

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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PREPARING FOR BATTLE

May Day in Turkey and Cuba

CENTRE
Assata Shakur, former Black Panther, speaks from exile in Cuba



Inside:

EDITORIAL - Labour's 'hard choices' only for the working class p2

MAY DAY - eye-witness reports from Havana and Istanbul p5

CUBA - Communists prepare for battle p7



INTERNATIONAL CAPITALISM
Globalisation: a redivision of the world by imperialism p10/11



BRITAIN
Socialism and the working class p12

UNEMPLOYMENT
Smash the Jobseeker's Allowance p16



Hard choices only for the working class

Speculation on the possible date for a general election is never far from the press these days. Much depends on how long it is before another Tory MP drops off his or her perch. In the meantime, the government has embarked on a war against Europe which would be laughable if it were not tapping into a sinister vein of British racism and chauvinism. The fact is that in advance of its likely defeat, sections of the Tory party are seeking to position themselves as an extreme right-wing populist opposition in the belief that tomorrow belongs to them.

However, the New Labour government that will follow will bring no help for the working class. As its leaders set out their policy on a wide range of issues, it is becoming more and more obvious that New Labour will be as anti-working class as the Tories are today. Tony Blair is making it clear that his government will need to make 'hard choices'. Even more: he says 'only if we show ourselves capable of making them [hard choices] in opposition will we deserve to be elected to government.' But whenever he explains what a 'hard choice' is, it always involves kicking the working class in the teeth.

One such hard choice is the clear decision not to re-nationalise any of the privatised utilities. Any idea that they might make an exception of the railways has long been buried. Meanwhile, Gordon Brown, Shadow Chancellor, wants across-the-board Whitehall efficiency reviews, adding 'Our aim will be to save money before we spend money'. This involves more 'hard choices' - to cut child benefit for 16-18-year-olds and deduct 40 per cent of the benefit of 18 to 24-year-olds who refuse New Labour's employment, education and training schemes. New Labour have now finished their review of the 'welfare state', and come up with suggestions that are difficult to distinguish from the Tories. Chris Smith, shadow Social Security spokesperson, says he wants to get away from 'the sterile battle lines of public and private, and, instead, to look at how the two can work together in the interests of the citizen'. In his view, 'the principle must surely be that the state acts as the guarantor of all provision, the regulator of all provision - and the administrator of some'. In other words, privatise the provision of state welfare. But we know what privatisation

means for those in receipt of state welfare - nursing homes of an appalling standard, too numerous to regulate at all. We also know what it means for those who work in privatised welfare - long hours, low pay, no employment rights. New Labour wants more of the same.

New Labour is also preparing for when the working class resists. Blair has constantly repeated that the main elements of the Tory trade union laws will stay in place. In Jack Straw, shadow Home Secretary, he has an ally who will be as ruthless as Michael Howard is today. A copper's friend and the fearless foe of 'junkies, winos and squeegee merchants', he led New Labour into abstaining on the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act just before Easter. The following week even that seemed a radi-

cal hangover when Straw and New Labour supported a drastic extension to the Act's stop and search powers, allowing them to be rushed through parliament in 24 hours. This followed a carefully orchestrated campaign by MI5 which included a 'special' briefing for both Blair and Straw. In the 1970s, MI5 attempted to get rid of Wilson because they thought him a dangerous red. They clearly won't have the same problem with Blair or Straw. Whilst Straw and New Labour abstain on the Asylum Bill so as not to upset the racist vote, they

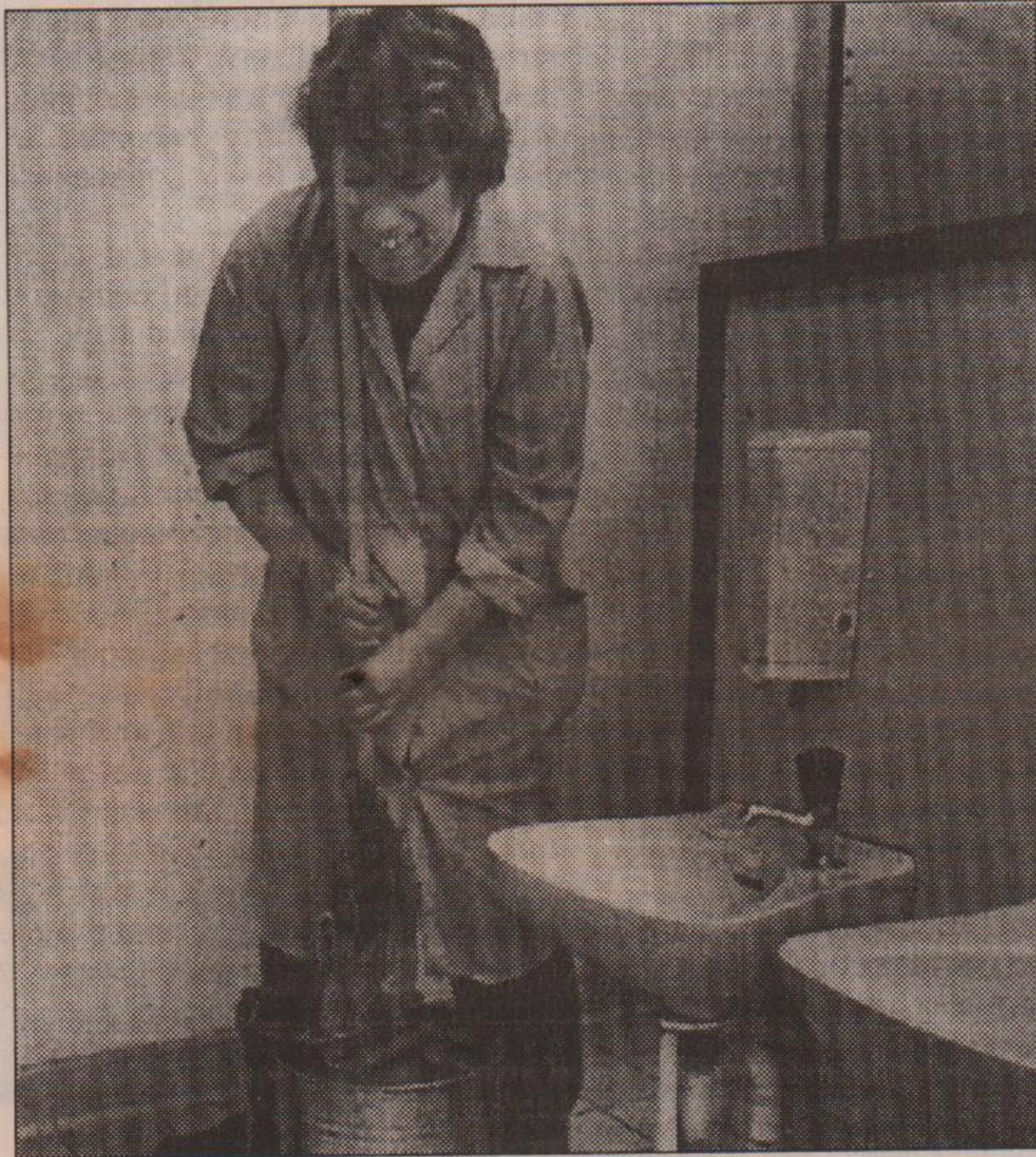
have joined the Tories in blaming bad parents and bad families for juvenile crime. It takes an ex-Chief Constable, John Alderson, to condemn Straw's moral cowardice for endorsing Victorian values and being fearful of breaking the consensus on crime and punishment. Education and health are next in New Labour's sights. They have already said they will allow grant-maintained schools to continue, and that they will introduce streaming within comprehensive schools. Now in another 'hard choice' they have agreed that maintenance grants for university education must be replaced by a system of loans which will be re-paid through extra national insurance contributions. The only students who will lose will be working class. Labour have yet to say what they will do about grants for

is a key part of the clinical team. How do you engage that service from a non-NHS employer whilst making sure they remain as a core part of the clinical team?' In other words, once you start privatising bits of the NHS, you have to privatise the lot.

New Labour is now as right-wing as Thatcher was when she came to office 17 years ago. Their 'hard choices' have targeted the working class, while bolstering the privilege of the middle class on whose votes they now depend. Hence Blair has made clear that those on £30,000 to £40,000 per year will not have to pay a higher rate of tax, and slapped down Clare Short when she implied that they could afford it. The fact is that New Labour can only fulfil this promise if they cut state welfare for the working class.

However, New Labour's attacks on the working class are not just about satisfying the middle class. They are an essential part of a programme to rejuvenate British capitalism and restore its competitive position. Blair is missing no opportunity to explain this to the British ruling class, or indeed to the American ruling class. Speaking to the New York banking elite in April, Blair said that New Labour would set corporation and income tax low enough to attract foreign investors, and that it would be on the side of wealth creators, innovators and entrepreneurs. He got his reward: an endorsement from George Soros, who made £1 billion out of currency speculation when the pound fell out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992.

Let Blair have the last word for New Labour: 'Jobs for life have gone... Working patterns are changing. There must be protection against abuses, but we do not want an inflexible labour market'. As always, it is what comes after the 'but' that marks out the real content of the sentence. Shackled trade unions, non-existent state welfare, Victorian practices in crime and punishment - these are what are necessary if there is not to be an 'inflexible labour market'. Many on the left have pinned their political hopes on New Labour winning the general election. We say that the only difference between New Labour and the Tories is that New Labour will be more sanctimonious as it puts the boot into the working class. That is why there is no choice between the two. ■



Low-paid workers are on the receiving end of 'hard choices'

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tuition fees - no doubt they too will be ended taking the chance of a university education even further away from the working class.

GP fundholding will remain under another name - GP commissioning - and now New Labour is beginning to agree that hospitals could be privately financed. They say that 'clinical provision' in such hospitals - that is, doctors and nurses - won't be privatised, although cleaning, portering and ancillary services would be. But as a Trust Chief executive pointed out, 'The domestic housekeeper

Howard's programme for increased imprisonment

NICKI JAMESON

Michael Howard's announcement in April of the government's latest gambit in the 'war on crime', otherwise known as the war with Labour for the 'law-and-order vote', has precipitated a storm of protest from judges, law-lords and, in particular, the retiring Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, who told the House of Lords: 'Never in the history of our criminal law have such far-reaching proposals been put forward on the strength of such flimsy and dubious evidence'.

The White Paper 'Protecting the Public' follows Howard's emotional 'no more half-time punishments for full-time crimes' speech at last year's Tory Party Conference. Its central planks are:

Automatic life imprisonment for a second conviction for a violent offence. Government publicity emphasises the use of this against attempted murderers and rapists but the list of crimes also includes robbery, wounding with intent and possession of a firearm with intent.

Mandatory minimum sentences of seven years for a third conviction for trafficking in a class A drug. Ecstasy is a class A drug and selling a tablet to a friend constitutes trafficking. Juvenile offences will count in the calculation, as will so-called 'spent' convictions.

Mandatory minimum sentence of three years for a third conviction for burglary. Probation officers estimate that this alone will add 9,000 to the prison population. Many of them will be heroin addicts who persistently commit small burglaries to pay for their habit.

The abolition of automatic remission. This is the 'half-time punishment' bit. Howard's outrage and horror when he made that speech were palpable and the listener could have been forgiven for not realising that the apparently liberal sentencing procedure he was attacking was introduced by the Conservative government in 1992.

Prisoners will in future serve the sentence specified by the courts, with a discount of only up to one fifth, earnable by 'good behaviour'. This is akin to jumping through hoops: 'For the first 12 months of a sentence... a prisoner would be



Michael Howard

able to earn a discount of six days a month by co-operation with the prison regime. Beyond 12 months the prisoner would be able to earn three days by co-operation, and a further three days each month for positive good behaviour and effective and diligent compliance with prison programmes related to his or her offending behaviour.'

Following the White Paper's launch, acting Director General of the Prison Service, Richard Tilt, was forced to make clear that the 12 new prisons the government anticipates building to accommodate prisoners sentenced as a result of these measures, are in addition to the 10 new gaols needed to cope with the way the prison population is already rising. *The Independent* estimates that the government will need to build a total of 40 new prisons over the next 25 years.

Despite the outcry, the White Paper is virtually certain to become law. It is telling that those who have opposed the draconian plans of the Conservative government's most vicious Home Secretary to date have not been Labour's opposition spokespersons in the Commons - they are far too scared of being branded 'soft on crime' to oppose the White Paper in any substantial way - but the Tories' own peers and the law lords.

Once the proposed measures are in place, sustained opposition is most likely to come from those directly affected. If prisoners' chances of early release are reduced to a minimum and dependent on prolonged grovelling, they will have considerably less to lose by demanding to be treated with dignity and be far more likely to stand up for their rights. ■

COMMUNIST FORUMS

William Morris: his life and work

LONDON

Sunday 9 June, 2.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1 (Holborn tube). £1/50p
Creche available on application.

MANCHESTER

Wednesday 10 July, 7.30pm
Friends Meeting House
Mount Street, Manchester

Tel: 0171 837 1688 for details

Scotland

No to school closures

MICHAEL TAYLOR

Victory! In Glasgow, the working class communities affected by the Labour council's school closures programme rose up in resistance and have saved 17 schools out of a hit-list of 22.

All over the city schools were occupied by parents and their supporters. Some sit-ins have run for 50 days, and campaign-

ers in the remaining schools are staying in over the summer to stop them closing. Netherpton Primary in Castlemilk has won the battle to stay open, but defiantly continues its occupation in solidarity with these schools.

The council has backed down in the face of this opposition - fearful of losing votes, no doubt. The good news is that they have already lost the few

they get because the people will not forget what they tried to do.

In Dundee, the priority of the organised trade unions is to defend Labour at all costs. That means ignoring, isolating and attacking those fighting to save schools. Despite our contingent of school campaigners forming the bulk of the annual May Day march, we were refused a speaker because we had chanted

against Labour. While the trades council marched, other local campaigners fought to save an AIDS ward from closure. They were not represented on the event, either.

So what is to be done? Faced with a labour and trade union movement of this kind, what does the working class do in order to defend its interests? This is a concrete question which socialists must answer clearly now. Can these present-day, small struggles be grafted onto a hostile and indifferent labour movement? Clearly not. Will a New Labour government

give the working class breathing space from 17 years of the Tories? Not a chance!

Schools campaigners across Scotland have pledged to be outside those schools that are left during the election to loudly dissuade voters from voting Labour. In Dundee, the Scottish Socialist Alliance will stand against the local Labour MPs who have a miserable record of backing school and hospital closures. We are beginning to see the small beginnings of a real working class movement prepared to organise and break with Labour. ■

Ireland:

Phoney elections offer little hope for peace

SARAH BOND

In the aftermath of the end to the IRA ceasefire, British government intransigence in the 'peace process' continues. As we go to press, the 30 May elections have yet to take place. These elections have been instituted by the government in order to determine who can participate in all-party talks to commence on 10 June. The Republican movement had initially hoped that it could unite with the SDLP in a boycott. But when the SDLP announced it would participate in the elections, Sinn Fein was forced to agree to contest them also.



the Republican movement's bargaining power at the conference table.

At the same time, Dublin and Westminster want to bolster the influence of moderate Nationalists. That is why the role of the forum to be established as a result of the May elections (and proposed by the Loyalists) has been diminished. It smacked too much of Stormont to be sold to the SDLP. Now the forum will take a very secondary role to the separate all-party talks involving the elected negotiators.

There remain two preconditions for Sinn Fein's participation in the talks following the elections. The first is the acceptance of the six Mitchell principles, which include abandoning

the armed struggle as part of a final settlement. Sinn Fein has indicated it will accept the principles, as long as Loyalist organisations do likewise. Naturally no similar demands have been made of the Loyalist parties contesting the elections, despite their often open links with death squads.

The second precondition is the resumption of the IRA ceasefire. So far, the IRA has indicated that it will not lay down its arms and its activities continue. A bomb was found under Hammersmith Bridge on 26 April which had failed to go off. It contained the largest amount of Semtex ever to be planted by the IRA and, according to the *Sunday Telegraph*, could have created traffic prob-

lems into the year 2000. On 18 April, the day before the second reading of the bill relating to the 30 May elections, a bomb exploded in an exclusive block of flats under refurbishment in The Boltons, Earls Court (where supermarket millionaire David Sainsbury owns a residence).

What has happened, you might wonder, to those categorical demands for decommissioning of arms as a precondition for talks? The IRA had made it clear that it would never accept such a condition. Ever flexible tactically when it comes to defending British imperialism, both Tory and Labour parties have therefore shifted away from this demand, for now at least. Instead they are concentrating on forcing Sinn Fein into elections which they hope will give a clear indication of the Republican movement's isolation, and then moving rapidly to the conference table where Sinn Fein will have to do battle with both the middle class Nationalists of the SDLP and the Loyalists in negotiating a settlement. This strategy, it is hoped, will wear down Republican resistance and reduce Nationalist demands. Meanwhile, the Nationalist working class will continue to suffer the poverty, discrimination and repression that has been their lot since Ireland's partition. British socialists must continue to support their struggle to rid their country once and for all of British imperialism, whether represented by Conservative or Labour. ■

Forensic lies

SARAH BOND

Scientific evidence plays an important role in securing convictions. It can be completely erroneous but very convincing to a lay jury. Remember the Birmingham Six, whose fingers government experts said bore traces of explosives - until it was discovered that the same traces could have come from playing cards. You might think that all that time and money spent on the May Inquiry and the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice following such miscarriages of justice was supposed to ensure that such errors couldn't happen again. You'd be wrong.

It has recently been announced that the machine used to test for Semtex at the Fort Halstead Forensic Explosives Laboratory has itself been contaminated with Semtex ever since it arrived at the laboratory in 1989. Serious doubts have been cast over at least twelve convictions of people accused of causing explosions as a result. The government waited for two months before making public the discovery: no doubt they were weighing up whether they could get away with a cover-up, and decided it would be safer to bring this particular skeleton out of the cupboard themselves.

Most of the cases in which the equipment was used relate to IRA operations in Britain. Whether convictions are quashed will depend upon the quality of other evidence. As for how the contamination occurred, it is claimed that the equipment was second-hand and that it must already have been contaminated. The problem was discovered during a routine check, after a control sample spilled onto the equipment. When the sample was tested after the spillage, it was found to contain RDX, the chemical which indicates the presence of Semtex. The government's response has been... to launch another inquiry. ■

do more than save a few pounds.

For the most part we must rely on collective action to provide a pension. Some, through no fault of their own, have endured long periods of unemployment not to mention war service, and the necessity to try and help elderly parents and other relatives.

We must counter with indignation the charge that we have been spendthrifts - for most, the opportunity would have been a fine thing. So let's unashamedly fight on for a pension on which we can live and which we've paid for during our working lives. We can't afford to wait for better times to make this demand.

Let's get back some of the loot stolen from us so that we're able to face the next cold spell feeling we have the means to provide for ourselves with more comfort and don't forget, as individuals we can do little but together we are formidable.

I've just received a report from our Blackpool conference which makes it clear we will not do any soft pedalling because the Labour Party fears to press for any demands that they believe might damage their electoral prospects. ■

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, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. *We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.*

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*

Education Notes:

Cutbacks and targeting - rationalising the rationing

SUSAN DAVIDSON

The Tory party is set to abandon comprehensive schooling and is attacking the very idea of local, collective and equal provision for all the children in a neighbourhood. The Parents' Charter, sent at a cost of £3 million to every household, gives open support for grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges, assisted places, voluntary schools, training credits, selective schools for the academically able and private education but does not even mention comprehensive schools which are 90% of secondary schools in Britain.



The system fails the poorest children

on working class education.

When a recent front page in the *Times Education Supplement* led with the headline 'Caribbean boys fall far behind', it was an argument for 'targeting'. Other recent research came to the conclusion that the most failing students are white, working class males from the lowest economic classes. Supporters of this report want 'targeting' for this group. Others, who have carried out investigations in Tower Hamlets in East London want to 'target' Bangladeshi girls as the least successful students.

What is this 'targeting'? It is merely a cover-up for the failure of overall educational provision for working class children. The TES headline should have read, 'Birmingham Education Authority Fails Black School Children'.

Failing teachers or failing system?

Contempt for the working class is what Chris (Bigga Classes) Woodhead is all about. In his recent report as Chief Inspector

of Schools he attacks teaching and teachers in three of the poorest areas in the country. He re-wrote the Ofsted Inspectors' report on Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Islington primaries to emphasise the negative. The overall findings are that nearly 80% of 7-year-olds are behind in reading and 40% of 11-year-olds are two years behind in these boroughs. This comes as no surprise to those who see the effects of multiple deprivation on young children, a point made in the original report but deleted in Woodhead's version: 'Most of these characteristics - bilingualism, poverty, pupil and staff turnover - were outside the control of the schools and where schools faced a combination of their task was a difficult one'.

Chris Woodhead is the ideological arm of the Tory offensive against the working class. The Ofsted report found a quarter of schools were not resourced effectively to teach national curriculum reading requirements, but Education minister Shephard said resources were 'not a problem'.

Such contempt for the achievements and difficulties of the children of the poor is nothing less than fear and loathing of the working class. Advice on how to teach reading to deprived children or which group to target for extra help is insulting from those who are only concerned to cut back on expenditure. So watch out for the combination of ideas and reforms of the coming Labour Party bosses Gordon Brown, Blunkett and Frank Field. They spell out an even harsher future for working class children in British schools. ■

Pensioners notes

RENE WALLER

The long, cold winter has not been easy for many pensioners to survive even if, like myself, they were in a residential home where those in charge did all they could to help. The plight of those dependent on carers calling to supply basic necessities must indeed have been very difficult - worrying too for the carers, paid and unpaid, often expected to cope where the resources available are inadequate.

Once again, many pensioners were forced to go to bed to keep warm and the only meals provided needed reheating to be edible. What happened when all the heating had been turned off to save money?

Well, spring has come at last, and I just wish I could be confident that the basic pension would be really adequate to cover essential needs and would be paid to everyone as a right.

On 17 April, there was a big lobby at Parliament to make our dissatisfaction clear, and once again Lewisham Pensioners were able to arrange a meeting with our local MPs in the House so that we could ask questions and make our position clear. But we are not relying on such action alone to achieve results. Once again we're out each Friday morning from 10.30 to 12.30 collecting signatures and support for our petition for proper funding for community care, and we hope to show such wide support that we cannot be ignored. To say that we are to blame for not preparing adequately for old age ignores the fact that few ever had enough to

Israeli terror in Lebanon



Israeli artillery

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

From 11 April for over two weeks in Operation Grapes of Wrath, Israeli artillery, F-16 fighter aircraft and Apache helicopter gunships rained death and destruction across Lebanon. Within days Tyre, Nabatiyeh and Sidon and their surrounding villages were emptied as 500,000 refugees fled north to the relative safety of the capital Beirut. But even Beirut's Muslim-inhabited southern suburbs were bombed, as were the city's power stations.

seven Israeli soldiers have been killed, but in the illegal Israeli-occupied southern security zone. Israel has repeatedly ignored UN resolutions to withdraw from Lebanon.

The real cause behind the Israeli butchery has nothing to do with Hizbollah. Clashes between Hizbollah and the Israeli security forces are a permanent feature of life in southern Lebanon. The Zionists time their murders to suit political ends and their clashes with Hizbollah are always a convenient pretext. In this latest case the reason was Prime Minister Peres' electoral

undertake such a large scale slaughter for exclusively party-political ends. They assented because the repeated devastation of Lebanon serves a much more fundamental Israeli/imperialist aim. Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri put it plainly: Israel does not want an effective economic competitor in the region, especially one aligned with Syria.

The so-called peace process has opened up the Middle East's markets to Israeli and imperialist capital. Israel has ambitions to emerge as an imperial economic force in the region and beyond. A reconstructed Lebanon could present a threat to Israeli hegemony. So its periodic devastation dovetails well with Zionist ambitions.

Whether Peres succeeds in winning the elections is immaterial to the Lebanese, Palestinian or Arab people as a whole. Between Peres's Labour and Netanyahu's Likud there are only tactical differences over how to obliterate the Palestinian people. For the moment Israeli and imperialist capital are backing Peres because of Labour's current role in the peace-process. The *Financial Times* notes that:

'Critical to many of Israel's biggest companies is the fact that the peace process has opened up new markets in south-east Asia, Africa, South America and the Middle East which were previously closed.'

Likud's opposition to the peace process could endanger these advantages for capital. Nevertheless, if Likud does win the elections, it will be forced to adjust to capital's needs. But neither party will pay any heed to the needs of the Palestinian, Lebanese or Arab people.

The great tragedy today is that the leadership of the Arab people has abandoned all opposition to Zionism and imperialism. Indeed, amidst the latest demonstration of Zionist militarism and terrorism, Yassir Arafat's PLO deemed it expedient to drop from its constitution a clause insisting that the 'liberation of Palestine...aims at the elimination of Zionism in Palestine.' This readiness to conciliate with Zionism and imperialism is what renders Israel free to butcher Lebanese and Palestinian alike.



Lebanese boy trapped under rubble after the Israeli attack on Qana

By 25 April 60 villages in south Lebanon had been obliterated and an unknown number of civilians murdered. In Qana, a premeditated Israeli attack slaughtered 109 unarmed men, women and children camped in a UN base. Repeated pleas by UN officials at the camp for a halt to Israeli fire were simply ignored. The economic damage to Lebanon, which is still recovering from civil war, is estimated at over £6bn. Clinton refused to condemn the slaughter, while Britain's Defence Minister Portillo supported Israel's butchery.

The Zionist establishment justified the slaughter as a legitimate response to Hizbollah rocket attacks into northern Israeli villages. This claim is a fraud. In none of Hizbollah's rocket attacks has a single Israeli civilian died. Seventy-

ambitions and Israel's regional imperial ambitions.

Peres timed the murder and destruction to coincide with his Labour Party campaign for the 29 May Israeli general election. He needed to bolster his tough, 'no nonsense', law-and-order, 'smash terrorism' image. Likud, Labour's main opposition, was moving ahead in the polls, especially as the Peres government had failed to prevent Hamas suicide bombings which have killed some 58 people recently. So, for Peres, murdering some hundreds of Lebanese and destroying their homes and villages was a cynical tactic to bolster his flagging electoral prospects.

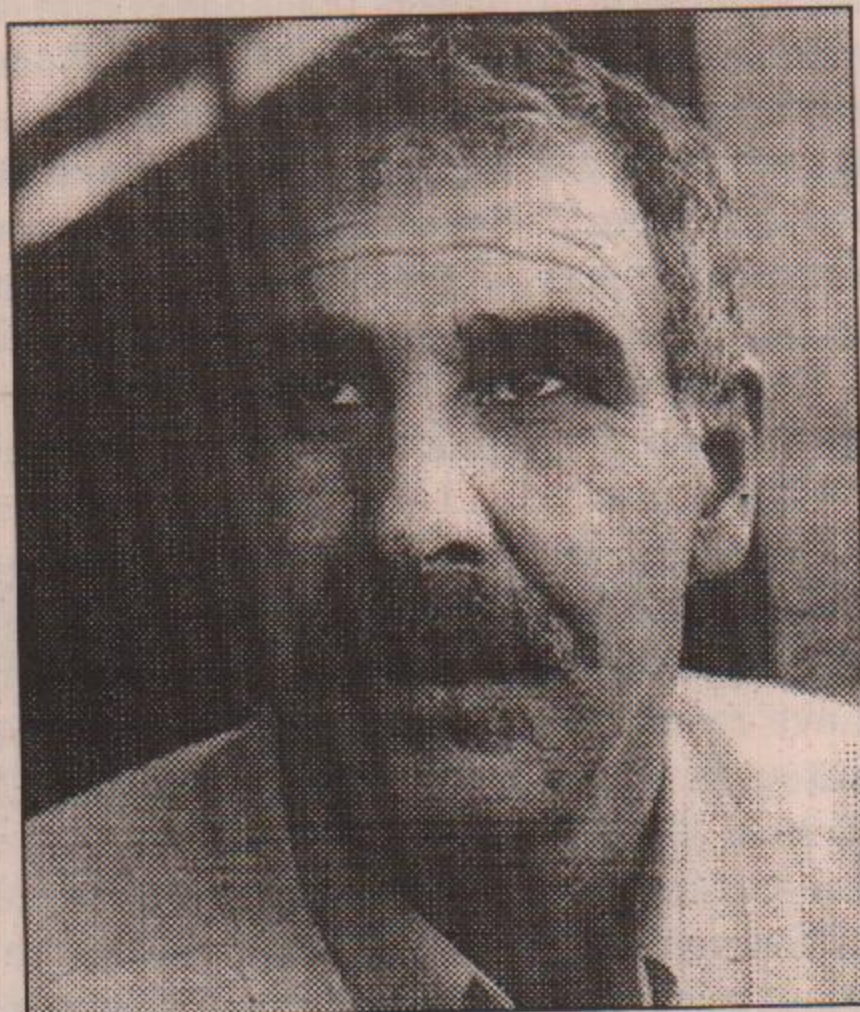
But neither the Israeli ruling class nor its senior adviser and sponsor US imperialism would allow Peres to

Release Kani Yilmaz

TREVOR RAYNE

About 2,500 mainly Kurdish people marched through the centre of London on 18 May to demand the release of the European Representative of the PKK Kani Yilmaz from a British prison. Kani Yilmaz was seized outside the Palace of Westminster by the Metropolitan Police on 26 October 1994 on his way to address a meeting of parliamentarians at their invitation. Last summer the British courts ruled that an extradition request lodged by the German state was in order. The appeal against extradition was heard on 20 and 21 May. No decision was announced; this will come within the following month.

The hearing was switched from the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand, where it would normally take place, to Woolwich Crown Court, which adjoins Belmarsh Prison where Kani Yilmaz is held. The court is accessible from the



Kani Yilmaz

prison by a linking underground tunnel. This manoeuvre, the British state said, was made for undisclosed security reasons. Of course, it served to prevent the Kurds and their supporters from having any public profile while the

hearing was underway and it defined Kani Yilmaz as a danger to security and a terrorist. Armed police guarded the entrance to the court and observers were meticulously searched. From such hostile treatment the appeal judges are expected to take their cue.

No mainstream press journalists attended the hearing, although all were contacted. Only the RCG/*Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, the Colin Roach Centre, the Irish Political Prisoners' Support Group, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and CARF joined the 18 May demonstration. The USA, Germany, Britain, Israel and Turkey have recently been discussing the continuing resilience of the Kurdish liberation movement and how to defeat it. They will accept nothing less than the military defeat of the PKK and the Kurdish people. Kani Yilmaz came to Britain to help find a peaceful and just end to the war in Kurdistan and for that he was seized and imprisoned. Even within gaol he is subjected to harassment and additional repression over such rights as even the use of telephones. Release Kani Yilmaz!

Cuts in Germany: lessons from Britain?

TREVOR RAYNE

Industrial output falling 1.7 per cent in the year to March 1996; total production expected to contract by 0.3 per cent in the first six months of this year; a growing proportion of investment going overseas as domestic investment shrinks relative to consumption, unemployment approaching four million. Is it Britain? No, Germany. As Britain was the first capitalist country to industrialise, so holding a mirror to the world of its future, German workers would be advised to learn from the past 20 years of British decay for they are embarking on what could be a similar journey.

Thatcher attempted to slice in Britain in a single year. A proposed two-year public sector pay freeze, cuts in sick pay and a reduction in local states' incomes combine with intentions to cut taxes on profits and high-income earners and make it easier for employers to sack people.

Like their French neighbours last winter, faced with similar attacks on public spending, many German public sector workers went on strike and protested in the streets. Kohl is adamant that the German government cannot retreat on the plans. They are justified as necessary for restoring competitiveness and, by reducing state borrowing, meeting the Maastricht criteria for European monetary union. The trade union lead-



German bus drivers on strike in protest at welfare cuts

German capitalism can no longer afford German workers' wages, social security, sick pay, pensions, job protection, restraints on working hours, holiday rights - in short, their standards of life. Chancellor Kohl announced plans to cut £32 billion from public spending, around 2 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and thus more than Margaret

ers and the opposition Social Democratic Party have been forced to move swiftly to criticise the plans. If German workers can take one vital lesson from the British experience, it is that the trade union leaders and the Social Democrats are the surest allies that German capital has in its effort to drive down workers' living standards.

German state persecutes anti-fascists

In 1993 a newly-built German prison was destroyed by a bomb, shortly before it was due to open. Three months later German special forces shot dead a member of the Red Army Faction, Wolfgang Grams and arrested his comrade Birgit Hogefeld, who was sentenced, on no evidence, to 20 years for the bombing. However, the state did not end its 'investigation' there and has continued to use the pretext of hunting down those responsible for the prison-bombing to harass anti-fascist and anarchist groups.

An undercover police agent is known to have infiltrated a Frankfurt anti-

fascist organisation, made friends with some of its members and sold one of them a motorbike and sidecar. Shortly afterwards he disappeared. The squat in which Andrea, the woman who bought the motorbike, lived was then raided several times by the police and the sidecar found to have bomb-making materials hidden in it. Andrea is now in hiding. Raids on her former home and those of her friends and comrades continue.

Other members of the anti-fascist group are constantly harassed and threatened with arrest, either for shielding Andrea or for participating in the bombing itself. They are regularly brought before a judge and questioned. Under Germany's Terrorism Act withholding information is punishable by six months' imprisonment. So far, six members of the group have been gaoled in this way; two are still in prison.

Letters of support can be sent via Infoladen, Leipzigerstraße 91, 60487 Frankfurt, Germany.

Turkey MAY DAY Cuba

Lessons of the May Day massacre

May Day is the international day of unity and struggle for proletarians of the world. In Turkey, it has a special importance since 34 people were killed during the 1977 May Day Rally after unidentified gunmen opened fire on the 500,000 strong crowd. May Day was made illegal after the 1980 military coup. But revolutionaries still took to the streets on each May Day. In 1989, a 19-year-old worker was killed when thousands stormed Taksim square, site of the 1977 events. In 1990 a young student was shot by the police and left paralysed. ELIF MUTLUAY reports on this year's bloody massacre.

From 1992, legal rallies sponsored by the trade unions have been permitted. The Turkish government calculated that maybe May Day would be turned into a 'peaceful' event under the watchful eye of the trade union bureaucrats. But year after year revolutionary and communist groups have continued to turn up in force, and May Day remains an event at the summit of the class war in Turkey. The growing influence of the revolutionaries on the workers has prompted some trade union leaders to say that the next year, they would take the workers 'on a picnic' instead of letting them attend the rallies. Such was their mood before May Day this year.

On the morning, tens of thousands started assembling, even though the day coincided with the middle of a long public holiday. It was obvious early on that the revolutionary groups would number at least 50,000. The unions had made their best effort not to bring their members to the rally, so only about 15,000 workers were behind union banners. Many joined the ranks of the revolutionary groups.

Early in the morning, the police provoked an incident and promptly opened fire. Two demonstrators were killed there and then. The mood became very tense, but most groups kept a disciplined and determined attitude and started the march. In the rally area, the union leaders refused to announce that two had been killed, and even refused to announce calls for blood required for the many wounded. Halfway through the rally, some revolutionary organisations occupied the speakers' platform. The union leadership immediately left the area, and most of the unions were unprepared for the turn in events. As the rally ended, and as the groups prepared to disperse, the police attacked the HADEP (pro-Kurdish) party, whose members were just arriving at the rally point, delayed by the huge size of the crowd and the lack of space. HADEP members acted in a disciplined manner and stayed put, but confusion started. Some groups started smashing the windows of banks, post offices and shops.

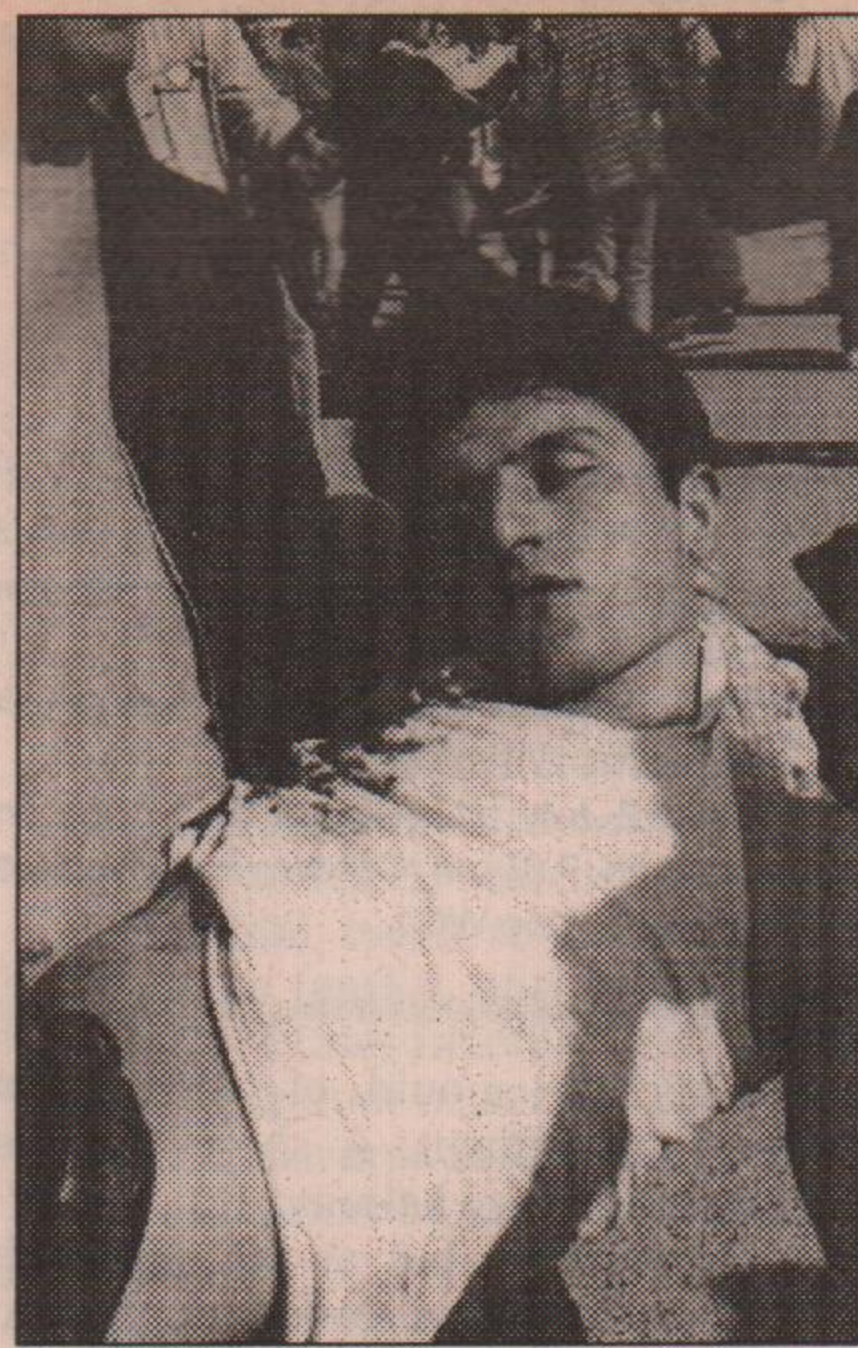
In the events that followed Kadkoy, the rally area, became a battle field. The police were shocked by the courage of the revolutionaries, because they were chasing the police in spite of the fact that the police used their guns. One more person died there, many were wounded with bullets. One person later died after being tortured by the 'anti-terrorism' branch. One more person is in a critical condition with a bullet wound in the head.

The bourgeoisie tried to use the fact that some windows were smashed to create a negative climate, to support their planned crackdown against revolutionaries. Their media



Tens of thousands of demonstrators celebrated May Day in Turkey

THANKS TO DHKP FOR PHOTOGRAPHS



Demonstrators carry away a wounded man after police opened fire.

kept using pictures of people smashing irrelevant objects, such as flowers, pointedly not referring to the fact that the police had killed some of the demonstrators.

On the day after the rally, Ridvan Budak, the leader of DISK - the legal trade union movement - stated that from now on, they would exclude anyone whose aims were not limited to 'a social state and democracy': that is, revolutionaries and communists.

Some of the very important weaknesses of the left groups in Turkey also became apparent. One was the fact that the groups did not use the May Day Rally to organise a counter-attack against the proposed austerity package to be announced on 6 May. Most groups, reporting in their papers after the May Day rally, talked mainly about their own numbers and how impressive their supporters were. The urge to advertise and to be

'media-impressive' is still strong in most groups.

Another important weakness was that most groups did not evaluate the climate correctly. Instead of trying to make May Day another step in forming ever closer links with other more organised sections of the working class, and pushing the trade union bureaucracy into an even tighter spot, they used their numerical superiority to occupy the platform, from which they were not prepared to say anything more than 'unite under our flag'.

The march also showed that many groups were not making enough effort to develop their supporters, and educate them in the basis of class war. Their supporters' rage was focused on the objects that represent capitalism, when it needed to be directed towards capitalism itself. Many of them were from persecuted Kurdish or Alawite minorities in the slum areas, and the influences they were under reflected their situation. The struggle against their historical injustices must be directed towards more clear class positions.

In fact, many of the Kurdish youth in the rally carrying PKK flags, shouted 'No to dirty war, no to dirty peace' demonstrating that their horizon was not limited to national liberation. Most of the revolutionary organisations proved that their structure and their members and supporters were ready for riot, but not for revolution.

Since these events, the Turkish bourgeoisie has intensified its attacks against revolutionaries. A young worker selling a legal leftist newspaper on the street was shot and killed, and many are still in custody. There are also some revolutionaries, almost certainly abducted by the police, who are as yet unaccounted for. The class war continues to develop. ■



A revolution worth fighting for

1 May was a national holiday here in Cuba. Celebrations were held in all 14 provincial capitals and in every municipality in Havana. The scale of the festivities reflects the improvement of conditions in Cuba. Due to the Special Period, these events have not been held since May 1992. This year's celebration marked both the close of the three-day CTC (Central Organisation of Cuban Trade Unions) Congress and International Workers' Day.

In Havana we were woken early by the crowds bustling past our house towards Revolution Square. In all the major roads around the area hundreds of thousands of people were already assembling to march into the square. We found the meeting area of the Union of Young Communists (UJC), where a group of young rap artists were entertaining the crowds waiting to join the procession. A truck full of young salsa musicians of the FEEM (Federation of High School Students) came by and began to coordinate their music with that of the UJC musicians. There was a real feeling of unity, a carnival atmosphere. The young people were dancing, chanting and waving flags. The air was electric with excitement and anticipation.

There were contingents of school students in the national uniforms, as well as young children from the Pioneers Centres. Also represented were workers from the various workplaces, soldiers, doctors, showing their support by waving leaflets and banners denouncing the illegal Helms-Burton Bill. Children were placed on our shoulders and space was made for the elderly. The crowd began a spontaneous chant of Viva Fidel!

Liam from London, who teaches English at Havana University, was standing opposite the platform of government officials. He said, 'I watched the crowds streaming past for nearly an hour. Everybody was waving and chanting out Fidel's name. It was an amazing display of love for their commander.'

In a stand opposite the statue of Jose Marti, hundreds of international representatives and journalists participated with equal enthusiasm. They were there not only to show solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, but also to take the news back to the people of their own countries, to spread the message of the Cuban people's courage and determination and their ever-strong support for President Fidel Castro shown by the impressive turnout.

We stopped to watch as a procession of thousands of UJC cyclists whizzed through the square. They were followed by an orderly parade of army officers and farmers on horses. There was also a large contingent of the Cuban Olympic sports

teams and many other contingents besides, including GALEES (Action Group for Free Expression of Sexual Choice). There were also many groups of families and friends who had chosen to pass their holiday marching to the square in a show of support for their socialist revolution.

Before the front of the procession had entered the square, two speeches were made from the platform beneath the statue of Jose Marti which rises above the square.

The first speech was by Victoria Velazquez, First Secretary of the UJC. Then followed a speech by Pedro Roos Real, General Secretary of the CTC. Bethan, a student from West Sussex teaching English in Matanzas was there: 'Following the speeches, Fidel himself spoke a few words. The crowds instantaneously became static, each individual poised, alert and the square fell silent. The force of Fidel's words were truly savoured, captivating his audience. Despite the difficult economic times and increased pressure from the US Helms-Burton Bill, people still responded to the call for 'Socialismo' with 'o muerte!' (socialism or death).

As we approached the statue of Jose Marti, the crowd became ecstatic. Everybody wanted to see Fidel and the other government officials. At the end of the march, everyone rose and the words of the *Internationale* rang round the square as the people swayed, their arms raised and hands joined.

Once through the square, the people walked on to the buses and trucks which had been provided to bring them to the celebration. There was very little military presence and no disturbances. Contrary to US propaganda, participation in the May Day celebration was voluntary and no record of attendance was made.

It was an amazing experience and we shall never forget the enthusiasm and elation of the people who participated. After 37 years, Castro still commands the admiration and respect of the Cuban people, who are more than ever determined to resist the US onslaught. One million people, half the population of the city of Havana, returned to their homes, having shown that they still consider their socialist revolution worth fighting for.

Susan and Helen Yaffe

CUBA VIVE!

CTC defends the power of Cuban workers

At the end of April, the Central Organisation of Cuban Trade Unions (CTC) held its 17th congress. It took place in the context of five hard years of the Special Period since the last congress, and with Cuba facing new US aggression and harsh sanctions imposed by the Helms-Burton Act. The congress was preceded by discussions in every workplace on the theses put forward by the CTC.

The workers' delegates discussed the diverse labour methods that have been implemented during the Special Period, many on the initiative of the workers themselves and approved by workers' parliaments, and the problems that have arisen and methods of dealing with them. Concern was raised on the effects of tourism, and its associated risks - prostitution, drug abuse, health problems and even Mafia activity - and the delegates reaffirmed their commitment to fight even harder against this.

The congress discussed the problems of food shortages, the need to raise productivity in agriculture, greater vigilance against the theft of foodstuffs (with harsher penalties for these offences) and concern about intermediaries who earn large amounts from the existence of farm-

ers' markets. The main concerns were the need for greater efficiency and quality. Due to the Special Period, the lack of spare parts, raw materials, fuels and hard currency have meant that all state enterprises have had to increase efficiency, resulting in lay-offs and restructuring, increased self-employment, unemployment, lack of choices for work and depressed wages. This has given rise to some inequalities, but a new tax system as well as social security and rationing of basic foodstuffs attempt to limit these inequalities, along with vigorous efforts to find new employment.

The congress confirmed its support for all the measures taken in the current difficulties, rejecting neoliberal formulas and shock therapies, and committed itself to ensuring no

section of the population or workforce is left unprotected.

Fidel Castro, speaking at the end of the congress, praised the workers for their tremendous efforts in overcoming the worst difficulties of the Special Period, bringing about a recovery in the national economy and their steadfast determination to become more efficient and improve labour discipline. Restating that 'not a single step was taken without consulting the people, especially the workers', Fidel commended the people's spirit of solidarity and their initiatives.

In the political declaration of the congress, the CTC stated: 'We will defend at any price our national independence, socialist ideals and the political power of the Revolution, which is the power of the workers.'

David Howarth



Delegates at the CTC 17th Congress

Cuba Solidarity Campaign AGM

With Miami right-wingers and the US intensifying their aggression towards Cuba and the introduction of the Helms-Burton Act, the need to step up political solidarity with the Cuban revolution has never been more pressing. Why then did the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, at its AGM on 28 April, vote against a national demonstration on the streets of London in October?

The proposal for a demonstration was a composite of motions from three local CSC groups - South London, Sheffield and Lincoln - and Rock around the Blockade activists. The counter-proposal put forward by the Executive's Annual Plan for 1996 was a fiesta in July, to mark the sending off of the material aid in the Containers for Cuba. This fiesta, whose main attractions are billed as music, comedy, magic and food, was the only serious mass activity proposed by the Executive for the rest of the year.

The supposedly troubled finances of the campaign during the past year - blamed by the Executive on last year's demonstration - were used to justify its low-key plans. However, as the treasurer's report to the AGM revealed, the CSC's total income last year was £101,783.58. The entire October Week of Action, of which the demonstration was part, cost just £3,886. Eventually treasurer Sue Grey admitted that the

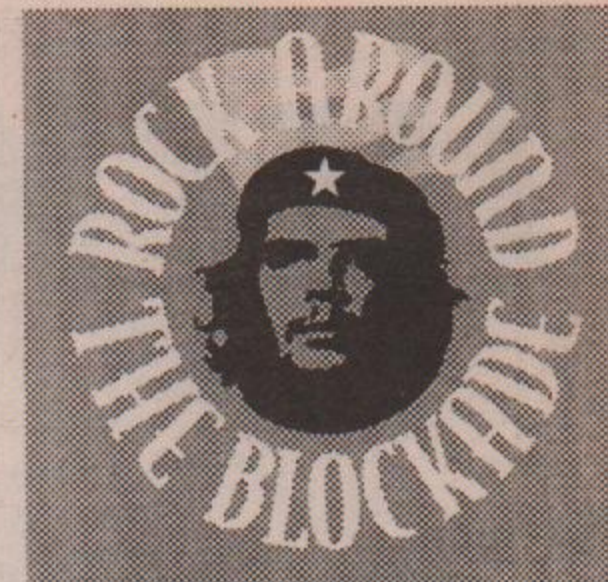
demo itself cost about £1,500, with £5,000 spent advertising the Week of Action. That is still only 6.4 per cent of the total income being spent on what the CSC itself said was the largest pro-Cuba demonstration in Britain since the 1960s. And besides, as Brian Lyons (Sheffield CSC) pointed out, a solidarity campaign raises money in order to hold political events - not the other way round. Last year, when finance was not at issue, the Executive still vociferously opposed the call for a demonstration. Then, they were defeated. This year they were better prepared.

The shift by the CSC executive away from political campaigning in defence of Cuba's socialist revolution to a concentration on parliamentary lobbying around the issue of 'national sovereignty' reflects its concern to make the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's principal base the labour and trade union movement. This narrow concern means that a national demonstration - capable, last

year, of bringing thousands of ordinary people onto the streets in a show of solidarity with Cuba - is denigrated in the Annual Report because the trade unions didn't support it. This year, in addition, one suspects that the executive is keen that all significant political activity in support of Cuba should cease by the autumn because they anticipate a political activity of far more significance to them and their allies - a General Election. To put lobbying for the Labour Party before campaigning for Cuba is sectarianism of the highest order. Particularly given that, as CSC Vice-Chair Jude Woodward revealed, Labour appears far more reluctant to promote British trade with Cuba than the Tories!

These narrow and sectarian interests are imposed on the grassroots activists and local groups who want to see more, not less activity in solidarity with Cuba through an undemocratic voting structure lifted straight from the

Rock around the Blockade



An active two months of campaigning mean Rock around the Blockade has succeeded in raising £2,000 towards the £6,000 we need to buy a sound system and lights for a mobile disco for young people in Cuba in solidarity with the work of the Union of Young Communists (UJC). Rock around the Blockade will also be taking a brigade to Cuba from 26 December 1996 to 9 January 1997 to deliver the sound system, work with young Cubans on a UJC agricultural camp and learn more about the realities of the Cuban Revolution.

Activities have included a material aid collection in north London and stalls in Manchester, Blackburn, Birmingham and Slough. We have supported anti-Asylum Bill demonstrations and sold t-shirts and badges at May Day events and the showing of the film *Gay Cuba*. A successful sponsored slim by two supporters in Blackburn raised £178 for the campaign. In London, a very successful social was held on 11 May with superb performances from bands The Other Brothers and Itch, which raised £800. We are planning another social for July. If you know of bands who would play at a benefit, please let us know. In Manchester, we attended the Moss Side Carnival in May and will be at the Chorlton Unity Festival with a stall on 6 July. On 7 July, Rock around the Blockade will join the Manchester-Blackpool sponsored cycle ride.

Campaign meetings are held around the country. In London, fortnightly meetings have included discussions on the history of Cuban revolution, democracy in Cuba and Raul Castro's address to the Fifth Plenum of the Cuban Communist Party (see p7). Future educationals are planned on Chile, health care in Cuba and other topics. We also try to include some basic Spanish lessons in the meetings for all those hoping to go on the 1996 brigade.

We have a busy programme of activities over the summer. If you would like take part in the 1996-97 brigade to Cuba in December and/or show your solidarity with Cuba - then get involved!

Campaign meetings

Manchester: Wednesday 17 July 7.30pm, upstairs at the Beer House, Rochdale Road, Angel Street.

London: fortnightly on a Monday, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube). Next meetings - 10 June, 24 June, 8 July, 22 July.

Other events

Saturday 1 June: petitioning against the US blockade. Meet 3pm, steps of St Martin's-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London.

Saturday 29 June: leafleting at Coin Street Gran Fiesta, Waterloo, London.

Friday 12 July: showing of *Gay Cuba* and discussion. 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Sunday 14 July: Cuba Solidarity Campaign 'Cuba Lives' free fiesta. 2-7pm Highbury Fields, Islington, N1

Sunday 28 July: Public meeting: Remember Moncada! Defend the Cuban Revolution. 3pm, Conway Hall (as above). Speaker from Cuban Embassy (invited).

Material aid

Rock around the Blockade is supporting the CSC's Container Appeal for Cuba which culminates with the fiesta in July. All material aid must be collected and packaged by 30 June. Educational and material aid is needed, but we are collecting in particular for three projects.

The Federation of Cuban Women is aiming to provide a toy for every child in Cuba.

The Carlos Fonseca School for the Visually Impaired in Ciego de Avila urgently needs spectacle frames, braille writing equipment and paper, white canes, pencils, pens and paper.

The Joven Club in Ciego de Avila is part of a computer youth project run by the UJC. 11-year-old Katia told Rock around the Blockade supporters who visited the club, 'I feel so good working on the computer with my friends here', but stressed the club's chronic shortages. They need computers (including parts) - 286s, 386s, 486s; computer manuals, especially on Visual Basic and Turbo Pascal; software; printers - Epson LQ 1000, Epson LQ 1070 and Epson 1170; floppy discs - 5 1/4" and 3 1/2"; pens; paper; pencils; chalk; grammar books; English/Spanish dictionaries; tools such as soldering irons and solder.

We would also welcome work clothes - especially boots and gloves (not second hand) - for agricultural workers.

If you can help with any of these, please contact us at the address above.

A Rock around the Blockade pamphlet of eyewitness accounts; from the 1995-96 Nuestro Tiempo brigade to Cuba and interviews with Cuban communists will be out in June. Contact the campaign for details.

Hannah Caller

For more information about Rock around the Blockade and the brigade to Cuba, write to: Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel: 0171 837 1688. We can also be reached via e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk.

Wearing badges is not enough... so buy the t-shirt too!



The classic campaign t-shirt - high-quality Fruit of the Loom white cotton, red and black design of Che Guevara and 'Viva Cuba' on the front and 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back - is still available for only £7 inc p+p. XL only.

'Rage against the US blockade' Che Guevara badges are 50p.

I would like to order _____ t-shirt(s) and _____ badge(s) and enclose £ _____ (cheques/POs to Rock around the Blockade) Donation to campaign £ _____ Total £ _____

Name _____ Address _____

Return to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

Greg Scott

Cuban communists prepare for battle

The Communist Party of Cuba is preparing to do ideological and political battle against a growing internal threat to the revolution. The very measures that Cuba has been forced to adopt in defence of the social gains of the Revolution are producing class forces hostile to collectivism and egalitarianism. EDDIE ABRAHAMS comments on a 23 March speech to the Communist Party Central Committee, where Raul Castro, head of the Cuban army, sets out to: 'examine the political and social situation in the country in order to derive from this analysis the ideological work our Party has to carry out during these times of the special period.'



Raul Castro

This work is of particular urgency. While the Cuban economy has made a significant recovery, huge problems remain. These are exacerbated by the continuing US blockade, with the latest Helms-Burton Act amounting to a 'criminal plan of action to make our people surrender out of starvation and disease.' The US has adopted a twin-track strategy against Cuba. 'Track One is the blockade, seeking economic asphyxiation. Track Two is the idea of internal subversion, to eat away at the country from within.' In the coming period US attempts to 'sow confusion' and 'create discontent', and 'disorder' will increase.

The Cuban Revolution is engaged in 'life or death battles' which will only be won by convincing the working class, in practice, that only socialism and not a return to capitalism can solve the economic and social problems they face.

The social situation

The collapse of the socialist bloc and the tightening US blockade has created enormous economic and social dislocation. 'Hardships continue to affect the vast majority of our people' with shortages of foodstuffs, power supplies, medical equipment, transport and an 'almost total absence' of clothes and footwear, and an aggravation of the housing problem.

The resulting widespread discontent has created fertile ground for the activities of anti-socialist forces. Even more dangerous, however, is the development of a social class whose form of economic production makes it absolutely hostile to socialism. In the current world situation:

'the only form of socialism possible in Cuba today (requires) us to assimilate such difficult factors as mercantile commercial relations and even certain elements of capitalism, and to reinsert ourselves into the world economy dominated by the monopolies of the imperialist powers.'

To sustain economic production the state, besides encouraging imperialist investments, has permitted the development of internal private production in the country and small-scale private production and trade in the towns. Thus has emerged the 'strata of nouveau riches' consisting of prosperous farmers, sections of the urban self-employed and their intermediaries.

Alongside the rise of this class there has been a relative shrinkage of the working class - due to a partial or complete closing down of activities in state enterprises related to production and services. In the countryside a large portion of the agricultural working class from all state-run sugar plantations and most of the state



One million Cubans march to denounce the Helms-Burton Act on May Day

farms has gone into workers' cooperatives. In addition today more than 200,000 people now make their living through self-employment. This is an official figure. The real figure is much higher.

Raul Castro points out that:

'The psychology of private farmers and self-employed workers in general, because of the nature of their work, which is carried out on an individual basis or in conjunction with the family, and because of the source of their income - private trade of the product or service they render - tends towards individualism and is not a source of socialist consciousness.'

This new proto-capitalist class can become a vanguard of counter-revolution, to which end it will ruthlessly exploit popular discontent. Individual economic production 'can lay the foundations for the formation of groups, organised associations and actions which are divorced from the state', and 'can constitute the breeding ground for the subversive work of the enemy.'

The work of this stratum, in alliance with corrupted state officials and international capital, is facilitated by the negative by-products of current economic policy which permeate society as a whole. A 'loss or reduction of work for hundreds of thousands' and 'an increase in unemployment among young people' produces crime and corruption. The decriminalisation of dollar possession 'allows those who receive this money to achieve a better economic position, which implies an element of inequality'. The search for dollars and the very presence of capitalists in

Cuba undermines socialist values as 'bribery and corruption are part and parcel of business under capitalism'.

Whilst the development of tourism has tremendous significance for Cuba's economic revival it 'has an undeniable (negative) influence... since (tourists) from capitalist countries bring with them ideas about consumer society.' The 'appearance of *jineterismo* (prostitution) is the most visible and humiliating' side-effect of tourism.

'These material difficulties have been augmented by feelings of depression and political confusion resulting from the disappearance of socialism in Eastern Europe and above all, by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and a parallel increase in psychological warfare mounted by the major superpower in a unipolar world.'

However without imperialist assistance, the internal counter-revolution would be helpless. By means of money, material aid, gifts, favours and promises, the US hopes to create an organised political movement against Cuban socialism. The US government, foreign capitalist firms, international agencies, various Non-Governmental Organisations and religious missions are acting as a 'Trojan horse to foment division and subversion here'. They seize on difficulties and popular discontents to spread capitalist propaganda, encourage the internal opposition, bribe it, organise it and extend its influence.

This work amounts to a veritable 'ideological offensive' against socialism in the intellectual, educational and health fields and 'among young people and sectors they consider

most vulnerable'. The political and ideological struggle against these emergent anti-socialist forces is the critical task of the day. 'Never before' says Raul Castro, 'has there been such a need to raise the Party's ideological work to the levels of the country's combat missions.'

The ideological battle

In their work Cuban communists begin from a position of strength, for:

'Without any doubt, US imperialism has failed to transform the profound economic crisis the country has been experiencing for over five years into

with dollars and create some rich people. However:

'With the profits gained from the sale of \$5,000 worth of products in our hard currency stores, we obtain the resources needed to purchase the powdered milk required to provide one litre of milk for one day for 10,000 children.'

The shortage of hard currency is one of the main problems for the national economy, therefore 'it is of the utmost importance to increase our exports of sugar, nickel, tobacco, seafood, citrus fruit, medications, coffee and rum etc.' Some individuals will benefit disproportionately from this. But it is legitimate 'to bring in hard currency with the greatest possible profit margin, for use in solving the people's problems.'

However, and here lies the decisive importance of the Party's ideological campaign: defending working class interests whilst having to 'adopt certain elements of capitalism' and 'reinsert ourselves into the world economy' requires a permanent and 'tenacious struggle' to tightly control anti-socialist forces and compel them to 'strictly abide by the law'. Such control can only be exercised by the working class itself, organised on a mass basis on the principles of socialist democracy and through its exercise of state power. Whilst the 'market is part of the solution', the 'national economic plan is the key'. And this plan cannot function 'without the pre-eminence of the state that guarantees it'.

But, as socialists have always maintained, the socialist state does not stand above or separated from the working class. It can function as a working class state only on the basis of mass popular participation and mass political organisation. Without the mass of people organised as a state force it will be impossible to defend the collective interests of the working class against the predatory individualism of the anti-socialist forces.

Thus the campaign against them must take place first and foremost in peoples' assemblies, in the workers' parliaments where millions of workers will have 'the chance to reflect on and discuss the issues'. Such participation will ensure the ideological struggle and concrete measures necessary to defend socialism become a 'mass movement, a work of the masses'. This movement will be a movement of the people, not of the privileged minority. The minority will not be allowed to exert any influence over it. It will 'exclude the minority of rich people who serve the enemy, the annexationist traitors, the troublemakers'.

At the head of this movement must be the working class organised in a political party:

'As a result of the detailed analysis carried out, now more than ever, the main objective of all of us has to be working so that, in the midst of the changes and the old and new problems we are facing, the leading role of the party is preserved. Everything the enemy does on the ideological front is aimed at weakening just such a guarantee of the scientific and at the same time revolutionary and heroic leadership of our people.'

Such are the terms in which the Cuban communists are setting out to defend socialism. The least we can do here to support their struggle is to step up our anti-capitalist work and our activity in support of Cuba. ■



'In a society based on things can change'

Assata Sha

former Black Panther, spea



Above: Assata Shakur in Havana
Below: the Black Panthers set up free food programs



FREE MUMIA ABU JAMAL!

The United States denies it has political prisoners but it is a very shallow denial and I don't even think they believe it. When I was in prison they kept me in solitary confinement for two years, saying the reason was my political beliefs. There are more than 100 political prisoners in US prisons, in the worst prisons, many in maximum control units.

Prisons are becoming the new plantations. They are turning prisons into factories with slave labour. They have reconstituted the chain-gang. You have prisoners working by the side of the road, doing hard labour. You have more and more people being sent to prison. Prisons are the number one industry in the United States. One third of young black men between 18 and 30 are in prison or under the supervision of the criminal justice system. It is tantamount to genocide. Sixty per cent of those in prison are people of colour and the same applies to the death penalty.

I make an urgent appeal to anyone listening to struggle for the freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the only political prisoner currently on death row. His case is one of the most naked cases of injustice in the United States and it is important that he receives as much international support as possible. There is a campaign for him to have a new trial and they are asking people to send letters to Janet Reno, US Attorney General, asking for a new trial and an investigation of human and civil rights violations in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. It is very important that people write letters and campaign diligently to save this man's life.

Send letters to: Janet Reno - Attorney General, US Department of Justice, Washington DC 20530, USA.

FRFI: How did you come to be in Cuba?

Assata Shakur: Well, I have admired Cuba since I was at college. I read everything about Cuba that I could get my hands on. So, when I escaped from prison, my first idea was Cuba. But it took me five years to get here. I couldn't write beforehand and say 'Dear Fidel, I would like to come to your country'. I just had to come and, luckily, people here knew who I was and they gave me the status of a political refugee.

I chose Cuba not only because of its politics but because of its closeness to the United States, so my family and friends could come and visit me.

You escaped from prison in the United States. You were a political prisoner.

I was a political prisoner. I was a political activist since the mid-1960s in a number of community organisations struggling for social justice. I went back to college. I became involved in the student movement and in the movement to end the war against the Vietnamese people and to stop the United States intervention, not only in Vietnam but in south east Asia in general, in the world in general. I later became a member of the Black Panther Party, which at that time was targeted by the FBI, by J Edgar Hoover.

There was a programme - we didn't know anything about it - called COINTELPRO, the Counter-Intelligence Programme. Under that programme the government used every means at its disposal to 'neutralise' political activists. I was in the Harlem branch of the Black Panther Party and the first major move against us was the arrest of 21 of our leaders in what became known as the New York Panther 21 Conspiracy Trial. The charges were insane. They were charged with conspiracy to blow up department stores at Easter and there was one very strange charge that no-one could understand - still nobody understands it - they were charged with conspiracy to blow up the botanical gardens. We couldn't figure out the basis of that. How do you defend yourself against conspiring to blow up flowers? But insane as it was, each Panther was given \$100,000 bail. Most could not raise it so they stayed in prison for more than two years. When they finally went to trial it was one of the longest trials in New York City history but the jury acquitted them all in less than 45 minutes and many jury members actually apologised to those who were on trial and said 'We are really sorry you have had to go through this injustice'.

The Black Panther Party came under attack on every level. In Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, the police raided and attacked Black Panther Party offices. They were trying to destroy the Black Panther Party and they would shoot first and ask questions later.

They also used many divide and conquer tactics. They tried, for example, to pit the Black Panther Party and other organisations, like the United Slaves in Los Angeles or the

ASSATA SHAKUR was a political activist in the United States in the 1960s and '70s. As a member of the Black Panther Party, she was targeted by the FBI under its counter-intelligence programme, COINTELPRO. She was framed for the murder of a New Jersey State Trooper and sentenced to life imprisonment. In 1979 she escaped from prison and since 1985 has been in political exile in Cuba. DAVID YAFFE spoke to her there on behalf of FRFI.

Black Stone Rangers in Chicago, against one another, and actually tried to make them fight one another. Inside the organisations they tried to fuel disputes and eventually in the Black Panther Party they targeted Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton and wrote false letters to Huey signed by Eldridge, and vice versa. It had very serious consequences. Eventually there was a split between the so-called East Coast or Eldridge Cleaver faction and the West Coast/Huey Newton faction.

The FBI dominated everything. There was no thing too dirty for them. They would call your landlord and say you were selling drugs; they would call your employer and say you were stealing from the job; they would call your lover and say 'I just saw your wife go into a motel with another man'. They did everything to assassinate people's characters. And they also used outright assassination. Many Panthers lost their lives and in one case, that of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, they actually had a police agent drug them, the police went in and shot everybody, killed Fred Hampton, killed Mark Clark, and said it was a shoot-out. The ballistics later proved that all the shots were going from outside to inside and it was an FBI-directed assassination.

The other thing they did was to falsify charges against people. This happened in my case. Originally they broke down my door, charging me with aiding and abetting and harbouring a fugitive. Even though I was never formally charged with that, they raided my house, took everything out of my house, and I was forced to go underground. Then the FBI systematically started to leak story after story to the press, accusing me of every incident a woman was involved in, and some stuff that just men were involved in - they tried to say that I dressed up as a man. It was a total character assassination but it created the conditions where any police in the United States could blow my head off and be justified. It wouldn't be a human being they'd be shooting; it was this monster, this terrorist, this horrible creature.

In 1973 I was captured. I was shot, once with my hands in the air and once in the back. I was left to die. They kept coming back and saying 'Is she dead yet? Is she dead yet?' I was finally taken to hospital and kept for four days incommunicado, questioned, interrogated and tortured, even though I was paralysed. Finally, there was a demonstration in front of the hospital, because it was clear what was happening inside, and two weeks later they moved me to another hospital, with another set of guards. I was accused of killing a New Jersey State Trooper and the people guarding me were New Jersey State Troopers, so you can imagine what that was like.

You had been involved in community politics. The Black Panther Party was organising health care and food for people.

Even though what the Black Panther Party was doing was a free breakfast programme for children, free health clinics, free clothing drives, struggling to get decent housing for people, the whole media image was of this terrible, terrorist Black Panther Party with guns, waging the armed struggle.

We were certainly convinced that people who are oppressed, no matter where, had the right to liberate themselves by whatever means they deemed necessary and we thought that, given the nature of the 1960s and 1970s, it would be criminal to attack armed struggle. When the Vietnamese people were being napalmed and bombarded, there was no way we could say 'We're for struggle but we're not for armed struggle'. And, given the violent nature of imperialism, we took the position not only that armed struggle was legitimate but that we had to fight to defend ourselves.

People were suffering police brutality on a daily basis in the black communities, the Puerto Rican communities, the poor communities. The police are like an occupying army and we said, 'We have the right to defend ourselves. We can't just be permanent victims.' And we called

justice,

Shakur

Views from exile in Cuba

ourselves the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence. But that got all blown out of shape by the media who accused us of being the aggressors and the police of being the victims.

In some ways, though, the most dangerous thing you were doing was showing that people didn't have to tolerate the appalling conditions of US capitalism. It was possible to organise health care and so on outside of the system. And isn't that why they want to destroy Cuba as well? Cuba itself has shown that there is an alternative way, that people can organise their own situation.

That's a good analogy. For example, when I came to Cuba, I thought everybody was going to be walking around in fatigues! My image of Cuba was so shaped by what the media had projected and when I got here I saw all these people who were laid-back and there was nothing military about Cuba. It was incredible how brainwashed even someone politically committed to Cuba was.

The first thing you come into contact with in Cuba is the humanness of people and the thing that hits you hardest is all these open doors, in a big city, with millions of people. You'll never find an open door in New York or Chicago; everybody has a million locks on their doors and they are all shut. That openness, that peace, was something I've never known in any other place I've been. And that kind of commitment to human beings.

People here don't have a lot of material things but they have enough to live on and there are not these huge contrasts between huge \$30,000 a month apartments, on the one hand, and people eating garbage, on the other. Even in the Special Period we don't see the kind of poverty in Cuba that we see in the United States. I've never seen people here sleeping in doorways and parks; I saw it every day in the United States. So, even if you don't have a lot of resources, it's how you distribute the resources that's important. Cuba is not perfect, Cuba is not fantasy-land, but it's a place where people are committed to making a better life for everybody, which is different to most of the rest of the world.

Most governments right now are committed to a more selfish agenda, making rich people richer, a more racist agenda, a more sexist agenda. Cuba is threatening to them because if one, two or three places exist and say 'Wait a minute, you can live another way', then people may say 'We have a choice'. I think that one of the things that happens in the United States and places like it is that people believe that this *is* the way life is. That everything *has* to be unequal. That everything *has* to be violent. That it *has* to be resolved in terms of the powerful having control. So when you live in a place like Cuba you see that things don't have to be like that; there *can* be another way.

As a black woman you have suffered double oppression throughout your life. Would you like to say something

about racism and about the oppression of women in the United States and then any points you'd like to make about Cuba.

My whole life in the United States was shaped by racism and sexism, so at a pretty young age I decided I had to struggle against them and to dedicate my life to the struggle against them. I still feel that way. When I came to Cuba I didn't know what to expect. I had no idea. It was clear that a revolution was not a magic wand that you wave and all of a sudden everything is transformed. The first lesson I learned was that a revolution is a process, so I was not that shocked to find sexism had not totally disappeared in Cuba, nor had racism, but that although they had not totally disappeared, the revolution was totally committed to struggling against racism and sexism in all their forms. That was and continues to be very important to me. It would be pure fantasy to think that all the ills, such as racism, classism or sexism, could be dealt with in 30 years. But what is realistic is that it is much easier and much more possible to struggle against those ills in a country which is dedicated to social justice and to eliminating injustice.

The difference now between Cuba and the United States is like night and day. In the US you have all the major candidates running on a basically racist agenda. Everything is in code-words: 'We are against affirmative action' means 'We are against blacks and Puerto Ricans'; 'We are against immigration' means 'We don't want anybody to come into the United States unless they are white and have a university degree'. That is the acceptable kind of immigrant; all others are unacceptable unless they serve some kind of political purpose. The code-words are endless but they all mean racism, privilege and sexism.

So you think that Cuba has a social system that eventually through struggle will wipe out racism and sexism?

Yes, I think so. You cannot wipe out racism or sexism unless you have some kind of system that guarantees basic human rights, and food and shelter, and is humanistic. Because in a dog-eat-dog society, with a dog-eat-dog philosophy, you have a dog-eat-dog way that people interact and right now in the United States you have a system with a high level of technical sophistication, a high level of technology, of industrial capacity, and you have some very barbarian-thinking people. It's like cavemen with computers. The only way you can completely eradicate racism or sexism is to have a society which is very well-founded in social justice.

You are an internationalist. You have said, 'Unless people who are oppressed internationally come together, we are going to be a long way from making any change'. Given the depth of racism in the major capitalist, imperialist powers, how can this be overcome?

First of all, workers in the developed

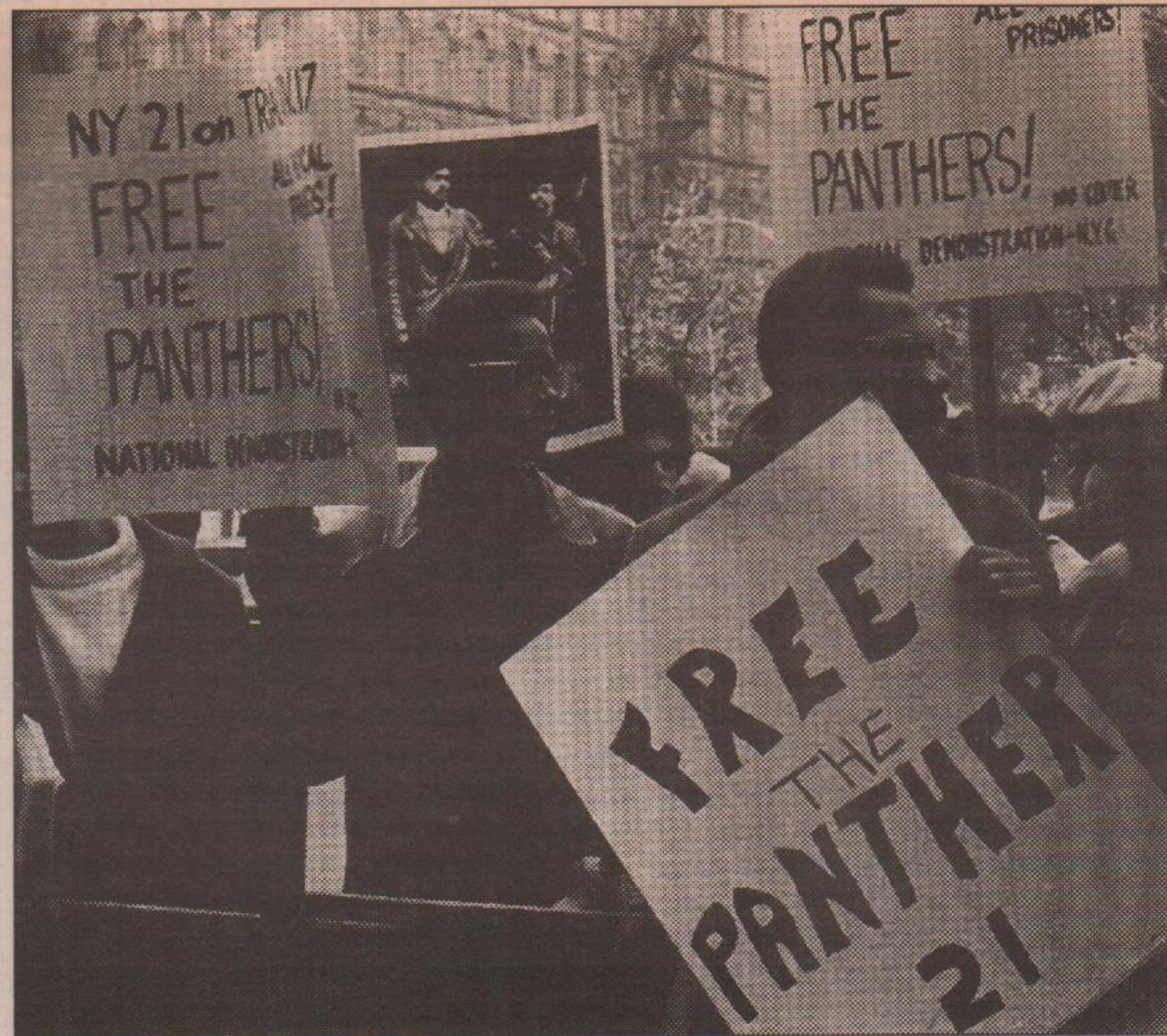
capitalist countries have to be educated to realise that their lives, how they live and how well they live can cease to depend on how well big corporations in those countries can suck people's blood in the Third World, and can depend instead on different worldwide priorities.

A worker in a developed capitalist country is subsidised by Third World workers. They have a higher standard of living, a higher ability to buy all the available junk: tape-recorders, sneakers, clothes, cars, etc. But they pay a very high price. For example, in the United States a worker can afford an expensive watch, but he can't wear it anywhere, because the crime rate is so high. And most workers have to work so hard and so long, double time and overtime, Saturdays etc, just to make ends meet.

Recreation is extraordinarily expensive there. Here in Cuba you can go almost any place for three to five pesos. In the United States that is unheard of. Here any young person can go to a concert on the Malecon and dance until dawn; in the United States you just can't do that: it's too dangerous or too expensive.

countries don't even like being workers, so they don't even defend their own interests. Long live the Queen! What did the Queen ever do for them? I've never understood the fascination of the Queen and Lady Di. It's crazy. These people not only waste goodness knows how much of the world's resources, but they have common people defending their right to do so and buying papers to read about their million-dollar divorces! But I think that when people in the developed capitalist countries realise that it is in their interest to have a society based on justice, things will change.

Right now, even the water and the air are becoming so contaminated by big business, whose only interest is profit, that in a little while you are going to have to have your own business just to breathe. So, if you want a society where your child has education as a right, where the air and water are protected, where you can live freely, then you have to think of some kind of society that has a socialist point of view, that is dedicated to the social good of the majority of the people.



The Black Panther Party was targeted by the FBI: above, the New York Black Panthers demonstrate to free their comrades who had been framed

Human development is so expensive in the developed capitalist countries. You have to pay an enormous amount of money to play sport, go dancing, learn painting, whereas over here kids go to the Casa de Cultura and just sign up and play whatever they want to. That human development is available. If you want to be a sportsperson (and everyone knows that Cuba wins everything!) you can develop your abilities. This is one of the fundamental things you don't have in capitalist countries. There they study for years and years, take tests in subjects they don't even like, to work for a company they don't even like, to do a job they don't like, so they can make money to send their kids to a school they don't like!

Workers in the developed capitalist

I've studied what happened in the Soviet Union. A lot of people thought, 'We've got rid of communism and we're going to have the same things they have in the US. We're going to have some tennis-shoes and stuff'. But what they got is a mafocracy, a mafia-led government, where the mafia control everything. The people are poorer than they ever were; they have lost all of the social guarantees. So, being brainwashed carries a very high price and workers have to work out which side they're on. If you don't have enough sense to be on your own side, then you are well and truly brainwashed. One of the real problems in capitalist countries is that people are so brainwashed they will believe anything. They believe soap operas are the

truth. There is no group of human beings in the world as politically ignorant as those in the United States (although maybe England can compete). That is why they are so easily controllable by people who are working against their interests.

You were critical of socialism in the USSR. Cuba is trying to solve the problems the USSR never managed to solve and which contributed to its collapse. Do you think that Cuba is showing us a different way, which has universal application?

Cuba is thinking and rethinking how to build socialism. Twenty years ago the Soviet Union was saying, 'This is the only way you should build socialism. This is the only way you should build a revolutionary movement. This is the only position you should have in terms of party-building and alliances and whatever.' People all over the world got caught up in that. It was unavoidable.

I think that everybody who is interested in social change and social justice today, whether they are in Cuba or Mozambique or Poland, wherever they are, they have to say: 'The phase we are in, in building socialism, in conceiving of socialism, is the infancy, the beginning of human beings coming together and saying we have to construct societies that are for the people, that are fully democratic, that offer full human rights'. The process of conceiving and building that society has to constantly grow. Because if you just have a narrow idea of what socialism is, you are going to build some terrible socialism.

I feel very hopeful and encouraged by Cuba's openness, Cuba's willingness to change and grow and create. If you build a house and don't put any paintings on the wall you have an ugly house. The same is true about building a society. It is important not just to have an education programme, but that it is creative education; it is not just important that young people gather together to have fun, but that they do it creatively. When human beings become divorced from their creativity and their inventiveness, they stagnate and die a little. A revolutionary process is the same; it has to be creative, dynamic and loving. When you feel good in a place, even if you don't have a lot of material wealth, you have a lot of spiritual and human wealth, and you are not as interested in trying to buy all those little trinkets and gadgets. The way we can conceive of building a socialist society has to be more on the human level, rather than on the material aspects. I'm not saying material aspects are not important but that when it comes to building socialism both are important and in order to build an enduring socialism, you have to go way, way beneath the surface to the human psyche and the human heart.

FRFI would like to thank the UJC and Susan and Helen for helping to make this interview possible.

FURTHER READING ABOUT THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

Among the many books which chronicle the revolutionary black political movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the following are highly recommended. Most are now out of print but can be obtained in many second-hand shops.

Assata - an autobiography by Assata Shakur. Zed Books. 1987.

If they come in the morning by Angela Davis. Orbach and Chambers. 1981.

Soledad Brother and Blood in my eye by George Jackson. Penguin. 1971 and 1975.

Agents of repression: the FBI's secret war against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement by Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall. South End Press, Boston. 1990.

Globalisation is the latest fashionable term used to describe the all pervasive forces of a rampant capitalism. It suggests a new stage of capitalism in which multinational companies and financial institutions, attached to no particular nation state, move their capital around the world in search of the highest returns, and in so doing create a truly global market and global capital. In fact, as DAVID YAFFE argues in this article, the degree of internationalisation of capital is only now approaching those levels existing before 1914. And far from being new, we are seeing a return to those unstable features of capitalism which characterised imperialism before the First World War.

Globalisation a redivision of the world by imperialism

The strongest supporters of the globalisation standpoint are the neo-liberal right. A recent convert to their free market orthodoxy – it is said in order to save itself from the chop (*The Guardian* 20 May 1996) – has been the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), an organisation set up 32 years ago to provide reports on trade and development from the perspective of developing countries. Its recent *World Investment Report 1995* (WIR 1995) reads like a eulogy to globalisation:

'Enabled by increasingly liberal policy frameworks, made possible by technological advances, and driven by competition, globalisation more and more shapes today's world economy. Foreign direct investment by transnational corporations (TNCs) now plays a major role in linking many national economies, building an integrated international production system – the productive core of the globalising world economy.' (WIR 1995 p xix)

However, its own report produces a wealth of statistical material which shows a very different picture emerging.

Transnational or multinational?

Throughout its report UNCTAD uses the term transnational companies. In fact transnational companies are relatively rare. Most companies are nationally based, controlled by national shareholders, and trade and invest multinationally with the large majority of their sales and assets in their home country.

A recent study of the world's 100 largest companies taken from the Fortune Global list showed that in 1993 only 18 companies maintained the majority of assets abroad. The internationalisation of shares was even more restricted. Just 2.1 per cent of the board members of the top 500 US companies were foreign nationals with only 5 of the top 30 US companies listed having a foreigner on their boards. All the companies seemed to have benefited from industrial and trade policies of their own countries and at least 20 would not have survived if they had not been saved in some way by their governments (*Financial Times* 5 January 1996, *The Economist* 24 June 1995).

UNCTAD's own index of transnationality, based on shares of foreign assets, foreign sales and foreign

employment, shows that in 1993 40 of the top 100 multinational companies (MNCs) had more than half of their activities abroad, with the average for the whole group at 41 per cent, falling to 34 per cent for US MNCs, which comprise nearly one third of the total. Even these figures are misleading as Nestlé, which tops the list with 92 per cent, limits non-Swiss voting rights to 3 per cent of the total. In addition, most research and development (R&D) takes place in the home country. For US MNCs, the share of R&D performed by majority owned foreign affiliates was only 12 per cent in 1992 (WIR 1995 pp xxvi-xxx, and Wade p19).

Finally, a recent study by Hirst and Thompson (H&T), based on company data for 500 MNCs in 1987 and 5,000 MNCs in 1992-93, assessed the relative importance for MNCs of home and foreign sales and assets of particular countries, mainly the US, UK, Germany and Japan. They found that between 70 and 75 per cent of MNC value added was produced in the home nation. They conclude that international businesses remain heavily 'nationally embedded' and continue to be MNCs rather than TNCs (H&T pp76-98). However, that international companies are nationally based and trade and invest multinationally tells us little about the overall strategic importance of the 25-30 per cent activity conducted abroad – a point that will be returned to below.

An integrated production system?

Foreign direct investment is linking many national economies, but far from this leading to an 'integrated production system', it is reinforcing the economic domination of the vast majority of the world by a small number of imperialist countries. Multinational companies have become the principle vehicle of imperialism's drive to redivide the world according to economic power.

Since 1983 foreign direct investment has grown five times faster than trade and ten times faster than world output (*The Economist* 24 June 1995). This process is being reinforced with recession and stagnation continuing to afflict the major imperialist economies. From 1991 to 1993, worldwide foreign direct investment stocks grew about twice as fast as worldwide exports and three times as fast as world GDP. In 1995 the foreign direct investment of MNCs was estimated at \$230bn, producing a world-

wide foreign direct investment stock of \$2,600bn (1995) with worldwide sales of foreign affiliates at \$5,200bn (1992) and up to \$7,000bn, if subcontracting, franchising and licensing are taken into account.

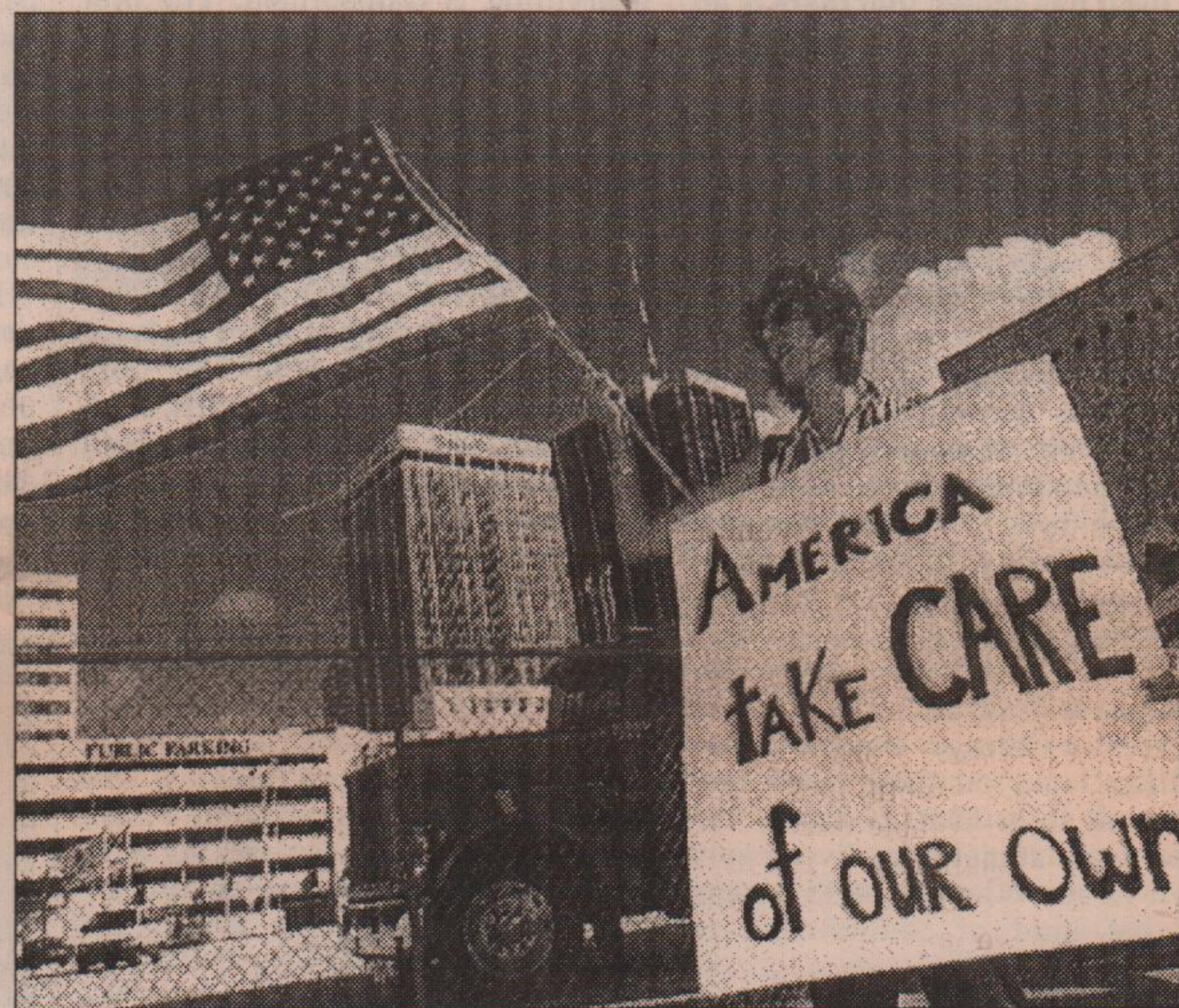
Investment stocks and flows, inwards and outwards, are concentrated in the imperialist countries and particularly in the competing power blocs, the 'Triad' of the European Union, Japan and the United States and their regional cluster of countries (see FRFI 111 p7). Seventy per cent of the outflows from the imperialist countries (60-65 per cent of total world flows) comes from only five countries: France, Germany, Japan, the UK and the US. Continual repositioning has taken place among them and in the recent period the US has reasserted its lead, accounting for one quarter of the world's stock and one fifth of world flows (see Tables 1 and 2).

The relative change in the balance of economic power since the end of the post-war boom is highlighted by the US share of the world outward stock of foreign direct investment falling from 52.0 per cent in 1971 to 25.6 per cent in 1994, while Japan's share rose from 2.7 per cent to 11.7 per cent. The European Union is the dominant imperialist bloc and Britain, a rapidly declining industrial power, still retains a formidable imperialist presence.

cent) in 1994, and is estimated to have reached \$90bn in 1995, nearly 40 per cent of total foreign direct investment outflows (Table 3).

The flows into the Third World were, however, very concentrated. 79 per cent of foreign direct investment inflows into Third World countries in 1993 went to only ten countries, including China. With nearly \$28bn, China was the second largest recipient of foreign direct investment (after the United States) taking 37 per cent of the total going to Third World countries. Foreign direct investment outward stock was likewise highly concentrated with 67 per cent of Third World stock in just ten countries in 1993. Asia accounted for 70 per cent of total flows into Third World countries in 1994. Latin America and the Caribbean received 24 per cent, with two countries, Mexico and Venezuela, accounting for 71 per cent of the region's foreign direct investment inflows. On the other hand, foreign direct investment into Africa has declined from 11 per cent of Third World inflows in 1986-90 to 6 per cent in 1991-93 and 4 per cent in 1994. Finally, privatisation was the main reason for the \$6.3bn flows into the ex-socialist countries of central and eastern Europe in 1994, turning former domestic companies into foreign affiliates of multinational companies.

Our argument can be further sub-



Over the last 10 years foreign direct investment outflows from Third World countries have more than doubled, growing from 5 per cent of world foreign direct investment outflows in 1980-84 to 10 per cent in 1990-94, reaching 15 per cent in 1994. However, this does not represent a significant step towards a more integrated system, since most of the capital flow comes from a small number of the so-called newly industrialising countries (NICs), mainly in Asia, with Hong Kong alone contributing 64 per cent of the total. Hong Kong outflows seriously distort the overall figures. A lot of the other outward investment results from companies in NICs forced by rising wages to move labour-intensive foreign direct investment to lower wage countries in the same region. Of real significance is the fact that only 6 per cent of foreign direct investment outward stock is accounted for by Third World countries. It is a great deal lower than their share of world exports and world GDP, at 23 per cent and 21 per cent respectively.

The recession which hit most imperialist countries in 1990-92 and the stagnant economic growth of the following years, while reducing overall foreign direct investment outflows from the imperialist nations, saw a much greater share of them go into the Third World, and, in particular, China. Foreign direct investment inflows into Third World countries increased from \$35bn (17 per cent of the total) in 1990 to \$94bn (37 per

stantiated by looking at foreign direct investment in terms of its distribution among the world's population. The Triad countries, comprising 14 per cent of the world's population, attracted some 75 per cent of foreign direct investment flows. If we add to this the population of the ten highest recipients of foreign direct investment in the Third World, then 43 per cent of the world's population received 91.5 per cent of foreign direct investment between 1981-91. This includes all of China with a population of 1.2bn. If we only include China's population in the coastal regions where most foreign direct investment is concentrated then only 28 per cent of the world's population receive 91.5 per cent of foreign direct investment. On this basis, between 57 and 72 per cent of the world's population receive only 8.5 per cent of total world foreign direct investment (H&T p67-68). This is hardly a picture of an integrated production system but one that is highly concentrated and very unequal.

Monopolisation and inequality

'...a fall in the rate of profit connected with accumulation necessarily calls forth the competitive struggle. Compensation of a fall in the rate of profit by a rise in the mass of profits applies only to the total social capital and to the big, firmly placed capitalists.' (Karl Marx)

Table 1: Outflows of FDI from five major imperialist powers 1982-1994

Country	1989 (outflows \$ bn)	1992	1994	1982-1986 (Share in world total)	1987-1991
France	20	31	23	5%	11%
Germany	18	16	21	10%	10%
Japan	44	17	18	13%	18%
UK	35	19	25	18%	14%
United States	26	39	46	19%	13%

Table 2: Shares in total FDI stock 1971-1994

Country	1971	1980	1990	1994
France	5.8%	4.6%	6.6%	7.7%
Germany	4.4%	8.4%	9.1%	8.6%
Japan	2.7%	3.8%	12.1%	11.7%
UK	15.6%	13.8%	11.8%	
United States	42.8%	26.1%	25.6%	



UNCTAD's support for countries opening up their economies to foreign direct investment shows, quite brazenly, its neo-liberal sympathies:

'In today's increasingly open and competitive global economic environment, the performance of countries - best measured in terms of per capita income (as a proxy measure for welfare) and growth - depends significantly on the links they establish with the world economy.' (WIR pxxvii)

Unusually, we are provided with a definition of competitiveness as the ability of firms 'to survive and grow while obtaining their ultimate objective of maximising profits' (WIR p150) - which helps to explain today's increasingly unequal and monopolistic global environment. Growing competition for profits creates an inexorable tendency towards monopolisation as it is only the 'big firmly placed' companies which can survive in a world where capital accumulation is stagnating. Growing monopolisation of markets for goods, investment, technology and raw materials, through mergers, acquisitions and foreign direct investment, is the result of multinational companies' relentless search for ever greater profits to compensate for a general fall in the rate of profit. This creates a very different 'global environment' to that promoted by the report.

We have already shown how foreign direct investment by predominantly nationally-based multinational companies is concentrated within a number of competing power blocs. It is also controlled by a small number of multinational companies within those blocs. There are in the region of 40,000 multinational companies having some 250,000 foreign affiliates. However, the largest 100 multinational corporations (excluding those in banking and finance) had an estimated \$3,700 billion worth of global assets with \$1,300 billion outside their respective home countries. This accounted for a third of the combined foreign direct investment stock of their countries of origin. The world's 500 largest industrial corporations employ 0.05 per cent of the world's population and control 25 per cent of the world's economic output; while a mere 1 per cent of all multinationals own half the global stock of foreign direct investment. Two thirds of world trade is controlled by multinational companies, with half of this trade, or \$1,300 billion exports, being intra-firm trade between multinational companies and their affiliates. In the case of US multinationals, \$4 out of

\$5 received for goods and services sold abroad by US multinationals are actually earned from goods and services produced by their foreign affiliates or sold to them.

The concentration for a certain range of products is even greater. In the case of consumer durables the top five firms control nearly 70 per cent of the world market in their industry. In automotive, airline, aerospace, electrical components, electrical and electronics and steel industries, five firms control more than 50 per cent of output. In oil, personal computer and media industries, the top five firms have more than 40 per cent of sales (Korten p223). The total sales by foreign affiliates of 23 multinational companies accounted for 80 per cent of the total world sales in electronics. 70-80 per cent of global R&D expenditure and 80-90 per cent of technology payments are within MNC systems. Far from this presenting a picture of an 'open and competitive'



Table 3: Inflows and Outflows of FDI 1982-1994

Country group		1990	1992	1994	1982-86	1987-91	1994
		(\$ billion)			(share in total)		
Imperialist:	Inflows	176	111	135	70%	82%	60%
	Outflows	226	171	189	94%	94%	85%
Third World:	Inflows	35	55	84	30%	18%	37%
	Outflows	17	19	33	6%	6%	15%

(Discrepancies between outflows and inflows are due to data collection problems)

environment we have one that is increasingly controlled and increasingly monopolistic.

The same principles which lead to the concentration of capital in the hands of a few large corporations determine the extent and direction of foreign direct investment. The forces of monopoly consolidate at a global level. Most foreign direct investment going into the imperialist nations is 'ownership-switching' - mergers, acquisitions and privatisations as opposed to new establishment or 'greenfield' investment. In the case of foreign direct investment going into the United States in 1993, 90 per cent in value was for acquisitions of existing companies. For US outward foreign direct investment the ratio of the number of new establishments to acquisitions was 0.96 in other imperialist countries compared to 1.8 in Third World countries. (Data on values are not available).

In a classic piece of understatement UNCTAD informs us 'foreign direct investment is not a panacea to break from the vicious circle of underdevelopment' in the Third World. That is certainly true. For the strategic importance of the Third World for MNCs lies in its ability to generate adequate profits through the access it provides to essential markets and productive resources throughout the world.

MNCs' foreign direct investment inflows to Third World countries accounted for only 7 per cent of Third World domestic investment in 1993. As we discussed earlier, it is mainly concentrated in only 10 countries. These countries have an average GDP per capita of \$6,610 and come into the top sector of middle income countries. MNCs are looking for high, guaranteed profits, easy access to relatively large markets, good social and industrial infrastructure, a skilled workforce at low cost, political and economic stability, open economies and easy repatriation of profits. Africa, for example, is now of limited importance to them, in spite of high rates of return, because of widespread poverty and political and economic instability. Not surprisingly, foreign direct investment in Africa is concentrated in countries with important raw materials, particularly oil.

Official rates of return to US foreign direct investment in Third World countries in 1993 at 16.8 per cent were nearly twice the level in imperialist countries at 8.7 per cent. The rate of return in the primary sector in Africa was a massive 28.8 per cent. Actual rates in Third World countries are probably even higher once transfer pricing and other tax avoidance devices are taken into account.

MNCs use Third World countries as a low-cost, profitable location for export-oriented industries. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the share of foreign affiliates in exports were as high as 57 per cent in Malaysia (all industries) and 91 per cent in Singapore (non-oil manufacturing). In 1990 44 per cent of total manufactured exports from Brazil and 58 per cent from Mexico were by foreign affiliates of MNCs.

The trend is accelerating for many MNCs to move manufacturing and service industries out of high labour cost countries to ever cheaper ones in

the Third World as competition for markets and demands on profits from shareholders intensifies. Morgan Crucible, the UK speciality materials group, is typical. It is shifting production to low-wage economies in eastern Europe and Asia. Average labour costs are \$1.50 an hour in eastern Europe compared to \$26 an hour in Germany. At its new Shanghai plant workers are paid \$1 a day compared with \$31 an hour in Japan. It was doing this despite a 20 per cent increase in profits. Similarly, British Polythene Industries (BPI), Europe's largest polythene film producer, reported an increase of pre-tax profits from £8.61m to £11.5m. It closed its plant in the Midlands where workers were paid £15,000 a year, to move to China where workers are paid \$1,000 (£670) a year. BPI's chairman said, that: 'We had to go there or see our business disappear' (*Financial Times* 12 September 1995). Such trends will reinforce and extend existing inequalities in all countries concerned.

UNCTAD ignores such realities when, in promoting foreign direct investment, it highlights the rapid increase of inflows into India as a result of its government's recent neo-liberal economic policies. 'By the turn of the century it is estimated that India's middle class will include over 9.4m households earning over \$9,000 per annum.' This is in a country with a population of over 800m people, the vast majority of whom live in dire poverty. Likewise, Asia is seen as an area with a growing and potentially high-spending middle class. If present day growth rates continue, 'the middle class in Asia could top 700m by the year 2010, having \$9 trillion spending power - 50 per cent more than the size of the US economy today.' This in an area where 180m urban dwellers and 690m rural people lack safe drinking water and access to proper sanitation and overall 675m people live in absolute poverty.

Finally, foreign direct investment inflows into the Third World have been used by imperialist countries to export environmentally-polluting industries and factories. Japan, in what UNCTAD refers to as 'house-cleaning' its domestic industrial structure, has financed and constructed a copper smelting plant run by PASAR in the Philippines. Gas and water emissions from the plant contain high concentrations of boron, arsenic, heavy metals, and sulphur compounds that have contaminated water supplies, reduced fishing and rice yields, damaged forests and increased the occurrence of respiratory diseases among local residents (Korten p31).

It is not just the low wages - \$1.64 an hour compared to an average \$16.17 in the United States - which make the Mexican *maquiladora* zones attractive to MNCs, but also their loose environmental regulations. Studies have shown evidence of massive toxic dumping polluting rivers, groundwater and soils and causing severe health problems among workers and deformities among babies born to young women working in the zone. The workers are housed in dwellings in shanty towns that stretch for miles with no sewer systems and mostly without running water (Korten p131-2).

Table 4: Ratio of exports plus imports to GDP at current market prices (%)

Country	1913	1950	1973	1994
France	30.9	21.4	29.2	34.2
Germany	36.1	20.1	35.3	39.3
Japan	30.1	16.4	18.2	14.6
UK	47.2	37.1	37.6	41.8
US	11.2	6.9	10.8	17.8

(Taken from *Financial Times* 18 September 1995)

The spectre of 1914

The rapid internationalisation of capital since the mid-1970s has, to a significant extent, brought the capitalist system closer to pre-first world war conditions. The openness of capitalist economies today is no greater than before 1914. The main players are the same but the balance of economic power between them has changed. Merchandise trade (exports plus imports) as a percentage of GDP is close to the levels of 1913 (Table 4).

Foreign direct investment stock has been estimated at 9 per cent of world output in 1913 compared to 8.5 per cent in 1991. But there are differences which in fact add to the growing instability of the capitalist system.

\$1,230bn a day flows through the foreign exchange system as financial institutions and multinational corporations hedge, gamble and speculate on the movement of national currencies. The financial system has now an unprecedented autonomy from real production and represents an ever-present threat to economic stability as it rapidly redistributes 'success and failure' throughout the system. Third World debt, at a record \$1,714bn in 1994, continues to grow despite massive debt repayment which bleed these countries dry. Labour migration is far more restricted than before the First World War, leaving whole populations imprisoned in untenable social conditions. Inequalities between rich and poor countries and between the rich and poor in all countries have reached unprecedented levels and are still growing.

The fundamental shift in the international balance of economic power has removed the dollar as the anchor of the capitalist system. Nothing exists to replace it. Neither Japan nor an increasingly fractious European Union are in a position to take over the United States' global role. Inter-imperialist rivalries are growing and trade wars are being constantly threatened. Far from being a beacon of capitalist progress, 'globalisation' is a sign of economic decay and increasing instability in a world of obscene and growing inequality. ■

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Socialists and the working class

In the previous article, we argued that if socialists are to attempt to relate to the working class they need to understand the significant changes in its structure over the past 15 years, the major features of which were:

- ▶ A massive rise in service sector employment with a continuing fall in manufacturing employment;
- ▶ A continuing rise in part-time and temporary employment, particularly amongst women;
- ▶ A steady deterioration in the conditions of work, and in the rights of workers to do anything effective about them;
- ▶ A continuous high level of unemployment;
- ▶ The exclusion of part-time and temporary workers from the trade union movement.

No longer does the working class in Britain experience employment in large factories producing manufactured goods. Instead it works in shops, supermarkets, distribution companies, hotels, restaurants and so on.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! is not alone in acknowledging this new reality. Previous issues of the paper have analysed the positions that have been put forward by Red Action in the context of setting up the Independent Working Class Association (IWCA). They have drawn a number of conclusions about today's political situation:

- ▶ That the working class is increasingly alienated from Labour. The task of socialists is not to mend this relationship, but to accelerate its demise;
- ▶ That the working class needs an organisation to represent its independent class interests, one not only independent of, but hostile to Labour;
- ▶ Such an organisation will represent a clean break with the past: it will not orient to the trade unions, but will be community oriented, and in time community-based.

The difficulty that the IWCA has had to confront is that there is no independent working class movement at the moment, nor indeed any sign that one will emerge in the near future. This is not to say that there are no struggles taking place at the present time – clearly there are such as those of the Liverpool dockers or the Hillingdon cleaners. However they do not pose an independent challenge to the forces of the past – the trade union and Labour leadership and the apparatus they control.

The issue that confronts socialists is: under what conditions might a new movement develop? What are the issues it will have to confront? What sections of the working class will it involve initially? If we cannot start to answer these questions, we will not be able to respond adequately when the movement does emerge, and the danger is that it will be destroyed before it has time to establish itself as a force able to challenge Labour and its trade union allies. To illustrate what is at stake, it is useful to go back to an earlier period, at the end of the 1970s, when such a movement did start to appear,



By the late 1970s, working class women in the Relatives Action Committees were mobilising tens of thousands onto demonstrations which in 1979 were occurring on an almost weekly basis

involving black, Irish and other low-paid workers, how the left responded to it, and how it was defeated.

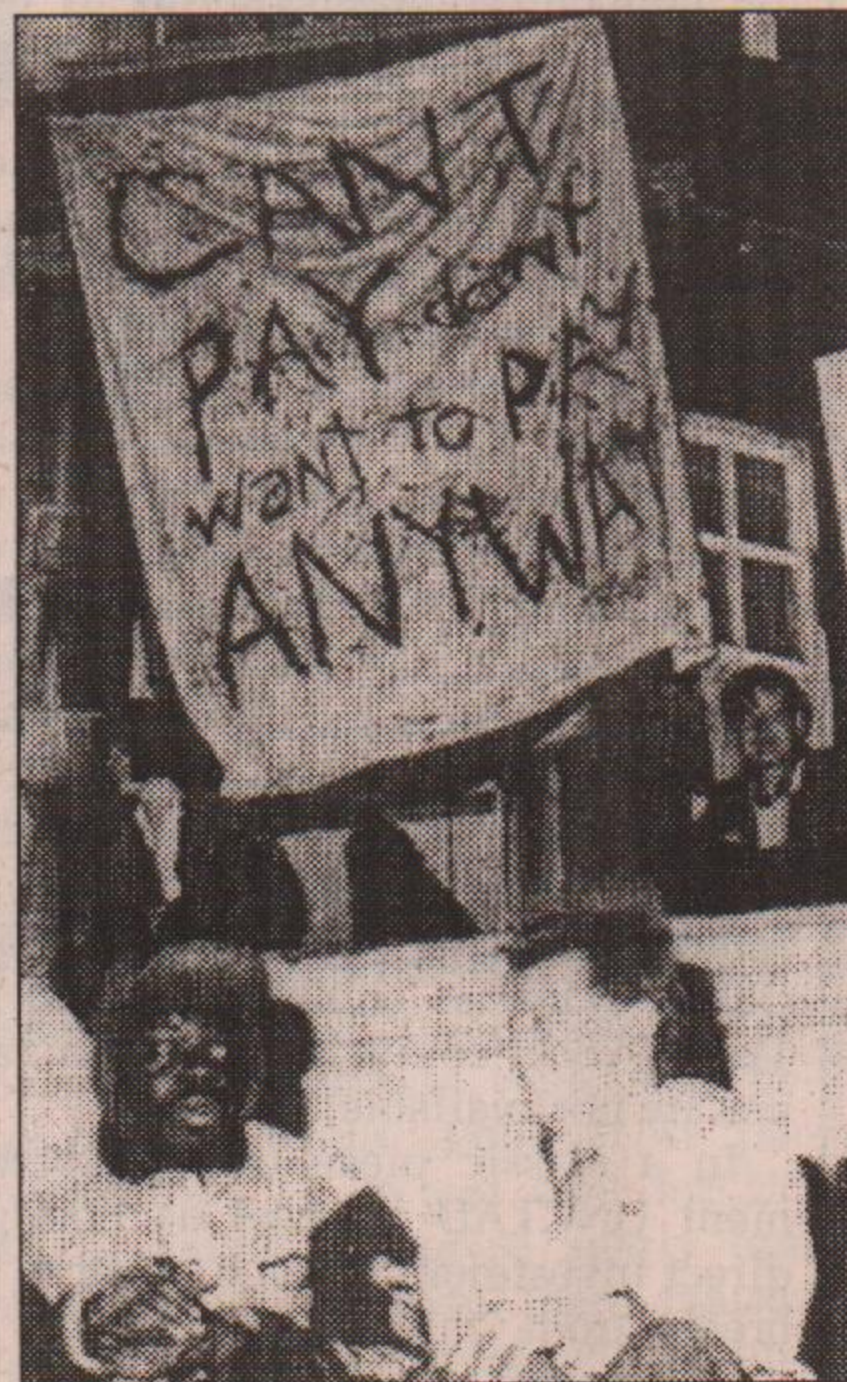
1974-79 Labour Government

The Labour Government elected in 1974 was to preside over the end of the post-war boom. The cuts in state expenditure it imposed in 1976 accompanied the biggest fall in annual take-home pay (some 10 per cent) for many decades. Although many higher-paid workers particularly in the private sector were able to recover the loss, lower-paid public sector workers could not as the government imposed successive stages of its Social Contract wage freeze. When it announced the third phase in 1978, there was open rebellion: through the winter of 1978-79, large numbers of local government, NHS and other state sector workers took part in frequently unofficial action in an effort to recover what they had lost over the previous two years.

The emergence of such trade union resistance coincided with other developments within the working class. Labour in office proved itself thoroughly racist. It made no effort to discontinue the 1973 Immigration Act. It used the paramilitary Special Patrol Group in an effort to break a strike of Asian women at Grunwick's in North London, and then again



Anti-poll tax riot in Trafalgar Square in 1990



Can't pay, won't pay – mass action against the poll tax brought down Thatcher

Yet far from crushing the liberation struggle such repression actually fortified it. By the late 1970s, working class women organised in the Relatives Action Committees were mobilising tens of thousands onto demonstrations which in 1979 were occurring on an almost weekly basis. Support for the armed struggle reached new heights under a revolutionary working class influence. Labour efforts to sustain its position in parliament in 1978/9 through back-door deals with Loyalist MPs merely fuelled the intense hatred which the Nationalist people held for it.

It was this co-incidence of three trends that pointed to something new in British working class politics. Black, Irish and low-paid workers (amongst whom of course black and Irish workers were anyway disproportionately represented) were being forced to oppose Labour. Such unity, founded on an anti-imperialist, anti-racist basis, presented in a very real way the possibility of establishing a new working class movement opposed to the old forces represented by Labour.

The response of the left

Yet this movement was dismissed by the left. When the Labour Government finally fell in April 1979, the Revolutionary Communist Group was the only left organisation in Britain to campaign for working class abstention at the General Election. Despite its record of racism, of torture and murder in Ireland, of its support for apartheid, despite its attacks on low-paid workers, the whole of the rest of the left called for its return. In October 1979, the editorial of the first issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* argued that 'the oppressed, black and Irish, have no illusions in the neutrality of the British state.... They have learnt through the experience of their daily lives, at Southall, at Grunwicks, on Bloody Sunday, during 10 years of war in Ireland... that their only defence is to fight back, for unlike the petit bourgeois left, they have nothing to lose.'

Continuing, the editorial stated that 'Because of this experience black and Irish people are the key to the development of an anti-imperialist movement and the revolutionary vanguard in Britain. Only their struggle can begin to unify the working class against imperialism and against the pro-imperialist anti-working class sections of the British labour movement', and concluded by arguing that 'We recognise the dangers which the opportunists in the labour movement and the petit bourgeois left present to the vanguard. In order to protect their own interests they will try to isolate the vanguard of black and Irish people from the working class as a whole.'

Defeat in the 1980s

This was exactly what happened, as within a brief space of time the new movement was snuffed out. In

Ireland, concessions made by the Republican movement to win middle class support for the POWs undermined the influence of the working class within the liberation struggle as a whole; the strategy itself proved unable to prevent the defeat of the hunger-strike in 1981. In Britain itself, the early 1980s saw the emergence of a form of municipal socialism which shied away from any real challenge to the Tories, but which served as a gravy-train for the radical middle class, whether Trotskyist, black or Irish. Labour offered the bribes, which went to the middle class, the Tories the repression, which was directed against the working class, and between the two of them they were able to isolate and strangle the new movement. The final straw was the defeat of the miners' strike, which finally buried the possibility of any new movement emerging through the trade union struggle.

Today, in contrast to the situation at the end of the 1970s,

- ▶ The Irish movement has experienced significant setbacks, and the movement itself is being pushed to seek an accommodation with imperialism rather than its defeat;
- ▶ A small but significant black middle class has been created closely linked to the local state apparatus;
- ▶ The trade unions represent a small proportion of the working class, millions having left since their heyday in 1979;
- ▶ Liberation struggles throughout the world have experienced serious defeats as a result of the Thatcher-Reagan counter-revolution;
- ▶ The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has led to a general discrediting of socialist and Marxist ideas.

Such conditions preclude a new movement emerging in the same way as it did nearly 20 years ago. Opportunism is far more entrenched: through their alliance with municipal socialism, the black and Irish middle class has proved more than capable of subverting any protest movement to its own ends, whilst the official labour movement is completely compromised by New Labour's drive to woo the middle class. A new movement can only emerge if the stranglehold of the middle class over all forms of working class expression and organisation is broken. In today's circumstances, that requires such a crisis of the capitalist system that large sections of the middle class are suddenly thrust into destitution. That such a crisis will occur is beyond doubt, and, in the absence of a popular anti-capitalist struggle, it may mean that these strata will turn to fascism or some right-wing populism as the answer to their problems. In this case, a new movement of the working class will be built out of the anti-fascist struggle, with black and Irish workers playing a leading role given the dependency of fascism on imperialism and racism.

Socialists do not stand on the sidelines waiting for this to happen, however. Working class communities, abandoned by Labour, will start to organise in an effort to ameliorate desperate conditions caused by the accelerating withdrawal of state welfare. Socialists will have to be part of this process which may initially be no more ambitious than the food programmes organised by the Black Panthers in the late 1960s. Yet we should remember that it was the Panther's attempt to build a real working class base through this form of activity that unleashed the programme of frame-ups and assassinations which led eventually to their destruction. As the IWCA recognises, socialists today have to forge a real relationship with these communities if they are to be in a position to respond adequately to threats of fascism tomorrow. It is a challenge we must face up to.

Robert Clough

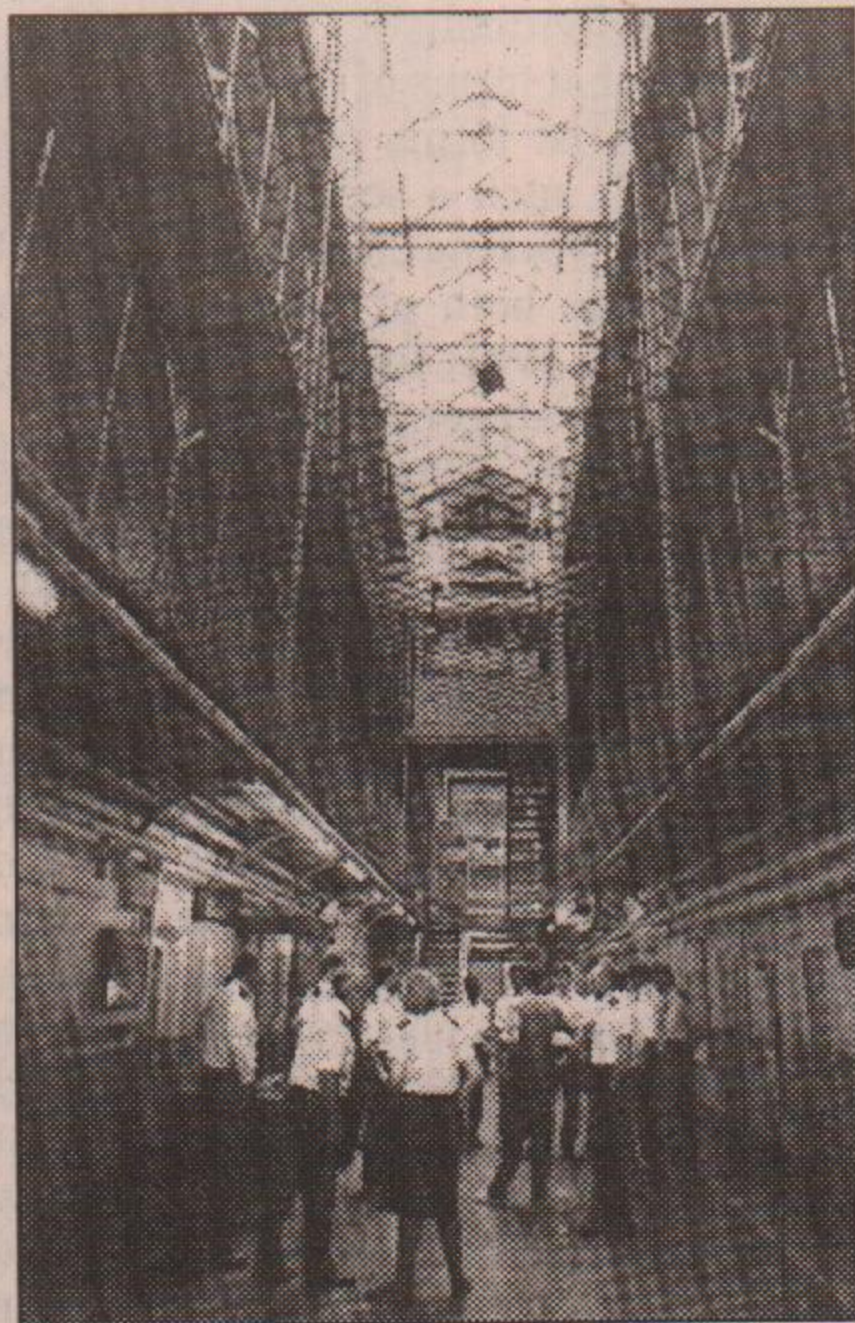
Brutality in low-security prisons

Release from a sentence of life imprisonment depends on descending through the security categories. The process of adjustment from dispersal prisons to category B prisons, from B to C, and eventually to D or open prisons is disconcerting. One goes through an entire change of culture, where attitudes, behaviour patterns and coping strategies are no longer relevant. The effort to adjust all too often results in failure, precipitating transfer back to a higher category prison.

Going backwards is something the Home Office hates. It is cheaper to warehouse prisoners in lower security gaols where conditions, warders' attitudes and other prisoners' behaviour, mostly very short-termers, can be disheartening and corrupt.

There is an unspoken policy that if a prisoner assaults a warder, regardless of provocation or intimidation, that prisoner will be badly beaten up. Even this invisible policy is often exceeded and prisoners attacked, not because they have done anything, but because the inherent cowardice and brutality of prison officers' culture is expressed through physical violence.

The system provides the perfect cover-up for attacks on prisoners: Control and Restraint (C&R). Officially this is a tactic for dealing with violent and uncontrollable prisoners but in reality there is no difference



between C&R and beating prisoners up. The paperwork filled out subsequent to the incident is written by the warders involved and always blames the prisoner.

While I was in HMP Stocken, refusing ordinary location and demanding a backwards move, a prisoner who was due for release within a week was brought to the seg. He placed a blanket over his window to block out the bright lights which were keeping him awake. Evidently there was a rule against this, although no-one had told him. The next morning he was dragged out of bed and attacked by the seg warders. The following morning, although there was no blanket covering the window, he was attacked in an identical manner. After a couple of hours he began shouting at the warders, calling them cowards and bullies. Again they unlocked his cell to 'control and restrain' him. I feel that after this he experienced some kind of breakdown as he would sometimes shout 'What is happening?' or 'I don't understand'.

After the second attack, I heard one warder tell a governor they had 'given him a few slaps' but they didn't think they had injured him. The prisoner, however, was asking for a doctor as he was injured. Eventually a doctor was brought. The prisoner's door was unlocked and the doctor said, 'I can't talk to you about this'.

There was tension in the seg so the staff put on a show of strength to intimidate the rest of us. One of the most vicious individuals in Stocken was the woman vicar who made it

clear she sided with the warders. A Board of Visitors (BOV) woman was produced, dragged about like a dog on a lead and shown every prisoner except the injured one, whose cell card had been removed to make it appear he had never existed. He was moved out of Stocken the next day.

These unprovoked incidents are an example of things going on in Stocken block on a regular basis. Another tactic warders used was to hit the riot bell before an incident so they had plenty of back-up when they were ready to attack.

Some weeks after returning to Gartree, local radio news stated that Keith Vaz MP was involved in investigating attacks on Stocken prisoners. I wrote to him but he never replied. I also wrote to Mr Heath, chairman of Stocken BOV. He did reply, saying he had looked into this and it never happened. I accused Mr Heath of being an integral part of the conspiracy to cover up violence against prisoners. No reply. Months later, I discovered that Stocken BOV has dismissed Mr Heath, due to his failure to attend to complaints of violence against prisoners. This rather proves my point.

I personally was not attacked, nor am I seeking financial compensation. I am writing this to warn other prisoners of the behaviour of warders in lower security prisons. My personal compensation could only be a cessation of attacks on prisoners and a prison system which facilitates movement through descending categories in a reasonable manner.

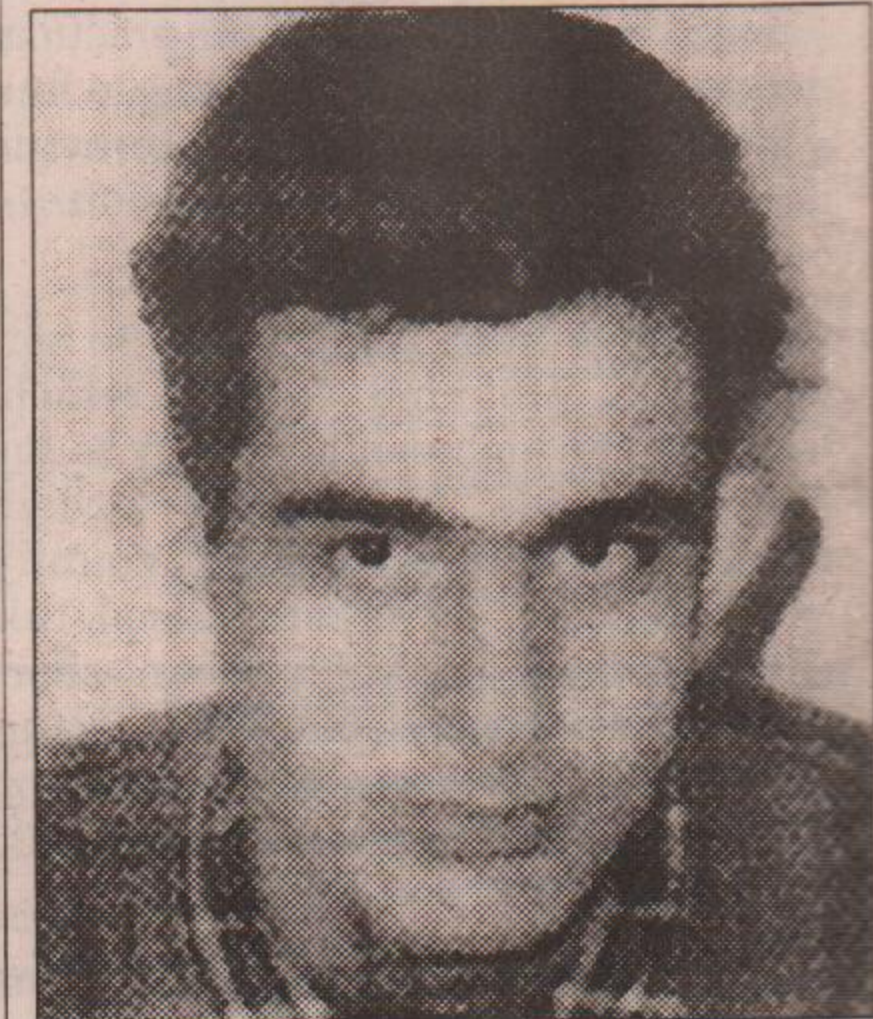
Chris Tierney
HMP Gartree

DAVID BOWEN

On 10 May, in the final court case arising from the 1990 Strangeways uprising, David Bowen was refused permission to appeal his conviction for conspiracy to commit grievous bodily harm against prison officers attempting to retake the prison, but granted leave to appeal the length of sentence imposed. This was then reduced from nine to six years.

David's total sentence is still ten years, as he is also serving a year for escaping from custody and three years on a ludicrous charge of conspiring to pervert the course of justice, by nobbling the jury at the trial of others involved in the uprising.

KURDISH PRISONERS



Servet Ozen

Cafer Kovaycin, Hikmet Bozat and Servet Ozen have also been granted leave to appeal, not against their 1994 convictions for bombing Turkish banks in London, but against their sentence lengths and, even more importantly, against the judge's order that they be deported afterwards. More information on the campaign to support these prisoners can be obtained from PO Box 10831, London, N8 0BY.

BULLINGDON

Prisoners at Bullingdon, Oxfordshire have written to FRFI regarding oppressive conditions, particularly in the block where cell windows cannot be opened at all, effectively preventing any ventilation, and prisoners have to choose between taking a shower or exercise, but are not permitted both.

Throughout the prison up to 150 prisoners are on 'closed' visits, resulting in very long waiting times for visitors and 20-minute visits, as there are only six closed-visit cubicles.

Jason Stewart, Martin Reilly and Domenyk Noonan recently staged a dirty protest against conditions in the block. (Domenyk is particularly hated by the prison system for his militant activities in organising prisoners into the PLA in 1989-90.) After a few days the men indicated they wished to terminate the protest but were effectively prevented by prison officers who would not let them leave the dirty cells. Domenyk was subsequently attacked by screws in riot gear, who twisted his thumbs back and handcuffed him, leaving deep marks on his wrists. One officer put his hand around Domenyk's throat, causing him to pass out. He woke up in a strip-cell, where he spent 26 hours with only a blanket.

Readers are asked to protest to The Governor, HMP Bullingdon, Arncott, Bicester, Oxon, OX6 0PZ.

POWs' birthdays

Michael O'Brien BT3782
HMP Full Sutton, York YO4 1PS
11 June

Peter Sherry B75880
HMP Belmarsh, Western Way
Thamesmead, London SE28 0EB
30 June

Unrest in Scottish prisons

Three recent disturbances highlight the extent to which severe overcrowding and an accompanying screw-down of rights and conditions is resulting in a serious 'crisis of control' throughout the Scottish prison system as prisoners resist and fight back.

On 15 April, at Perth maximum-security prison, D hall prisoners fought a pitched battle with screws (three of whom were hospitalised) and extensively wrecked the hall. Over the past two years 16 Perth prisoners have committed suicide, and the culture of staff violence was highlighted in February by the conviction of three screws at Perth Sheriffs' Court for beating up a prisoner whilst 'escorting' him to the segregation unit.

Over recent months at Perth serious overcrowding has resulted in the unprecedented 'twoing-up' of long-term prisoners, including lifers, in cells designed for a single occupant,

physical security, in line with the Learmont Report's recommendations, continues apace.

On 27 April at Polmont Young Offenders' Institute near Stirling 40 prisoners protested by wrecking their cells in a concerted act of indiscipline. Notorious even by Scottish Prison Service standards for its brutalisation of young offenders, Polmont is a breakers-yard for young, rebellious prisoners, and staff have long operated a regime based on routine bullying and intimidation. The protest was essentially an act of collective resistance by terrified and desperate young prisoners.

Four days later, prisoners in the Youth Offenders' Hall at Saughton, Edinburgh, staged a similar protest, causing £8,000 worth of damage, and highlighting a regime which was recently condemned in an independent psychiatric report as a prime factor in the high incidence of suicide attempts at the gaol. The governor's response was to call in the police and demand prosecution of the 'ringleaders'.

All three 'disturbances', which are clearly a portent of wider unrest throughout Scottish prisons, are manifestations of rage and hopelessness, as prisoners struggle to cope with increasingly longer sentences in progressively more intolerable conditions. Michael Howard's obsession

Innocent men doing time for police murder!

GARY MILLS AND TONY POOLE

On 16 April the Court of Appeal rejected the appeal of Gary Mills and Tony Poole against their 1990 convictions for the murder of Hensley Wiltshire, a black man who died in the custody of Gloucestershire police. JOHN MCGRANAGHAN, who himself served ten years for crimes he did not commit, before being freed on appeal in 1991, has written this account for FRFI:

'The appeal of Gary Mills and Tony Poole once again highlighted the sinister farce of the English judicial system and what any innocent person faces when fighting their convictions. I don't think any one of us who knew of the case or attended the appeal were under any illusions as to the battle the two innocent men faced. It was, after all, the ultimate frame-up in that the police had brutally murdered a prisoner in the cells and then, to cover up, framed two innocent men for the killing. It was Tony and Gary's sheer misfortune (to put it mildly!) to have been in a fracas with the murdered man on the evening before.

The judges completely discounted the expert medical evidence produced by Gary and Tony's lawyers. Anyone who has ever had bruised ribs knows the pain and discomfort of such injuries. For the judges to rule that because the murdered man had been obstructive on the two occasions while in hospital, prior to his death in the police cells, the doctors had not noticed the broken ribs, beggars belief. It is also quite incredible that the man had not even com-

plained of pain to doctors or police until just before his death!

The judges then simply and crudely shrugged off tape-recorded evidence of a police officer threatening a potential defence witness not to appear in court as a 'minor breach of rules'. 'Non-disclosure' of statements by the prosecution was given the same short shrift.

Not only did the judges cruelly and coldly reject Tony and Gary's appeal, they compounded it by ruling that the murdered man had met his death at their hands because he had attempted to muscle in on the Gloucester drug scene.

I'm sure everyone who is aware of this terrible miscarriage of justice wishes Tony and Gary the best of luck in their continuing fight to prove their innocence.'

John McGranaghan
and Margaret McDermott

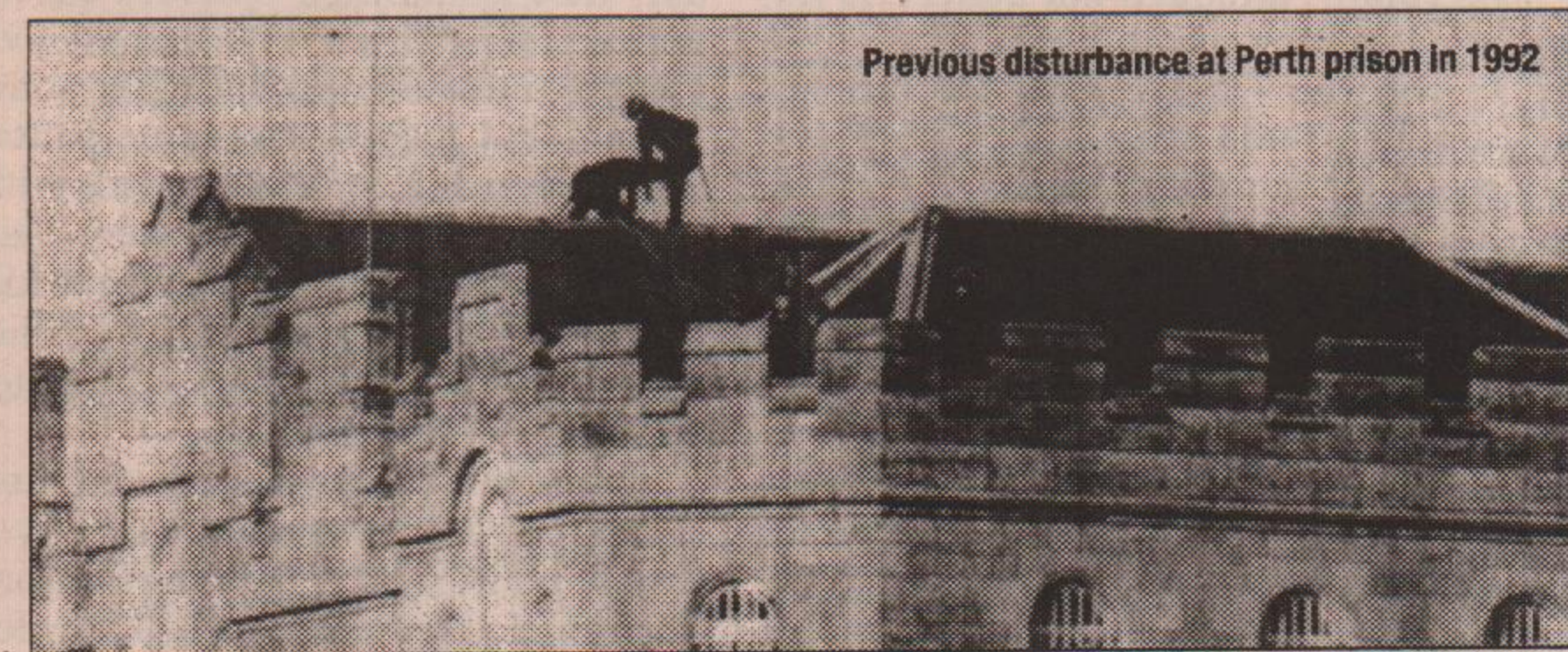
Gary Mills (WM0469) and Tony Poole (WM1030) are both in Long Lartin prison, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcs, WR11 5TZ.

MALCOLM KENNEDY

Malcolm Kennedy, who was also framed for a police killing, goes back to the Court of Appeal on 1 July. This appeal is against manslaughter, as he has already had a successful appeal against the original murder charge, followed by two retrials and conviction on the unlikely charge of manslaughter. The dead man, Patrick Quinn, was violently kicked to death in a cell in Hammersmith police station, in a way that can hardly be described as accidental. If Malcolm Kennedy didn't murder him, someone else did. The only other possible culprits are, once again, the police.



End the systematic brutality against all prisoners orchestrated by the British State



Previous disturbance at Perth prison in 1992

and a progressive deterioration in conditions and facilities, such as access to visits and telephones. Sharp cuts in education and welfare expenditure have eroded even further any semblance of a humane regime, while a massively expensive beefing-up of

with scapegoating prisoners has planted a time-bomb within British prisons and here in Scotland the countdown to an open and uncontrollable explosion is well underway.

John Bowden
HMP Perth

Nothing is lost forever

This book looks at the changes imposed on the British working class by the shift from manufacturing to service work and raises fundamental questions. What, if anything, will replace the manufacturing-based vision of class outlined by Marxists? What impact on the working class has the consumer culture had? What is the relation between the working class in richer nations and that in the poor nations? Finally, what is the relationship between these changes and the environmental crises now raging?

While these questions are not answered, from the immediate practical standpoint of socialists grappling to find a political way forward, they provide material for thought and discussion.

Seabrook and Blackwell write:

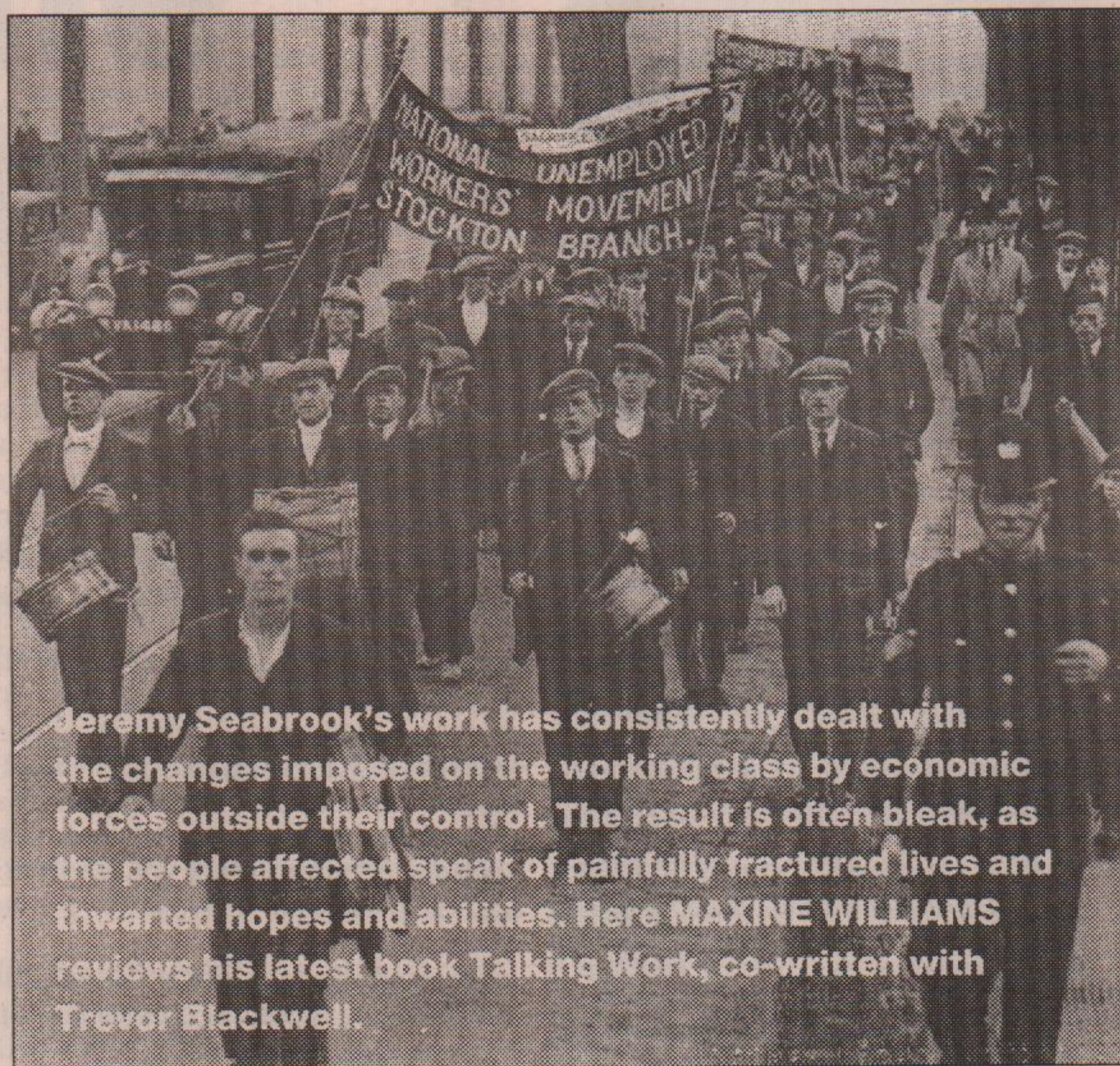
'The change from manufacture to service is as profound as that which, from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, transformed Britain from a primarily agricultural country to a manufacturing nation. Indeed, this shift has had as profound an effect upon the sensibility of the manufacturing working class as that imposed on the agricultural workers nearly 200 years ago.'

This is illustrated by accounts from people displaced either by the loss of entire industries or by mechanisation. It is clear from some of those interviewed, that work itself gave profound meaning to their lives.

Taken a leather worker, whose job was taken over by machines, says 'after you'd done it, you looked at it and you thought, well, isn't that lovely'. Or a steel worker: 'Computers, clocks and gauges had all come in. It took the art out of steelmaking. It became boring, no challenge.' This despite the dangers and harsh discomforts of the labour process.

The authors are critical of socialists' failure to appreciate the nature of the human relation to labour. Many, capitalist and socialist, have worshipped at the altar of increased productivity without examining the results: de-skilled and de-humanised jobs, or no jobs at all.

This is not to romanticise the difficulties and dangers of much manufacturing work, or to underestimate the deformities of human spirit caused by a division of labour which forces people to spend most of their waking hours engaged in one activity. It is, however, a reminder of the fact that to wish for meaningful, non-alienated and useful work is human.



Jeremy Seabrook's work has consistently dealt with the changes imposed on the working class by economic forces outside their control. The result is often bleak, as the people affected speak of painfully fractured lives and thwarted hopes and abilities. Here MAXINE WILLIAMS reviews his latest book *Talking Work*, co-written with Trevor Blackwell.

Now that twice as many people in Britain work in service industries as in manufacturing: 'The experience of work in the twentieth century has been essentially a slow, uneven, yet unmistakable movement away from direct contact with materiality'. The authors ask, but do not answer, the question: 'What does it mean to be no longer anchored in the experience of labouring in material things?' We might expect to see a complacency or outright lack of curiosity about how things are made or even where they are made and a more casual attitude to objects which took time and effort to make. We might expect – especially given the virtually sacred duty to consume more and more things – the triumph of style over either quality or durability. We might expect individuals who have to live by selling such intangible abilities as charm or communicativeness, to be as inwardly mentally distorted and invaded as steel workers or miners were outwardly maimed by the sale of their muscular ability. The infinite personal flexibility so much admired in modern economies can easily become infinite malleability and empty-headedness. And indeed we do see such developments in current culture.

British workers may not be producing material things but 'it is not as though we have outgrown the human

need for shoes, clothing, steel or energy. Quite the contrary: we consume greater quantities of all these things than ever before. It is simply that others now make them for us... One thing we do know: the conditions in which they labour are every bit as bad as those which we once knew. And what do we think will happen when they decide that they, too, would like to be free from such labour? Who will be the next working class?'

This question is itself linked to the question of consumerism. 'Those who speak of the de-industrialisation of Britain misunderstand. What is happening is a more intensive industrialisation of those areas of human experience hitherto regarded as beyond its reach.' In the rich nations everything is a commodity. The exhaustion of mental faculties must find comfort in ever more banal forms of entertainment; the need for human solidarity is met by paid counsellors; the care of the old, the sick, the unwanted, can turn a nice profit.

Alongside the more direct relation to manufacturing work grew up a working class culture. The older workers describe joining the union. 'I joined the union as soon as I started, I didn't have to be told.' Gradually these large groups of workers saw their conditions improve, sometimes beyond recogni-

tion, over the post-war years. And then the unions faced the test of the closures, redundancies and need for 'flexible' labour. And they proved powerless. 'No one tried to resist the redundancies. The feeling is that no one had any option. There's no strength left.' Or 'It started to fade away in the mid-80s, it changed then. It's a number of things. People buying their council houses, new technology... People have become disillusioned with the unions as well. A lot of skilled workers moved into office work...'

But in the voices of the younger workers the union rarely figures. Casualised and individualised forms of employment do not lend themselves to those older forms of organisation. And as the whole tenor of society is far more individualistic the question is raised: what forms of collective organisation, what forms of protest and by whom, fit such a society? The manufacturing working class was forced into collectivity both at work and where they lived. What forms of collectivity, if any, do younger people relate to?

There are several interviews with young workers in Harlow – a painter, a receptionist, an unemployed man, a dance student, an electrician and a telephone salesperson. Only one of them expresses political views and these are anarchistic with an emphasis on the political potential of music to reach young people. Two of them, doing working class jobs, describe their parents as middle class or well-off, a reminder that a large section of the working class in the post-war period rose up socially. Their children do not have this opportunity. The only black young person interviewed was terrified to go into the town centre and had been attacked by racist gangs at home and driven out of various jobs by racists. Although he says a minority of whites are doing this, the rest turn a blind eye. It is a bleak world for the young.

Understanding that capitalism cannot reform or green itself, the authors predict: 'Since the only obstacle to the industrial system is people's continuing capacity to provide for themselves and each other outside of it, we may be sure that such hindrances will be swept aside as relentlessly as the ways in which people once grew their own food, or cared for each other.'

What forces are there to fight against such a future? The authors ask: 'Where in their own direct experience, do people now find their capacity to even begin to understand the nature of the society they live in?' As production has shifted to other nations, what is left in Britain? 'If we no longer have to toil in mill and mine, we are still under the compulsion to sell our labour... the consumer society still depends upon a

complex division of labour, a division which has become more diffuse, more opaque and more intricate as it has become global.'

From this is drawn an important political conclusion: 'The conditions for the liberation – even the salvation – of the working class in one country can be understood only when we grasp the function of that local working class in a far wider patterning of labour.' And what is the role of the Western working class? 'Capitalism changed in order to meet the needs, the demands and the threats of its working class; and to do this, it externalised its own inner contradictions. In doing so, it transformed the working class; it radically depleted the resource base of the earth; it visited the poverty lifted from the Western working class upon the poor of the earth; and it rendered unimaginable all alternatives to itself.' In other words the price of the historic compromise between capitalism and the Western working class in the post war period was paid by the poor of the earth and by the earth itself.

The poor include not only the poor in the oppressed nations but also here, where 'a majority of the working class has gone upward and a minority downward'. This intractable one third of the population is 'disenfranchised'. The Labour Party has risen up with those it once represented and despises those left behind as the 'underclass'.

What can be done? The authors emphasise that the discarded values of self-help and solidarity are rediscovered in the fight against ecological crisis and intensified poverty. What the authors call the 'invisibilizing of the working class' is shown to be a 'process of eclipse, loss and elision of those values which cannot figure in a world dedicated to the abuse of both material and human resources. The working class has become the class that dare not speak its name.'

'But nothing is lost for ever.' Those values – self-activity, collectivism – the values of socialism, must be made relevant to that section of the working class which still exists in the Western world. That section is likely to grow over the next decades. Somehow, the socialist movement must weld together an international movement that relates to today – to the questions of poverty both here and in the oppressed nations, that encourages people to help each other through collective activity, that harnesses the idealism of young people's environmental concerns and sets itself radically apart from a system that is corrupt both in its plenty and its scarcity.

■ *Talking work: an oral history* by Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook, Faber & Faber 1996, £15.99.

Get involved, get active!

■ *Undercurrents 4* (video). Undercurrents Productions (formerly Small World Media), Box 61, 16B Cherwell St, Oxford, OX4 1BG. Fourth in series available for £34.99 for four issues or one issue £10.49 waged/£7.49 unwaged. 83 minutes.

Using footage shot by activists and individuals on domestic camcorders, *Undercurrents* challenges the world of 'feelgood TV' and 'Cosynation Street' that puts Princess Di's menu as first item on the news on the same day it drops an item about Britain voting against the EU's anti-racist laws. Footage from *Undercurrents* films has also been used to successfully defend dozens of people from police prosecution.

This latest offering is hugely entertaining and politically devastating. It includes such gems as *Look, chum* – an expose of the Labour Party's cowardly refusal to oppose the Criminal Justice Act. Roy Hattersley and Paul Boateng fudge and squirm and dash away when asked what the Labour Party has to say to young people about



the CJA, offering only 'a big up-yours'.

Two Tarts in a Kitchen provides footage and voices from women organising direct action – from the suffragettes to the Child Support Act, lying down in front of bulldozers, chaining themselves to Parliament, facing bailiffs and police, fighting the CJA, promoting the rights of lesbians, campaigning against domestic violence and rape. From *Get your hair cut* on the JSA, through pirate jungle music radio stations in north London to Shell's devastation of Ogoniland, this subversive and invigorating collection of documentaries suggests a welcome blossoming of pockets of resistance around the country. Older voices mingle with the new as miners' wives fighting pit closures and the introduction of open-cast mining remember a community solid in strike action through the years, from 1926 through to 1984/85 to today, reminding us that those who stand together can win. And finally, as the booklet accompanying the video stresses, when you have finished watching: 'Remember – that isn't enough. Get involved, get active.'

Cat Wiener

Turkey=executions

■ *The freedom of the state to kill* DHKC (Revolutionary People's Liberation Front), 20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN, 1996.

Each year Western diplomats faithfully record that the human rights situation in Turkey, although not perfect, is improving. Each year this argument is used to win the Turkish state the military supplies, trade deals and political and economic support it needs to survive. Yet evidence from local and Western sources unmistakably describes a situation wherein that survival requires it to resort to ever more frequent and crude violations of human rights.

The following were compiled by the Turkish Human Rights Association for February this year: missing after arrest, 16; tortured and reports of torture, 51; journalists arrested, 19; associations, syndicates and presses closed, 2; associations, syndicates and presses attacked, 12; arrested for expressing thoughts, 124; killed, 50. Turkish state violence is increasing as the Kurdish resistance continues and Turkish society itself becomes more unstable and volatile.

In their pamphlet *The freedom of the state to kill*, the DHKC document examples of state terror and murder from 1988 to 1995. Here are the disappearances, the mutilated bodies left by roadsides, the policemen in balaclavas, the familiar excuses whenever an officer reaches the courts – the victims opened fire first, they refused to surrender, they committed suicide, etc. Of note is the pattern of repeated involvement of the same rings of senior police officers and judges. The same pattern was used to deploy death squads within the state forces in El Salvador. Here is Mehmet Agar giving the order to kill, Mehmet Agar former Chief of Police now True Path MP, Cabinet Minister, and Minister for Justice.

It is a vile tale, made all the more sickening because of the complicity of British politicians of both the Conservative and Labour parties who know full well what is going on in Turkey, and who either say nothing or approve. British Army specialists are training Turkish police and troops in 'counter-insurgency techniques'. This trade in death squads must be exposed and stopped.

Trevor Rayne

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RCG COMMUNIST FORUMS

WILLIAM MORRIS HIS LIFE AND WORK

LONDON

Sunday 9 June 2.30pm

Speaker: Eddie Abrahams
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn)

MANCHESTER

Wednesday 10 July, 7.30pm.

Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

This is the last in the current series of forums. A new series begins in September. For details: FRFI (Forums), BCM 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

TERRY O'HALLORAN MEMORIAL FUND

Since 1989 the TOHMF has provided books, periodicals and radios for prisoners in British gaols.

Many prisoners have written into the Fund with requests and its work has become widely known. We are currently organising a prisoners' art competition to design a card for production at Christmas.

This work is becoming increasingly costly but we are determined to continue it. Consequently we are making this urgent appeal for financial support.

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LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX e-mail: rcgrfi@easynet.co.uk.

Contempt for Labour phoneys

FRFI 127 had an article on the housing crisis. Let me give you some idea of how it works here in Glasgow.

An acquaintance in the Glasgow Housing Authority told me there are over 800 houses lying vacant in the city and east districts. There are said to be roughly 800 in the south district as well. If it's the same in the north and west, that means over 3,000 houses lying vacant in the Glasgow public housing stock.

At the same time, there are hostels around the city, sort of working class hotels with a room with a bed, chair and table. You get breakfast, and there are showers and baths, plus a washing machine and cooker. Then there is a TV room and games room. All this costs around £90 per week (and I understand it is going up), paid for by social security offices.

Why don't the housing authority give the homeless people one of the empty houses instead? Could it be because they are running a very profitable business operation, making lotsa lolly off the social security offices?

Needless to say, the hostels create jobs for the Labour faithful in the city: managers, supervisory staff, maintenance staff etc. Then, of course, there are the contracts to supply the hostels with food, blankets and bedding. I also know of at least one hostel that held political meetings in the dining room, with the usual snout-in-the-trough junkie at the end of the meeting. All of this must run to a tidy sum.

It seems reasonable to assume this situation prevails in other Labour-controlled cities throughout the land. To me it all reeks of a deliberate policy of

encouraging homelessness in order to cram the poor unemployed men and women into these hostels to continue the money-making racket, and to justify the fat-salaried white-collar jobs the social workers have created for themselves out of homelessness and poverty.

If you become homeless in Glasgow, you go to the Hamish Allan Centre in the southside. There, toffee-nosed employees will process your case (after waiting an hour or so). A plaque on the wall spouts noble sentiments about how much the staff c-a-r-e for their poverty-stricken charges, but it means nothing. They are all typical, callous, bureaucratic phoneys - and not all Labourites. I saw some that I thought were SWP types (and one Tribuneite). They all adopt that superior air of your authentic bureaucrat, before

whom the needy, homeless worker is supposed to grovel gratefully.

You are subjected to an intensive session of questioning by some arrogant social worker. Refuse to answer these extremely personal questions, and you are disqualified from aid. One of them sneered at me that I could sleep in the streets.

If they like your face and manner, you will be sent to a hostel with a pass. There you are fed on breakfast until social security gets time to process your case, maybe in three-four days. If they don't like your face, they will send you to absolutely appalling accommodation. One hostel is run by a religious group and is thus purportedly a charity organisation - but it's cold charity, believe me. If the Hamish Allan Centre will not sign or authorise payment cheques, the hostel will refuse to accommodate you. It is just one more money-making racket run by bureaucratic religious phoneys. They put me out on the streets, even though

they had about 24 empty beds. No cash, no accommodation - it's as simple as that. I slept for some weeks on scaffolding in the centre of Glasgow, living off my Army War Disablement Pension. This just allowed me to get baths in public bath houses and wash my clothes in public wash-houses.

I should point out here I am a decent working man. I don't take drugs or booze, or even smoke. I had never been unemployed in my life until I got older. If I could get a job I would take it, but there are just no jobs going and that's the truth. I expect to be unemployed for the rest of my life (I'm in my sixties now). This means I will have to live in dire poverty until I die, upon which they will, I suspect, bury me rather reluctantly at tax payers' expense. You will perhaps understand why I jeer with contempt - even hatred - at the political fat cats in Labour who say they c-a-r-e for us unemployed. The stinking phoneys.

NAME AND ADDRESS WITHHELD

In the footsteps of the Nuestro Tiempo brigade

Unable to join the Rock around the Blockade brigade to Cuba in December, in April we decided to follow the route of the 30 Nuestro Tiempo brigadistas to Havana and Ciego de Avila (reported on in FRFI 129), and also Santiago.

In Havana, we met Noel Carillo from the Cuban trade union centre (CTC) and Rogelio Polanco, the head of UJC International Relations and discussed Rock around the Blockade's projects for the coming year.

We were struck by the level of democratic participation in Cuba. Everybody we spoke to was sure of one thing: among all the uncertainties and difficulties of the Special Period, the government does not lie to them. While we were there, everyone was discussing Raul Castro's recent speech.

When we arrived in Santiago, it was the 35th anniversary of the UJC and the city was in the mood to party. In the magnificent Plaza de la Revolucion, 30,000 young people gathered for politics, comedy and dancing which went

on late into the hot Caribbean night. The next day we joined in a street party of the Cuban Federation of Women (FMC). 'Viva communism, viva Fidel, viva the women of Cuba, the best women in the world!' they cried.

At the railway station on the way to Ciego, we faced a six-hour delay. The waiting crowd included the Cuban National Tai Kwan Do Team who had recently won the Pan American Championship! It was six hours of political discussion interspersed with gifts of fruit juice, rum and delicious fritters from nearby stalls. We discussed the problems facing Cuba and the massive wealth and individualism of the imperialist countries. 'We think,' we were told, 'capitalism is good for rich people but not for poor people'.

In Ciego, following in the footsteps of the Nuestro Tiempo brigade meant that we were treated like honoured guests. On the Eduardo Garcia Delgado work camp we were shown the fine banana crops. Ciego had just won

top place for rural production and Fidel Castro presented an award there shortly after we left.

At the young people's computer club in Ciego we saw the workshop where computer parts are mended and put together. Nothing is ever wasted. They were astonished to learn that older generation computers are virtually thrown away in Britain. They have a desperate need for all middle technology relating to computers. The club is open to everyone, but is mostly used by children after school.

We were treated to coffee, ice-cream and cake at the office of the FMC, whose current project is to provide a toy for every child in Cuba. There are 86,000 children in the province of Ciego de Avila alone, so this is a very demanding project. But these are determined and committed women, and with a little help from people like the readers of FRFI they will achieve their goal.

Perhaps the highlight of our visit was the evening we spent at

Disco Amigos in Ciego. They have built a wonderful outdoor area with a flower-shaped roof over the main dancing floor surrounded by tables and chairs. There we saw real Cuban salsa, a complicated and sensual dance performed by couples with a breathtaking casual flair. Hundreds of young people moved to the deep bass beat that hit the hot night sky.

We discussed with the UJC in Ciego the importance of providing young people with the music they love through their socialist organisations, limited by the hardships of the Special Period. The provision of facilities for young people is therefore of immense value as part of the struggle against the ideological onslaught of imperialist culture. The disco attracts 250 people each night of the week and up to 800 at the weekends. Everyone who supported Rock around the Blockade last year or who gets involved in this year's campaign can be certain that they are making a real contribution to the socialist struggle in Cuba.

ANN ELIOT
North London

Support Satpal Ram

We are asking people to write to Richard Tilt, the Director General of Prisons, in protest over the recent abuse of Satpal Ram in the prison system and in support of his request to be moved to HMP Gartree, in Leicestershire, where he previously spent three years relatively unscathed. The address is: HM Prison Service, Cleland House, Page Street, London, SW1P 4LN.

As your readers may be aware, Satpal was physically and sexually assaulted in Long Lartin prison and was denied access to his personal possessions for most of the time he was there, and since, as he has been in segregation units at Bristol and Brixton.

Recently two demonstrations were held simultaneously outside Long Lartin and Brixton prisons. They were well attended and the Long Lartin picket was attended by the family of Danny Johnson, who has since unfortunately lost his appeal, and friends of Gary Mills and Tony Poole, who also

lost their appeal last month. The Satpal Ram Defence Campaign would like to send solidarity greetings to you all.

Satpal will have served ten years of his 11-year 'tariff' in November, yet still the authorities show no sign of decategorising him, which would enable him to go to a lower security prison and help him prepare for release. This is not altogether surprising, as to qualify for parole one has to admit guilt and the only thing Satpal is guilty of is defending himself against a racist attack. In fact, they have just sent Satpal to Parkhurst, on the Isle of Wight, some 200 miles away from his family. When Mrs Ram visited Satpal at Long Lartin it was the first time she had been able to visit him for two years, as previously he was in Full Sutton near York and she is unable to travel long distances, because of ill-health. Now they are trying to isolate Satpal again.

We hope that you will support our campaign.

Self defence is no offence!

KATHY ROBERTS
Free Satpal Campaign, 101 Villa Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B19 1NH

Thanks for a great paper!

I am writing as a reader of FRFI and of your publications. Your books *Labour: a party fit for imperialism*, *The Legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution*, *Murder on the Rock* and *Strangeways 1990* have opened my eyes to the way that a socialist society would benefit us all. The 'power people' of today's society are hypocrites who claim they'll do so much good for the 'lower classes' and then, once they're in power, kick them in the teeth.

I am only 22, so I don't remember the last Labour

government, but from what I've heard and read, so-called 'New Labour' is a load of trash to try and win the election.

One of the most oppressive regimes I've come across in prison is here at Swaleside. That's pretty sad considering I've served the DC system which was very oppressive. I shared FRFI 127 with a Bosnian soldier who is in prison here and he was impressed with your view.

Well, I've taken up enough of your wonderful paper, but I'd like to end by saying thanks for a great paper and please keep up the revolution, comrades!

JAIE POWELL
HMP Swaleside

MEETINGS & EVENTS

RCG PUBLIC MEETING
Fortress Britain slams the door: no to the Asylum & Immigration Act
Sunday 9 June 2pm, Bangor Street Community Centre, Brookhouse, Blackburn.
FREE MALCOLM KENNEDY/ JUSTICE FOR PATRICK QUINN SOCIAL
Friday 7 June, 8pm, Camden Irish Centre, Murray St, London NW1.

(jointly organised with the Free Frank Johnson Campaign)

PUBLIC MEETING
Wednesday 19 June, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

PICKET OF APPEAL COURT
Monday 1 July, 10am onwards
Court of Appeal, Strand, London WC2.
The campaign can be contacted via the Colin Roach Centre, 56 Clarence Rd, London E5 8BE. The hearing is scheduled to last a week:

support is needed every day. To pledge a time, te: 0181 533 7111.

FUASCALT - IRISH POLITICAL PRISONERS CAMPAIGN

Fuascalt organises monthly pickets of Downing Street on the first Sunday of every month, 12-1.30pm and socials at The Victoria, Holloway Road, London N7 on the last Thursday of every month. For further information write to PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA or tel: 0181 985 8250.

I would like to order _____ copies of *Strangeways 1990* at £7.95 (post-free) _____ copies of *The Legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution* at £2.95 + 80p p&p _____ copies of *Labour: a party fit for imperialism* at £2.95 + 80p p&p _____ copies of *The New Warlords* at £2.95 + 80p p&p _____ special offer sets of the last three books at £9, including postage (Cheques payable to Larkin Publications)

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Smash the JSA – start the fightback!

**FIGHT
RACISM**
FIGHT IMPERIALISM



On the 9 April unemployment benefit entitlement was cut from one year to six months. This will rob unemployed people of £145 million in benefits in the first year. From October 1996 the whole system will change over to the jobseeker's allowance (JSA) – a system designed to degrade and harass unemployed people even further.

The JSA will not be automatically upgraded in line with inflation. Existing benefits have fallen from 40% of average male earnings in 1979 to 17% today. As well as financial punishment for claimants, the JSA will bring a stricter benefit regime:

- Anyone who walks out of a job or is sacked can have their benefit stopped for up to 26 weeks.
- There will be a 100% benefit sanction for refusing any job or a government training scheme, replacing the present 40% sanction.
- A 100% sanction can be used against claimants for refusing Jobseeker's directives which include changing the way you dress, your hairstyle and your attitude. If you are homeless, your efforts to find housing will define whether you are 'actively seeking work' and therefore entitled to benefit.
- Jobseekers will have to sign a Jobseeker's agreement, setting out how you are going to find work or increase your chances of finding work.

Claimants under 25 who sign on, who make up over a quarter of all claimants, will have their benefit slashed from the unemployment benefit level of £48.25 to a lower rate of

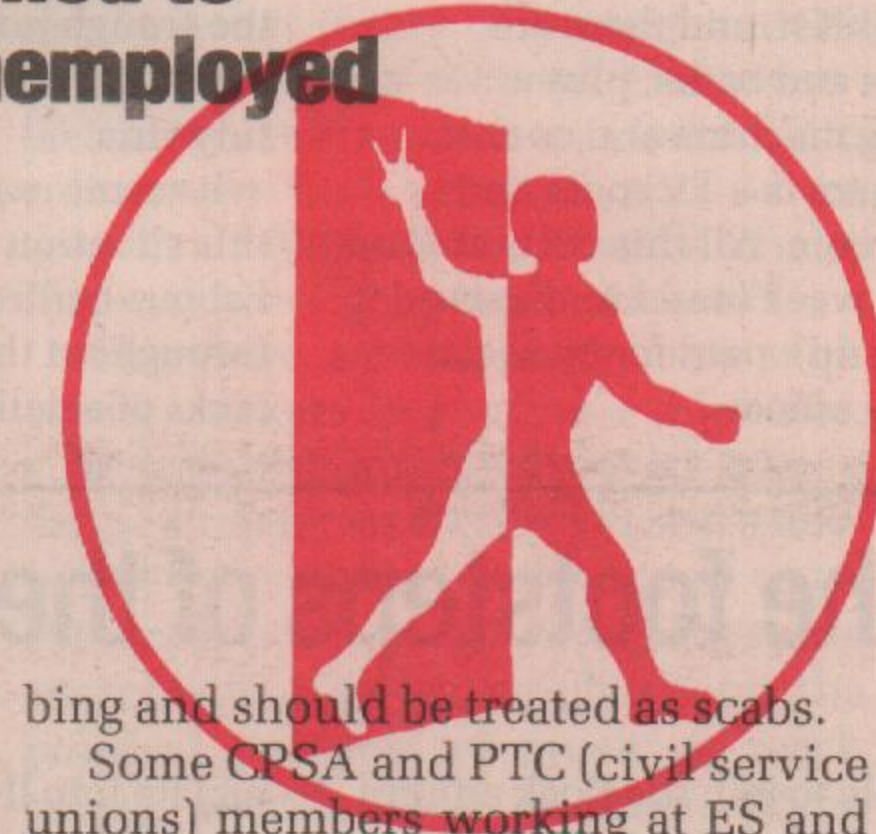
£37.90, regardless of previous national insurance contributions. The allowance of £29.75 a week for an adult dependant will be dropped completely, hitting women hardest.

Pilot schemes can be introduced in any area which will force you on to a 'scheme' or you lose benefit. So far pilot schemes exist in Hull, Gillingham, Maidstone, Gravesend, Beverly, Bransholme, Hessle, Chatham and Strood.

The JSA also serves a political purpose, reducing the official unemployment figures by forcing claimants into low paid jobs or onto government training schemes, which include National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Security Guard training, Retail training (involving one week spent in a classroom and 25 weeks working in a shop for your benefit plus £10 per week, of which £4 is for travel expenses) and some computing courses (run by private companies often using obsolete equipment, being taught by people with no teaching experience, with the emphasis on passing tests and assignments rather than being taught to be computer-competent). By reducing the unemployment figures it is also easier to attack the unemployed as lazy and work-shy.

The JSA will have far wider effects than just attacking the living standards and rights of the unemployed. If the JSA is enforced, the unemployed will be forced into low-paid jobs which will undermine wage levels for most of the working class, and they could be forced to scab for companies like Pall Mall against the Hillingdon strikers. If Employment Service (ES) and Benefit Agency (BA) workers implement these coercive state measures, they will inevitably face an increase in physical attacks and if they are 'successful' in removing people from the dole, they will face losing their own jobs as well.

For there to be any progress for the working class, as a whole, the JSA must be smashed. But who will build the resistance? Not the Labour Party: it has never defended the interests of the unemployed and the low-paid; it wants to make claimants work for their benefits to stop them being a burden on the stakeholders; Labour councils are as rabid as the Tories on benefit fraud. Nor the TUC; it has taken no action against the JSA. Equity, the actors' union, has a campaign to exempt its members from the JSA. These middle class sectarians think the JSA is all right for everyone else but not for them. They are scab-



bing and should be treated as scabs.

Some CPSA and PTC (civil service unions) members working at ES and BA offices which have JSA pilot schemes have been striking for screens in their offices and no redundancies. But at the Peckham ES office the union members have decided to suspend industrial action pending a decision by the Health and Safety Executive – it looks like the plastic flowers are going and the screens are coming back! Elsewhere ES and BA staff on temporary contracts are being offered permanent contracts if they implement the JSA, and in Manchester the staff are being offered promotion.

Groups against the JSA have been formed around the country and have united under the Groundswell network of independent groups against the JSA. In a statement from Groundswell they say 'Whilst recognising the marginalised position many of us have as claimants, particularly our lack of economic or finan-

cial muscle, we must learn the positive lessons of struggle from the last 16 years and tackle the JSA in ways that encourage widespread participation in resistance, both of an individual and collective nature'. As yet, however, the only concrete actions proposed are to support ES and BA workers in their strikes against the JSA to improve their own conditions.

The fight against the JSA has the potential to unite millions of working class people and must contain concrete demands to unite the unemployed, pensioners, low-paid workers, those fighting the 'all work test' for incapacity benefit, those fighting the racist Immigration and Asylum Bill, those fighting for a minimum wage and dole workers. These demands must include:

1. Decent benefits for all, including refugees accompanied by an end to checks on immigration status.
2. Benefits restored to 16 and 17 year olds and housing benefit to be paid in full.
3. All job vacancies to be advertised at job centres made law, to stop the process of privatising vacancies through agencies, specialised jobfinder newspapers, etc.
4. No workfare, compulsory training schemes or being forced to take low paid jobs.
5. TU and community support for all claimants who resist the JSA. Immediate financial support and political demonstrations at any benefit office that enforces any benefit sanctions.
6. Smash the JSA!

By building this movement based on the interests of all the poor, we will build a real fighting movement capable of putting the interests of the working class at the top of the agenda, to start building a world fit for all to live in.

David Howarth

For information about Groundswell, or 'JSA info pack' – send a S.A.E. to Claimants Action Group c/o OUWCU, East Oxford community centre, Princess Street, Oxford OX4 1HU or phone 01865 723750.

Westminster Council gerrymandering:

Tory jobs should face trial

In May, Dame Shirley Porter, former leader of Westminster Tory Council, and five of her best mates and stool pigeons were found guilty of the most gross and blatant corruption, and collectively surcharged £31.6 million by District Auditor John McGill. With a bit of luck Porter will have to pay most of the surcharge out of her £60 million Tesco fortune, since her co-accused are relatively broke. Unfortunately that is not the end of a story which began exactly ten years ago – Porter has lodged an appeal to delay judgement and her victims still suffer.

In the summer of 1986 Westminster Tories saw their majority on the local council slide from 26 to 4. Westminster was already a Tory 'flagship' council – representative of all the Tories can offer in local government. For Porter, the prospect of a future Labour victory in Westminster was unthinkable: 'Imagine socialists running Buckingham Palace', she wrote. 'Militants lording it over Parliament and controlling Downing Street. Left-wing extremists interfering in the daily running of business. A horrible nightmare!' It would require more than a Labour victory to achieve such progress, but Porter is nothing if not stupid. She immediately put into operation plans to gerrymander West-

minster so that the Tories could stay in power – what is more, like the Nazis, she wrote it all down.

'Building stable communities' was the euphemistic title for the strategy. Minutes of closed meetings record instructions to 'stop rehousing in marginal wards', 'politically control' housing allocation, the planning system to be 'managed' and 'its use for social engineering to be discussed with the property owners' group'. The Tories targeted eight marginal 'key wards' which would be demographically controlled through designated sales of council houses to ensure that the poor would give way to aspirant home owners and the middle classes who were more likely

to vote Tory. The homeless were to be shipped out of the borough, and property developers brought in to convert hostels and hotels into luxury flats.

Dr Richard Stone, a local GP, first reported these manoeuvres to the District Auditor in February 1988 when he realised his sick patients were not being rehoused, yet the council was spending £500,000 on steel doors on empty council properties designated for sale. The homeless people 'lucky enough' to be rehoused in the borough moved to tower blocks which were riddled with decaying asbestos which, the Tories knew, was flaking off the ceilings.

Since 1988 Porter et al have been fighting a rearguard action to delay judgement day, claiming that McGill is incompetent and that what they did was legal. They claim that the designated sales policy applied to the whole borough, but this was cosmetic; of the 9,500 properties designated for sale, 75% were in the 8 marginal 'key wards'.

In tune with the times Porter et al have strenuously denied everything: the more vast the corruption, the more complete and damning the evi-



Porter, invested a Dame in 1991 – was 'wilful, disgraceful, improper and unlawful'

dence, the louder they have cried 'unfair'. Porter flits between her homes in Tel Aviv and Florida, carefully avoiding having to explain her flat denials. Yet the £31.6 million surcharge is a drop in the ocean in relation to the scale of corruption – it only accounts for the estimated losses from designated sales. There has been no accounting for the lost rents, planning permission and property development scams, slush funds for re-election and of course, the cemetery sale of a £5 million asset for just 15p. Meanwhile thousands of gullible leaseholders, bullied into buying council flats, have been left

with crippling repair bills and service charges in property which is unsellable and worth little.

Porter claims that the biggest injustice is not to the poor of Westminster, but that the District Auditor has been both judge and jury of her case. She is appealing to the High Court against the surcharge. We think she should get her day in court, not in the civil court, but at the Old Bailey facing criminal charges, with a jury composed of Westminster's homeless people and council tenants. Let's see some harsh sentencing of this real enemy of the people.

Carol Brickley