTS & MEETINGS

Tuesday 9 April

MARCH AGAINST THE JOB SEEKERS' ALLOWANCE

Assemble Geraldine Mary
Harmondsworth Park, Lambeth Rd
(Lambeth North tube) 1am

Called by London Against the JSA

Friday 19 April

FUNDRAISING SOCIAL FOR IRISH REPUBLICAN PRISONERS

Chats Palace, 242-244 Brooksoys
Walk, London E9. Doors open 8.30pm

Proceeds to Prisoners Dependents Fund
Organised by the Colin Roach Centre

CUBA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN DAYSCHOOL

Saturday 27 April
9.30am-5pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1 (Holborn tube)
£8/£4.

THE 1996 CUBA SOLIDARITY
CAMPAIGN AGM WILL BE ON
SUNDAY 28 APRIL AT ULU,
MALET STREET,
LONDON WC1
9.30AM-5PM.

BENEFIT NIGHT FOR IWCA

with **Folk in Hell**
Victoria Pub
Holloway Road, N7

Thursday 4 April

8pm till late
admission £3/£2 concs.

Independent Working Class Association

Satpal Ram harassed in gaol

Last week, along with the Free Satpal Ram Campaign, I went to see Satpal in Bristol prison. He told us about the continual attacks and harassment he suffers from the prison authorities.

He has fought against his unjust treatment for 'murder' for the past nine years and it is for this reason, particularly, that he has to undergo the brutal treatment from the prison officers and authorities in various prisons.

Satpal has been in solitary confinement for three weeks now, and prior to his removal from Long Lartin prison, he was subjected to the most horrific forcible strip search. The level of violence used in these attacks leads Satpal to be in fear of his life. During his confinement, he has been denied proper food, bedding, medical aid and access to his legal and personal possessions. There seems to be a concerted, systematic campaign by the authorities to keep

him in solitary confinement for the remainder of his sentence.

The Free Satpal Ram Campaign asks people to protest against this miscarriage of justice and ill-treatment of Satpal. Send/phone protests to the Governor, Mr Dixon, HMP Bristol, Cambridge Road, Horfield, Bristol BS7 8CS. Tel: 0117 942 6661 Fax: 0117 924 4228

NAZIMA RAHIMKHAN
Birmingham

Ugar Salih is innocent

I write in the hope some of your readers will be able to come to my aid in proving my innocence and securing my freedom.

On 6 January 1990 I went on a drive out to Kent with four others: Michael Smithyman, his girlfriend April Sheridan, my girlfriend Michelle Miles, and Paul Smith. Paul was driving us to a bungalow owned by his father. He stopped the car twice on the way out of London and April got out: once to look for her babysitter and once to buy cigarettes. If she had been frightened of Smithyman then she would have been unlikely to return.

Once inside the bungalow Smithyman suddenly became aggressive. He produced a shotgun out of his bag without warning and started giving us all orders, ordering us back to the car. He put a shovel in the car and ordered Paul to drive us to Kent Woods where he pointed out a spot where he told Paul to stop. I was totally shocked and terrified by this sudden change in Smithyman's attitude and began to fear for the safety of us all.

Smithyman ordered April out of the car. He then told Michelle to get out too, saying April was going to get it. I begged Smithyman to leave Michelle in the car, saying I would take her place. I got out of the car at gunpoint and was ordered to carry the shovel. I had no option but to do as I was told.

We reached a spot where a large tree had fallen, leaving a hole in the ground. Smithyman forced April to stand in the hole. I was frozen with terror. He shot her six times in cold blood and buried the gun.

Once back at the car Smithyman threatened to do the same to Michelle but eventually left her alone and we drove back to London.

We were all so terrified that we stayed silent about the incident. I myself suffered deep shock. I did not know what to do or where to go; there were so many thoughts on my mind that this abhorrent murder was impossible to relate to. Taking a human life was not something I had ever witnessed before.

The following day Smithyman came to my house, demanding I return to the scene of the crime. I refused, despite his threats to mutilate me and put my body parts in a plastic bag.

Smithyman was known to have 'underworld' contacts and this sent me into a state of paranoia. I was too afraid to contact the police because I had heard what he would do to 'grasses' and their families. Eventually Paul and I both returned to the scene with Smithyman to bury the body.

We were all arrested. Smithyman was tried separately and rightly convicted of murder. Yet we were also found guilty of murder, on the basis of 'joint enterprise'. I did not shoot April. I tried to persuade Smithyman to stop. I thought he might kill me too.

Since I was sent to prison I have spent time in punishment blocks and been moved on many occasions; there has even been an attempt (involving Smithyman as a prosecution witness) to fit me up for another murder. I will not accept the system's right to control me as I am not guilty; I am not a murderer. My life has been destroyed. Smithyman is now prepared to state that I am innocent but I am still in prison.

UGAR SALIH
HMP Parkhurst, Newport, Isle of
Wight, PO30 5NX.

Anti-Irish hypocrisy from the pseudo-left

Now that the one-sided peace initiative in Ireland is over, due to the blank refusal by the British government to honour their agreement to enter into broadly-based talks leading to a comprehensive settlement of the 827-year-old conflict, we will undoubtedly be bombarded by waves of hypocrisy emanating from the pseudo left. Over the years the pseudo left have complained that the military campaign prevented them from raising the subject with a view to putting pressure on the government to produce a formula for a just and lasting peace. Well, 18 months ago a ceasefire was called and straight away the largest of the pseudo-left groups, the SWP, launched into an anti-Irish campaign. This will not surprise any genuine socialist because the SWP has always vented all their hatred on all things socialist.

They hated the existence of the Warsaw Pact states. They call for the destruction of Cuba and any other country that is a thorn in the side of capitalism. The sad thing is that among such groups there are some people who are good and courageous socialists, whose energies are being wasted on perverse ideology, at best, or government agency, at worst. It is very sad to see such waste at a time when the country is crying out for new direction and to find so few who can be relied on to point the way. Perhaps there are others, but apart from the RCG I do not know of them, but it is some consolation to know that there is at least one body which is not selective in its denunciation of racism and imperialism.

M MURTAGH
Surrey

Go there, do that - but make sure you get the t-shirt!

The design for our campaign t-shirt proved so popular that in Cuba it's painted up on the wall of Disco Amigos, the UJC youth centre Rock around the Blockade provided a sound system for, and here in Britain, we've ordered new stocks! Order yours now. Made in high-quality white Fruit of the Loom cotton, with a design of Che Guevara and the words

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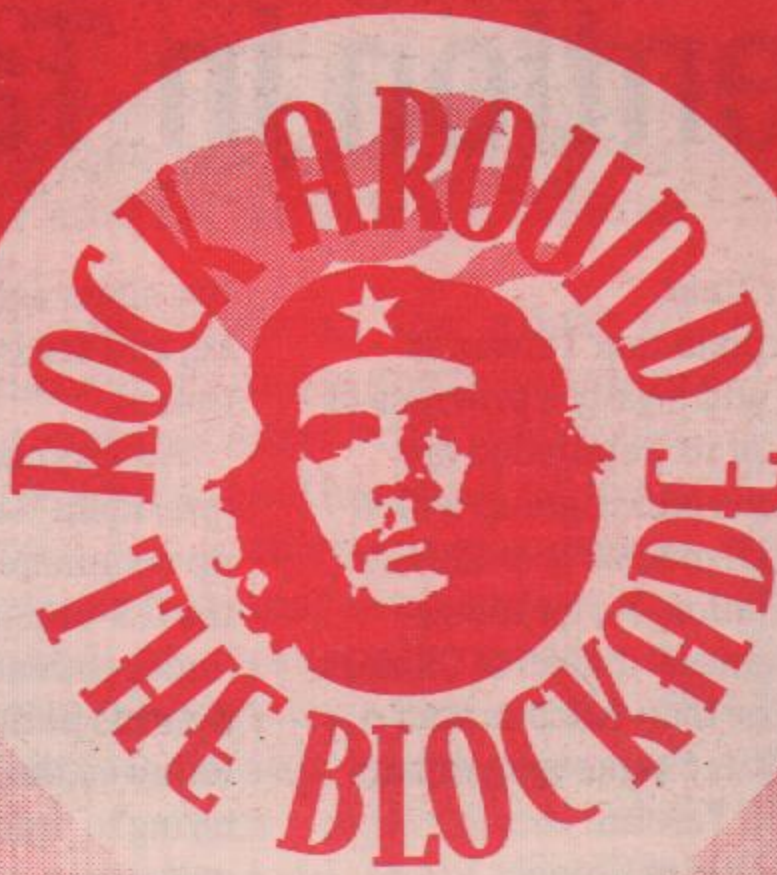
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'Viva Cuba' in red and black on the front, and a quote from Che 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back, it costs only £7 including p&p and is available in XL only. Che Guevara badges (white, with red and black design) with the words 'Rage against the US blockade' are available for 50p.

**FIGHT RACISM
FIGHT IMPERIALISM**



**ROCK AROUND
THE BLOCKADE
1996**

US steps up aggression against Cuba

On 24 February Cuban exiles from the counter-revolutionary Brothers to the Rescue deliberately flew into Cuban airspace in defiance of previous Cuban warnings. It was 'an open secret' in the Miami exile community that something was going to happen. After issuing warnings, Cuban MiG fighter planes shot down two of the three pirate Cessnas. Four pilots died, sacrificed to the cause of tightening the blockade against Cuba. KATHY FERNAND and CAT WIENER report.

The exiles' aim was to ensure the anti-Cuban Helms-Burton Bill got through. Their provocation was timed to coincide with the US election Primaries. Unwilling to alienate the important exile vote in Florida and New Jersey, President Clinton dropped earlier reservations about the Bill, and announced further sanctions against Cuba. Predictably, on 6 March, the Helms-Burton Bill was passed in the House of Representatives by 336 votes to 86. Brothers to the Rescue had achieved their immediate aim.

Prior to this, to the dismay of the reactionary Cuban exile groups, the Clinton administration had seemed to be adopting a more softly-softly approach against Cuba. There was even talk that the blockade might be lifted if Clinton was re-elected in the autumn. This reflected growing pressure from sections of US business who were establishing potentially profitable contacts with Cuba.

However, the US was prepared to let Brothers to the Rescue continue its harassment of Cuba, with 20 illegal flights into Cuban air space in the last 20 months. The Cuban government made repeated protests about these flights to the US government and the Federal Aviation Administration of the US. The US failed to act. After two incursions in January 1996, when thousands of leaflets were dropped over Havana, the Cuban government warned next time it would act. After the planes were shot down in February, the Cuban government immediately issued a statement regretting the loss of life, but emphasising its determination to defend its national integrity at all costs. Castro pointed out in an interview in *Time* magazine, 'All these attacks against Cuba are done with civilian planes... we had warned US officials time and time again... We had been patient, but there are limits.' Such flights are also suspected of being used for drug trafficking.

US attempts to bully UN

Clinton's entourage immediately claimed the planes were shot down over international waters; Secretary of State Warren Christopher condemned Cuba's 'murderous acts' against 'innocent civilians'. Cuba has agreed to participate in a UN inquiry to prove the planes were within its territory.

Within hours of the shutdown the UN convened an emergency session of the UN

Security Council, where it attempted to bully unprepared delegates to condemn Cuba as 'a threat to international order' and its action as an 'unlawful use of force'. Requests that the session be delayed until Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina could get there were ignored. However, resistance by China and Russia to US railroading tactics ensured that what was finally agreed was a watered-down presidential statement 'deploring' the Cuban action. The statement was passed at 3.30am. Roberto Robaina was granted a US visa an hour later.

The US dirty war against Cuba

The reality is a history of constant harassment of Cuba by the United States and counter-revolutionaries based in Florida, which the US has done nothing to prevent. Responsibility for the shooting must lie squarely at their door. It is no coincidence that the flights were timed to coincide with a scheduled meeting in Havana by the dissident group Concilio Cubano - which receives funds from Brothers to the Rescue. In *Time*, Castro stated: 'In addition to these flights, there was also interference by the US Interests Section [in Havana] in our internal affairs... giving money and paying the bills of dissidents... visiting the provinces and promoting opposition to the government under the pretext of checking on rafters returned from the US... it was intolerable.'

There is nothing 'humanitarian' about Brothers to the Rescue. They were set up in 1991 by Bay of Pigs veteran and fanatical anti-communist Jose Basulto with the sole aim of overthrowing the Castro government. Two days after the shooting they were denounced on Cuban TV by former Brothers pilot and Cuban agent Juan Pablo Roque as terrorists who had plotted sabotage and assassinations against Cuba.

Cuban 'Liberty and Solidarity' Act

Immediately after the incident, Warren Christopher warned that Clinton held military action 'in reserve'. The Brothers would undoubtedly like to provoke all-out military action against Cuba. However, under a Democratic President they will settle for all-out economic assault. The Helms-Burton Bill - now the Cuban

The 1996 Rock around the Blockade campaign has been enthusiastically launched by FRFI, members of the Nuestro Tiempo brigade (see FRFI 129), supporters and newcomers to our solidarity with the UJC (Union of Young Communists) and socialism in Cuba.

There were RCG reportback meetings in London (attended by 60 people), Manchester, Birmingham and Lincoln in January and February. Other meetings addressed by members of the 1995 brigade included South London Cuba Solidarity Campaign's meeting to launch the Container for Cuba Appeal, also addressed by Javier Dominguez of ICAP, North East London CSC, a sixth form in Birmingham and a Communist Party meeting in Manchester.

Rock Around the Blockade has set its main goals for the next 18 months: another brigade to go to Ciego de Avila, Cuba in December, taking with it another sound system, this time for a mobile disco intended to reach Cuban youth even in the remotest corners of the province; to organise a UJC speaking tour of Britain in early 1997; and to send a delegation to the World Youth Festival in summer 1997.

To help build the campaign, we are producing a pamphlet on Cuba and a video of the Nuestro Tiempo brigade. Campaign meetings are held regularly around the country, and will include an educational programme on Cuban revolutionary history and its current situation. The meetings will discuss organising, fundraising (we need £6,000) and activities.

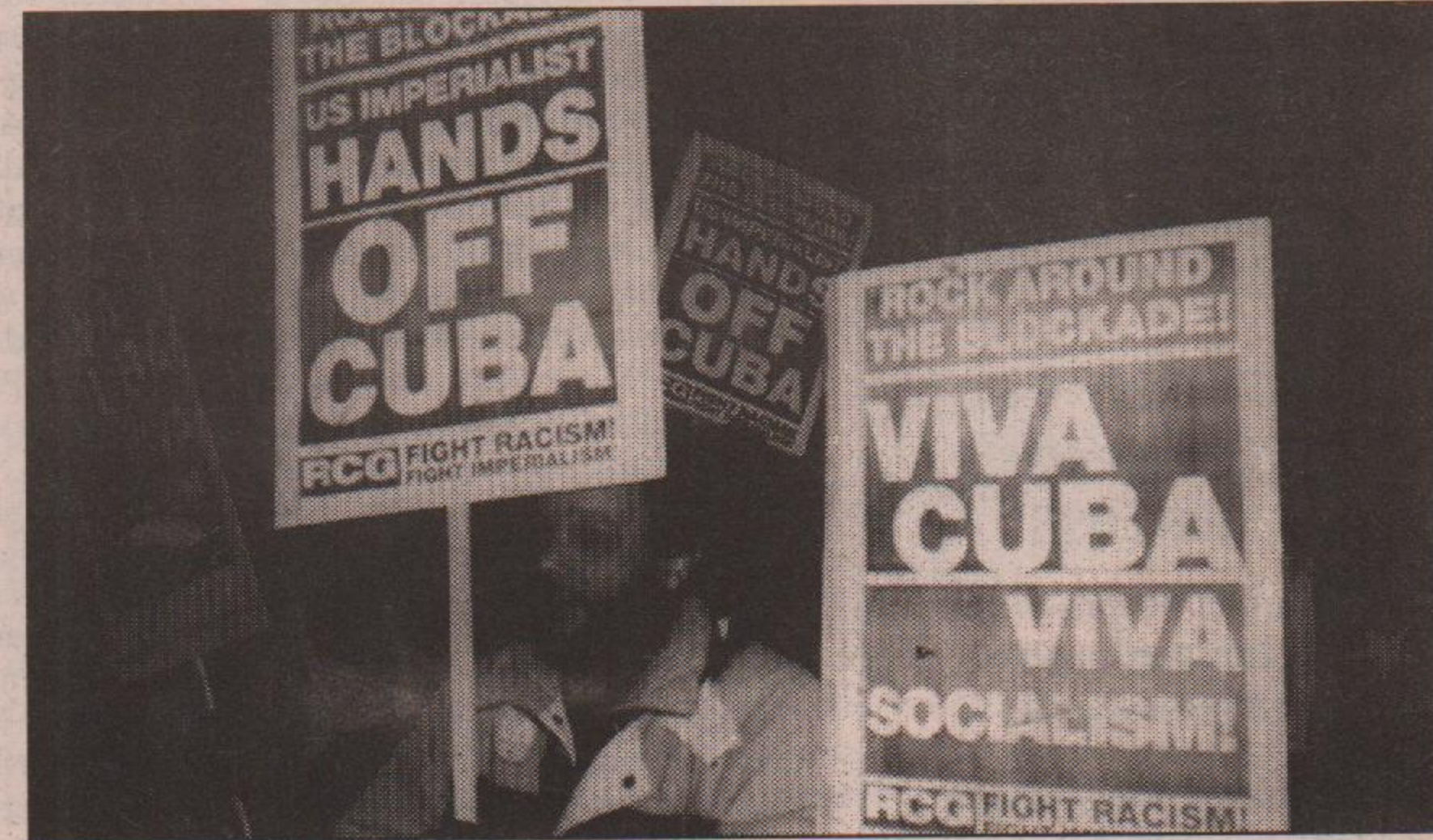
We held a lively, noisy picket of the US embassy on 4 March, protesting against 'Brothers to the Rescue' and the Helms-Burton Bill, and supported the CSC picket on 11 March.

We are collecting material for the CSC's educational aid

Liberty and Solidarity Act (!) - is the most far-reaching attack on foreign trade with Cuba to date. Its main provisions enshrine in law sanctions imposed by Presidential order, give Cuban-Americans and other US citizens the right to sue foreign companies using property confiscated by the Cuban revolution, and suspend visas from anyone involved in companies subject to an expropriation claim.

Cuba's trading partners in Canada, the European Union and Mexico will challenge the Act's extra-territorial provisions, taking the US to the court of the World Trading Organisation. The EU described US attempts to limit their trade as 'completely unacceptable'. They continued: 'We and the Americans share the same goal - establishing democracy in Cuba - but we differ about the best means to achieve that.'

The economic measures adopted by Cuba to beat the blockade, including joint ventures and increased foreign investment in the economy, are bearing fruit. Nickel production is up to its highest levels ever, tourism is the fastest-growing sector and the sugar harvest looks set to reach the target of 4.5 million tons for 1996 - a 30% increase on last year. But capitalist companies, in seeking to maximise their profits, will inevitably conflict with and attempt to undermine Cuban socialism. Communists support Cuba's



Rock around the Blockade called a picket of the US Embassy to oppose the Helms-Burton Bill

right to trade with whoever it wishes to defend the gains of the revolution. But our campaign cannot be based, as the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in Britain wishes, on a defence of *British* trading rights. Our priority must be to build an active, popular movement in defence of Cuban socialism and against the blockade.

Cuban internationalism continues

On 27 February, 96 Cuban doctors arrived

and Container Appeal, concentrating particularly on requests the brigade received from the youth computer club and Carlos Fonseca School for the visually-impaired in Ciego de Avila, and the national Federation of Cuban Women's appeal to provide a toy for every child in Cuba. It is proposed that the Container Appeal climaxes with a rally and festival on 7 July.

In view of the increased attacks on Cuba by the US, which are likely to escalate during the course of this US presidential election year, we are calling for increased action in support of socialist Cuba. We will be supporting calls made to the CSC Annual General Meeting for a national demonstration, regular pickets of the US embassy and prominent anti-Cuba US organisations, and for a boycott of US products and companies such as Bacardi (which helped draw up the Helms-Burton Bill), American Airlines (which funds Brothers to the Rescue), American Express and so on.

Our main aim is to get the message of the need to support Cuba, and what it represents, to the largest audience possible. You can help defend socialism! If you are involved in a campaign against hospital closures, education cuts, environmental destruction, unemployment, low pay, homelessness and poor housing, or racism, then invite Rock Around the Blockade to speak at your meeting about the relevance of Cuba to your struggle. Also, you can invite us to speak at your school's sixth form society, debating club or general studies class, college or student union, trade union branch - or set up a local Rock Around the Blockade group.

You can also help with fundraising. Are you in, or know of, a band that would be prepared to do a benefit concert? Do you know any organisation that would sponsor our campaign? Would you like to get involved in our work in solidarity in Cuba, and perhaps come on the next brigade? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, contact Rock Around the Blockade c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, tel: 0171 837 1688.

Materials wanted for the Container for Cuba Appeal: computers, floppy disks, software and manuals; pens, pencils, notebooks, paper; spectacle frames; toys. Or make a financial donation, which can be used to buy materials, such as lights for the school for the visually impaired.

David Howarth & Greg Scott

Rock around the Blockade campaign meetings in London are held fortnightly on Mondays. The next meetings will be: 1 April, Marchmont Centre, Marchmont St, London WC1 (tube: Russell Square), 15 April and 29 April, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn). All meetings start at 7.30pm. All welcome. (For details of meetings in your area, contact the campaign on the address above.)