

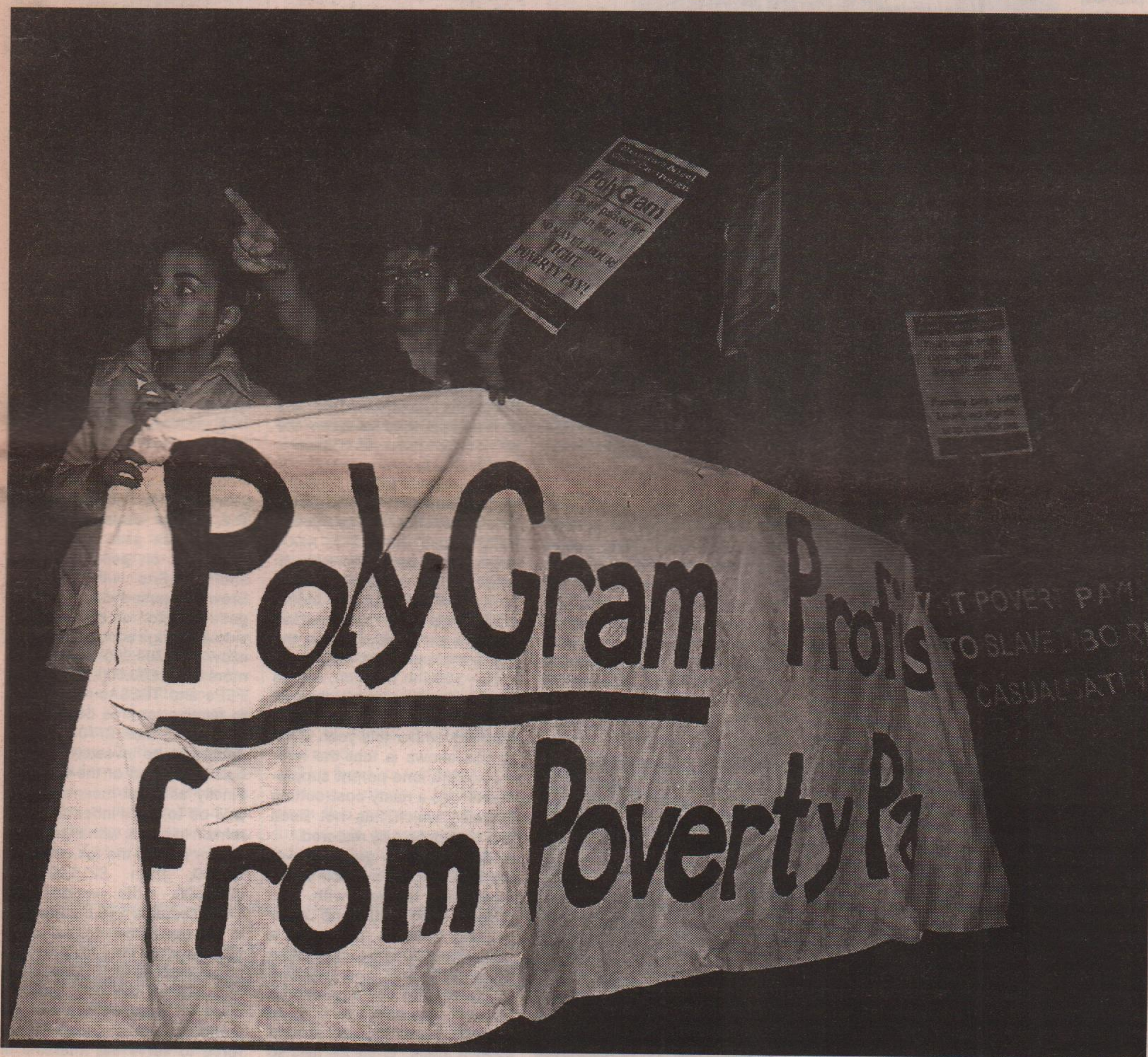
FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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FIGHT POVERTY PAY



'New Labour sold out the dockers just like they'll sell out the rest of us'

The Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign took its protest against poverty pay to the Brit Awards – and Chumbawamba demonstrated their view of New Labour!

Inside:

Solidarity
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EDITORIAL:

Labour's budget: prudence for the poor p2

ZIMBABWE:

David Kitson on the crisis p5



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY:
Fighting women p6

IRAQ:

Iraq, oil and the war suspended p7

FIGHT POVERTY PAY:

New Deal goes national; Brit Awards, RNCC round-up p8/9

COMMUNISM:

The Communist Manifesto: its relevance today p10
Review: A People's Tragedy p11



CUBA:

Remember the Bay of Pigs invasion p12

Interview with revolutionary fighter Ana Delia Gonzalez; Music for Cuban youth in Trinidad de Cuba p13

PRISONS:

New Labour prison policy p16

+ News, letters, FRFI/RATB round-up

Labour's budget: prudence for the poor

To the resounding cheers of the expensively-attired New Labour clones, Gordon Brown, adopting the air of a Victorian mill owner, declared his budget to be a 'prudent' one: 'prudence for a purpose – to meet the people's priorities'.¹ But which people? A closer examination of the budget shows that those who really benefit are New Labour's people, representatives of banking and multinational capital, the middle classes and the privileged sections of the working class that formed the coalition of forces that brought New Labour to power. The small inducements given to sections of the poor working class were indeed 'prudence for a purpose' – to force the growing numbers of poor working class people into the workforce as cheap and 'flexible' labour.²

More prudent than the Tories

Brown's 'unshakeable commitment to prudent monetary and fiscal rules' has already led to a 'fiscal tightening' of £17bn, a reduction of public borrowing of more than 2% of national income since Labour came into office. Labour's spending this year is even undershooting the target inherited from the Tory government for 1997/8 by £1.5bn. This process of 'fiscal tightening' will continue and the government plans to run a budget surplus from the year 2000 onwards, determined to pay back nearly one quarter of the national debt. This is the sharpest reduction in borrowing since the disastrous Tory budget of 1981. It is happening because it serves the interests of the City bankers and multinational company representatives at the heart of Labour's coalition.

All this is occurring with a National Health Service in desperate financial straits: 40% of NHS Trusts were on the verge of bankruptcy 15 months ago, and waiting lists are already up 108,000 from those inherited from the Tories. Brown boasted that his prudent management has allowed him to add an extra £500m to the NHS budget next year. This is totally inadequate. Spending in real terms will rise by only 2.3% in 1998/9, not even matching the annual rise of 2.7% since the NHS was created and well below the 3% growth needed for the service to simply stand still, let alone restore some of the real cuts under the Tories. In every day language this means that tens of thousands of people suffer pain or needlessly die due to lack of adequate resources for the NHS.

In addition, Labour's fiscal 'prudence' extends to education, housing, transport and local authority expenditure, forcing millions of working class people to confront deteriorating services in every walk of their lives. Labour's priorities are clearly not the people's but the bankers' and corporate man-

agers' now involved in every aspect of government. Barclays Bank, through its chief executive Martin Taylor, is a major influence on Labour's tax and benefits policies; British Petroleum, through its chair Lord Simon, on its trade policies; PolyGram, through its chief executive Stuart Till, on its policies towards the film industry and a multi-millionaire beneficiary of an offshore trust, Paymaster General Geoffrey Robinson, on its policies against tax avoidance. More recently another banker, David Edmonds, director of NatWest Bank, was named the new Director General of Telecommunications (Ofcom) and Sir Colin Marshall, chair of British Airways, as the chair of a task force investigating green taxes to cut down energy use by industry. Prime Minister Blair himself has now taken to representing Rupert Murdoch's global interests with the Italian government.

Labour lays claim to having found that much-sought-after third way, 'free from the old ideas of state control and *laissez faire*'. Its new ambition will encourage 'enterprise and entrepreneurship', as well as 'enterprise and fairness' to meet 'the ambitions of the British people'. The budget demonstrates what this really means.

The party of business

To 'help businesses to invest and grow', Labour reduced corporation tax by a further 1p, to 30p for larger firms and 20p for small businesses, a saving to business of £1.5bn each year. Last year's Labour budget had already reduced it by 2p. Britain, boasted Brown, now has 'the lowest main rate of corporation tax of any major industrialised country. The lowest in the history of corporation tax in Britain'. He committed Labour to a main rate of corporation tax of 30p or less for 'the rest of this parliament'. Capital Gains Tax will fall progressively from 40% to 24% for non-business assets held for ten years, and to 10% in the case of part ownership of businesses – 'the lowest rate ever achieved'.

Barclay's Martin Taylor was behind the biggest reform of National Insurance Contributions (NICs) for 20 years. It will cost £1.4bn a year from April 1999. The changes make it cost-effective for businesses to take on greater numbers of low-paid workers by raising the starting point of NICs for employers in April 1999 to that of income tax – from £64 to £81 a week, abolishing the 'entry fee', that is payment on the first £81. In addition, the present rising steps in employer's NICs will be replaced by one rate of 12.2%. The starting point for workers' contributions will remain unchanged at £64, with the 'entry fee' abolished from April 1999. Some time later it



will be raised to the starting point of income tax. The cost of hiring a worker on half the average wage will fall by more than £250 a year. This will open the way for a relatively low minimum wage of £3.50 an hour. These changes will lead businesses to replace high-waged workers by lower-waged ones. To ensure this is possible it will be necessary to have a readily-available

fits. This laid down the groundwork for forcing young people on benefits into the labour market as a cheap labour force.³ This budget reinforces this programme with small inducements to those with children to accept jobs paying poverty wages. The carrot to follow the stick.

The Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) will replace



Brown makes great play of the fact... families with two children and with one adult working full-time will have a guaranteed income of £180 a week.

supply of cheap labour, a reserve army of labour which can be forced into low-paid jobs. Unsurprisingly, there has been no reform of the cut-off point at which the well-paid cease to pay further contributions. This leads on to the tax and benefit changes.

Prudence for the poor

Labour's last budget produced the finance for the 'New Deal' Welfare to Work programme with its four options open to young people on benefits. To 'unreasonably' refuse such options will mean a cut in bene-

Family Credit at an additional cost of £1.5bn a year. It is effectively a subsidy to employers to allow them to pay poverty wages and an incentive to workers to stay in such jobs. It consists of a basic credit of £48.80 for those working at least 16 hours a week, with additions for children depending on age, and a supplement for working more than 30 hours. The income level above which benefits will be withdrawn will be raised from £79 to £90 a week, and the rate at which benefits will be withdrawn will be reduced from 70p on every

extra pound earned to 55p. This, however, increases to 95p for those also claiming housing and council tax benefit. It will begin in October 1999 and can be paid directly to the mother as now or through the pay packet from April 2000.

To encourage parents with children to accept jobs paying poverty wages, Labour will introduce a childcare tax credit for low-paid families. It will cover up to 70% of the costs of childcare for children under 11, with a maximum of £100 a week for the first child and £150 a week for two or more children. Costing £1bn, it can only be introduced in April 2000 because of the lack of registered childcare places. At present only one childcare place exists for every nine children under the age of eight. As a result of these changes, private childcare facilities, staffed by barely-trained, low-paid childminders, will undoubtedly mushroom as the government tries to solve the very real problem of childcare, on the cheap.

The political fallout from the vicious reduction of lone parent family benefits in last year's budget has forced a much larger than usual increase in child benefit of £2.50 a week from April 1999 for the oldest child. This will be financed mainly from a reduction of the married couples tax relief from 15% – 10%. In addition, means tested benefits for all children under 11 will be raised by £2.50 from November this year. What all this shows is that the removal of the lone parent supplements was a nasty cost-cutting exercise which has not been and will not be fully restored.

Brown makes great play of the fact that, as a result of his measures, families with two children and with one adult working full-time will have a guaranteed income of £180 a week. And the same working family will not pay any income tax until they earn over 50% of average earnings, or around £220 a week. What he fails to point out is that families who receive 50% or below average household earnings are living under the official poverty line.

But alleviating poverty is not his intention. The worst off as a result of Brown's budget are those who, for one reason or other, continue to live on state benefits which are fixed in real terms: pensioners already living on the lowest state pension in Europe; substantial numbers of the long-term sick and disabled; many lone parents with young children and, of course, the unemployed who, despite harassment and victimisation from the 'New Deal' policemen, simply cannot find work. The small amounts spent on alleviating poverty for families in all this tinkering show this too. Overall those households without children lose about £1,050m, those with gain £930m, and those in the top half of the income scale

lose £800m, while the bottom half gains £680m.

Brown is concerned primarily to cut the costs of benefits by forcing the working class poor into accepting low-paid work. He puts this very bluntly: 'And because in future work will pay, those with an offer of work can have no excuse for staying at home on benefits.' Barclay's Martin Taylor presses this point home when he makes clear that in order to claim out-of-work benefits 'both partners in a childless couple should be required to present themselves for work.' (*Financial Times* 18 March 1998)

Aid for the middle and upper classes

'Middle England can feel pleasure that low income families are getting help without the pain of footing the bill', was how the *Financial Times* (21/22 March 1998) assessed the political impact of the budget. Brown was effusive in reassuring the middle classes. 'We will not raise the basic or top rate of income tax...not just for one year, but for the parliament.' The middle class subsidy of £10bn each year through tax incentives on pensions, PEPs and TESSAs will continue. Brown reversed the last budget's decision on the new individual savings accounts and will allow the 700,000 savers with more than £50,000 invested in PEPs and TESSAs to continue to receive tax-free benefits. As a result some £770m is expected to be invested in PEPs before the end of the tax year. Finally all legal means for the well-off to avoid inheritance tax remain in place, with the threshold for paying the tax raised by £8,000, from £215,000 to £223,000. Little wonder only 17,500 estates a year contribute to this tax. Brown cannot afford to alienate the middle and upper classes as he disciplines and cajoles the poor working class off state welfare into the workforce as a cheap labour force to serve the interests of capital.

With manufacturing industry already in a recession, Labour is well aware that, as the British economy deteriorates, all its tinkering with incentives to work could be of little consequence as Welfare to Work is swept aside on a tide of growing unemployment. When this occurs, and the poor working class begins to fight back, Labour needs to ensure that the coalition of forces that elected it to power still remains on its side and intact. That was the real intent behind both this Labour budget and the last.

1 Quotes referring to Labour policy, unless stated otherwise, are from Brown's budget speech.

2 See FRFI's analysis of Labour's first budget in FRFI 138 August/September 1997 where the principles behind Labour's economic programme are discussed in more detail.

3 Ibid.

Waging war on the poor: Labour's Green Paper on welfare

ROBERT CLOUGH

With a great fanfare, Labour launched its plans for welfare reform on 26 March. Short on details it might have been, but the headlines next day told the real story: 'Welfare war on workshy' (*Daily Mail*), 'Blair in welfare war on idle' (*Daily Telegraph*) and 'Shake up in welfare hits the workshy' (*The Times*).

Author Frank Field, minister for welfare reform, introducing the paper, was particularly concerned about what he called 'welfare fraud' - 'Every pound in the pocket of a fraudster is a pound less in the pocket of someone in need'. Obviously he wasn't thinking of Martin Taylor, Chief Executive of Barclay's Bank, who chairs the government's benefits and tax taskforce. In 1997, his salary was £976,000; he also exercised the right to a further bonus worth £762,000.

Whilst it may have few specific policies, the intent of the paper is quite clear: it is to restructure welfare so as to force people into poverty pay jobs. There are going to be tougher eligibility tests for benefits, as if the current rules weren't complicated enough to deter people from getting their full entitlement. A particular target will be Incapacity Benefit, claimed by 2.4 million people at an annual cost of £7.8 billion. A new test will focus on 'what disabled people can do, not on what they cannot'. This is a recipe for extreme vindictiveness.

The 'welfare contract' set out in the proposals places an onus on the individual to seek training or work where he or she is able to. We know what this means from the New Deal: the meaningless qualification of NVQ level 2, the prospect of empty dead-end jobs for poverty pay. In the meantime, the crackdown on the Green Paper proposes on 'welfare fraud' is not going to be paralleled by any crackdown on corporate tax evasion. Martin Taylor will see to that.

Financial crisis hits the NHS

HANNAH CALLER

The Labour government is facing a financial crisis in the NHS. The latest estimate of the combined debts of the NHS is £600-700 million. Ministers insist that these deficits must be cleared by 1999. Yet waiting lists are now at a record high of 1.3 million, a rise of 108,000 since the general election. In an effort to deal with the situation, the government has promised a further £500 million from the budget. This will be targeted towards reducing the waiting lists, but elsewhere there will be massive cuts.

As a foretaste, 32 NHS trusts merged on 1 April, as a result of which over 80 hospitals will be affected by planned closures or transfer of services. The move is towards bigger hospitals serving around 500,000 people. Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, says that this will reduce the duplication of services amongst neighbouring hospitals and will encourage 'more basic' care to be provided by GPs closer to people's homes. All the evidence is to the contrary. The Centre for Health Economics find no good evidence that increasing hospital size improves outcomes, and the Hay Management Consultants warn that 70% of mergers fail to deliver the required benefits. The mergers are not about improving services, but cutting costs. Now health authorities are increasingly forced to ration care by excluding some treatments on the NHS, forcing those who can pay to have treatment privately, and those who can't to forego the treatment they need.

The focus on waiting lists is anyway utterly fraudulent, given that people have to wait first to get an outpatient appointment in order to be put on the waiting list for the treatment



The mergers are not about improving services, but cutting costs.

they need. Take the Addenbrookes hospital in Cambridge as an example. Patients have to wait 52 weeks for a routine appointment at an allergy clinic, 65 weeks for the dermatologist, 40 weeks for ENT and - wait for it - 156 weeks for hips and knees. It is of course well known that a private appointment can be got within one or two weeks for these specialties - if you have £100 or so to spare.

The fact is that £500 million is nowhere near enough to sustain an adequate health service. Half of the £1.2 billion allocated at the end of last year is already committed to wiping out existing deficits. Meanwhile, with

attention focused on waiting lists, mental health services, already at a critical level in London, will deteriorate further. Against this backdrop, Labour has decided to increase prescription charges by 15p, from £5.65 to £5.80. In opposition, it called prescription charges 'a tax on ill people'; in government it sings a very different tune.

The White Paper reforms, which will put more financial power in the hands of GPs, are now coming under attack, as doctors realise that they will be the ones rationing services and imposing cuts. In response, three private health insurance firms are setting up a national

network of privatised GP surgeries and aim to take hundreds of GPs from the NHS. A two-tier health system is now looming large. A recent review of London's health services shows that there are now fewer GPs in London than in 1993 when the situation was already bad, and that despite over £100 million having been spent on GP premises, less than half meet minimum acceptable standards.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes continue to be sought for hospital building. Labour have now signed up to four such deals - the Tories couldn't complete any. A further 11, totalling £750 million, are awaiting government endorsement in the spring. One of the requirements of the PFI process is the transfer of some of the support services to the facilities management company. The hospital pays a fee and the Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment (TUPE) is supposed to apply to protect staff, who transfer on their existing pay, terms and conditions. But this legislation excludes pensions, and there will no doubt be other loopholes that the private employers can exploit to ensure that low-paid workers are progressively casualised and marginalised.

It is not only GPs who are in short supply: there are an estimated 10,000 nursing post vacancies nationally, with a rate of 20% in some London Trusts. 25% of currently qualified nurses will be due for retirement in the next four years and the NHS is failing to recruit and train sufficient numbers to replace them. 1998 is the first year in which there have been fewer applicants than the 16,000 available places. This is compounded by institutionalised racism: in 1988, 10% of all nursing recruits were black; now it is as low as 1%.

The fact is that we are seeing the creation of a two-tier system, where those who can afford to pay for treatment get it, and those who can't don't. That is why we must support all those fighting back against the savage cuts in services and those fighting against casualisation and poverty wages.

Hungry children 'more likely to fail'

Meanwhile in the land of the free (enterprise), the USA, where private funding has penetrated state education to an extent that makes New Labour wild with jealousy, important research continues. The journal *Paediatrics* has concluded that 'hungry children are seven times more likely than their better-fed classmates to fight, steal, flout school rules and fail academically'. It is estimated that nationally about 8% of children in the USA under the age of 12 - about four million - experienced prolonged periodic hunger. About a quarter of all children are considered at risk of hunger. The report comes as federal support for low-income children and their families is being cut back. At present more than \$8 billion a year is spent subsidising school meals for children, about a quarter of it on in-school breakfasts. Clearly working class children in the US are suffering on a huge scale.

Susan Davidson

Education notes

Education, education, education - and national prosperity

The bleating Blair used the 'education' slogan in his election campaign to attract the votes of middle-class parents whose schools were facing cuts. But New Labour also claim that education is the basis for the economic regeneration of Britain. 'The future of prosperity of the nation lies in raising the standard of basic skills' is the usual formulation. In FRFI 140 we showed that there is no such link. While it is true that individuals can increase their own earnings by getting qualifications, this does not indicate how wealth is distributed among the people as a whole. Another recent study confirms that there is no automatic link between national economic performance and educational levels. The Institute for Public Policy report, *The tyranny of league*

tables, shows that an increase in educational levels of achievement does not necessarily lead to an increase in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) which is the result of many factors, not least the enticement of investing in a cheap work force which is what the government's policies are all about.

Not enough students for the marketplace

Poor students! They have many problems but do they ever realise how powerful they are? University chancellors, admissions secretaries, college heads and recruitment officers will lie their heads off just to get them onto courses. Because funding follows the student, the scramble for customers takes up more time and energy packaging and image-selling than goes into teaching. Recently there have been some amusing revelations

about the cut-throat market techniques being used to sell further and higher education courses. For example: 'this is the best course of its kind in the country' - it is the only one; 'the pass rate is 100% - only three candidates were entered'; 'there was a university on this site 400 years ago' - yes, but it disappeared for 300 of them! Inducements of all kinds are also on offer. One of the latest is from Toll Bar School in Grimsby which is offering 20 free driving lessons worth £250 to pupils who choose its sixth form for their A levels. Really enterprising students would do well to shop around picking up as many inducements as possible.

IIYP

These strange letters stand for both the title and the logo of the government's latest initiative,

Investing in Young People, fresh from the 1997 White Paper, *Learning to compete*. IIYP takes the form of a plastic 'learning card' with local college, careers office and school phone numbers, which will be given to every 16-year-old. Those who hope to be moving on to A level studies, university and debt can drop it in the bin. Those who are going to be directed to the nearest Welfare to Work scheme will also not need the card. In fact, no one will need the learning card, which will be yet another expensive stunt to give the impression that the government really cares. The massive waste of money in ever-changing education policies, glossy brochures and information packs is a profitable business for some. The labour government thinks that it is a price worth paying if, in the long run, it can cut down public expenditure on state schooling. If it could sell off the entire stock of working class children, even at a small loss, to private industry, it would.

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!
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<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rcgfrfi/rcgfrfi.htm>

Reign of terror at Wormwood Scrubs

NICKI JAMESON

On 18 March the Prison Service announced an inquiry into the 'very serious' allegations of assault levelled at a group of prison officers at Wormwood Scrubs by 11 serving prisoners. Their solicitor, Daniel Machover of Hickman Rose, told the press that some of the allegations, which date from October 1996, 'amount to torture'. Eight prisoners allege they have been seriously assaulted, including one who was beaten up every day for a month. Five of the prisoners are black and they also accuse prison staff of sustained racial abuse.

The allegations in the dossier passed to the Prison Service are just the tip of the iceberg. FRFI spoke to the mother of a recently released Wormwood Scrubs prisoner who witnessed the beating of a fellow inmate: a young man in gaol for the first time for driving offences who, confused by the size and noise of the prison, couldn't find his own cell at 'bang-up' time. The screws shouted to all the others to get into their cells, dragged the boy's cell-mate out of their cell and pushed him into it.

Once in the cell he was beaten severely, sustaining a broken cheek-bone and a lacerated ear.

Extreme violence at the Scrubs is not a new phenomenon. However, what does appear to be different in the recent accounts is that the group of prison officers carrying out the beatings has become so confident that they no longer restrict themselves to beating up prisoners in the segregation unit. Instead, under the guise of 'Control and Restraint', they have taken their reign of terror to all parts of the prison.

In 1993 we received this account of a prisoner's experience in the segregation unit of Wormwood Scrubs:

'On 25 March 1993 at approximately 7.30pm whilst returning from the recess I was grabbed by a number of prison warders simultaneously by my arms and around my throat. I was subjected to a barrage of punches to my face and abdomen, and received numerous kicks to my body. I was pinned to the ground and my limbs twisted behind my back. I was at this point screaming aloud with pain but the warders continued with their violent attack against

me. I was put into "wrist locks". At one point my forefinger was bent backwards. This was very painful and I was afraid my finger would break. The assault was so severe that I was unable to stand or walk to the strip cell when ordered to do so and consequently I was dragged naked along the landing to the strip cell by my arms. Once in the special strip cell I received further punches to my abdomen. I was pinned to the ground and a body belt was applied. The body belt was so small that it cut into the sides of my abdomen.'

In March 1997 the Prisons Inspectorate published a report on Wormwood Scrubs. The inspectors said they were 'horrified at conditions' and that many staff displayed attitudes 'which have no place in the modern world'. Whether the newly commissioned inquiry will seriously investigate the brutality or will simply result in a cover-up remains to be seen but if the Prison Service was remotely serious about uncovering the truth, it would begin by suspending those prison officers named in the allegations while the inquiry takes place. This it has so far refused to do. ■

Stephen Lawrence murder Racist police cover up

CAT WIENER

The public inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence which opened in March, has exposed the extent of police racism in their original investigation into the murder – an investigation so flawed, as Michael Mansfield QC told the court, that it amounted to 'criminal negligence'.

Stephen, an 18-year-old black student, was stabbed to death by a group of white youths in April 1993 while waiting for a bus in Eltham, south London. Two weeks later five youths, some with a history of knife attacks, were arrested. They were never prosecuted and only ever came to trial when the Lawrence family mounted a private prosecution in 1996. But the judge in the case ruled vital identification evidence inadmissible and without it the case collapsed. Despite an inquest jury last year finding Stephen Lawrence had been murdered in an unprovoked racist attack, no one has ever been convicted of his murder. Scotland Yard have always maintained that Kent police had pursued all lines of inquiry correctly and blamed the lack of progress on a 'wall of silence' in the commu-



The Lawrence family

nity that had prevented them from collecting sufficient evidence.

The reality, as Michael Mansfield revealed, is that 26 people positively identified the murderers, Jamie and Neil Accourt, Gary Dobson, Luke Knight and David Norris, who called their fascist gang The Krays. One informant provided detailed information on the killers the day after the murder; it was never followed up. A witness who had evidence about conversations with the suspects before and after the murder had initially gone to the police but

no statement was then taken. As Mansfield said, 'So much was missed by so many that deeper causes and forces must be considered.'

The inquiry still has three months to run. Whatever its outcome, it will make clear for all to see that the 'deeper causes' must include, as the Lawrence family have maintained throughout their battle for justice, the entrenched racism of the police and judicial system, for whom black lives are worthless and white murderers worth protecting. ■

Black people more likely to be murdered in British prisons

NICKI JAMESON

On 25 March an inquest jury at Kidderminster returned a unanimous verdict of unlawful killing following the death of black prisoner Alton Manning in the privately run Blakenhurst prison at Redditch, Worcestershire. Alton died in December 1995 of asphyxia after being carried face down by six prison officers while a seventh held him in a vice-like neckhold until blood gushed from his mouth. Two other black men, Kenneth Severin and Dennis Stevens, also died in 1995 as a result of being forcibly held down by prison officers.

Following the verdict and the suspension of seven prison officers pending an inquiry, the Director General of the Prison Service Richard Tilt came out with the ludicrous and highly offensive 'theory' that 'Afro-Caribbean people are more likely to suffer positional asphyxia than whites'. No experts were produced, evidence provided or research cited to back up this absurd and racist conclusion. Perhaps Richard Tilt should be subjected to the same treatment as Alton Manning to see whether he survives.

The truth is that the prison system is racist. If black prisoners die more frequently of suffocation it is not because of something physiological in their make-up but because they are more likely to be attacked, beaten and forcibly held down than their white counterparts. Tilt's outrageous statement was designed to reflect the glare of bad publicity away from the Prison Service and onto its victims. The Prison Service made an unconvincing attempt to



Tilt behind bars

cover Tilt's back by alluding to research into a number of deaths in custody in which sickle-cell anaemia was considered a possible contributing factor.

Richard Tilt took over the job of running the Prison Service after Derek Lewis was sacked by Michael Howard. He has had a cosy relationship with the Labour Party and to some extent with the prison reform lobby, which welcomed the fact that, unlike Lewis, he did actually know something about prisons. This is perhaps why *The Guardian*, which splashed the allegations of brutality at Wormwood Scrubs across its front page, chose to tuck Tilt's outburst away on page 5 and describe it as a 'gaffe'. *The Mirror*, on the other hand, showed no such reticence, featuring 'Rage at jail chief's claim' on pages 1 and 2, as well as calling for his resignation in their editorial column.

Alton Manning, Kenneth Severin and Dennis Stevens were murdered. If Richard Tilt wants to even begin to convince anyone that he is not motivated purely by bigotry and the desire to cover up the truth, he will initiate an immediate public inquiry into the three deaths and sack all prison officers, governors, doctors and officials found to be in any way responsible. ■

Privatised railways fiasco

ROBERT CLOUGH

For some, the privatised railway system has been a way of making a huge amount of money. For passengers and staff, it has become a complete nightmare. Trains are now slower, less frequent and less reliable than a year ago. The infrastructure is in a worse state, with more speed restrictions, and more hazards. The facts speak for themselves.

Trains are slower

- In 1980, Paddington to Newport took 84 minutes. In 1998, the fastest journey is 96 minutes; most are 105 minutes.

- In 1938, the Coronation Scot took 112 minutes to reach Crewe from Euston. In 1998, the fastest journey is 110 minutes, the average 120 minutes.

- Trains from London to Manchester or Liverpool are timed at 10 to 15 minutes slower than they were 10 or 15 years ago.

The slower trains are less punctual

- In summer 1997, well under three quarters of Virgin trains arrived within 10 minutes of schedule. Their flagship routes are... London to Manchester or Liverpool.

- On 18 January, John O'Brien, the rail franchise director, reported that train reliability and punctuality are declining rapidly. Worst offenders are... Virgin, and Connex, which serves the South East.

- Great Western Trains, operating from Paddington to Bristol and South Wales, including Newport, is increasing its journey times to avoid fines for constant late running.

There are fewer of them running

- MTL, which owns Regional

Railways North East in Yorkshire, cancelled or curtailed 5,500 trains in the first year of its operation after getting rid of over 80 drivers.

- In 1997, both Connex and South West Trains were cancelling hundreds of trains a week, also after making drivers redundant.

- Connex wants to cut 25 per cent of its services anyway, a move that the regulator is powerless to prevent.

They are old and decrepit

- The three rolling stock leasing companies ('rosco's') which bought up British Rail's rolling stock for a song, have not ordered any new trains since privatisation.

- The three companies own 2,200 carriages which were condemned as unsafe after the Clapham rail disaster of 1987. They were all supposed to have been replaced by last year.

- South West Trains received so many complaints about slam-door carriages made in the 1970s that it replaced some with slam-door carriages built in... 1957! These are supposed to run till 1999.

But they are very lucrative...

- Railtrack reported six-month profits of £184 billion on a turnover of £1,226 million. At privatisation, its share price was 380p. At the end of March, it was 975p. In the meantime it has held up hundreds of millions of pounds worth of necessary maintenance work.

- Two of the three 'rosco's' were sold on within months of privatisation for £800 million profit. Directors netted up to £33 million each.

- Of the three companies, Porterbrook (owned by Stagecoach, who also own South West

Trains) made £80 million profit in a year on a turnover of £180 million. Angel Train Contracts made £109 million profit on £270 million turnover, whilst Eversholt Rosco made £129 million on £219 million.

- FirstGroup, the bus and train company, have bought Great Western Trains in the first of an expected series of takeovers and mergers. Ten directors got between £2.2 and £3.7 million each.

The sale of Great Western Trains took place before the report into the Southall rail crash last September. After trying to blame driver error, it is now known that the Automatic Warning System, which rings a warning bell on passing a signal, was not working in the leading engine cab. In addition, the Automatic Train Protection system, which stops a train if it passes a red light, was not functioning. The enquiry into the Clapham rail disaster recommended that all trains be fitted with this within 10 years – that is, by 1997. Its use has not gone beyond pilot stage. In March, the driver of a train which crashed at Watford in 1997 was acquitted after being accused of driving through a red light. The solicitor for the dead passenger's family later said that he thought there would have been a different verdict if Railtrack had been in the dock.

The 'rosco's' are not regulated at all. They have 35-year franchises, whilst operating companies are tied to seven-year leases. With a shortage of stock, the 'rosco's' have the operators over a barrel. It takes three or four years to bring new trains into service, and few operators are prepared to take the risk in case they lose their leases.

Hence they have to take what the 'rosco's' offer, which may be unsuitable for different tracks. The 'rosco's' have now hit on a new wheeze: exporting their existing stock, in one case to New Zealand. They have no plans to replace the thousands of coaches condemned after the Clapham disaster.

And yet it all costs more. The government subsidy to the various railway companies now stands at £1.8 billion, compared to £1 billion before privatisation. It's bound to cost more, since the shareholders now have to have their cut. Passengers – in newspeak, of course, customers – pay more. That is of course if they can get through to rail enquiries, and if they get through, get the right answer. One in ten enquirers are given the wrong information, rising to one in three on Sundays. Only in November 1997 did the service meet its target of answering 90 per cent of all calls. But the best wheeze for maximising income must go to Great Western Trains. Saver tickets are not valid on any service leaving Paddington between 15:59 and 19:01. When do the South Wales services leave in this period? 16:00, 17:00, 18:00 and 19:00!

What has the Labour government done? Nothing – apart from huff and puff, and sell off disused railway tracks, sidings and stations which were not privatised with the rest of British Rail. However, it is considering the privatisation of London's underground, splitting the various lines into separate franchises in the same way the Tories privatised British Rail. Railtrack is interested in taking over the infrastructure. Another fiasco in the making. ■

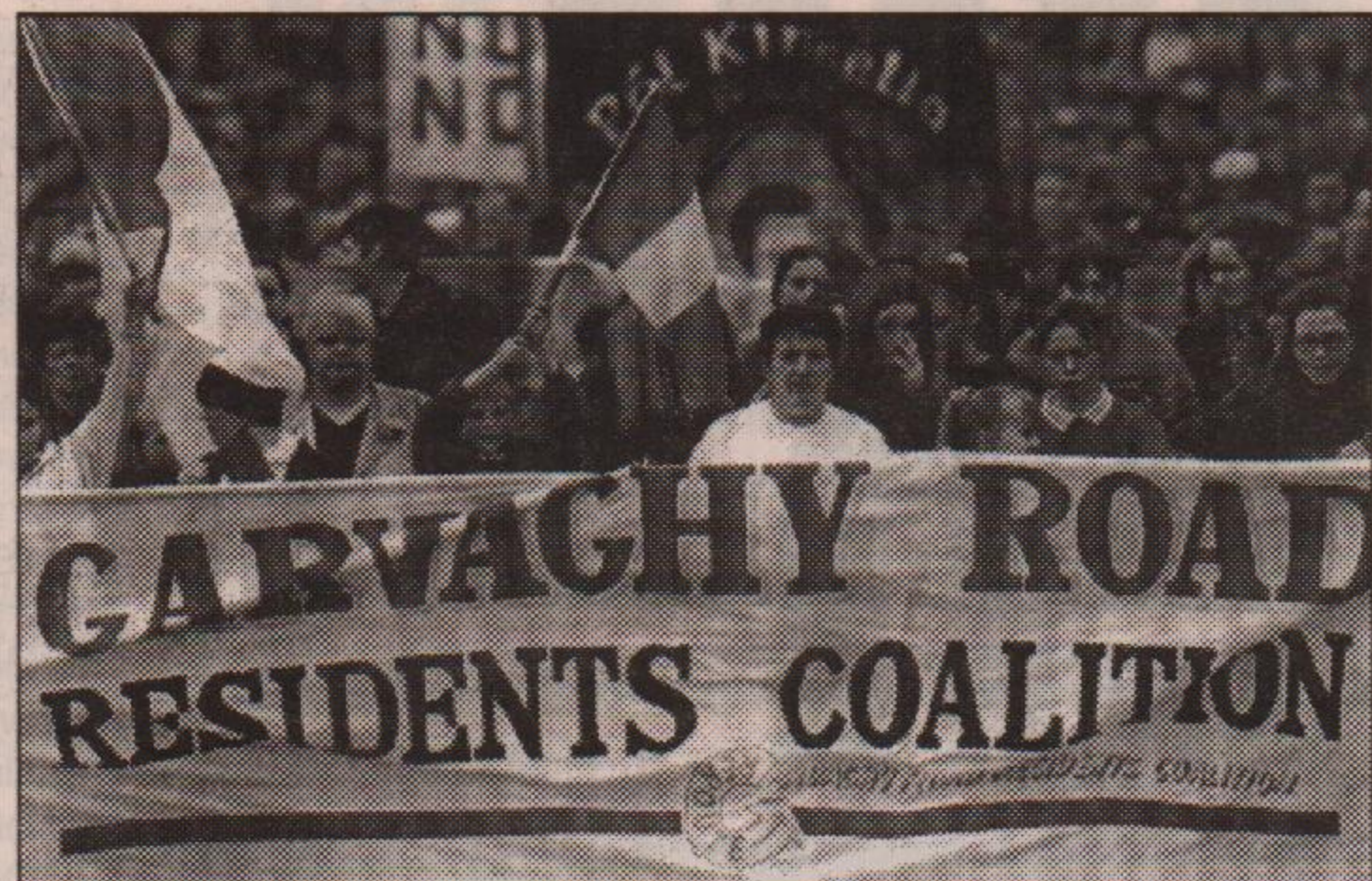
Ireland: 'peace talks' near conclusion

BOB SHEPHERD

On 23 March, the 'peace talks' reconvened in Stormont for their final phase. Sinn Féin took their place at the table following their suspension on 20 February. The schedule laid down by Tony Blair is for agreement between all parties on the future of the north of Ireland to be reached by Easter, after which it will be put to referendum both north and south of the border in May.

For Sinn Féin, the minimum position they can accept at the end of the talks is that 'all-Ireland bodies' are created which 'exercise significant and meaningful executive powers'. Trimble and the Ulster Unionists have made it clear that they are determined to oppose any cross-border bodies having any real power. The intransigence of the Unionists over even the smallest concession to nationalist aspirations suggest that the talks schedule is unlikely to be kept to, although Tony Blair says he remains 'stubbornly optimistic'.

One of the reasons why Labour is pushing for agreement to be reached by 9 April is that it wants the 'peace talks' over before the Orange marching season begins. Labour has been reassuring Unionists, through its appointments to the new Parades Commission, that they will look after their interests and defend their positions of privilege. The Parades Commission is supposed to be an independent body which can arbitrate between Unionists and nationalist residents who do not want triumphalist sectarian Orange marchers down their streets. Mo Mowlam has appointed Glenn Barr, a former leading member of the UDA, and Tommy Cheevers, a member of the Orange Apprentice Boys, to the Commission. This display of Labour contempt for the rights of nationalist communities is being extended by the RUC with a campaign of intimidation against nationalists in Newtonbutler, where 25 residents have either been charged or ques-



Garvaghy Road residents oppose the Orange march through their area

tioned over their opposition to an Orange march through their community last August.

Parallel to the 'talks', there has been a continued campaign of intimidation, violence and murder directed against the nationalist community. This includes the cowardly attack on a bar in Poyntzpass, Armagh on 3 March, when gunmen from the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) ordered the defenceless customers to lie on the floor and shot two of them dead, one a Catholic, the other his Protestant friend. During the last week of February, loyalist death squads planted bombs in West Belfast, on the main road between Belfast and Dublin, and one on the main road in Carnough in North Antrim. In addition, they posted parcel bombs to homes in Belfast and Toomebridge. The day after the Poyntzpass murders, a loyalist gang launched a gun attack on a family living in a predominantly Protestant housing estate in Antrim, wounding a mother and her child. Days later, on 8 March, the home of Bertie Shaw, a Larne Catholic, was attacked with a pipe-bomb. On St Patrick's night, the LVF attacked and bombed a Catholic sports and social club in Larne, luckily failing to injure anyone.

Just as the 'talks process' hasn't changed conditions on the ground for working class nationalists, it hasn't altered conditions for POWs. The campaign to release Roisin McAliskey was successful, a concession from the Labour

government which followed its decision a week earlier to give soldier Lee Clegg a retrial over his murder of Karen Reilly. Labour has also made a vindictive decision to set a natural life tariff for the Balcombe Street 4, Hugh Doherty, Harry Duggan, Joe O'Connell and Eddie Butler, all now in the 23rd year of their imprisonment in English gaols. Seamus McArdle, still held on remand in Belmarsh gaol following the collapse of his trial in February for the Canary Wharf bombing, is suffering serious harassment from the prison authorities. After enduring 120 strip searches during his Old Bailey trial, he is facing weekly cell moves and more strip searches.

The lack of movement in the 'talks process', the continued repression in the prisons and on nationalist working class estates has led to increased military activity from republicans opposed to Sinn Féin's peace strategy. The Continuity Council IRA is believed to be behind the bomb which destroyed the RUC barracks in Moira on 20 February. They have also launched a number of mortar attacks on RUC stations in Armagh. This military opposition to the 'peace talks' process is bound to continue and increase, since any agreement will be based on Labour's framework document, central to which is acceptance of a 'new Stormont' assembly. Communists in Britain continue to demand Troops out now! Prisoners out of gaol! ■

across Iran. If the USA, using the Turkish government as its local advocate, succeeds, then the Caucasian states and Central Asia will be under its sway, with Turkey serving as its powerful regional commander. If the oil and gas are exported via Iran and Russia then Turkey will depend on Russia for oil. Against this manoeuvring is the looming backdrop of China which has already proposed a multibillion dollar investment in a pipeline to bring oil from Kazakhstan to its east coast industries. Chinese diplomacy has shown an increasing interest in the Middle East of late. China and Russia were strongly against the proposed US and British strike against Iraq.

As the major powers compete, tensions and conflicts in the region are exploited and encouraged. Georgian president Shevardnadze blames Russia for assassination attempts against him. Azerbaijan was the target of a Turkish-inspired coup

Crisis in Zimbabwe

DAVID KITSON

When ZANU came to office in consequence of a British-run election in 1980, they dubbed themselves a Marxist-Leninist Party. If one regards the social welfare facets of Engels' *Principles of communism* as socialist, then ZANU can be looked at as building socialism in its early stages – which lasted about ten years.

Primary schools, adding to the existing resources, were built country-wide. One found such schools in the most remote places in the *bundu* (rural lands). Free primary education was provided for all. The number of secondary schools, where fee-paying was still required, were increased to 1,500 from 140. Free medical clinics and hospitalisation were introduced for the *povo* (poor). Land, known as 'the communal areas', was provided for thousands of peasants, with compensation being paid to the previous owners in terms of the Lancaster House agreements. The first British aid met the costs of such takeovers in the Mount Darwin district. Price control of staple foods was introduced, labour legislation gave all types of workers a fair crack of the whip.

However, during the first ten years, many of the former liberation leaders feathered their nests. Corruption became rife, kickbacks the norm. That darling of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and of the USSR, Joshua Nkomo, became very rich and has a substantial landholding in Matebeleland. There are many others like him. Zimbabwe became the most highly-taxed land in Africa. The airwaves became full of crass US religious propaganda. After the USSR collapsed, the ideas of socialism were abandoned by the ruling party. That real socialist, Fay Chung, Minister of Education, gave up and got a job in UNICEF.

The government got in line for handouts from the IMF and World Bank, introducing policies aimed at pleasing these bodies through economic reform. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP)

was introduced. Market economy became the rule. Economic controls disappeared. Supermarkets filled up with imported consumables, especially from South Africa, now that it had ceased being a pariah. The textile industry collapsed in the face of this. One can now buy just about anything provided one has the money. Coca-Cola has become the national drink. Inflation is soaring. Poverty has increased dramatically. The rich are getting richer. On nearly every corner street-vendors vie with each other trying to sell a few tomatoes and small piles of popcorn. In parking lots flea markets proliferate, offering imported second-hand clothing and every kind of flashy and cheap gimmick under the sun. The *povo* are reduced to buying bread by the half loaf.

However, the number of civil servants, which was sup-



Robert Mugabe – the early days

posed to be rigorously cut back, is huge. Budget estimates for various government departments are ignored. Money for essential projects is getting difficult to come by. Fees for primary schools have been introduced and increased. Many girls have been withdrawn from secondary schools because their brothers get preference. About 40% of the female population has fallen victim to HIV. The Minister of Health reports that every week 700 people die of AIDS. Fees at medical clinics have now to be paid and they are regularly increased.

At first people became withdrawn (although students have been demonstrating for many years). In by-elections, about 4% of the electorate voted, with about 80% of them voting for ZANU – which would then claim an overwhelming victory. Now people are becoming fractious. When the sitting MP for a Harare seat, Margaret Dongo, was displaced in the ZANU primaries she stood as an independent. When the vote against her in the last general election was rigged, she appealed to the Supreme Court which threw the result out. She won the ensuing by-election and is now one of the two MPs out of 150 who are not in ZANU. Her example is being followed, especially in municipal elections. The recent election for the mayor of Chitungwiza, the third largest town in Zimbabwe, saw the independent candidate get a substantial vote, although he did not win.

Matters came to a head when the rank-and-file realised how the elite were ripping off the fund provided for ex-combatants who had been injured during the struggle against the Smith regime. The Minister for Posts, for example, claimed an 80% disability and received Z\$560,000. Impoverished ex-combatants took to protest so menacingly that Mugabe promised them lump-sum hand-outs and Z\$2,000 a month. Z\$5bn was needed to fund this, so income tax was raised by five per cent, sales tax became 17.5% and the price of fuel went up yet again, with knock-on effects. Price rises produced riots.

The Zimbabwe dollar collapsed from Z\$20=£1. One day, last December, it reached Z\$45=£1 but Reserve Bank intervention has reduced it to 27.

Last year there were 106 major strikes, most of them lengthy. Workers wanted big rises to cope – like 55%. Students are asking for 250% increases in their stipends. There were demonstrations in the CBD (Centre of Business Development), smashing shop windows and burning cars. Perturbed by enormous price rises, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) led by Morgan Tsvangirai, its general secretary, organised and executed a well-planned general strike which shut the country down. (When Castro's In defence of socialism was launched here, Tsvangirai was the main speaker.) Shortly after the strike, a group of men, said to be ZANU hitmen, invaded his office and beat him up.

The government said it would withdraw the rises. The five percentage point income tax rise went but the other increases remain. Oil is up despite the general reduction in the cost of oil worldwide. So the ZCTU called for another stay-away, this time for two days. Despite the most dire threats involving the mobilisation of the army and police against 'violence', most industrial workers stayed away, while *The Worker*, the paper of the ZCTU, reported that the strike, which was remarkably non-violent, was about 80% successful.

Dr Makombe, a political analyst in the University of Zimbabwe, appearing on TV, claims: 'Mugabe's government is clearly on the downslide', saying that if Mugabe does not step down, violence will ensue.

A 'Mugabe must go' movement is arising. In Parliament, Cde Mhvaire, the MP for South Masvingo, called for Mugabe to step down. This has produced a backlash from ZANU party-liners. Mhvaire has been suspended from ZANU, losing all his posts, but not his seat, for two years. Cde Ndebele, the Speaker, has been severely castigated by ZANU for drawing attention to parliamentary privilege. Mugabe, just returned from a junket in Botswana celebrating the retirement of President Masire at the end of this month, has become hysterical on public platforms, screeching against the enemy within, but he means within ZANU.

Watch this space, it's just beginning. ■

Turkey and oil

TREVOR RAYNE

Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union, Turkey's role has altered from being a forward base for imperialism against the socialist bloc to that of a conduit for investments into the Caucasus and Central Asia. It also oversees Middle Eastern oil reserves. Turkey is now embroiled in inter-imperialist rivalry over control of the former Soviet republics' energy supplies.

The former Soviet republics hold 5.8% of the world's proven oil reserves, compared with western Europe's 1.8%. With global oil consumption anticipated to rise a third by 2010, (much of this growth from China and Asia), the region

from the Caspian Sea, through Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to the Chinese border is deemed critical to the future balance of global power. It is not just the reserves themselves that count, but the access they provide to influence over local states and thereby to Middle Eastern oil. The contest is being fought over ownership of the reserves and oil and gas pipeline routes.

The USA's favoured route is from Baku in Azerbaijan, through Georgia to eastern Turkey and on to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean. This would diminish Russian and Iranian influence over the supplies. The French firm Total is already in Iran, with a Russian group. Royal Dutch Shell intends to build a pipeline

attempt. Armenia and Azerbaijan have territorial disputes. The USA has encouraged the forging of a military alliance between its two most reliable regional allies, Israel and Turkey, and the two collaborate against the Kurds.

Despite government borrowing rising to 12% of national income in 1997 and debt repayments consuming 75% of government revenues, with inflation over 100%, Turkey is currently in the midst of a \$31 billion military modernisation programme: part of a planned \$150 billion expenditure on weapons over the next 25-30 years. This is completely unsustainable without further US and west European credits. Turkey is to be an armed camp in the battle for energy. The Kurds and the Turkish working class have different plans: for Turkey can only play the role that imperialism intends for it if they are crushed and permanently subjugated. ■

'Let a joyous sense of serving the common cause and of fighting simultaneously for their own female emancipation inspire women workers to join in the celebration of Women's Day.' Alexandra Kollontai, first Bolshevik Minister for Social Welfare, written in 1913

On 8 March 1908, hundreds of working class women, under the leadership of women workers employed in the New York City needles trades, gathered in Rutgers Square to demand the vote and urge the building of a powerful needles trades union. The success of the demonstration inspired women around the world and led Clara Zetkin, a leading German communist and secretary of the International Socialist Women, to call for the date to become enshrined as International Women's Day, dedicated to fighting for equal rights for all women in all countries. In 1911, the first International Women's Day took place.

Ninety years later, it is worth recalling the working class and socialist roots of Women's Day and the struggles waged by women around the world against capitalism, imperialism and racist oppression. For in Britain today, young women are denied any sense of that history and offered instead a parody – the preposterous 'girl power' of the Spice Girls; the personal rantings of New Feminism served up as politics by the likes of Natasha Walters and Naomi Wolf; the spectacle of Blair's babes, 100 new women MPs we are told represent a victory for womankind as they meekly troop into the lobby to vote to cut lone parent benefits. This is bourgeois feminism triumphant, concerned with more women in the board room and in government and caring nothing for women on factory floors and in high-rise, grim estates. It has nothing to do with the kind of movement we need. For despite more than 20 years of equal pay and sex discrimination legislation, women in Britain's average weekly earnings are less than 73% those of men. 10% of all women in paid employment earn under £3 an hour (compared to 5% of men); 30% earn under £4 an hour. Women, particularly women with children, predominate amongst those living on the margins of poverty in Britain, subsisting either on benefits or on low-paid, unskilled and part-time jobs. A million more women than men are among the poorest 20%. Maternity rights for women in Britain are amongst the worst in Europe. And, although the government has pledged more childcare as the inevitable price of forcing lone parents into low-paid, dead-end jobs, currently there are registered childcare places for just one in nine children under eight years old.

For International Women's Day, FRFI pays tribute to just a few of the women around the world who have understood that their struggle for justice is inextricably bound up with the struggle to end all oppression. It is they, and hundreds of thousands like them, who are the true torchbearers of our liberation.

Fighting Women



Clara Zetkin 1857-1933

Clara Zetkin would not have been surprised by the posturings of today's bourgeois feminists. She always argued that they

united with each other against the men of their class to win concessions for themselves within the current system, while the proletarian woman needed to join with working class men against the capitalist class. 'We carry out our war, not as a fight between the sexes, but as a battle against the political might of the oppressing classes;... a fight whose final aim and glory will be that one day, the proletariat in its entirety, without distinction of sex, shall be able to call out to the capitalist order of society: "You rest on us, you oppress us, and see, how the building you have erected is tottering to the ground"'. She was editor of the Social Democratic Party's women's newspaper, *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) until 1917, when they removed her for her principled campaign against the first imperialist war. In 1918 she helped found the German Communist Party, the KDP, and became International Secretary of Communist Women in the Third International. She was involved in discussions with Lenin on the question of women. She consistently fought imperialism and, as head of International Red Help, called for an international movement to defend the nine black Scotsboro youth in the United States, framed on charges of raping two white women and sentenced to death.



Simone de Beauvoir 1908-1986

'I never cherished any idea of changing woman's condition; it depends on the future of labour in the world. It will change significantly only at the price of a revolution in production.'

De Beauvoir was a leading French intel-

lectual who participated in the French Resistance, publicly – and dangerously – opposed French repression of the Algerian struggle, took a stand against the Vietnam war and, at a time when abortion was illegal in France, led a demonstration for the liberalisation of the abortion laws and publicly admitted she had had an abortion. But perhaps her greatest achievement was the publication of *The Second Sex* in 1949, which became a classic statement of the material and social basis of women's oppression. She was, however, critical of classic Marxist explanations for women's oppression, but argued: 'We must not believe, certainly, that a change in woman's economic condition alone is enough to transform her, though this factor has been and remains the basic factor in her evolution; but until it has brought about the moral, social, cultural and other consequences that it promises and requires, the new woman cannot appear.'



Eleanor Marx 1855-1898

Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx was, with Engels, the person who did most to ensure the

enduring legacy of Marxism after her father's death. She edited much of Marx's work and was active in the Second International, fighting for a revolutionary, Marxist position. She worked in the trade unions, most notably in the Gasworkers' Union, herself living extremely modestly as a manual labourer working on a typewriter. She always championed the role of women, and declared 'When the revolution comes, it will be by the workers, without distinction of sex or trade or country, standing and fighting shoulder to shoulder.'

Speaking at a demonstration at Hyde Park in 1887 in support of Irish nationalism, she made the link between the struggle in Ireland and the struggle of the British working class, saying that to help Ireland would be helping ourselves. Throughout her life she worked 'for every practical reform

without for a moment losing sight of the revolutionary aim; to agitate for the total overthrow of the system without brushing aside a single immediate demand for which the working class was prepared to fight.'



Constance Markievicz 1868-1927

'While Ireland is not free I remain a rebel, unconverted and unconvertible... I am pledged as a rebel because I am pledged to one thing – a free and independent Republic... A state run by the Irish people for the people. That means a government that looks after the rights of the people before the rights of property... My idea is the Workers' Republic for which Connolly died.'

The Irish revolutionary Constance Markievicz helped found the Republican Army and was one of the organisers of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. Arrested and sentenced to death, she was reprieved because of her sex. She was the first woman ever elected as MP to the British parliament, although she refused to take up her seat there. In the Dail Eireann of 1919, she was the first minister for labour. The last ten years of her life were spent either on the run or in prison – often in solitary confinement and on starvation rations. At the age of 60, she took part in a hunger strike. 300,000 people turned out to line the route of her funeral.

Always practical, Constance offered the following advice to women getting involved in revolutionary politics: 'Dress suitably in short skirts and strong boots, leave your jewels in the bank and buy a revolver'.

Useful reading

The Family, Private Property and the State Frederick Engels
'Women's Oppression under Capitalism', *Revolutionary Communist* 5, Larkin Publications
Clara Zetkin, *Selected Writings* edited by Philip S Foner, foreword by Angela Davis, New World Paperbacks
Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings*, translated by Alix Holt, Allison & Busby
Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, Women's Press
Eleanor Marx Vols 1&2, Yvonne Kapp, Virago
The Prison Letters of Constance Markievicz, ed Amanda Sebestyen, Virago
Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*
The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir, Penguin



Angela Davis 1944-

Angela Davis grew up in Alabama amid the racial tension of the segregated south. Her family were among the first black peo-

ple to move into a previously all-white area. She described reading *The Communist Manifesto* as a schoolgirl as hitting her 'like a bolt of lightning'. She joined the Communist Party and for a while also the Black Panther Party. In 1969, a visit to Cuba impressed her with the 'results of the fierce struggle that had been waged against racism after the triumph of the revolution'. Her appointment to teach at the University of California was blocked on instructions from Governor Ronald Reagan. She became active in the campaign to free the Soledad Brothers, fitted up for the killing of a prison guard, and grew close to George Jackson, influencing him into rethinking his previously reactionary views on black women.

On 7 August 1970, George's brother Jonathan held up a California courtroom. Prison guards opened fire, killing the judge as well as Jonathan Jackson and two prisoners. The guns used by Jonathan were registered in Angela's name. She fled to New York but was captured and spent 14 months in jail before being bailed and finally acquitted of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy, following a massive international campaign which, she emphasised, was not an individual campaign but one linked to the struggles of black people against racism, women against male domination, prisoners for human rights and dignity and people the world over to build socialism. In her autobiography, she wrote 'The forces that have made my life what it is are the same forces that have shaped and misshaped the lives of millions of my people... I am convinced that my response to these forces has been unexceptional as well, that my political involvement, ultimately as a member of the Communist Party, has been the natural, logical way to defend our embattled humanity.'



Sylvia Pankhurst 1882-1960

Sylvia Pankhurst joined the Women's Social and Political Union founded by her mother Emmeline, the British suf-

fragette campaigner, and elder sister Christabel, in 1903, concentrating her work among poverty-stricken women in East London. She wrote of them 'The creation of a woman's movement in that great abyss of poverty would be a rallying cry to the rise of similar movements in all parts of the country... I was anxious, too, to fortify the position of working women when the vote should actually be given; the existence of a strong, self-reliant movement amongst working women would be the greatest aid in safeguarding their rights on the day of settlement... I wanted to rouse these women of the submerged mass to be, not merely the arguments of more fortunate people, but to be fighters on their own account.' She was thrown out of the WSPU because of her class politics – a rift deepened when the WSPU supported the war drive of 1914 with nationalistic fervour and dropped the demand for votes for women. Her newspaper, *Workers' Dreadnought*, was the only socialist paper in Britain to take the principled position of supporting the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916. She did not support the tactic of joining the new Labour Party and worked to establish a British Communist Party. The later part of her life was spent fighting against fascism and for Ethiopian independence, dying in Addis Ababa.

The Middle East contains 66.4 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves and 'the Gulf is the world's hydrocarbon heartland'. Control over oil and the Middle East not only secures fantastic profits but whoever wields that control exerts tremendous power over potential rivals dependent on oil. Germany and Japan lack domestic oil supplies and China, the world's sixth biggest oil producer, became a net importer of oil in 1993 and by 2010 is expected to be the world's biggest oil importer.

Cheap supplies of oil and gas are essential to the industries and living standards of the handful of developed capitalist nations. The readiness of the imperialists to resort to war to get cheap energy is demonstrated by the strategies of two world wars this century. This winter's expedition was the twenty-eighth British military intervention in the Middle East since 1945. The 1991 assault deposited the explosive equivalent of seven Hiroshima bombs on Iraq, killing a quarter of a million people. *New York Newsday* magazine on 2 February this year revealed that President Clinton had signed a directive authorising the tactical use of nuclear weapons against Iraq under 'certain conditions' (John Pilger, *New Statesman*).

This time the USA and its British sidekick desisted as Iraq allowed inspection of its palaces and other sites for weapons development. However, the USA cannot allow itself to appear in any way constrained by the United Nations which brokered the deal with Saddam Hussein, for that would give the green light to European interests especially to lever the USA out of its dominant regional position by doing deals with the local rulers.

Meagre opposition

Just as the Labour Party in opposition was full square behind the 1991 war on Iraq so the 1998 Labour Party in government was the most enthusiastic (and only) bellicose ally of the US war plans. In 1990 thirty-five MPs voted against the proposed war. In 1998, with a far larger complement of Labour MPs in the House of Commons than in 1990, just twenty-five MPs voted against the motion for war, of these four were from Plaid Cymru.

As the threats to Iraq intensified and the missiles were shown on television to be ready for firing, the level of protest in Britain at the government's involvement in the war plans was meagre. The biggest demonstration being 2,000 people in London on 21 February. Where were the thousands who marched with CND ten and fifteen years ago? Like the majority of Labour MPs they were happy to go along with the demonisation of Iraq if that is what the Labour Party leadership wanted.

Labour in government and opposition has always been a trusted defender of British multinational corporation oil interests; with the head of BP sitting in the Labour cabinet, nothing less than the utmost vigilance is to be expected. People interested in the prevention of war need only examine the history of the Middle East this century to understand that Labour is as ready to use violence in defence of oil interests as any Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan. Cheap oil is essential to the comforts and privilege that the British middle classes and better-off workers enjoy and Labour, old or new, will be very vigilant in caring for these.

Iraq's price

On 2 August 1990 Iraq occupied and subsequently annexed Kuwait, thereby commanding twenty per cent of the world's oil supplies. The entrance into Kuwait also threatened Saudi Arabia, containing the world's largest oil reserves. Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi ruling class challenged the imperialists' domination of oil and presented them with independent and imperialistic ambitions of their own. This could not be tolerated and so Iraq was not just

Iraq, oil and the war suspended

That the USA and Britain did not unleash the threatened bombardment of Iraq in February was due to growing tensions between the imperialist powers and US calculation that its regional position would be harmed rather than strengthened by going ahead with the attack. There can be no doubt that the contentions over oil, the Gulf, Middle East and Caspian regions will be resolved by force and that the USA must use violence, sooner rather than later, if its position as dominant imperial power is not to be undermined. **TREVOR RAYNE** reports on the context of the latest confrontation in the Gulf.



Part of the 1991 US armoury now permanently stationed in the Gulf

to be driven from Kuwait but returned to a pre-industrial level.

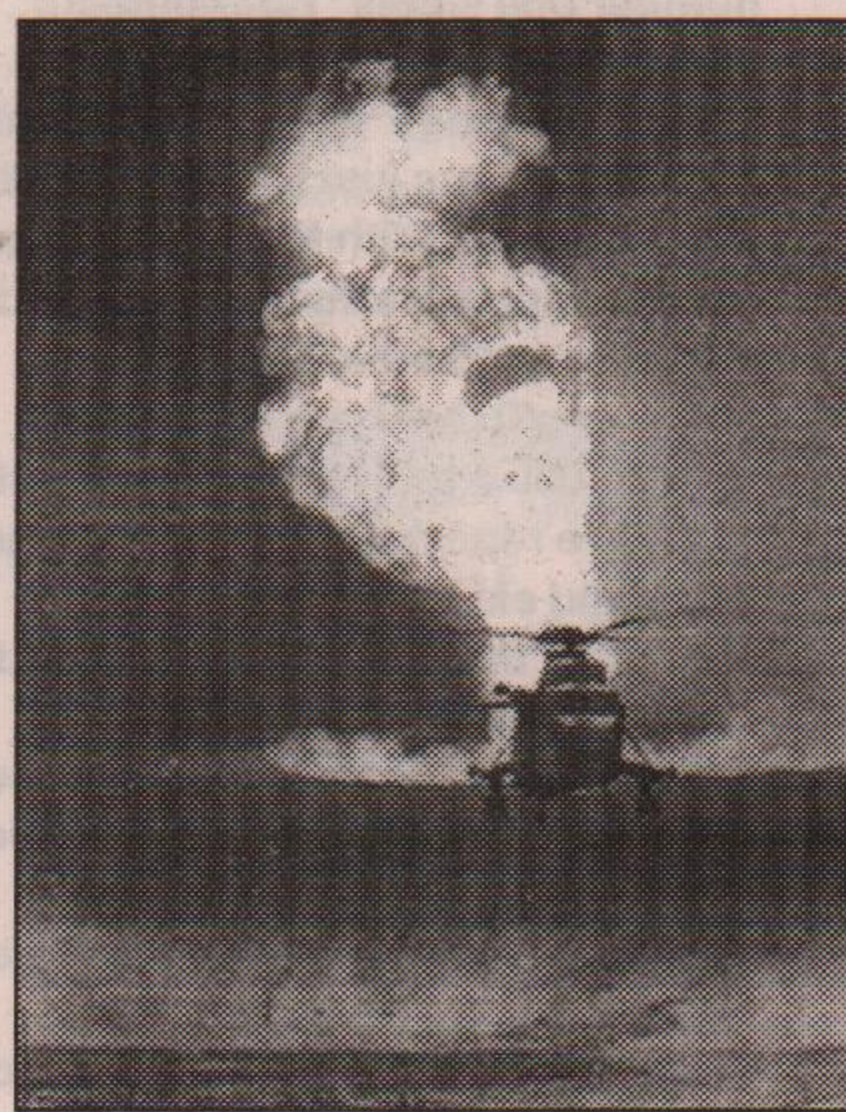
It must not be forgotten that the USA and Britain sold Iraq the means with which to produce chemical and biological weapons. These weapons killed 45,000 Iranian soldiers between 1983-88 and 5,000 Kurdish civilians at Halabja in 1988, without complaint from the powers that supplied the means of death. As long as they were used to maintain the regional status quo there was no problem. After all it was the RAF that introduced chemical weapons into the Middle East in the 1920s, gas bombing Kurdish villagers into submission on the orders of Winston Churchill. Now, those means of producing weapons are being used as a reason to cripple Iraq and demonstrate the hegemony of US imperialism.

The World Health Organisation states that 1,211,285 children died in Iraq between August 1990 and August 1997 as a result of UN embargo-related causes; chiefly malnutrition, diarrhoea and unsafe water. The *Financial Times* reports only half of Iraq's 8,000 farms operating and these manage only 20 per cent capacity. Egg and chicken production, staple to the diet, have fallen to an eighth and fourteenth of their pre-sanctions level.

British Foreign Secretary Cook said, '...it is not the UN which is starving Iraqis... there are no sanctions on importing food and medicine.' As John Pilger points out, this is false. Pesticides, fertilisers and animal feed equipment are classified as 'dual use' and banned. Baby food, enriched powdered milk, school books, paper, pencils and shoelaces are banned. Medical equipment, including bandages, X-ray equipment, refrigeration for antibiotics, ambulances etc. are banned by UN

Whoever controls oil will control the world, for he will rule the seas with heavy oil, the air with refined oil and the land with petrol and light oil. In addition, he will economically control his fellow men because of the fantastic wealth he can win from oil... Who has oil has empire

Henry Berenger, merchant to the French government circa 1918



sanctions. This is the kind of calculated deceit from Cook that amounts to Labour's 'ethical foreign policy'.

Inter-imperialist rivalry

Foreign Secretary Cook repeated that Britain was 'leaving no diplomatic avenue unexplored' in the search for a peaceful solution to the dispute over UN inspectors. These 'avenues' seemed always to lead to the doors of Middle Eastern governments and other world powers in a failing attempt to gain

endorsements for the military project. Of the Gulf allies that lined up behind the USA in 1991 only Kuwait gave support. Russian president Yeltsin and Chinese prime minister Li Peng issued a joint statement denouncing the use of force. Russia warned that an attack on Iraq would cause bilateral relations to suffer and Yeltsin spoke darkly of World War Three. Iraq owes Russia up to \$30 billion for 1980's

weapons supplies. France refused to endorse any new military threat. Germany, Netherlands and Portugal offered 'support facilities' only, Oman (dominated by Britain, and the USA) and Diego Garcia (leased by Britain to the USA) offered military bases and Canada and Australia offered token forces.

The absence of key US Middle Eastern allies in the line up and the opposition of major world powers made the US administration think twice. Britain sought a new UN resolution to endorse the attack but that would clearly not be forthcoming. The USA proposed to go ahead under the mandate of the 1990-91 resolutions but withdrew at the prospect of revolt in the Middle East and competitive manoeuvrings of the other world powers.

While the USA tries to isolate and enfeeble Iraq, Libya and Iran with embargoes, European capital is using the opportunity to strengthen its position in the Middle East at the USA's expense. On 13 and 14 March 1995 the *Financial Times* ran reports that heads of major oil companies were in Baghdad discussing multi-billion dollar contracts with the Iraqi government. Those who got in place before the sanctions are lifted would be most favoured. Present at the meeting were

French oil companies Elf Aquitaine and Total, the Italian Agip, Repsol of Spain and Deminex, Germany's biggest oil exploration and production company. Also present was Mitsubishi Oil of Japan. In 1997 Total announced a major investment in Iran in defiance of the USA, which wants to guide Caspian Basin energy flows through Turkey rather than Iran.

Eni is Italy's biggest firm and main petroleum company. Its chief executive Franco Bernabé calls for the scrapping of sanctions against Libya, Iran and Iraq. Eni is the largest foreign company operating in Libya, it has a production contract pending with Iraq and has long established relations with Iran. Bernabé states, 'Since the Second World War the USA has applied 104 sanctions. Of these, 61 have been applied between 1993 and 1996... and the reasons for imposing sanctions are spreading and covering all sorts of issues including religious, ethical, human rights, military and countless other grounds,' (*Financial Times* 18 March 1998).

Foreign Secretary Cook's March visit to Palestine, Israel and the Middle East was, in part, intended to repair damage done to British interests by the isolated engagement at the side of the USA in February. The European Union donated 53 per cent of the aid given to the West Bank and Gaza Strip during 1994-96, the USA's portion is 9 per cent. Europe's money is part of a strategy to win allies in the Middle East. While the British ruling class is willing to throw its military forces into action alongside the USA it has to watch out that it is not being out manoeuvred by its European counterparts; the USA may not always be the best bet - its military reach was extended in 1991 and had to be paid for by Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf; 1998's effort was going to be a much smaller show.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the struggle for resources and markets between the major capitalist powers is intensifying. The consequences of this struggle are proving to be bloody and threaten to get much worse. US and UN intervention in Somalia was concerned with obtaining access to African oil reserves and securing sea routes south from the Gulf. We now learn of terrible massacres of a thousand or more people by US troops on a single day in 1993. The brutal crushing of Chechnia's 1995 revolt was intended to preserve Russian control of oil flows from the Caspian Sea. Pakistani and thereby US complicity in the Taliban victory in Afghanistan is partly to counter Iranian and Russian influence over proposed pipelines from the Caspian Basin and Central Asia. Western China is being targeted for provocations against the Chinese government; this part of China will be crucial for future oil imports from the Caspian Basin and Central Asia. Turkey becomes the second biggest recipient of arms supplies to try and put down the Kurds and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) to make eastern Turkey/northwest Kurdistan safe for oil pipelines from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean.

In the thick of all this are the energy multinationals and none more so than BP, Royal Dutch Shell and British Gas. They cannot afford to have any conscience about the wars they sow about them. Their prize is black gold and beside it life's purposes dim.

In the last century the contest played out from the Caucasus through Central Asia was called the Great Game. Its main contenders were Russia and Britain and the prize was India. All along its route soldiers and civilians fell; the victims of the Game. Now, the pundits tell us there is a new Great Game, played from north Africa to the western borders of China and the prize is energy and domination of the planet. Unless the grip of the multinationals is broken from the governments of the world and the resources are taken into collective ownership of all the people then the the new Game will ignite many more wars.

New Deal goes national for the under-25s

Labour's New Deal for the unemployed goes national from April. **TED TALBOT** and **DAVID HOWARTH** report on this new form of tyranny for those on the dole.

The Employment Service has produced a glossy pack for employers to assure them that New Labour's soundbites about quality, real wages, opportunities and so on are just window-dressing. Young people who have been out of work for six months or more will be introduced to the 'Gateway' which will be up to four months of 'counselling and support' for which you can read aggravation from the dole office. People who have not managed to get off benefit during this period will have one of four 'options':

1. **A subsidised job.** This looks like an employer's dream. They will receive a weekly subsidy of £60 for each full-time employee for six months plus £750 for 'training'. The pack offers them a choice of candidates who have been prepared, screened and matched to their vacancies. Such vacancies can be 'organised through a "Work-Trial" - a short, "risk-free" period for you to assess recruits while they remain on benefit.' Employers may also take on claimants for part-time work (between 24 and 30 hours including training) with a £40 a week subsidy. They are expected to pay their New Deal employees at least as much as they receive in subsidy - but they don't have to pay more.

2. **Environmental Task Force.** This appears to be similar to the painting and decorating, tree planting and canal towpath clearing that featured under Project Work which is due to be phased out in May. This will last for six months with a grant of £400 paid to the 'volunteer' on top of benefits: £15 a week. A day a week for training is allowed, but this is only up to the very basic NVQ level 2. Claimants already studying for NVQ 3 or higher for under 16 hours per week, as permitted by the JSA, can be stopped if their studies are not deemed 'suitable'.

3. **Voluntary Sector.** In a move which makes a nonsense of the term 'voluntary' our intrepid volunteer will be able to hang around in a charity shop for six months gaining valuable work experience. Again there will be a grant of £400 paid to the 'volunteer' on top of benefits: £15 a week. The training allowance is the same as for work in the Environmental Task Force.

4. **Education and Training:** This too is only to NVQ level 2. No extra £15 a week here. Labour's view of the unemployed as only good for menial work could hardly be better illustrated. However, at this point the claimant has no choice: if he or she does not take one of the 'options' then their benefit will be stopped.

The scheme involves handing over jobsearch and placement provision to private agencies. These currently include Grand Met (involved in Project Work pilot schemes), Instant Muscle (a parasitic 'charity' involved in harsh regime job clubs which previously ran Restart courses) and Reed (the employment agency, whose owner allegedly gave New Labour a £1 million donation, a fact which Minister for Education and Employment, Blunkett, has refused to confirm or deny).

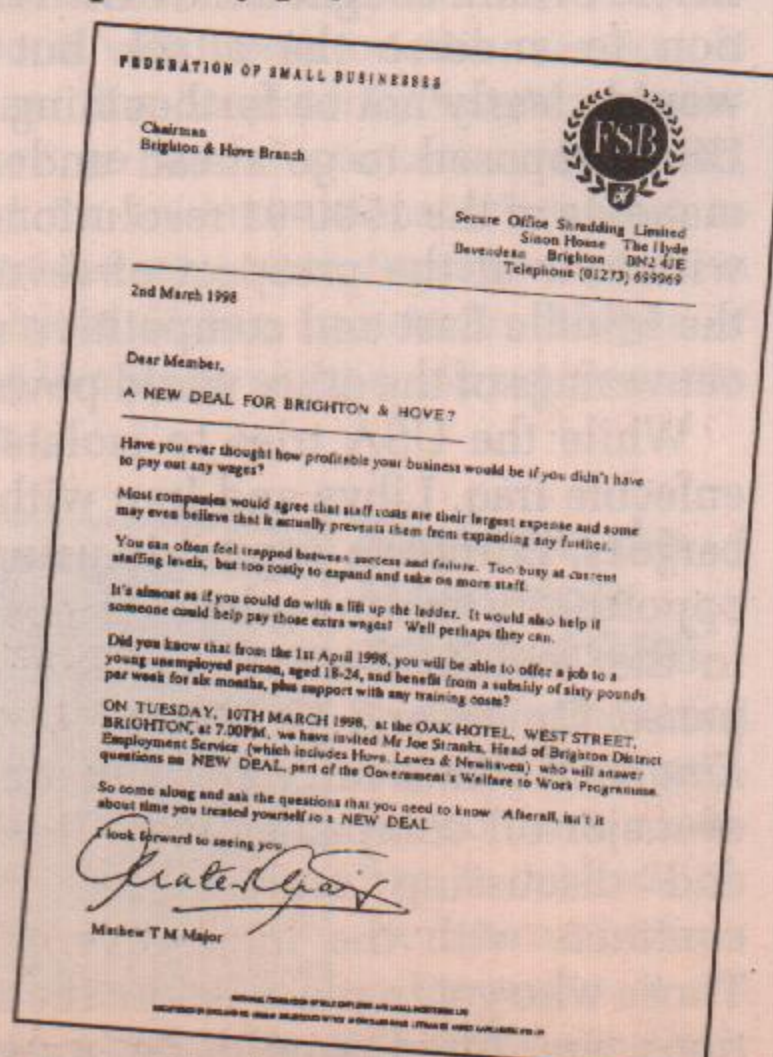
Over 50 of Britain's largest companies have signed up for New Deal workers, including Tesco's (who plan



to create 1,500 New Deal jobs), Sainsbury's, Dixons, Littlewoods, Virgin/Our Price, Halifax, Midland, ICI, Shell and Stagecoach. However, for the New Deal to be seen as a success, tens of thousands of small and medium size companies have to become involved. In Brighton and Hove, the chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses sent a letter to his members inviting them to a meeting to find out about the New Deal, asking 'Have you ever thought how profitable your business would be if you didn't have to pay out any wages?'

Private industry is not alone in welcoming the New Deal. The TUC is supporting it, whilst the CPSSA and PTC, unions that organise in dole offices, have agreed to 750 New Deal placements a year in ES and Benefit Agency offices under the same conditions as those on short term contracts.

Local groups are already fighting back. In Brighton, claimants and their supporters organised a militant demonstration against Mo Mowlam when she spoke at a New Labour 'Welfare Roadshow' for selected party members. They also made local headlines when they turned up at the meeting arranged by the Federation of Small Businesses, outnumbering its audience of would-be slave-masters by four to one. Meanwhile, Groundswell, which acts as a national information exchange network organised a meeting in February to discuss action against at least one of the agencies handling placements. This type of resistance must be spread throughout the country if we are to build a real fight against poverty pay.



Brighton small businesses are promised cheap labour

The Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign is leading the campaign against poverty pay. Its hugely successful picket of the Brit awards on 9 February put the issue on to the front page, sparking a lively debate on the role of the Labour government in both *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker*. The Campaign continues to gain support through a series of meetings, pickets and other events. Here it reports on the progress it has made so far, and its plans for the future.

The Britannia Music awards; showpiece of the multimillion pound music industry in Britain - superstars, supermodels, stylists and fashion critics, and sponsored this year by PolyGram. Stars spilt out of limousines, fans screeched hysterically, the paparazzi called out, cameras snapping. Unexpectedly a chant of 'fight poverty pay' rose from the motley gathering. Mingling with the glitterati of the music world were 200 protesters from the 'Reinstate Nigel Cook' campaign who had arrived to bring their message via megaphones.

Soon protesters had scaled a building dropping a huge banner: 'PolyGram profits from poverty pay', whilst some of us made a run for the entrance armed with leaflets and placards and yelling our demands. We were immediately rugby-tackled by the startled security guards and thrown back behind an ineffective barrier, already preparing for the next run. One protester, the campaign press officer, walked easily up to Cherie Blair and handed her a leaflet. Police reaction to this was delayed and confused, but soon he too was bundled off the red carpet. He reported back: 'we chatted for a good minute or so and she made a promise to look into Nigel's case.'

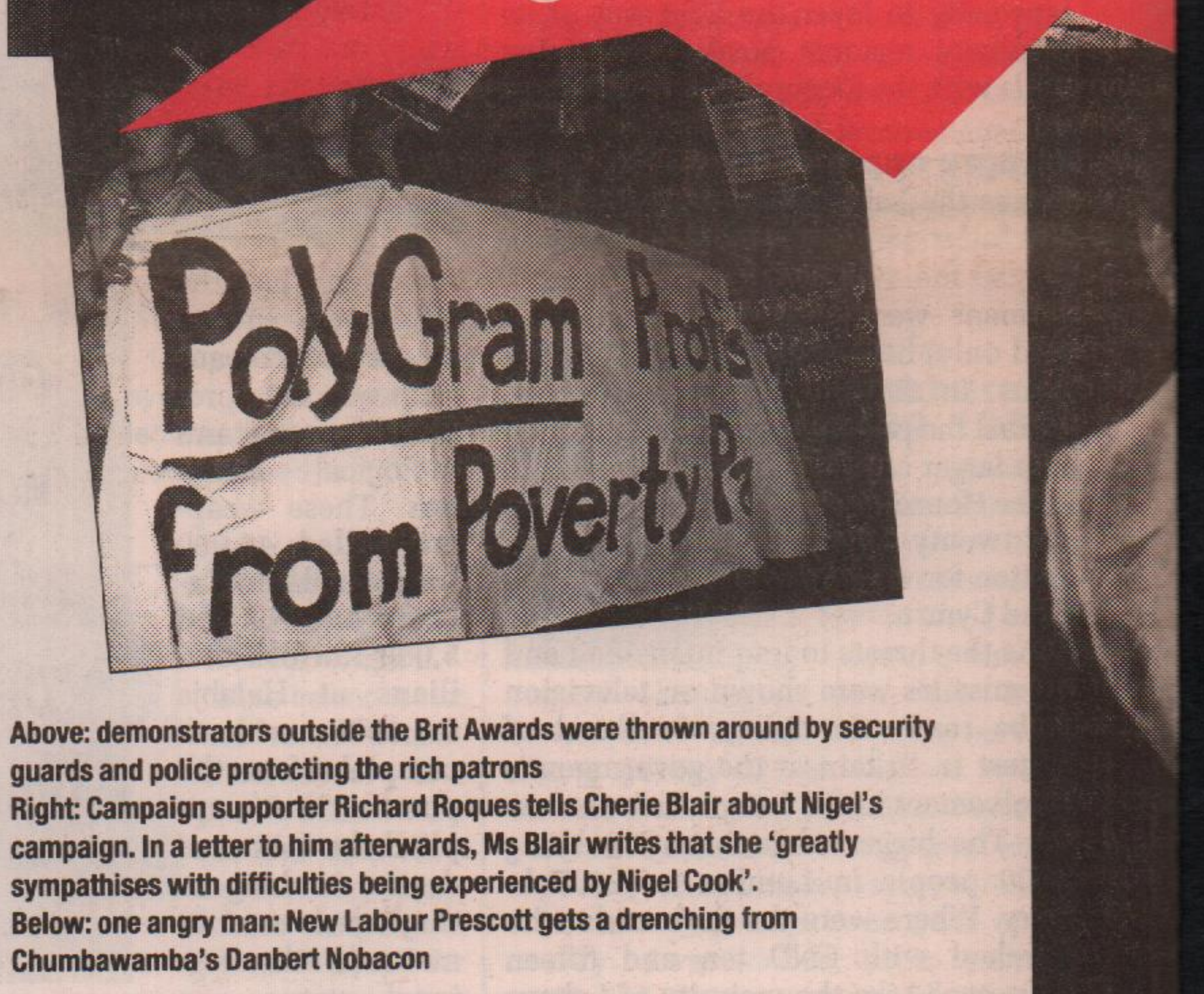
Chumbawamba's Alice Nutter strolled over with a couple of the Liverpool dockers, recently forced to end a 28-month dispute. If the band won an award the dockers would go up to accept it. Chumbawamba opened the ceremony with their number one single 'Tubthumping', changing the words to a clear and cutting message 'New Labour sold out the dockers just like they'll sell out the rest of us'. With the band's help, a couple of protesters had managed to slip in amongst the 20,000 strong audience. To be there legitimately cost £5,000 a table and £500 a seat. *Big Issue* reporter Gibby Zobel was there and explained how they escalated the protest 'We grabbed the megaphones and headed for the compere Ben Elton (on stage)'. They never reached him, but the diversion was enough. Danbert Nobacon, Chumbawamba's spikey-haired bass player was off and up on to Mr Prescott's table. In an act of 'drench warfare' the deputy PM was soaked with a bucket of icy water.

The demonstration was a success; the Reinstate Nigel Cook campaign appeared in every national newspaper. During the aftermath, Prescott complained about the distress caused to 'womenfolk' at his table by such 'terrifying behaviour'. How concerned is he about the feminine delicacy of the nearly one million women who earn less than £2.50 per hour? And who paid for his seat, I wonder? **Helen Yaffe**

Fight



PolyGram profits from poverty pay
Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign
goes to the Brit Awards



Above: demonstrators outside the Brit Awards were thrown around by security guards and police protecting the rich patrons
Right: Campaign supporter Richard Roques tells Cherie Blair about Nigel's campaign. In a letter to him afterwards, Ms Blair writes that she 'greatly sympathises with difficulties being experienced by Nigel Cook'.
Below: one angry man: New Labour Prescott gets a drenching from Chumbawamba's Danbert Nobacon



Letter from Mike

On 9 February my wife Sylvia and I were invited by Alice Nutter of Chumbawamba to the Brit Awards. We have known Alice since the beginning of our long-running and bitter Liverpool Docks dispute, which began on 28 September 1995, when 50 Liverpool dockers were sacked for defending basic trade union rights. During that time, Chumbawamba has helped us and our families on a number of occasions to raise money for our hardship fund.

On our arrival at the Brit Awards, we were aware of a demonstration outside the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign. I don't know about Nigel, as he had been a guest speaker at a mass meeting of Liverpool dock workers. After meeting all the members of the band and explaining to Alice what was happening outside, we were with Alice and Keir to meet the campaigners outside to see what we could do to help. After speaking to some of the demonstrators we were disgusted with the way 'outsourced' workers packing CDs for PolyGram are treated. We had decided that if Chumbawamba won the award, which I was to receive on the behalf, I would have an opportunity to speak about the Liverpool Dock dispute and the way the Transport & General Workers Union and the Labour Party had 'sold us out'. I decided then and there was also going to speak on behalf of the Nigel Cook Campaign and to tell Pol

Poverty Pay



ey and Sylvia Tighe

Gram to hang their heads in shame over the way they are treating human beings.

To think guests at the Brits were sitting in £500 seats at tables worth £5,000, paid for by record companies, while PolyGram outsources its work to companies like M&S Packaging which pays workers disgraceful wages under atrocious conditions!

We were fortunate enough to get two campaigners into the awards. It was a pity I didn't get the opportunity to speak on their behalf. The campaign is always on our minds and whenever I or Sylvia, from Women of the Waterfront, have an invitation to speak, we try to mention the Brits and the Nigel Cook Campaign.

Chumbawamba were condemned by national newspapers for the action they took against Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott as being cowardly, but I can tell you, under the top security that took place in the Brits that evening, it was very brave of them to come out in that manner in support of working class people. I would also like to say that the contract they had been offered by Nike for £1.5 million to promote their sportswear they refused because Nike were moving their factories to Mexico, for cheap labour. In view of the fact that we were in good company, we had an enjoyable evening. Victory to the working class!

Mikey and Sylvia Tighe

PAUL MATTSSON

1 Dole harassment
For protesting at the Brit Awards against my sacking I had my benefits stopped. The ES made it worse by deliberately not informing me of their decision. When I hadn't received my giro, I went to the ES office to enquire about the delay. They told me my dole had been stopped on the 11 February and that they had sent a letter to me on the 12th. I never received this letter. When I asked to see a copy, they produced one dated the 16th.

I told the local adjudication officer, Lynn Bolton, that I was going to appeal against the decision to stop my benefits and asked her to explain why they had done this. She replied that she works to a 'set of laws and guidelines'. When I asked to see a copy of these laws, she told me to 'go look them up in the library'.

Instead I enquired at the Royal Mail sorting office whether the letter was ever sent. At 5.00 am the next day, the post office phoned to tell me they had collected a letter the previous afternoon from Blackburn Job Centre. When I got it and opened it, the letter was dated the 13th. So the ES had deliberately delayed sending me the letter. I am now appealing the decision to stop my dole money and I have also lodged a complaint against the ES. At present, my benefits have been reinstated.

Nigel Cook

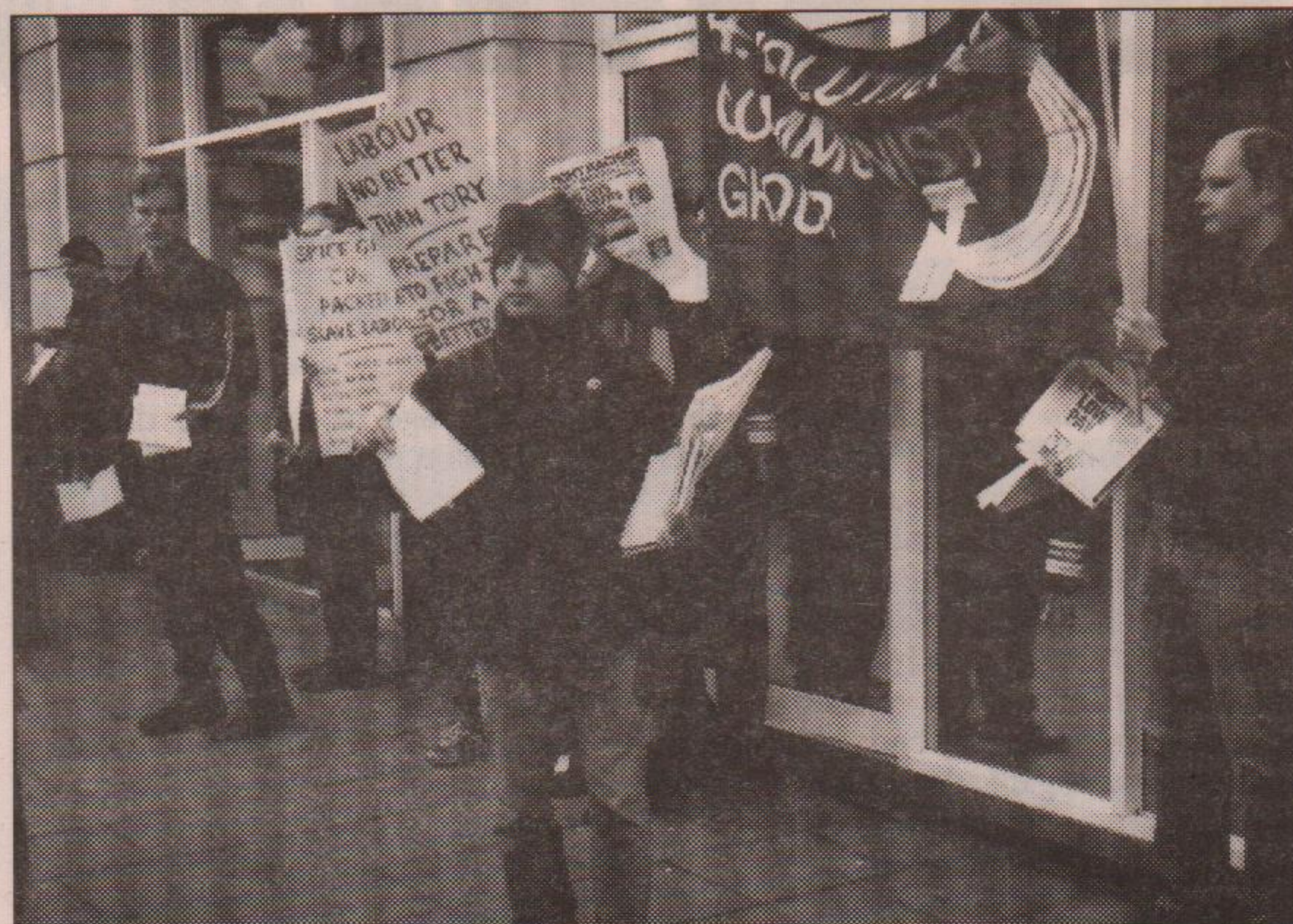
'We had decided that if Chumbawamba won the award, which I was to receive on their behalf, I would have an opportunity to speak about the Liverpool Dock dispute and the way the Transport & General Workers Union and the Labour Party had 'sold us out'. I decided then and there I was also going to speak on behalf of the Nigel Cook Campaign and to tell PolyGram to hang their heads in shame over the way they are treating human beings.'

Demonstrate against PolyGram

**11am 23 May 1998,
Phillips Road, Blackburn**

One year since Nigel Cook was sacked on the instructions of PolyGram.

For transport details, contact RNCC on 01254 679 605 or 0171 837 1688.



Despite threats of legal action from HMV, Leicester RNCC supporters together with Nottingham Claimants Action and campaigners attending a Groundswell conference picket their Leicester store. For further details on Groundswell, contact Claimants Action Group, c/o OUWCH, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street, Oxford OX4 1HU.

Join the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign now

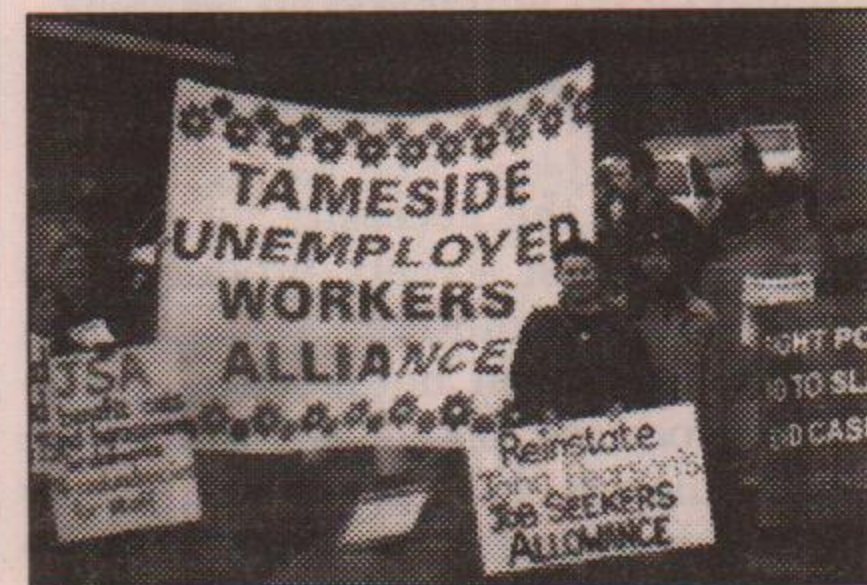
Get copies of its bulletin, invite a speaker to your organisation, send donations or any information on what you are doing locally. The campaign also wants any details about companies profiting from poverty pay, or knowledge of any harassment from the ES or Benefits Agency. Affiliation rates: £15 TUs, £5 waged, £1 unwaged. Contact us at PO Box 14, Accrington, Lancs, BB5 1GG. Tel: 01254 679 605

2

Dole harassment

John Pearson, a member of the Tameside Unemployed Workers Alliance, recently had his benefits stopped under the Jobseeker's Allowance rules when he attended a Restart interview and refused to sign an agreement that he would apply for slave labour jobs paying poverty wages.

It took over a month for his appeal to



be heard. On the day, over twenty people joined a protest outside Stockport's Job Centre, supported by the RNCC. John won, and in a letter to the campaign wrote 'We have won a major victory in that I can apply for jobs that I find myself rather than the crap jobs advertised in the Job Centre. I have no doubt that the militant demo outside the appeal building had an influence on the tribunal in this respect. I am very grateful for the major contribution made to that demo by the comrades from the RNCC'.

The lesson learnt is a simple one. If we organise to fight back against the harassment of the dole workers - we will win!

RNCC

3

Dole harassment

Two supporters of Nottingham Claimants Action (NCA) have been subjected to a campaign of harassment and intimidation from the ES and are asking for support. The NCA, a member of Groundswell, actively supports the 'three strikes' policy and 'outed' two ES staff for their harassment of claimants.

John Codd has had to give up a part time job, had giros delayed and had 17 weeks of incorrect deductions. At one point he was made homeless because of the delayed payments. Stuart Tideswell has been waiting more than eight weeks for a new claim to be processed. Both faced telephone harassment from ES staff, who even went as far as having them arrested early one morning under harassment laws!

Send letters about their case to Employment Service District Manager, Mr D Dudley, 59 Castle Boulevard, Nottingham NG7 1FR. Tel: 0115 909 5280. Send copies of letters and replies to: NCA, PO Box 192, Nottingham NG1 1FJ.

Nottingham Claimants Action

Gas break-in

On 24 March, three agents of British Gas and Transco broke into my house, disconnected the gas and removed the meter - leaving me and my seven-year-old son without heating, hot water or any means of cooking.

To get reconnected, I had to spend four hours on the phone, speaking to more than 30 people in Manchester, Newcastle, Preston, Edinburgh and Leeds. When I asked why they had broken into my house, they said they had a warrant from some middle class judge. When I told them that I had an agreement to pay what I owed in three instalments, they made out I was lying. I refused to give in and kept demanding to speak to the managers. Eventually they were forced to admit they were wrong. They then told me it would take three days before I was reconnected. Again I persisted and again it paid off - my gas was reconnected the following morning.

This sort of thing happens all the time; I was told that in Newcastle alone, there were 365 homes waiting to be reconnected that day. I have now lodged a formal complaint with the gas consumer council. The lesson is: it pays to fight back.

Nigel Cook

ROUND-UP

M&S press statement slanders Nigel

In response to the publicity around the Brit awards, M&S have issued a press release claiming that Nigel was sacked for 'gross misconduct', the first time they have given any reason. What they said originally was that they did not have to give an explanation - which is why Nigel did not lose benefit after his sacking.

The statement also claims that the company now 'complies fully with all the relevant industrial and health and safety legislation', and - wait for it - they 'value the welfare' of their staff fully.

The statement also refers to a previous Industrial Tribunal case involving Nigel. How they got hold of this information is a matter of concern, since the case happened so long ago that the information is no longer accessible to the public.

T&G official undermines Nigel's case

As we reported in the last issue of FRFI Brian Dawson, T&G Regional Organiser in Manchester, had asked the Industrial Tribunal (IT) to 'strike-out' Nigel's application. In response, Nigel wrote to the IT saying he had not been consulted on this, had no wish to withdraw his application, and asking that the case be held in abeyance until M&S Packaging is released from 'administration'. When asked by the IT, Dawson agreed he had not consulted Nigel, and went on to cite some irrelevant case law to support his behaviour. Nigel has asked Dawson to justify himself. He has not heard anything. Even the IT told Dawson they were 'rather perplexed' at his stance.

Initially the IT agreed to Nigel's request to hold his case in abeyance. But then under pressure from M&S lawyers they changed their minds, giving the union 14 days to 'show good cause' why the decision should stand. The day before the time limit was up Nigel contacted Dawson who said that the union was not going to support him and asked him to withdraw his application since the T&G could no longer risk future costs being awarded against it. This from an organisation with nearly £70 million assets and annual income of £60 million. Nigel has refused to bow to the T&G, but as no legal aid is available to fight ITs he is having to go it alone. In the meantime the union has still not paid Nigel any victimisation benefit.

Music industry links to the government

Labour MPs attending the Brit Awards included a wet John Prescott, Defence Secretary George Robertson, Heritage Secretary Chris Smith and Paul Boateng. A total of 80 MPs were present.

Meanwhile Michael Levy, who recently sold his M&G/Wired operation to the PolyGram subsidiary Britannia Music Group was appointed to the House of Lords. Sony's Creation Records founder, Alan McGee, has been appointed to a 'music industry task force' to put proposals to enhance the value of the music business. As has already been reported, PolyGram chair Stuart Till is now co-chair of the government's Film Working Group.

PolyGram news

PolyGram itself continues to amass vast amounts of profit. In 1997 its music group alone announced a 10% rise in profits to £358 million and overall raised their operating profits by 17%. Alain Levy, another PolyGram chief executive, described this substantial increase in profits as 'outstanding' in what is widely regarded as one of the most difficult years for the industry - what would they make in a good year? In order to maximise their increased profits PolyGram are now attacking the conditions of their own employees. Workers at its Blackburn CD manufacturing plant are currently balloting for strike action against what is in effect a pay cut. A recently introduced employment contract now allows for greater 'flexibility' of all new PolyGram workers - a sign of the times.

'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism.'

Such words might seem odd to us eight years after the collapse of the socialist countries and nine months into the most reactionary Labour government.

According to the ruling class, when the socialist bloc was destroyed, history ended, the ideas of communism were a failure and capitalism was here to stay. This triumphalism is no longer tenable as recessions and financial crises threaten the world with ruin. The 'tiger economies' of Asia have collapsed and imperialism has failed to reintroduce viable capitalism to Eastern Europe. It is in this context that *The Communist Manifesto*, published 150 years ago, gains renewed importance. ADAM SHERWOOD celebrates a document of such power and vision it can help us change the world.

COMMUNIST MANIFESTO



The *Manifesto* was published on the eve of revolutions that spread across Europe, overthrowing monarchies and bringing the bourgeoisie to power. In 1848, talk was not of stability but of revolution. As the *Manifesto* states: 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.' It was easy to see that the bourgeoisie had not always been the ruling class and its ideas had not always reigned supreme.

'The modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and exchange.'

At the very beginnings of bourgeois rule, Marx and Engels were able to foresee the failings of capitalist society and the way forward to a new society. This vision enraged the propertied elites:

'You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine tenths.'

At the time Europe's impoverished masses bore the brunt of a trade slump. The *Manifesto* exposes the bourgeois hypocrisy;

'All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions. The French Revolution, for example, abolished feudal property in favour of bourgeois property.'

And it takes sides: '...you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend.'

An alternative society

Marx and Engels envisaged a society based not on profit and ruthless competition but on co-operation and mutual development. They proposed a world in which workers would not be thrown on the scrap heap when they are no longer needed for production but where they have democratic control over their lives and are valued as individuals.

'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.'

Cuba shows the superiority of socialist organisation even in the face of extreme economic hardship. Socialist organisation means that today in Cuba, a third world country blockaded by the US, not one single hospital or school has been closed. No one sleeps on the streets and Cuba has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. Despite many shortages, what they have they share and no-one is rejected.

This is the alternative form of social organisation of which the *Manifesto* spoke. The consequences of not achieving this society are bleak indeed. This year 14 million children

under the age of five will die from malnutrition and preventable diseases. Every day 25,000 people die from waterborne disease. The choice today, as in 1848, is socialism or barbarism, 'a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or...the common ruin of the contending classes.'

Where Marx and Engels made a great advance was that they did not just raise a moral indignation at the horrors of bourgeois rule. For the first time, the *Manifesto* charted the historic progress of humanity and provided a scientific analysis of the inevitability of the rise of capitalism from feudalism and its death in the birth of socialism. Twenty years before *Capital*, the *Manifesto* shows us how the capitalist economy is to develop. The colonial scramble of the late 19th century is foreseen: 'the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe'. Eventually even the global domination by capital of resources and markets is not enough to support its insatiable drive to expand and the whole edifice comes tumbling down.

'Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.'

The destruction of society that occurs progressively in each crisis leaves capital less and less room to manoeuvre. With each crash, it becomes harder to re-establish profitable industry until the question of revolution can no longer be delayed. 'It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put on its trial, each time more threateningly the existence of the entire bourgeois society.'

The stock market crash of October 1987, the Mexican peso crisis of 1995 and most recently the currency and stock market crash of southeast Asia show what is in store.

The working class as agents of change

Along with the necessity for revolution, capitalist society produces the agents of revolution: the working class. 'What the bourgeoisie, therefore produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.' Freed from any ties to property, the working class have nothing to sell but their labour power, forming a class in opposition to the capitalists. It is the working class, who have no stake in the capitalist system, who can give a lead to all the oppressed to throw off the yoke of capital and build socialist society. 'Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class.'

The *Communist Manifesto* was written to give ideological expression to the working class as a whole and to organise it into politically independent parties. 'The Communists...

have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own...The immediate aim of The Communists is the...formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.'

The seizure of state power

Marx and Engels understood that in this struggle the working class would have to confront all existing social relations. 'The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society cannot stir, cannot raise itself up without the whole super-incumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.'

The *Manifesto* warned against any illusions in the neutrality of the state in this conflict between classes. 'The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.'

During the miners' strike of 1984-5 the state organised the police into a paramilitary force to occupy mining towns, attack and imprison strikers and prevent them travelling to picket working pits. In the Six Counties of Ireland, the British Army's record of torture, murder, internment without trial and connivance with loyalist terrorism, belies any suggestion of impartiality.

Following the defeat of the first working class seizure of power in the Paris Commune of 1871, Marx and Engels were to make their only amendment to the *Manifesto*:

'One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes".'

The bourgeois state has to be smashed; it is unreformable.

False friends of the working class

For many petty-bourgeois commentators on the left today, this historic revolutionary role of the working class is denied or distorted by Eurocentrism.

Eric Hobsbawm, writing in *The Guardian* (28 February 1998) states: 'It is now evident that the bourgeoisie has not produced "above all its own grave-diggers" in the proletariat. "Its fall and the victory of the proletariat" have not proved "equally inevitable." ...why was it inevitable that it could not provide a livelihood, however miserable, for most of its working class, or alternatively, that it could not afford a welfare system?'

For sure, it could – in Western Europe. Yet today welfare systems are being dismantled, threatening extreme misery for the working class.

Martin Jacques, formerly of The Communist Party of Great Britain, speaking on Radio 4 on 7 March, said that the last workers who were arbiters of change were in Europe in the 1950s. What he thinks of the heroic struggles of the Korean, Cuban and Vietnamese working classes, we can only conjecture.

All these positions recognise only the more secure, better-paid sections

of the working class. These workers, traditionally organised in the European labour movements have enjoyed a comfortable existence at the expense of the people of oppressed nations.

The more oppressed sections of the working class, 'the lowest stratum of our society', does not exist for these bourgeois commentators. They ignore the majority of the world's population, capitalism's victims, who live in abject poverty; the 1.2 billion who earn less than one dollar a day, the 180 million under-fives who suffer from malnutrition or the one in three who have no safe drinking water.

Yet it is precisely this section of the working class that is growing, drawing in other sections. As this process accelerates, conditions more akin to those of 1848 or of the third world today, will re-occur in Europe. Today in Britain, the largest differences in income levels have been recorded since records began in 1886. 13.7 million people live in poverty and 31% live in a household where nobody is in full-time employment.

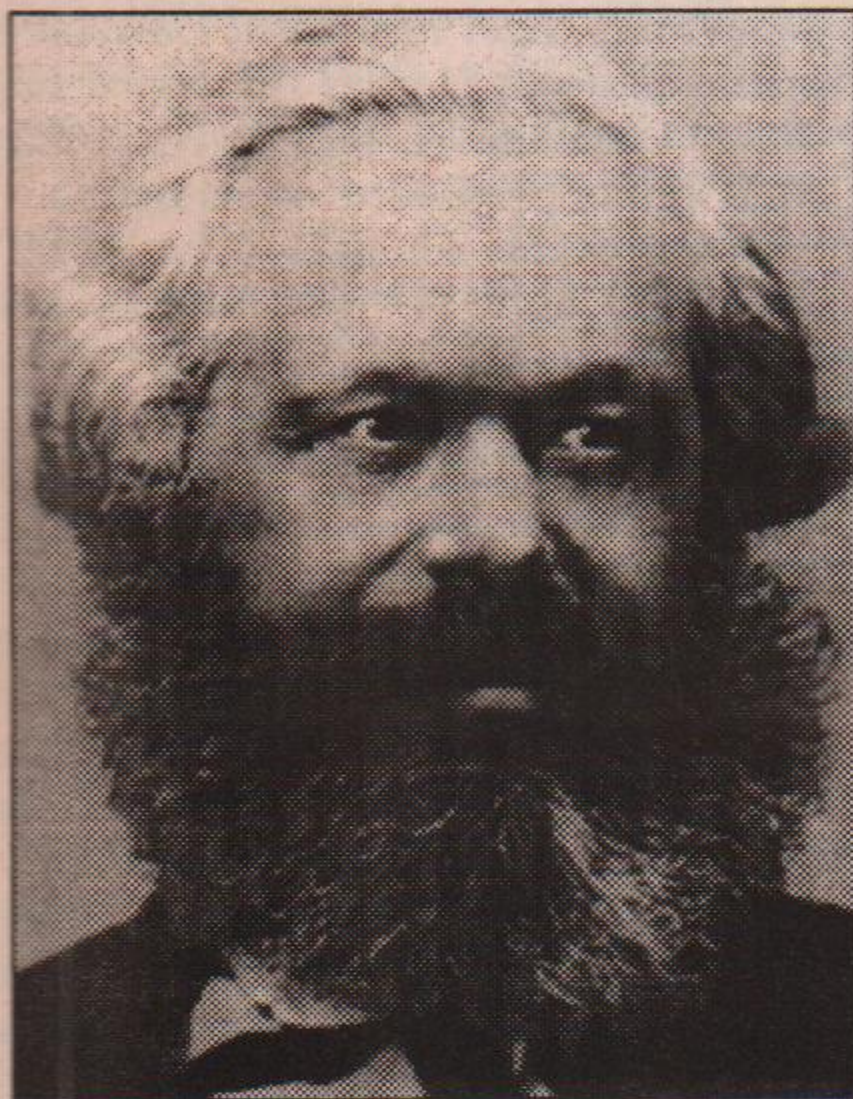
It is not just that the poorer sections of the working class are suffering but that they are being joined by previously privileged layers of the population: 'Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great camps, into two great classes directly facing each other; Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.'

'The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.'

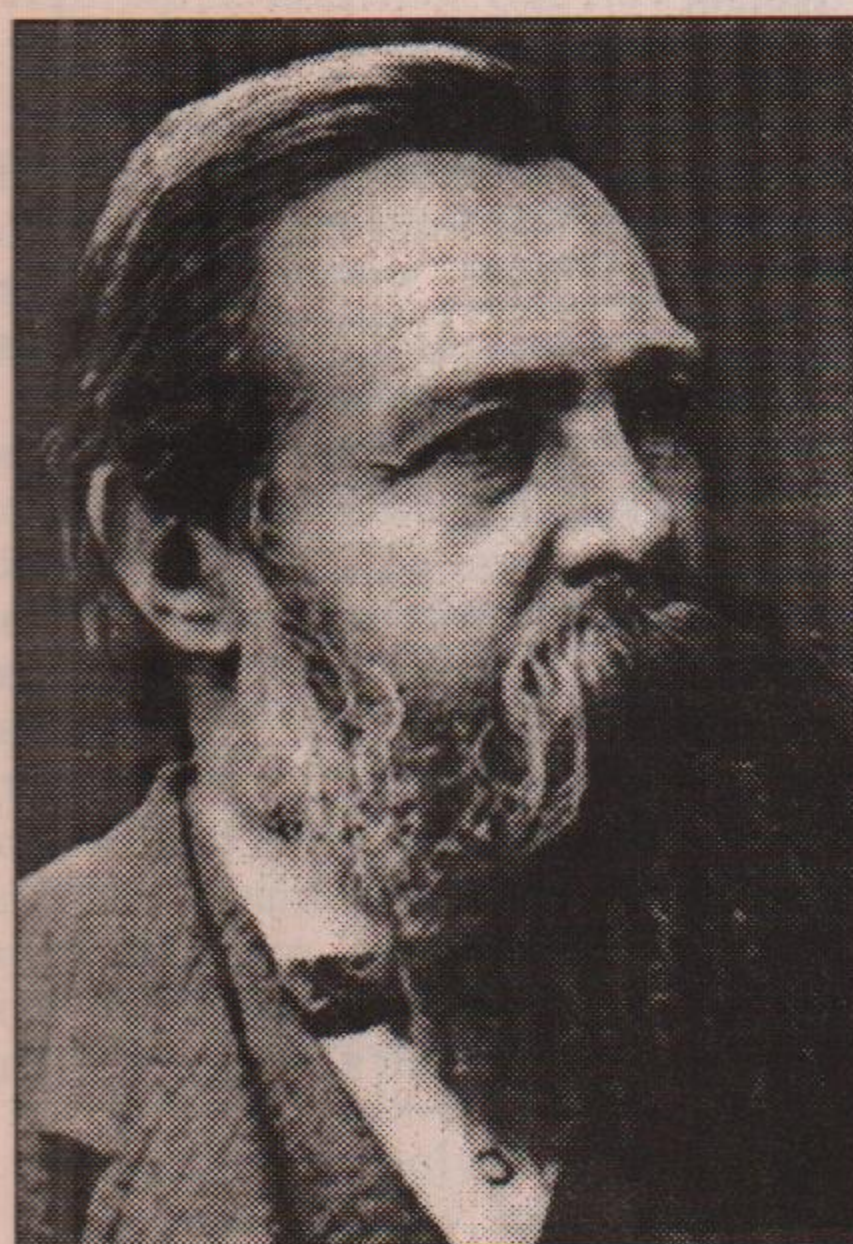
As these middle class elements return to the ranks of the working class, they present the working class with great potential and great danger. Those who make common cause with the oppressed will contribute to the building of a new revolutionary movement. Those who try to preserve their privileges will be forced into ever more desperate attacks on the working class to do so. Social democracy – a middle ground – is increasingly untenable.

'The lower middle class...fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance they are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present but their future interests.'

Whatever the outcome of the great historic battle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the depth of the current crisis, one thing is certain. The more oppressed sections of the working class, from South Korea and Indonesia to Kurdistan and Turkey, from the Six Counties of Ireland to the heartland of British imperialism itself, will unite to resolutely oppose capitalism, for they 'have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.'



Karl Marx



Engels

'Study the historian before you begin to study the facts'

What is history, EH Carr

'Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.'

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx

REVIEW A PEOPLE'S TRAGEDY: THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1891-1924

Dead generations and live politics

Orlando Figes, the historian, has written a very large book on the Russian Revolution – 923 pages spanning the years 1891 to 1924 (the year of Lenin's death). It is a work of scholarship, deploying a great many 'facts' – many no doubt recently trawled from the newly accessible archives in Moscow. If all we wanted, like Mr Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, were facts, '...Facts alone are wanted for life', then this review could be as short as Mr Figes' book is long. But taking EH Carr's admonishments to heart and recognising that historical 'facts' are anything but objective truths, it is first necessary to look at the author and his project. This way we may discover why Figes has chosen to present us with this particular selection.

Figes, a Cambridge University history lecturer, is explicit about his project, and it is expressed in the title of his book – *A People's Tragedy*:

'[this book] attempts to show, as its title indicates, that what began as a people's revolution contained the seeds of its own degeneration into violence and dictatorship. The same social forces which brought about the triumph of the Bolshevik regime became its main victims.' (pxvi)

This is not a crude right-wing perspective. Figes has no illusions that Tsar Nicholas and the autocratic elite were either noble or progressive. He correctly portrays the regime as obsolescent – its power founded in feudalism which, at the end of the nineteenth century was being fundamentally undermined by capitalism. This rapid development of productive forces was at the root of Russia's crisis, both in the countryside where the peasantry were in revolt and in the towns and cities where a new explosive working class was flexing its muscles. From the 1905 Revolution onwards, the issue was whether the Tsarist regime could hold on to some power, by conceding a measure of democratic government through the Constituent Assembly (a route the Tsar rejected), or could simply smash all opposition through brutal repression (the Tsar's favoured strategy). Like King Canute and the tide, Tsar Nicholas and his regime were about to discover that such a dynamic change in productive forces cannot be stamped out of existence. All this Figes would accept.

Revolutionary periods throw up many movements and political strategies which represent the opposed interests of different class forces. So, apart from the the death throes of the Tsarist feudal corpse, Russia's future was up for grabs, and, in the period that Figes examines, the ferment was at its height. There were sections of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie who hankered after a more liberal autocracy or a constitutional monarchy. There were bourgeois forces, including sections of the rich peasantry who yearned for a bourgeois democracy in the European model. There was a mass socialist movement spanning a broad range of interests: from those who wanted to hold back the

interests of the working class and poor peasants in favour of a bourgeois democratic revolution – the Mensheviks; to those who were determined to secure a socialist revolution – among them the Bolsheviks.

For Orlando Figes 'the people's tragedy' is a 'failure of democracy in 1917', by which he means a failure of bourgeois democracy. Mr Figes is the ghost, reappearing as Hegel and Marx suggested he might – he is a Menshevik. And, he is anxious to reassure us, there is nothing crude about his Menshevism either. He does not believe that the 'people' were simply 'the passive objects of the evil machinations of the Bolsheviks'. No, they contributed to their own demise due to factors 'deeply rooted in their political and social history'.

What these factors were and how they brought about the 'Russian' people's 'unhappy fate' is the subject of Figes' book. These were, according to the author a combination of complex psychological and sociological factors. Just for instance: Marx's *Capital* was published in Russia in 1872. It was an instant hit, selling 3,000 copies in the first year – the German first edition of 1,000 took five years to sell out. Why was it a hit? Figes suggests cultural isolation and:

'the consequence, as Isaiah Berlin has so elegantly argued [!], was that ideas imported from the West (as nearly all ideas in Russia were[!]) tended to become frozen into abstract dogmas once the Russian intelligentsia took them up.' (p126).

The Russian intelligentsia, apparently, were constantly searching for absolute truths, unlike their European counterparts who, as a result of pluralism, maintained a healthy scepticism. In the course of 923 pages, there is plenty of room for patronising analysis:

'There was much that was endearing in this strangely Russian search for absolutes... and yet the underside of this idealism was a badgering didacticism, a moral dogmatism and intolerance, which in its own way was just as harmful as the censorship it opposed.' (p127)

And why was Marxism so popular with the workers?:

'When people learn as adults what children are normally taught in schools, they often find it difficult to progress beyond the simplest abstract ideas. These tend to lodge deep in their minds, making them resistant to the subsequent absorption of knowledge on a more sophisticated level. They see the world in black-and-white terms because their narrow learning obscures any other coloration (sic). Marxism had much the same effect on workers... it gave them a simple solution to the problems of "capitalism" and backwardness without requiring that they think independently.' (p120)

Figes, we assume, does not subscribe to the government programme of lifelong learning. Here speaks the English bourgeois intellectual, over-



Meeting of the Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies

stuffed by his privileged education. He, unlike the Russian worker, will not have troubled to read *Capital*.

There is much of this sort in this book and most of it is objectionable. Figes is determined to pin the 'blame' for the fact that bourgeois democracy was snatched from the hands of the bourgeoisie and its opportunist supporters in 1917 on the psychology of the 'Russian' people, or on the Bolsheviks, or preferably on a combination of the two. With such a project, Lenin necessarily comes in for a lot of stick: he had 'noble' origins; he had a 'dogmatic outlook and domineering manner'; he was 'intolerant of criticism from subordinates'; he 'looked on the masses as no more than human material needed for his revolutionary plans'; he 'could not pronounce his 'r's (like Gorbachev)' [!]; he had 'a knack of finding easy slogans which he crammed into the heads of his listeners by endless repetition' (p392).

Figes attempts to come to grips with the debate in the Bolshevik Party over Lenin's *April Theses* (a party, by the way, which was both 'dominated absolutely by Lenin' and 'deeply divided' and ill-disciplined on the question of the way forward) and the events which followed the October Revolution. His account is littered with personal abuse and vitriol. For example:

'The Bolsheviks never quite suc-

ceeded in ridding themselves of their underground habits [wearing leather jackets]. Lenin still gave the impression of a party conspirator rather than a statesman. It was of course a common phenomenon – one might call it the Jacobin Syndrome – which in part explains the tendency of the revolutionary state to perpetuate violence and terror. But the Bolsheviks took it one step further than the Jacobins. Theirs was the first of the twentieth century dictatorships (followed by those of Mussolini, Hitler, Franco and Castro) to glorify its own violent past through propaganda and the adoption of military symbols and emblems. It was as if this cult of violence was central to the Bolsheviks' self-image, an end in itself rather than the means.' (p505)

Apart from the truly staggering mendacity of this statement – what price the 20th century adventures of British and US imperialism, not least two World Wars and an array of military conflicts backed by propaganda – it fulfils a purpose for Figes' argument. The Bolsheviks, he argues, were just plain violent and it was this love of the clandestine and the violent which sabotaged the prospects for democracy in 1917. This is the simple idea which bourgeois historians have consistently used to attack the Bolshevik Revolution, dressing it up as sophisticated analysis and objective fact.

At the root of this is the most fundamental political question which has faced the socialist movement in the twentieth century. In 1917, the Mensheviks – ostensibly a section of the socialist movement, in reality opportunists and the antecedents of today's Labour left – were frightened. The workers had forced through the February Revolution, deposed the Tsar and instituted Soviets: they were looking not only for economic improvements but also for political power. Alongside the Soviets, the Provisional Government posed as the legitimate inheritors of power, tried to continue Russia's now terminal involvement in the First World War, and above all aimed to promote the interests of a thoroughly weak and supine bourgeoisie. The Mensheviks were a majority in the Petrograd Soviet and used it to attempt to hold back the aspirations of the working class and poor peasants in favour of the bourgeois Provisional Government – they were, as Lenin argued, *better defenders of the bourgeoisie than the bourgeoisie themselves*. This revolution, they had decided, was bourgeois. Lenin's *April Theses* turned the Bolsheviks away from this theory: he argued that the interests of the proletariat and poor peasants could only be protected and furthered by socialist revolution – the destruction of the Provisional Government, 'All Power to the Soviets'. The interests that Figes seeks to rescue from the dustbin of history are those of the bourgeoisie, quaking in their boots in the Winter Palace, frightened by the revolutionary movement, unable to govern decisively even in their own bourgeois interests. The Bolsheviks rejected the Provisional Government and the Constituent Assembly promoted by the Mensheviks, not because of a supposed hatred for democracy, but because this bourgeois democracy was *less* democratic than the Soviets. Any other course would have betrayed the workers. The difficulties which followed the October Revolution were not problems of illegitimacy: they were caused directly by the stranglehold of opportunism in the 'more sophisticated' European countries (which sealed the fate of other prospective revolutions) and the military intervention by imperialism.

The fundamental division between communists and opportunists is not dead history. And 923-page books are not produced and hailed as path-breaking simply for the sake of scholarship. The ideas which Figes promotes are alive and well, driving the US blockade against Cuba, promoting the view that the Cuban system of democracy is deficient compared to that most bourgeois of all bourgeois democracies where you have to be a billionaire to buy presidential office. The division is alive in Africa, where nation after nation has discovered that failure to defend the interests of the working class and the poor and reliance on bourgeois democracy (albeit in the name of Socialism) simply dissolves into the worst corruption, the most reactionary dictatorship and the grossest barbarity. It is an issue which has living manifestation in South Africa.

It is no coincidence that Figes has produced his book at this time. The bones of Tsar Nicholas, that ghastly, brutal, anti-Semitic, superstitious remnant, have been cleaned up in order to be buried with 'honour' in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg. President Yeltsin, surely Figes' new hope for bourgeois democracy in Russia, is discovering the attractions of Tsardom – now he has sacked the entire government much as Tsar Nicholas closed down the Constituent Assembly after the 1905 Revolution. Marx was right: 'the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.'

Carol Brickley

The People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924, Orlando Figes, Jonathan Cape, 1996, 923 pp, hb £25.00. Now available in paperback.

If in the Sierra Maestra we were fighting to destroy Batista's dictatorship, we were also fighting for social justice and our country's liberation. From 17 April 1961, our people, with arms in their hands and at the cost of their blood, fought for socialism

FIDEL CASTRO

As the United States landed an invasion force on the shores of Cuba on 16 April 1961, Fidel Castro announced the socialist nature of the Cuban Revolution. Within 72 hours, the Cuban people had defeated the invaders, inflicting the first-ever defeat on US imperialism in the western hemisphere.

Bourgeois commentators – and even some so-called socialists – argue that Cuba's turn to socialism following the triumph of the national liberation struggle on 1 January 1959 was simply a pragmatic solution to save the Revolution from being destroyed by imperialism. DAVID HOWARTH argues that, on the contrary, Cuban revolutionaries had consciously sought to prepare the conditions for the transition to socialism; US aggression only accelerated the process.

The Revolution triumphs

In pre-revolutionary Cuba, US multinationals dominated the major sectors of the economy, deliberately keeping Cuba underdeveloped to serve US interests. Only a handful of rich Cubans – a corrupt political elite and a few large landowners – benefited. A mere 1.5% of landowners, including the huge multinational United Fruit Company (UFC), owned 46% of the land. Necessarily, therefore, sections of the Cuban national bourgeoisie supported a revolution, hoping to use it to gain privileges for itself.

Fidel Castro had made this point plainly in the Moncada programme – the text of his defence speech at the 1953 Moncada trial which, published as *History will absolve me*, was to become the political programme of his 26th July Movement. In describing those the Revolution counted on, he listed: '700,000 Cubans without work...500,000 farm labourers inhabiting miserable shacks who work four months of the year and starve the rest...400,000 industrial labourers...100,000 small farmers who live and die working on land that is not theirs'. To these he added the thousands of small businessmen, professionals and others who currently found themselves 'at a dead end, with all doors closed'. The programme was therefore radical and progressive, but not socialist: 'The problems concerning land, the problem of industrialisation, the problem of housing, the problems of unemployment, education and the health of the people; these are the problems we would take immediate steps to resolve'.

On 2 January 1959 a new government was formed with mostly 'moderates' from

the national bourgeois wing of the movement. Manuel Urrutia became President; José Miró Cardona Prime Minister. Castro's Rebel Army, largely lacking experience for government posts, retained control of the military and security forces with Fidel Castro as commander-in-chief. Castro and others from the radical wing of the 26th July Movement began holding secret meetings with the communist Popular Socialist Party to set up schools to teach Marxism-Leninism to trusted Rebel Army units.

The new government halved housing rents, reduced prices for medicines and turned former barracks into classrooms. Concessions granted by Batista to the telephone and electricity companies (both US-owned) were cancelled and their rates reduced. The Revolution took over control of the casinos, using the profits to pay for social projects, and opened up private beaches to the public. Racial discrimination was outlawed and war criminals were tried by revolutionary tribunals. However, some of these reforms were instituted in the face of increasing reluctance on the part of the 'moderate' bourgeois revolutionaries who, now having power, wanted the Revolution to stop there. On 21 January, at a rally of 800,000, Castro declared that Cubans wanted not only political freedom but economic freedom, and on 13 February Cardona resigned, complaining that ministers sought the approval of Castro for new measures rather than him. Castro became Prime Minister.

Bourgeois and US imperialist hostility

In May matters came to a head as the Agrarian Reform Law was signed and the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) created to implement it, build roads, housing for peasants and tourist resorts and proceed with industrialisation. Agrarian reform distributed up to 400 hectares of land to small farmers. Peasants on squatted land were given title deeds and land belonging to Batista's cronies was confiscated to create state farms and co-operatives. The Cuban bourgeoisie and US government claimed communists were taking over in Cuba, condemned the trials of war criminals and called for elections to be held. The US began channelling aid to those opposed to Castro and the CIA prepared plans to assassinate Fidel Castro, his brother Raul, and Che Guevara; in Cuba President Urrutia began making anti-communist speeches and organising forces opposed to the new measures.

Castro called on the masses to support the Revolution. They forced the dismissal of right-wing cabinet ministers and the resignation of Urrutia. Reform continued. Che Guevara became head of Cuba's national bank, sold Cuba's gold reserves in Fort Knox and moved the money to Canada and Switzerland. Trade agreements were set up with the USSR to supply Cuba with oil and machinery to aid industrialisation.

The US, in alliance with counter-revolutionary Cuban forces, stepped up its attacks, organising sabotage and air-raids and landing weapons. Planes flown from the US bombed sugar mills, strafed trains and dropped incendiary devices and leaflets on Havana. The Revolution



Fidel Castro addresses the people, January 1959

sought weapons to defend itself. British agreed to sell the Cubans fighter jets, but reneged under US pressure.

In response, Castro announced the formation of militias, arming the people. In January 1960, Cuba expropriated 70,000 acres of land from US companies, half of it from the UFC, which owned a total of 235,000 acres in Cuba. The bombing raids increased, mainly targeting sugar production. A shipment of weapons from Belgium, destined for the revolutionaries, mysteriously exploded on arrival in Havana harbour, killing 80 workers.

US President Eisenhower secretly ordered the CIA to train Cuban exiles for an invasion, mainly in Guatemala. Cuba accused Guatemala of conspiring with the UFC to invade Cuba. US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was a shareholder in and adviser to UFC; his brother Allen was head of the CIA and former president of UFC. Cuba moved to expropriate the remainder of land owned by UFC.

When crude oil arrived from the Soviet Union, the refineries owned by Shell, Esso and Texaco refused to refine it, so they were nationalised. By the end of September, Cuba had expropriated all US industrial and agrarian enterprises and banks. The US cancelled its sugar quota from Cuba for the year.

The Soviet Union announced it would support the Cuban people if anyone intervened against Cuba and agreed to buy the 700,000 tons of sugar that the US had cancelled. In Cuba, the Urban Reform Law abolished landlord ownership of housing for profit and nationalised all commercially-owned real estate. 382 large industrial and commercial compa-

nies 'belonging to the Cuban bourgeoisie' were expropriated. Castro announced that the Moncada programme had been fulfilled.

In the US presidential campaign, Democrat candidate JF Kennedy accused the Republicans of allowing 'Castro and his gang' to turn Cuba into a Soviet supply depot for Latin American revolution. President Eisenhower responded by declaring a partial embargo on trade with Cuba. The CIA set up a radio station to broadcast propaganda to Cuba and U2 spy planes started flying over Cuba. The US Navy was sent to Guatemala and Nicaragua under the pretext of protecting them against Cuban invasion. In April 1961, Kennedy denied that US forces would intervene in Cuba, even as the invasion fleet was leaving Nicaragua under US Navy escort.

Revolution organises the masses

From the first moment, the 26th July Movement leaders, conscious of the fate of the progressive reformist Arbenz government in Guatemala, ruthlessly crushed by a CIA-backed coup in 1954, had involved the masses in the defence of the Revolution. In 1960, Castro set up of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, arming and organising the Cuban people to defend themselves against the counter-revolutionaries.

The mass National Literacy Campaign of 1961, which wiped out illiteracy throughout Cuba in just one year, involved the participation of the whole people. The murder of an 18-year-old student teacher by counter-revolutionaries in the Escambray mountains in January 1961 provoked outrage throughout the

country. Castro consistently explained that those committing the hostilities represented bourgeois and imperialist privilege and called on the people to defend their Revolution.

Che Guevara, as head of the industrial department of INRA, educated thousands of workers in socialist consciousness. He explained that previously imperialist monopolies could create relatively privileged sections amongst the workers to destroy the solidarity of the working class. The first task of industrialisation was to produce work for the unemployed and underemployed. He counterposed the anarchy of production under free enterprise to the planning of industry. At every step, the revolutionary process was explained to the masses who participated in decision making.

In 1961, with an invasion imminent, Czechoslovakian and Soviet instructors started training Cubans in the use of newly-arrived weaponry. They thought it impossible to train the number of people necessary in so short a time. The Cuban solution was for those trained in the morning to teach what they had learned in the afternoon – enabling hundreds of thousands to be trained in a few months. So it was with a whole nation armed, conscious and mobilised that the Revolution prepared to face US imperialist aggression head-on.

The Bay of Pigs

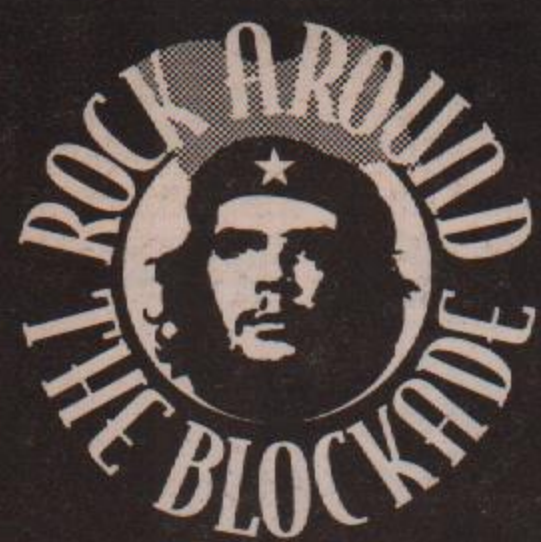
On 15 April, B26s painted with Cuban airforce insignia bombed three Cuban airfields, destroying five planes out of a Cuban airforce of 13 and killing seven Cubans. Two of the B26s then flew to Florida, claiming to be defectors from the Cuban airforce.

On 16 April, at the funeral of those killed in the air raids, Castro announced the socialist nature of the Revolution. In the early hours of 17 April, an invasion force of 1,500 mercenaries landed at Playa Giron and Playa Larga (the Bay of Pigs). Over half of these were from the privileged classes of pre-revolutionary Cuba, having owned between them 914,859 acres of land, 9,666 houses, 70 factories, five mines, two banks and ten sugar mills. The Cuban bourgeoisie had ended up as mere tools of imperialism.

The CIA's plan was to spark an uprising and install a stooge provisional government headed by former Prime Minister Cardona which would then call on the Organisation of American States to send armed forces (led by the US) to intervene in Cuba. (In reality, Cardona was detained throughout the invasion by the CIA.) They issued a press release in the name of the 'Revolutionary Council' stating that 'Cuban patriots' had begun to 'liberate' Cuba. The CIA radio station broadcast a call to arms to the Cuban people.

Castro called a national alert. In Havana, 35,000 people suspected of counter-revolutionary sympathies were detained. At daybreak, Cuba's airforce attacked the invasion fleet, sinking two ships and damaging another, forcing the others to flee with the mercenaries' fifth battalion and ten days' supplies on board. Cuban forces surrounded the invaders and engaged them in battle. Over the next two days, with the invasion failing, the CIA authorised US pilots to join the attack using bombers armed with napalm. Four were killed as their planes were shot down. On 19 April two US destroyers entered Cuban waters to evacuate the invaders. Castro ordered his forces to stop them fleeing. Over 1,000 mercenaries were taken prisoner. The invasion had failed. US imperialism had been humiliated by the Cuban masses, united and armed in the defence of socialism. Later, Castro would explain: 'The anti-imperialist, socialist revolution could only be one single revolution, because there is only one revolution. That is the great dialectic truth of humanity: imperialism and, standing against it, socialism'.

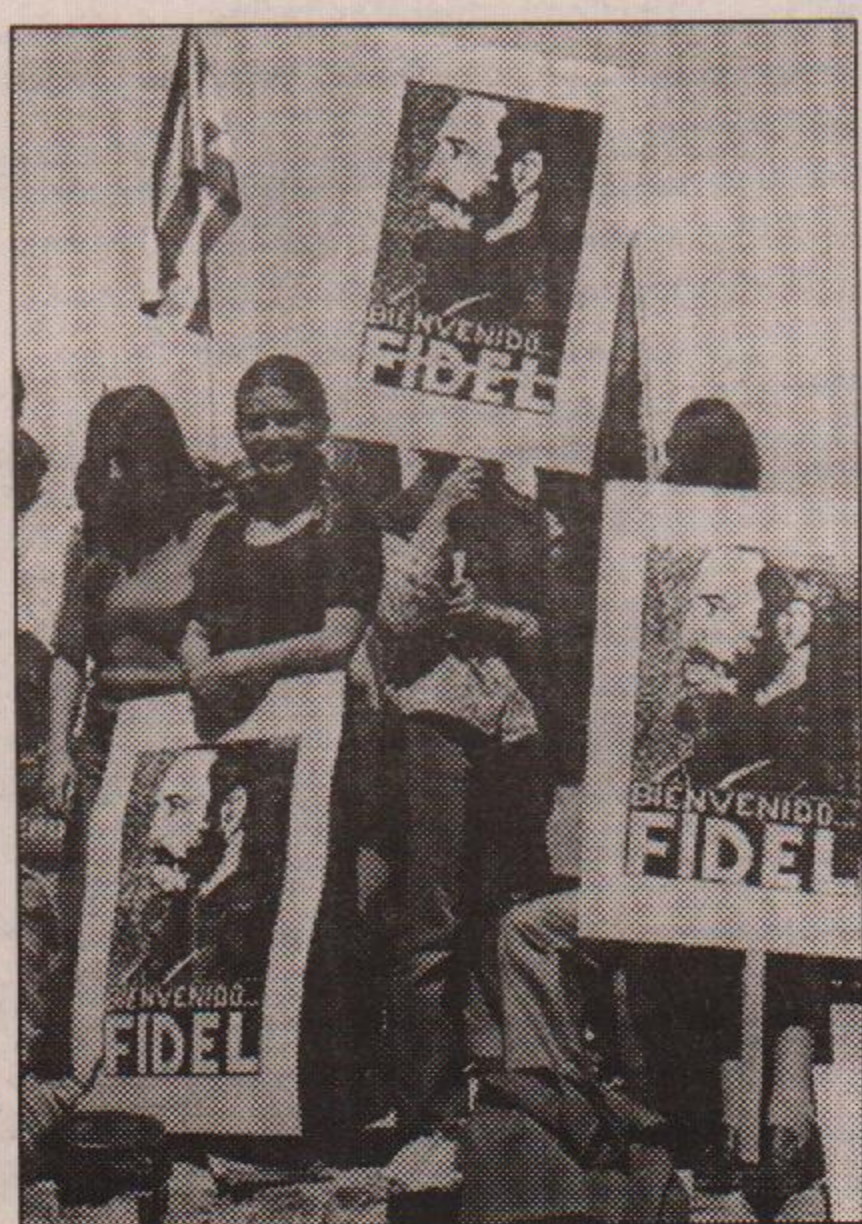
That year on Cuban television, Castro announced: 'I am a Marxist-Leninist and I shall be a Marxist-Leninist to the end of my life'. Four years later, the Cuban Communist Party was formed which still leads the Cuban people and defends the socialist revolution today.



CUBA VIVE

Interview with a revolutionary Ana Delia Gonzalez

Born in 1925 in the province of Sancti Spiritus, Ana Delia Gonzalez was the fourth child in a family of seven children. After her father's death, the family lived in great poverty in one rented room in Havana. Her mother and elder sisters worked as maids - there was little other work available to black women in pre-revolutionary Cuba. She herself started work as a maid aged 12, having been able to stay on at school only till 3rd or 4th grade. Early on, she became involved in revolutionary politics. Here, she talks to TANIA JACKSON about her life as a revolutionary.



My friends in the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP, the Cuban Communist Party of the time) would get me to help with propaganda; when I reached 14 I joined the youth wing of the party. When Jesus Menendez, a PSP member and National Secretary of the Cuban Union of Sugarcane Workers was murdered in January 1948, I was involved in mobilising people to attend his funeral - thousands went. It was also the first time the Partido Ortodoxo, which was anti-imperialist but also anti-communist, had worked with us.

While Fidel was in the Sierra Maestra, in the late 1950s, I remained with my comrades working in the underground. There were cells in Holguin, in Santiago, throughout the country, as well as in Havana. I was in the Action and Sabotage Group of the PSP. During the 9 April 1958 general strike, we stopped traffic by building barricades in the streets; we chucked home-made bombs and painted graffiti. A friend and I painted 'Yankees out of Cuba!' on the US Embassy, in English and beautifully done! On one general's house we painted 'Down with Batista' so he could see it when he got into his car in the morning.

Out of all of us, only one, Carlos Hernandez, was captured. He stored *Carta Semanal*, our weekly newspaper. He was tortured by Ventura but never spoke a word; he died a week later in a police hospital. The police came to my house once, but all my material was hidden beneath a child's seat and when the police saw my mother's Santería altar, they were scared and left. I got a message at work not to go home and stayed away till late that night. My neighbours never informed on me, even though they knew. Ironically, the only time I was arrested was the day after the triumph of the Revolution, when a group of us at a PSP meeting were accused of being Batista sympathisers! Che was informed and sent someone to sort it out. I was the only woman among the eight and they said I could go home, but I said not without my comrades. We were all released by the end of the evening.

After the triumph of the Revolution, during the general strike called by Fidel Castro, we guarded the bodegas (shops) and provided food rations for children. I worked for two years in the provincial offices of the Federation of Cuban Women and

later in the Partagas cigar factory, where I stayed till I retired. While with the FMC, I was chief of the militia unit. At that point, there were so many in the militias that Fidel said only those who scaled Pico Turquino [Cuba's highest peak, at about 6,000 feet] could stay. I did it in July so we were in the Sierra for the first proper 26 July Moncada celebration, which was also my birthday.

I also went to night classes and attained 7th grade in a few months. During the literacy campaign, I joined the *Patria o Muerte* brigade in the factory and went to stay with a campesino family for three months, after which they were all able to read the newspapers. With the factory, I was made an educator to help others reach 7th grade. I was also the ideological leader for my party nucleus. I married in 1964 - I was too busy to meet anyone earlier! I am now a member of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution.

What are the main changes brought by the Revolution?

We eliminated illiteracy and now there is free education for all. Before, there were private schools for the rich and white, and state schools for the rest. Breakfast was supposed to be provided, but the education minister stole all the money, so families without food couldn't send their children. Now there is free health-care - before there were private medical clinics for the rich and ordinary hospitals for the poor, but to get in you had to have sold your voting cards to the party in power.

Now women are able to work alongside men on equal salaries. The Revolution provided childcare centres for working mothers, although more are needed because the building programme was slowed down by the collapse of our socialist trading partners in Europe. The FMC advise and help us if any women have problems with their husbands, such as alcoholism and, together with the FMC, block committees help find employment for women seeking work. Many women are now heads of factories and workplaces, although there is still sexual inequality at home. Women do most of the domestic work and their husbands at most 'help' - they need to realise they have to take on an equal role at home. ■



LIGHTS, MUSIC, SOLIDARITY

'What was especially important was for the young people to see how young people from Britain, from a distant capitalist country, could create a political movement to raise money to bring music to our province.'

So Julio Martinez, then Secretary of the Cuban Union of Young Communists (UJC) of Ciego de Avila, described Rock around the Blockade's first project to raise funds for a disco for young Cubans. This year's project is even more important, providing for the youth of the province of Sancti Spiritus an opportunity to see in the New Year and celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Revolution on 1 January 1999, in their own disco. At the moment, in the provincial capital, Trinidad, there are only dollar discos geared towards tourists.

The UJC of Sancti Spiritus have described in detail their dream disco, with CD player, twin cassette deck, amplifier, powerful speakers, microphones, smoke machines and loads of lights - strobes, mirror balls, central rotating coloured lights, the

works. It will become a central venue for local youth, costing only a few pesos each, and allowing the UJC to improve its work uniting the young people and maintaining their revolutionary commitment. So please, help us raise the £5,000 we need before November by sending us your donations now and by getting involved with Rock around the Blockade.

And why not see the discotheque inaugurated in Trinidad on 30 December 1998 and celebrate the Revolution's triumph in the company of young Cuban communists? Rock around the Blockade will be sending a group of people out to Sancti Spiritus in December, to show their solidarity with the Revolution and learn more about life under socialism by working on an agricultural camp, participating in visits and meetings with organisations like the Federation of Cuban Women, local Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and trade unions as well as with Cuban families. If you would like to be considered for inclusion in this group, then let us know and start working in solidarity with Cuba now.

CUBA IN BRIEF

US feels the pressure

There are signs that the Pope's criticism of the US blockade is putting pressure on the United States government, as the Cubans had calculated it would. Some measures introduced in February 1996, following the shooting down by Cuba of two planes flown from the US over Cuban national waters, have now been lifted. These include the reinstatement of direct flights to Cuba for humanitarian purposes and the loosening of restrictions on relatives sending cash back to relatives in Cuba. Brothers to the Rescue, the Miami-based counter-revolutionaries who organised the 1996 incursions, in which four people died, for the specific purpose of provoking a US backlash - especially the signing of the Helms-Burton Act, have reacted furiously; it was condemned by arch-reactionary Jesse Helms as 'a serious mistake'. However, distribution of the medicines and food arriving on the humanitarian flights will, crucially, be coordinated by the Catholic church, strengthening its role. In addition, the move can be seen as an attempt by the US to stave off pressure for it to lessen the blockade in any meaningful way. Foreign Secretary Roberto Robaina seemed to hold this view when he dismissed the moves as 'crumbs' and part of a political manoeuvre Havana could not accept.

The campaign against the blockade is gathering pace within the United States itself. Initiated by progressive forces, including sections of the church such as Pastors for Peace, it now draws backing from large sections of US business, who

see profitable opportunities for investment being snapped up by Canadian, Mexican and European capital before their very eyes. The Torres-Rangel Bill authorising the sale of foodstuffs and medicines to the Cuban people has been sponsored by a number of Democrat and Republican representatives, religious figures, professionals, the Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Humanitarian Trade with Cuba. The Chamber of Commerce says 'US products which are important for living should be freely accessible to the people who most need them' and 'unilateral sanctions against Cuba make it impossible for US companies to respond to that need'. Senator Jesse Helms is countering the Torres-Rangel Bill with his own bill, co-drafted with the Cuban American National Foundation, which would offer humanitarian aid under humiliating conditions in return for a definite commitment to maintain the blockade.

Mandela stays loyal to friends

President Mandela added his voice to the growing protest against the US blockade during Clinton's tour of Africa. At a joint press conference in Cape Town, he criticised US sanctions against Cuba and Libya, saying the US should try to eliminate tension in the world and should 'call on its enemies and say "Let's sit down and talk peace"'. He added 'Those... who berate me for being loyal [to countries like Cuba and Libya] can go and throw themselves in the pool... Our moral authority dictates that we should not abandon those who helped us in the darkest hour in the history of this country. Not only did they support us in rhetoric, they gave us the resources to con-

MATERIAL AID

Rock around the Blockade is also supporting a number of other youth projects in Sancti Spiritus including a secondary school, a pioneers' palace and a scouting camp and are collecting material aid which we hope to be able to send in July via the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's Container Appeal. If you can help with any of the following please contact the campaign.

Two sets of audio equipment with microphone • television and video recorder • toys suitable for children aged 5-14, including 'quiet' toys (eg, puzzles, cards) • carpentry and design tools • educational material including paper, notebooks, pens, pencils, rulers, compasses, graph paper, coloured paper, cardboard, overalls, paints and paintbrushes • two clown costumes for adults and two for children • an electric fan • curtain material, needles, thread • electrical equipment - 100W bulbs, interruptors, plugs • tape recorder • cassettes • rucksacks • hammocks • stopwatches • torches and batteries • tents • fluorescent 20W lamps • children's books (in Spanish) • balls, bats etc • water bottles •

The campaign urgently needs your help - your involvement, your material aid and your money! Please send donations and/or offers of help to the address below.

Name _____
Address _____

I would like to help Rock around the Blockade's project for Cuban youth and enclose a donation of £_____ (payable to Rock around the Blockade)
I would like to join Rock around the Blockade (£10 waged £4 low waged, £2 unwaged/student) _____
I can provide material aid _____

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

duct the struggle and to win.'

Cuba asks for EU aid status

Cuba has applied to the EU for special aid status as an ex-colony. However, for a country to be helped in this way requires the unanimous agreement of the EU states. The current Spanish government is hostile to Cuba and Britain is likely to cave in to US pressure on the question. Cat Wiener

Wear your politics on your sleeve...

with our popular campaign T-shirt, reissued to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution at the end of this year. Black and red on white, with a picture of Che Guevara and the words 'Viva Cuba' and '40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution' on the front and a quote from Che 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back.

...or your lapel

with Rock around the Blockade's new campaign badge, 3cm diameter, red and black on white, 50p.

Please send me _____ T-shirts (specify XL, L, M, S) at £7 each and _____ badges at 50p each

I enclose a cheque for £_____ payable to Rock around the Blockade

Name _____
Address _____

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



FIGHTING LOW PAY WITH FRFI

Fighting capitalist lies...

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! supporters have continued to build support on the street for the fight against poverty pay. This has involved pickets and all sorts of meetings. The RNCC has been involved in events in Stockport, Leicester, Blackburn, Manchester and London (see pages 8-9 for details). Susan Rose of the RCG spoke on behalf of the campaign at a meeting on 28 March in Brighton opposing the New Deal. FRFI supporters were involved in the Groundswell conference, spoke at events for the Liverpool Dockers and at a meeting called by the Socialist Labour Party in London to oppose anti-trade union legislation, and took part in the protests against student loans.

A month earlier, comrades in London led a picket of Harriet Harman's surgery at Southwark Town Hall, protesting at the cuts in lone parent benefits and the suggested cuts in disability benefits. Over 100 people attended, including members of Merton Unemployed Alliance,

disability campaigns, the Socialist Labour Party and Socialist Workers' Party. When Harman slunk in an hour late, the picket followed her in, maintaining a noisy presence. A black woman who had been waiting to see Harman spoke on the megaphone of her experience of British racism at the hands of Labour and Tory governments alike.

Meanwhile in Doncaster on 26 February 30 people attended the first *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* meeting ever in the town, called in support of socialist Cuba. The audience heard about the importance of defending Cuban socialism as a living example of what is possible in a rationally organised society, as well as an explanation of the political standpoint of Che Guevara.

All this work has

drawn in many people involved in campaigns against cuts, poverty pay and casualisation – all those currently bearing the brunt of Labour's attacks on the working class. Inevitably it has also brought us into conflict with those sections of the left still tied to



an old movement that has proved itself incapable of defending the working class so far, and which is holding back the building of one that can. An example of this is the fixation of organisations like the Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party on the unions as the prime force for change. In practice this means that they try to defend dole workers organised in the CPSA/PCS who are implement-

ing Labour's policies at the expense of the unemployed. The truth is that this approach is becoming an obstacle to building anything new in this country. That is why supporters have been out on the streets working in support of the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign – to speak to those who are excluded from the official movement.

If you too want to build a movement

against poverty pay, or join the struggle in support of Cuban socialism, then come along to any of the meetings advertised below.

Turkey

On 8 March in Istanbul, Turkey, David Yaffe spoke on behalf of the Revolutionary Communist Group to an enthusiastic and militant festival of more than 3,000 members and supporters of the Sosyalist Iktidar Partisi (SIP). The festival was called to celebrate both the 150th anniversary of the Communist Manifesto and International Women's Day.

During his 5-day stay with the SIP, David gave a substantial interview to the party newspaper and also spoke to high school and university student members of the SIP on the nature of working class movements in imperialist countries. In addition, discussions took place concerning greater collaboration between the RCG and the SIP, particularly in relation to each other organisation's publications.

FRFI reader's group meetings

LONDON

Wednesday 29 April 7.30pm
Iraq, oil and war postponed
Introduced by Trevor Rayne
Wednesday 27 May 7.30pm
Women and the fight for socialism
Introduced by Cat Wiener
Both at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1
(Nearest tube Holborn)

LEICESTER

Saturday 4 April 1.30pm
The Communist Manifesto
Saturday 2 May 1.30pm
The state and revolution
Both at St Peter's Tenants Association, St Peter's Shopping Centre, Melbourne Road, Highfield

MANCHESTER

Tuesday 22 April 7.30pm
The Communist Manifesto
The Vine, Kennedy Street

PRESTON

Tuesday 5 May 7.30pm
The Communist Manifesto
Adelphi Committee Room, UCLAN

BLACKBURN

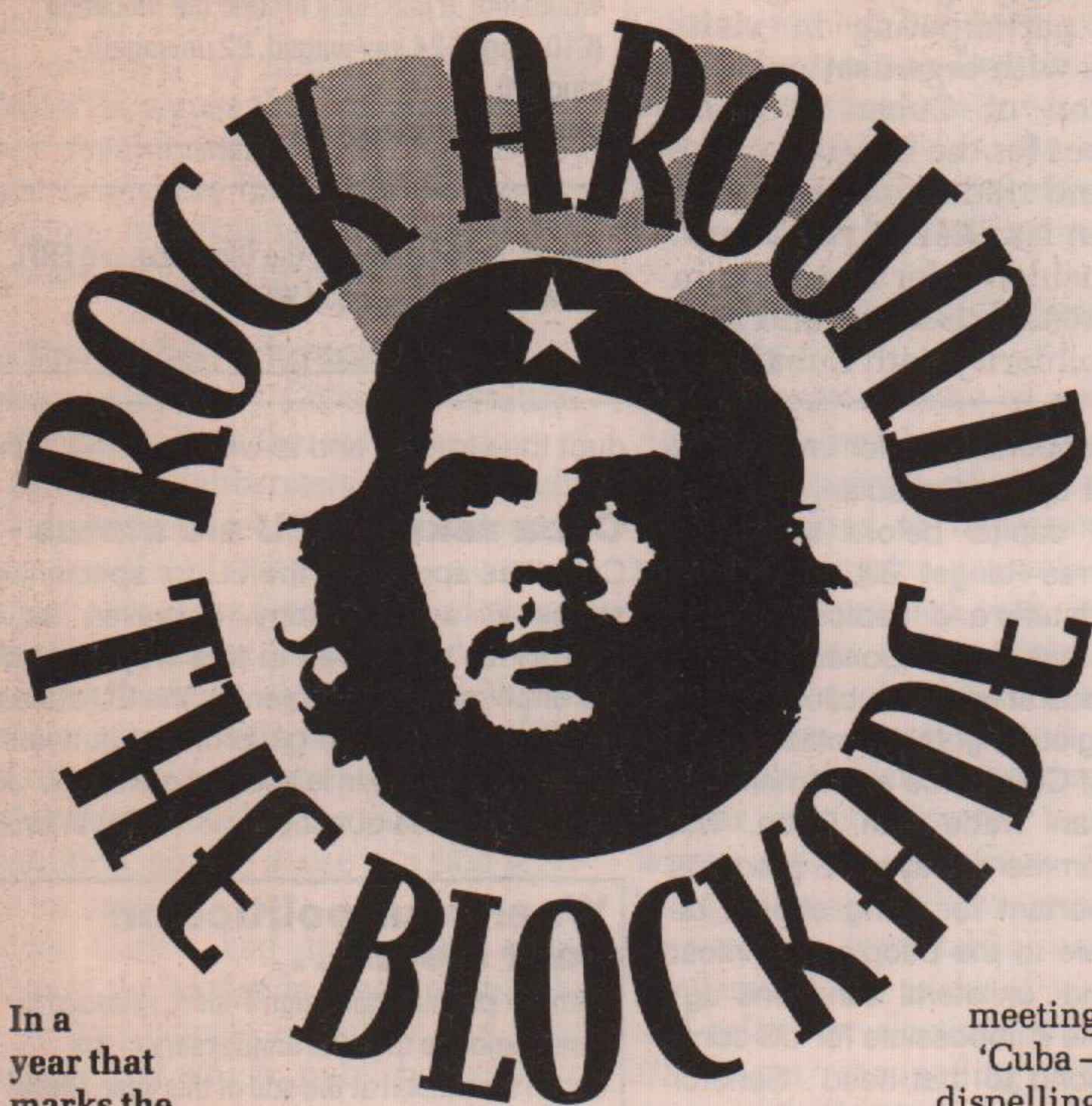
Thursday 7 May 7.30pm
The Communist Manifesto
Fox & Grapes, Preston New Road

LONDON PUBLIC MEETING

Monday 11 May, 7.30pm
A world to win – the relevance of the Communist Manifesto
Speaker: Hannah Callar
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
(Holborn tube) £1/50p

BLACKBURN

Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign
Next meeting Thursday 16 April, 7.30pm
Fox & Grapes, Preston New Road, and fortnightly after that.



In a year that marks the 150th anniversary of Cuba's war of independence against Spain – and the beginning of direct US intervention in Cuba – Rock around the Blockade has been using the opportunity to step up its work against the continued imperialist aggression of the United States, and in defence of Cuban socialism.

London

In London, the Cuba Vive society at University College, London, has held its third successful salsa evening in conjunction with the Latin America Society and has now raised £400 towards our disco project for young people in Trinidad de Cuba. The event was followed up with a lively and informative

meeting 'Cuba – dispelling the myths' at the beginning of March, with speakers from Rock around the Blockade. The London Rock around the Blockade campaign continues to meet fortnightly on Mondays, with regular political discussions, reviews of news from the Cuban weekly paper, *Granma International*, and to plan political and fundraising activities, which include working with the new Little Havana club in Leicester Square to organise a salsa night, and a sponsored walk planned for early June. On 6 April, we will be holding a public meeting to show the video *Cuba's meningitis miracle*, which reveals vital and startling facts about the success of Cuba's meningitis vaccine, which imperialist

countries, including Britain, attempt to conceal and deny. A national weekend of activity is planned to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the US Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba – a demonstration outside the US embassy and a dayschool (see below for details).

Doncaster

A packed public meeting on 26 February – the first organised by

the local group – entitled 'Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution' had speakers from Rock around the Blockade and FRFI speaking alongside Dave Douglas of Hatfield NUM. Nigel Cook stressed how Che was an internationalist and a communist and remained an example for us today; he also described his own campaign for reinstatement and against the atrocious pay and working conditions that

face many people today in Britain. A lively discussion ensued amongst the audience, which included anarchists, members of the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Party.

Preston

The Rock around the Blockade society at the University of Central Lancashire has held regular stalls about Cuba and a public meeting on 39 years of the US blockade, and took part in the student demonstrations in March, contrasting the current attacks on students in Britain with conditions in Cuba. Their next step will be to launch a Boycott Bacardi campaign at the university (see box).

Manchester

The Cuba Society at Manchester University also took part in student demonstrations and, when the students occupied council chambers and held an impromptu meeting, a speaker from the society addressed them. The society is organising a sponsored walk to raise funds along the route of the mass trespass along Kinder Scout in the 1930s, and has other imaginative fundraising ideas lined up. Its main priority for the coming period will also be the Boycott Bacardi campaign, with a launch meeting planned for 28 April.

Midlands

Lincoln Cuba Solidarity Campaign group, which works closely with Rock around the Blockade, have recently shown the meningitis video.

BOYCOTT BACARDI!

Following the success of Middlesex University students in getting Bacardi rum barred from their campus and replaced with Havana Club, Rock around the Blockade is urging students around the country to take up the campaign.

The Bacardi company is one of the major backers of the Helms-Burton Act – its lawyers even helped draft key parts of the legislation – aimed at tightening still further the US blockade on Cuba. Some people in the US, according to the *New York Times*, even called it the 'Helms-Bacardi Law'. Bacardi has consistently refused to negotiate compensation for its distilleries and breweries in pre-revolutionary Cuba, nationalised by the Revolutionary Government in 1960. With a family fortune estimated at \$1.8 billion, Bacardi is one of the principal financial backers of the virulently

counter-revolutionary Cuban-American National Foundation. Drinking Bacardi means supporting US aggression against Cuba, while drinking Havana Club rum, now produced in a joint venture between Cuba and the French company Pernod, actively helps supply hard currency to the Revolution. Not a hard choice!

The campaign has been enthusiastically embraced by the Cuba Society at Manchester University, who have an imaginative poster and sticker campaign planned and a launch meeting organised for Tuesday 28 April, 6pm, Room MR3, Manchester University Students' Union. For more information, contact the Cuba Society c/o MUSU, Oxford Rd, Manchester M13 9PL.

If you would like to initiate the campaign in your own college, petitions for collecting signatures and campaigning information are available from Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX or tel 0171 837 1688

EVENTS

PUBLIC MEETING

Cuba's meningitis miracle: the vaccine the world denies

7.30pm, Monday 6 April, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (nearest tube Holborn)

CUBA: 37 YEARS

AFTER THE BAY OF PIGS – a weekend of events 18/19 April

Demonstration: Imperialist hands off Cuba! Saturday 18 April, 2pm outside US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1 (Tubes: Marble Arch, Bond St)

Dayschool: Cuba and the fight for socialism today Sunday 19 April 11am-5pm, Millman Community Centre, Millman St, London WC1 (Tubes: Holborn, Russell Square) £5 (£2 unwaged) includes tea/coffee and light lunch. Wheelchair accessible.

REGULAR CAMPAIGN MEETINGS IN LONDON ARE HELD FORTNIGHTLY ON MONDAYS AT CONWAY HALL (AS ABOVE) Next meetings: 20 April, 4 May, 18 May, 1 June. All at 8pm.

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 ☐

Name

Address

Tel

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Dole bondage: up yours!

Dole bondage: up yours! is 'an open letter of resignation from the secretary of Wales against the JSA', Stuart Bracewell, detailing how the radical left turned Wales against the JSA (WajSA) into a union support group rather than an organisation which represented the interests of claimants. The 'left', which included the CPSA (which organises dole workers), the local trades council and the Socialist Party, dismissed all ideas of direct action – occupying dole offices – preferring a diversionary demonstration. However, Bracewell comments,

'Most of those arguing strongest for the march... seemed to do the least to build it... As it turned out, around 150 people, mainly members of the various Leftist groups, trudged around Cardiff city centre in a pathetic spectacle, that at best bemused the Saturday shoppers.'

The entry of CPSA members into WajSA, Bracewell argues, caused its 'effective death', as CPSA representatives launched a hysterical attack on the '3 strikes' policy which had not been brought

up in WajSA before. (The '3 strikes' policy means particularly obnoxious dole workers receive two warnings before a poster of them is pasted up and a demo takes place at the dole. It is one of the few ways in which claimants can assert some power). The position of WajSA became untenable as 'fetishisation of the CPSA and its "struggle" had placed (WajSA) in a position that... amounted to open collaboration with people on the one hand willing to carry out the latest of the government's attacks, and on the other acting as a bureaucratic block upon militant action.'

The role of Employment Service workers has changed from one of simple administration to a much more repressive policing role as they attempt to force claimants off the dole by any means necessary. The dole workers' relationship to the state has been modified into one where they are explicitly called upon to carry out a repressive role of social control, backed up by the very real threat of 100% benefit cuts. The interests of dole workers and

claimants are diametrically opposed. When dole workers are attacking claimants they should not be too surprised when claimants respond.

The story of *Dole bondage* reflects the one-time situation inside the Nottingham Campaign Against the JSA, when trades council members came to anti-JSA meetings with all the usual arguments against claimants upsetting the CPSA. All the union wanted was a quiet life whilst its members carried on attacking the unemployed! Fortunately, in Nottingham, there were more of us than trades council types, so they eventually left and we were able to carry on and engage in some real activity.

The whole sordid business shows that when the CPSA, trades councils or other representatives of the 'official movement' call for 'unity', it is always a bogus unity on their terms – against the unemployed and claimants.

TED TALBOT
Nottingham

FRFI: soft on opportunism?

With the so-called 'peace process' in Ireland arriving at its inevitable outcome predetermined by the ruling class of Britain, Eire and the United States, it is becoming crystal clear that the leaders of Provisional Sinn Fein, supported by a sizeable majority within Provisional Sinn Fein and the IRA, are laying the ground for the greatest betrayal of the Irish people since the 1920s. These traitors who are prepared to compromise with British imperialism must be exposed for what they are and be attacked relentlessly for their opportunism.

It is surprising therefore, given the RCG's excellent record in exposing opportunism whenever it shows its ugly head, that you seem reluctant to attack the Adams/McGuinness clique and their supporters more strongly. Why? Is it simply assumed that the working class in Ireland will pass judgment on the current process by rebelling against Adams and his cohorts' opportunism? If so, it is in my opinion simplistic and erroneous. Did the Palestinian working class, for example, rebel against Arafat's treachery? Did the South African black working class rebel against

Mandela and his betrayals? They did not, mainly because their leaders had conditioned them into accepting that the 'New World Order' means that national liberation and political and economic self-determination were no longer realistic in the current climate? These ideas, along with other reactionary tendencies, continue to have a strong grip on the working class in these oppressed countries. No doubt Sinn Fein is pushing similar ideas within the working class of Ireland. To assume that the working class will simply reject Adams' opportunism is naive. What has happened in Palestine and South Africa must not be allowed to happen in Ireland. What the RCG should be doing is supporting all those forces opposed to this sham peace process, like Republican Sinn Fein and the 32-County Sovereignty Movement who support Irish liberation and attacking those opportunists like Adams who will sell out Irish liberation by pedalling their reactionary opportunism under a cloak of deceit.

STEVEN PORTER
Chesterfield

Gay rights in Cuba

Lorenzo's show has survived, partly thanks to a good relationship with the neighbours – who regularly get a free performance – and partly because the authorities have eased up on the repression. Like his partner, Vladimir – who nightly slips into a tight-fitting dress, falsies and a blond wig for his performance as Camila – Lorenzo is HIV+. They asked for their real names and other identifying details to be kept secret'. Thus *The Guardian* runs another 'Gays in Cuba' story. Above this text is a picture of two men in full make-up, long wigs, tights and bare, hairy chests, laughing and making up for the drag show. These are either Lorenzo and Vladimir (not their real names) or two other Cuban drag queens, also anxious to hide their identity, or even, perhaps, two *Guardian* reporters, anxious to preserve the anonymity of their interviewees, donning drag in their Farringdon office.

The gay issue has been used time and again as a stick with which to beat the Cuban revolution. After my first visit to Cuba, I was queer-bashed in London, receiving nine stitches in my head. When I was in Cuba a year

and a half ago, I stayed in a suburb of Havana with a white gay man who lived openly with his black lover. When Pepe put his arm round me in the street and caressed my cheek, I felt uncomfortable because I'm not used to doing this in Camden High Street where I live. Instead, I go to a gay pub where most of the clientele complain about 'the straights who invade our pub'. We have had to create a ghetto to protect ourselves and now we cling onto it in a society that supposedly accepts our sexuality. In Havana, the neighbours are all invited to a free drag show!

The British media faces an increasingly difficult job attacking Cuba. They are forced to print in this recent article that 'in 1992 Fidel Castro declared that homosexuality was "a natural human tendency that simply must be respected"'. The conclusion is that this is 'another crack in the once monolithic revolution'. My conclusion is that the Cuban people and their leadership are recognising they were wrong in the past about homosexuality and society is gradually changing. Unlike Britain, where there is an unequal age of consent and a ban on

homosexuality in the armed forces, there are no discriminatory laws against gays and lesbians in Cuba. The AIDS sanatorium I visited in Havana had individual houses for residents set amongst swaying palm trees, extensive grounds and many patients away for the weekend. *The Guardian* has managed to find a former patient who described this as 'a kind of concentration camp'. I presume this person did not give their name either.

In rich, 'democratic' Sweden, people who test positive for HIV are issued with an ID number and are bound by the 1986 Infectious Diseases Act. They are obliged to register their address, reveal past sexual contacts and declare their status to new partners. Failure to comply with the law can lead to internment for 'surveillance and re-education'. This takes place in The Yellow Villa which, interestingly, has only a few white, gay men but is crowded with prostitutes, migrants and IV drug users. In Brazil, gays and drag queens risk being shot in the street. I know of no other third world country, apart from Cuba, where the most advanced anti-HIV drugs are supplied free to those who need them.

RICHARD ROQUES
North London

Free the Railway Street Two!

I write to highlight my wrongful conviction for grievous bodily harm in May 1996 under Section 18 of the Offences Against the Person Act.

The Crown's case against me, my brother and brother-in-law was one of *no blood*, *no fingerprints* and *no weapon*. The only 'evidence' was of four witnesses who contradicted each other and admitted police told them to read other people's statements before writing their own. But when pressed in court, the witnesses withdrew that claim and stated their evidence was truthful. My brother and I were sentenced to nine years and my brother-in-law to 15 months.

Since our conviction, three out of the four witnesses have been arrested on charges including fraud, child abuse and wounding.

I appeared at the appeal court in December 1997 and my appeal was dismissed within 20 minutes. My barrister said it felt as if 'someone in high office' didn't want me freed.

Since then, a new witnesses has come forward with new evidence which is being checked out.

My family have started a campaign, the Railway Street Two Campaign. 950 people have signed the petition so far, calling on Jack Straw to refer our case back to the Criminal Cases Review Commission for referral back to the appeal court. Our campaign has the backing of civil rights lawyer Imran Khan and others. For more information about our campaign, contact Tania Martain, 12 Syon Park Close, St Mellons, Cardiff or Mrs Cryer, 19 Bedwas Close, St Mellons, Cardiff. All petitions should be sent to one of these addresses.

IDRIS ALI (RV3497)
HMP Frankland, Brasside, Durham
DH1 5YD

CAS brutality

Over the previous few years, which I have spent unjustly languishing in segregation/isolation blocks, I have met many other prisoners in the same situation. This implementation for so-called 'control problem' prisoners is presently known as the Continuous Assessment Scheme. However, many prisoners are placed there out of sheer

Free Satpal Ram

■ RAFI, Asian Dub Foundation, London Records, £14.00

Real Areas For Investigation (RAFI) is Asian Dub Foundation's latest hard-hitting album. Driven through by heavy drum-and-bass beats, the music is spiced up with funky bass guitars, rock chords, woody flutes, pacy congas, violin melodies and flavoured by the traditional sounds of Asia. The rapping is as unmoderated as the lyrics are uncompromising. The sound encapsulates the real voice of those it represents, angry but focused, a people oppressed by a society which denies their existence. Asian Dub Foundation produce a sound that is rough with reality, unsweetened by commercial pampering, yet rocks you all the more.

Track 5, 'Free Satpal Ram', is perhaps the tightest track on the album. It starts with slowly spiralling folk music above a cymbal ticking like a timebomb, till angry voices break through, chanting the innocence of Satpal Ram, 'just another innocent man'. A voice channelled through a distorter reports how Satpal Ram defended himself against a serious racist attack

and after a farcical trial, where no interpreter for witnesses was provided, was himself convicted for murder by a racist judicial system. The title is repeated, demanding justice for Satpal, generating the threat of an angry crowd and the strength of people power.

The album covers issues from a peasant uprising in West Bengal, police surveillance in Britain and racial unity to state hypocrisy and attacks on the poor. As the track 'dub mentality' says, 'We're using our voices to express our reality'.

Helen Yaffe

'Free Satpal Ram' is also available on single, price £4.99

Satpal Ram is subjected to the Prison Service's punitive Continuous Assessment Scheme which means he is moved between prisons every 28 days. As we go to press he is at HMP Hull. Readers are encouraged to send him cards and messages of solidarity. Write to Satpal Ram (E94164), HMP Hull, Hedon Road, Hull HU9 5LS.



vindictiveness and presently languish illegally in isolation/punishment blocks, victims of management's abuse of power.

The guidelines set out in security manuals, circular instructions and governors' instructions concerning prisoners on CAS go against the manual of prison law and the national guidelines concerning rule 43 GOAD prisoners in the manual of prison rules. As a result of the illegality of this conspiracy, it has come to the stage where legal action is imperative to expose this brutal ferocity.

I have compiled a dossier of my experiences over the years and of my time spent on CAS, a shocking and truthful account of the treatment I have endured at the hands of a system that unjustly contains me.

I request that prisoners presently on this scheme help me by compiling statements about the treatment they have received while on CAS, including how many times they have been moved between prisons, reasons for these moves and, if possible, any Rule 43 forms issued on initial isolation in each segregation/punishment block. Those of you who are prepared to assist me in this case please forward all statements etc to me c/o Nicki Jameson at FRFI. At present I'm alone in my continued struggle against a system that continually tortures us all. I ask that you reading this, languishing in isolation on CAS, rise up alongside me to resist that force which is trying to bring us down and help to expose

the injustice presently in motion. It's time to stand up and unite!

KENNY CARTER, HMP Bristol

Prisoners' property

I am writing to invite prisoners who have waited months on end to receive their property after getting ghosted from a long-term gaol, and those who have received their property only to find it damaged or destroyed to send letters to me about their experiences so I can collate them and send the information to the Prison Service headquarters, Prison Reform Trust etc, to see if there can be a solution to this on-going problem. I have been waiting nine and a half months now for my property to come from HMP Whitemoor. I was moved from there on 29 April 1997 and because I have had seven moves since then I have only just started the internal procedure. Anyone wishing to contact me should send their letters recorded delivery.

Could you please put me on the mailing list for FRFI as I have read it a couple of times and have been well impressed.

STEVE SLEAFORD (GG1030)
HMP Frankland, Finchale Avenue,
Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

New Labour prison policy -

In opposition, today's Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw excelled himself in attacking his Conservative opponent, the rabidly reactionary Michael Howard, not from a left-wing or even liberal perspective but from the right. According to Straw, the pro-hanging Howard wasn't too vicious: he was too lax, too soft on crime. In response to Howard and Prime Minister John Major's rallying cry 'Prison Works', Straw and Blair never said, 'No, it doesn't'. Instead they proclaimed, 'Yes, prison works and we will make it work better'. **NICKI JAMESON** takes a look at the state of the British prison system after nearly a year under Labour.

bringing in most of the Conservatives' minimum sentencing legislation and exercising his power to determine the length of a life sentence and prevent some prisoners from ever having any realistic chance of release. While this approach continues, the British prison population will continue to outstrip that of almost all European countries and may well begin approaching the obscene proportions of imprisonment in the US.

Continuing Conservative repression

During the last few years of Conservative government, a whole range of repressive measures were introduced into prisons. Some appear under the guise of security, such as the more frequent and intrusive searching of both prisoners and visitors, the use of special Dedicated Search Teams and Volumetric Control: the restriction of prisoners' property to what will fit in two small boxes. Others are designed specifically to divide and rule the prison population. Among the most hated by prisoners are the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme and the Mandatory Drug Testing programme. Labour has embraced both.

Under the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme all prisoners are defined as Basic, Standard and Enhanced, according to a 'performance assessment'. Basic regime entitles them to basically nothing and the other categories progressively award more 'privileges'. These consist of visits, association and the right to spend your own money: £2.50 per week on Basic, £10 on Standard, £15 on Enhanced. The system is unfair in itself, particularly to prisoners without regular visitors or friends to send them money, but is also implemented in a completely uneven and arbitrary way, depending on which gaol a prisoner is in and the whims of individual officers.

Mandatory Drug Testing was introduced in 1996 at a cost of millions. Some 70,000 'random' drug tests are now carried out annually. Prisoners who test positive are then punished. Punishment is virtually the same for cannabis as for heroin. The system is blamed for actually creating heroin users as heroin stays in the body for days, whereas cannabis is detectable for several weeks. For prisoners who are heroin users, no treatment is provided. There is no methadone programme or any other form of detoxification. Punishment takes the form of loss of

remission and closed visits, with a glass screen between the prisoner and the visitor. This punishes the prisoner's family and friends as well, even when there is no suggestion that drugs were obtained on visits. It does not punish drug pushers, only users. The pushers test negative and carry on their trade. It is a system which is entirely punitive and a complete waste of time and money.

Special Units - what's in a name?

Just as Harold Wilson's 1974 government continued with the previous Conservative administration's plans for a special behaviour modification unit at Wakefield prison to brutalise 'subversive' prisoners, so Tony Blair's government has continued with the setting up of 'Close Supervision Units' at Woodhill, Hull and Durham prisons. Despite some public rhetoric about 'ground-breaking group therapy', these units operate on a crude carrot and stick basis and are designed to destroy their inhabitants. The Woodhill units opened in February and as we go to press the old Hull Special Unit is being refurbished in order to reopen as an 'Activity Intervention Unit'.

Most of the Irish prisoners of war housed in the prison system's other type of unit - the Special Secure Units - have been repatriated, along with the majority of other POWs. However, contrary to public perception, Labour has not closed the SSUs: the one at Whitemoor is still in operation, although it holds very few prisoners. The Belmarsh SSU has simply been renamed the High Security Unit and continues to subject remand prisoners to a punitive, closed regime.

The repatriation process begun by John Major's government has speeded up under Labour. However, prominent among those POWs whom Labour still refuses to repatriate, or even set a release date for, are the four men arrested at Balcombe Street in 1974 who have been in English gaols ever since.

Privatisation and the POA

While in nine-tenths of the pre-election 'law and order debate' there was no distinction between Labour and Tory, one crucial area of penal policy where the parties did take different positions was over privatisation. Writing in the POA's magazine, *Gatelodge*: Jack Straw said 'I should like to...stress my fundamental objection to prisons run by the private sector. This is surely one area where

there can be no free market. We cannot break contracts which already exist, but we shall certainly make no new ones and, within the existing budget, shall take back into public service privatised prisons as soon as contractually possible.'

On coming to power, Labour did a U-turn and by October 1997 Straw had given the go-ahead to the building of four new private prisons, in addition to the four already in operation and three then under construction. This latest four included the Cookham Wood secure 'children's prison' for 12-14 year-olds, which is due to open this Spring and will be run by Group 4.

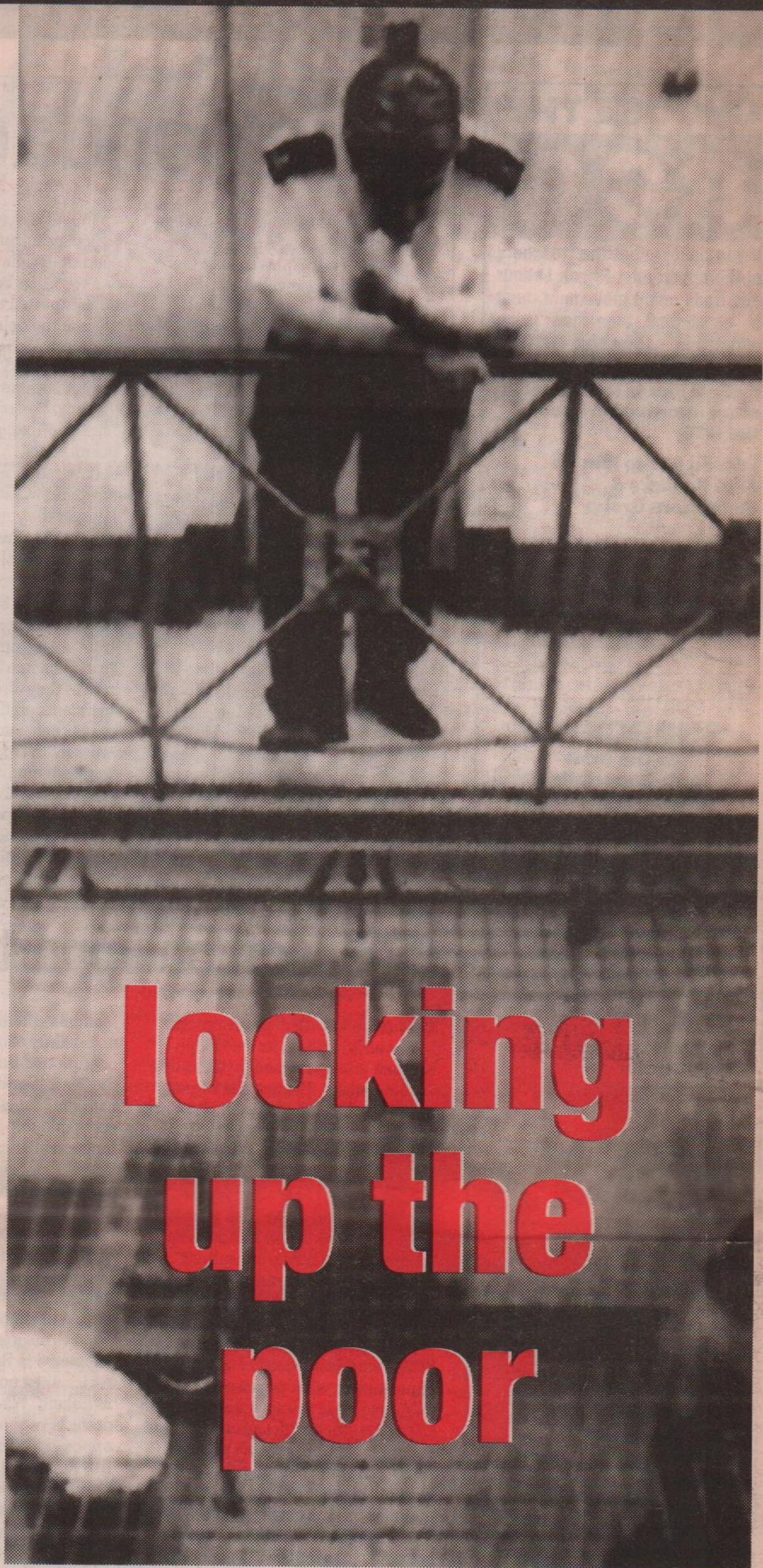
It is no coincidence that the anti-privatisation stance was designed to curry favour with the POA. Similarly, Labour had hinted that it would reverse the Conservatives' removal of the prison officers' right to strike. Of course, it has done no such thing.

In FRFI's 1997 Election Special we wrote: 'In many respects, Labour and the Tories mirror one another on law and order...There has been, however, a class difference which surfaced in times of crisis. Labour, having its origins in the labour aristocracy, has tended to support the Prison Officers' Association's reactionary but anti-government line of "need for more staff"/"blame cuts"/"oppose privatisation", allowing it to attack Conservative policy without defending prisoners. In government, Labour will be forced to ditch this alliance for financial reasons and will continue Tory attacks on prison officers' privileged status.'

Locking up the working class

The past 20 years have seen a massive transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. The differential between the richest and poorest sections of society is greater now than in Victorian England. At the same time, successive governments have been hell-bent on dismantling the small protection against poverty afforded by the Welfare State. They preach 'individual responsibility' and 'prudence'. Every single survey carried out into the make-up of the prison population reveals that prisoners are overwhelmingly poor and that the vast majority of crime is directly or indirectly motivated by poverty. Labour, like the Conservatives before them does nothing to address the root cause of the problem: social inequality. Tony Blair's famous utterance: 'Tough on crime; tough on the causes of crime' is complete nonsense, with so-called anti-poverty measures and 'social exclusion' units at best window-dressing and at worst part of the policing methods. There are more and more people in prison; the conditions they face there are worsening; their chances of 'rehabilitation' lessening. The Labour government is as vicious as its predecessor and is creating a monster which it will not always be able to control. At her most arrogant Margaret Thatcher was caught off guard by the anti-Poll Tax riots and the Strangeways protest. So, watch out Tony Blair - the people who today are being driven into poverty and into gaol will not be submissive for ever.

PRISONERS FIGHTBACK



**locking
up the
poor**