

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 140 December 1997/January 1998

(unwaged 30p) 50p

## CRISIS LOOMS



South Korean bank workers protest against the government.

Ten years after the stock market crash, five years since the last recession, two years after the Mexican bail-out, new shocks have jolted the international financial system, threatening every corner of the capitalist world with economic ruin.

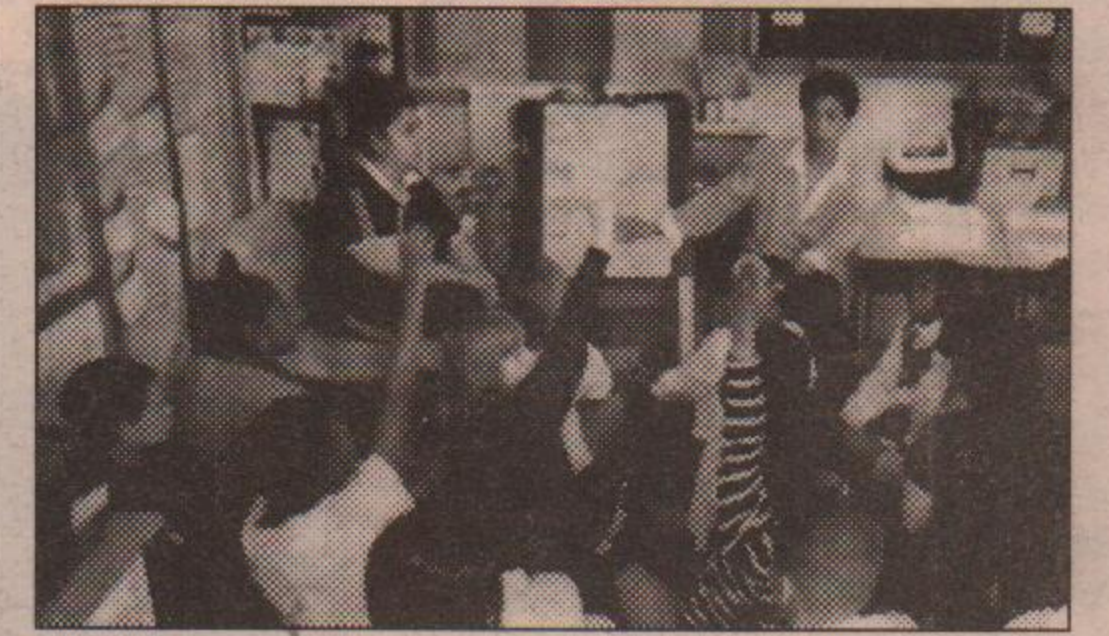
# TIME TO REBUILD SOCIALISM

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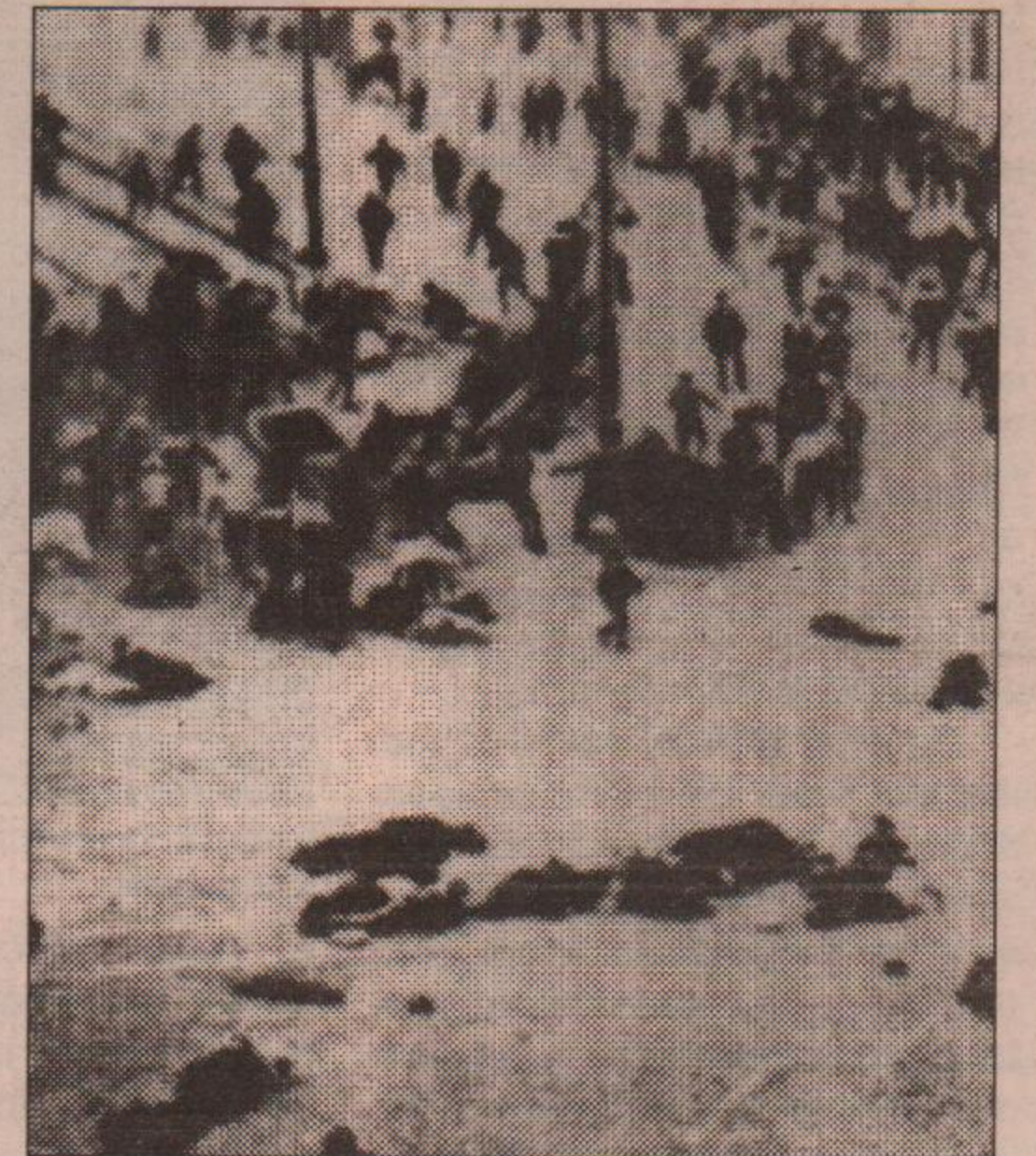
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# The smoking gun: Labour's corruption

We are six months into the Labour government, and there is no doubt as to whose interests it represents. Having made a great play about introducing some window-dressing reforms designed to appeal to the middle classes, it has had to ignominiously abandon them in the face of resistance from big business and wealthy landowners. Profits come first. Jack Straw announced that animal testing for cosmetics would continue 'for the foreseeable future'. The government has decided not to allow time for a bill to ban fox hunting and hare coursing. Meanwhile, its commitment not to raise income tax is being translated into punitive attacks on state welfare for the poor, on the NHS and on state education. However, it is when we look at the tobacco sponsorship fiasco that we see most clearly where Labour's allegiances lie.

There was a chorus of indignation at the revelation that Bernie Ecclestone, head of Formula One, had lobbied a £1 million bung to New Labour before the general election. How could squeaky-clean New Labour stoop to this after all the sleaze of the Tories? It is, of course, a daft question: sleaze and corruption are the norm of bourgeois politics. Multinationals and big business don't have votes as such in a bourgeois democracy, so they get around this little problem with money. If they are BP in Colombia, they buy the local police, and then invest in a private army to terrorise their workers. This is one manifestation of the global labour market. New Labour is impressed, and BP's chair, Lord Simon, now sits in Blair's government. Bernie Ecclestone chooses a different route: a cool million; of course given as an act of complete altruism, without any thought that he would need to call in favours at an early date. In your dreams!

So what are the facts of the matter? New Labour promised a ban on tobacco advertising, and its associated sports sponsorship. It was one of their few promises, but one which the tobacco companies didn't like one bit. However, they also knew they could not fight the proposal openly. Hence they used the Formula One Association (FIA), of which Bernie Ecclestone is vice-president and whose chair is Max Mosely (son of Oswald Mosely, and in the 1960s a fascist activist in support of his father), to fight their corner. Bernie Ecclestone, who is in the *Sunday Times* list of the richest 500 people in Britain (along with three owners of F1 teams) gave £1 million to New Labour in January of this year.

Almost immediately, New Labour started to modify its commitments. In March, Chris Smith, then Shadow Secretary of Health, wrote in the *Financial Times*: 'We need to try and ensure action on sponsorship and promotion in such a way that sporting activity does not suffer. No final decisions have

been made'. Contrast this with what his deputy, Kevin Barron, had said in October 1996 at a meeting in the European Parliament: 'In the UK we will ban advertising and with the EU will work with you in support of the proposed directive on Tobacco Advertising'. This directive would ban all tobacco sponsorship in the EU, and was completely dependent on British support at the Council of Ministers.



Blair - open-ended exemption

Ecclestone's investment was already paying dividends. By summer, Frank Dobson was on board: 'We recognise that sports are heavily dependent on tobacco sponsorship. We do not wish to harm these sports. We will therefore give them time



Harriet Harman - punitive attack on lone parents

to help reduce their dependency on tobacco...'. In fact, the one sport really dependent on tobacco sponsorship is Formula One: it receives £35 million per annum from the tobacco industry compared to £10 million for all other sports. The reason is simple: the huge inter-



Tessa Jowell, Minister of Health

national audiences for Formula One races built up through the FIA's TV marketing monopoly. On 14 October, Dobson was advising Blair that there should be a longer transition period for F1 than for other sports. Two days later, Blair had a meeting with Mosely and Ecclestone, and the following day replied to Dobson saying the exemption should be open-ended. It was left to Health Minister Tessa Jowell to announce the policy on 3 November, arguing that a ban would drive F1 into countries outside of the EC where they would face no restrictions, and at a cost of up to 50,000 jobs in Britain - this last a complete fiction.

The rest is history. A tip-off to the press that Bernie had lobbied the bung sent it into a feeding frenzy. The government hastily sought advice on 7 November from Sir Patrick Neil, the Parliamentary standards watchdog, about both the £1 million donation and a further expected one of £500,000, hoping presumably that it could keep the first if it refused the second. Alas, Sir Patrick ruled against both, leaving Labour £4.5 million in the red. So Bernie and the baccy companies end up without having to pay anything! Meanwhile, smoking will continue to kill 300 people every day - but then most of them are working class, so what does Labour care?

However, giving £1 million to Labour is all the fashion, it seems. Lord Sainsbury has now joined the club. He doesn't want any payback, either - the fact that ministers did not stop a Sainsbury's development in Richmond-upon-Thames after a planning inspector overruled the local council who were against it is, of course, sheer coincidence. Maybe Sainsbury's donation is just protection against its competitors: after all, Asda's Chief Executive, Allan Leighton, is 'advising' the government on its Welfare to Work programme, and has spoken out about the need for a more relaxed approach to out-of-town retail schemes. There are 150 other applications in the pipeline for such developments, and we may expect that with their idolising of consumer choice, the government will be letting these through as well. Certainly Sainsbury's and Asda will want to be amongst the front-runners.

Third member of the £1 million club is Robert Earl, owner of Planet Hollywood, whose personal wealth is estimated at £500 million. He is impressed by Tony Blair, he says - but then he was also very impressed by Margaret Thatcher, so he is being consistent, at least. When Tony Blair spoke at the Labour Party conference about the need for a 'giving society', we now know exactly what he meant!

So let there be no doubt about the reality of New Labour: it is financed by big business to run government with the assistance of big business in the interests of big business.

# Labour's war on the working class

ROBERT CLOUGH

Two years ago, Tony Blair boasted to a big business audience that New Labour would be the only party that would be serious about welfare reform - the fashionable term for welfare cuts. Now he is being true to his word. The government has announced plans to continue with Tory cuts which come into effect next April, and to consider adding further cuts of its own.

First, on 19 November, Harriet Harman, Social Security Secretary, decided to implement Tory government cuts of between £5 and £10.50 per week in lone parent benefits through the abolition of the higher rates of Income Support and Child Benefit they currently receive, saving £390 million over three years. The next day came a report that the government is considering cuts in benefits for 6.5 million disabled people. Such cuts would be implemented either by taxing such benefits, or means-testing or time-limiting them. Answering criticism of her decision on lone parent benefits, Harman declared 'I said this is a hard choice. We're not making a virtue of this. But we are making a virtue of the fact that we have to stay within our manifesto commitments.' Not that this is all. The government has also decided to press ahead with a further Tory measure to limit backdating of benefit claims to one month rather than one year at present. And lastly, they will continue with plans to limit payment of council tax benefit to poor people in large houses, affecting 65,000 people and costing them on average £3.80 a week.

A week earlier, Harman had criticised a group of 54 academics who had protested about poverty-level benefits, saying

'We will fulfil our duty to support those who are without work. But those who can, have to recognise their responsibility to work'. In other words, working class people have a choice: poverty-level benefits, or poverty-level wages.

Alongside actual benefit cuts, civil servants have been in a policing programme to force people off the various types of disability benefit to which they may be entitled. No less than



Children will suffer

250,000 claimants of Disability Living Allowance (currently paid to 1.8 million people) have been targeted for home visits under the so-called 'benefits integrity programme'. It was only after four months that ministers agreed to exclude paraplegics from the review. What is clear is the government is stigmatising disabled people as the 'undeserving' poor in an effort to reduce the £23 billion benefits they currently receive.

'Hard choices' is a cliché used whenever the government announces an attack on the working class; there are never any 'hard choices' to be made in relation to big business and the multinationals - for instance over tobacco sponsorship. Gordon Brown's Green Budget spelled out further attacks on low-paid workers and women in particular through the pro-

## Hard choices

### Legal Aid

One of the latest of Labour's 'hard choice' reforms is the removal of legal aid from all actions which are not criminal, divorce/family law or social welfare cases. Poor people will pay the price of Labour's 'hard choice' by having access to justice completely removed. In future it will be up to solicitors to take on these cases on a 'no win, no fee' basis - something they will be reluctant to do. Plaintiffs will have to take out insurance to cover the payment of defence costs if they lose - and the cost of this will be prohibitive.

The outcome of this 'reform' will be that 932,000 cases a year will not be eligible - many of them compensation for accident victims. Further, for the cases still covered by legal aid, there will be a higher test to qualify - a 75% chance of success, rather than 50%.

The sharpest expression of the cut will be cases involving police misconduct. The police complaints system is rightly held in contempt, and now the only avenue for justice - suing

the police - will also be closed unless you are rich. The police will be above the law.

Meanwhile Lord Chancellor Irvine has had to make some very hard choices about the handmade wallpaper for his office which has cost the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds. Blue or red?

### No freedom of speech for prisoners

Jack Straw, Home Secretary, has decided to continue an appeal begun by his Tory predecessor Michael Howard, intended to deny prisoners the right to give interviews to the press. The case centres on two life prisoners who say they are innocent, who were denied the right to give an interview to Bob Woffinden, author of a book on miscarriages of justice. A previous hearing found in favour of freedom of speech. For Jack Straw and the Prison Service this is much too liberal - if you are found 'guilty' you should be shut up in more ways than one!

### No freedom of speech for anyone

In November Noel Mulholland, Saxon Wood and Steve Booth,

posed Working Family Tax Credit. This would replace existing family credit, and could only work if the government scrapped independent taxation of men and women, and if workers were forced to tell their employers intimate details of their domestic arrangements. Even then, the net effect would be to make low-paid families worse off. Then there was the proposal for 'after-school clubs' for children of lone parents. Harriet Harman has pointedly refused to rule out the possibility of making their use compulsory, saying that compulsion was 'not the issue'.

What has the Parliamentary Labour Party been doing in response? One MP, Steve Pound, said of the single parent benefit cut that 'It's only the same as the price of a couple of packets of fags', saying later that government whips had told him to say this. Five others appeared in a fashion shoot as 'sexy, stylish and spirited' MPs in *Elle* magazine before being told by party whips to support Harman's war against the poor. Another new woman MP dismissed evidence that two-thirds of single parents live below the poverty line with the comment that 'These aren't desperate people. Most of them have got men somewhere in the background', going on to say, 'I appreciate there were some people who voted for us who thought we would make a difference. They didn't understand'. Lastly, a former leftist, Denis MacShane, described single mothers as recipients of 'state charity'. Ugly, middle-class prejudices, uttered by people who will stoop to anything to defend their privileges and their positions.

The cornerstone of Labour's victory was its alliance with big business and the multinationals. The government and its policy committees are stuffed with their representatives. They are now demanding action on welfare spending, and they have a bunch of fawning, odious, middle class wretches in the Labour Party only too eager to do their bidding in between obligatory makeovers. They have declared war on us - we must declare war on them.

were convicted at Portsmouth Crown Court of conspiring to incite criminal damage and sentenced to three years' imprisonment for editing and distributing *Green Anarchist* and the *ALF Newsletter*. According to the state, these publications incited violent direct action, but what was really under attack was the right of activists and journalists to report on actions which have already taken place.

### Merit?

Lord Denning, formerly Master of the Rolls in the Appeal Court and (briefly) Law Lord has been given the Order of Merit for services to the ruling class. Among his many 'hard choices', Denning is particularly loathsome for his dismissal of the Birmingham 6 appeal ('an appalling vista') and his later claims, after their release, that the Guildford 4 and the Birmingham 6 were guilty. If the Birmingham 6 had been hanged, he said, there wouldn't have been all the bother. In a timely move, Blom-Cooper QC has taken up the torch and published a book with similar claims. Perhaps he would like an Order of Merit too? We hope he, at least, gets a libel writ.

# Labour's education fails the test

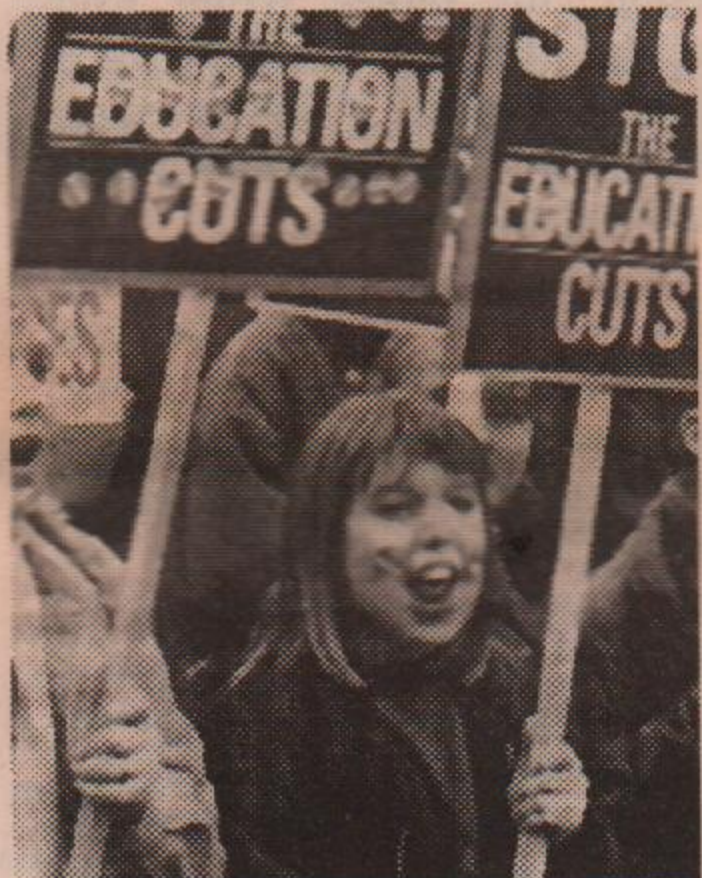
JIM CRAVEN

Labour tells us that 'education, education, education' will solve all. This ludicrous ideological smokescreen is, however, becoming more and more transparent every day. The central idea that raising standards in education is the key to greater economic prosperity and to full youth employment, and so to ending poverty and social exclusion, have been blown aside by recent research.

Peter Robinson from the Centre for Economic Performance has shown that there isn't any significant link between academic performance in schools and economic prosperity in developed countries. Ironically, he used the same Third International Mathematics and Science Study that was used by Labour to damn the quality of mathematics in British schools to show that several countries with weak economies, such as the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, perform well at maths, while some of the strongest economies, including Germany and the USA are not significantly better at maths than Britain. Robinson further undermined Labour's claims that poor academic performance is at the root of economic problems by pointing out that in a parallel study of science attainment in schools Britain finished near the top of the league. More embarrassment for Labour came when it was revealed that British children came second only to Singapore in the ability to apply mathematics to problems; a skill arguably more relevant to economic performance than simply doing sums.

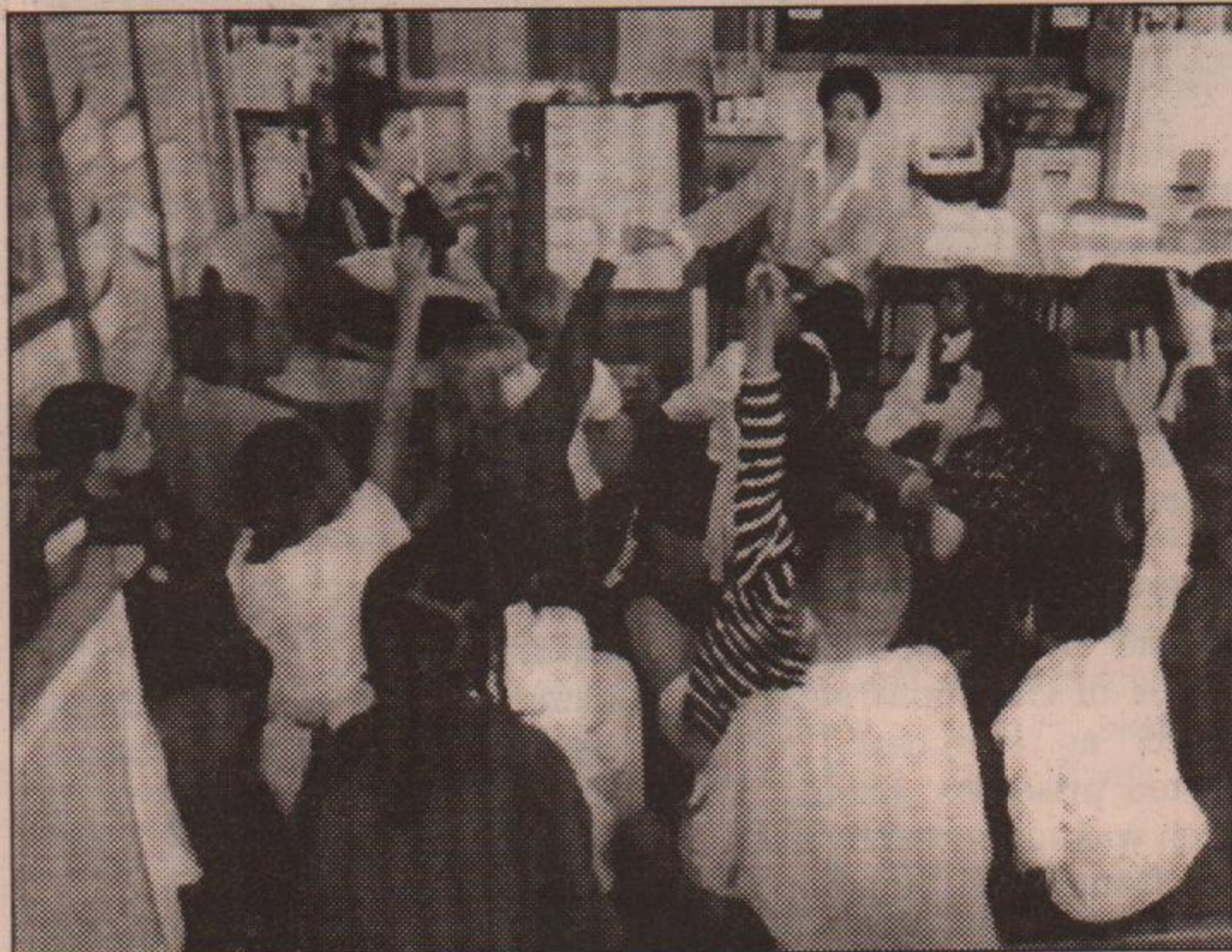
Robinson discovered that instead of academic performance affecting economic performance it is rather the other way round. It is the social and economic disadvantages suf-

fered by so many working class children that creates the conditions for their comparatively poor academic performance. The effects of poverty and social exclusion totally overwhelm all the other educational factors such as teaching methods, homework policy, streaming and setting that Labour is so keen to promote. Indeed, two pieces of research from Manchester University reveal that, despite all the educational tinkering and billions of pounds spent, there has been no improvement in maths standards over the past eight years and reading standards for 11-year-olds have notably deteriorated since 1992. The only other significant influences on children's performance Robinson could find - parental involvement and peer groups - are also social class factors, so Robinson concludes that 'Over the long run the most powerful "educational" policy is arguably one which tackles child poverty, rather than any modest interventions in schooling.' David Blunkett,



in a display of philistinism remarkable even by his standards, dismissed the whole of Robinson's report as 'claptrap'.

Robinson's claims, however, are illuminated by an analysis of SAT results in 1996 (SATs are the compulsory national tests at seven, 11 and 14 years) which demonstrated such a



'Over the long run the most powerful "educational" policy is arguably one which tackles child poverty, rather than any modest interventions in schooling.'

close correlation between levels of achievement and the children's class background that the test results could have been pretty accurately predicted from the social composition and location of the school alone.

Not that SAT results are usually very illuminating. Robinson points out how unreliable they are as indicators of improvements in academic standards. He demonstrates the inconsistencies and contradictions between standards as revealed by the different tests and exams (SATs, GCSEs, NVQs etc) and between the different national performance targets based upon them. In particular, Robinson points out that the targets for primary mathematics and English (that 75% and 80% respectively of 11-year-old children should be achieving National Curriculum level 4 by the year 2002 and a similar target for GCSEs) could be achieved by concentrating schools' efforts on the 'top' 80% of children and totally ignoring the 'bottom' 20% whom Labour claims to be so keen on helping.

In another section of his report, Robinson challenges Labour's claims that employers are crying out for better skilled

workers. He points out that the Department for Education and Employment's own Skill Needs Surveys between 1994 and 1996 showed that only 18% of employers believed there was any 'skills gap' in their workforce and most of this was to do with non-academic skills. Only 4% felt there was a lack of necessary literacy and numeracy among their employees. This shouldn't be surprising if we consider that jobs in capitalist Britain are so mind-numbing that 40% of all jobs and 80% of unskilled jobs require reading skills no better than those achieved by many infant school children and that 85% of all jobs and 95% of all unskilled jobs require only a similar level of mathematics.

This is important to bear in mind, because Labour uses the illusion of skill shortages and rising demand for academic skills as a spur to make reluctant students conform with their educational programme. In fact, even if trends in the 1980s towards a greater proportion of 'white collar/pen-pushing jobs' was to continue, the present level of educational attainment would not be exhausted for another 25 to 50 years. And the reality is that the

radical destruction of the old manufacturing industries has now been mainly completed and the trend is towards more and more unskilled and de-skilled work.

It may remain true that, all else being equal, an individual can improve his or her employment prospects by achieving better academic qualifications. However, this is only because he/she has the credentials to leap-frog over someone else in the dole queue. It is not because that person is now able to fill some previously unsatisfiable skills shortage. And it certainly is not a solution open to the mass of unemployed workers. Unemployment is endemic to capitalism. Under the normal conditions of capitalism now prevailing there just won't be the jobs available to be filled by workers; better qualified or not.

Educational standards are not at the root of youth unemployment. Indeed Blanchflower and Freeman at the Institute for Public Policy Research have shown that there is no significant pool of 'unemployable' young people, as Labour would have us believe. They point out that young people today are far



David Blunkett - 'Read my Lips, No Selection'

better qualified than earlier generations when unemployment was lower. Nor have young people priced themselves out of jobs, for their wages in recent years have fallen relative to other workers' pay.

Instead, what Blanchflower and Freeman found was that youth employment is 'exceptionally sensitive' to overall employment conditions. A 1% rise in total unemployment leads to almost twice that rise in youth unemployment. In other words, the quickest way to solve youth unemployment is to make sure there are more jobs all round.

Of course, this is precisely what decadent capitalism in crisis cannot do, no more than it can create the conditions for educational advance by eradicating poverty and class privilege. So Labour, the party of capitalism, will continue to tinker with the system, desperately chasing the phantom of 'standards', sowing false hopes and diverting the blame for failure onto teachers and the young people themselves; while the social democratic left, unable to see the class nature of education, think the problems can just be solved by more resources. Most working class youngsters already see through these delusions but can't yet see an alternative. It is the urgent task of communists to win young people to the only movement that can create the conditions for life enhancing work and education. We too have our educational priorities - revolution, revolution, revolution. ■

## 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 and Public Order Act and anti-trade union legislation have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. **The RCG opposes all anti-working class laws and fights to defend democratic rights - the right to organise and protest.**

► Britain is an imperialist country. Ireland is Britain's oldest colony and the nationalist working class of the Six Counties are subject to military occupation and brutal repression. **The RCG supports the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination and calls for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.**

► 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.**

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. **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. Website:  
<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rcgrfi/rcgrfi.htm>

## Pensioners' notes

RENE WALLER

To say pensioners are dismayed by the government's failure to take any action to restore the value of our pensions or make any move to put things right after the barefaced robberies inflicted by the years of Tory rule is putting it mildly, at the very least.

Yes, it's true that some cold weather payments were reluctantly made to avoid the scandal of mass fatalities amongst those totally dependent on the state pension, but this just highlights the disgraceful position which shows that, despite a lifetime of work in one of the richest countries of the world, pensioners cannot rely on an income to supply even their basic needs, let alone allow them sufficient to enjoy a modicum of comfort and freedom from anxiety. Pensioners should not have to beg - this much is surely their right. Let

younger people remember we all get old and the best provision we can make is to ensure there is an adequate state pension for everyone. Yes, we should, if we can, put something by, but the average pay packet is at best hard put to keep us out of debt and provide the occasional treat. A long period of steady work is a bonus when most workers save what they can, but how many are able to avoid dipping into the fund long before retirement? It's good to preserve a small nest egg but that's all it can be - and that is not adequate.

Pensions are not a favour but a right, and we need them guaranteed now. Let's get together and fight for it, and understand right now that Labour has made no pledges. They understand only one thing - the threat of lost votes. At the moment they think they can get away with anything by shouting 'Our number one job is to keep the Tories out.' Our priority is to keep their



Tory policies out. We can do it if we are quite clear as to what we want.

Despite unfavourable weather we can still mobilise quickly and efficiently. All we need is a clear purpose and a refusal to be defeated. To get the Tories out is fine, but it is only the start and don't let us ever forget it, otherwise once again we'll be facing a Tory revival supported by those blindly wanting change but not seeing how to get the sort they really want. So let's pause, take careful stock and then act firmly. And don't forget that we can and must win and a victory for us

will help everyone. We don't see our struggle as an isolated thing; we don't want to take from other sections of workers, but to blaze a trail for others to follow. After all, we have plenty of experience of how to resist attack and that's something we'd be proud to pass on.

I'll end by promising victory if we not only fight hard but stay united and firmly refuse to back down when we know our cause is just.

Once again, let's remember we are many, they are few. All we need is the determination to win.

# Hungry for justice

A unique and inspiring demonstration of solidarity with wrongly-convicted prisoners took place in Birmingham city centre from 27-29 November. From all over the country, families, friends and political groups came together for the first time, in an initiative launched by Action against Injustice, to expose a rotten and corrupt British judicial system, police and courts which have put hundreds of innocent people in gaol. They went on hungerstrike for the three days alongside over 100 prisoners in 24 different gaols – the number of prisoners joining the hungerstrike went up each day.

In Eastwood women's prison, Gloucestershire, Annette Hewins went on hungerstrike and was immediately joined by 12 of her fellow inmates, so angered were they by her wrongful imprisonment. Similar acts of solidarity took place throughout the prison system.

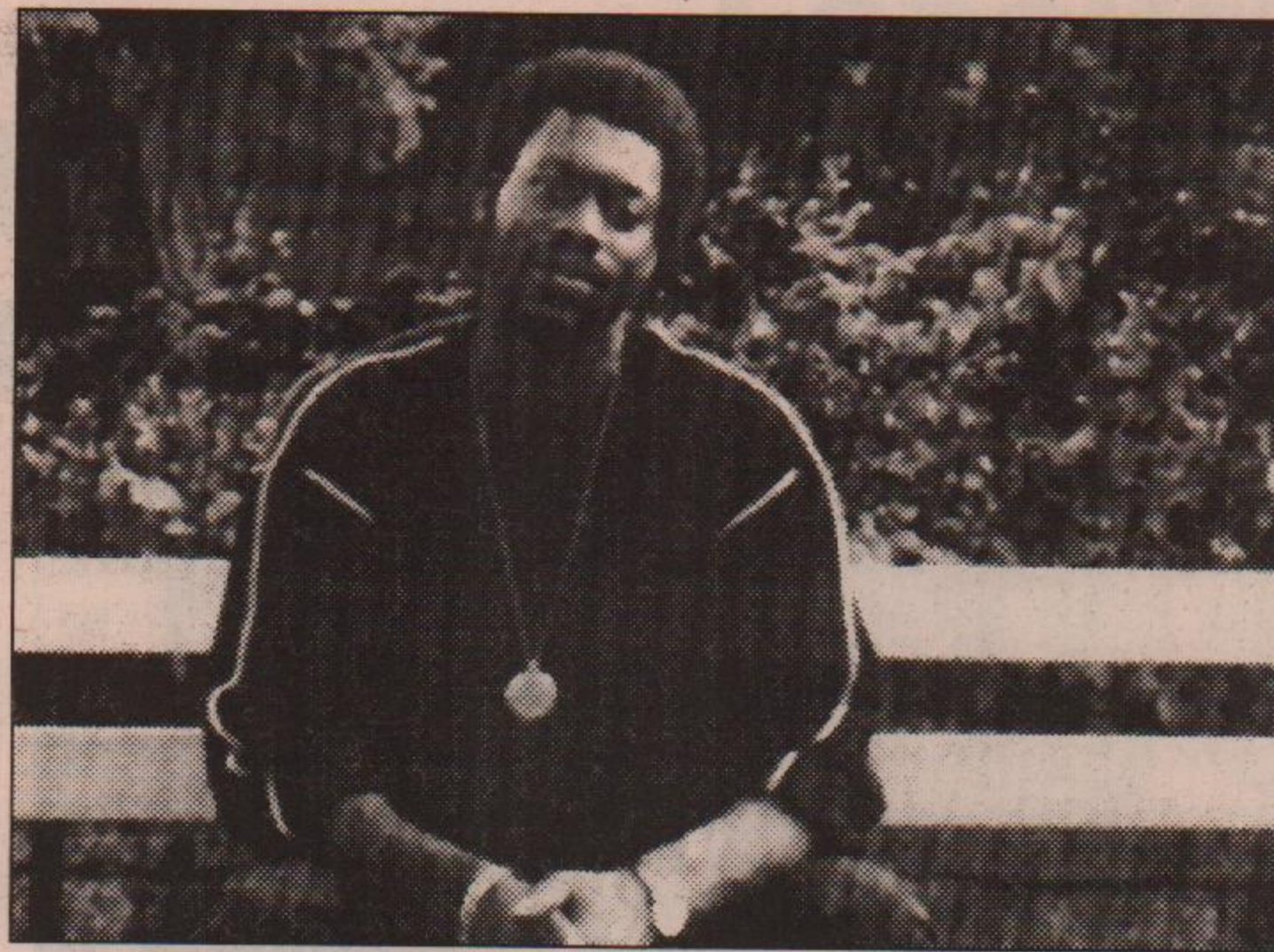
During the course of the three days, members of all the campaigns petitioned, gave out

leaflets and talked to thousands of people. Fourteen television interviews were given, getting the message across loud and clear: 'No justice! No peace!' Russ Spring, of Anarchist Black Cross, told FRFI that the intention is to 'continue to build a movement rather than individual campaigns'. It was clear that this united approach was giving much strength to the families – until now so isolated.

Simon Singh, son of Michael Singh who is in Stocken prison after being framed by Bradford police for murder in 1989, said: 'This is the best way to get the message to the public. The campaigns have been helpful to each other.'

The campaigns set up banners, stalls and photographs of wrongly-convicted prisoners. These included Winston Silcott, Satpal Ram, Kenny Carter, Roisin McAliskey, Susan May, Oliver Campbell, Mark Stoner-Seed, Eddie Gilfoyle, Warren Slaney and many more.

Two massive banners bearing the names of all the prisoners were at the head of the



Winston Silcott – framed prisoner

march on 29 November to mark the end of the hungerstrike. Crowds of Christmas shoppers paused as marchers noisily chanted prisoners' names. The march was supported by delegations from the Hillingdon Hospital strikers and the Liverpool Dockers. A supporter of the dockers told the concluding rally: 'We have to fight for people whose voices cannot be heard... against the judicial system that wants to bury them.'

Following the success of this action, the campaigns have agreed to plan more activity, and have proposed a Convoy for Justice – several marches converging on London in April/May 1998. The idea is to hold

public meetings and protests at prisons along the way. Prisoners will be asked to supply visiting orders to Home Secretary Jack Straw, inviting him to discuss their cases with them individually in prison!

This hungerstrike is a significant development by relatives, families and campaigners. As Nicole Gorman, whose husband John is in Wormwood Scrubs, told FRFI: 'I'm very pleased with the demonstration, especially as it's been raining. John is only one of many in prison for crimes they didn't commit. When we come together in solidarity we've got a voice for them as well as for our own campaign for justice.'

# Refugees not welcome in racist Britain

NICKI JAMESON

October 1997 saw an outpouring of unrestrained xenophobia directed at Roma (gypsy) would-be immigrants from the Czech and Slovak Republics. Lurid headlines proclaimed 'Gypsies keep out' (*Daily Mail*) and 'Invasion of the Giro Czechs' (*The Sun*). Even the 'broadminded' *Independent* was no better with its 'Gypsies invade Dover hoping for a handout'.

To the rescue of the sacred white cliffs charged Home Secretary Jack Straw who, like his predecessor Michael Howard, is the descendant of immigrants from eastern Europe. Straw denounced the 'refugees' attempts to claim political asylum as 'abusive' and rushed in new measures, cutting the period of time in which asylum applicants can lodge information supporting their claim from 28 to five days after they are interviewed on arrival. The Refugee Council spinelessly welcomed this move, declaring it was in refugees' interests to have their claims processed quickly.

## 'Genuine refugees' and 'economic migrants'

It is important to understand that the entire distinction made by successive governments between 'genuine refugees' and 'economic migrants' is a false one, deliberately used to smear all asylum-seekers and reduce their chances of settling in Britain. Tyranny, war and imperialism destroy people's lives and their livelihoods. For example, the Turkish army burns down villages in Kurdistan, terrorising the inhabitants, destroying their livestock and rendering them destitute. The political

and economic consequences of such racist brutality are inseparable and the notion that those fleeing from it can be neatly divided into one group fleeing persecution and another seeking to improve their standard of living is complete nonsense.

## Persecution in the Czech and Slovak Republics

There is overwhelming evidence of systematic persecution of Roma people in both parts of the former Czechoslovakia. Since 1990, nearly 30 gypsies have been murdered in racist attacks in the Czech Republic alone, including a six-year-old boy who was strangled. This year in Slovakia a Roma house was burned down resulting in one person dead and three seriously injured; a father was stabbed to death and his son badly injured; three Roma died as a result of violence by skinheads and a group of mentally handicapped Roma children were savagely attacked by a skinhead gang yelling 'we will kill all gypsies'.

The majority of the violence is carried out by gangs of skinheads, who clearly have widespread support, both among large sections of the non-Roma population and at government level, with ministers making public comments about reducing the gypsy population.

After centuries of persecution culminating in the Nazi holocaust, the rights of the east European Roma were protected by postwar communist governments. Since the collapse of those governments a decade ago there has been a huge resurgence of violent racism, against 'foreigners' in general and gypsies in particular. The 1992 division of Czechoslovakia into two separate nationalistic

republics has made matters worse. A Czech law, requiring two years' residence and a clean criminal record for the previous five for anyone from the Slovak side of the border who wishes to live in the Czech Republic, has been deliberately used against Roma, rendering them effectively stateless. In Slovakia gypsies hounded from their homes by racist violence are forced into shanty-town 'settlements' in isolated areas. Their chances of finding employment are non-existent.

## Persecution in Britain

Following the implementation of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act (passed by the Conservative government with no opposition from Labour), and a subsequent High Court ruling which judged it inhumane to withdraw welfare benefits from refugees, responsibility for providing for asylum-seekers has largely been devolved to local authorities. Most of the Roma who have not been deported or detained are eligible for Income Support, having made immediate claims for political asylum. But in the current wave of hysteria, the issue of local resources has been exploited to stir up anti-refugee and anti-gypsy feeling among the population of east Kent, a largely impoverished area. Its mining industry destroyed after the 1984-5 strike and employment in the ports savaged by cutbacks, mergers and privatisation.

Gypsies are a 'soft target' for racists. They are stereotyped as dirty, anti-social and criminal and have been persecuted, not only in eastern Europe, but in Spain, Britain and Ireland, for centuries. As a result of the 1994 Criminal Justice Act, one in three gypsies in Britain is



now without an authorised stopping place. Racist attacks on gypsy sites are commonplace, access to education and healthcare is poor and infant mortality is 7.5 per cent higher than among the settled population.

The Home Office claims that the east European gypsies came to Britain as a result of a television programme showing an easy life here. Britain's public image abroad, especially following the death of Diana, queen of good causes, still miraculously manages to be that of a benevolent, caring country, which upholds minority rights, a safe haven for victims of persecution.

This 'decent' image has always been a lie: Britain introduced its first asylum laws in 1905 to prevent Jewish refugees from entering the country to escape pogroms in eastern Europe, and has been introducing similar measures ever since, most of them designed to keep out black people. Last year, 28,000 out of 30,240 applications for asylum in Britain were refused. Many of the Czech and Slovak Roma, who arrived this summer and autumn have been sent straight back – to who knows what fate – while others have been imprisoned in immigration detention centres. So far this year, the Home Office has processed 140 asylum applications from Slovakian refugees. Not a single one has been accepted.

OBITUARY

## Steven Kitson

4 January 1957 – 12 November 1997



Steven Kitson, Secretary and Treasurer of the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group, died in Amsterdam on 12 November 1997 after a year-long struggle against cancer. He was 40. Steve's father, David Kitson, was a political prisoner, imprisoned in the early 1960s for 20 years for his activities as a member of the High Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing. All the family – Steven's mother, Norma Kitson (an ANC member), Amanda, his sister, and Steven himself – were involved in campaigning against apartheid and to free the political prisoners. In January 1982, on a visit to South Africa to see his father in gaol, Steven was arrested and detained by South African security police. The vigorous campaign which secured his freedom within days – 'squeezed like a pip from a lemon' his father wrote from prison – led to the setting up of City of London Anti-Apartheid Group. It was an event which changed our lives.

In 1982, I went to a picket outside the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square which was calling for the removal of prisoners in Pretoria Central prison (including David Kitson) to a new gaol, and for the release of all political prisoners. I had been at this, but apart from knowing that his father was in gaol in South Africa, I was ignorant of politics and knew only a little about South Africa. So I kept going to the picket – it was inspirational. It ended 86 days later, when the apartheid regime agreed to move the prisoners to decent conditions.

With the Kitson family, the RCG and people met through the picket, the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group grew from strength to strength. In 1986, in

response to the State of Emergency in South Africa, City AA called its second non-stop picket, this time promising to stay outside the embassy until Nelson Mandela was free – a promise which it kept.

Steve would spend all night on the picket and go to work in the morning. He continued his commitment to the struggle against apartheid throughout his life, inspiring others to join and be active in the movement. He worked behind the scenes in administration, gave speeches and, most of all, led the singing on pickets and at demonstrations. During the 1987 hurricane he kept the banner flying!

Three years after the release of his father from gaol, Steve moved to Amsterdam and was active in the Azania Committee. He was active in two choirs singing South African freedom songs, both of which were present at his funeral.

Well over 200 people attended Steven's funeral in Amsterdam, at which I spoke on behalf of the Revolutionary Communist Group and City of London Anti-Apartheid Group. A moving letter was read out from his niece, Nomp, and the room resounded to the sound of song and drumming.

Steve was physically fit and athletic. He cycled and played rugby and football. He was a talented mathematician and a computer genius. He was well respected in his field and had a brilliant career, cruelly shortened.

He showed the same courage facing death as he had shown in life in his personal and political struggles. I will remember him on long, freezing nights on the non-stop picket getting the entire shift to run around the racist Embassy to keep warm. A luta continua, Steve.

Richard Roques

There will be a memorial meeting to celebrate Steven Kitson's life at 7pm on Tuesday 16 December, outside the South African Embassy, Trafalgar Square, and later at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. All are welcome.

## TERRY O'HALLORAN

1 May 1952 – 23 January 1989

Terry O'Halloran, communist, journalist, campaigner for prisoners' rights and the freedom of the people of Ireland, died nine years ago at the tragically early age of 36. His comrades continue to remember him with affection and value the lasting contribution he made. Each year, as the anniversary of his death approaches, we find ourselves reflecting on what he might have said or written about the year's events. This year, of course, the election of the New Labour government would have been top of the list of topics to be mercilessly savaged by his biting wit and incisive political commentary.

To commemorate Terry's life and work, the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund was set up in 1989. The Fund provides books, magazines and radios to prisoners and organises occasional meetings on related themes. As the prison population continues to rise every year, more and more prisoners are contacting the Fund with requests for material and support. The Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund can be contacted at BCM Box 5960, London, WC1N 3XX.

The Fund also organises an annual event to remember Terry. For the past few years this has taken the form of a short commemoration at the Karl Marx memorial in Highgate Cemetery, followed by a social gathering. For full details of this year's commemoration, telephone FRFI on 0171 837 1688.

## Organising against low pay

Background to the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign

- Under the Jobseeker's Allowance rules, Nigel Cook was forced to register with job agencies, which supply casual labour to companies on an 'as and when needed' basis. Workers are employed on literally an hourly basis with no security of employment.
- Within an hour of registering, Nigel was sent to a firm, M&S Packaging (Blackburn) Ltd, which packs CDs for the multinational company PolyGram.
- Conditions at M&S were appalling and casual workers were paid as little as £3 an hour. Workers had to work 12-hour shifts, days and nights, and had to stand all the time. Breaks were at the supervisor's discretion.
- When Nigel started to organise a union he was sacked. Due to a legal technicality, he was prevented from going to an industrial tribunal.
- A campaign was started to get Nigel his job back and to highlight the ever-increasing use of casual labour and to fight back against the obscene levels of poverty pay now being paid to many workers.

# REINSTATE NIGEL COOK

NIGEL COOK reports on developments in his campaign

### PolyGram profits from poverty pay

It is now a well-known fact that managers of PolyGram had put pressure on the owners of M&S Packaging to sack me. Jack Pye, support services manager for PolyGram, in a letter to Dave McCarthy, a director of M&S, complains about an article I wrote detailing the slave labour conditions in which PolyGram's CDs were packed. Obviously angered by these accusations being made public, Jack Pye then attempts to attack my character by accusing me of misconduct. His letter ends with a firm instruction to McCarthy that I 'will not be allowed on PolyGram premises'.

It was some time after my sacking that we became aware of this letter. The campaign immediately sent a reply to the managing director of PolyGram International in London. We made thousands of copies of this letter and used it in our campaign work. In towns and cities up and down the country we have held stalls outside record shops that sell PolyGram CDs. Many people, when told of the vast profits made by PolyGram at the expense of workers forced to work for poverty pay, were outraged and enthusiastically signed our letter of protest to PolyGram.

Clearly alarmed, and concerned for its image, in mid-November PolyGram started to reply. In a standard letter, Amanda Conroy, head of Corporate Communications, is now telling people that 'the matter extends beyond Poly-

Gram's responsibility'. She also claims PolyGram have no 'control' or 'direction' over M&S and that this company does not work 'on an exclusive basis with PolyGram'.

She seems to have forgotten the existence of the letter written by her colleague Jack Pye which resulted in my sacking. She also fails to mention the fact that PolyGram managerial and supervisory staff are continually present at M&S and are fully aware of the slave labour conditions there. Conroy's denial that there is an 'exclusive' relationship between PolyGram and M&S is totally misleading. We have a sworn affidavit made by the management of M&S that clearly states PolyGram is their 'sole customer'.

### Downsizing, outsourcing - let's keep that fact in-house!

PolyGram, like all the other multinationals, is 'restructuring' and 'rationalising' its operations. These words are used as image-friendly terms to hide the impoverishing offensive being waged on workers' conditions and wages. A South Korean business delegation that recently visited the Blackburn site praised PolyGram managers for the 'flexibility' of their workers.

The Philips-owned site, where its PolyGram company is based, now houses firms that do work for PolyGram. For instance, the printing of the CD covers and the actual packaging of the CDs are now done by firms situated only yards



The RNCC pickets PolyGram

from PolyGram's manufacturing plant. Both these firms are in buildings formerly used by PolyGram and are protected by PolyGram's own security guards. Both these firms use casual labour.

On 25 November, Philips made 12 workers redundant. New employees of PolyGram are now being employed on a new type of contract. Whilst technically classed as full-time and permanent, workers on these contracts can be laid off, without pay, with very little notice for indefinite lengths of time.

This is the reality of the 'flexibility' so admired and envied by businessmen around the world

### Labour guarantees business a flexible workforce

The Labour government's position on the increasing use of casual labour has been clearly spelled out by Minister of Labour Ian McCartney. They support it. In a letter to the campaign, he tells us: 'Part of the government's longer-term task is to create a fresh approach...[to] help improve the competitive performance of UK business.' So as not to be misun-

derstood, he drops his flowery language and tells us exactly what is meant by 'fresh approach': 'It is therefore important to maintain flexibility on the labour market.' His final sentence rams this point home when he declares: 'It is right that employers should have the freedom to offer contracts that best meet their particular business objectives'.

Such unashamed defence of exploitation will come as sweet music to the ears of the management of PolyGram!

### Business and Labour profit from people's misery

The Labour Party recently received a £1 million donation from Planet Hollywood, which pays its workers less than £3 per hour. Such generous donations from big business will ensure that Labour serves their interests. Any talk of a minimum wage is just crap, designed to give the impression that Labour really cares about the most impoverished sections of the working class forced to work for poverty pay. It does not.

The campaign recently held a stall outside a meeting of the Blackburn Labour Party. Jack Straw was the guest speaker. He

sneaked in through the back door so he would not have to meet us. As we informed the members of Blackburn Labour Party about the reality of poverty pay - for example, a job advertised in the local Jobcentre for a care assistant to work 10-hour night shifts for £1 an hour - one of them threatened me. Shortly after speaking to Phil Riley, secretary of the local party, Councillor A Patel came out of the meeting and scrubbed his name off our petition.

Blackburn's Labour mayor, Peter Greenwood CBE, has attacked the campaign and publicly told other Labour councillors and members not to get involved in it.

Nationally and locally, Labour, in words and deeds, have not only refused to support our campaign but are actually hostile to it and attempting to kill it off. We won't let them. The campaign's street work proves to us that those who will be in the forefront of the fightback, against poverty and slave labour, are those who are forced to work in such conditions. ■

Donations to the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign can be sent to PO Box 14, Accrington, BB5 155, cheques payable to RNCC. Or tel: 01254 679605 for more information about the campaign.

### Picket of Polygram and Rally

11am Saturday 6 December  
Philips Rd, Blackburn

Speakers: Nigel Cook; Liverpool Dockers; Hillingdon Hospital Workers; Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! TGWU

The rally is a contribution to the worldwide Season of Conscience, highlighting the use of slave labour by multinational companies

## News from Cuba

TANIA JACKSON

### Poder Popular

On 19 October, Cubans elected their municipal leaders in the Poder Popular. 97.59% of the Cuban electorate voted in these elections, with only 7.21% left blank or spoiled - a ringing endorsement of popular support for Cuban democracy. The kind of 'electioneering' we are familiar with in Britain is not allowed here: candidates may only post up their CVs, showing their educational, workplace and political achievements and which organisations they belong to. They don't have to be Communist Party members to stand - in my district, one out of the three wasn't. Candidates simply need to have the support of the people. Those elected are chosen on the basis of merit alone. Long live Cuban democracy!

### Cuban Communist Party's Vth Congress

The historic Vth Congress of the CPC was held in Havana from 8-10 October, with 1,500 delegates taking an active part, electing the new Central Committee, re-electing Fidel and Raul Castro as first and second secretaries, and contributing to debates on the Economic Resolution and the conference document, *The Party of unity, democracy and human rights*

we defend. A draft of this had been discussed not just by the Party's 780,000 members, but in 230,000 meetings up and down the country; out of the 6.5 million Cubans who participated, only 766 rejected the document.

Fidel addressed the opening session with a 6½-hour speech - not bad for someone that the US claims is at death's door! His main theme was Cuba's survival through the hostile conditions of the Special Period and the intensification of the US blockade. To combat the shortages, Cuba has had to encourage foreign capital investment, increase tourism, legalise the dollar and introduce incentive payment schemes, allow self-employment and transfer some state entities into cooperatives, especially in the agricultural sector. All this has led, as Fidel pointed out, to undesirable social differences. However, Cuba has managed to survive and maintain a basic standard of living for its people. But, as Fidel stressed, there are many countries where the poor live in a permanent 'special period'. And, in Cuba, despite the difficulties, they have increased life expectancy to 76 years and further reduced infant mortality to 7.4 per 1,000 live births.

The issue now for Cuba is to increase production to pull out of the Special Period. This



means increased efficiency, particularly in sugarcane production and other export goods, and increased food production to reduce prices in the farmers' markets. Workers in all parts of the economy are being asked to step up the drive for efficiency, with party cadres expected to play a leading role.

### Music on the streets

From 14-16 November, Ciego de Avila hosted Cuba's fourth Mobile Disco Festival, with four other provinces taking part and supported by the national mobile disco of Cuba. We were able to see in action the mobile disco donated to Ciego's UJC last year by Rock around the Blockade. People of all ages filled the streets, out to enjoy themselves in Cuban style. First prize went jointly to Ciego and Santa Clara, and the DJ from Camaguey won a prize for animating the crowd so well. A brilliant event.

Tania Jackson & Kathy Fernand

## Remembering Comandante Che

CAT WIENER

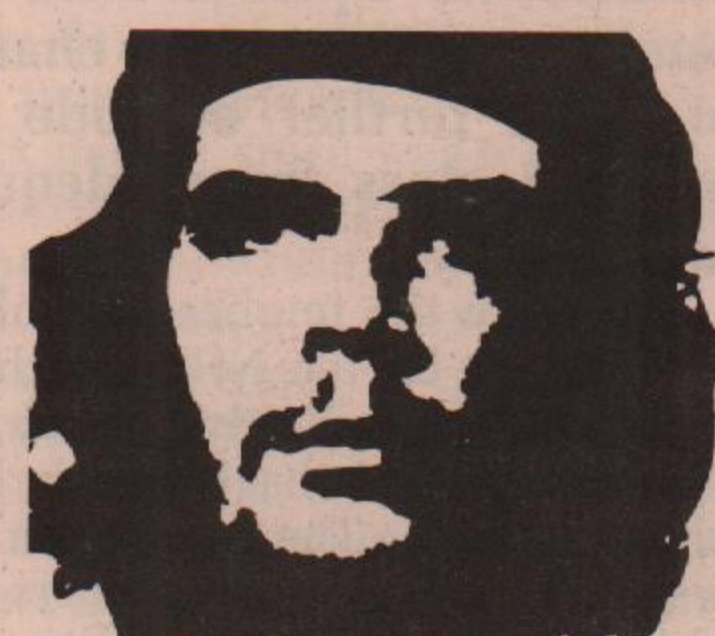
On 17 October, almost exactly 30 years after their murder in Bolivia, the bodies of Comandante Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and six of his comrades were laid to rest in Che's adopted homeland, Cuba, in the city of Santa Clara where Che had led the Rebel Army to victory in 1959.

Tens of thousands of Cubans lined the route and in every city Cubans gathered to express their respect and emotion. The corteges were met by Fidel Castro, members of the Political Bureau and Central Committee of the CPC and comrades from the Rebel Army, as well as members of Che's family and thousands of residents of Santa Clara. A children's choir sang, followed by a 21-gun salute. President Castro paid tribute to Che, saying: 'His stature will continue to grow as injustice, exploitation, inequality, unemployment, poverty, hunger and misery become more dominant in human society...Che was a genuine communist and is now the example and paradigm of revolutionaries and communists...a fighter may die, but not his ideas... Today, he's not in La Higuera, he's everywhere, wherever there is a just cause to

defend. Che is waging and winning more wars than ever. Thank you, Che, for our history, your life and your example.'

### London rally: 'Che lives'

On 8 October, more than 200 people gathered for a torchlit rally in Trafalgar Square to mark the anniversary of the death of Che Guevara. In a fitting tribute to Che's internationalism, a large number were Turkish and Kurdish comrades from the Turkish organisation DHKC, involved in their own struggle against imperialism and oppression, as well as representatives from British political organisations, student societies and the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign. There were revolutionary songs, readings from Che's writings, chants against the imperialist US blockade and in defence of Cuba's socialist revolution, speakers from the Revolutionary Communist Group, Rock around the Blockade, the DHKC and the Young Communist League (CPB), and messages of solidarity from those in struggle around the world. All paid tribute to Che's lasting legacy as a communist, a revolutionary and an internationalist. The rally ended with a rousing rendition of the *Internationale* in English, Turkish, and Spanish!



### Messages to the rally

'... a new 'ghost seems to be stalking Europe' - and America and Africa as well... Che is still alive and the study of his life and revolutionary thinking guides struggles all over the blue planet.

For us here in South America, it was an excellent surprise to know that this anniversary is being celebrated also in Britain, where the working class was born. Wasn't history supposed to be finished? Wasn't the destiny of humanity to be exploitation and competition forever? Once again in London, Montevideo, Havana and many other cities thousands of people will answer: NO!

Juventud del Movimiento 26 de Marzo, Uruguay

'To know that all over the world, in Britain as in Italy, from Europe to Latin America, there are millions of human beings who continue to hold these aspirations in their hearts, that they are still working and getting ready to "conquer the future", strengthens our conviction that we are on the right path... Hasta la victoria!'

Circulo de Perugia (Italia) de Asociacion de Solidaridad Internacionalista con Cuba

# New Labour: attacking our health



**E**very measure of health status shows that the working class suffers more ill health than the middle class. Infant mortality rates, life expectancy, frequency of debilitating diseases, incidence of mental health problems, all are worse for the poor. Yet how will New Labour deal with this? By reorganising the NHS so that it becomes a nakedly two-tier institution run by the middle class for the middle class. And to reinforce this aim, they will continue to squeeze NHS expenditure and increase charges so as to further exclude the working class from adequate healthcare.

These are the implications of the White Paper on the NHS which the government will shortly publish, but its main proposals have already been widely leaked. The separation between purchasers and providers will remain in the form of 'locality commissioning' bodies which will replace health authorities and GP fundholders. Groups of GPs will band together in localities covering populations of about 100,000, and will purchase all healthcare for this catchment area. The purpose of this move is to constrain expenditure on acute hospital services, the most expensive part of this NHS. There will be much talk of a 'primary care-led NHS': an NHS whose main purpose is to tackle illness earlier before it requires hospital treatment. In reality, such an NHS cannot exist in a class-divided society except as a two-tier institution, with the middle class paying privately to 'top up' their care.

## The NHS today: the Tory legacy

Despite their rhetoric, state expenditure rose consistently under the Tories. Although this was mostly to meet the cost of state benefits for the unemployed, spending on the NHS also rose. Yet the increase was insufficient to meet the extra costs of healthcare arising from an ageing population and improved medical technology. Hence in reality, cuts in service became the norm.

In an effort to deal with what had

become an annual funding crisis, the Tories implemented the internal market in 1991 as a means to control hospital expenditure. The NHS was split between the providers and purchasers of care. Within five years, every NHS unit had become a Trust, whilst GPs were encouraged to hold their own funds. Such fundholders had control of their own budget and could bargain with hospitals and other provider units in order to buy services for their patients – in practice at the expense of the patients of non-fundholders. By 1997, GP fundholder practices covered the majority of the population.

## Compulsory competitive tendering

Another strand to the Tory strategy was the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) of hospital ancillary services (cleaners, porters, and catering staff), so that these services are run by the company which can provide the cheapest service. This policy arose directly from the role that these workers had played in leading strike action in the 1982 pay dispute. Now working for the private sector, they rarely have a proper contract, let alone union rights, job security, holiday pay, or sick pay, and are paid poverty wages. Union collusion has prevented any significant resistance. An exception are the 52 Hillingdon women (domestics at Hillingdon Hospital in West London), who refused to sign such slavery contracts and were sacked. They are still standing firm, two years on, although UNISON, their union, has abandoned them. Under the New Labour slogan of 'public-private partnership', CCT is being extended to other areas: for instance, the medical records department at London's University College Hospital is now up for grabs. In the ten years following the introduction of CCT in 1984, such working class employment in the NHS fell from 154,000 to 74,000.

A third policy was to reduce the right to free continuing care in the NHS, and couple this with the privatisation of nursing and residential homes. Between 1985 and 1995, the number of places for the elderly in Local Authority homes dropped from 116,000 to 63,000, while the number of places in private homes rose from 80,000 to 167,000. Because spending on such nursing care is means-tested, more than 40,000 old people have to sell their houses to pay.

Yet overall the Tory reforms have failed: they have not cut the cost of the hospital service. In particular, they have failed to cut spending on NHS work undertaken by NHS consultants, despite the contracts that enable them to do what they want when they want. Such contracts were a concession made by Aneurin Bevan when Labour established the NHS in 1948, and have now led to a position where full-time NHS surgeons spend little more than half a day each week operating on NHS patients, and a further day in clinic, whilst earning £50,000 and more from the NHS. Many such surgeons have so-called 'full part-time contracts', where they are paid 90 per cent of their salary; they then have the right to do as much private work during NHS hours as they like. Some now undertake private operations in NHS hospitals: hospital managers encourage this since it brings in extra cash, although it means that NHS patients once again get pushed to the back of the queue.

In desperation, the Tories then cut capital spending on the NHS from £1.9 billion in 1995/96 to £1.3 billion in 1997/98, introduced the Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), and then used the Treasury to stop any schemes from going ahead. Although the Tories trumpeted this as a major success, not one major PFI-financed hospital building project was approved before they were kicked out of office.

## Labour's plans

New Labour, like the Tories, want to cut spending on the NHS. Even before the election they announced their commitment to existing Tory public spending plans, the most draconian ever for the NHS. They proposed no net increase over a three year period: spending would rise by only 0.8 per cent from 1996/97 to 1997/98, stand still for 1998/99 and fall by 0.7 per cent in 1999/2000. Minimally, there has to be an annual increase of 3 to 4 per cent per annum (equivalent now to about £1.5 billion) to maintain a given level of service. The spending plans would bring completely unprecedented cuts of at least 10 per cent over a three year period.

This position is untenable at present: by raiding other budgets Labour has 'found' £1 billion for 1998/99, and £300 million to avert a winter bed crisis. But already the government has reneged on its pledge to 'cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra

100,000 patients by releasing an extra £100 million saved from 'red tape'. There are now 1.2 million people waiting for their operations. The number of people waiting over a year has increased fourfold, and 388 people have been waiting longer than 18 months compared to nine people a year ago. The number of emergency admissions continues to grow, contributing to a further lengthening of waiting lists; because emergencies are more expensive, NHS Trusts are forced to reduce the number of waiting list patients they treat still further. The Secretary of State for Health, Frank Dobson, admitted that the government would not be able to fulfil its election pledge in the 'short term'.

## A new deal for the middle class

Waiting lists will not shorten unless consultants' contracts are reformed. Yet there will not be a word about this in the White Paper, because whilst consultants carry out so much private work, the middle class can jump the queue. And this is really what Labour's new NHS is about: a deal for the middle class where they do not need to pay taxes for a proper health service for everybody, but use their privileged position to get one for themselves. It is estimated that if all surgeons operated just two days a week for the NHS, waiting time would fall to that of the private patients. But this would mean tackling consultant power, which Labour will not do.

This corruption, which for working class people is a matter of life or death, will continue. Consultants are completely unaccountable (except to their wallets): even when they kill people, they cannot be removed for years. 29 out of 53 child patients died during heart operations undertaken between 1990 and 1995 by surgeon James Wisheart and two other colleagues in Bristol, a mortality rate of 60 per cent – the norm for surgeons doing similar work elsewhere was 14 per cent. For years this situation was tolerated; Wisheart was a hospital medical director, and got full support from his Chief Executive. A surgeon's accountability is shrouded in the same secrecy as their manipulation of the system for personal gain.

## Creeping privatisation

Frank Dobson said in September that most elderly people would prefer to recuperate at home. This is true – pro-

vided that they have an appropriate home and the support that they need. But if they are poor, they probably don't; but then they are not part of Labour's equation. Estimates say that 7,000 elderly people are 'unnecessarily' in hospital due to lack of other suitable arrangements. While hospital bed numbers have been cut, there has not been the compensatory rise in community provision. Further dependence on the private sector is fostered, with social services having to pay. Social services budgets around Britain have been cut by an average of £2.5 million per authority for 1997/98. The government is not intending to end means-testing of payments towards residential and nursing home costs.

Locality commissioning, when it arrives, will be a means of handing more power to GPs to cut hospital spending on the working class. Their collectives will control over 90% of the NHS's £43 billion annual budgets. With 500-600 such collectives, as compared to the 190 Health Authorities at present, there will be plenty of opportunities for the middle class to pick up management jobs – there will be no reduction in bureaucracy or managerial layers.

Labour will continue with PFI and privatisation – their key-note of 'public-private partnership' is a clear statement of purpose. An extension of charges is clearly on the agenda. Frank Dobson recently refused to rule out the introduction of charges to see a GP – after all, Labour would not want working class people wasting such important people's time. The two-tier service is coming closer, and the middle class has been softened up for it: a recent survey of 1,730 hospital doctors by the newspaper *Hospital Doctor*, found that 62% agreed people should be charged for certain aspects of their care, and 88% believed charges were inevitable.

Rationing is now the name of the game, although it is called 'priority setting'. It meant that for a period last winter, Hillingdon closed its doors to any patient over 75. It means that Oxfordshire Health Authority operates a 'preferred waiting time' system: it tells the Trusts it contracts with how much time a patient should spend on a waiting list. Hence it says a neurosurgery patient must wait 12 months for treatment, even though hospital waiting lists are much shorter for this specialty: it says it cannot pay for them to be treated any earlier. Of course, if you go private...

## The fightback

In *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* 128 (January 1996), we wrote that a future Labour government would be equally committed to 'priority setting', and that 'it is but a short step from supporting grant maintained schools to the introduction of an equally overt two-tier system in the NHS. It is a matter of time before they take it openly'. That time is now approaching. The only class which can lead any resistance is that which will be hit most by such a move – the working class. We cannot rely on the trade unions – although UNISON organises thousands of low-paid workers, in practice it only represent its more privileged members, and it has shown its true colours through its betrayal of the Hillingdon Hospital strikers. Nor can we rely on the various professional associations, since they will be more concerned to protect their narrow sectional interests. The resistance has to be led by the working class organising in their communities, since only they have a consistent interest in preventing the privatisation of NHS services.

Hannah Caller and Robert Clough

Ten years after the stock market crash, five years since the last recession, two years after the Mexican bail-out, new shocks have jolted the international financial system, threatening every corner of the capitalist world with economic ruin. Capitalism's miracle economies are bankrupt. Stock markets are lurching downwards. Banks and financial institutions are collapsing all over southeast Asia. DAVID YAFFE explains the latest gyrations of capitalism's long-term structural crisis.

# COUNTDOWN TO CAPITALISM'S COLLAPSE

## Shock waves hit world financial system



Yamaichi president Nozawa weeping as he announces the closure

However drastic the crisis facing world capitalism, its economic experts will never admit that capitalism suffers from structural contradictions which threaten its destruction. Crises, they say, are always due to wrong, misguided policies, usually in other countries. The latest debacle is no exception.

### Triumphant capitalism in chaos<sup>1</sup>

The miracle of the Asian 'Tigers' turns out to be no miracle at all but the result of a 'crony capitalism and unbridled lending' that is now jeopardising the whole region. It was not, we are now told, the Tiger economies' exporting prowess, that shining light to all aspirant capitalist powers, that drove economic growth but 'often debt-fuelled speculation in golf resorts, high-rise office towers, and luxury condos... Money that did flow to manufacturing often just built auto or chip plants that simply added to the global glut in those products.' (*Business Week* 17 November 1997). At the root of the trouble is 'loose regulation, corruption, and over-reliance on lending to collapsing property and stock markets.' (*Financial Times* 31 October 1997). 'The confidence trick has been unmasked'. The lending that banks have made all over the continent has been exposed as unsound. 'Thai banks lent to property developers to support vastly over-priced office blocks; Korean banks have supported state industries losing billions...' (*The Observer* 23 November 1997). How fickle are the friends of capitalism!

In similar vein, the deep crisis facing the Japanese financial system is put down to its 'unique institutional arrangement, which allows holders of equities to use them as collateral for bank lending' (*Financial Times* 17 November 1997). A rising stock market leads to rising credit, which forces the stock market up further. It led to the creation of the so-called 'bubble economy'. On the other hand, when the 'bubble burst' with the stock market crash of 1990-92, the banks withdrew lending as equity and property prices crashed, so accelerating business failures. This in turn further depressed the stock market - a cumulative process. The Japanese economy has stagnated since that time. Japanese banks have been left holding a large portfolio of bad loans. Many face bankruptcy. The crisis in southeast Asia, where Japanese banks are the largest lenders, has only intensified this crisis. And for Yamaichi Securities, Japan's biggest bankruptcy so far with debts of Y3,200bn (£15.3bn), 'there was unhappy involvement in organised crime' (*The Observer*). 'Unsound lending', 'misguided policies' and

'corrupt capitalists', everything but capitalism itself, is used to explain away the latest crisis of the international financial system.

The crisis is real enough. 20% of all bank loans in Thailand no longer receive interest, neither do more than 15% in Malaysia and South Korea. Non-performing loans held by banks in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand are expected to reach \$73bn, about 14% of their total loans outstanding and equivalent to 13.3% of south-east Asia's gross domestic product. In South Korea, where seven of Korea's conglomerates, the *chaebol*, have collapsed or gone bankrupt, at least 17% of bank loans, some \$52bn, are seen as bad debts. Add to this the crisis hitting Japanese financial institutions, the main lender to south-east Asia, with an estimated \$250bn in bad loans - two banks and two security houses went bust in November - you have a serious threat to the international financial system.

East Asian companies have built up debts to the rest of the world of over \$700bn since 1992. Japanese banks alone have lent \$263bn with European countries throwing in \$155bn and the US \$55bn. With their currencies fixed in relation to the dollar, and world trade, economic growth and stock markets booming, these ever-increasing loans were not called into question. But as growth and trade slowed, and rising inflation made exports less competitive, their currencies came under attack. Since June, the Thai *baht* has fallen by 36% against the US dollar, the Indonesian *rupiah* by 32%, the Malaysian *ringgit* by 27% and the South Korean *won* by 20%. Interest rates were forced up and stock and property markets began to crash. In Malaysia the stock market has fallen nearly 60% from its peak early this year. The South Korean market has hit a 10-year low, over 40% below its 1997 peak. 'Risk-free' loans have now become unpayable.

The immediate concern of the dominant imperialist powers is to prevent south-east Asia reneging on its massive short-term foreign debts as they become due over the next months. That debt was built up to finance a rapidly deteriorating balance of payments position. Importing more than they were exporting, they have been increasingly reliant on short-term capital inflows to finance the deficit. Of Thailand's nearly \$90bn foreign debt, an estimated \$40-66bn, \$20bn of it short-term, is due over the next 13 months. That is greater than its reserves. Of South Korea's \$110bn foreign debt, around \$60-70bn is short-term and due to be paid back within a year. Its central bank has foreign exchange reserves of around \$30bn. Similar problems face the other countries. With the

Japanese banking system itself in deep trouble and in the process of cutting credit lines to these countries, an international rescue operation became necessary. Imperialism's trouble-shooter, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was called in. So far loans to bail out Thailand of around \$20bn, Indonesia of \$40bn and South Korea, an initial \$20bn, have been raised. They will almost certainly not be enough. And they come at a price.

### Recolonising Asia

Many Asian countries were opposed to IMF intervention and so, initially, was Japan. These countries were involved in talks led by Japan to set up a new financial regime for the area which would be independent of the neo-liberal/free trade 'Washington consensus', and would begin to represent the economic interests of an Asian imperialist bloc headed by Japan. The aim was to set up a \$100bn Asian Monetary Fund which would back a new regime of capital controls against foreign currency speculation and support countries refusing to comply with IMF/WTO demands to open their economies fully to US and European penetration. In response, the US launched a massive diplomatic effort in November to persuade Japan that all external rescue efforts were to be conducted through the IMF and that the principles of free trade should be adhered to by the Pacific Rim countries. The pressure continued, with the personal intervention of US President Clinton during the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum in Vancouver in the last week of November. For the moment the US has had its way but real tensions remain and can be expected to intensify as the full implications of IMF intervention become clear.

In Indonesia the IMF has forced the government to liquidate insolvent banks, to drop restrictions on wheat and flour imports, lessen the power of the National Logistics Boards, which governs trade and distribution of commodities, and scrap regulations governing use of local products in car assembly. Already two million jobs have been lost due to the economic downturn. The IMF austerity programme will cause further devastation. In South Korea the IMF is demanding full financial liberalisation, the shutting down of insolvent banks, and industrial restructuring, which will lead to the closing of debt-ridden *chaebol*, throwing tens of thousands of Korean workers out of their jobs. Already South Korea's fourth largest shipbuilder has said that it will sack half its 6,000 workers by next month. The workers, among the most militant in South Korea, have made it clear that they intend to resist.

The IMF intervention is an attempt by the US and European imperialist powers to take advantage of the economic crisis in Asia to prise open further the Asian economies, including Japan, to increased trade and investment by US and European multinationals and banks. South Korea, the world's 11th largest industrial power, is being forced to open up its debt-ridden *chaebols* and banks to buy-outs and mergers with western multinationals as part of the restructuring process. In November, Doosan, a beverage company, announced that it is selling its bottling operation to Coca-Cola for \$432m. Ssangyong has sold its paper-making business to Proctor and Gamble and is looking to sell its carplant to Daimler Benz. Japan has already been forced to bring in foreign banks to help package and market its banks' bad debts, including real estate, in marketable securities, and distribute them globally. Bankers Trust New York Corp, Barclays Bank and Swiss Bank are involved and teaming up with other Japanese Banks. So far some \$50bn of such securities have been sold.<sup>2</sup> It is only the beginning. The process of opening up the

Japanese financial sector to other imperialist financial institutions will intensify. It is part of the growing rivalry between the three competing imperialist power blocs, the 'Triad', as the international crisis of capitalism rapidly deteriorates.<sup>3</sup> They are manoeuvring in the contest to redivide and recolonise Asia.

### A crisis of the international capitalist system

This crisis cannot simply be put down to the 'crony capitalism and unbridled lending' of the Tiger economies. After all, it was the rising capital flows from the imperialist nations, as they sought to find profitable outlets for their surplus capital, that was the basis for that lending and expansion. Private capital flows to developing countries in 1996 reached \$244bn, six times that of official development assistance. More than 80% of it went to just 12 countries, the majority in Asia.

On 27 October the New York stock market came close to crashing with the biggest points fall in its history forcing it to suspend trading. This was precipitated by events in south-east Asia, but they were not its cause. 'What Wall Street calls a bull market is an asset-price bubble created by... very easy monetary policy at the Fed through most of the 1990s.' Since 1992, US debt has increased by \$1,200bn, an amount which is greater than the increase in income in that period. 'The US has been on a credit binge' to fuel a stagnating economy (*The Wall Street Journal Europe* 15 April 1997). The stock market is at present close to 130% of corporate net worth, higher than any time since 1920 and double the long-run average. It does not take much of a setback to cause that 'asset-price bubble' to burst.

That is why, as part of the US diplomatic offensive during November, pressure was put on the Japanese not to resort to huge sales of its US Treasury bonds to shore up the balance sheets of its failing banks. If Japan liquidates a sizeable amount of its \$250bn holdings of US Treasury bonds - one quarter of the foreign holdings of US debt<sup>4</sup> - then global interest rates will rise, precipitating an almost certain crash on the world's overvalued stock markets with devastating consequences for the world's population. The 1929 stock market crash was a prelude to massive unemployment and hunger around the world and the march through fascism to the second imperialist world war.

The massive capital flows to southeast Asia, the easy credit that has financed the global stock market boom, the growing monopolisation of capital through mergers, acquisitions and privatisations, the unprecedented autonomy of the financial system from real production, and the growing rivalry between the major imperialist powers, have the same cause - an overaccumulation of capital in the heartlands of capitalism. The frenetic international expansion of capitalism - globalisation - has now spread that crisis to every part of the world. The latest shocks to the world's financial system are just another stage in the countdown to capitalism's collapse. ■



Cumulative devaluation against the dollar, 1 June 1997-21 November 1997  
Source: *Financial Times*

1. A description used in Trevor Rayne's article 'Meltdown' in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* (FRFI) 127 October/November 1995. A good background to present developments is contained in that article.

2. *Business Week* 17 November 1997

3. See my articles, 'The gloved fist of imperialism' in FRFI 111 February/March 1993 and 'Globalisation: a redivision of the world by imperialism' in FRFI 131 June/July 1996.

4. As a result of devalued currencies in southeast Asia, the US trade deficit is almost certain to mushroom, with ever cheaper goods crowding the US market while US exports become increasingly uncompetitive. This will fuel the drive towards protectionism in the US where Congress has already refused President Clinton 'fast track' authority in trade relations with other countries.

1917-1997

This November marked 80 years since the Bolshevik revolution overthrew Czarist rule and installed the world's first socialist republic. In 1991, triumphalist capitalism celebrated the fall of the Soviet Union as the end of communism – the end, indeed, of history. It had been, they said, an experiment that failed. Just six years later, it is clear what capitalism really means for the people of the former Soviet Union: a swift descent into barbarism for the majority while a tiny handful enrich themselves. Russia's economy has halved since 1991 and male life expectancy has plummeted from 69 to 58 – the first country in history to experience such a sharp drop. A fifth of the population lives in poverty, the health care system has collapsed and preventable diseases such as measles have reached epidemic proportions.

Worldwide, capitalism repeats this degradation and impoverishment on a grand scale. Just 358 people own wealth equivalent to the income of almost half the world's population, while billions live with poverty, disease and hunger. That is why the legacy of the Bolshevik revolution, which brought the basic necessities of a decent life to the Soviet people and hope to the oppressed peoples of the world, can never be extinguished. Below, we reprint an article first published in 1991 (FRFI 103), in which EDDIE ABRAHAMS and MAXINE WILLIAMS pay tribute to the world's first socialist revolution.

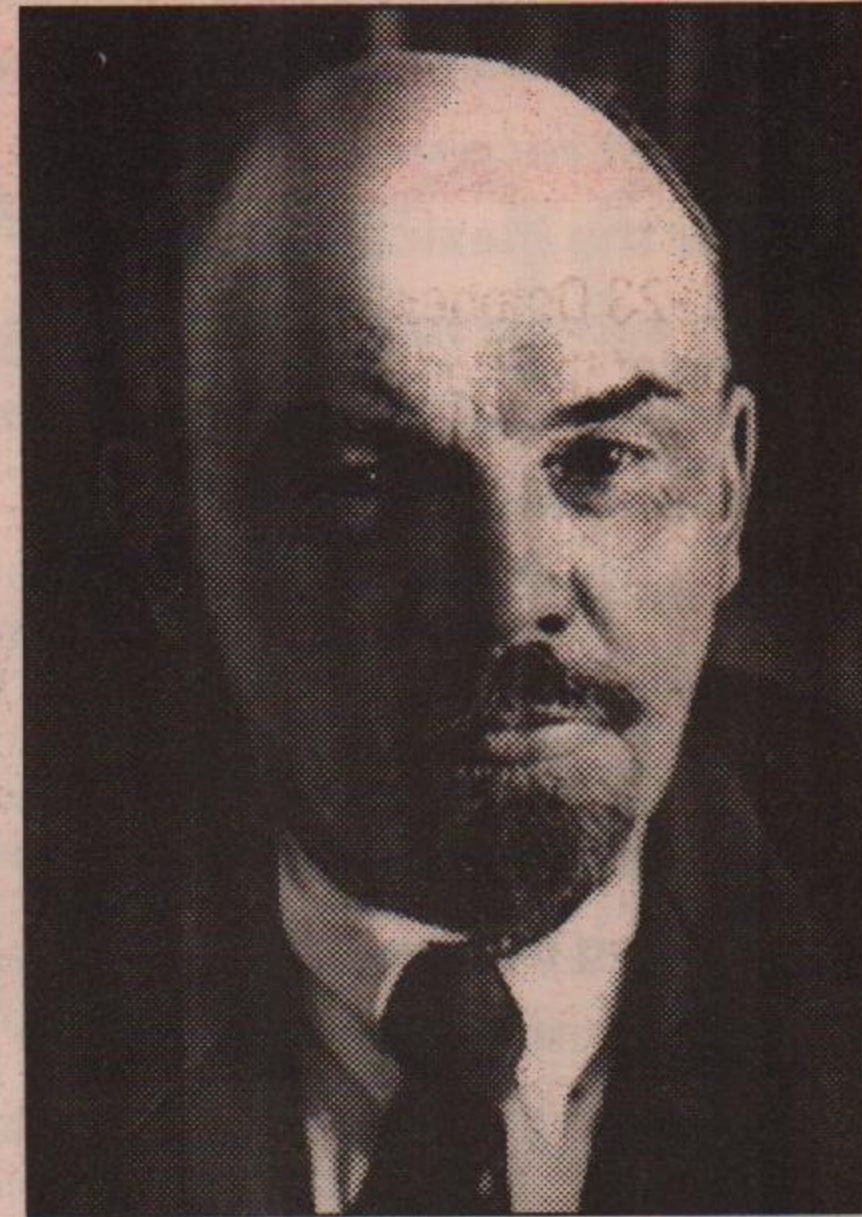
**T**he Russian revolution of 1917, born amid the hope of millions, has finally collapsed. That this colossal and noble effort consciously to seize and control human destiny should have lasted 74 years in the beleaguered Soviet Union is almost miraculous. In the entire history of humanity, it was the first sustained attempt to create a society in the interests of the majority rather than a dominant minority class.

This fragile vessel, the world's first socialist state, navigated uncharted waters amidst a host of dangers. It was holed many times, its timbers became rotten and finally it succumbed to attack from within and without. But not before it had transformed the lives of millions of its own citizens and given substance to the aspirations of billions more throughout the world.

The imperialists greeted the counter-revolution in the Soviet Union with ecstasy. They always feared, loathed and waged wars against Soviet power. In unrelenting propaganda they equated communism with tyranny, the destruction of civilisation and the denial of individual human nature. They tried to bury the revolution in this dungheap of abuse precisely because of the simple and terrifying truth it proclaimed: the poor, the majority, can take power from their oppressors.

From day one of the revolution, when they heard that workers and peasants had taken charge, that foreign debts had been cancelled, that the property of their rich Russian

# THE LEGACY OF THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION



VI Lenin, 1918 – 'The Bolsheviks tried, against all odds, to give life to the most liberating and noble ambitions of humanity.'



Petrograd, 1917

cousins had been confiscated, the capitalists declared war. It began with the 1918 invasion by no less than 14 capitalist powers, with Britain at the head. That war has never ceased. But their current, grotesque dance upon the grave of the revolution is quite futile. The grave contains only old bones. Its flesh and blood, its life and spirit, have long since passed to other parts of the world. There, the oppressed know only too well that capitalism, far from representing the pinnacle of human civilisation, represents poverty, dead children, hungry bellies and murdered freedom fighters. They have heard the message that once heard is never forgotten – poor people can take power. That is the gift that the Bolsheviks bequeathed to history. They tried, against all odds, to give life to the most liberating and noble ambitions of humanity.

## Communism and human liberation

'Philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however is to change it' (Marx)

Every age has produced thinkers who have fashioned ideas to free humanity from material and spiritual poverty, unleashing its creative

potential. In some periods, they remained isolated thinkers and dreamers. But in others, periods of turbulent social change, these ideas were taken up by vast masses of people and used to shape new institutions. Voltaire, Rousseau and others saw their ideas emblazoned on the banners of the French revolution as 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. When that revolution had consolidated the rule of the capitalist class, such dangerous ideas ceased to have any appeal to the rich and privileged. Henceforth they would devote themselves to the protection of their riches and their philosophers would be paid to pronounce only that we lived in the best of all possible worlds.

From the mid-19th century the task of pushing forward the ideas of progress fell to quite different forces. Marx and Engels forged the communist outlook during the youth of the working class. This class, produced by the capitalist system:

*'is driven directly to revolt against this inhumanity [of capitalism]... The proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life*

*without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own condition.'*

Marx and Engels elaborated the fundamental principles of scientific socialism and communism. They proved that capitalism, based on production for profit, could neither fully develop the forces of production nor meet the needs of the majority of humanity. The institutions of the capitalist state, however democratic, expressed only the interests of the minority who owned the means of production. A central condition for emancipation from the horrors of capitalism was proletarian power – the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Paris Commune of 1871 furnished the first brief experience of working class power and the guidelines which inspired the Russian working class of 1917.

## The Bolshevik achievement

Perhaps only those alive in 1917 can fully understand the earthquake of the first socialist revolution. Its shockwaves swept the world, a world of war, suffering and starvation. Through the trenches, in the stinking slums, in the factories and the streets,

the thrill was felt. Men and women who previously rotted in the Czar's gaols were now creating the first socialist state. Soviets, councils of workers and soldiers, were now making the political decisions that previously were the province of a tiny elite.

The Bolshevik programme was Bread, Peace and Land, simple demands that still today represent what two-thirds of human beings in the world lack. This essentially modest programme is precisely what capitalism cannot give them. When the people took power the Russian bourgeoisie resisted with every weapon at its disposal. The majority had spoken, but the bourgeoisie, who only talk of democracy to disguise their own dictatorship, resorted to civil war to suppress them. But the lesson of the Commune had been well learned.

*'The working class cannot simply lay hold of the old state machinery and wield it for its own purpose'. (Marx)*

*'It must destroy the old capitalist state and use its own organs of power – the people armed – for the forcible suppression of the resistance of the exploiters, ie an insignificant minority of the population, the landowners and the capitalists'. (Lenin)*

It was precisely these measures that the bourgeoisie has always called 'tyranny'. It is not 'tyranny' to starve millions of people, to keep them illiterate, to turn women into chattels, to drive millions into beggary and prostitution? Apparently real 'tyranny' was to execute the Czar, to divide aristocrats' land among poor peasants, to take the mansions of the rich to house the poor, to forbid the publication of fascist propaganda, to confiscate factories and prohibit individual enrichment through the work of others or speculation.

The achievements of the Bolshevik 'tyranny' include: huge strides towards the elimination of poverty, hunger and disease; the education of a previously illiterate population; the survival and cultural advance of nationalities threatened with extinction; the nationalisation of land; and the industrialisation of this vast, backward country through the planned economy.

## The torch is passed on

But perhaps the greatest achievement of 1917 came not in the Soviet Union itself but in its international impact. Lenin recognised that capitalism had entered a new stage – of imperialism and parasitic decay. Competing imperialist powers had divided up the world between them, drawing every corner of the globe into their web of exploitation. Henceforth the world was divided between oppressed and oppressor nations. A large section of workers in

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From 21-23 October 1997, at the invitation of the Communist Party of Cuba, the Revolutionary Communist Group attended a conference in Havana to pay homage to Che Guevara: *Socialism towards the 21st Century*. More than 200 delegates from 97 organisations participated in three commissions: The reality of contemporary socialism, The validity of Marxist-Leninist thought, and Imperialism at the end of the century. David Yaffe presented the RCG's paper 'Lenin's Imperialism and the split in socialism – its relevance for rebuilding the socialist movement in imperialist countries today' in the commission on Marxist-Leninist thought. It is reprinted below.

# LENIN'S IMPERIALISM AND THE SPLIT IN SOCIALISM: – its relevance for rebuilding the socialist movement in imperialist countries today



**C**apitalism is failing the vast majority of humanity. 1.3bn of the world's population live in absolute poverty. Inequalities are rapidly widening between rich and poor nations and within all nations whether rich or poor. Britain has registered the greatest inequalities in wage levels since statistics began in 1886. Yet in imperialist countries like Britain, no political parties have so far arisen to represent the interests of the growing numbers of poor working class people. There are few signs, as yet, of the revival of the socialist movement.

How can this be explained and what possibilities exist for changing this? How can socialism be revived in imperialist countries like Britain? What forms of organisation can meet this challenge? Are existing labour organisations adequate for this purpose? What attitude should communists take towards them? In this contribution we will advance a number of propositions which can serve as a basis for discussing these issues.

## 1. The division of the world into imperialist and non-imperialist states

Lenin's standpoint on imperialism and the split in socialism is as relevant today, in all its essential aspects, as in his own day. The world is divided up into imperialist and non-imperialist countries, between oppressor and oppressed nations. At the turn of the century Lenin argued that a small number of other imperialist countries joined Britain in

exploiting the whole world:

*'A handful of wealthy countries... England, France, United States and Germany – have developed monopoly to vast proportions, they obtain superprofits..., they "ride on the backs" of hundreds and hundreds of millions of people in other countries and fight among themselves for the division of the particularly rich, particularly fat and particularly easy spoils...'*<sup>1</sup>

Globalisation today means we live in a world of competing imperialist power blocs; the US, Japan and the European Union and their cluster of allied countries divide the world according to economic power, with multinational companies, banks and financial institutions the driving forces in this process. These multinationals are in the main tied to and supported by particular imperialist countries, or are part of one of the three power blocs. Britain is a major imperialist power – one of the five countries responsible for two-thirds of foreign direct investment and for spreading poverty, destruction and death around the world. While investment in Britain is stagnating, British investment abroad is booming. In 1993, following the 1990-92 recession, British investment overseas (direct and portfolio) was, at £101.9bn, greater than the total capital investment in Britain of £94.2bn, and more than eight times the investment in manufacturing industry. Such a relationship between the export of capital and

investment in Britain last occurred in the period before the first imperialist war. Lenin's categorisation of imperialism as parasitic and decaying capitalism has never been so appropriate. The British state is the defender, in the last analysis, of British imperialist expansion and exploitation. It cannot be otherwise under capitalism.

## 2. The split in the working class

Imperialism not only divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nation, but divides the working class into a privileged minority of 'labour aristocrats' and the mass of the working class. This privileged stratum of the working class is the social basis of opportunism and chauvinism in the working class movement. Lenin saw his position on the split in the working class as a development and generalisation of Marx and Engels' position on the working class in Britain in the last half of the nineteenth century.

At the time of England's unchallenged monopoly ('1848-1868, and to a certain extent even later'), it was possible to bribe and corrupt the working class of one country for decades out of the superprofits of imperialism. In 1916, when inter-imperialist rivalries had turned into imperialist war, Lenin thought this had become improbable, if not impossible. On the other hand 'every imperialist "Great" power can and does bribe smaller strata (than in England in 1848-1868) of the "labour aristocracy".' So that bourgeois lab-

our parties (to use Engels' term) are now 'inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries.' Lenin thought it improbable that these parties could prevail for long in a number of countries. For while the existence of trusts, financial oligarchies, and high monopoly prices etc, in short imperialism, enabled the bribery of the top layers of the working class, it was also 'oppressing, crushing, ruining and torturing the mass of the proletariat and semi-proletariat.' Nevertheless, the history of the labour movement would be determined by the outcome of the struggle between these two opposing tendencies; between imperialism's effectiveness in sustaining 'the political privileges and sops' of the top layers of the working class represented by bourgeois labour parties, and the resistance of the increasingly oppressed masses who bear the brunt of imperialism and imperialist war.<sup>2</sup> The important point is that, economically, the desertion of the labour aristocracy to the bourgeoisie is an accomplished fact. A split has occurred in the working class and 'the opportunist trend can neither disappear nor "return" to the revolutionary proletariat.'<sup>3</sup> The split in the working class is irrevocable.

Lenin's optimism concerning the demise of bourgeois labour parties, of course, was not borne out, and capitalism with its bourgeois labour parties was to survive two world wars and fascism. This has occurred with a continual change in the nature of the privileged strata of the working class over the last 100 years (in Britain, 150 years). At first it was composed of skilled manual workers, now it is mainly made up of highly-paid white-collar workers in the public and service sectors. Workers formerly amongst the most privileged sections of the working class – engineers, miners, steel workers – were thrown into the ranks of the unemployed as the economy was restructured to serve the rapacious needs of capital accumulation. New privileged workers took their place in the labour organisations which had been created to sustain the political influence of a privileged minority of the working class and undermine spontaneous working class opposition to capitalism.

A change in the character of the labour aristocracy, however, in no way makes it redundant:

*'To see this as the end would be to miss the whole essence of the labour aristocracy, to see it purely descriptively, in just one of its forms, and ignore its historical role and development: as the active process by which labour's class organisation was purged of anti-capitalist elements and made safer for economism and spontaneity.'*<sup>4</sup>

The effectiveness of this 'active

process', of the elevation of new sections of the working class to a level of privilege previously enjoyed by skilled workers, is tied to the ability of imperialism economically to sustain these privileged layers and their political influence over the working class movement through recurring crises in the capital accumulation process.

## 3. Bourgeois democracy and imperialism

In an imperialist country, the ruling class could not stay in power and maintain the facade of bourgeois democracy without winning the allegiance of a section of the working class. But not just any section: it must be a stratum which controls the principal organisations of the working class and which can constantly exclude any revolutionary element from these organisations – make them 'safer for economism and spontaneity'. That is, act as the 'labour lieutenants of capital'.

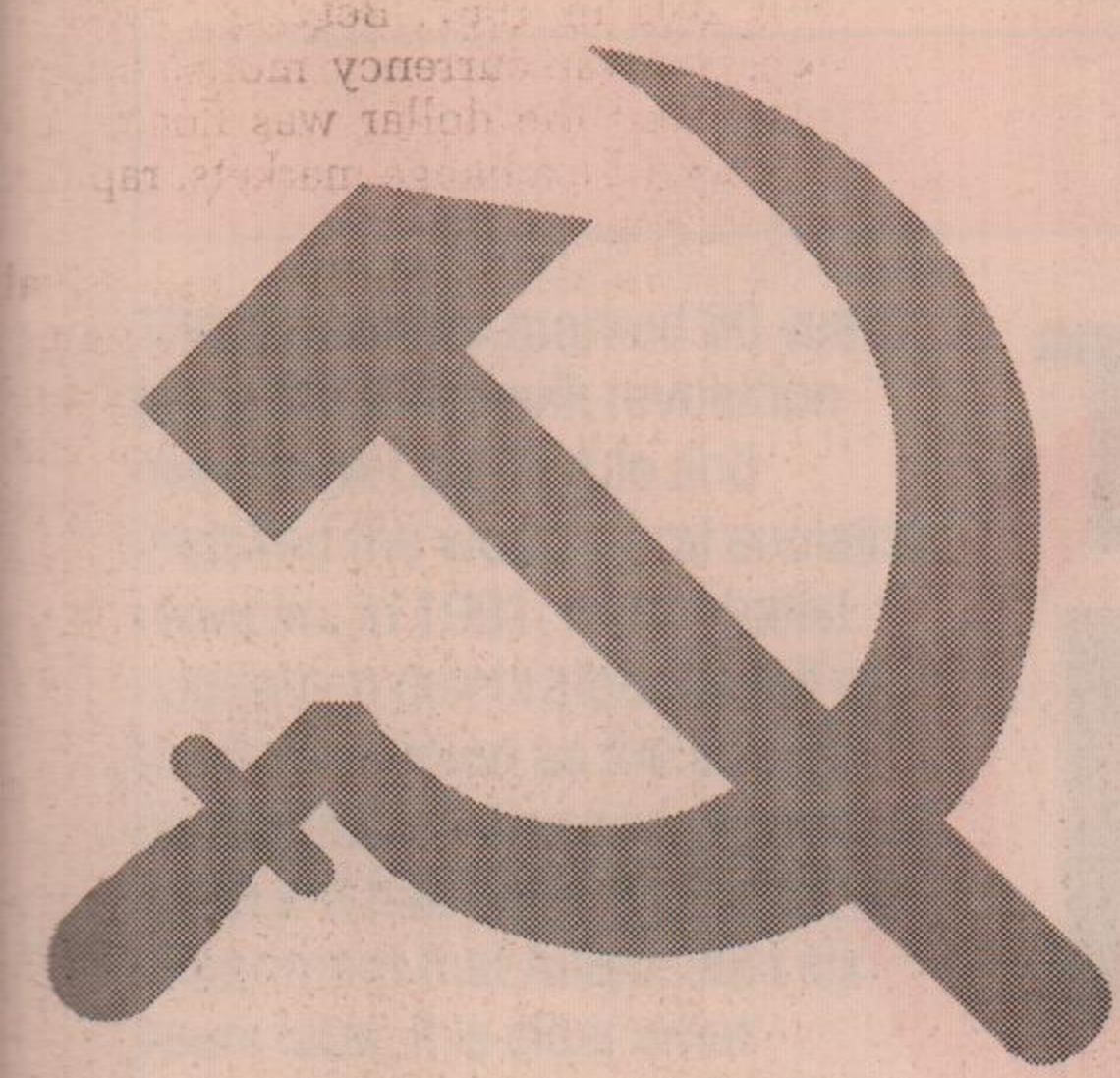
To win and retain the allegiance of this section of the class, capitalism must be able to offer it both a political and economic stake in capitalism's survival. Without this support and the ability of this section of the class to control the organisations of the working class, imperialism could only maintain its rule by violent means, through its control of the apparatus of the capitalist state, by military rule or fascism.

The importance of this opportunist current for the development of the working class movement, and the damage done to the interests of the working class through its control of 'labour' organisations, was expressed forcefully by Lenin at the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920) when he said that:

*'Opportunism is our principal enemy. Opportunism in the upper ranks of the working class movement is not proletarian socialism but bourgeois socialism. Practice has shown that the active people in the working class movement who adhere to the opportunist trend are better defenders of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeoisie itself. Without their leadership of the workers, the bourgeoisie could not remain in power'*<sup>5</sup>

It is in situations where the privileges of the 'labour aristocracy' come under severe pressure or when its influence is thoroughly discredited, that the class character of the imperialist state becomes thoroughly exposed to workers in the imperialist country itself. This happened in Britain during the 1926 General Strike and to a lesser degree during the 1984/5 miners' strike. That the opportunists, by collaborating directly with the ruling class, retained their control of British working class

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## THE LEGACY OF THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

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the imperialist nations had benefited from imperialism and become infected with the political diseases of chauvinism and opportunism. The opportunist workers' movements of the imperialist nations had become a major obstacle to the struggle for socialism and against imperialism. The Bolsheviks understood that in this century the torch would pass to the peoples of the oppressed nations who:

*'will participate in deciding the destiny of the whole world and will cease to be simply an object for the enrichment of others.'*

Reality has confirmed this. The Russian revolution swept through the Czarist empire to produce the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The revolutionary torch passed to Germany, whose workers' revolution was only defeated in blood in 1919, with the complicity of the opportunist Social Democrats. The impulse towards socialism may have begun in Europe, but it moved inexorably elsewhere. It is no accident that after 1917 the most authentic socialist revolutions took place in China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba. The existence of the Soviet Union, its material aid and political support, has been a major factor in allowing these revolutions to survive for so long in the face of such enormous imperialist opposition.

Communism was an international force for democracy. In the 1930s as the threat of fascism grew, the progressive forces of Europe, led by communists, turned to the defence of the Spanish Republic. Huge anti-fascist and Resistance movements were formed and with the prolonged sacrifices of the Soviet people laid the basis for the defeat of Nazism.

In the postwar period, communists stood on the verge of power in Greece and were a serious threat in other European countries. In the wake of liberation by the Red Army and national resistance movements, socialist governments were established in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Albania, Rumania and Bulgaria. The peoples of Asia, Africa and the Arab world continued their resistance to colonialism. Communist North Korea was established in 1948, China in 1949 and North Vietnam in 1954. In 1961 socialist Cuba was established and with Vietnam provided the focus for imperialist aggression which continues today. The postwar period saw the overthrow of colonial regimes in most of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The 1970s witnessed the establishment of revolutionary regimes in Grenada, Nicaragua and Afghanistan. And these are by no means all the changes which came in the wake of, and drew strength from, 1917. As Marx once said, 'Well grubbed, old Mole'.

### Only the first steps

The current round of setbacks, defeats and surrenders may tempt some to say that the old Mole is dead. They are quite wrong. Imperialism has plunged much of the world into terrible poverty. The people of the oppressed nations simply cannot survive in the existing international order. And in the imperialist countries, a growing number of people live in poverty, insecurity, pollution and cultural privation. The imperialist countries are armed to the teeth and limbering up through economic competition for redividing the world. There is no peace, progress or security in the new world order. It is as inevitable as the day following night that socialism will revive anew.

And it is thanks to the efforts, sacrifices and hard-won lessons of the Bolsheviks and the revolutions which have followed, that the next round of the socialist revolution will begin from an incomparably higher stage. Future socialist efforts will not blindly follow the Soviet model. Its gains, and there were many, were made in the most difficult of circumstances (including a war in which 25 million Soviet citizens died) and against the most concerted imperialist opposition. These pressures exhausted the revolution. The leaders and masses alike were drained and lost their connection with each other. The impetus dwindled and development became ossification; timeserving careerists replaced revolutionaries; sacrifice became privilege; communism lapsed into social democracy.

But as Marx said of the Commune:

*'The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce par decret du peuple. They know that in order to work out their emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men.'*

The twentieth century has been the century of first steps in this 'historic process'. There is much for socialists to learn from the successes and failures, the tragedies and sacrifices. There is an indescribably rich tradition which this international effort has left us. All the revolutions and uprisings adapted their programmes to suit their conditions and fought to produce solutions to immensely varied problems. But all took their inspiration from 1917. It is now the task of communists everywhere to study those lessons, absorb the contributions of nearly a century of international effort, before we can go forward again.

**This has been the experience of Liverpool dockers sacked for opposing casualisation and the Hillingdon hospital workers sacked for refusing to accept a huge pay-cut resulting from privatisation. These workers, fighting for over two years to regain their jobs, have been abandoned by their trade unions.**



## LENIN AND THE SPLIT IN SOCIALISM

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organisations during these periods of intense class conflict led not only to the defeat of the working class in both these strikes but set back the working class movement in the following decade.

### How do communists combat opportunism?

Underlying the Marxist standpoint on the labour aristocracy is the understanding that the working class is a revolutionary class because of its position in capitalist society. Its revolutionary opposition to capitalism is first expressed in its actions and subsequently in its consciousness. Mass struggles and revolts of an oppressed and persecuted working class are the necessary preconditions for revolutionary opposition to capitalism. But they do not guarantee the revolutionary transformation of society. That is only possible when such spontaneous struggles are turned into politically conscious ones to overthrow the existing order. Lenin, in expressing this position, spoke of the importance of an all-sided and all-embracing political agitation which 'brings closer and merges into a single whole the elemental destructive force of the masses and the conscious destructive force of revolutionaries.'<sup>6</sup> The fusion of the spontaneous, popular movement of the working class with a revolutionary socialist movement was vital for effective working class revolt against capitalism.

Lenin brings out the practical political implications of his argument. Engels, he says, 'draws a distinction between the "bourgeois labour party" of the old trade unions — the privileged minority — and the "lowest mass", the real majority, and appeals to the latter, who are not infected by "bourgeois respectability". This is the essence of Marxist tactics!' Because the proportion of the proletariat who are following and will follow the opportunists will be revealed only in struggle, it is the duty of socialists to 'go down lower and deeper, to the real masses; this is the whole meaning and whole purport of the struggle against opportunism.'

Unless a 'determined and relentless' struggle is waged all along the line against the bourgeois labour parties or such groups and trends, 'there can be no question of a struggle against imperialism, or of Marxism, or of a socialist labour movement.'<sup>7</sup>

Communists in imperialist countries, therefore, have to concentrate their work among those sections of the working class with no stake in the capitalist system, fight for their interests and wage a relentless struggle against 'bourgeois labour parties' and official trade union organisations that represent the interest of the 'labour aristocracy'. At the centre of communist politics, and as a vital

part of this struggle, must be opposition to the imperialist state, fighting its brutal exploitation and oppression of the peoples of oppressed nations, its racism and its militarism — in short, the fight against imperialism.

### The relevance of Lenin's position in imperialist countries today

Lenin's ideas are vital to our situation today. In Britain we have a bourgeois Labour Party, recently elected to government, and a trade union movement led by opportunists representing the privileged layers of the working class.

The Labour Party came to power with the support of significant sections of multinational capital, with the electoral backing of the middle classes and the labour aristocracy. It has promised the multinationals a 'crusade for competitiveness', with flexible labour markets designed to make Britain a central player in the globalisation stakes. It has promised the middle class and labour aristocracy that it will not increase taxation. The result of both these promises is that millions more workers will face crushing poverty and drastic cuts in state welfare, healthcare and education.

Crucial to all this is the maintenance of Britain's imperialist exploitation of the Third World. The Labour government is a driving force behind this exploitation. The Chair of British Petroleum is a member of this Labour government. British Petroleum employs police and paramilitaries to protect its oil interests in Colombia by brutalising workers and their families. The Labour government will export Hawk jets to Indonesia — jets used against the liberation fighters of East Timor — as part of its determination to sustain an arms industry and export weaponry to the most brutal and repressive regimes in the world.

The effects of Labour's programme are already being felt. The National Health Service and state education are in crisis and millions of workers are being forced into casual and temporary jobs paying poverty wages.

This has been the experience of Liverpool dockers sacked for opposing casualisation and the Hillingdon hospital workers sacked for refusing to accept a huge pay-cut resulting from privatisation. These workers, fighting for over two years to regain their jobs, have been abandoned by their trade unions. This is not surprising given that trade unions in Britain are run by opportunists, and represent and primarily organise the more privileged sections of the working class.

These trade unions are run like capitalist businesses. Their leaders are paid £60-80,000 per year, more than four times the average wage.

They have enormous assets, nearly £600 million, and gross income of more than £700 million. Their income continues to rise despite a fall in their membership. Unions have invested heavily in the capitalist system, on the stock market, in pension funds and other financial institutions. Unions and their officials have an important stake in the capitalist/imperialist system.

The British trade union movement supported the war against Argentina in the Malvinas and the imperialist conflict in the Gulf. Because 1 in 10 workers in Britain work in 'defence' industries, trade unions take no action against the criminal arms trade and often defend that trade to protect jobs. The trade union movement supports immigration controls, a racist standpoint in an imperialist country.

Their political role is to tie the working class to the bourgeois Labour Party and its economic and political programme. The Labour Party has already announced that it will leave the most serious anti-trade union laws in place.

With millions of workers being thrown into poverty, we have to adopt the standpoint of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and 'go down lower and deeper into the real masses'. Political organisation of the masses will require a relentless struggle against the Labour Party and all those who want to tie the working class to the interests of the bourgeoisie through links with that party.

We will have to organise amongst the workers who have been thrown into poverty and whom the trade unions have abandoned. We will only rebuild the communist movement in Britain on a programme which represents the independent interests of the mass of the working class.

The continued existence of Cuba as a socialist country is vital to the independent interests of the working class internationally. By upholding the banner of Marxism/Leninism, by defending and giving practical expression to the ideas of Che Guevara, Cuba is providing inspiration, example and education to communists throughout the world. It has become a cornerstone of the rebuilding of the communist movement internationally.

**Viva Cuba!**  
**Viva Che!**  
**Viva Communism!**

David Yaffe  
Revolutionary Communist Group, Britain

- 1 Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* Collected Works volume 23 p115.
- 2 Ibid p116.
- 3 Ibid p117, p118.
- 4 John Foster, 'Imperialism and the Labour Aristocracy' in ed. J Skelley: *The General Strike 1926* (1976) p31.
- 5 Lenin, *Collected Works* volume 21 p242.
- 6 Lenin, *Collected Works* volume 5 p512.
- 7 *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, op cit, p120.

**'Europe must be a whole bouquet with all its bright colours.'** Chancellor Kohl

**In a year's time the euro looks like becoming reality. The number of euro-denominated transactions will come to equal or exceed US dollar transactions. The euro then threatens to displace the dollar as the world's leading currency.**

**This scenario takes place tranquilly only in the brain of a banker and would-be Napoleon. Historically, the transfer of capitalism's financial centres from Amsterdam to London and London to New York was accompanied by financial crises and wars. The birth of the euro would signal the onset of intensified inter-imperialist rivalries. Indeed, its emergence displays the marks of capitalism in crisis rather than consolidating its triumph over socialism. TREVOR RAYNE examines the drive towards a single European currency.**



German workers protest against job losses at Volkswagen

# SINGLE CURRENCY

Ultimately, the strength of a currency reflects the productivity and size of the economy behind it. The fifteen countries of the European Union (EU) share of world output is 32% and of world trade, 21%. The figures for the USA are 27% and 18% respectively, and for Japan 14% and 10%. If eastern European countries applying do join, the EU's population is potentially double that of the USA; it is currently 370 million compared to the USA's 263 million.

The relative decline of the US and rise of the German economy makes a single European currency possible. German national output is half again that of the second biggest European economy, France, and its population is 43% greater than any of Britain, France or Italy. Under capitalism these facts determine Germany's pivotal role in the drive to monetary union. Germany is Britain's biggest trading partner and over 54% of Britain's exports are destined for the EU. German and European capital interweave with British capital.

Thatcherite contempt for Germany and Europe is an anachronism. British capital can no longer afford. As Tories wangled, New Labour saw its opportunity and reassured the multinationals that it would comply with their new agenda.

On 27 October chancellor Gordon Brown announced, 'We are the first British government to declare for the principle of monetary union', establishing a committee to oversee preparations for Britain joining European Monetary Union (EMU). The committee includes Lord Simon, Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe and head of BP, (also currently or formerly a director of Grand Metropolitan, RTZ, Deutsche Bank and the Bank of England and adviser to Allianz AG) and Sir Colin Marshall, head of the CBI (director of British Airways, Inchcape, British Telecommunications and board member of the New York Stock Exchange). Big multinational corporate interests rule.

A year ago only Luxemburg met the Maastricht criteria for entry into the single currency zone: inflation rates within 1.5 points of the average of the three lowest national rates; long-term interest rates within two points of the average rate of the same three countries; budget deficits to be no greater than 3% of the gross domestic product (GDP); the ratio of public (national) debt to GDP no greater than 60%. Now, eleven countries are said to be on target for entry: a triumph of political will over decimal points, you might say. All but the 3% budget deficit criteria have been neglected as considerations and 18 months of low German interest rates injected some recovery (and much stock market speculation) into European economies, raising government revenues.

So, the schedules have been posted: in May 1998 the European Commission will decide who can join EMU. On 1 January 1999 the euro will become the unit of account for member countries' transactions, their exchange rates already being fixed and converted into euros, and

in 2002 all assets, incomes, payments and taxes will be calculated in euros. National currencies will be phased out thereafter. Issue of euros will be the responsibility of the European Central Bank based in Frankfurt. Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Greece are unlikely to be among the first group of members. Nevertheless, British companies trading in and with Europe will be forced to price and pay in euros.

Blair plans to propose membership after the next general election, if it is seen to be 'in Britain's best interests'. This qualification acknowledges that most people in Britain either know little about the single currency, are sceptical or simply want to 'save our pound' - they need to be 'educated, educated, educated', to coin a phrase. It is certainly not intended to unnerve the bosses of multinational capital.

## Yes, No interlude

The purpose of the formation of NATO in 1949, according to General Lord Ismay, its first Secretary-General, was to keep the USA in, the USSR out and the Germans down. Similar could be said of the formation of the European Economic Community (EEC) by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Winston Churchill supported the idea of a United States of Europe at the end of World War II, but without Britain. Britain was to prosper from its empire. Devastated Europe was unstable for capitalism, communist parties were strong in France and Italy, the Red Army was in Germany. Only in Britain did social democracy in the form of the Labour Party have a reassuring control over the working class.

Key to the reconstitution of Europe as a place safe for capital was the pacification of the working class, the defeat or containment of the communist parties and the stabilisation of West Germany, to serve as a bulwark against socialism and then the spearhead for an assault upon it. This could not be achieved without quickly restoring production in western Europe. The US Marshall Plan allocated \$13 billion for reconstruction, 1.5% of US GDP. Western Europe's output grew by a third between 1948 and 1951, industrial output by over 70%.

The Marshall Plan and formation of NATO signalled US determination to project its power into Europe. This was assisted by Britain which helped draw up the West German constitution. Marshall Aid was accompanied by market, trade and payments systems for use between west European countries; the forerunner of the Common Market. French rulers, nervous of the reformation of a German state, were reassured by US and British involvement and the market arrangements. Germany would be tied economically to France and divided it would be unable to dictate terms.

Between 1950 and 1973 West Germany's economic growth rate at 6% per annum was double that of Britain's, while Italy averaged 5.5% and France 5.1%. Higher incomes were accompanied by a redistribution of income towards sectors of the working class, middle classes and

farmers. A social democratic consensus was bought across much of western Europe; the communist parties were contained and pushed away from revolutionary programmes.

Within six months of the 1956 Suez Crisis (when British, French and Israeli forces were compelled by US economic threats to cease an attempt to reclaim the Suez Canal from Egypt), the Treaty of Rome was signed. British imperialism reconsidered its position. The independence of India in 1947 indicated a weakening of Britain's ability to secure its global empire by force. Suez confirmed this. The demand for independence in the colonies was difficult and costly to resist. Additionally, there was the economic success of the EEC to consider. In 1961 the Conservative government applied for EEC membership but was rejected by French President de Gaulle - 'Non' - apparently viewing Britain as a US 'Trojan horse'. De Gaulle conceived a European bloc from the Atlantic to the Urals.

Under Attlee and Gaitskell the British Labour Party was unqualified in its chauvinistic opposition to Britain joining the EC: in 1950 Attlee saw entering the European project as a threat to British democracy. In 1962 Gaitskell's opinion was that Britain should never abandon 1,000 years of separate existence. Labour's view was that the Empire and the alliance with the USA was Britain's arena, not Europe.

By the mid-1960s Britain's relatively poor economic performance told in balance of payments problems and currency crises for an overvalued sterling. Roy Jenkins, Dennis Healey and Anthony Crosland pushed for a pro-EEC membership position in the Labour Party. The Labour government made a second British application in 1967. With the pound devalued from \$2.8 to \$2.4 that year, de Gaulle added economic weakness as a second reason for a further 'Non'.

De Gaulle was removed following the May 1968 uprising in France. The third application to join was accepted and Britain became a full EEC member on 1 January 1973; Edward Heath, by then Prime Minister, having led the negotiations. The parliamentary Labour Party was split, with the majority against membership but the leadership for it. The Tories were also divided but the majority were pro-membership, as were the Liberals. The 1975 referendum approved Britain's continued EC membership.

De Gaulle's point about sterling devaluation and economic weakness came when the international financial system that had underpinned the biggest boom in capitalism's history was about to break up. Following the Second World War the major capitalist currencies were tied to the US dollar, which was itself tied to gold. The cost of the Vietnam war and big US budget deficits pumping huge dollar surpluses into the world banking system, while the European and Japanese economies were growing faster than that of the USA, made the global fixed exchange rate system untenable. West Germany and the Netherlands, with substantial trade surpluses, revalued their currencies

upwards in 1967. Between 1971-73 the postwar currency model unravelled and the dollar was floated on the world exchange markets, rapidly devaluing.

Currency instability and rival devaluations, practiced in the 1930s, are a major impediment to a free market, which is what the EEC was devised as. A common currency was discussed in preparations for the Treaty of Rome. A 1970 plan envisaged a single currency by 1980, but was dropped following the devaluation of the dollar and accompanying currency uncertainty. In 1972 the European Narrow Margins Arrangement ('the Snake') was introduced whereby EEC countries coordinated the adjustment of their exchange rates. Italy and Britain stayed out. The head of the snake, around which other currencies aligned, was the Deutschmark.

France and West Germany announced the establishment of the European Monetary System and Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in 1979, to create a zone capable of defending itself against the shocks of dollar volatility, exacerbated by growing speculative flows of 'hot money', a zone with low inflation and stable exchange rates. Member currencies fluctuated against each other within 2.25% bands. These bands pivot on the ECU (European Currency Unit), a unit of account calculated from member states' currencies, which are weighted according to the proportion of each member state's product as a part of EC gross national product and the amount of intra-EC trade done by the country. The ECU fluctuated against other world currencies in line with the Deutschmark. It is the forerunner of the euro. Until 1990 Britain kept out of the ERM.

The French Socialist government's finance minister, Jacques Delors, tied the French franc to the Deutschmark in 1983 following a run on the franc, announcing the end of Mitterrand's spending plans and the effective dictatorship of the money markets. Delors headed a committee to outline the route to currency union. Publishing his report in 1989 after a period of economic growth in the USA, Japan and Europe, with the USSR intact, he provided a focus for capitalist governments' opposition.

Britain became a member of the ERM in October 1990. Between 1989 and 1991 the Berlin Wall came down, Germany reunited and the USSR collapsed. Britain's strategic significance for US imperialism was reduced. Germany's position in Europe was enhanced. During this period Chancellor Lawson, Trade Secretary Ridley and Deputy Prime Minister Howe resigned over the Thatcher government's European policy. The Maastricht Treaty was signed at the end of 1991 and the march to the single currency mapped out. Germany demonstrated its confidence and ambition to match its economic strength with political and diplomatic power by unilaterally declaring its recognition of Croatia and Slovenia and then forcing the other European Union countries to comply. Britain accepted this, against its government's will, in exchange for an opt-out clause from the Social Chapter of Maastricht governing work and social rights.

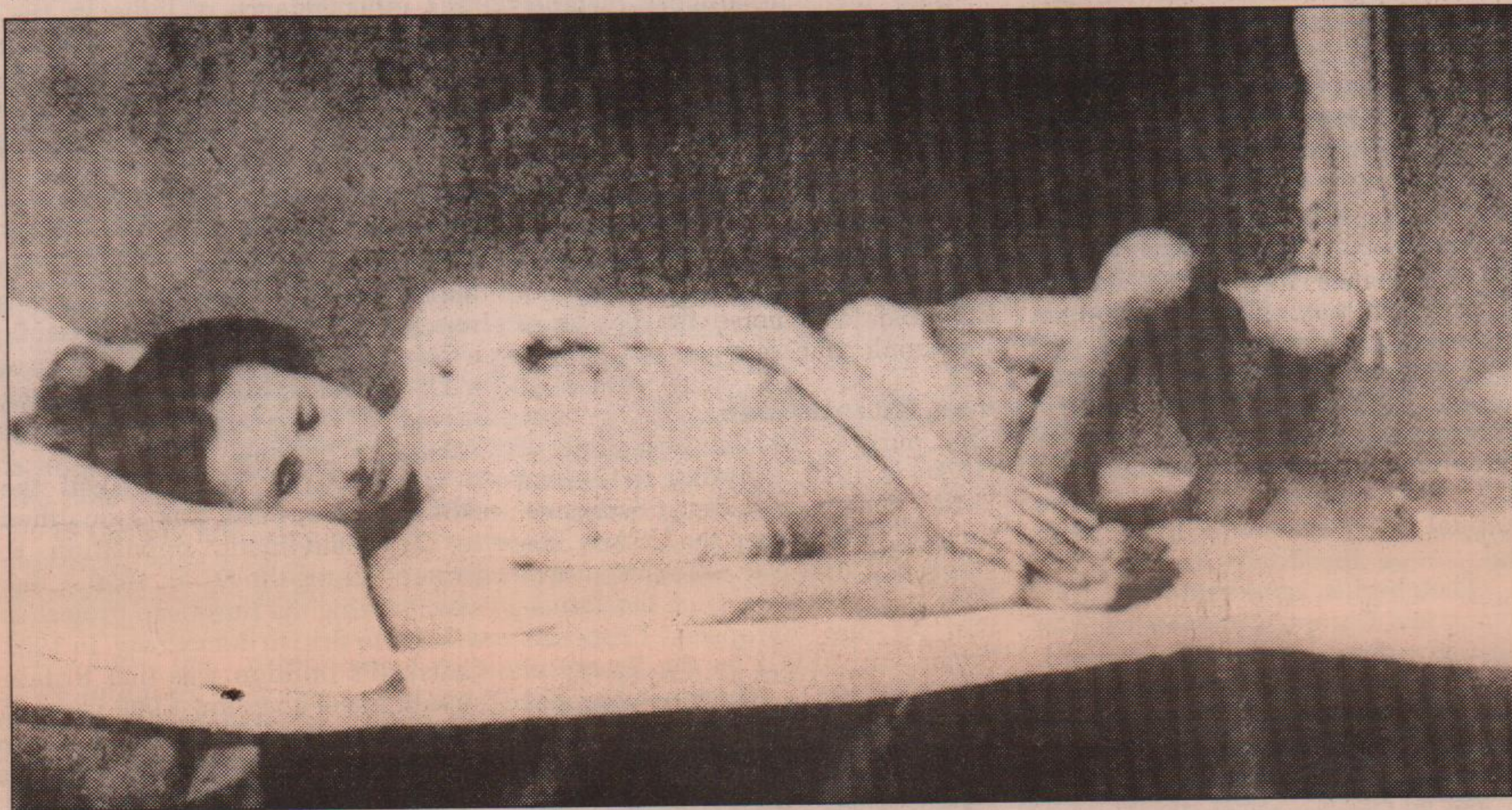
Tensions in the British ruling class over alignment with Europe or the USA and their resolution in favour of Europe are reflected in the evolution of the Labour Party's position. Social democracy recognises that its social basis in the middle class and more affluent workers depends upon a strong imperialism. With the re-emergence of regional power blocs, the ruling class sees the only possibility for sustaining that basis is in alliance with Germany and Europe.

In part two of **Single Currency** we will examine the cases put for and against monetary union and the dangers it spells for the working class internationally.

# The true banner of Capitalism

## 'Sterilise the weak, abuse the poor, exploit the dependent'

Throughout Scandinavia, in France, the USA, Switzerland and in many other leading capitalist nations, a vicious policy of 'eugenics' has been promoted over the last 50 years. Its stated aim – nurturing the strong and cleansing the weak ('racial improvement') – is to ensure the health necessary to capitalistically exploitable labour whilst ridding society of its 'useless', 'burdensome' population. Deliberate inhumanity. With the development of 'genetic engineering' and with science held under lock and key by profiteering industry, the abuses perpetrated by capitalism on women, the poor and the sick can only become more insidious.



A sterilised woman in a Nazi concentration camp

cate, re-educate, re-educate' them. For some 50 years up to the 1960s, over 100,000 Australian aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their parents – legally kidnapped – and placed in white foster homes. Many suffered physical and sexual abuse from their new 'superior' culture. 'Assimilating' the children would kill off the 'backward' culture that had lasted 40,000 years. In May an inquiry (the Wilson Report) ordered by the previous government describes the policy as 'genocide'. Crocodile tears – this September more licences for oil exploration in Aboriginal lands were issued (as well as in other ecologically unique areas). Naturally the Australian government (like the Swedish) is still refusing liability for compensation and the government doesn't want to apologise.

### 'Experimental material'

Yet in the end the actual 'proof' of the permanent superiority of those in authority is simply asserted by the inhuman abuse of the ruled. Apart from animals as such, why not use 'inferior groups' for experiments? Earlier this year the deliberate denial of penicillin in experiments over 40 years, the fostering of syphilis in groups of black people in Tuskegee (Alabama again), was revealed. Patients were deceived into thinking they were being treated, whilst in fact they were simply the object of a perverse study. The US president apologised (of course).

But in August the US Defense Department admitted that 20,000 air force and navy staff (imperial cannon fodder) were subject to radium experiments between the 1940s and 1960s (no need to watch *The X-Files*). In the 1950s, Inuits were treated with radioactive iodine. Blacks with 'low intelligence quotients' suffering from cancers and attending the Medical Faculty of the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, had radiation applied all over their bodies. Food at a Massachusetts school for 'backward' (difficult) children was laced with radioactive elements, as was food supplied to conscientious objectors (like laboratory rats) of the Mennonite Faith in exchange for escaping military service. So far \$6.5 million has been paid out to persons impregnated with radiated materials, mostly to maintain military morale.

If this sort of abuse becomes difficult inside the imperialist states, then of course it will still be carried on by the same owners against oppressed peoples elsewhere. Precisely the same sort of medical experiment deceitfully imposed on Afro-Americans earlier is now being undertaken in Africa itself. A mixture of placebo and actual drugs preventing the transmission of the AIDS virus are being handed out in 15 different trials (nine are US-financed) on 12,000 women in 11 'developing countries'. These include Burkino Faso, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The funding states are the US, France, Belgium, Denmark and South Africa. This would not be possible in the imperial heartlands themselves. More than 1,000 babies are likely to inherit AIDS rather than receive protection against it.

In Britain, 'Gulf War syndrome' is clearly believed by the victims and their advisers to be the result of the use of soldiers in *de facto* experiments, either with serum, chemicals or the use of depleted uranium in weapons. All this arises from the fact that the ruling classes in their fight to keep control of the world's wealth will unhesitatingly 'waste' and remove working people for any purpose that suits them and that they think they can get away with.

Alvaro Michaels

Racial 'purification' and 'cleansing' have always been a tool of the most reactionary and vicious regimes, but as the revelations in August of the forced sterilisation of at least 73,000 women throughout Scandinavia (60,000 in Sweden, 11,000 in Denmark, over 1,000 in Finland, over 1,000 in Norway) from 1935 to 1976 show, such ideas are endemic in modern, 'democratic', bourgeois societies.

Almost simultaneously, similar barbarities are reported to have been practised on more than 60,000 persons in the United States from the 1940s up until the early 1970s. The US historian P Reilly states that about another 60,000 Americans were forcibly sterilised in the 1930s alone, and that 34 states had laws that could impose the practice. 'Delinquents, cripples and the mentally ill' – both men and women – were forcibly sterilised.

Laws drawn up around the world in the 1930s, show common contempt for working people by all imperialist states. The idea of an ideal biological type that Hitler drew together for German imperialism is an obvious example, but it was neither new nor did it die with him. In Canada, families of 700 out of 3,000 victims of forced sterilisation between 1928 and 1972 are taking action in the courts in Alberta and British Columbia. In the Swiss Canton of Vaud it was 1986 before the 1928 law permitting the sterilisation of the mentally 'retarded' was abolished. Swiss specialists are sure that such acts continue illegally. In Austria, Green Party spokespersons say that such acts still take place behind closed doors. In France this September, a report showed that 15,000 women in psychiatric institutions had been sterilised without their permission and that a *de facto* policy of eugenics 'could be' [sic!] developing. Forceable sterilisation is still legal in France.

These crimes take place because the ruling class, the owners of the wealth of nations, must intimidate those without property if they are to keep control. They hold the poor and oppressed in contempt and fear. By constantly asserting the 'inferiority' of certain sections of workers, the rich class aim to split solidarity within the working class – especially the weak and unemployed – between those with 'desirable' and 'undesirable' physical and mental conditions. It also consequently provides them with sections of the population they can abuse and experiment on.

Where private property is well established this is done particularly by attacking the unemployed (and especially women), the uneducated, and sick workers – those, in short, who are not immediately suited to work for the owners of property. Where private property is still expelling earlier (eg aboriginal) users of the land, or preventing reoccupation, the idea of 'inferiority' again 'justifies' violence against the poor in order to seize that land.

In short, 'eugenics' is a product of modern capitalist class rule. This system of the rich enriching themselves has no direct concern for those out of work, or indeed for the conditions of life of the workers outside working hours. Capitalism never has enough money for itself; it will certainly not give it away without a fight – which also explains why the social democratic dream of a democratic capitalism is both an illusion and a deceit.

### Social democracy and eugenics

The present European public outcry arose from the Swedish revelations. In Sweden, one example will suffice to show the arbitrary and repulsive nature of 'eugenics' as a policy of dividing the workers. Maria Nordin, now 72, was classified as 'intellectually inferior' (not owning glasses she couldn't see the blackboard at school) and was sent to a school for 'deficient' pupils, where a Dr Ingvarsson told her that she 'was not very clever and cannot have children'. She signed a sterilisation order to escape from the institution. Her claim for compensation was rejected in 1996. Now, after this year's newspaper headlines, Minister of Social Affairs Margot Wallstrom says that ex-gratia payments – state charity – will be paid to victims: ie the state refuses to accept legal and moral responsibility of its own laws. She now passes off these horrors as a result of 'the spirit of those times', but we can see that they are also clearly in the spirit of the present.

Since Sweden has been the apple of the social democrats' eye for many a year, this exposure of eugenics there has prompted a sweeping attack on any 'Left' politician or thinker by some establishment hacks. In a melodramatic, deliberately confusing and Eurocentric article in *The Guardian* (30 August 1997) by Jonathan Freedland, it is suggested that 'the early history of British Socialism [from 1880s to the 1930s] contained the seeds of the atrocities that were to come' – ie Nazism, Pol Pot and Swedish 'eugenics'. In the process Freedland shamefully smears Darwin and Marx as the beginning of 'the trouble', and even Keynes is treated as a socialist (!) so as to use his views on social selection to bolster the argument. It is true that many self-declared social democrats and 'liberals', clear allies of British imperialism, flirted with eugenics whilst the mass of workers demanded proper wages and health care. Freedland actually states: 'Many of the left, were members of the upper middle-class or lower aristocracy...' and so it

is easy for us to identify the real class basis of the reactionary ideas held by the Webbs and others. But Freedland does what the rich always try to do, constantly promoting and introducing as socialist a few highly publicised ideas held by self-declared 'friends of the people' that are completely against the interest of the working class. In this way, genuinely democratic working class ideas can be completely overlooked, a false perspective imposed and the reactionary abuses of private property let off the hook.

Social democratic politics are counter-revolutionary. Their ideas are reactionary. Social democracy arose on the back of the 'welfare state'. This was created by the ruling classes as a means of absorbing the militant demands of the masses of workers, especially after the second world war. It has essentially been aimed at improving the quality and reliability of labour hired by business as world markets expanded. But where workers are too old, beyond cheap repair or quiescent, capitalism at best abandons them and, at worst, often uses them as a means of social experiment. In this context 'eugenics' is applied both to split and intimidate different sections of the working class and, of course, to reduce the costs of the 'welfare state' compromise. The murderous ideology of eugenics clearly flows from protecting a system based on the accumulation of society's wealth in a few private hands.

### Black and poor

In the USA the Kennedy Commission of 1972 documented 24,000 cases of forced sterilisation in the previous period, yet despite publicity of this sort, in 1973 the two children (aged 14 and 12) of a black couple – Mr and Mrs

Reif – were forcibly sterilised while attending a hospital in Alabama (where neither social democracy nor Keynes, Darwin nor Marx find much favour, Mr Freedland!). The Southern Poverty Law Centre discovered the existence of hundreds of such cases in the 1940s and 1950s: the victims were all black and poor. The health authorities justified these as a means of eradicating poverty. For the rich of course, poverty is always the fault of the poor, who will insist on breeding!

The US Sexual Sterilisation Act (officially in operation until 1973) saw eugenics applied to a wide group of 'undesirables' – 'alcoholics, the mad, sexual delinquents, degenerates and cripples', and was extended to the weak and elderly. Until the 1950s, eugenics was defended by a wide group of scientists and doctors – there being an American Society of Eugenics (later rebaptised the Society for the Study of Social Biology). Today Florida and California have laws that permit chemical castration.

### Oppressed peoples

An obsession with 'superiority', superiority of achievement and so of intellect and morality, of capacity to beat other classes, is what marks the leading ideas of bourgeois political leaders, especially in all the imperialist states. The idea of 'national blood' arose with the capitalist nation state. It was the 'sons of the blood' that carved out capitalist empires, and the threat of 'rivers of (national) blood' is the clarion call of the bourgeois xenophobe.

Seizure of raw materials is vital for capitalism. If aboriginal land users are branded 'intellectually or culturally inferior' peoples, then it may be easier to seize the land from them. All the rich do, oh-so-very kindly, is 're-educate, re-educate, re-educate' them.

# Woodhill Control Unit to open soon

# INSIDE NEWS

**P**rior to Woodhill unit first opening in January 1993, one of the unit managers, along with other prison and Home Office personnel, was taken on a guided tour of Marion and Florence control units in the USA. They found the brutal austerity at Marion and the internal structure at Florence very much to their liking, and returned with the sole intention of implementing such forceful tactics in the unit at Woodhill. However, at this time they were neither organised nor prepared to institute such a high level of abuse. It was due, and only due, to the efforts of prisoners within and arriving at the unit, that the strategic plans to subdue those prisoners who were perceived to be control problems quite quickly reverted to a policy of appeasement.

At this stage it became clear to a minority of prisoners that it would only be a matter of time before such units of the past once again became a reality of the future. Woodhill was on the agenda to become part of that future.

Regular FRFI readers will have read the article in issue 138 by long term prison activist John Bowden, who describes the purpose of the Control Review Committee (CRC) and the history surrounding Wakefield control unit and other attempts at behaviour modification. It is clear that we are now entering an era of modernised (Americanised) systematic measures of security and control, which have no motive other than to break down the spirit of prisoners deemed to be politically motivated or articulate, by the use of strategies which were in force at Wakefield and which are still very much in force in a wide range of punishment blocks throughout the country.

The use of mechanical restraints (specifically body-belts) and psychiatric drug measures of control have been issues of grave concern over the years. Prison reformers, prisoners' rights activists and families and friends of the victims forced to endure these abuses have fought to

have such inhuman techniques abolished, due to their long-term psychological effects and the fact that they have been responsible for a large proportion of deaths in custody. A 1996 Prison Reform Trust (PRT) report on the use of body-belts estimated that in that year they were used at most half a dozen times. This gives the impression that the use of mechanical restraints is rapidly fading; however, what the PRT failed to disclose is that while the use of body-belts has decreased somewhat, this has been an astute move to experiment on the use of ratchet handcuffs and leg-straps. Mechanical restraints, far from decreasing in use, are still very much a part of daily prison life and throughout 1997 we have again begun to see the return of the frequent use of the body-belt.

In 1972 we had a wide range of disturbances throughout the prison system, due to the draconian laws within such establishments. These were followed by further high profile disturbances in 1979, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1992, 1993 and most recently at Full Sutton in 1997.

It is obvious that such disturbances are sparked off by national discontent at the abuses directed not only at prisoners themselves, but also at families, friends and loved ones, who feel the impact of the severe castigative measures meted out towards those on the inside. Unfortunately, rather than the bureaucrats acting to address the root cause of the problem, they conspire to intensify the problems by introducing further methods of oppression and control.

Woodhill unit is a complex of five small self-contained 13-cell units, of which only two are secure enough to hold maximum security prisoners. When the unit reopens in the very near future prisoners will be expected to work their way through three stages of lockdown, Basic and Standard. Stage 1 Unit 1 will be controlled lockdown, permitted only the most basic of rights. Every three months a review board will assess



the progress of the individual: if it is decided that he has failed to conform to the expected requirements of the regime, he will remain on lockdown until such time as he does begin to show signs of great 'improvement' in attitude and behaviour. If, however, it is decided that the prisoner has positively conformed the board may recommend a transfer to Stage 2 Unit 2. Once located in this unit the prisoner will be permitted further privileges, bordering on a level with Basic regime in other prisons. He will then be required to work with psychotherapists, personal officers and the unit manager and become actively involved in the activities of the unit. Prisoners can expect to remain on this unit for at least six months. If the review board then recommends a transfer to Stage 3, the prisoner will be transferred out of Woodhill to Unit 3 at Hull, reaching a level on a par with Standard privileges. He will be required to repeat the work he began at Woodhill unit, again for a minimum of six months. If the review board then decides that they have subdued this individual to what they deem an acceptable level, he

will then be returned to one of the five dispersal prisons where any relapse in behaviour will result in an immediate return to Stage 1 lockdown.

This is obviously a futile strategy. Prisoners have to be forced to submit to the barbaric and inhuman conditions which exist at present, and will not conform to the new system either. But their resistance will be rendered even more difficult than it already is, because it is a constant policy of this highly secretive prison system to suppress the truth of the rife and blatant acts of torture and brutality in a continuous conspiracy of silence. The rapid growth in prison and CRC personnel malpractices is often protected by higher Home Office officials, police and courts, who will not condemn such actions, for fear of their being exposed to the public in general. This allows the torture, brutality and even murder to continue, as they are permitted to investigate all complaints about themselves, themselves, with the result that the Prison Service and CRC personnel are answerable to no-one.

Kenny Carter, HMP Belmarsh

## Satpal Ram beaten in Nottingham

On 7 November Satpal Ram fell foul of a ridiculous 'three strikes and you're out' policy at Nottingham prison. Satpal was on Standard regime and full time Education when he was told he had to work in a prison workshop. He refused, for the third time, and was relegated to the Basic regime and Basic wing. In protest he barricaded himself in his cell but was forced out of it by prison officers who took him to the punishment block but not before they had battered him to the extent that he sustained a black eye, a swollen nose and injuries to his spine. Satpal contacted Nottingham Black Prisoners Support and the police who came and took a statement from him. The prison was therefore forced to act with concern and had him taken to an outside hospital for an X-ray. The prison has received telephone calls and faxes inquiring about Satpal's treatment and on 22 November local activists demonstrated outside the prison.

This is the latest episode in the abuse meted out to a man whose only reason for being in prison in the first place is that he defended himself against a racist who attacked him. Send messages of solidarity to Satpal Ram E94164, HMP Nottingham, Perry Road, Nottingham, NG5 3AG.

## Full Sutton update

Summonses relating to the revolt at Full Sutton on 20 January have been issued against 20 prisoners on charges of prison mutiny. An initial hearing has been set for 3 December at Pocklington Magistrates Court.

## More prisoners under New Labour

April 1997 - the prison population of England and Wales reaches a record 60,012 as New Labour sweeps to victory after 18 years of Tory rule. The 'pragmatists' say 'of course, we have no illusions that Labour will be progressive but at least things won't get any worse...'

September 1997 - the prison population now stands at 62,481...

In 1987, when the prison population hit a then all-time high, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd announced an amnesty for short-term prisoners nearing the end of their sentences. Jack 'Straw's' answer, when asked about a possible amnesty, was to build more prisons and forget that little pre-election commitment (which certainly secured the votes of the POA) to end the privatisation programme. Since being elected, he has given the go-ahead to the construction of four new private gaols.

However, even these new gaols and those already commissioned by the previous government are not enough to house the rapidly increasing numbers of prisoners. Labour has therefore resurrected another Tory policy - electronic tagging. It now plans to tag and release some 6,000 prisoners.

## Domenyk Noonan acquitted - DeepJoy!

**T**he prison officer on the escort asked the cops the cost of the escort and they put it at £7,000 an hour. There were armed response cars, bikes, a bomb-proof van on loan from Belmarsh with drivers for a week and a helicopter. The streets at the back of the courts were sealed off. There were 42 cops...

Who was on trial at Manchester Crown Court at the centre of this costly high security operation? IRA volunteers, perhaps? No, in fact, it was Domenyk Noonan, charged with assaulting a prison officer at Walton gaol in Liverpool.

The assault charges were serious ones and it is well known that serving prisoners are often subject to unnecessary security measures, eg handcuffs in the dock,

simply in order to prejudice the jury, but £7,000 an hour?

Domenyk has been deeply unpopular with prison officers since 1989 when he began organising militant prisoners into the Prisoners League Association. So unpopular that a Walton Senior Officer who consigned him to a strip cell with just a mattress and a blanket recorded his feelings in the Observation Log: 'DeepJoy!' Needless to say, this rapture did not look good in court. Nor did the clearly fabricated evidence that Domenyk had made serious threats against staff: evidence which had led to his being charged with GBH with intent. Domenyk was acquitted of all charges. He then thanked the jury and told them that his feelings could be summed up by one word: 'DeepJoy!'

## Free Warren Slaney!

Warren Slaney, framed by Leicester police, is serving double life for murder. He and his family are fighting to prove his innocence and win back his freedom.

Following a double shooting in August 1990, the police mounted a massive round-up of suspects. They had threatened to pin something on Warren for years and finally succeeded; however the facts leave anyone wondering how on earth he could have been convicted:

- ▶ eye-witness descriptions did not match Warren's description;
- ▶ nine people testified that they were with him at a party when the killings took place;
- ▶ four police searches of his home yielded no forensic evidence;
- ▶ it was physically impossible for Warren to have pulled the trigger - he has metal plates inserted into his hands, a fact not mentioned in court;
- ▶ a crucial prosecution witness admitted in court that she had falsified her evidence;
- ▶ the man who disposed of the gun told another prisoner that Warren was not involved but this evidence was rejected in court precisely because it came from a prisoner.

Up until now, Warren's defence has been breathtakingly incompetent, resulting in his appeal being dismissed in July 1996 in just 20 minutes. Warren has now changed solicitor and progress is being made.

Inside, Warren has been continually harassed. He has been 'ghosted' every Christmas and put on punishment at every opportunity. He is currently on GOAD at Frankland, 200 miles away from his family, for being two minutes late returning to his cell and 'destabilising the landing'.

Despite these attempts to break his spirit, Warren is fighting on. Although they too face massive intimidation, his family and friends are actively campaigning with petitions. John Slaney, Warren's father told FRFI 'We are trying our damndest to get publicity for all prisoners who are suffering injustice. We will fight on to get as much support as we can to free our son Warren.'

Contact the Warren Slaney Support Campaign, c/o Dept Z, Littlethorn Books, 13 Bidduph Street, Leicester, LE2 1BH and send messages of solidarity to Warren Slaney (JB2574), HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue, Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YD.

# Reviews

## Lessons from the struggles of the US working class

### Workfare workers organise

■ **'We won't be slaves': Workfare workers organise**, Larry Holmes and Shelley Ettinger, published by International Action Centre, New York 1997, \$11.95

*'The over-work of the employed part of the working class swells the ranks of its reserve, while, conversely, the greater pressure that the reserve by its competition exerts on the employed workers forces them to submit to over-work and subjects them to the dictates of capital. The condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part, and vice versa, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalist'*

Karl Marx - *Capital* Vol 1

The British ruling class, confronted with the problem of keeping the working class in its place, frequently looks to the USA for methods to solve its problems. Recent examples include private prisons, zero-tolerance policing, long batons, pepper sprays, and a battery of criminal justice measures. The same is true of the so-called 'reform' of the welfare state. Dressed up with all manner of excuses ('the need to modernise' being one), New Labour, like the Tories before them, is determined to cut costs, and therefore, necessarily, to attack the living standards of the working class. All who rely on benefits, and particularly the unemployed, have been designated scroungers. Before the last election, both the Tories and the Labour Party sent delegations to New York to study Mayor Giuliani's Work Experience Program (WEP) which formed the basis of Clinton's federal welfare repeal law signed in August 1996. Once elected, New Labour unveiled its Welfare to Work programme for the unemployed (see FRFI 138), which, although not an exact replica of the US model, does have compulsion and working for benefits included in the package. This book, *'We won't be slaves'*, is an account of *Workfairness*, the organisation of resistance to WEP, and is of particular interest to us in Britain - organisation and resistance can defeat the onslaught.

WEP has been hailed as a great success by its capitalist promoters - new armies of capitalists can now make a profit out of forcing people to work. In the US the first excuse for the Workfare programme was to cut government spending. But, as *Workfairness* points out, 'Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Student Aid, housing, food and nutrition programs and all direct public assistance combined comes to \$145 billion annually'. This is compared to the \$150 billion spent on 'corporate welfare' as tax breaks, giveaways, and handouts to big business every year. Besides this, 'roughly half of all general tax revenues go, either directly or indirectly, to the military': this includes interest payments on the federal deficit, of which 80 per cent is from military spending - accounting for \$293 billion for the 1998 tax year. Once these figures are known, it is hard to persuade working people that poverty should be increased whilst the bankers and corporations get subsidies from the public purse. The second front of the

state's ideological attack was to convince people welfare is just bad, partly by portraying welfare recipients as lazy cheats living off the taxpayer, and by consciously using racism (two-thirds of AFDC recipients are black or Latino). Thus the politicians hail themselves as saviours, ending 'the cycle of dependency' by getting people 'from welfare to work'.

The reality of Workfare is somewhat different. Benefits have been restricted by time limits, some benefits reduced and some scrapped altogether. Around 10 per cent of the population will lose some income, an extra 2.6 million people (including 1.1 million children) will join those living in poverty. Workers are forced to work full-time in hospitals, parks, schools etc, doing menial jobs for no pay. Some people have been forced to give up college classes in order to do this work. This is not just cheap labour, it is wage slavery.

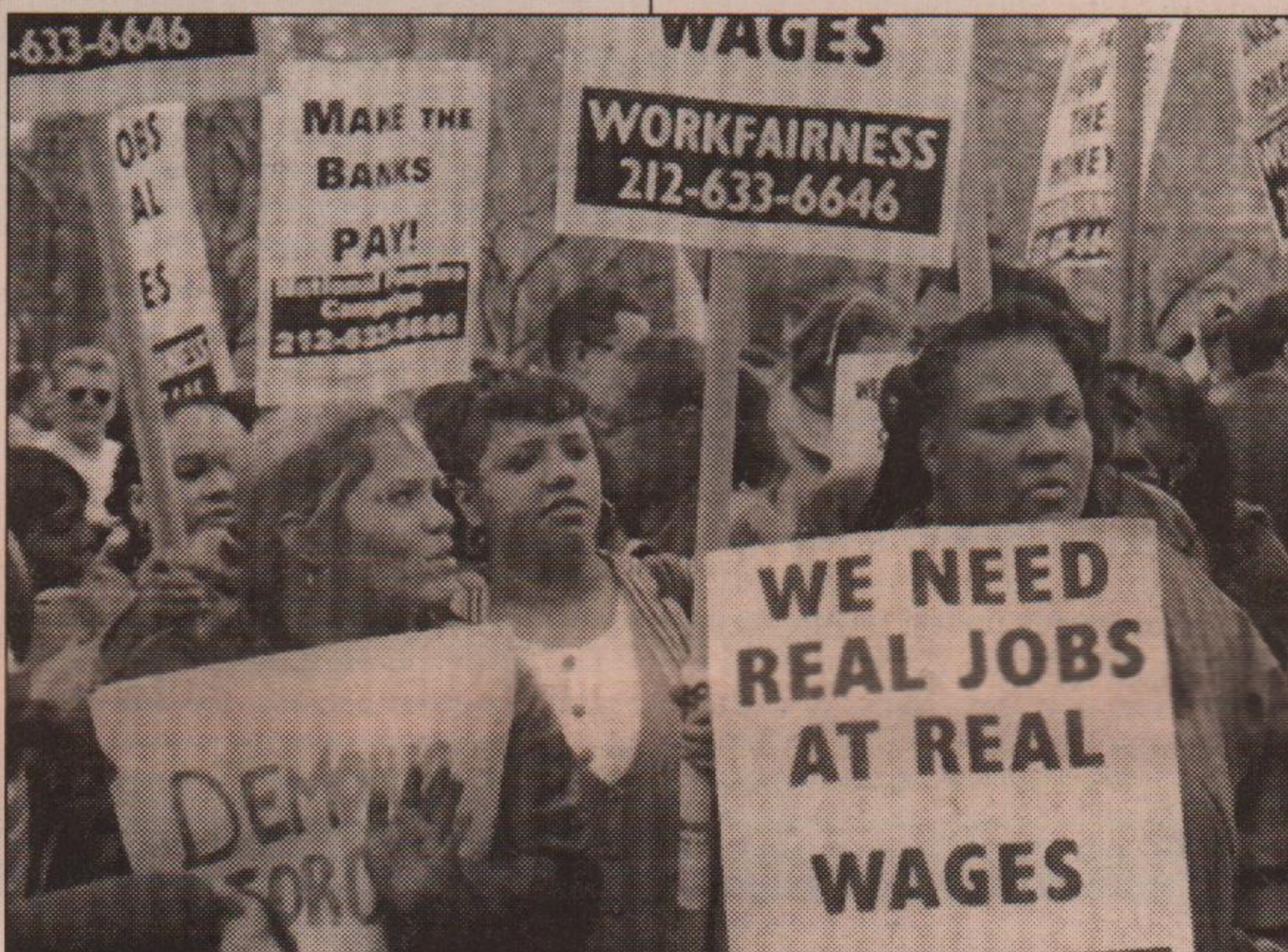
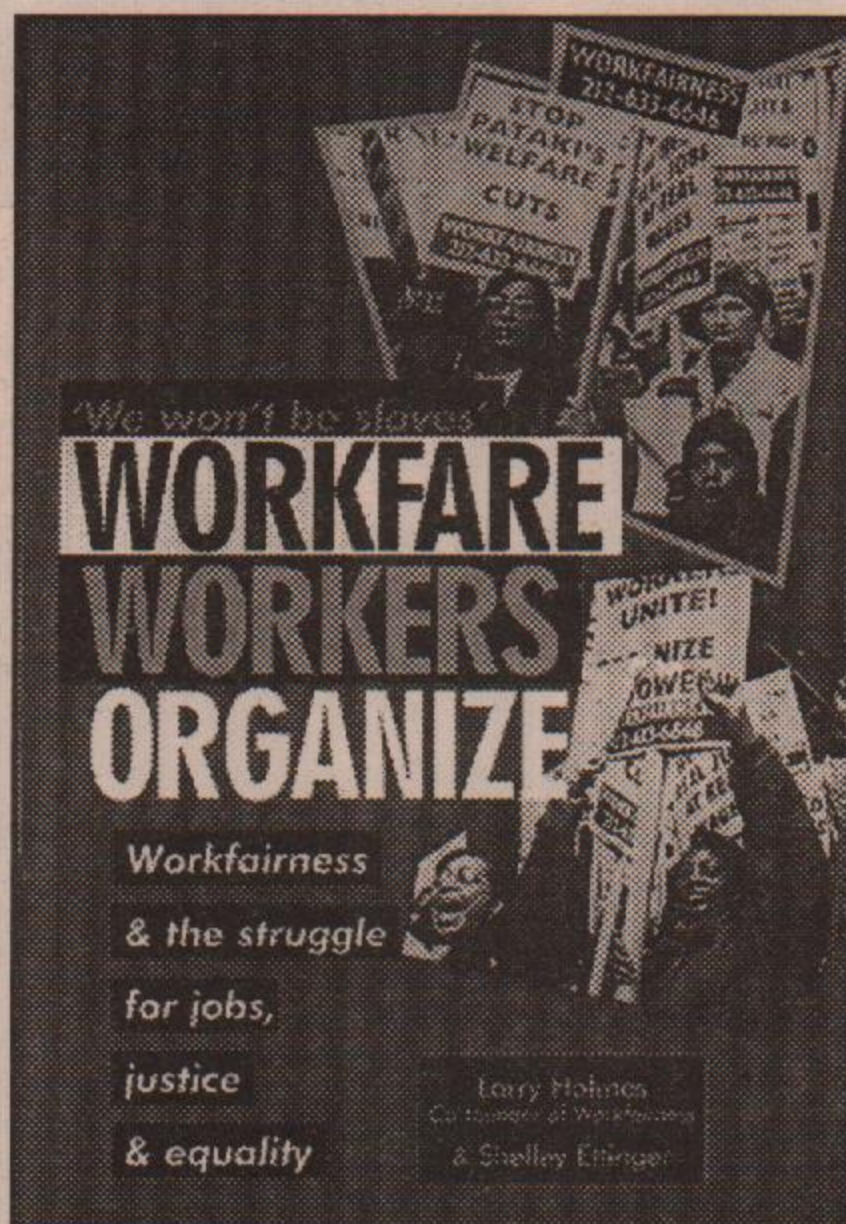
Companies are falling over themselves to win the contracts to administer Workfare: employers are given large tax credits for each welfare recipient hired and, at a conference in Washington, participants paid \$1,295 each to learn how to 'capitalise on the massive growth potential of the new world of welfare reform, gain a leading edge in the market while it is in its early stage, identify future strategies in this booming market'. Similar conferences are now taking place in Britain in relation to Labour's New Deal.

*Workfairness* started when more than 110,000 welfare recipients in New York City had been forced into the Work Experience Program and a few of them called a meeting. Seven WEP workers attended along with some union activists; the second meeting doubled the numbers. They organised to go out to WEP work sites, sign up members at the city's Sanitation and Parks departments, schools and hospitals. By the fourth meeting, 70 people attended: 'Black, Latino, Asian and White, most of them women - came together to forge a struggle to demand full rights as workers'. They decided to build for a rally at the main WEP placement office, and it was announced that *Workfairness* had 1,300 members.

They issued an eight-point programme to make concrete some of their basic demands:

*Equal pay for equal work!  
A say in the work we do!  
Stop the policy of dropping people off welfare for any reason!  
PERMANENT JOBS AT UNION WAGES!  
To be able to go to school full-time!  
No cuts in benefits!  
Full eligibility for all immigrants!  
Representation of our choosing at hearings!*

*Workfairness* correctly analysed the reforms as an attack on 'the wages of every worker in this country' and a means to undermine organised workers, calling on unions to support their struggle. 'Hundreds of WEP workers, joined by supporters from a number of unions' attended the rally and heard local union leaders pledge their support to organise WEP workers. *Workfairness* announced that the next step was a petitioning campaign to authorise *Workfairness* to repre-



sent WEP workers in collective bargaining, challenge 'the denial of union rights to workfare workers and push forward the struggle to win these rights'. *Workfairness* sought more allies and planned a rally and news conference at the New York City Hall. This rally attracted television and radio news interest, and was followed with a report in the AFL-CIO weekly update, 'Work in Progress', receiving national coverage in the union movement. A few weeks later the AFL-CIO executive council announced 'that it would instruct affiliated unions to proceed with organising workfare workers'. A leading WEP worker in *Workfairness* called this 'a big step forward... it opens a new phase in the struggle'.

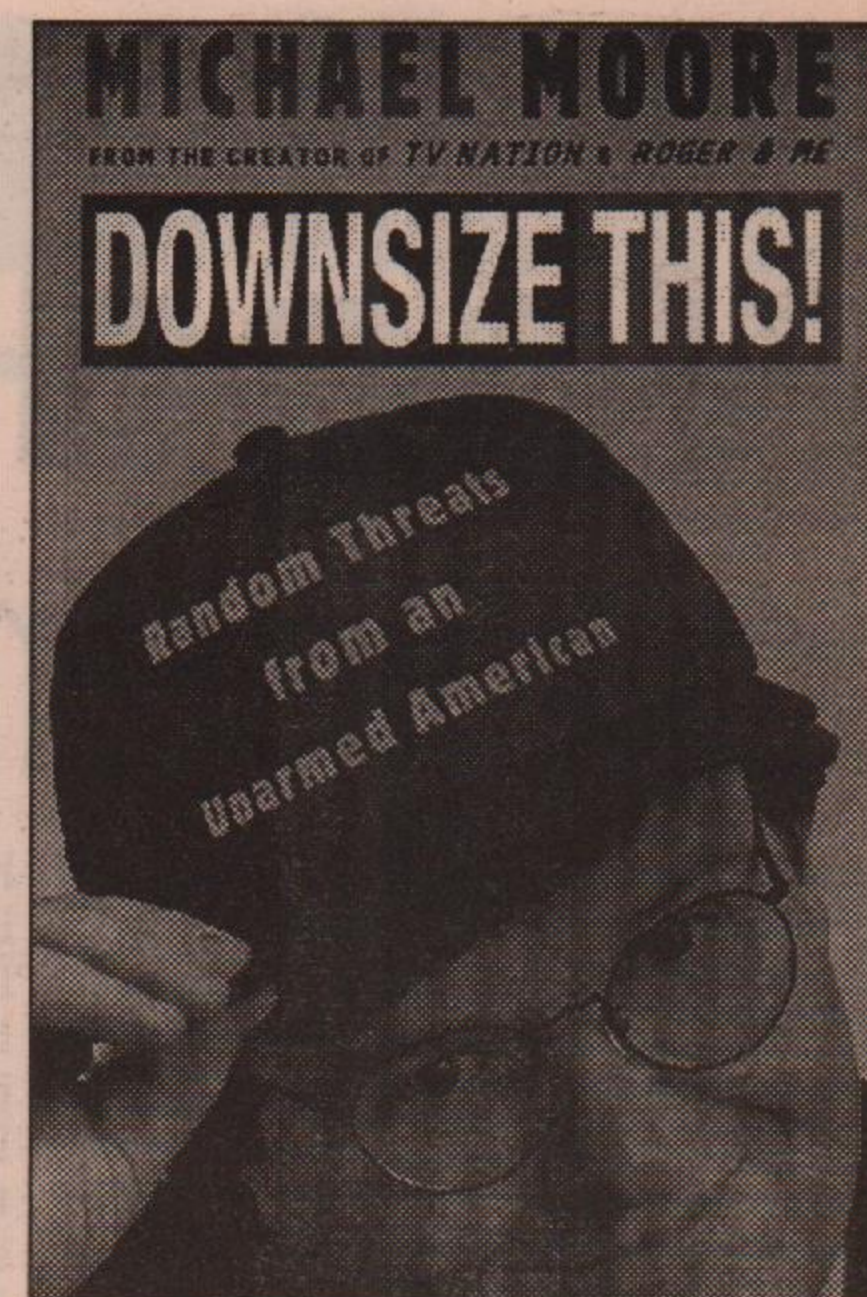
*Workfairness* went from strength to strength and, due to the high proportion of WEP workers being women and from ethnic minorities, they celebrated International Women's Day (which included a discussion on its origins and the struggle of New York women workers 1908-13) and commemorated Martin Luther King's assassination with another rally at the City Hall. At the 4 April rally hundreds of WEP workers held placards saying 'WEP Workers Unite! Organise = Power!', and the theme of the rally was solidarity 'voiced by both WEP workers and the many trade unionists who came'. The book ends with this action which marked the point where 'People on welfare - so stigmatised, marginalised, demeaned and oppressed - were taking their place in the vanguard of the labour movement'. They are determined to remain in the vanguard 'because this fight is just beginning. It won't end until Workfare workers have won'. David Howarth

### Downsize this!

■ **Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American**, Michael Moore, Bantam, Macmillan 1997, £9.99

'Everyone Fired - Wall Street Reacts Favourably' is a recent *New York Times* headline. 'That's our system,' remarked a somewhat sombre President. 'We have to believe in the free market system. My heart goes out to those who lost their jobs. I will continue to press forward to get the minimum wage raised to five dollars and forty cents an hour'.

Quoting this article, Michael Moore tries to show why it is that 'If



associated community is immense. Overall, US research shows that 'for every 1% rise in the jobless rate, homicides increase by 6.7%, violent crimes by 3.4%, crimes against property go up by 2.4% and deaths by heart disease and stroke rise by 5.6% and 3.1% respectively'.

Following his documentary film, Michael Moore created the television show *TV Nation* with NBC and the BBC. The format is recreated in his book. Michael Moore's politics are folksy, participatory direct action. Each chapter is concerned with one element of US life: the prison system; the anti-abortion lobby; the right-wing militia movement; the trade unions ('Why Are Union Leaders So F\*cking Stupid?'); racist attacks, and some slightly obscure to the British, such as the German community in Florida. Although packed full of facts and information, the method of enquiry is as important as the result. Michael Moore and his assistants send letters, make phone calls, attempt visits, put in applications, send questionnaires, carry out occupations and generate activity in the search for the reality behind the American Dream.

For Michael Moore the medium is as important as the message. He writes in hope of showing that it is possible for the ordinary guy on the street to do something together with other everyday folks to organise the working poor against the rich. The unions have sold out and the 'left' intellectuals, gathered in their universities, have no relation to the poor who service them as cleaners, washroom attendants etc on the lowest of pay.

Michael Moore achieves something remarkable in *Downsize This!* He generates a feeling of solidarity with US blue-collar workers, reminding the reader in the process of the history of their struggles and the transience of their victories over the power of capital. He also takes on board the racism and right-wing lunacy of sections of the working class but shows clearly how relatively small this section is. Newt Gringrich, the loudly-promoted Republican Senate leader, got 20% of the vote. Indeed, 60% of the electorate did not bother to vote in the 1994 election, and in the Michigan State Primary between Bob Dole and Pat Buchanan only 12% bothered to turn out.

We do not share Michael Moore's respect for Hillary Clinton and we may think that right-wing militia groups should be shot rather than taken for rides on the big wheel and treated to ice creams, but we still have a lot to learn from *Downsize This!* about the US working class today. It is also a very entertaining read: it always was the best of fun to make fools of the rich and righteous and the book has lots of laughs. It may offer some ideas, too. This country is seeing the start of a fightback against similar conditions of cheap wages and flexible employment. We definitely need to improve the style and effectiveness of our campaigning. Another Sunday march from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square is just not enough. Susan Davidson

'Downsizing is management speak for sacking, making redundant, firing: a worker whose employment has been terminated is a "downsized employee", disemployed, dislocated, and a firm or corporation that gets rid of workers has rightsized, destaffed, de hired, involuntarily separated, transitioned and displaced in the pursuit of "workforce imbalance correction"'. In 1989 Michael Moore directed the documentary film *Roger and Me*, about his efforts to persuade Roger Smith, the chairman of the world's richest corporation, General Motors, to visit Flint, Michigan. 30,000 car workers in Flint had been fired, to be followed a year later by another 3,000, during a time when the company was making record profits. The devastation wreaked on the lives of the workers, their families and the

# ORGANISE WITH

## frfi

FRFI readers' groups have continued to serve as a forum for lively political debate over the last couple of months, and are now well established in Black-

burn, Leicester, London and Manchester. Meetings have also been held in Edinburgh and Lincoln. Topics in the recent period have included the legacy of Che Guevara, and the fight against racism. Forthcoming meetings will be discussing the Labour government, with a series in London focusing on the book *Labour: a party fit for imperialism* (available from Larkin Publications, price £3.00 including postage and packing). With many on the left still offering support for Labour, however shame-faced and apologetic, communists have to hammer home the lesson that it is a ruling class party, whose sole purpose in government is to defend ruling class interests. The meetings will address issues of concern to many getting involved in politics for the first time - for instance, why can't the left unite, or can the trade unions play a progressive role even if the Labour Party cannot? Such questions need to be clarified if we are to be really equipped to fight against the onslaught on state welfare, education and health.

**For information on meetings in other cities or to help set one up in your area:**

**Write to us at** BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

**Phone us on** 0171 837 1688

**E-mail us at** rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

### FRFI Readers Groups

**LONDON**  
Wednesday 10 December  
Second part of discussion on *Labour: a party fit for imperialism*



Wednesday 7 January  
Discussion on editorial to FRFI 140  
**The smoking gun: Labour's corruption**

Wednesday 21 January  
**PUBLIC MEETING**  
Countdown to capitalism's collapse  
All at 7.30pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube)

**LEICESTER**  
Leicester FRFI Readers Group meets on the second Saturday of every month at St Peter's Tenants Association Office,

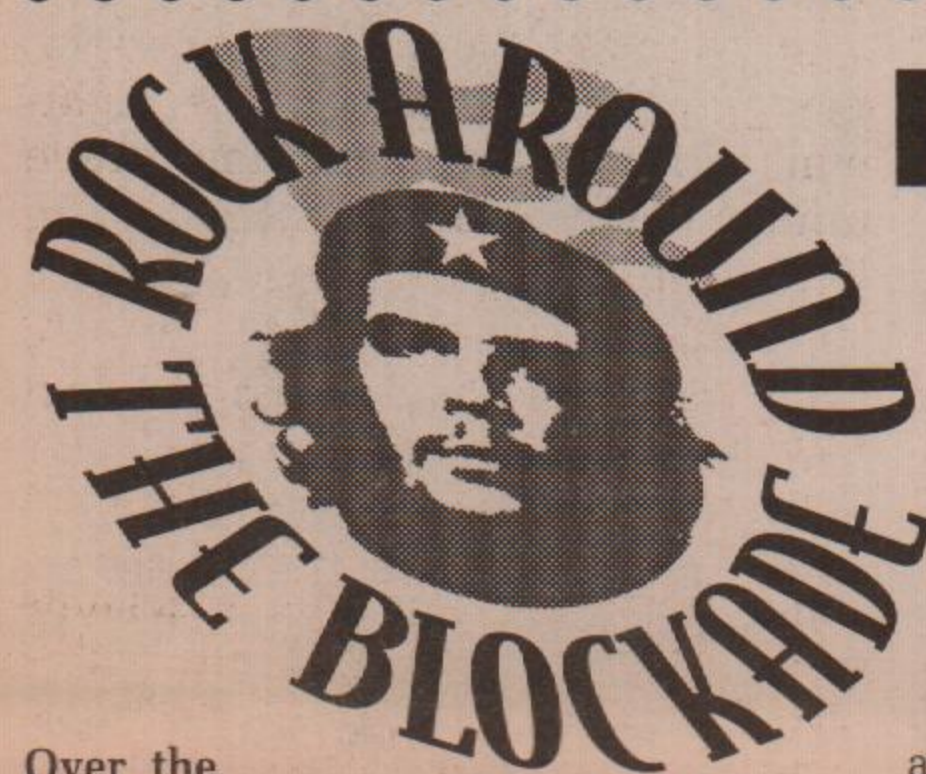
St Peter's Shopping Precinct, 112 Melbourne Road, Highfields, Leicester. The next two meetings are on Saturdays 13 December and 10 January and start at 1.30pm.

**MANCHESTER**  
Thursday 4 December, 7.30pm  
Beer House, Rochdale Rd/Angel St, Manchester  
Why Labour is the enemy of socialism  
Tuesday 20 January, 7.30pm  
The Vine, Kennedy St, Manchester

I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ copy/copies of *Labour: a party fit for imperialism* at £3 each (includes p&p)

Please make cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications and return to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Rocking all over the towns

Over the next 18 months, Rock around the Blockade will be raising money for its third sound system for young people in Cuba, this time working with the Union of Young Communists in Sancti Spiritus. The sound system is destined for Trinidad, where, as tourism increases so do dollar discos, while the youth have no peso discos to go to themselves and risk being sucked into the corroding influence of the world of tourism. We hope to send comrades out to visit the project area in the coming period, and a group will be going there in December 1998 and will be staying to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the revolution on 1 January 1999. Work has already started in local groups and student societies all over the country, drawing new people into active solidarity with socialist Cuba and against the US blockade.

distortions. Students from the Cuba society at the **University of Central Lancashire** and other Rock around the Blockade members also intervened at an SWP meeting on Che held there. The

Socialist Society. **Lincolnshire CSC**, which works closely with Rock around the Blockade, held a public meeting to celebrate the life of Che Guevara, which was attended by 40 people, many of them young people wanting to hear about Che for the first time.



SWP tried to prevent one of them from speaking - on the grounds that he was not a student at UCL, only to be forced to back down by an audience keen to hear what he had to say. At **Manchester University**, the student society has held stalls and meetings and organised a successful benefit gig attended by nearly 400 people, again supported by Up Bustle and Out. A group is also being set up at **Goldsmiths College** in southeast London and will be holding its first public meeting in the new year.

Meanwhile, in **Leicester**, the Revolutionary Communist Group and Socialist Labour Party organised a joint meeting on Cuba to commemorate the life of Che Guevara. It was attended by over 40 people and addressed by Trevor Rayne (RCG), Dave Roberts (SLP) and Thea Hutt (a delegate to the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students held in Cuba in the summer). It was followed by a salsa evening. The money raised will go towards the sound system for Cuban youth. Street stalls are being held regularly, and we now hope to extend Rock around the Blockade's work further in Leicester in collaboration with Leicester University

The meeting was addressed by Cuban student leader Evaristo Sierra Utria, who assured us that it was only a small minority of Cubans who were being diverted from the path of socialism by the distractions of tourism and capitalism. The vast majority of Cubans, he said, supported the revolution. Earlier, the meeting heard Lincoln CSC's Jim Craven outline the life and legacy of Che Guevara as a communist and revolutionary, and demonstrate the great relevance of Che's ideas to today's struggles, when the only choices for humanity are socialism or barbarism. He called upon young people in the audience to consider which side they will be on, and to join the struggle for socialism. Lincolnshire CSC is also involved in a project to support and exchange information between a local school and a school in Havana.

Rock around the Blockade in **London** has continued with its fortnightly meetings and discussions, and concentrated on building for its Che commemoration rally on 8 October (see report on page 5). We mobilised a huge and successful contingent on the Cuba Solidarity Campaign national march in London on 18

October, which brought supporters and banners from Bristol, Brighton, Manchester, Blackburn, Preston, Birmingham, Lincoln and Leicester. Unfortunately - and inexplicably? - the organisers of the march seemed rather less happy with our presence, as SUSAN ROSE reports below.

### Viva Cuban socialism!

Rock around the Blockade got our message out loud and clear: 'Viva Cuba, viva Che and viva socialism!' A large, noisy contingent echoed the chants 'Hands off socialist Cuba and smash the blockade!... Viva communism! Down with imperialism'. October marked the 30th anniversary of the death in combat of Che Guevara and our placards saluted him as a revolutionary fighter, internationalist and communist. A 100-strong contingent including RATB student societies from round the country, wearing Che t-shirts, banging drums and playing various Cuban instruments shone brightly in the sunshine as the march moved from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square. Overall, sadly, things weren't so brilliant - 1,000 people on the march, fewer than two years ago in spite of the CSC having reportedly increased its membership. And the unions, amongst whom the CSC has concentrated so much of its work? I saw just one banner - from the National Union of Teachers. Furthermore, apart from our loud chants and the samba band, the march was quiet. Yet two CSC stewards approached us and asked to stop chanting 'inappropriate slogans'. They felt that shouting 'Viva communism!' would put people off supporting Cuba. Perhaps they felt that the fact Cuba is a socialist state, led by a Communist Party - a fact the bourgeois press is never reluctant to hammer home - has somehow passed most people by. We asked who decides on such censorship? We were there to support the demands of the march, supporting Cuba and opposing the blockade. We argued that the best way to build support for Cuba is through a non-sectarian solidarity that allows all voices and political trends to be heard. And we made sure our voices continued to be heard! Fortunately, many people appeared to agree with our slo-

gans and our views - we sold 65 Rock around the Blockade t-shirts, nearly 100 badges and 175 copies of our newspaper, Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! and raising over £400 for our sound system for Cuban youth. Our message was clear: Cuba is a shining example of socialist principles and as communists we are proud of that! **Next Rock around the Blockade campaign meeting in London: Monday 15 December 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube)** For meetings in 1998 or for details about meetings in your college or area, tel: 0171 837 1688 or write to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

In January, Rock around the Blockade is launching a newsletter to keep members in touch with our many activities around the country. Please send reports of your meetings and solidarity events in support of Cuba to Susan Rose, RATB Newsletter, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX tel: 0171 837 1688 fax: 0171 837 1743 e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

## MEETINGS AND EVENTS

### REINSTATE NIGEL COOK CAMPAIGN

Picket and rally outside PolyGram  
11am Saturday 6 December  
Philips Road, Blackburn  
Speakers: Nigel Cook; Liverpool Dockers; Hillingdon Hospital Workers; Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!; Transport & General Workers Union

Last year PolyGram sales were £3bn. It paid its Board of Directors £6.2m. That same year it sacked 550 workers. Workers who now pack its CDs are paid only £3 an hour. This rally is a contribution to the international Season of Conscience highlighting the use of slave labour by multinational companies.

**RNCC Campaign Meeting**  
Thursday 11 December 7.30pm  
Blackburn Central Library

**A HISTORICAL WALK: KARL MARX IN LONDON**  
Sunday 28 December, 10.45am  
Meet Piccadilly Circus tube outside Subway 1.  
Organised by London Walks, led by Richard Roques, an experienced London guide and member of the Revolutionary Communist Group.  
Special discount £2.50 unwaged/£3.50 waged with copy of FRFI.

## CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group

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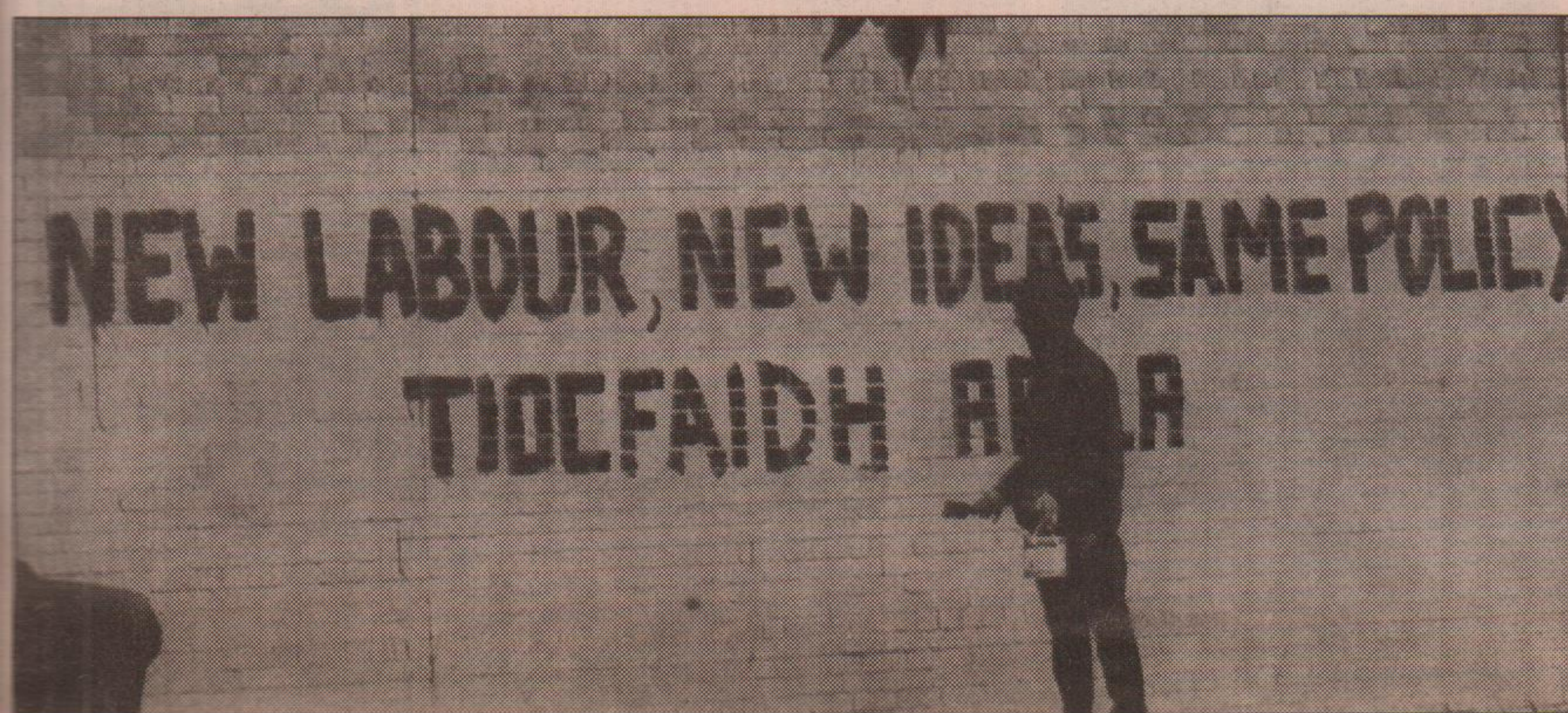
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**FIGHT  
RACISM**

**FIGHT IMPERIALISM**

As the so-called 'peace talks' meander along discussing nothing of any real substance, repression directed by the British state against the nationalist working class has been stepped up. While Gerry Adams may have shaken hands with Tony Blair and be visiting 10 Downing Street before Christmas, POWs remain behind bars and the RUC is increasing its harassment of the nationalist community. BOB SHEPHERD reports.

# Britain steps up repression in the north of Ireland



It is this gap between the reality of events on the ground and Sinn Fein's strategy of pursuing the 'peace talks' process that lies behind the recent resignations from Sinn Fein and the IRA. According to the bourgeois media, Sinn Fein has suffered resignations in the border district of Louth and, more damagingly, the IRA is reported to have suffered defections from Louth, Dundalk and south Armagh. These are said to include the IRA quartermaster-general and their engineering department, and Bernadette Sands, sister of Bobby Sands, is said to be in the leadership of the oppositionists. The level of resignations has been denied by Sinn Fein, but what cannot be denied is that it is the policy of the British state to drive a wedge between the revolutionary section of the movement and that section which is prepared to compromise with imperialism.

Central to this strategy is continued repression of the nationalist working class. The RUC has stepped up its attempts to coerce and recruit people as informers. Using 'community policing' methods to arrest and question people for minor road traffic and drug offences, the RUC is then targeting individuals, threatening them and in some cases offering them bribes to become informers. In Lurgan, in October, six men came forward to Sinn Fein to expose how, after being arrested on minor charges, they were offered large sums of money, up to £5,000, to inform on named Republicans. Similar events have been exposed in Derry, Dungannon and Belfast.

General levels of harassment by the RUC have increased in the recent period. Children have been targeted in Belfast and Derry. In Belfast, 11-year-old Gerard Daly was assaulted by the RUC on his way to school; in Derry, they have been photographing youth on the estates. On 20 October,

a ten-year-old boy from Ardoyne appeared in a Belfast court with the RUC describing him as a 'main rioter in the Ardoyne area'. The charges were so preposterous that even the judge had to dismiss the case. The boy, Francis Booth, had been arrested in the spring and hit across the head with a rifle butt by a soldier from the Parachute Regiment. When his parents made a complaint, the RUC charged him with rioting.

On 12 October, at the Roslea Martyrs commemoration march, the RUC in the course of their normal harassment of nationalists took the details of many marchers. They have since visited many of them to warn them that their lives may be in danger as the details were 'lost'; they claim the information 'fell out of an officer's hat' in a scuffle with loyalist counter-demonstrators!

With the collapse of the 'Combined Loyalist Military Command', the activity of loyalist death squads is bound to increase. Gerry Adams was targeted by loyalists as he launched his new book in the Sinn Fein centre on the Falls Road on 15 October. The loyalist gang was spotted and fled towards the Shankill Road area. In Larne, on 23 October, a Catholic family's home was petrol-bombed; the occupants were lucky to get out alive. In one district of Larne, loyalists have warned young nationalists to stay in and not go out to play hurling.

The family of Robert Hamill, a Catholic kicked to death by loyalists in Portadown in April, are taking a private prosecution out against 'those involved, including the RUC'. Robert Hamill and three friends were set upon by a gang of loyalists on their way home after a night out. The attack was witnessed by four RUC members in a Land Rover, but they refused to stop the attack.

In Britain, Irish POWs continue to be brutalised. There are 26 POWs in

English gaols, with five of them serving more than 21 years. Six prisoners are being held in high security units at Belmarsh prisons - units which are, in all but name, the same Special Secure Units which were condemned by Amnesty International. Brian McHugh, who was arrested in the same operation that saw Diarmuid O'Neill gunned down on his doorstep by armed police, has been subjected to a reign of brutality at Belmarsh for over eight months. He has been stripsearched 96 times and was attacked and handcuffed so tightly his wrists bled when he was taken to court on 3 November. The plight of the prisoners is central to any peace deal. In the north of Ireland, the Saoirse campaign is beginning to organise rallies and demonstrations calling for the release of POWs, but the issue of prisoners is not on the agenda of the 'peace talks'.

Some superficial concessions, however, are being made by the Labour Party. These include the announcement that the army is to stop daytime foot patrols in west Belfast, continued media speculation over the government issuing an apology for the Bloody Sunday murders and talk once again of the repatriation of POWs. These are all moves by Britain aimed at strengthening the position of Gerry Adams and that section of the republican movement which supports the 'peace talks' strategy. In response, Adams was able to say of Tony Blair, at a Sinn Fein rally in Belfast on 23 November: 'I think his instinct has to be against discrimination, against occupation, against militarism. His instinct has to be on the side of those who want change.' Tony Blair has shown since he's become prime minister that his instinct is deeply conservative. If Sinn Fein's peace strategy depends on the instinct of Tony Blair, then it is a strategy that is deeply flawed. ■

# Kurds targeted

The criminalisation of Kurdish communities in Britain took a menacing step forward in November when the two main Kurdish and Turkish community centres in London were raided by Metropolitan Police using the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). This campaign against the Kurds in Britain is an extension of British foreign policy into domestic policy and it threatens the democratic rights of all people in Britain.

When the Labour government extradited Kani Yilmaz, the European Representative of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to Germany in August, it brushed aside appeals for a change of line on the Kurds and to support a peaceful resolution of the war. Kani Yilmaz was arrested in 1994 on a visit to Britain at the invitation of Labour MP John Austin Walker to speak to parliamentarians. Now, far from changing policy, Labour has demonstrated that it will energetically comply with the wishes of international intelligence agencies and the Turkish state in intensifying repression of the Kurds in Britain.

On 13 November Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court issued a warrant under Schedule 7, paragraph 2, of the PTA, authorising a search for 'evidence of contributions towards acts of terrorism (money, accounting records, computer records and other documentation)'. On Wednesday 19 November the London *Evening Standard* ran a front page headline 'New Law To Drive The Terrorists From London', about supposed backers of the massacre in Egypt living in Britain. Home Secretary Jack Straw, speaking on 19 November, promised a 'major overhaul' of anti-terrorist legislation, saying he accepted a report commissioned by the Conservative government recommending the addition of Middle Eastern and other terrorist groups to the list of officially 'proscribed organisations'. This would make fundraising on their behalf illegal.

At approximately 8am on 20 November simultaneous raids were mounted by police on the Halkevi Centre, Stoke Newington, and the Kurdistan Workers' Association (KWA), Haringey, using the 13 November warrant. For seven hours police officers sealed off the premises, broke locks and systematically went through every room and document. Bank statements, cheque books, grant application forms etc, trainee records, photographs, hard and floppy computer disks were seized. At the Halkevi one man was badly beaten by the police and four detained, to be later released.

At the KWA the police were accompanied by a man acting as interpreter who claimed to different people at different times that he was Armenian and Turkish. He was well informed on Turkish and Kurdish political groups.

The 20 November broadsheets repeated the *Evening Standard* story and on 24 November the diplomatic editor of *The Times* named the PKK as a target to be outlawed, as it is in Germany. This same journalist, Michael Binyon, ran an article in *The Times* on 2 November 1994, just after Kani Yilmaz's arrest, branding the Kurds with the 'Islamic terrorist bogeyman' threat. This was to counter appeals for Kani Yilmaz's release.

In 1994, the then head of MI5,



Stella Rimington identified the Kurds as a threat to British national security. The Metropolitan Police announced it was setting up special units to investigate 'Turkish terrorists'. Surveillance, including the use of police camera crews, and attempts to recruit from within the Kurdish and Turkish communities, was stepped up. British, German and Turkish intelligence agencies liaise on what they term Kurdish 'separatists'.

Critical to the criminalisation of the Kurds is the use of the media. A series of articles citing unattributable police, Home Office and Ankara sources began in 1992, accusing Kurdish communities of harbouring extortionists, drug runners, arsonists etc. In September this year *The Observer* ran a front-page horror story about Kurds threatening British tourists with biological and chemical weapons. These are the psychological operations component of the war in Kurdistan. They are intended to break the links that have developed between Kurds in Britain and parliamentarians, human rights activists and churches and diminish the sympathy of British people for the Kurds' plight generally. An isolated target is easier to hit.

What the raids, the use of the PTA and Straw's statement mean is that the attack on the Kurdish and Turkish centres was carefully planned. It paves the way for the criminalisation of entire Kurdish and Turkish communities in Britain if they continue to oppose the Turkish state. The Kurds are to be set up to justify the extension of repressive legislation to suppress effective opposition on government foreign policy. Targeting the centres and their funding is the domestic complement to the sale of arms to the Turkish state and the provision of British Army trainers to the Turkish Army. FRFI has repeatedly warned that the British government's support for the war against the Kurds threatens essential rights in this country. Labour is preparing draconian legislation that will strike at the right to free speech, assembly and organisation not just for Kurds and other peoples from abroad in Britain, but for all people in this country. If we do not stop this criminalisation of the Kurds, we are cutting our own throats. Trevor Rayne