

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

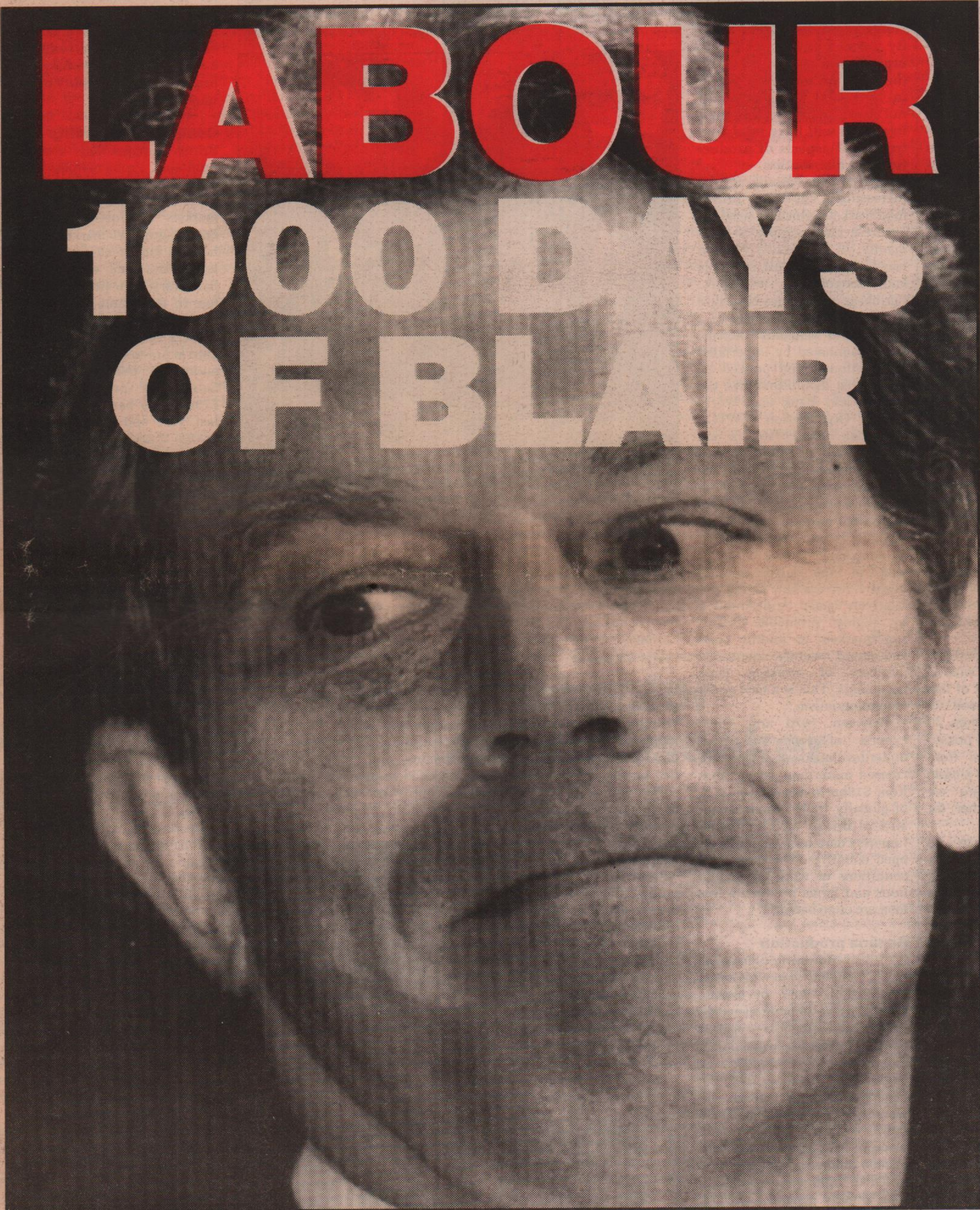
Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 153 February/March 2000

(unwaged 30p) 50p

# LABOUR

# 1000 DAYS OF BLAIR



# 100 YEARS OF INFAMY

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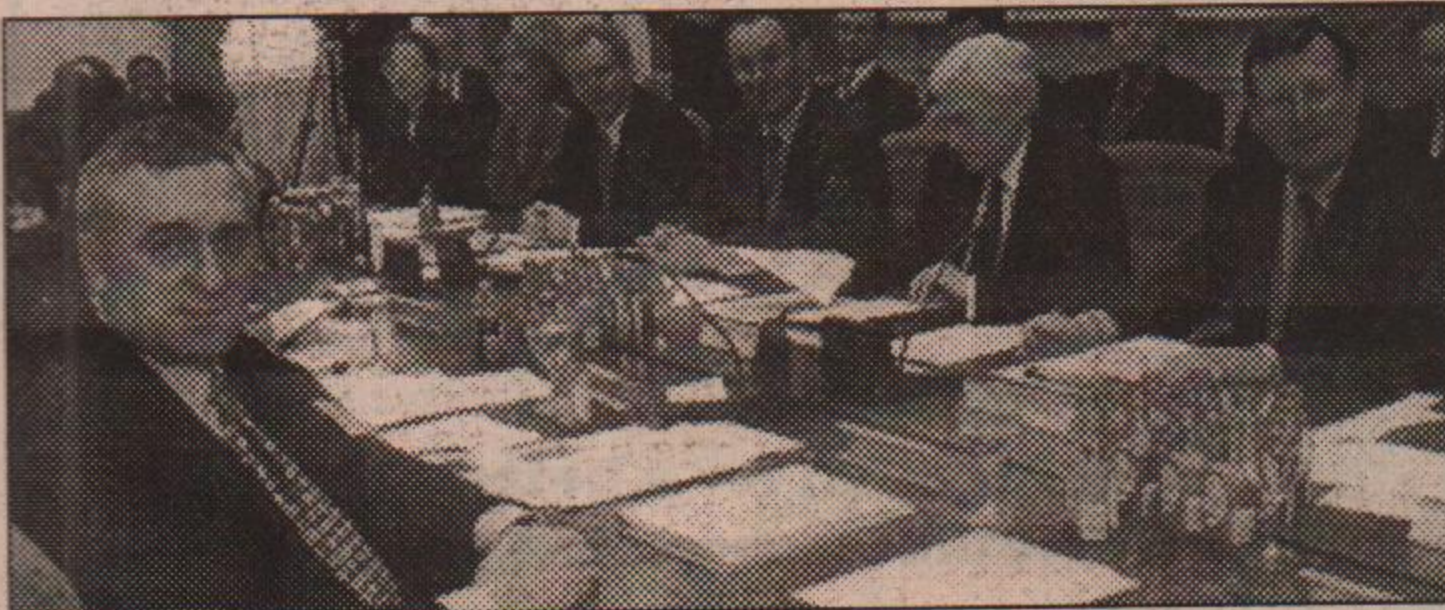
Ireland

# Decommissioning: a temporary crisis?

David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party, in agreeing to the Mitchell Review and the process that led to the setting up of the Northern Ireland Executive, set themselves a deadline of February for the IRA to begin decommissioning. If decommissioning has not begun by the time their leadership council meet on 12 February, then they threaten to withdraw from the executive. This deadline comes after the first report on the decommissioning process by General John de Chastelain, expected on 31 January. The Peace Agreement itself has set May as the date by which decommissioning should have been completed.

'I think that decommissioning has been achieved in Republican terms, in that the IRA are not using their weapons. That is decommissioning for Sinn Fein.' Sooner or later the IRA will have to begin a decommissioning process, but what is crucial is that ideologically the Republican Movement has already decommissioned.

While the question of IRA decommissioning has dominated bourgeois reports on Ireland, British imperialism has actually been increasing its military police in border areas. An *Phoblacht* reported on a document issued by Mandelson called 'Security - return to normality'. In it figures show that



All Ireland Council meets

The announcement by Peter Mandelson on 19 January that the British government was going to implement almost all of Chris Patten's recommendations on the reform of the RUC infuriated unionists. The changes, which will be introduced in autumn, will alter the name of the RUC to the 'Police of Northern Ireland'; do away with its crown and harp cap badge; reduce the number of police from 13,500 to 7,500; set up a new police board with two Sinn Fein members on it and attempt to recruit more Catholic members.

This perceived 'insult' to unionists means that IRA decommissioning assumes even greater political importance for Trimble at the Ulster Unionist Council meeting on 12 February. Trimble has said he will resign from the Executive if IRA decommissioning has not begun by then. Mandelson 'understands' Trimble's position, and there is talk of the British government suspending the Executive rather than have Trimble resign. The British government has also reneged on a commitment to allow Sinn Fein MPs Adams and McGuinness to use facilities in the House of Commons. According to the UUP, they will not be allowed to use the facilities until the IRA decommission.

However, amongst all the jockeying for position and hot air and bluster, all sides know there is no going back. Trimble, talking about his possible resignation from the Executive, said: 'Even if we do have a crisis, I think it will be a temporary one and we will be able to work our way through it in a satisfactory way.'

Sinn Fein chair Mitchel McLaughlin reiterated the organisation's commitment to the constitutional politics and commented on the question of decommissioning:

since the ceasefire of 1997, the level of British army and RUC members deployed in South Armagh has increased by 75%. Helicopter activity and stop and search are both at an all-time high. £79 million has been spent in the last year on strengthening and expanding military bases in the area.

The Royal Irish Regiment (the renamed Ulster Defence Regiment) a central part of this military machine, exposed its true sectarian nature when 70 members were pictured posing with an Orange banner from Drumcree. The banner's slogan read 'Drumcree - Here we stand, we can do no other, for religious and civil liberty'.

The RUC, waiting to be renamed, started the new millennium as it finished the last, viciously assaulting three young nationalists from Downpatrick in the early hours of 9 January. In Tyrone, the RUC has mounted a campaign of intimidation and blackmail in an attempt to recruit local people as informers.

In Derry on 11 January the nationalist owner of a fish and chip shop narrowly escaped death when he was attacked and knocked unconscious by a loyalist gang before they set the shop on fire.

These continued acts of repression and terror directed at the nationalist working class alongside the absorption of Sinn Fein into the state structures of the Six Counties are forming a political vacuum. One result of this is a conference called for February by a new organisation, the Anti-Partition League, which sees itself as an 'umbrella' group, uniting all those who are against Stormont, against partition and against British rule in Ireland. The conference is in Derry and its outcome will be of interest to all those opposed to British imperialism in Ireland. ■

# Britain's supermarkets - food imperialism

DAVID YAFFE

**Faced with the growing demands of British consumers for high-quality organic fruit, Sainsbury is planning to invade the Caribbean island of Grenada, to take over and convert most of its good quality agricultural land to organic production. It will do the same on four large farms in St Lucia. Sainsbury will not own or farm the land itself, but will have total control of all aspects of production and distribution.**

To sustain its profits in the increasingly cut-throat British food market, Sainsbury needs to ensure a ready supply of high-quality, 'healthily' grown bananas, passion fruit, coconuts and mangoes for its stores. Caribbean agriculture is in dire straits, unable to compete in a global farm economy increasingly dominated by imperialist multinationals and policed by imperialist institutions like the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO). Caribbean small farmers are being driven off the land and rural communities are destitute. Grenada, with 16% unemployment and 65% of its population dependent on farming, is in no position to resist this invasion by Sainsbury. This is the other side of the good quality, healthy, increasingly exotic and relatively cheap food supplied by highly profitable British supermarkets to middle class and, more recently, increasing numbers of working class consumers. This is a new era of food imperialism.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1970 and 1994, exports of foodstuffs from underdeveloped countries increased more than seven times from \$16bn to \$117bn, or 31% of globally traded food. About 30% of British food and drink imports come from underdeveloped countries. The terms and conditions of work on plantations and farms producing this food are often barbaric.

### Banana production

In 1995, 515 million bananas worth £300m were imported into Britain. 70% of banana sales were in supermarkets. In Colombia, violence against banana workers is widespread. Paramilitaries are employed by large landowners to rid the banana-producing areas of workers who try and organise to improve their conditions. 400 workers belonging to the main banana union Sintrainagro were killed in 1995 and a year later their deputy general secretary, Osvaldo Olivo, was murdered. That year own-brand mini-bananas from Colombia were being sold in both Sainsbury's and Waitrose.

65% of imported bananas came from the Caribbean region in 1995. They are produced on small family farms on hilly islands and have high production costs. Preferential treatment of imports of these bananas has now been ruled out by the WTO in the interests of 'free trade' and as a result of the

recent trade conflict between the US and EU. Faced with unequal competition from US multinationals producing in Latin America on large plantations, many of these farms, already under financial pressure, will not survive and the livelihood of the many workers

more in 1996 than in 1980. 26% of this comes from Peru. Most of the women (90% of the workforce) who work in the asparagus industry in Peru could never afford to buy it and have never tasted it. The average daily wage in 1996 was £2 - not enough to feed a family a meal.



Faced with unequal competition from US multinationals producing on large plantations in Latin America, many Caribbean banana producers, already under financial pressure, will not survive

and their families will be destroyed. In this way, decisions by the WTO open the door to multinational conglomerates like Sainsbury to invade the Caribbean to take over agricultural production.

### High profits, cheap food, and abused workers

Whether it is tea from Sri Lanka, asparagus from Peru, pineapples from the Dominican Republic, prawns from Thailand or coffee and grapes from Brazil the picture is the same.

185 million cups of tea a day are drunk in Britain. One of the main producers is Sri Lanka which exports 95% of its tea production, about 17% of this to the EU. Many tea workers live in low-quality housing in overcrowded rooms - it is not uncommon for a family of five or more to be squashed in a one-roomed house and ten houses to share one water pipe. There is an almost complete neglect of the health and education of the workers.

Britain is importing record amounts of asparagus, six times

Some of the women, engaged in demanding work, have become sick with tuberculosis. They get no medical help and are sent home, which means they don't get paid.

In addition to poor working conditions, starvation pay, inadequate housing and transport, workers in pineapple, coffee and grape production face lack of protection from large use of pesticides and other chemicals needed to meet the quality and quantity of such products for European markets. Headaches, nausea, skin sores and dizziness are widespread and medical facilities are inadequate or non-existent or must be paid for. The chemicals and feed in commercial prawn production lead to widespread social and environmental damage through salination of soil and water supplies and cause increasing hardship for the local farmers and fishing communities.

Whatever is happening on the ground, the supermarkets don't lose out. Typical are tea bags from Sri Lanka. While UK manufacturers' cost and profits

represent 45% of the price and supermarkets' mark-up 30%, plantation workers' wages are only 7%. A bunch of grapes from Brazil, costing £1.42 in a supermarket, is made up of 47p for the supermarket, 40p UK distribution costs and taxes, 25.5p to the plantation and 27p other Brazilian costs, with only 2.5p going to the workers in Brazil. This is the reality of food imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

### Competing for profits

British supermarkets are very profitable. Profit margins range from 5% to 7% compared to 1.5% in Germany. Four supermarkets control 64% of the £60bn grocery market. Tesco has the largest share 22%, followed by Asda with 16.53%, Sainsbury 16% (it was number one in 1996) and Safeway 9%. The most profitable supermarket was Tesco making a massive £881m pre-tax profit for the year ending February 1999. Sainsbury's pre-tax profit at £756m was barely higher than last year and lower than the £810m it made five years ago. It has announced job cuts of 1,100 workers in the face of what it considers poor results.

Sainsbury is under a lot of pressure to produce better results. The recent £6.7bn takeover of Asda by the US retail giant Wal-Mart will increase this pressure. Wal-Mart has threatened a price cutting war - when it took over a supermarket chain in Germany it cut the price of 50 best selling products by 30%. With the soaring demand for organic foods now even among lower income shoppers, it says it will reduce the price of some organic products to those of non-organic ones. This will increase the pressure on all other supermarkets where prices of organic foods are typically 20-30% higher. Producers will be forced to cut the costs of organic production as supermarkets fight to defend their profit margins.<sup>3</sup>

Sainsbury's invasion of Grenada now begins to make sense. It might have signed up for the ethical trading initiative, but, in reality, it will be the people of Grenada who will be made to pay for the lower prices of organic products demanded by a highly profitable and increasingly competitive British grocery market. High profits for the supermarkets, cheap fruits for the British consumer paid for by the toil of the producers in underdeveloped countries - this is food imperialism. ■

1 Sainsbury's invasion of Grenada was reported by John Vidal in 'Supermarket isle' *The Guardian* G2 19 January 2000.

2 This and much more information can be found in *The global supermarket* Christian Aid 1996. Christian Aid and other pressure groups used these facts to put pressure on supermarkets to adopt an ethical trading initiative to improve the social, environmental and working conditions of those producing such products. A later publication *Taking stock: how the supermarkets stack up on ethical trading* 1999 assesses their inadequate response.

3 Articles on supermarkets: *Electronic Telegraph* 3 June, 12 July, 8 August 1999, *Guardian Unlimited Archive* 23 January 2000.



Interview with Michael O'Brien

# Cardiff Newsagent 3 win justice

HELEN BURNES

In 1989, 18-year-old Darren Hall was questioned by South Wales police about the murder of a Cardiff newsagent. After three days chained to a radiator in a police cell without food and water, he confessed to a crime he had not committed, and named Ellis Sherwood, 19, and Michael O'Brien, 20, as his accomplices. Sherwood and O'Brien were held for 36 hours and lied about their whereabouts to cover up the fact that they had been stealing a car at the time of the murder.

It took over ten years for the 'Cardiff Newsagent Three' to clear their names. They were released from prison in December 1998, when the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) referred their case back to the Court of Appeal, and the court finally quashed their convictions on 25 January 2000.

Michael O'Brien told FRFI how the police fabricated evidence against them to back up Darren Hall's false confession, and how the trial became a foregone conclusion: 'I knew we had lost before we even came to trial. I watched it happen in front of my eyes.'

Once inside Michael O'Brien began to study law: 'I stood up for my rights and those of other prisoners. In Gartree I won 18 adjudications for other prisoners and five for myself.'

Michael was punished for his resistance: 'They beat me physically and they screwed me

up mentally. I got up in the mornings and wondered what they were going to do to me today. I was shipped over 300 miles to Frankland, so that my family couldn't visit. They tried to isolate me. They physically assaulted me in full view of visitors, including the BBC journalist Karen Voisey.'

When his father died, Michael was given compassionate leave to attend the funeral. Never missing a chance to demoralise those who fight back, the police turned out fully armed and in riot vans.

Support for the Cardiff Newsagent Three's campaign for justice grew and the breakthrough came when the BBC TV current affairs programme *Week-in, Week-out* covered the case, correlating evidence of their innocence.

Initially, journalist Karen Voisey was denied access to Michael. This led to a series of court cases to determine whether serving prisoners are allowed to be visited by journalists. Home Secretaries Michael Howard and Jack Straw both opposed this right, but the House of Lords finally ruled in the prisoners' favour last year.

Michael's advice to prisoners who are denied press visits is to instruct a solicitor to seek a judicial review of that decision. 'You can force the High Court to honour the House of Lords decision. It was quite a precise ruling. They can draw up a disclaimer to say you can't talk about named prison officers and security matters, but that's it. I



Ellis Sherwood, Michael O'Brien and Darren Hall outside the appeal court

heard that in Winston Silcott's case they brought in an assistant governor and a press officer from the Prison Service Headquarters. That is contrary to the House of Lords ruling.'

It took the CCRC three years to review the new evidence broadcast on the BBC programme in 1996. 'I had a lot of problems with the CCRC. There should have been an independent body investigating our case. But they got an outside police force to investigate. They still have a freemason working on the CCRC; he can't be independent. Unless your case is high profile in the media, the CCRC can get away with ignoring it.'

'Inside prisons in this country, there is systematic abuse of human rights and civil rights. Prison officers are like the police but they get away with it even more because they operate behind tightly closed doors. Just look at the number of deaths in custody. There should

be a public inquiry into how these prisons are murdering people.'

Michael's advice to other innocent prisoners is not to give up. 'You've got to fight all the way. No one else will do it for you. Study your case and know it inside out. Then study the law, find out what they convicted you for and which laws they broke.'

Michael himself hasn't ended his struggle for justice since being released. He has been travelling around Britain and Ireland, speaking at meetings and giving interviews. 'People need to hear about this stuff.'

He is particularly concerned about Martin O'Halloran, who has served 20 years, suffered several strokes and is now in a wheelchair. The CCRC is looking into his case, but unless they speed up, Martin may be another fatality of the British justice system.

SUSAN DAVIDSON

The 'All-London march against racist police, frame-up and murder' took place in north London on Saturday 22 January with a rally outside Tottenham police station. The protest, called by Movement for Justice, Police Crimes against Civilians (The Lindo Campaign) and Duwayne Brooks and supported by other campaigns against police brutality, was born out of anger at the continuation of the old pattern of police crimes.

The Metropolitan police seem licensed to kill and criminalise people with impunity. No trial by jury for us - but no trial at all for them! Almost a year has passed since the Macpherson Report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence found the Metropolitan police to be 'institutionally racist'; despite the promise of change, in practice it has been used as an excuse for doing nothing. It is as though the ruling class just shrugs its shoulders and accepts this as a fact of life. The week following the Report the Crown Prosecution Service announced that there would be no prosecution of the police officers involved in the violent deaths of Shiji Lapite in Hackney and Ibrahim Sey in Ilford, even though coroner's juries had returned findings of unlawful killing in both cases.

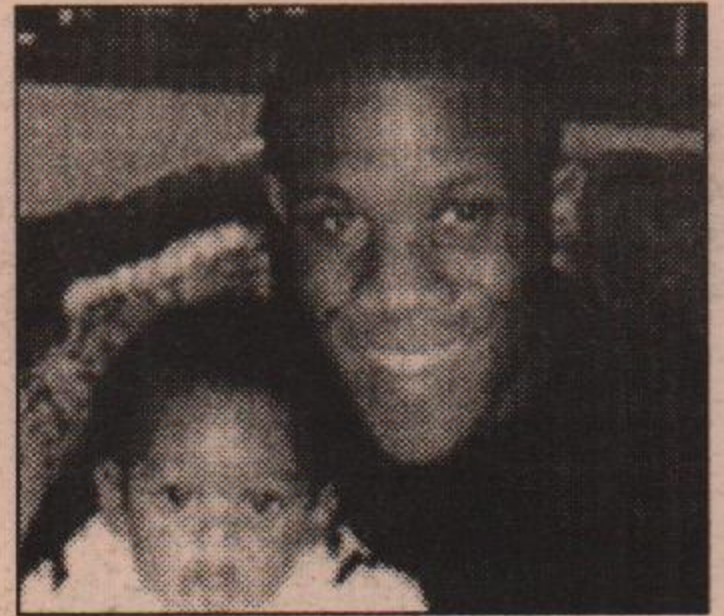
In January of this year, Metropolitan police stopped and questioned Stephen Lawrence's father about a robbery; they also stopped the Bishop of Stepney, John Sentamu, on suspicion of carrying drugs. Both are middle-aged men. Statistics show that police stop and search 10 times more black than white men in London. Recent propaganda by Paul Condon as Head of the Met suggests that the police are 'afraid' to stop and search ethnic minorities for fear of being seen as racists with the result of a new surge in street crime. This should act as a warning to us that stop and search will soon reach new levels and that official abuse and harassment on the streets will have the backing of Jack Straw, whose vicious legislation against the poor has already made him the most oppressive Home Secretary ever.

The Lay Advisory Task Force on Racism that was set up in response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry has already been shown as a fraud. The head of the Commission for Racial Equality and the so-called 'community leaders' who were supposed to 'restore confidence' in the Met Police have quit. Their complaint is that they were not listened to but in reality the Home Office is not interested in what is being said.

Last January, Roger Sylvester, a young black man, died at the hands of the Tottenham police. In August, Sarah Thomas, a young black woman died only hours after being arrested by an armed response unit in Hackney and, in September, Harry Stanley, a white man, was shot dead at 50 yards because the police in Hackney wrongly



Duwayne Brooks



Roger Sylvester

suspected he was armed.

During this period Duwayne Brooks, the friend who was with Stephen Lawrence when he was murdered, has been the victim of new attempts by the Met to criminalise him. He has been charged with carrying offensive weapons (in fact, his work tools). At the time of the Lawrence case, police mounted a campaign to discredit him as a witness, and Duwayne has taken out a civil case against 15 police officers, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Condon. Duwayne is not a passive victim of racism but an active fighter for justice and this has made him appear particularly threatening to the racists.

Meanwhile the persecution of Winston Silcott continues with the targeting of his friend Delroy Lindo and his family. Indeed, since Delroy first established the campaign to defend Winston Silcott against the charge of police murder in 1985, he has been harassed ruthlessly by the Tottenham police. Delroy and his wife Sonia have faced six prosecutions with a total of 15 charges in the last two years. Every single charge has been defeated in court.

The hounding of the Lindo family reached new heights after Winston Silcott received £50,000 damages from the Metropolitan Police. On 13 December 1999 their 15-year-old son was subject to a racist attack in the street. Delroy was charged with assault on the police when he stopped the attack on his son - while the police took no action against the attacker.

Now is the time to get involved and defend those under attack from the police and the state.

Demonstrate at the trial of Duwayne Brooks: Monday 7 February, 9.30am, Woolwich Crown Court, Belmarsh Road, SE28. Next to Belmarsh Prison, nearest rail stations Plumstead and Woolwich Arsenal.

Support Harry Stanley's brother who is standing for the Greater London Assembly elections as an independent candidate on an anti-police brutality platform in May 2000.

# Privatisation kills: Remember Simon Jones

HANNAH CALLER

Simon Jones, aged 24, was killed on 24 April 1998 at Shoreham Harbour on his first day at work on the docks. Employed by an agency, not given sufficient training for the job he was to do, Simon was tragically to be the victim of privatisation with its increase in the use of casual labour and the resultant drop in health and safety standards.

Simon died because a grab bucket was not replaced by a lifting hook. This takes as little as one hour to do. The grab bucket can be inadvertently closed or opened because the controls are so sensitive and therefore by law no worker is allowed within six metres of the grab bucket. Accidental lever engagement caused Simon's death. In order to save money, there was a cynical disregard for human safety.

Failure to prosecute will allow similar workplace situations to go unchallenged. However, a successful prosecution would open the floodgates to further cases. The government wants to avoid this and the family and friends of Simon Jones know only too well the upward



struggle they face to ensure that justice is done. As well as political, the struggle unfortunately is also financial. To those most at risk, justice is most inaccessible. Legal aid under the Labour government has become even harder to qualify for and, from 1 April this year, will be stopped in personal injury cases. Simon's family and friends need money to continue to fight.

The date for the second substantive hearing in the case of Simon Jones is at the High Court, Strand, London WC2 on 16 March at 10am. For the future of workplace safety and working class lives, be there to support the struggle for justice and against casualisation and privatisation. Contributions and fundraising for the Simon Jones Legal Fund is vital and urgent. For details contact Ann Jones via FRFI.

# Victory for asylum-seeker

On 15 December the High Court ruled in favour of asylum-seeker John Quaquah, who had sought a judicial review of the decision to deport him. John was one of the 'Campsfield 9', whose farcical trial collapsed in June 1998 when it became clear that the Group 4 guards giving evidence about a revolt at the privately-run Campsfield House Immigration Detention Centre, were repeatedly lying to the court about what had happened.

Following his acquittal, John Quaquah began civil proceedings against Group 4 and the Home Office; however the Home Office served him with a deportation order, maintaining he could continue his civil action from Ghana. They were no

doubt aware that in reality this would be virtually impossible, and hoped to save themselves from having the embarrassing debacle of the Campsfield trial brought up yet again.

The High Court judge accepted that removing a would-be litigant to another continent was not compatible with Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the new rules on Civil Procedures, both of which require an 'equality of arms' between parties.

Hopefully, the civil case which John Quaquah now brings will dish as much dirt as possible both on Campsfield House itself and on the Home Office's contract with Group 4 to run it and other private prisons and immigration detention centres.



# Judicial murder in the United States

NICKI JAMESON

Between 1982, when the state of Texas resumed the use of the death penalty, and 1995, when George W Bush became state governor, 104 people were judicially murdered in Texas. This was the highest figure for any state and equalled approximately one third of all US executions since the death penalty was reintroduced by the Supreme Court in 1976. Bush's predecessor, Ann Richards, a Democrat, never issued a pardon and supported legislation to 'speed up' the process. Since Bush became governor, he has approved 116 executions, giving him the distinction of being the most murderous US governor of the 20th century. He is now campaigning for the Republican nomination for the next presidential election.

Although Bush and Texas are the most virulent examples of how the vicious, supremacist culture which drives the US dispenses 'justice' to the poor and the mentally ill in its own backyard, the same ideology exists across the US and all the main presidential hopefuls from both parties embrace it fervently. The appropriately named Al Gore boasts of his and Clinton's suc-

cess in 'expanding' the use of the death penalty and promises yet more expansion if elected. This presumably means that a far greater range of crimes will become punishable by the death sentence and that US criminal law will become reminiscent of 18th century England, where the range of capital crimes was so great that it was popularly known as the Bloody Code.

Like Texas, the state of Indiana uses lethal injection as its murder weapon of choice. Indiana death row prisoner Zola Agona Azania has sent FRFI a copy of the 'Protocol for lethal injection in Indiana'. This explains graphically that the injection consists of five separate syringes: the first containing sodium pentothal; the second, a saline solution to insure that the different drugs don't mix and cause a clogging effect; the third, pancuronium bromide, a muscle relaxer; the fourth, saline solution again; and the fifth syringe contains potassium chloride, a toxic drug which stops the heart.

With an eye to the macabre, executions are to take place 'between 12 midnight and 1am local time, and no later than the hour before sunrise on a day fixed by the sentencing court'. The prisoner is strapped to 'the

death gurney', after which the technicians 'will insert an angiocath into each arm, attach the necessary tubing and start an IV [drip] consisting of a saline solution. The Execution Order will then be read to the condemned offender by an Assistant Superintendent or his designee. Once this is completed, the Superintendent or designee will ask the condemned offender if he has any last statements or comments. Once the "Proceed" command is given...the injection procedure will continue until the chemicals, all five syringes, have been injected into the offender and the person is presumed dead...If the offender's heart has not stopped...the Superintendent or designee shall order the injection process to be repeated.'

US polls claim that three out of four citizens support the use of the death penalty. But Zola Agona Azania's letter explains that the US death penalty is not there to make them feel more secure as they walk the streets: 'The death penalty is not applied because the majority of people want it. It is not there to prevent crime but to instil terror in the masses as a whole. Rising crime and the fear of being a victim of crime are excuses for the death penalty.'

'The death penalty was pressed against me because, among other things, I declared my conscious citizenship and allegiance to the Republic of New Afrika in court. I was captured in August 1981 for armed bank expropriation and killing a white policeman in Gary, Indiana. On 25 May 1982 I was sentenced to death. My direct appeal was rejected in 1984. The Supreme Court of Indiana subsequently overturned the death sentence in 1993 but allowed the prosecution to put it on me again in 1996. I am still appealing the state government's ruling.'

'International standards of human rights are not recognised in the United States and the use of the death penalty to repress liberation movements is state-sanctioned terrorism. Revolutionaries are enemies, a threat to the 'security' of the elite, and must be treated accordingly. US capital punishment is an instrument of class warfare, organised and designed to permit an elite, local and multinational, to operate without any constraint from democratic human rights processes.'

For further information on Zola's case please contact: Zola's Freedom Campaign, c/o Crossroad Support Network, 3420 West 63rd Street, Chicago, Illinois 60629, USA or write to him direct: Zola Agona Azania - #4969, Indiana State Prison, PO Box 41, Michigan City, Indiana 46361-0041, USA. ■

# Turkey: Ocalan spared

TREVOR RAYNE

On 11 December the European Union (EU) agreed to make Turkey a formal candidate for membership. A month later the Turkish government announced that it would abide by the European Court of Human Rights ruling that captured Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) President Abdullah Ocalan would not be hanged. Ocalan remains a hostage of the Turkish state, which has threatened to hang him if the PKK continue to fight. The PKK Central Committee welcomed the decision: 'this decision is a starting point in achieving the reality of a Turkey constantly striving for the goal of a Democratic Republic'.

The USA and EU seized on the opportunity of Ocalan's capture last February and the subsequent political strengthening of the Turkish state to reinforce their NATO asset. Greece provided aid after the August earthquake and subsequently agreed to supply Turkey with electricity under Exxon management. BP-Amoco has apparently finally agreed a deal on an oil pipeline from Baku on the Caspian Sea to Ceyhan on Turkey's Mediterranean coast. The British Labour government has agreed to support Balfour Beatty building a dam across the

Tigris in Kurdish areas in Turkey. These very practical demonstrations of 'goodwill' helped The Turkish government find some 'leniency' for Ocalan.

However, the imperialists are not running a charitable campaign. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Turkish state have agreed their seventeenth structural reform programme for Turkey's economy, the others having gone unimplemented. Turkey's economy shrank 4% in 1999. Government debt interest payments rose from 40% to 69% of government revenues last year. The IMF insists on monetary and fiscal changes, including raising the pension age and imposing wage controls in a country with 65% inflation. 49 of 74 state-owned businesses are to be privatised. Income from privatisation is scheduled to total \$3.2 billion this year. The Turkish working class can expect to suffer from the successes of the Turkish state over the PKK and Kurds.

Meanwhile, Leyla Zana and Hatip Dicle, Kurdish MPs in Turkey, remain in prison, Turkish army operations continue in Kurdish areas, Kurdish language, culture and political organisations continue to be repressed, the State of Emergency remains in force, brutality, torture and disappearances continue against Kurdish and Turkish workers. ■

# AOL/Time Warner merger: Monopoly online

ANTHONY BIDGOOD

The recent 'merger' of the world's largest Internet Service Provider (ISP) America On Line (AOL) with the media-entertainment company Time Warner made headline news not only because of the vast sums involved, \$350 billion, but also because AOL would be the senior partner. In the advanced capitalist countries we are now being bombarded with tales of the 'new economy' based on 'the information revolution' of which the Internet is an integral part.

But what is the Internet? Where did it come from? It began as a military requirement to protect lines of communication against enemy attack. The military wanted a system that would have 'no obvious central command and control point, so that all surviving points would be able to re-establish contact in the event of an attack on any one point'.<sup>1</sup> This concept, known as 'packet switching', was combined with computer research in the United States. Much of this research was funded by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) of the US Department of Defence. In 1969 the first experimental network - the ARPANET - linking computers at four different sites (nodes) was set up in the western United States. Similar networks were also set up in Britain and France. The ARPANET itself grew to 15 sites by April 1971, 35 sites by January 1973, 111 sites by 1977 and 4,000 sites by 1983. It became the backbone of the emerging Internet. In

October 1972 representatives from several different countries proposed an international interconnection of networks and it is from this that the Internet emerged.

At present to get onto the Internet a user needs a personal computer, a telephone line and an ISP account. These in turn depend on first, the existence of an adequate telecommunications structure, and second, on the individual's ability to afford the money and time to use the service. This already rules out the vast proportion of the world's population, given that one half of the world's population has never made a telephone call let alone got access to a PC.



Bill Gates: in the business of making money

The growth of the Internet is part of the communications-computing convergence, 'the information revolution', which for the majority currently using the Internet means the transmission of greater amounts of data, from email to music and film at increasing speeds along wires, cables and via satellites. There are potentially many socially useful purposes for such rapid communications - for instance, in making preliminary medical diagnoses in remote areas, or telemedicine. However developments in information and communications technologies are

based on potential profits for capitalism, not on social use. What is alarming bourgeois commentators is that many of the 'new economy' companies are being 'valued' by investors at levels that bear no relation to possible future profits. They fear that the bursting of this speculative 'bubble' will cause serious problems for the capitalist system. Yet these investments are made because of the enormous amounts of money seeking profitable outlets.<sup>2</sup> Much of this comes from the large and affluent middle classes in the imperialist states through their various pension, superannuation and mutual funds. The intense interest in the 'new economy' has much more to do with capital investment than any interest in technological developments.

'General Motors is not in the business of making cars, it is in the business of making money.' (General Motors chairman, 1928)

The 'merger' of AOL-Time Warner is part of this 'business of making money' and illustrates the importance of share 'value' to capitalism. Despite being much larger than AOL in terms of revenue (\$26.8 billion) and numbers of employees (70,000 to 12,100), Time Warner nevertheless will become the 'junior' partner in the 'merged' company simply because AOL's share market 'value' is larger (\$164 billion compared to \$97 billion). Besides the hugely speculative nature of Internet investment and the talk of new 'dynamic' entrepreneurs, the tendency for capital to concentrate is as pro-



Case and Levin celebrating the AOL-Time Warner Merger

found in the 'new economy' as in the 'old economy'. The near monopoly of Microsoft is well known, but even in a small imperialist country like Australia concentration of the 'new economy' proceeds apace. With approximately 2.3 million Internet users in a country of 19 million people, Australia has over 700 ISPs yet six ISPs have half of these users and only 100 ISPs have more than a 100 subscribers. Furthermore, the largest ISP, Telstra, is attempting to take over the second largest ISP. Similarly in the USA AOL has twice as many paying subscribers as the next six largest Internet companies together.

Hence the 'new economy' companies seeking to exploit the Internet are part and parcel of the frenetic attempt by capitalism to find new profitable outlets for investment. Their tendency towards monopoly is no different from any other sector of the capitalist economy. But the fact that they are the focus of so much speculative interest means that they are contributing to the instability of the system as a whole. ■

1 Michael and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, p.116.

2 See FRFI 145, pp 8/9 and FRFI 150, pp 8/9 for explanatory accounts.

# Turkish political prisoner on hunger-strike in German prison

Turkish political prisoner Ilhan Yelkuvan is currently on hunger-strike in protest against the inhuman conditions he is being held under in a German prison.

He was arrested in early 1999 and charged with membership of an illegal organisation (the DHKC) and conspiracy to cause acts of violence. The second charge stemmed from a fatal attack on a member of the Grey Wolves, a Turkish fascist organisation with an active membership in Germany. Yelkuvan was accused of having ordered the attack and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The German government fears Yelkuvan's influence on other Turkish-speaking prisoners, and is keeping him in solitary confinement within the psychiatric wing of Hamburg prison. He is not allowed to speak to other prisoners, even when on exercise; his mail is intercepted, his cell searched daily and his legal papers confiscated. Warders have ripped up his clothing and continually bang a gong outside his cell.

Faced with this harassment, Yelkuvan began a hunger-strike on 30 November, announcing on 13 January that he would pursue this to the death if necessary, rather than accept his treatment.

Ilhan Yelkuvan's demand is simple - that he is removed from isolation and allowed to associate with other Turkish-speaking prisoners. After he had been on hunger-strike for over 50 days, the government offered

to move him to another prison, where he could associate with other prisoners; however the prison in question has no Turkish-speaking prisoners and Yelkuvan speaks no German. He consequently declined the offer and continued with his protest.

Thirteen other prisoners in Hamburg, Berlin and Frankfurt gaols have been on hunger-strike for varying periods in solidarity with him. One, Ihsan Ersoy, has been force-fed and assaulted by prison warders, who broke his arm. DHKC supporters have also staged solidarity hunger-strikes in Belgium, France and Britain, and in Turkey itself 1,000 DHKC prisoners went on hunger-strike for three days in January. They were supported by political prisoners from at least three other organisations.

In London DHKC activists and their supporters have picketed the German Embassy and Lufthansa and occupied both the Goethe Institut and the office of Amnesty International. Amnesty had told them that hunger-strikers were outside its terms of reference, but following the occupation agreed to consider writing to the German government to protest at Yelkuvan's solitary confinement.

Readers are asked to fax letters of complaint about the treatment of Ilhan Yelkuvan to the German Ministry of Internal Affairs (0049 49 1888 6812926) or the Ministry of Justice (0049 1888 5824525). Information on activity in London can be obtained from dhkc@dircon.co.uk

The Labour government and other apologists for imperialism never cease to tell us that education is the key to ending poverty. Their 'vision' for globalising prosperity is, of course, nothing more than a smokescreen for intensifying capitalist exploitation. The reality is that the vast majority of the world's people remain both poor and uneducated.

**Illiteracy – the lot of the world's poor**

Over 125 million children worldwide do not have access even to the most rudimentary education. Another 150 million will drop out before completing four years at primary school. In sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 60% of children have any education at all, and only one in four has access to secondary schooling. In South Asia, which includes India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, around 70% of children enrol in school, but almost half of these will leave before completing their primary education. There are at least 880 million illiterate adults throughout the world, including a quarter of all adults in the underdeveloped nations.

It is, of course, always the poorest sections of the population that suffer most. Inability to meet school costs, lack of transport, poorer health and greater reliance on income from their children's work all contribute to their greater educational deprivation. In India, for example, where elementary education costs the equivalent of 30-40 days' pay for a rural labourer, there is a 25% difference in the enrolment rates between the poorest and richest fifths of the population. In Pakistan the difference is even greater. At least 250 million children in underdeveloped countries aged between five and 14 have to work; about half of them full-time and many in Western multinational sweatshops.

**Capitalist crisis brings educational collapse**

It is not only in the poorest countries, however, that educational development is stagnant or in decline. A recent report\* states that in the new capitalist countries of Russia and Eastern Europe:

'the education systems of the region are crumbling in the face of economic stagnation, rising inequality and declining state provision...Half a million Russian children aged between six and ten are now missing from each grade in the school system...One in five of Georgia's schools has been classified unsafe and unfit for occupation...In most of the former Soviet Republics, teachers' salaries are now below the poverty line'.

Not so long ago, education in the 'tiger' economies of East Asia was being praised by Blair, Blunkett and co as the perfect model to be emulated in British schools. Now we don't hear anything about them from the Labour government. Not surprising, as following the economic crisis in that region, the numbers of children dropping out of school in Indonesia doubled to nearly three million and, in Thailand, 300,000 children dropped out in 1998 when over a third of poor households fell into debt, partly due to rising education costs.

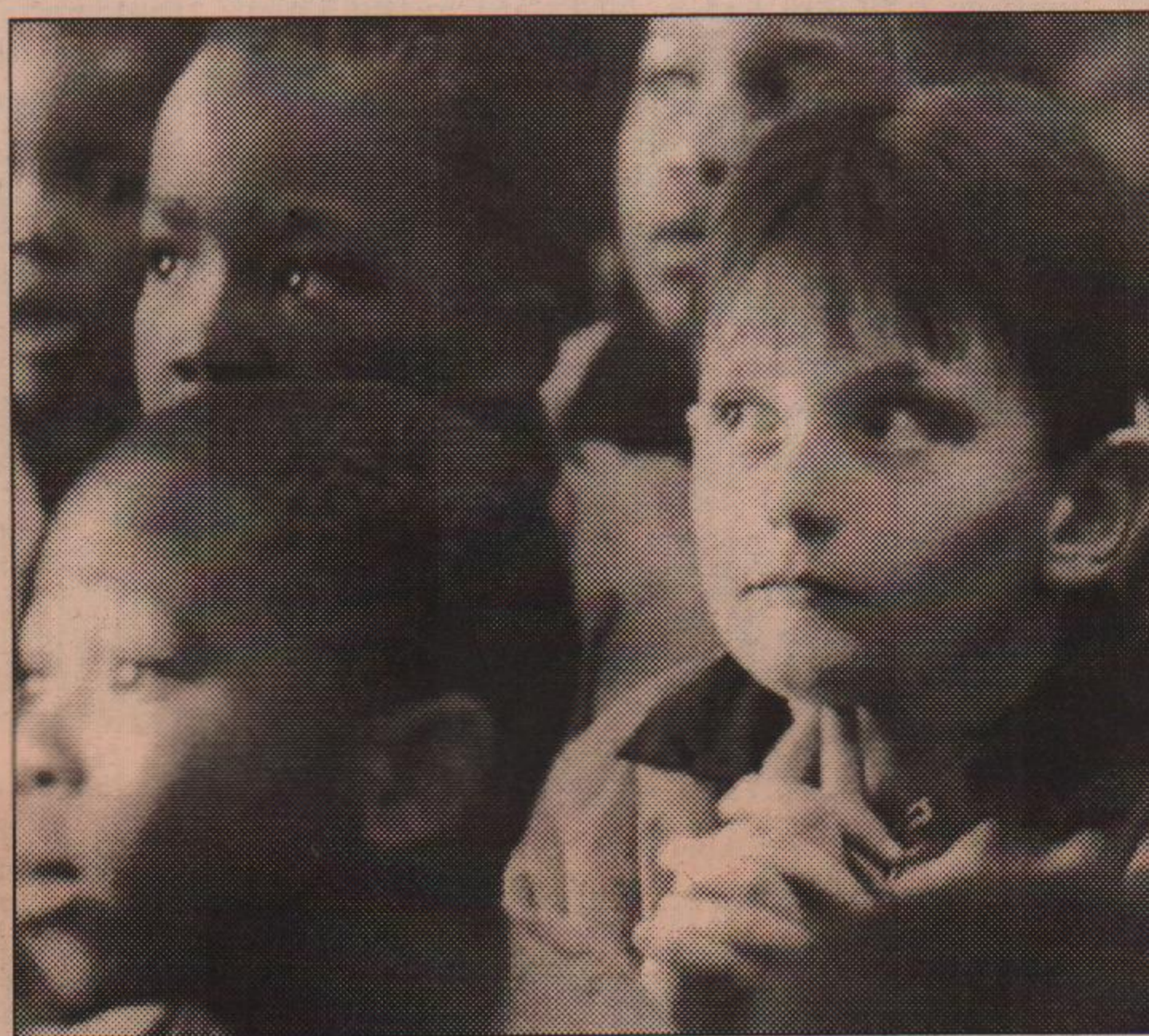
Even in the rich countries themselves, where just 21% of the world's population consume 84% of the world's educational resources, capitalism cannot provide a decent education for everyone. As we have often pointed out in FRFI, educational inequalities in Britain are directly related to the gulf between rich and poor. Exam pass rates, access to further education and the proportion of so-called 'failing schools', for example, are all closely corre-

lated with levels of poverty. In the United States, a Department of Education report in 1997 admitted that schools in poor areas were underfinanced, under-equipped and provided with the worst-trained teachers. Youngsters from the poorest 20% of the population were 11 times more likely to drop out of high school than those from the wealthiest 20%; twice as likely to have to repeat a grade and three times more likely to be expelled.

**Capitalist grand plans fail**

There have been many 'grand plans' to tackle these problems of world education but they have barely managed to scratch

the surface. The World Conference on Education at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990, convened by the World Bank and the major United Nations agencies and attended by 155 governments, set the year 2000 as the target date for universal access to and completion of primary education. Progress was so slow that subsequent 'grand plans' in the mid-1990s moved the goalposts to the year 2015. It has



the problem in perspective. At the time of the revolution in Cuba, over half a million children were not in school and those who were in school received an average of just three years' education. Within one year, an additional 300,000 children had been enrolled, and within five years universal primary education had been achieved. By the mid 1970s two-thirds of the population were

**Utopian dream or socialist revolution?**

Are even these modest targets, then, unachievable? Is it utopian to think we could ever provide a decent education for everyone in the world? The example of socialist Cuba puts

receiving at least six years of education. Every child in Cuba now has the opportunity of education from nursery through to secondary school, of a quality second to none, and one in five Cubans has some form of higher education. Adult illiteracy in Cuba was eradicated within one year following the revolution.

What is the secret of Cuba's success? It is certainly not that the Cuban government has had vast resources to pour into education. At the time of the great literacy campaign the only available stocks of paper were those abandoned by the Yellow Pages Company when it fled the island. The literacy tutors, for the most part, were barely-trained volunteers.

Cuba's success was achieved because it revolutionised the underlying economic and social structures that had maintained the previous regime of ignorance; because Cuba took an independent path and resisted the ferocious attempts of US imperialism to reimpose its domination and exploitation of the island; because the Cubans built a socialist system planned for the needs of the people.

The Cuban literacy campaign was waged because the government regarded literacy as a matter of human dignity and the campaign itself as a means of forging new social relations between the poor and illiterate rural workers and the young urban 'alfabeticos' who volunteered to live and work among them. Like so many other 'grand plan' literacy campaigns in underdeveloped countries, the Cuban campaign would have had no lasting effect, however, if the Cuban government had not put in place other revolutionary measures such as agrarian reform, the nationalisation of industry and health care programmes which convinced the people that a transformation of their lives was underway, so

that literacy and learning would have some meaning and purpose for them.

Of course, Cuba later had considerable assistance from the Soviet Union, an option no longer available to underdeveloped countries, but, even throughout the last ten years of the Special Period, following the demise of the Soviet Union, while under severe economic difficulties, Cuba has maintained and indeed further developed the education system. During this time Cuba has not closed a single school; it retains more teachers per head of population than any other country in the world and continues to provide educational assistance to other poor countries.

This is not to claim that the Cubans have managed to do all they would wish. A socialist system of education cannot be complete under such conditions of imperialist hostility as faced by Cuba. However, what they have achieved is streets ahead of anything that the international 'grand plans' could even dream of.

**Education for all only under socialism**

The lessons are clear. There can be no wide-ranging and consolidated educational progress for the vast majority of the world's people, including the poorest sections of the working class in the imperialist countries, under a system dominated by the lust for profit. In general, and over the long term, capitalism has no material reason to develop education except for the purposes of work training and social control. Only when new priorities of social justice, equality and an end to alienating labour prevail will universal access to knowledge and understanding be achieved. The struggle for a liberating education cannot be separated from the fight against imperialism and the struggle to build socialism.

Jim Craven

\* Education now – break the cycle of poverty, Oxfam Publications 1999, from which most of the statistics in this article are taken.

**Education Notes**

**The league of poverty**

Well-paid sociologists and academics now agree with common sense experience that 'successful' schools are those with the best facilities and resources and the richest kids. This is not to insult the poor. It is simply a reminder that 'education' is not separate from the rest of life. A life free from want and anxiety and full of visits, holidays, books, computers and extra tuition is what makes middle-class children succeed. Every year since they were first published the League Tables of exam results show an increase in the differences between poor working class schools and middle class schools. The pupils who leave school with few or no qualifications are either in local authority care, are poor or refugees.

**Specialist schools**

New Labour does not want to backtrack on the annual public 'naming and shaming' of the poorest children's schools in the League Tables. But it feels the

need to fudge the real picture of wealth and poverty by introducing new categories of schools. Up to one in four comprehensive schools will be turned into 'specialist' schools, in technology, languages, sport or the creative arts. To achieve this new status each school must raise £50,000 from business sponsorship in order to receive £100,000 capital grant and £120 extra for each pupil a year for at least four years. The League Tables will now show results from private schools, grammar schools, grant-maintained, specialist schools, local comprehensive schools and special schools side by side and in competition with each other.

**How to improve a school – a step-by-step guide**

1. As a representative from the Campaign for State Education said, 'If giving one in four schools more means they get better results, surely it would be a good idea to give all of them more'. Adequate school funding would at least begin to compen-

sate for other deprivations in a child's life.

2. Ted Wragg, Professor of Education at Exeter University explained that any school could improve. All it had to do was to become selective and get rid of any children with learning difficulties. The only problem, obviously, is where will this estimated 25% of children go? And which schools will be obliged by law to educate such pupils? The answer, of course, is the local comprehensive school.

**Crime reduction on the timetable**

While New Labour is not prepared to finance the state education system with a universal and decent level of provision it is making money available for programmes of social control. A large part of Blair's 'Social Exclusion Unit' is concerned with containing the poor. Sums of cash are available for this purpose. The police have located 'crime hot spots' around the country – no, not in the City of London, but in working class



Any school can improve. All it has to do is become selective and get rid of any children with learning difficulties.

areas where there is a lot of petty youth crime. Schools in such areas are to get 'Behaviour Management' teams coming into schools to monitor the behaviour of disaffected pupils. As a result teachers in some schools will find themselves working alongside, Young Offender Teams, and other agents of the Home Office. There is money for anything except what parents buy in the private sector, smaller classes and lots of support.

**Excellence in the Cities – oh yes!**

While 'deviant' troublemakers will be monitored by adults hired from one pot of money, 'Gifted and Talented' pupils will be given extra help by the Excellence in the Cities initiative. This three-year project in 24 inner city authorities is designed to improve the education of 'a group whose needs have in the past been underestimated and unmet' as New Labour's Minister for Excellence in

Education, Michael Barber puts it (well he would, wouldn't he). Teachers prepared to offer additional activities outside of the school day, like homework clubs, will be paid £30 per hour for providing extra help. On offer is extra tuition for a small section of the working class who are expected to perform well in exams.

**Initiatives, projects, programmes and policies**

New Labour has been busy with the state education system since it came into government. Like a relentless shredding machine, it has carved up the comprehensive schooling system and sold off sections to the highest bidder. The next issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* will look more closely into what it means to make profits from education.

Susan Davidson

# Hoopla in Seattle



Despite the US authorities conspiring to prevent Fidel Castro's attendance, there were some fine scenes at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) summit in Seattle in November/December 1999. Protesters taking to the streets, famous brand names boarded up, US trade representative Charlene Barshevsy booed and jeered by Third World delegates in the hall. European Union (EU) trade commissioner Pascal Lamy blamed the USA for the collapse of the talks, the Caribbean Community's chief trade negotiator Sir Shridath Ramphal said the Caribbean and other Third World nations 'have good reasons to be happy with the final outcome'. *The Financial Times* pronounced 'Disaster in Seattle'. President Clinton said the protests were 'a rather interesting hoopla', but deployed the Special Forces division to suppress the demonstrators.

Dissent on the streets and dissent in the halls, the two combined to signal a growing challenge to neo-liberal globalisation/imperialism. The major powers did not get their way because they are divided and because representatives of the vast majority of humanity in the poor nations were present and they did not like the deal on offer.

The underdeveloped countries were promised access to North American and European markets for their agricultural products, textiles etc. In exchange they would co-operate on intellectual property rights, open up to multinational investments and services. Current disputes over multinational corporation patents on indigenous crops in India and HIV treatments in South Africa express disillusion in the underdeveloped countries as they continue to face protectionist barriers in North America and Europe.

The USA, EU and Japan have had a series of trade disputes over bananas, hormone-treated beef, automobiles, genetically modified food and extra-territorial legislation, as used by the USA against Cuba. Underlying these disputes is a \$325 billion a year US trade deficit, including a deficit with the EU of \$30 billion, with Japan of over \$50 billion and of over \$40 billion with China. This trade imbalance takes place in a context of over-capacity relative to

what can be produced sufficiently profitably for continued capitalist accumulation. Trade wars threaten in over-crowded markets.

Commentators on Seattle wrote of the 'rise of a new international civil society'. *The Economist* 11 December 1999 said, 'Citizens groups are increasingly powerful at the corporate, national and international level.' It charted the increase in international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from 6,000 in 1990 to 29,000 today. NGO aid to the Third World exceeds that of the United Nations. NGOs claim successes such as the controls on greenhouse gases proposed at the 1992 Rio summit, landmine bans, the Jubilee 2000 campaign for foreign debt relief, campaigns against road building schemes, derailing the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, embarrassing Shell over the Brent Spar oil rig and its abuse of the Nigerian Ogoni people, curbing Monsanto's trade in 'terminator' seeds and delaying its sale of genetically modified foods in Europe. Nike and McDonald's also faced embarrassing campaigns.

*The Economist* cites a RAND study describing Internet-mobilised 'NGO swarms' descending on a target and complaining that the 'swarm' has no 'central leadership or command structure; it is multi-headed, impossible to decapitate.' What is its

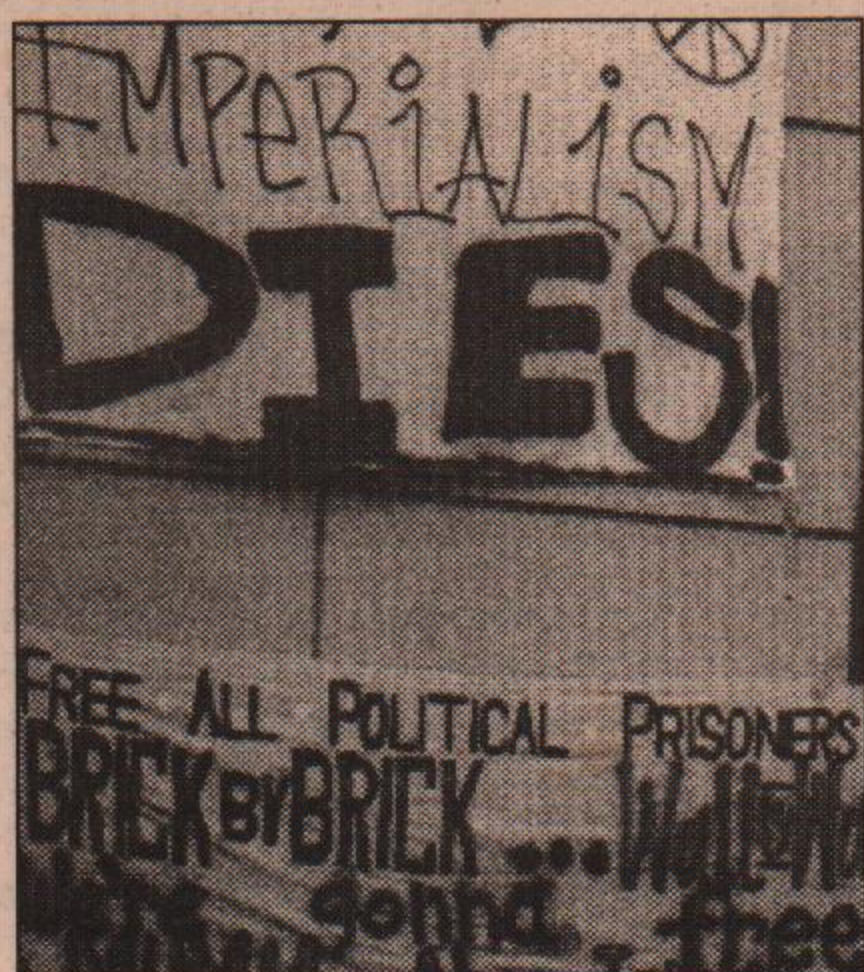
strength may be its weakness. NGOs serve particular interests drawn from different classes. They may pay full time staff rates comparable to the private sector; some are multi-million pound businesses receiving government grants, a quarter of Oxfam's income comes from the British government. Many people in Seattle, as in the City of London on 18 June 1999, are not members of any group. They shared an understanding of the effects of neo-liberal globalisation, they come together, and then like the 'swarm' they disperse. Imperialism may be stung, but it lives to fight on the following day.

*The Economist* quotes the case of the World Bank; 'NGOs are surprisingly quiet about the World Bank'. They were co-opted, 'More than 70 NGO specialists work in the Bank's field offices. More than half of World Bank projects last year involved NGOs... From environmental policy to debt relief, NGOs are at the centre of World Bank policy'. If you can't beat them get them on the payroll. Fifteen NGOs were invited to put their case to World Economic Forum in Davos in January. Capitalism is supremely adaptable as long as there is money in it. Multinational corporations are investing in consultants and human rights specialists. Shell, BP and United Technologies have joined the Business Environmental Leadership Council, lobbying for

reduced carbon emissions and improved energy efficiency. BP-Amoco is the world's biggest producer of solar energy. United Technologies will produce helicopter gunships using 25% less energy and water per unit sold. Does any of this make them any the less monopolistic and exploitative, any the more democratically accountable? No, they are just more efficient at wielding economic and political power.

If they have to, multinationals will by-pass the World Trade Organisation to get their way. They will arrange different deals between states that suit their interests. Where co-option and smiling cosmetics fail there will be the Special Forces, gas and bullets. Multinational capital cannot afford to be squeamish about human rights: those who continue to protest will be criminalised, branded terrorists and have the full repressive weight of the state directed at them.

For those who want to save the planet George Monbiot in *The Guardian* pointed to a vital Seattle lesson, 'Activists have realised that they can achieve far more through confrontation with power than through co-operation.' There are other lessons; unity of those in the oppressor nations against imperialism with those in oppressed nations fighting the same enemy is the way forward. And, like the swarm, organise. Trevor Rayne



## EYE WITNESS: THE BATTLE IN SEATTLE

'Ain't no power, like the power of the people, 'cos the power of the people, don't stop!' Everyone, everywhere, Seattle 1999.

You could hardly get more heart of the beast. A United States city at the end of the century that made the US the world's only superpower. Seattle, home of Boeing and Microsoft, was an eminently suitable city for the world's bigwigs to gather for the WTO's last meeting of this century, to plan the restructuring of world capitalism for however much of the next century the Earth will be able to handle it. And a fine place for tens of thousands to gather and tell them where to get off. JOE MAKEPEACE reports.

It started with a cocktail party. WTO delegates gathered on Monday night surrounded by a human chain of thousands who had marched from a local church to demand the dropping of the Third World debt. It is unknown whether Clare Short, one of the British delegation, was there sipping Martinis and wrestling with what's left of her conscience.

Normally, a demonstration like that would have seemed quite a big deal. But this was Seattle 1999 and the action was just the beginning. The next day, N30, was to be the first day of the WTO proper - according to the WTO. The people thought different. Slowly gathering before dawn on that rainy Seattle morning, the people turned up and the people shut the whole thing down.

For months, demonstrators had been organising and training for this day, putting great emphasis on ensuring that the demonstration was non-

violent. Unfortunately, someone forgot to tell the Seattle police. As demonstrators blocked every road into the Convention Centre they were met with hundreds of Darth Vader look-a-likes tooled up with teargas, pepper spray, three foot sticks, quickcuffs, rubber and plastic bullets, percussion grenades - and tanks unironically called 'peacekeepers'.

The protesters had a simple aim - to stop the WTO meeting by preventing delegates getting in. They did just that. As frustrated delegates hung around outside, cops fired tear gas into the protesters and moved in with batons and plastic bullets to clear the road. The cops shot and gassed and batoned; the people danced and chanted and stayed their ground. The people won.

Everyone had their story of police brutality that day: the environmentalist from Minnesota who got his eyes held open and pepper spray shot into them; the local black councillor hauled from his car and assaulted by police; the protester caught on network television with his hands above his head being batoned to the ground and shot at point blank range with a plastic bullet. It was remarkable just how little violence there was from protesters faced with this militarised police operation.

Throughout Tuesday the marches just kept coming. An anti-imperialist conference with communists from Asia, South America and Cuba arrived from the south; masked-up anarchists took out McDonalds, GAP and other targeted companies' windows; a 40,000-strong labour march arrived from the north and went back again for a rally. It was significant that every government spokesperson from the Seattle mayor to President Clinton

went out of their way to play down any connection between the 'legitimate' labour movement march and the 'unlawful' actions of others. You could almost smell the fear in their voices. The reality was mixed - union leaders were mainly concerned with demanding a 'seat at the table' for themselves, but some steelworkers and other union members did take to the streets and the docks along the US west coast did shut for a day. Significantly, when a section of a dockside march organised by the steelworkers union moved to the Seattle streets the next day it was immediately met with a volley of tear gas forcing it to disperse.

By Tuesday evening a state of emergency had been declared and central Seattle had been turned into what quickly became known as a 'constitution-free zone' with the right of free assembly abolished by the mayor. Selling or wearing gas masks was made illegal. By now, the police were chasing protesters into neighbourhoods nowhere near the WTO and throwing cluster bombs of rubber pellets at locals. The National Guard - in effect the army - was called out and posted on street corners across the city centre. At 1am President Clinton flew into a United States city under a state of emergency - no one can remember the last time, if ever, this had happened.

On Wednesday the police moved from violence to mass arrests. At one point they arrested 240 protesters for sitting in a city square then immediately left the square. The arrested protesters, many of them teenagers, were herded onto buses and driven to a nearby naval base where pepper spray was used to force them off the buses.

The next day hundreds marched to surround the city jail, demanding the release of everyone arrested and a public apology for police violence. By Friday there was a permanent camp outside the city jail and that evening the news gets out - the WTO talks had collapsed.

The battle of Seattle was certainly a spectacular display of civil disobedience - but did it represent anything more than that? Well, you could criticise the naivety of those protesters who joined in the media's deliberately divisive attacks on other protesters targeting the property of exploitative companies. You could question the solidity of the links being made between this often young and inexperienced movement and organised labour. You'd be right to. But then you could remind yourself that the most powerful superpower the world has ever seen was beaten on the streets of Seattle by a rag-tag army of protesters challenging the right of a global economic system to ravage the planet and exploit its peoples in the search for profits. You could remind yourself that that only happened because people made it happen. And you could decide to join in.

[www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) for more info.

### ANTI-CAPITALIST PROTESTERS STORM WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

As we go to press, on 29 January over 500 protesters defied a ban on demonstrations at the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland to interrupt US President's Bill Clinton's speech in support of intensified globalisation. The protesters also attacked a local McDonald's restaurant. Police fired warning shots and used tear gas and water cannon against the demonstrators.

# Special powers to police the crisis

**On 2 December 1999, Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw announced sweeping changes to existing prevention of terrorism laws to be introduced in this session of Parliament. This is one more example of the Labour government grasping more powers for the state at the expense of civil liberties – not a surprise for a party which has been prime architect of much of the special powers legislation used by the British state over the last hundred years.**

## Straw attacks jury trials

At the same time as Straw was demonstrating his leniency for Pinochet (see below) he was also back to his favourite pastime of hammering the poor. The attack on the right to jury trial may have ended in defeat in the reformed House of Lords, but that is only a temporary state of affairs. Straw has announced his intention to re-introduce the Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) Bill into the House of Commons within weeks. The Bill removes the right of the 18,000 people charged each year with 'either-way' offences – including deception, burglary and robbery – to choose trial by jury instead of being tried by magistrates. In supporting this measure, Straw has rounded on what he calls 'woolly minded Hampstead liberals' – a general insult to all those who feel that basic rights are worth preserving. He argues that the potential savings – up to £100m per year – are too great to ignore. Yet when the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice first proposed this step in 1993, it was no less than Tony Blair who condemned it, arguing that 'fundamental rights to justice cannot be driven by

administrative convenience.' Four years later, Jack Straw himself noted that if charged with dishonesty, an individual's reputation and personal future would be at stake, and asked 'surely, cutting down the right to jury trial, making the system less fair, is not only wrong but short-sighted and likely to prove ineffective?'

Times have moved on, and Straw has a deeper appreciation of his class allegiances. Now he is full of efficiency and savings. He is particularly keen on punishment – hence the renaming of the Probation Service as the Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Service (or CRAPS for short). Now he wants to make the path to punishment cheaper and more efficient. When challenged in an interview that sacrificing liberty in the name of efficiency is the plea of the tyrant, and that this allowed Mussolini to make the trains run on time, Straw was unfazed: 'Well, I am trying to make the courts run on time'. Social fascism indeed.

Robert Clough

The new Terrorism Act will replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Temporary Provisions) and the Emergency Provisions Act governing the north of Ireland. It will make permanent the 'draconian' measures infringing civil liberties which were previously justified on the grounds of a 'temporary emergency' in Ireland. The new law will give terrorism 'a more modern definition' (Home Office Press Statement). For 'modern' read wider and more globally authoritarian:

- Terrorism will now include 'ideological' and 'religious' motivation as well as the standard 'political' aims;
- This new definition will apply to domestic activities as well as to Irish and international terrorism;
- The state will be able to proscribe (ie ban) organisations said to be concerned in international and domestic terrorism as well as Irish terrorism;
- There will be a new 'and carefully proscribed offence' of inciting terrorist acts abroad from within the UK.

To understand these refinements and their real aim, it is worth looking at the way the previous Prevention of Terrorism Act worked and what it was used for.

In fact Emergency or Special Powers have existed in Ireland without a break since the 19th century. The climate created by exceptional laws, depriving sections of the population of basic rights, was a major contribution to the situation in the north of Ireland in the late 1960s – the emergence of a civil rights movement and the renewal of the armed republican struggle, when demands for equality were savagely repressed and internment introduced.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (Temporary Provisions) was introduced in response to the Guildford and Woolwich bombs and, in particular, the Birmingham pub bombs on 21 November 1974. First introduced in Parliament on 27 November, by 9.35am on 29 November the Act had received Royal Assent as a blood-thirsty House of Commons pulled out

the stops – no one opposed the new law. Described by the then Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins as 'draconian', the Act proscribed the IRA, making membership and support a criminal offence, instituted a system of internal exile in the UK where people of Irish origin could be expelled from the 'mainland' or banned from travelling to Britain, and increased police powers to arrest without warrant and to detain in custody for up to seven days on the word of a politician – the Home Secretary.

Every year the PTA was voted on in the Commons, ostensibly as an 'unfortunate' necessity to deal with an emergency, and therefore temporary, situation. Extra powers for the police and army were introduced to the north of Ireland itself, alongside special provisions for no-jury trials (Diplock courts). Even when these special powers were challenged in the European court and ruled to be a breach of human rights, Britain derogated (claimed that the law did not apply) on the grounds of an existing emergency. Over the 26 years since the PTA was first introduced, Britain's treatment of the Irish, including anyone who supported the Irish cause, became the testing ground for the infringement of civil rights generally. The introduction of paramilitary policing, plastic bullets, the tightening of public order law, widening of police powers to search, arrest and conduct surveillance, and the removal of the right to silence, were all tested first on the Irish.

In reality the PTA was not used to combat terrorism – existing police powers were certainly sufficient. What the PTA did was put the Irish – all the Irish and their supporters – beyond the pale. It provided the climate for intimidation and harassment, for false arrest, manufactured evidence and confessions, grave miscarriages of justice and the brutal treatment of prisoners. In the first seven years of its operation 5,251 people were arrested under the PTA. Of these 88 per cent were neither charged with an offence nor excluded from Britain. Only 85 people were charged under the Act, and 69 of these found guilty. 247 people were

excluded from Britain. The PTA was simply a means of repression and was successful in ensuring that, in Britain, support for the Irish struggle was stifled especially among Labour supporters and sections of the British socialist left.

In this light it is easier to see why the Labour government wants a more 'modern' Terrorist Act. It has abandoned the notion of an 'emergency' situation in favour of permanent draconian powers to deal with certain categories of 'criminal' less deserving of rights, apparently, than simple murderers or bank robbers. These will include animal rights activities, environmental activists, J18/Reclaim the Streets activists, 'muslim fundamentalists', and indeed any organisation or individual which seriously threatens the status quo. Labour is tooling up to police the crisis as it always does, with repression. With its history of support for the PTA, Jack Straw shouldn't face any troublesome opposition from within the Labour Party.

That said, there is one little local difficulty concerning the new, 'carefully proscribed' offence of inciting terrorist acts abroad from within the UK. Under its new definition, all acts of violence to further a political, religious or ideological end, are terrorism. What if a group of exiles in Britain (and their supporters) attempts to win public support including financial support, to violently overthrow an entirely oppressive regime in their own country. This regime is so oppressive that even the Labour Party opposes it a little (but not in practice). Let's pretend that the best-known political prisoner in this oppressed nation is leader of the rebel army, imprisoned for 'terrorism' and is called Nelson Mandela. Would ANC members and their supporters in exile be imprisoned in Britain under these new terrorism laws? Even the trickiest social-democratic rewriting of the ANC's history (and there has been some!) could not claim that the ANC opposed violence. The apartheid regime consistently argued that the ANC and PAC were terrorists; with this new Terrorist Bill on the statute book, Labour would have to agree with them.

Carol Brickley

## Pinochet: one law for the rich...

Spare the rich, hammer the poor. Such is Labour's concept of justice. On the one hand, Jack Straw wants to let a mass murderer avoid even the beginnings of justice. On the other, he has, through the Asylum Bill, condemned thousands of asylum-seekers to a regime of poverty and oppression. Such is the class character of Labour.

FRFI has covered the Pinochet case in previous issues. We pointed out that Straw faced a dilemma: either return Pinochet to Chile and thereby destroy his own political career, or allow the Spanish extradition proceedings to continue and create a situation where US imperialism as much as Pinochet would be in the dock. What Straw must have prayed for (and he is a religious man) is some escape route where he could get Pinochet out of the country without appearing to have compromised his position. Hence a complicated set of

plots involving the Spanish and Chilean governments was set in motion last year to enable Straw to use his discretion on 'compassionate' grounds and allow Pinochet to return to the country he had terrorised for nearly 20 years. The Spanish government, embarrassed by its judiciary's pursuit of Pinochet, had wanted to stop it from the outset. Hence it made it clear it would not appeal against any Straw decision to let Pinochet go. The Chilean government gave up campaigning for Pinochet's release on political grounds, and pursued it instead on health grounds, presenting a set of medical submissions to Straw in November 1999. From this Straw decided to appoint a four-person medical team to undertake further tests of Pinochet's condition on behalf of the Home Office. The team reported to Straw on 5 January, who announced six days later that he was 'minded' to

send Pinochet back on the grounds that given Pinochet's health, extradition would be 'unjust and oppressive'.

Immediately a flock of left-wingers sprang to his defence, favourably contrasting Straw's treatment of Pinochet with Pinochet's treatment of Chilean workers. Yet the point about Chilean workers is that they were poor and they were fighting for a new life. British justice is no different from Pinochet's justice when it comes to the poor and working class even if it is at present less murderous. The Asylum Bill and the manner in which it criminalises those seeking refugee status, driving them from pillar to post and shoving them in concentration camps is but one example. Since when has any asylum-seeker been spared all this on the grounds that their medical condition made it 'unjust and oppressive'? Straw was

never required to rule on Pinochet's ability to face a trial. That was up to the Spanish courts to determine. What Straw had to decide was whether the Spanish case had provided grounds for the extradition to be allowed. He has managed to avoid this. He has further shored up his position by taking the extraordinary decision that Pinochet's medical notes could not be made public for examination in a court. He claimed that this could only happen if Pinochet agreed to it. Pinochet is clearly not so much in his dotage as to have granted permission. The fact of course is that medical records can be subpoenaed – it happens on a daily basis. Pinochet may be old, but he is clearly mentally fit enough to understand the plot to release him. His rich supporters in the wealthy suburbs of Santiago and in this country must feel like Straw that God is on their side.



# NO ETHICS

## Labour arms the tyrants

During a few days in January, the sham of Labour's 'ethical' foreign policy was revealed for what it always has been: imperialist hypocrisy.

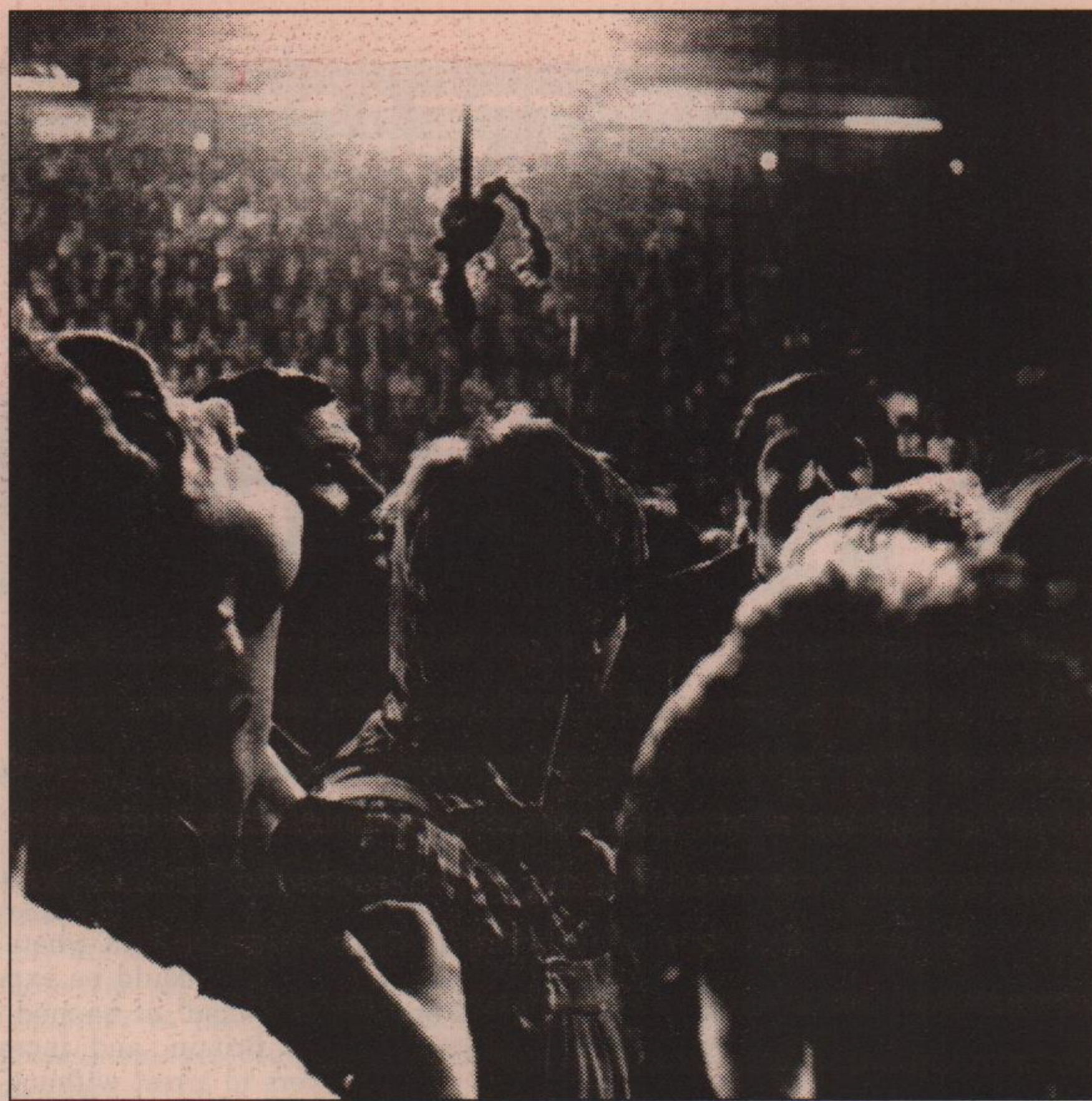
On 12 January, Stephen Byers, Trade Secretary of State, and Geoff Hoon, Defence Minister, were pressing for the end of a three-month embargo on the sales of arms to the Pakistani military dictatorship imposed after the coup in October 1999. 80 export licences had been frozen for that period, threatening a lucrative market, where sales in 1998 had included helicopters, frigates and combat aircraft.

The next day, John Battle, Foreign Office minister, announced that arms sales to Indonesia would resume four days later, saying that 'we need now to be underpinning rather than undermining Indonesia at this important time, helping build Indonesia's young democracy.' Yet Indonesian militias still terrorise 170,000 refugees in West Timor, preventing their return to East Timor, whilst the Indonesian military continues to refuse to co-operate with UN investigation into atrocities committed last year and is involved in suppressing uprisings in other Indonesian islands. Lifting the embargo would allow the release of seven Hawk jets outstanding from the batch of 16 ordered under the Tories, nine of which were delivered last year when Labour pleaded that it had to honour existing contracts.

Just over a week later, on 21 January, the government confirmed it would resume deliveries of Hawk aircraft spare parts to President Mugabe's reactionary and repressive regime in Zimbabwe. This flies in the face of a policy that is supposed to prohibit arms sales to any country involved in an external conflict. Zimbabwe's five Hawks are being used to support its intervention in the Congolese war. Blair's personal spokesperson, Alistair Campbell, ignored this inconvenient fact and claimed '[arms] contracts can only be revoked in extreme circumstances... Our export criteria do not say, and have never said, you cannot export arms to countries involved in conflicts. What they do say is you cannot export any equipment that might be used for external aggression'. Robin Cook supported him, saying that 'we are now in a position in which there is no fighting and there is progress on the peace track', at a time when the Zimbabwean army reported it had broken a siege of 2,000 of its troops in Ikela in East Congo.

The previous month, Blair himself had over-ruled objections from Syria, the Arab League, environmentalists and Kurdish representatives, about a British-led project to build a dam across the River Tigris at Ilisu. The Tigris is a lifeline for Syria and Iraq: the dam would allow Turkey to choke off their principle supply of fresh water at will. The dam itself will wreak environmental havoc, destroying historic sites and displacing 50,000 Kurds as waters behind the dam flood dozens of towns and villages in eastern Turkey. Yet what is at stake is not just a £200m contract, but the opportunity to strengthen trade relations with another important destination for arms sales. Turkey is also of huge strategic significance, the end point for a proposed oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea where British firms are amongst the leading investors. The go-ahead for the dam is sowing the seeds of future water wars in the Middle East, strengthening as it does the strategic position of the Turkish state vis-à-vis its neighbours.

Should we be surprised by this? Labour in opposition never made any secret of its support for the defence industry, and has championed its cause whilst in government. Only under extreme pressure did it finally agree to suspend delivery of Hawk aircraft last year to Indonesia. Even then, Blair was opposed to the idea until his position became untenable when the US also suspended arms sales. Labour is continuing the long tradition of British imperialism's willingness to sell arms to anyone provided there is a profit.



The 1984-85 Miners' Strike: a noose is lowered as TUC General Secretary Norman Willis is speaking at a rally in Aberavon. The Labour Party and TUC leaders sold-out the miners

**M**any on the left will say that Labour in 2000 is a very different creature from Labour in 1900, that Blair's New Labour project is a decisive break with the party that was once a home for Keir Hardie and Nye Bevan. But they have created a myth. Labour in 1900 was no more radical or socialist than it is today. Blair's Labour Party is in substance no different from the one founded on an alliance of imperialist socialists with middle class leaders and reactionary trade union leaders 100 years ago. Unquestioning defence of British imperialism; contempt for the rights of the oppressed; abhorrence for the poor, these were the hallmarks of Labour in 1900 as much as they are today. Yet the left has spun illusions in the Labour Party for as long as it has existed. Fearing the mass of the real working class, those whom are excluded from the official labour and trade union movement, they have pretended that the election of a Labour government would make a difference. They said this in 1983, in 1987, in 1992, again in 1997. They have fooled only themselves. Blair's government is what Blair promised it would be - imperialist, racist, pro-big business and deeply oppressive. The continuity with its early years is a fact, as we shall see.

### The British working class from 1848 to 1900

The foundation of the Labour Party followed a period when British imperialism's position as the dominant world power was facing a sustained challenge from younger imperialist nations - Germany, France and the US. Following the defeat of Chartism as a radical working class movement in 1848, British capitalism had expanded rapidly with the markets of the world under its domination. In the period to 1885, wages rose and conditions improved for the working class, but particularly for the skilled craftsmen who more and more turned away from Chartism to build up their craft trade unions and Co-operative societies. This stratum, some 10 to 15 per cent of the working class, earned a weekly wage approximately double that of unskilled workers. As this aristocracy of labour acquired a new bourgeois respectability, so the ruling class was able to grant a series of political favours such as the extension of male suffrage in the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884. In return, the labour aristocracy demonstrated its complete servility through its solid support for the party of the manufacturers and industrialists, the Liberals. As Engels commented in 1874:

'Wherever the workers lately took part in general politics in particular organisations they did so almost exclu-

sively as the extreme left wing of the "great Liberal Party"... In order to get into Parliament the "Labour leaders" had recourse, in the first place, to the votes and money of the bourgeoisie and only in the second place to the votes of the workers themselves. But by doing so they ceased to be workers' candidates and turned themselves into bourgeois candidates.'

Although by the middle of the 1880s, Britain's monopoly industrial position had disappeared forever, it still possessed a vast Empire, to which it made major additions in the 1880s and 1890s. The plunder from this Empire was to act as a cushion protecting British capitalism from the full impact of the new competition and allowed the ruling class by and large to maintain the conditions of the labour aristocracy up to the last decade of the century. In 1900, skilled workers could on average expect 40 shillings (s) per week, but poverty and destitution remained the norm for masses of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. In 1911, for instance, when 30s per week was the minimum to sustain an adequate family existence, 5 million out of 8 million male manual workers earned less than this; average earnings for this 5 million workers was 22s. The benefits of Empire were very definitely confined to an upper layer of the working class.

Trade unionism and political life also remained the almost exclusive preserve of this layer. In 1892, out of 14,000,000 people employed in industry and trade, only 1.5 million belonged to a trade union, and less than a million belonged to TUC-affiliates. With the partial exception of the miners, these were still the old craft unions. As a proportion of the workforce, trade union membership changed little until around 1910-11; only in 1906 did it exceed 2 million. In the meantime half of all working class men - some 6 million - and of course the entire female population were excluded from voting.

However the pressure on British industry from overseas continued to grow throughout the 1890s, forcing a series of confrontations with the skilled trade unions, in which the unions suffered significant defeats: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1897, and the South Wales miners the following year. It became apparent to the trade union leadership that its unconditional alliance with the party of the industrialist wing of the ruling class was no longer sufficient to guarantee their interests. The 1899 TUC therefore voted to convene a conference to set up the Labour Representation Committee to seek separate representation in parliament and thereby put its relations with the Liberal Party on a new footing.

# THE LABOUR PARTY 100 YEARS

On 27 February 1900, 129 delegates met in London to found the Labour Representation Committee, later renamed itself the Labour Party. Come 27 February 2000 there will be 100 years' struggle for social justice. Yet for real revolutionaries and socialists the Labour Party has been a constant setback for the British working class and the oppressed of the mass of the working class by a tiny privileged upper layer whose chief interests are imperialism, racism and sexism. Since then the Labour Party has been unable to prevent it from achieving anything of any consequence. From the days of the Independent Labour Party, the socialists has been to build a movement that could break Labour's stranglehold and give a lead to the mass of the working class.

Whatever doubts some trade union leaders had about the new organisation were dispelled with the 1901 Taff Vale judgement which threatened the right to strike and with it the cosy position of the labour aristocracy.

Radical Liberals, middle class socialists and the labour aristocracy: these were the forces that came together in 1900 to create an organisation that would defend their privileged positions. Many argue that the influence of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), established in 1893 after the defeat two years earlier of Bradford textile workers, gave the LRC a socialist character. This is not true. The overwhelming majority of the ILP's membership was drawn either from the skilled working class or the lower professional middle class. Its leadership, its political ideas and its organisers were dominated by a group of middle class radicals who moved effortlessly between the Fabian Society, the ILP, the TUC and the Liberal Party. Moreover these radicals had links with a variety of wealthy donors such as Cadbury whose financial donations were crucial to the sur-

vival of the ILP at the turn of the century. The ILP was bought from the outset.

The working class as a mass played no role in the formation of the LRC. The 1890s as a whole had been a period of intense reaction. This was in marked contrast to the events of 1889, when revolutionary socialists (amongst them Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl) forged an alliance with unskilled workers to create new unions which were non-exclusive and which could embrace the mass of the working class. Such a development represented a serious challenge to the narrow interests of the labour aristocracy, which moved quickly to crush it. Within two years, the labour aristocracy had regained its ascendancy, and the unskilled unions had been reduced to a shadow of their former selves. The revolutionaries had been isolated, leaving the middle class radicals free to construct the alliance that became the Labour Party. Only the Social Democratic Federation presented any sort of obstacle, but its sectarianism enabled its swift exclusion from the Labour Representation Committee.

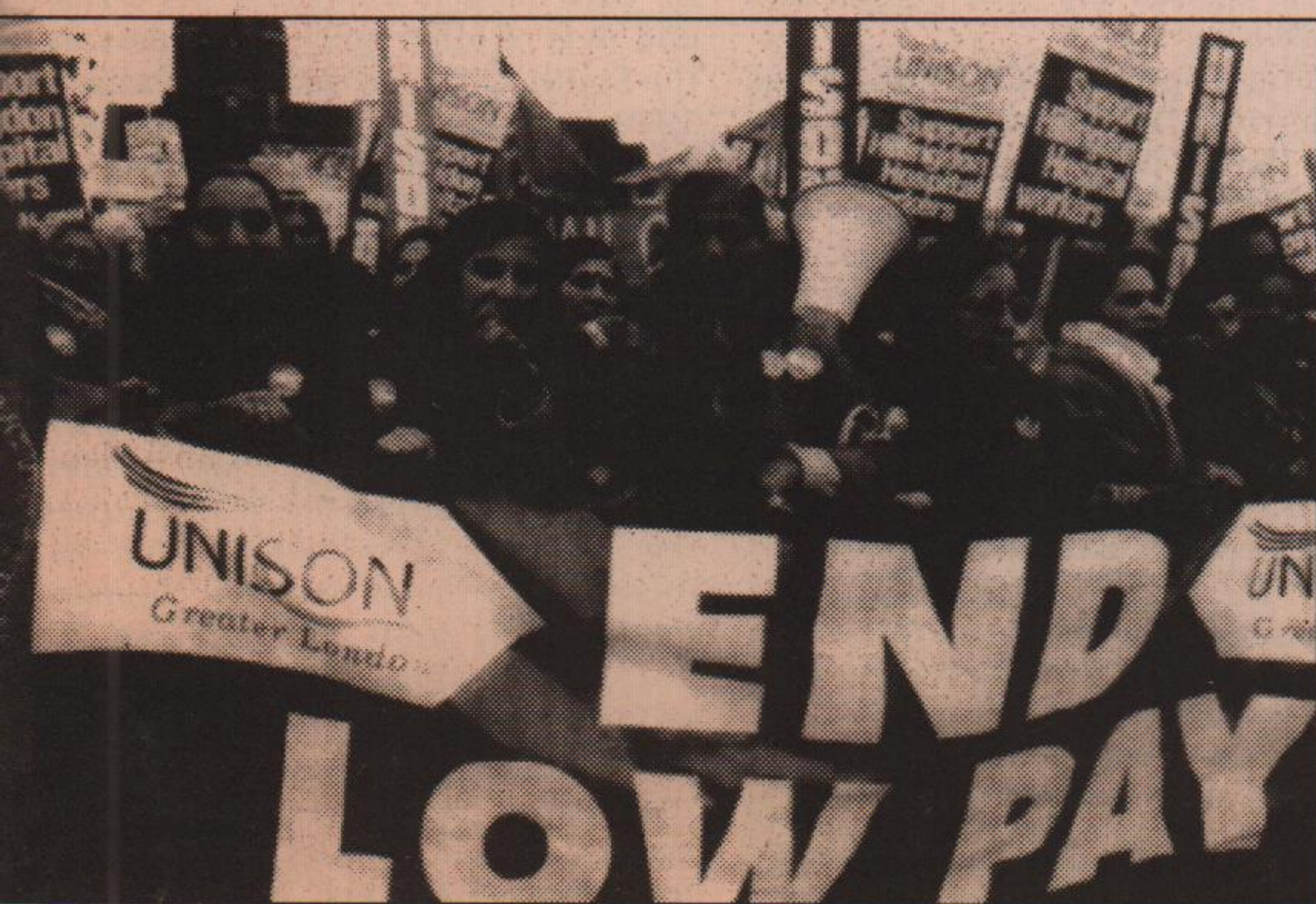
Derry: Funeral of 11-year-old Annette McGavigan, shot by the British Army in 1970. Labour sent to the Army in to defeat the republican working class





# OUR PARTY: RS OF INFAMY

our Representation Committee, an organisation that six years  
will doubtless be many a toast to the memory of Keir Hardie and  
communists, the establishment of the Labour Party was a pro-  
British Empire. It consolidated the political domination of the  
political characteristics were those of reaction and support for  
a millstone round the neck of the British working class, pre-  
of its inception, argues ROBERT CLOUGH, the challenge for  
gripping grip on British working class organisation and politics and



Labour has failed, once again, to defend the interests of low-paid workers

## To the First Imperialist War

The early years of the Labour Party were therefore no different from any other period in its history, marked as they were by its anxiety to please its imperialist masters and to ensure that the poor and oppressed were kept firmly in their place. It never campaigned to extend the vote to women, let alone to the disenfranchised poor. Although it was organisationally independent of the Liberal Party, politically it was not. Hence in 1903 the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald and the Liberals concluded a secret pact to avoid contests between the two in a certain number of constituencies so that Labour could increase its parliamentary representation. The quid pro quo was that Labour MPs were tied to supporting the Liberals, many times its most reactionary wing. Hence when the Liberal government introduced the first elements of state welfare with the National Insurance Act in 1911, the influential Fabian leader Beatrice Webb attacked 'the unconditionality of payments under the insurance scheme' because 'the state gets nothing for its money in the way of conduct'. Her conclusion was that the Act would even encourage malingers and that this gigantic transfer of property from the haves to the have-nots to be spent on them as they think in times of sickness or unemployment should have been made conditional on 'the obligation to good conduct.' In a sentiment to be echoed by members of a Labour government some 90 years later, she decided that the Act was 'wholly bad, and I cannot see how malingering can be staved off... What the government seeks is the extension of treatment and disciplinary supervision.'

During the Great Unrest of 1911 to 1913, when unskilled workers started to return to the trade unions and engaged in a massive wave of strike

activity, Labour leaders were quick to offer their condemnation. Four Labour MPs (including Arthur Henderson, architect of the modern Labour Party) put forward a parliamentary Bill which proposed making strikes illegal unless thirty days' notice had been given, and that those who struck illegally would be subjected to very heavy fines. As JR Clynes, both a Labour and trade union leader, told the 1914 Labour Conference 'too frequent strikes caused a sense of disgust, of being a nuisance to the community'.

## Imperialist war and the crusade against communism

Labour was racist and imperialist to the core from the beginning. Sidney Webb, 'intellectual' inspiration for Labour, observing the extent of destitution in London, asked 'what is the use of an Empire if it does not breed and maintain in the truest and fullest sense of the word an Imperial race?' Echoing her husband's sentiment, Beatrice complained 'what can we hope from these myriads of deficient minds and deformed bodies that swarm our great cities - what can we hope but brutality, meanness and crime.'

Labour's defence of Empire in the meantime was never in question. In 1913, it had helped isolate the strike of Dublin workers and ensure their defeat. The outbreak of the first imperialist war in 1914 cast it in the role of recruiting sergeant for the slaughter in the trenches. Labour MPs were to participate in the condemnation of the 1916 Easter Uprising in Dublin, their leader Arthur Henderson leading a round of applause in the House of Commons when the execution of James Connolly was announced. Prior to the war, Ramsay MacDonald had committed Labour to support for a so-called 'socialist colonial' policy during a

debate on the subject at a 1907 international conference of socialists in Stuttgart. In December 1917 a Labour Memorandum on War Aims explained 'it is impracticable [in Africa] to leave the various peoples concerned to settle their own destinies', describing them as 'non-adult races'. Later, in a January 1918 reply to Bolshevik peace proposals, Labour was to argue that 'nobody contends that the black races can govern themselves. They can only make it known that the particular government under which they have been living is bad in some or all respects, and indicate the specific evils from which they desire liberation.' In practice, Labour was never to champion the cause of colonial freedom; its over-riding concern was to preserve the integrity of the British Empire.

When Labour, prior to the 1997 General Election, decided to drop Clause 4, calling for the nationalisation of the means of production, from its constitution, the left was appalled. This, it claimed, was the emblem of its socialist principles; abandon this and the party would undermine any real hope for a socialist future. Yet Clause 4 and the rest of its 1918 constitution never had anything to do with socialism. Its purpose was to transform the Labour Party from a loose federation of affiliated bodies into a centralised and nationally cohesive organisation that would be an effective vehicle for fighting Bolshevism and the threat it posed to the British Empire. The Labour Party was a crucial political weapon for British imperialism in its drive to isolate the Russian revolution. Creating a centralised organisation was the first step to organising the forces of the labour aristocracy against any internal challenge from the mass of the working class. Next was the transformation of the Socialist International into a weapon of British foreign policy. The Labour Party had been an almost irrelevant member of the pre-war Second International of socialist parties. That now changed; the Labour Party took control of the movement, moved its headquarters to London to keep it under firm control, and used it as a platform to attack the Russian revolution and defend the post-war imperialist order that emerged from the 1919 Versailles Treaty. The Labour and Socialist International was never allowed to discuss colonial policy, particularly British imperialism's. Labour itself, when it formed governments in 1924 and 1929-31, pursued a brutal colonial policy, authorising the use of the RAF against Kurdish villages in 1924 and then suppressing the massive Indian uprising of 1928-1931.

During the first imperialist war, the great revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg condemned international social democracy as a 'stinking corpse' for its support for the mass slaughter. She was right. But even before 1914 the Labour Party did not play a progressive role - that was never its intent. Its formation depended on the defeat and isolation of socialists and the political exclusion of the mass of the working class in favour of a privileged upper layer and its middle class allies. With the triumph of the revolution in Russia and the threat that its promise of colonial liberation presented to the British Empire, Labour became the principle organiser of reaction within the international working class movement. Labour in 2000, Labour in 1900: they are both the same.

# A CATALOGUE OF TREACHERY



## Labour governments and their imperialist record

### The 1929 government:

- ▶ Used every power at its disposal to suppress the 1928-31 Indian uprising. Between April and June 1931, the RAF dropped 500 tons of bombs, 103 people had been shot dead in 24 incidents, political prisoners were hanged, 90,000 detained;
- ▶ Treated a Palestinian general strike against Zionist settlement in the same way: British troops killed 200 peasants; nine more were hanged and 200 sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.



### Between 1945 and 1951 Labour:

- ▶ Brutally suppressed the Malayan national liberation struggle in order to milk it for the dollar earnings from rubber and tin;
- ▶ Committed British troops to aid the restoration of French colonial rule in VietNam and Dutch rule in Indonesia;
- ▶ Continued military intervention in Greece against the ELAS national liberation movement;
- ▶ Played a leading role in establishing the imperialist NATO alliance.



### Later, between 1964 and 1970, it:

- ▶ Unconditionally supported the US onslaught on VietNam;
- ▶ Defended apartheid South Africa, blocking calls for sanctions in the UN. It capitulated to the racist settler regime in the former Rhodesia;
- ▶ Sent troops into Ireland in 1969;
- ▶ Was responsible for the routine torture of suspected freedom fighter detainees in Aden.



### Finally, between 1974 and 1979, it:

- ▶ Continued to defend apartheid South Africa in the UN;
- ▶ Supported the Shah of Iran as he faced a mass popular uprising against his tyrannical regime;
- ▶ Began the infamous sales of Hawk aircraft to Indonesia at the height of the genocidal war in East Timor;
- ▶ Implemented a ruthless regime of torture against republican prisoners in the North of Ireland.



### Two other facts:

- ▶ In the last two years under Labour's direction, British forces have dropped more bombs than under 18 years of Tory rule.
- ▶ Labour has supported 95 out of 96 British military engagements overseas since 1945. The exception was Suez when it clung to the coat tails of US imperialism and opposed the British/French invasion.



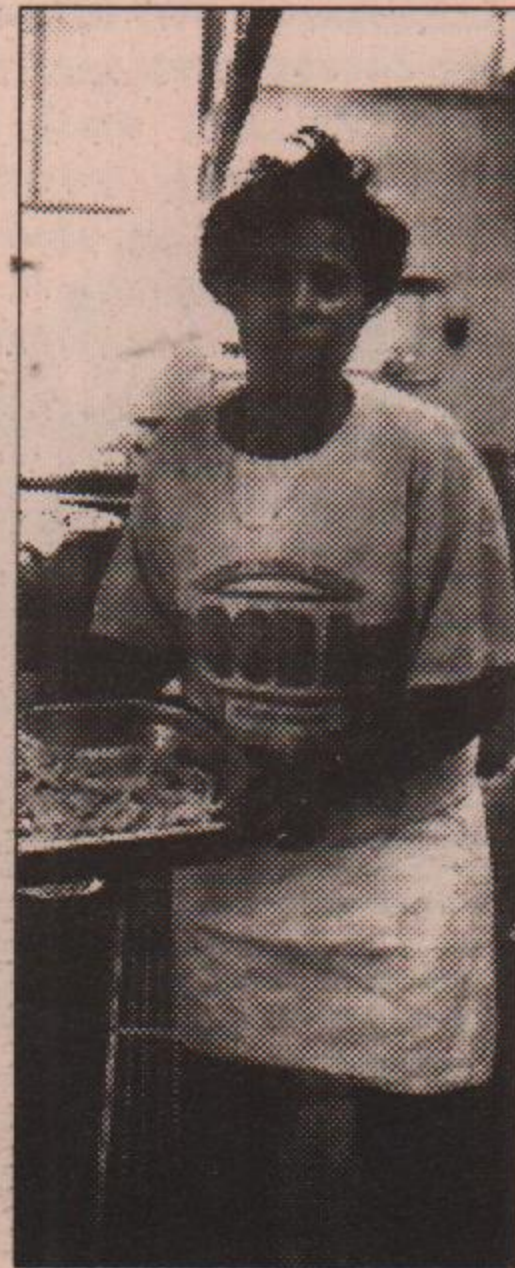
## Labour and racism

- ▶ The 1945 Labour government exploited Caribbean colonies as a source of cheap labour to do the most menial and poorly paid jobs particularly in the public sector;
- ▶ In opposition, Labour supported the first immigration controls in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, and then followed it up with further Acts in 1965, 1968 and 1969. Their sole purpose was to prevent black and Asian immigration.
- ▶ The 1974-76 government continued the use of the 1971 Immigration Act. It was responsible for the continuation of 'virginity tests'. It used thousands of police to defeat the Grunwick's strike of Asian women in 1976, and tolerated the ever-extending police use of the 'sus' law (the 1824 Vagrancy Act) to harass black youth. In the 1979 election, the government agreed to the use of thousands of police in Southall to protect a fascist rally from the anger of local people. The police killed Blair Peach.
- ▶ The current government has set up detention camps to hold asylum seekers, and encouraged a climate of racist hysteria against would-be refugees.



## Labour and the working class

- ▶ The 1924 Labour government introduced the 'Not Genuinely Seeking Work' condition to deny unemployed workers benefit. Today's equivalent is New Deal.
- ▶ The 1929-31 government was responsible for a rise in unemployment to 3 million, supervised further restrictions on eligibility to benefit, and fell after it agreed a 10% cut in benefit levels.
- ▶ The 1945-51 government renewed the 1920 Emergency Powers Act and used its powers to send troops in to break a dockers' strike in 1950.
- ▶ The 1964-70 government attempted to restrict the right to strike through its In Place of Strife bill;
- ▶ The 1974-79 government imposed huge cuts in public spending in 1976, and then attacked low-paid council workers when they attempted to recover cuts in their earnings during the so-called 'Winter of Discontent' 1978/79.
- ▶ The current government has retained the Tories anti-trade union laws; attacked the unemployed through the JSA and New Deal and cut eligibility to disability benefits.



# IRAQ – All change *but nothing changes*

Iraq, like all the Arab countries of the Middle East, was the creation of the hegemonic powers in the modern period. Carved out of the Ottoman Empire by the British, Iraq was set up as a monarchy in 1921. Ethnically mixed, with Arab, Kurdish and Turcoman communities, the country has a Shi'a Muslim majority of between 60 and 70%. The Shi'a version of Islam disputes the line of succession of rulers following the death of the Prophet Mohammed. This division among Muslims is highly political; differences of faith between Sunnis, the majority in Islam, and the Shi'a are minimal. One result of this divergence, which is absolutely crucial for an understanding of the politics of Muslim countries, is that the Shi'a have developed an ideology in which it becomes a religious duty to oppose a tyrannical ruler. This goes some way to explaining the overthrow of the Shah in the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, a country in which over 90% of the population is Shi'a. Sunnis have a more pragmatic and accommodating position. We can contextualise this in another way: the Shi'a have a long history of persecution. Even in countries like Iraq where they are a majority, the ruling elite has always been drawn from the Sunni Arab minority. This is important if we are to understand the current situation in Iraq.

The Ba'athist party first took power in 1963 in a military coup which overthrew the government of Abdul Karim Qasim, who had toppled the monarchy and nationalised the oil industry. This had similarities with the 1953 coup against Mossadeq who had nationalised the oil industry in neighbouring Iran. Qasim's popular politics on behalf of his people made him a target for Western intervention to safeguard oil and strategic routes. British Foreign Office documents from the period, published by the Iraqi historian Hamid al-Bayati, showed that both the UK and US governments encouraged the coup against Qasim and saw Ba'athism as essentially a tool of Western interests. We must not be confused



by the fact that Ba'athism dressed itself up in anti-imperialist and socialist rhetoric or that Saddam Hussein is said to model himself on Stalin. Ba'athism is a free floating 'modern', pan-Arabist ideology whose effect in power was to establish Western interests and to crush popular, nationalist aspirations.

The Ba'ath took power in Iraq using extreme brutality. Qasim was executed and thousands of Iraqis died. In 1979 Saddam staged another coup against fellow Ba'athists and took control of the country which he has ruled ever since through a network of family and fellow Sunni army officers. The list of his outrages, including chemical weapons attacks on his own people, murder of family members, routine use of rape and torture and displacement of populations, are by now well documented. We have to understand who is benefiting from this state of affairs and what the mechanisms are which allow it to be sustained. The West benefited from and encouraged Saddam's unprovoked attack on Iran in

Iraq is once again about to become high-profile politics. A recent conference in London on human rights in Iraq was funded by the US State Department. Given the continued aerial bombardment of Iraq and the sanctions enforced against its population, one could be forgiven a wry smile. The conference coincided with the trailing of Said Abureesh's forthcoming biography of Saddam Hussein which was quoted in a lengthy extract in *The Guardian* and the author appeared with Paxman on *Start the Week* on Radio 4. Abureesh claims that beneath Saddam's harsh exterior there lurks a humiliated child capable of acts of kindness as well as psychopathic outbursts of rage. According to this Palestinian ex-confidant of Saddam, the Iraqis themselves are somehow not Arabs, and are a violent and turbulent people.

**JACQUELINE KAYE** examines the real story behind Saddam Hussein's stranglehold on Iraq.

routinely removed from their homes for questioning and torture; good behaviour of Iraqis abroad is ensured by holding family members hostage. Films of torture and executions are available to create terror, as are sudden disappearances, poisonings, show trials and so on. The West ignored this brutal regime as long as the oil flowed; arms and chemical weapons were supplied to Saddam for use against his own people and against Iran.

Radical opposition to Saddam has come from the Kurds and the Shi'a; there have been many attempted coups from within the Ba'athist party. All have been suppressed with great ferocity. The West has shown little will to replace Saddam, preferring instead to pursue a policy of containment. Following the Gulf war 'safe havens' were created in the North of Iraq for the protection of the Kurds who want an autonomous region but who have no interest in any assault on centres of power in Baghdad. Imperialism was also con-

popular rising repressed with great force. In 1977 another uprising led to thousands of people being killed. In this rebellion, a prominent Ayatollah, Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim,

now the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which is the main organisation leading opposition in the South, was arrested, tortured and sentenced to 20 years in prison without having been brought before a court. Following an amnesty, al-Hakim moved to Tehran in reprisal for which the regime executed many members of his family. In 1980 Ayatollah Baqir Sadr led a revolutionary uprising; he was hanged alongside his sister and tens of other spiritual leaders in the South. Only last year, in February 1999 Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr and his two sons were shot dead in Najaf. Little of this or of other acts of resistance by Shi'a has been reported or commented on in the West which has preferred to focus on the image of the Kurds of the North.

The image of popular and cohesive resistance by the Iraqi people does not suit either the Western ruling elites or neo-liberals such as those who travel on the 'human rights' gravy train and who can be heard exhorting Iraqi opposition groups to adopt Western 'middle class' values. The West heard little of the heroic resistance to the war against Iran in which thousands of Iraqi army officers and soldiers refused to fight and surrendered to the Iranians, leaving over 80,000 of them as POWs. And this despite the fact that summary execution awaited deserters who left the battlefield while others were taken back to their villages to be killed in front of their families. At this time of course Saddam was a good guy fighting the menace of the Islamic Revolution.

There is no doubt that the US would like to see Saddam replaced in a military coup which would replace him with another Sunni army officer who can guarantee the status quo. The apparent bogue concern about the 'breakup' of Iraq is a smokescreen which facilitates a policy of containment until the conditions for such a coup are in place. What the US certainly does not want is a popular revolution or even the liberal nationalism of a Qasim. The Kurdish no-fly zones of the North are part of the policy of containment which also allows the US to present Iraq as an ethnically divided country which needs a strong ruler to hold it together. The supposed concern with the human rights of the Iraqi people is, in fact, a diversion which has the additional function of creating an atmosphere of hopelessness, given the baroque complexities of legal procedures and standards of proof. It also ignores the political realities. No power has ever been brought low as a result of a human rights campaign.

In 1998 the US Congress voted to give \$97 million for the Iraqi Liberation Act. This was in fact an illegal measure as it clearly implied direct intervention in Iraqi internal affairs. Much to the surprise of Iraqi opposition groups involved in military struggle, the money was earmarked to be spent not on arms but on conferences, computers, software and fax machines. We may safely hazard that if this topples Saddam, it will be the first time in history that a tyranny has been overthrown by information technology. ■

Iraqi children queuing for food in Baghdad



1980; ten years later he made a similar attack on his Sunni Arab neighbour Kuwait, a country which had funded his attack on Iran. Some saw this as an example of Saddam having turned to bite the hand which had fed him. It may, however, be too early to make this kind of judgement. There is some evidence that Saddam was planning to attack Israel, a move which would have been very popular in the Arab world. At a certain point for some reason he diverted his attack to Kuwait, perhaps with the encouragement of some elements within the US government.

Ba'athism has maintained its hold in Iraq, not only because it has been armed by the West and developed a sophisticated machinery of repression, but also because it has created a system of power which is classically fascist in operation. This power, located firmly within the Sunni Arab minority, is based around the security and intelligence services. Ba'ath party members are locked into a hierarchical chain through which they report any opposition activity from street level upward in a pyramidal formation. Around 4% of the population is directly involved in security. The state is a major employer and all promotions depend upon good standing with the party. People are

cerned to foment divisions in the Kurdish movement and, in particular, to undermine the PKK. The allied forces were in fact better placed to create safe havens in the southern marshes region bordering Kuwait, they chose not to do so, enabling Saddam to suppress the rising there, and turned a blind eye to his subsequent draining of the marshes – in itself an ecological disaster. When 14 out of 18 provinces rose against Saddam in 1991, having been urged to do so by no less a person than George Bush, US army checkpoints were ordered to allow Republican guards, cut off in the retreat from Kuwait, through with their tanks and heavy artillery so they could take part in the repression of the Shi'a. Eyewitness reports from astonished Kuwaiti POWs freed by the Shi'a also included the fact that the Americans were supplying Republican Guards with petrol. Saddam was allowed to use his helicopters in the repression while he was banned from the use of long-distance fixed-wing flights. Half a million people were killed in this rising.

The Ba'athist assault on the Shi'a had begun soon after their seizure of power. In 1970 the mourning following the death of the major Shi'i Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim led to a



# CHECHNYA:

## Background to the conflict

Conflict between Russia and Chechnya goes back centuries. In recent times, an expanding Imperial Russia forcibly incorporated Chechnya in 1859. Shortly after the Bolshevik revolution, in May 1918, the North Caucasus Republic, which included Chechnya and Dagestan, declared independence. In September 1919, a North Caucasian Emirate was proclaimed. This proclamation led to an invasion of Chechnya by the Red Army in 1920 who suppressed anti-Bolshevik resistance by 1921.

Chechnya became an autonomous region of the USSR from 1922 to 1936 when it was allied to Ingushetia as the Autonomous Republic of Chechno-Ingush.

After a short period of social tranquillity the collectivisation of agriculture, which was fiercely resisted by the Chechen peasantry, led to serious social unrest and rebellion. By the start of World War II the Chechen rebels had come to view the Nazi invaders as liberators. Only Hitler's orders to treat them as sub-humans, with the consequent repression, denied the Nazis the opportunity to create a significant anti-Soviet force.

From 1944 onwards Stalin ordered the wholesale deportation of people from the region for treason, and they were dispersed to Soviet Central Asia. An estimated 30% never completed the journey. This situation was reversed by Khrushchev in 1957 and the Chechno-Ingush republic was restored.

The demise of the Soviet Union prompted the Supreme Soviet of the Chechno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic to adopt a Declaration of State Sovereignty in 1990 that defined Chechnya as an independent entity. In November 1991, General Dzhokhar Dudayev gained power and the region declared its independence. After a brief attempt to squash the rebellion, Moscow adopted a negotiating strategy and in 1992, Chechnya was recognised by Russia to be an autonomous republic in its own right.

## Background to the war

Despite formally recognising Chechnya's right of autonomy in 1992 the Russian's played a cynical double game by backing anti-separatist forces opposed to Dudayev. By August 1994, full-blown civil war had developed and Russian forces entered Chechnya in December 1994 and bombarded the capital, Grozny.

The 1994-5 war was characterised by its brutal nature with 40,000 civilians dead and 250,000 made refugees by the first quarter of 1995. By June of that year, Russian troops had captured the majority of Chechnya's cities and the Chechen rebels fell back on guerilla warfare. The Russians lost many (possibly 3,000) soldiers, many of them inexperienced conscripts, in fierce close quarter street fighting and it is important to recall this when Russian tactics in the present war are examined later.

Two thousand hostages were taken on 14 June in Budennovsk. Following peace and hostage release negotiations in Grozny, an agreement was signed in July 1995. This was a peace agreement on paper only, as further fighting broke out in December 1995, and in January 1996, more hostages were taken in southern Russia after a Chechen incursion. After being guar-

anteed safe passage home the Chechens were intercepted at the border town of Pervomayskoye and subjected to an enormous artillery barrage.

In August 1996, on the eve of Boris Yeltsin's presidential inauguration, Chechen insurgents attacked Grozny in force. Murders of aid workers in December 1996 persuaded all of the international aid agencies to withdraw from Chechnya and by January 1997 all Russian Interior Ministry troops were announced to have left the region on Yeltsin's orders. On 27 January 1997 Aslan Mashadov was elected president of Chechnya with 63% of the vote and immediately affirmed that he wished to speed up the process of independence previously put on hold until 2001.



Russian has threatened to simply liquidate Grozny. An estimated 10,000 people have been killed in the war so far.

## The war today

The Russian populace was generally cynical and apathetic about the situation in Grozny until a series of terror bombings of Moscow apartment buildings, which left 300 Muscovites dead, reignited the issue as one of national pride and dealing with terrorism. Whether the bombings were carried out by Chechen Islamic fundamentalists or a branch of the Soviet security services we shall probably never know. What we do know is that the indignation and fear provoked by the terror bombings proved highly useful in psychologically preparing the Russian population for war.

In October 1999 Russian forces again invaded Chechnya and by 13 December were moving into Grozny. Learning from the 1994-6 campaigns, which had exposed the Russian army as poorly led and equipped, leading to large loss of life, different tactics are now being used. On the way to Grozny villages have simply been razed by a tremendous barrage of ground and air-borne cannon fire. In this manner, street fighting has been largely avoided and where it is necessary, specialist troops are being used. The Russians have warned all inhabitants to leave Grozny, which they have threatened to simply liquidate and rebuild somewhere else.

Again, the result in terms of human suffering has been immense with estimates of deaths put at 10,000, and 250,000 - nearly a quarter of the total Chechen population -

turned into refugees.

It is estimated that 30-50,000 people are trapped in Grozny including many ethnic Russians.

All military analysts agree that the Russian occupation of Grozny is inevitable, and the real questions are when and at what cost? If Russia starts losing large quantities of troops the initial enthusiasm for the war, an enthusiasm which Yeltsin's successor Vladimir Putin sees as vital for his success in the forthcoming presidential campaign, may quickly evaporate. The Russians may exert artillery control of territory, but the Chechen forces have proved adept at night skirmishing and limited counter-attacks thereby prolonging the campaign to Russian disadvantage. The Russians are responding with air and artillery barrages of extraordinary intensity.

## Motives of the Russian ruling elite

There is no doubt that the Russians see Chechnya as a matter of overall territorial integrity and a struggle that they must win at any price. Economically the formal loss of Chechnya would mean that the Federation would be deprived of its largest oilfields, timber, engineering, building materials and chemical industries. Furthermore, of the 21 republics and 68 regions which make up the Federation, some at least would see a Chechen victory as a green light for a similar outbreak of rebellion. The loss of

Chechnya could signal the eventual dissolution of the whole Federation as a viable entity. It may even be that the brutality of the Russian response to the Chechens is aimed at sending a forceful message to the other component parts of the Federation.

Politically the Chechen war has proved useful for the criminal elements in the Kremlin who now run Russia as coverage of the profound social and economic crisis has been displaced from the media, and Putin has been able to portray himself as the essential strongman to become president.

The aim of the Kremlin in Chechnya is to reassert Russia's control of the area thereby strengthening their bargaining position with the imperialist governments and Western banks. The aims of both the Kremlin and the imperialist governments are identical: the exploitation of the Russian and Caucasian peoples.

## National liberation struggle?

The Islamic separatist forces in Chechnya have been able to exploit some of the historic grievances against Russia mentioned earlier, but their overall aims and aspirations differ in no essential manner from the Kremlin's. It is absolutely vital to record, however, that a victory for the Islamic militants would be a catastrophe for the people of the region, especially for women, whose social and economic role would revert to one similar to that enforced by the pre-feudal Taliban in Afghanistan or the barbaric Mullah-led regime in Iran.

These varied bands of Chechen rebels do not constitute any form of genuine national liberation movement. They are not opposed to imperialism and in fact call for greater inward investment. Far from manifesting any mass democratic aspirations, the Chechen separatists want to establish their own direct connection to world capitalism via the 'national independence' struggle. There is nothing progressive about the Chechen rebels; the issue is one of exactly who in the gangster ruling elite will profit from drugs, racketeering and prostitution and be able to negotiate the best deals in exploiting Chechnya's natural resources.

## Role of Western imperialism

The dissolution of Russia would inevitably lead to massive instability

and dramatically diminish the possibility of the imperialists actually getting any of their loans back, never mind doing any useful trade. From a military point of view, the situation of tiny 'states' with nuclear weapons is a potential nightmare scenario for the imperialists.

Even at the height of the 'human rights' rhetoric, Clinton was scrupulously careful to condemn terrorism and to note that the Russians had the right to defend their territorial integrity. Talk of 'human rights' from the terror bombers of Serbia, can be treated as the hypocrisy it is when one recalls that it was precisely these governments who promoted Yeltsin and his gangster government as a democratic gain for Russia! Whilst a tiny elite got rich quick by old fashioned plunder, 'democracy' for the great majority of people meant mass unemployment, homelessness and impoverishment.

The war against Chechnya is being fought to defend the interests of the new Russian elite. The expansion of NATO and the terror bombing of Serbia/Kosovo have increased fears that the West may attempt to challenge Russian influence over the Caucasus. In response to US plans to unilaterally junk the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, and also in recognition of the decay of its conventional forces the Russian's have discarded their 'no first use' of nuclear weapons pledge.

## Lessons for socialists

What long-term lessons can socialists learn from the horrific events in Chechnya? After all, we have societies here with origins unique in history. Post-capitalist societies which have reverted to a type of primitive capitalist accumulation.

The resurgence of intense nationalism, which itself played some role in the break up of the erstwhile USSR, indicates that the Soviet policy of repressing nationalist sentiment only drove it underground. The same is true of religious belief. The Soviet government failed to combat nationalism and religion ideologically. This obviously embodies lessons for the long-term socialist project. The communist movement, using that term generally, has tended to underestimate the influence of nationalist and religious ideology on people. It is an indispensable lesson to learn for the future.

Ted Talbot

# Cuban socialism:

## against the odds

**B**efore 1959, Cuban society was characterised by extreme poverty, exploitation and the chronic abuse of basic human rights.

Despite massive and unrelenting pressure from US imperialism, since the revolution Cuba has fought back against the terrible economic and social conditions which still exist for the majority in developing nations today – and which have, indeed been intensified through globalisation.

Before seizing the political initiative, the Cuban working class was enslaved by the same imperialist forces which still have a stranglehold over its Latin American neighbours, Africa and Asia. While the majority of the population suffered hunger and disease, an elite of powerful land-owners, corrupt politicians and rich Cubans enjoyed the privileges of the exploiter class.

The revolution rapidly transformed life for the majority of Cubans, and its socialist achievements have become the envy of the world. The fundamentals of socialist society were promptly introduced. To basic human rights were added the right to work, free healthcare, education, the right to participate in sport and recreation and to develop culturally, and the right to participate in politics. These were set down in the Cuban constitution and applied to everyone regardless of race, origin, sex or religion. The strength of the Cuban system lies not only in the universal and inalienable nature of these rights but also in the quality of their provision. The revolutionaries knew that true freedom and democracy could only exist if these rights were guaranteed. True equality can only exist if there is equality of opportunity, which can only be achieved with a literate population. The Mass National Literacy Campaign began in 1961 and within just

Cuba's survival concerns all true socialists. For in a world where 1.3 billion people live in poverty and degradation, Cuba's struggle to provide a decent life for all its people proves that there is another way. BARNABY TASKER, who will be joining the Rock around the Blockade brigade to Cuba in April, looks back at 41 years of revolution.



one year illiteracy had been combated. This was just the first step. Students were encouraged to go on to further study. The Cuban population is today highly educated with a literacy rate that is one of the highest in the world.

The Cuban health care system is free and comprehensive. Cuba has a doctor for every 200 people and the rate of infant mortality has fallen every year since the revolution and currently stands at 6.4 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy is 75 years, equal to that of Britain. The health of the population is reflected in the nation's success in sport, most notably in athletics where Cuba enjoys a dominance which is disproportionate to its size. At the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, Cuba achieved fifth place overall out of a total of 172

competing nations. In Cuba unemployment is not a social problem and the system of social security guarantees a basic standard of living for all, culminating in a pension for life.

These revolutionary gains have been made despite the constant aggression from the US, manifested in the illegal blockade. Since 1959 the US has maintained a barrage of disinformation and military intimidation against Cuba, even following its defeat at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. Despite over 40 years of assault and elaborate propaganda from the CIA and the deprivations resulting from shortages caused by the blockade, the Cuban people have resisted US attempts to destroy their revolution.

Prior to 1959, the Cuban economy was underdeveloped and primarily agrarian in character. Much of the

country's technical expertise left Cuba after the revolution. It was in this context that the task of building socialism in Cuba was begun. Economic planning replaced the market. The function of planning was to transform the social relations of production, allowing for the elimination of exploitation and the formation of a new consciousness. The development of this higher consciousness was fundamental to the successful transition to socialism.

However, by the 1980s, the Cuban leadership became very concerned by the emergence of certain regressive tendencies within the Cuban economy which threatened what the revolution had achieved. Some sectors had started to demonstrate capitalist tendencies such as a disproportionate rise in wages relative to production, the use of material incentives, and the influence of supply and demand on prices. The behaviour of some state enterprises had begun to contradict the interests of a socialist society.

Fidel Castro was aware of the danger these developments posed to the survival of the revolution. He stressed the need to rejuvenate revolutionary consciousness to correct the mistakes that had been made. From 1986, the country embarked on a period of 'rectification'. An increased emphasis was placed on voluntary work as crucial to revolutionary success. The

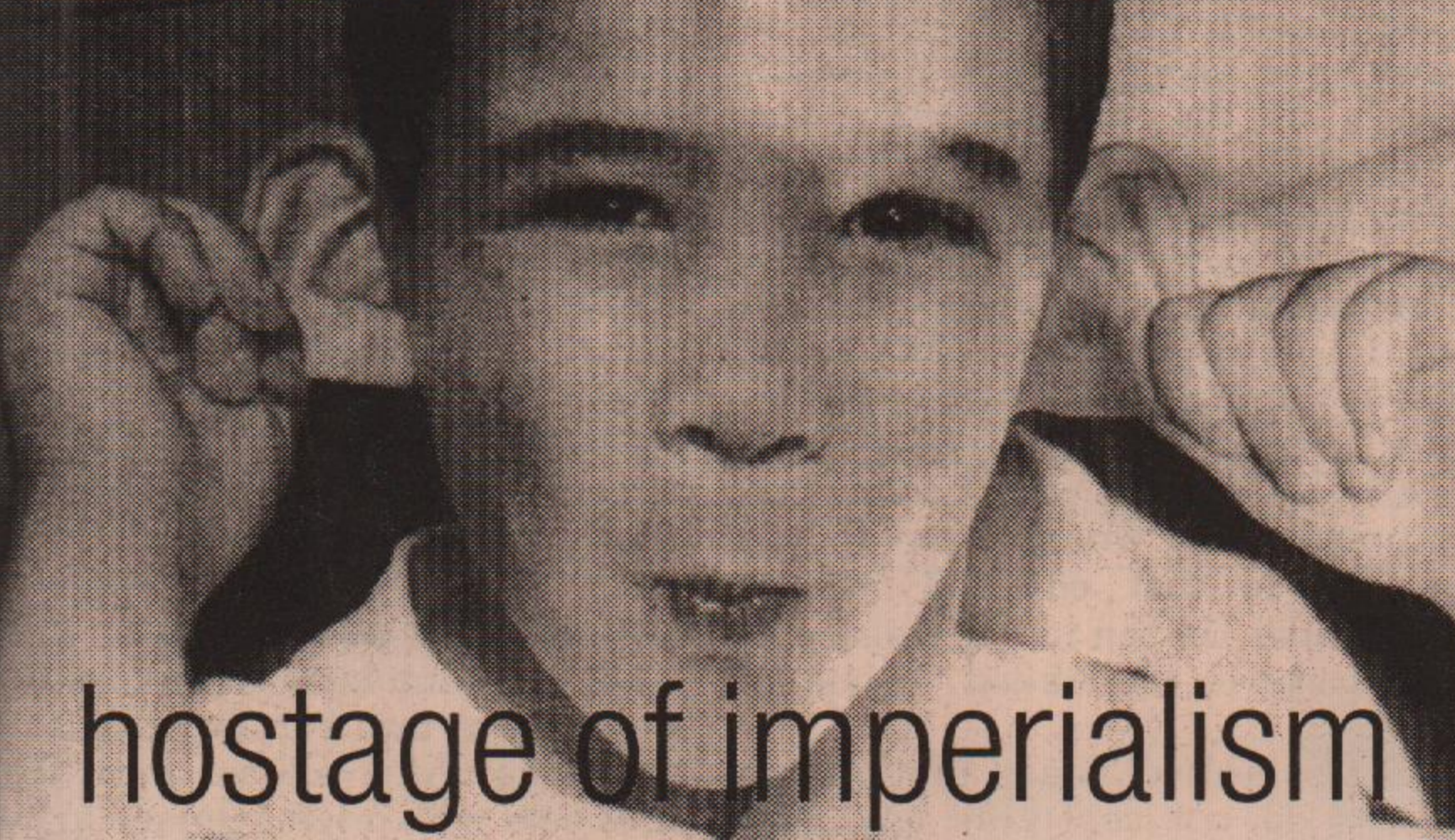
mini-brigade once again became a prominent feature of society which served a practical need and helped strengthen revolutionary solidarity.

But in 1989, as the rectification process was underway, came the collapse of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, followed by the fall of the Soviet Union. The loss of vital markets and political support was a hammer blow to the revolution and led to what was termed the Special Period. Sugar exports fell by 95% between 1989 and 1991 as Cuba lost 85% of its markets. Oil imports plummeted. By 1994, Cuban GDP had fallen by 34% from its 1989 level and the total amount of exports plunged by 70%. The combination of the blockade and the Special Period created severe shortages and led to a growing black market and an increase in illegal emigration.

To confront the crisis and bring desperately-needed hard currency into the economy, the Cuban government was forced to make a number of concessions towards the market economy: these included increased foreign investment in the form of joint ventures, the legalisation of the dollar economy and the expansion of tourism. Such changes, in turn, have led to the re-emergence of social ills such as prostitution, which had been virtually wiped out. These are, however, problems which the government is committed to tackling, and the dedication of the leadership and the commitment of the Cuban people remains strong.

Today, as ever, the revolution maintains its international stance. Cuba is a source of hope to oppressed peoples worldwide and offers an alternative model to imperialist exploitation. The Cuban revolution demonstrates that the only solution to global inequality and immiseration is socialism. ■

## Elián Gonzalez



hostage of imperialism

**O**ver recent months, the exile Cuban community in Miami plumbed new depths in its efforts to undermine the Cuban revolution with the kidnapping and systematic brainwashing of a six-year-old child.

On 25 November 1999, Elián Gonzalez was picked up at sea by the US Coastguard. His mother, stepfather and nine other Cuban would-be emigrants had drowned when their flimsy raft capsized. The little boy was handed over to distant relatives in Miami whom he had never met. With the backing of the virulently anti-communist Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), Elián has been turned into a cause célèbre for the entire exile community. When US Immigration ruled

that the boy must be returned to his father in Cuba, CANF promised mass action on the streets, violence and a blockade around the house where Elián is staying to prevent his removal. This powerful lobby ensured that an elected Florida judge, with known connections to the Miami relatives, set aside the immigration service ruling. US presidential candidates from both parties have spoken out against returning Elián to Cuba and the legal procedure is being deliberately strung out.

### Shameful manoeuvres

Elián is being used as a political pawn to extol the 'freedom' and good life of the United States (capitalism) against the so-called poverty and misery of 'Castro's

Cuba' (communism). To this end, a vulnerable and traumatised child has been denied a return to his family and normality in Cuba and instead is cynically paraded around dressed in the emblems of his country's enemies, draped in the US flag and photographed sitting in a toy plane to look like a member of Brothers to the Rescue. There is talk of offering Elián 'political asylum' or imposing US citizenship upon him. At the same time, he is showered with expensive and sophisticated toys, sweets, a trip to DisneyWorld. He is allowed to go nowhere without his Miami relatives – not even to meet his two grandmothers, who flew over from Cuba to visit him at the end of January. His father reports that when he phones him from Cuba, the Miami relatives stuff the boy's mouth with sweets and tell him what to say.

This cynical abuse of a young child by his self-styled guardians should be cause enough for Elián to be sent straight home to his father. International law demands it; natural justice demands it. Even the US's own discriminatory immigration policy towards Cuba – the Cuban Adjustment Act – demands it.

For 33 years, the Act has actively encouraged illegal migration from Cuba to the US by the promise of US citizenship to those who leave the island illegally, while severely restricting visas to those who wish to go through the proper channels. Meanwhile the illegal US propaganda station, Radio Martí, blares out lies about the capitalist paradise that awaits just the other side of the shark-infested Florida

Straits. Those seduced by the propaganda often pay huge sums to 'traffickers in persons' and risk their lives on unseaworthy vessels and rafts. Elián's stepfather apparently charged those who travelled with him \$1,000 each. However, the Act stipulates *that those picked up at sea – as Elián was – should be returned to Cuba immediately.*

### Rank hypocrisy

This politically-motivated immigration policy applies, of course, only to socialist Cuba. CANF claims it would be a 'human rights abuse' to return Elián to poverty in Cuba. But immigrant children from neighbouring Haiti are unceremoniously deported back to the island, where life expectancy is nearly 30 years less than that in Cuba; where infant mortality is 95 per 1,000 live births (6.4 in Cuba) and where they have 50% less chance of learning to read or write than a Cuban child.

Within the United States itself eight million children are without healthcare, many of them from immigrant families. Infant mortality in the USA is 7.2 per 1,000 live births, higher than in Cuba and, when statistics are analysed, twice as high for black children as for white. Drugs and guns are rife in US schools; a third of all inner-city children have had someone they know killed by the time they are 15. The Nike sweaters and Mickey Mouse baseball caps, hi-tech toys and Disney-World glitz which surround Elián are a glittering sham. A regretful Cuban exile wrote to Elián's father, imploring him not

to give in 'to a bunch of wackos who have power in this country in which there is not the least bit of respect for a child's life. This I tell you, as an exile, because I was one of those who, perhaps like Elián's mother, left from there thinking for the land of the free, and I found out that there's nothing of the sort and the power of those who have money rules.'

The Cubans may be poor in material resources, but are rich in their socialist society and the gains of the Revolution. In Cuba, every child goes to school, has access to healthcare and is cherished and valued. Elián's father has refused attempts by CANF to bribe him with offers of millions of dollars, a house and a car to defect to the USA. Instead, Cubans have mobilised in their millions to demand Elián's return to socialist Cuba. Hundreds of thousands demonstrate daily outside the US Interests Section in Havana; the Cuban children's organisation, the Pioneers, has brought the youth of Cuba out onto the street; all over the country placards, banners and t-shirts demand that Elián be returned to his family, his home and Cuba.

Cat Wiener

### DEMAND ELIÁN'S RETURN TO CUBA!

President Bill Clinton:  
e-mail [president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov)  
tel: 00 1 202 456 1111/fax: 00 1 202 456 2461

Attorney General Janet Reno  
Tel 00 1 202 514 2001/Fax 00 1 202 307 6777

Vice-President Al Gore:  
vice.president@whitehouse.gov

Send messages of support to Cuba via Granma International: [redac@granma.get.cma.net](mailto:redac@granma.get.cma.net)

# Long Lartin - liberal no more

Over the last five years the regime at Long Lartin maximum security prison in Worcestershire has been an accurate barometer of the radical diminution of prisoners' rights under first Michael Howard and now Jack Straw. **JOHN BOWDEN** reports.

Opened in 1973 as a liberal showcase gaol for the treatment of long-term prisoners, until the early 1990s Long Lartin enjoyed a reputation for enlightened, progressive ideas, albeit in the face of constant opposition from the Prison Officers Association. Its regime reflected a certain balance of power fought for by prisoners throughout the long-term system during the 1970s and 1980s and a high degree of solidarity and collective organisation among prisoners at Long Lartin itself.

The backlash under Michael Howard transformed the gaol into a testing ground for crude behaviour modification methods and psychological brutality, zealously pursued by screws eager to exact revenge for the years when prisoners had possessed a degree of empowerment and autonomy.

A significant dimension in the enforcement of a more brutal regime was the gradual removal of governors with a hint of liberalism and their replacement by screws in suits, hard-line and thuggish individuals rapidly promoted to governor grade positions.

Today Long Lartin operates as one large control unit with a graduated regime of punishment and discipline very obviously based on US prison regimes. Level One is the segregation/punishment unit. In 1999 a brand new segregation unit was built with accommodation for approximately 50 prisoners. The new unit came complete with 'anti-dirty-protest cells', CCTV-monitored strong-box cells and a regime deliberately designed to induce maximum psychological tension. Any protest is inevitably met

with maximum force and the emphasis is solidly on persuading prisoners dissent is pointless and simply invites even greater pain and distress.

Given such power over prisoners, screws in the segregation unit routinely abuse their authority and en-

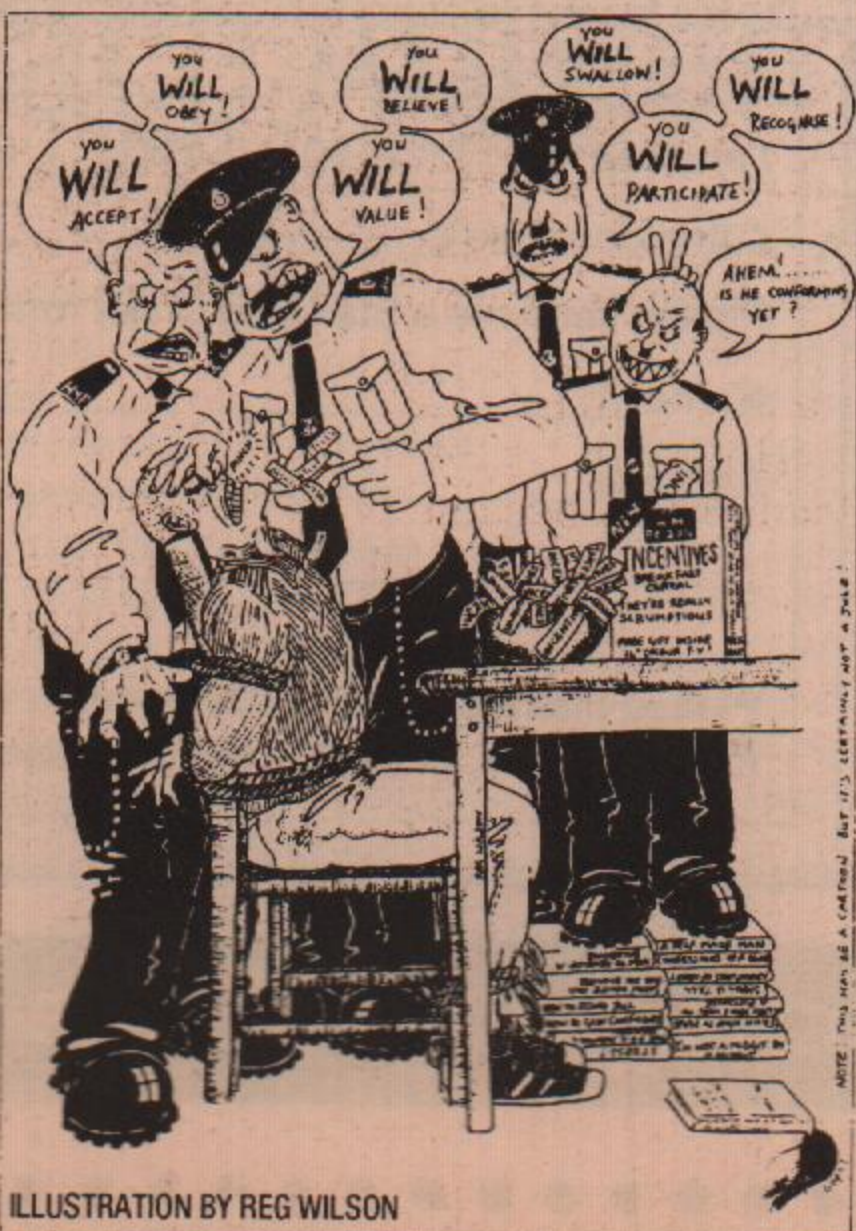


ILLUSTRATION BY REG WILSON

gage in 'wind-up' sessions, intended to inflict even greater psychological stress, as well as providing entertainment for the perpetrators.

Most prisoners in the segregation unit are not there for any specific offence against prison discipline but simply because they are deemed to have a 'bad attitude' and have shown insufficient respect towards prison staff. They are segregated 'in the interests of good order and discipline' (Prison Rule 45) and often spend months in segregation or solitary

confinement with no access to due process or a fair hearing.

Recently the administration at Long Lartin has attempted to deflect criticism of its arbitrary use of Rule 45 by the creation of a so-called Rule 45 Board. This meets every 28 days to 'review' the segregation of prisoners and is composed of prison officers, a probation officer, psychologist, doctor, member of the Board of Visitors, and an assistant governor. Its procedures are a mockery of natural justice. Prisoners are 'invited' to attend and given about three minutes to explain why they should be released from segregation. Following their 'contribution', they are immediately handed a photocopied notice informing them of the decision the board had already reached to extend their segregation for another 28 days. Every prisoner is given exactly the same reason for his continued segregation. It is to the eternal shame of the so-called 'specialist staff' on this board (doctors etc) that they willingly allow themselves to be a party to this charade and compromise their integrity so irreparably.

The board is usually chaired by a low-grade governor who is operational head of the segregation unit. Three years ago he was a senior prison officer in the old segregation unit, during a period when claims of brutality and maltreatment against prisoners were rife; his influence is apparent in the behaviour of the staff in the new segregation unit.

Prisoners who finally leave segregation are moved to Level Two - the 'Basic regime' wing. Created in 1995 as part of the new Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (devised to

divide prisoners by a system of reward and punishment), the Basic wing at Long Lartin was originally used to punish prisoners who refused to work. Since 1995, however, the reasons for removing prisoners to 'Basic' have become extremely elastic and staff now use it arbitrarily to discourage defiance and as a form of unofficial punishment. It is to all intents and purposes an unofficial segregation unit, without the theoretical procedural safeguards supposedly governing the ordinary segregation of prisoners. Conditions are austere, with prisoners confined to their cells for 22 hours a day. Any expression of individual protest inevitably results in removal back to Level One and the imposition of collective punishment on everyone else, usually in the form of 24-hour lockdown.

Prisoners usually spend 28 days on the Basic wing; however this is often extended indefinitely at the whim of staff, usually for the most petty and spiteful of reasons. The purpose is to break the prisoner's spirit and instil a deep-seated disinclination to question authority. Any complaints are forwarded to the segregation unit governor, who is also in charge of the Basic wing, and are inevitably ignored.

Level Three is 'Perry Wing', a prison officers' paradise of strict control and discipline, where prisoners know their place and screws behave like petty tyrants. No defiance is tolerated and a submissive demeanour towards staff is expected at all times. This is a model that will be reproduced throughout the long-term dispersal system unless prisoners organise against it. Unfortunately, for the moment the system at Long Lartin is encountering no resistance whatsoever and the administration's attitude is characterised by arrogant triumphalism. Their view is that the organised resistance of the 1970s and '80s has now been defeated to the extent where prisoners will suffer any abuse or insult in silence. A malaise of quiet rage has now replaced open protest.

Unless prisoners mobilise and organise to defend their human rights, they face a future of unimaginable oppression and cruelty, and the sadistic use of control unit regimes will become standard practice throughout the system. ■

## INSIDE NEWS

### Irish POWs update

All the POWs repatriated from England to the 26 Counties have now been released on extended licence; however Britain continues to hold three recently sentenced men in this country, with no sign that they will be repatriated in the near future. The three men, who were arrested after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and who are therefore not subject to its provisions, are Darren Mulholland, Liam Grogan and Tony Hyland. Darren and Liam were sentenced to 22 years imprisonment each and Tony to 25.

In November 1999 Darren Mulholland was ghosted from Full Sutton to Frankland segregation unit and told he would have to wear prison uniform. He responded by going 'on the blanket', to which the prison in turn responded by removing all privileges and placing him on a 'diet' of one meal per day. Following international protest - including the 'lobbying' of Peter Mandelson, who was caught unawares on a trip to the USA - Darren was moved again, to Belmarsh prison, and given his own clothes. He is now back at Frankland on normal location (see letters page).

### Thomas Meyer-Falk

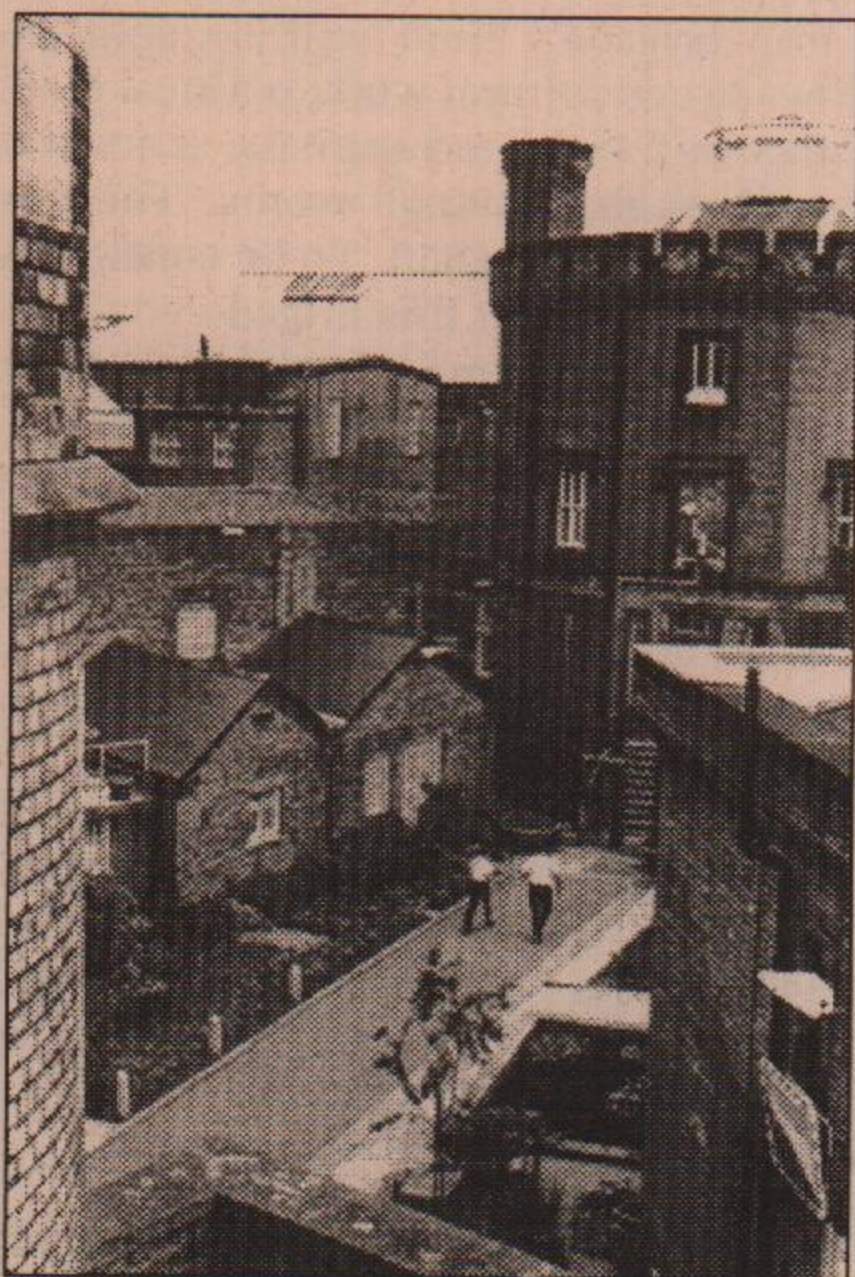
FRFI has been contacted by a German political prisoner, Thomas Meyer-Falk, who was convicted of a bank robbery in 1996 and sentenced to 13½ years' imprisonment plus 'preventive detention', which is equivalent to a discretionary life sentence, ie the authorities will only release him when they consider he is sufficiently broken. Thomas told us: 'In gaol I fight for human rights and against repression. For this I have been kept in solitary confinement. I could leave my cell only in irons, had to exercise alone and was subject to strict censorship. The biggest problem I face at present is the temperature in my cell. The heater works from 6am until 7.30am and from 3.30 to 6.30pm. I am kept in a special isolation cell in which the floor is bare concrete and it is extremely cold.'

Readers in Britain are asked to send urgent letters to the German Embassy, 23 Belgrave Square, London SW1 (Fax: 0171 834 1345) protesting about Thomas' treatment. Letters of solidarity can be sent in German or English to Thomas Meyer-Falk, c/o JVA - Z3117, Schönbornstrasse 32, D76646 Bruchsal, Germany. Further information on his situation can be obtained on request by e-mailing abcibk@hotmail.com. ■

## Wandsworth rules - not OK

Having recently castigated the lazy, brutal and uncaring behaviour of staff at Wormwood Scrubs, Feltham and Preston prisons, the Chief Inspector of Prisons' report into Wandsworth prison in south London comes as little surprise.

Sir David Ramsbotham visited Wandsworth in July 1999 and his report was published in December. His team was particularly shocked by the squalor of the segregation unit, which the report describes as run on 'a punishment ethos within rigid and unconvincing staffing arrangements'. The cells were 'without exception... filthy with a discernible smell of urine in most of them... ingrained dirt on most surfaces, piles of debris swept into corners or pushed to the margins of the rooms. Several walls had examples of organic matter splattered over them. We found live cockroaches in two cells and prisoners told us that the floors became infested at night. The paintwork was damaged and flaking. Salts escaping from the brickwork suppurated through the paint... [The] stainless steel sanitary units... were filthy and stained while some were not in working order. Segregation unit staff told us they had



not been descaled since their installation, five years before.' Prisoners arriving in the segregation unit were strip-searched in a manner deliberately designed to be both degrading and intimidating.

The whole prison was characterised by a total lack of interest in the welfare of prisoners and a determination to stick to what the report

refers to as 'the Wandsworth way' - the running of the prison, not merely as a place of containment rather than care or rehabilitation, but specifically as a place of punishment. This is compounded by the presence in significant numbers of two categories of prisoner, one of which is mentioned in the report - those on so-called 'overcrowding drafts' from northern prisons, who may have only a few weeks or even days to serve, and who are shipped to London, because Wandsworth has the space. The other category being prisoners who were formerly located in open prisons, in particular Latchmere House, and who are considered to have offended against prison discipline, often in the pettiest of ways. Their punishment is to have their security category increased and to be relocated at Wandsworth where prison staff make very sure that any illusions they brought from open prison that prison was benevolent or neutral are swiftly knocked out of them.

Wandsworth's special rules are legendary. FRFI has frequently heard from prisoners who on arrival there from other gaols have applied for normal entitlements, such as visits or clean clothes, only to be refused contemptuously on the grounds that 'this

is Wandsworth'. Visitors encounter the same attitude; that is if they are lucky enough to receive a visiting order and then manage to get through the 'booked visits' system. The 'Wandsworth rules', especially that which dictates that no prisoner is to walk on the hallowed polished 'centre' of the radiating wings, have been a source of pride to staff and misery to prisoners for many years. Wandsworth was the last prison to grudgingly accept that prisoners on exercise had a right to speak to one another.

The Chief Inspector is only telling the government and the public what those prisoners who are not too frightened to speak out have been telling everyone for years: Wandsworth, like Wormwood Scrubs and countless other local hell-hole gaols is 'a screws' nick', run by prison officers for prison officers. Their union, the POA, is all powerful and they are entirely unconcerned by any occasional ineffectual bleatings from graduate governors about fair or humane treatment for prisoners. Such governors soon learn to keep quiet anyway so the screws get on with their reign of terror and everyone else - 'Chaplains, Doctors and members of the Board of Visitors, as well as line management within the prison and the Prison Service' - shuts up and lets them get on with it.

Jane Nicholson

April 2000 will be the tenth anniversary of the **Strangeways Uprising** - Britain's biggest ever prison protest. Prisoners are invited to send in written contributions to FRFI's anniversary coverage.

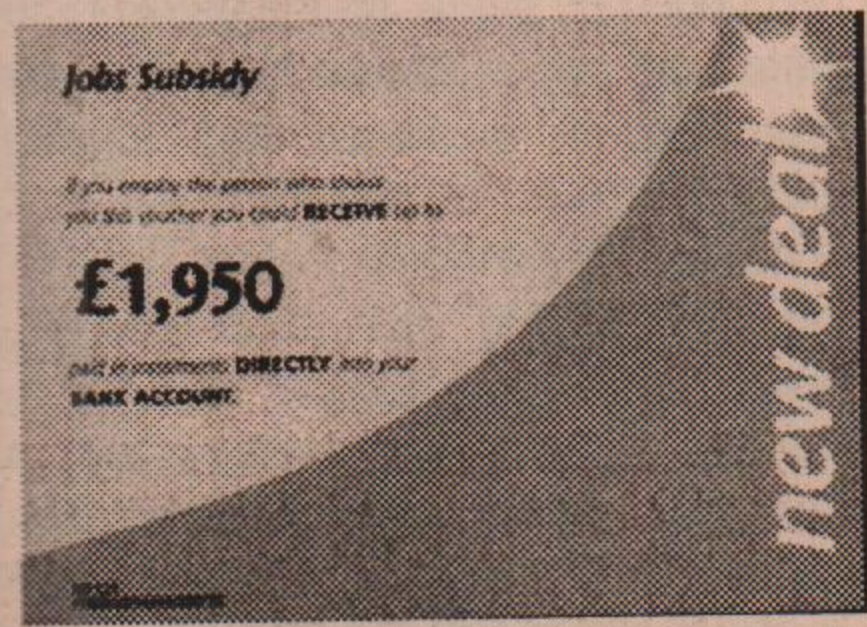


Strangeways 1990: A Serious Disturbance is available for £7.95 (including p+p) from Larkin Publications, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

**FRFI ROUNDUP**

FRFI supporters have continued to make the fight against poverty pay one of their priorities. The Labour government has shown its contempt for the poor by refusing to increase the minimum wage of £3.60 per hour in line with inflation, pitiful though this increase would be. Meanwhile an industrial tribunal has found in favour of a company that refused to pay a worker the minimum wage. Gurdev Kaur had been working for a textile firm in Birmingham for two and a half years, earning a dreadful £2 an hour on piece-work. When the minimum wage was introduced, the firm told its workers they all needed to meet a set level of productivity. When Ms Kaur failed to meet it, she was sacked.

Labour's poverty minimum wage is one side of its ruthless drive to discipline the poor and punish the 'undeserving'. Another side is New Deal. Recently claimants have been given a glossy yellow card to take round with them as they seek new employment. The card reads 'If you employ the person who shows you this voucher you could RECEIVE up to £1,950 paid in instalments DIRECTLY into your BANK ACCOUNT' [emphasis in the original]. It is humiliating enough having to traipse round canvassing employers for a job, even worse when you are on 'special offer'. There are no res-



# FRFI fighting poverty pay

## MEETINGS

**London FRFI**  
Public meeting: Wednesday 1 March at the Yorkshire Grey Pub corner Grays Inn Road and Theobalds Road WC1. Buses: 19, 38, 45, 55, 341 Nearest tube: Chancery Lane. Tel 0171 837 1688 for details of London FRFI Readers' Group or email rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

**Preston FRFI**  
FRFI Readers Group meeting Wednesday 8 March at The Adelphi (upstairs), Fylde Road, Preston, starting at 7:30pm

**Manchester FRFI**  
For Manchester FRFI Readers groups email fightpov@freenetname.co.uk

**Midlands**  
Leicester FRFI Readers Group: Saturday 19 February 2:00pm Venue: Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate. Topic: Rebuilding the socialist movement after the collapse of the Soviet Union

**Nottingham FRFI Readers Group:** Saturday 4 March 2:30pm Venue: International Community Centre/YMCA, 61b Mansfield Road. Topic: Rebuilding the socialist movement after the collapse of the Soviet Union

For further information on street events in Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Lincoln, Scunthorpe and Doncaster phone 01400 230 151 or email revcom@talk21.com

**Dundee FRFI**  
For details of meetings email scotrfg@mail.com

trictions on the sort of employment you may be given. The boss only has to pay you £3.60 per hour, and if he can describe part of your work as training, he can pay you even less. After six months, he can throw you out and recruit someone else with the voucher. Launched in 1998, New Deal is compulsory for all 18-24 year olds. 284,300 have been forced on to it, and so far 144,300 have completed it. Of these, only 57% have got jobs out of it, most of which have been either temporary or casual, and more than half of these, 55%, are back on the dole. The issues of poverty pay and the punitive regime

that Labour has established to force people in to poverty pay jobs are crucial for rebuilding the working class movement in this country. Join our Fight Poverty Pay campaign. If you have any information that will be useful for the campaign, or that you think we should publicise in our regular bulletins, contact us on [fightpov@freenetname.co.uk](mailto:fightpov@freenetname.co.uk). If you want copies of our bulletins to sell and distribute in your area, send us an email.

**FRFI Fighting Fund**  
Since we launched our fighting fund last issue we have managed to raise £550, over our target of £500. Thanks go to a number of supporters who raised the amount of their regular donations; to Manchester comrades who raised £60 from their second-hand bookstall, and London supporters who raised £200 with another bar night.

The campaign must continue. We are having to renegotiate the lease on our office, and the opening offer from the council is to double the rent. Once again we appeal to you our readers. There is only one newspaper on the left that maintains a consistent anti-imperialist and anti-Labour Party standpoint - *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* We need your support to help keep it going.

## FRFI FIGHTING FUND

Please send in donations to: FRFI Fighting Fund, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques etc made payable to Larkin Publications.

Write to us for Standing Order forms that will enable us to plan on a regular income.

Don't forget to take out a subscription.

I enclose: £100  £50  £20  £10  £5

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## Fighting capitalist lies...

# Boycott Bacardi Campaign

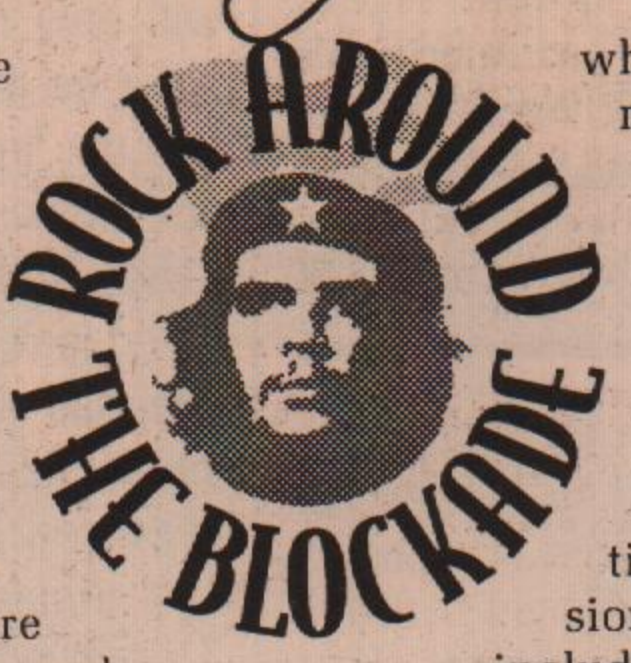
## Bar Busting Bonanza

In the run-up to the festive season, Bacardi had made a big push and their advertising was hard to miss. Unashamedly trading on its Cuban roots it promoted Bacardi Rigo as 'cut the Cuban way', its rum as 'Established Cuba 1862'. The fact is that neither are produced or sold in Cuba and Bacardi stands for none of the things that Cuba is so famous for today: defiance and spirit, a healthy and passionate people, a love of partying and musical expression. The reality is that the Bacardi family, who fled Cuba after the 1959 revolution, wants to destroy Cuba's socialist revolution that has brought universal free education and healthcare to the people of Cuba.

The bar bust action aimed to expose Bacardi's propaganda. Dressed as blood-sucking Bacardi bats we noisily occupied the entrances to various Bacardi toting bars. On occasions we were approached by the management, but we stood our ground and handed them a Bacardi info pack (available to you on request for £2) telling them what this multinational is up to. It was a merry event with lots of noise and support from the public. As we were sponsored for each of the bars we visited we expect to raise about £500.

We are now building for a national dayschool in London on 11 March: **Boycott Bacardi! - Smash the US Blockade of Cuba!** Bacardi was prominent in drawing up the latest tightening of the US blockade via the Helm-Burton Act. Bacardi, in fact, has been working with US imperialism towards a single goal for 41 years: the destruction of socialist Cuba. We call on all those

who are opposed to multinational domination of the global economy, those involved in the anti-capitalist movement and all progressives to join with us in a day of discussion, debate, and deliberation! Themes and discussion during the day will include - a history of US aggression against Cuba and Bacardi's complicit role - Cuba's stand against the inequality, poverty, and injustice of globalisation - building solidarity with socialist Cuba - getting active in the boycott Bacardi Campaign - sharing experiences of direct action, demonstrations and practical work.



### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- London**  
Street stall, Saturday 5 February, 1pm, Wood Green. Meet outside the entrance to the shopping centre by the library.
- Work session, Wednesday, 9 February, 7pm. Building for the Boycott Bacardi dayschool. Tel. 0171 837 1688 for details of venue.
- One Love - fundraiser, Saturday 12 February, 9pm till late: Harper's Bar, Opposite Tufnell Park tube, north London. Party on down to hip-hop, funk and Latin beats while raising money for a sound system for Cuban youth.
- Campaign meeting, Monday 14 February, 8pm Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 nearest tube Holborn.
- Street stall, Saturday 19 February, 1pm, Camden Town. Meet outside tube on Camden High Street.
- Look out for our stall outside Sadlers

Wells, Rosebery Avenue, Islington, which is holding a Cuban Dance Festival: Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba, Rumbadela. 2-13 February. Phone for details of times.

**Bacardi Bar Bust!** Evening of Saturday 4 March, Central London, meet at Oxford Circus tube, outside Shelley's. Phone 0171 837 1688 for times.

**Boycott Bacardi! Smash the US Blockade!** dayschool Saturday 11 March, 11am till 5pm. Marchmont Centre, Marchmont St, London, WC1, nearest tube Russell Square, £5/2 concessions, wheelchair accessible.

Campaign meeting, Monday 13 March, 8pm, Conway Hall, (as above).

### Midlands

Lincoln Rock around the Blockade meeting, Wednesday 1 March, 7.30pm. For venue details contact 01400 230151.

Street stalls are regularly held in Sheffield, Lincoln, Leicester, Birmingham, and Nottingham. For details phone of these and transport to the London Boycott Bacardi dayschool in March, phone Jim on 01400 230 151

### Northwest

Stalls are continuing in various areas and with a regular stall at the University of Central Lancashire (UCL), Preston every Wednesday in the foyer of the Foster Building.

Campaign meeting, Wednesday 16 February at UCL, Harrington Building, 1pm. Tel: 01253 729876 for details.

### Bristol

We will be going up to London for the Bacardi Bust Dayschool in a minibus. Contact if interested. Up to that time we will be holding street stalls in the centre of Bristol and events up at the university. Come and join us. Contact Naz: nr8977@Bristol.ac.uk

**WANTED!** Are there any DJs out there who want to support RATB by lending their skills to a fundraising event? We can provide a venue but we desperately need your talents. Contact our central office on 0171 837 1688 if you can help.

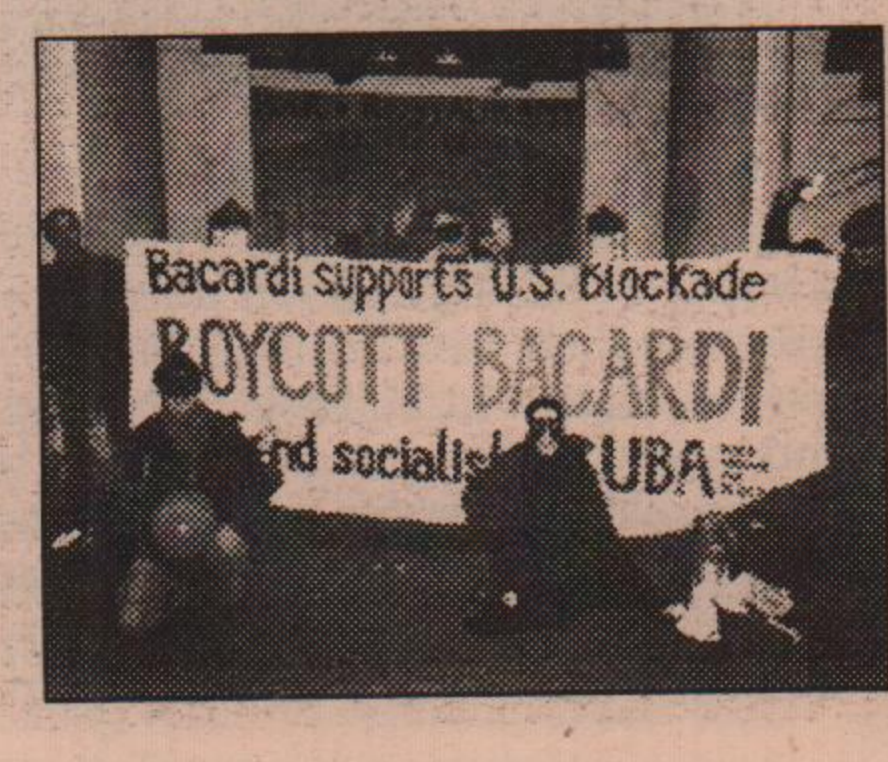
### Brigade to Cuba: a unique experience

Rock around the Blockade's fourth brigade to Cuba will be leaving for Guantanamo, southeast Cuba on Saturday 15 April returning on 29 April (though there are a number of places for a 1 May return for those who want to stay on for the May Day Celebrations in Havana). The brigade's time will be split between agricultural work, political meetings and visits to hospitals, schools as well as recreational events. The cost will be around £650. To be considered for inclusion on this brigade you need to be able to commit yourself to working in solidarity with Cuba, before the brigade goes out and after its return. You must be prepared to raise some money towards the sound system. For more information contact us at Rock Around the blockade, c/o FRFI BCM Box 5909, London, WC1N, 3XX. E-mail us at [rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk](mailto:rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk) and visit our website at <http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk> for fundraising activities, further details of brigades to Cuba, Boycott Bacardi Campaign material and education on the importance of the Cuban revolution to the struggle in this country. ■



### US embassy picket

RATB and the RCG joined the Cuba Solidarity Campaign on its picket of the US Embassy on 29 January which was calling for the return of Elian Gonzalez to Cuba (see p12). Almost 100 people turned up to chant and listen to a handful of speakers - two Labour MPs, trade union representatives and CSC members Ken Gill and Steve Wilkinson, who led the picket. The CSC denied RATB any speaking rights, despite being approached at the start. We were first told that the speakers' list was long but they might fit us in at the end. But when the end came, the line had changed and they were telling us 'we don't have to let you speak at all'. Shameful sectarianism when Ken Gill had just said that we all need to be part of building a solidarity movement in support of Cuba. This did not, however, stop us from speaking over our megaphone when Steve Wilkinson ended the event and before people had dispersed. Our speech against the US blockade, in favour of Elian's return to Cuba and about the work of Rock around the Blockade was applauded.





**FIGHT  
RACISM**

**FIGHT IMPERIALISM**

# Crisis in the NHS

## Little reserve

Britain has almost the lowest number of doctors per head of population in the developed world (one for 625 people) and spends only £869 per person per year on health care – less than Germany, France, Denmark, Belgium or Finland and well below the European Union average (OECD figures). Over the last ten years, the number of acute beds in Britain has fallen by 25,000 and there is a shortage of 1,500 nurses – 600 have left clinical practice to work for NHS Direct (a telephone helpline now covering 65% of Britain). Bed occupancy rates are running at 95% nationally, compared to 75% in the 1980s, leaving the system unable to cope with a sudden increase in demand. Britain already has the lowest number of intensive care beds in Europe per capita, and new hospitals being built under the Private Finance Initiative provide for significantly fewer beds than the units they replace.

The Department of Health is sitting on the report of a National Beds Inquiry, ordered by former health secretary Frank Dobson 18 months ago. Hardly surprising, since it calls for an increase in hospital beds and supports health workers' claims that money Labour had allocated for new intensive care (ITU) beds is being used to keep existing beds open. The Intensive Care Society says that there is no evidence of the new ITU beds despite government claims to the contrary.

## Present crisis

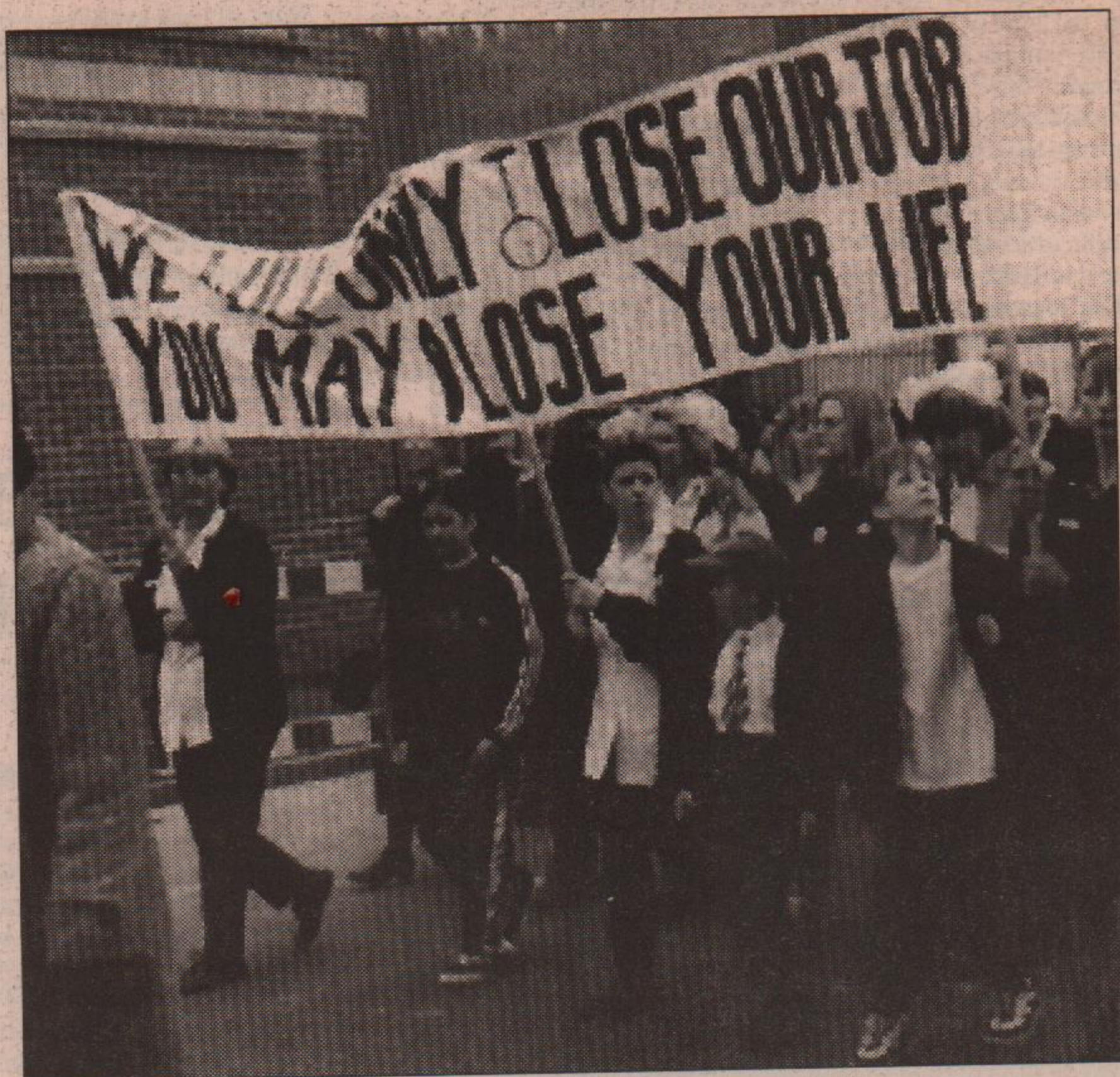
Alan Milburn, Secretary of State for Health, insists that the number of doctors is being increased, but the President of the Royal College of Surgeons, contradicting him, has said that numbers of surgeons in training are being reduced. By April, national training posts for doctors will be cut by 300.

The NHS Executive reports that elective surgery has almost come to a halt as there are so few spare beds. Emergency admissions rose by 30% in December. Between Christmas and New Year, hundreds of medical patients were in beds reserved for surgical cases. The absence of adequate ITU facilities has pushed the system to the limit – on 6 January, there were only 11 empty ITU beds out of 1,500 across the whole of Britain. That has resulted in risky transfers of critically ill patients, intensive care patients being treated in inappropriate settings and cancelled operations for anyone needing post-operative ITU care, including vital cancer surgery.

Elective surgery was due to recommence on 10 January across the country, but had to be cancelled in many centres, including three hospitals in Liverpool, all Portsmouth hospitals, St Thomas's hospital in London and the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, because of bed shortages. Nationally, on 9 January there were still only 21 free intensive care beds. The crisis in ITU is exacerbated by staff shortages. Hence at the Royal London, only 11 out of 13 ITU beds can be used due to the shortage of ITU nurses, whilst Bedford General cannot recruit nurses to staff a fifth ITU bed after four ITU nurses joined the local NHS Direct call centre.

The waiting list cut of 100,000 pledged by the government at the General Election has slipped even

Nearly three years into a New Labour government, public dissatisfaction with its running of the NHS is at an all-time high. Labour's plan – crucial to its electoral prospects – was to maintain an acceptable provision of state-funded health care for the middle class and the better-off section of the working class, while sustaining a basic level of service for the mass of the working class. All this while remaining within (self-imposed) Tory spending limits and not raising income tax. That plan has failed. The periodic winter bed crisis, exacerbated by a 'flu epidemic' (in fact an annual phenomenon, with an increase this year of viral pneumonia), has simply revealed the underlying crisis in the NHS and, as Lord Winston's remarks testify, the glaring inadequacy of provision throughout the health service.



Communities have battled to keep hospitals open, now there are 'too few beds'

further from its grasp. As one consultant radiologist said: 'it is impossible to run an elective service when the entire hospital is filled with medical emergencies'. November 1999 figures for Wales show a 2% monthly increase in waiting lists and no change in the position of 12 months ago. A summer crisis is likely because the backlog of elective cases will continue to create pressures on beds.

The chronic under-funding and inequality of provision within the health service is graphically demon-

strated by the provision of cancer services and in care for the elderly. There are proven geographic discrepancies in cancer treatment, with the more expensive drugs not being used in some areas. Meanwhile, cases of cancer are rising in Britain so that four out of ten people will be affected at some time in their lives. Despite this, Britain spends far less on cancer treatment than Europe and the USA. Charities provide twice as much funding for cancer research as the government (£62.4 million last year). A report by the Association of British

'We haven't been told the truth and I'm afraid there will come a time when it will be impossible to disguise the inequality of the health service from the general population' (Lord Winston, Labour peer and distinguished doctor)

Pharmaceutical Industry shows that compared to the USA, France and Germany, Britain has the highest death rate from cancer and spends the least on anti-cancer drugs.

An inquiry is investigating the cases of 50 elderly patients who died after allegedly being deprived of food and water by hospital staff. SOS NHS Patients in Danger, a pressure group set up by relatives, is taking cases to the European Court of Human Rights. Geriatric consultant Dr Treloar has described such treatment of elderly patients as 'involuntary euthanasia'.

## Labour's response

New Labour's response was swift: first silence the critics – Lord Winston was forced to retract his attack on the government – and then announce a pay rise which sounds good on paper. Senior nurses will be awarded a 7.8% pay rise; nurses, health visitors and midwives will get 3.4% and doctors and dentists 3.3%, all without the staging of previous years. Staff not covered by the Pay Review Body (porters, clerical staff, lab assistants) will get 3.2% or £300, whichever is greater.

However, there is no extra money to cover this. Trusts will have to bear the full cost. The pay rises along with the offer to health workers of a three-year pay deal backdated to April 1999 will mean an increase of 3.6% on the hospital pay bill for 2000/01, accounting for a third of their increased funds. In real terms, authorities which fund trusts have been given an average of 4.3% increase in their 2000/01 budget. This makes the pay awards look affordable – until you factor in the following financial obligations on the trusts:

- an extra 1% in employers' pension contributions;
- 0.5% to cover the costs of the European working time directive;
- deficits from the last financial year;
- discretionary salary points to pay for doctors and nurses;
- a £50 million package for hospital consultants facing the greatest intensity of work;
- a rapid inflation of generic drug costs which is resulting in huge over-spends this year.

The truth is that the headline increase is another sleight of hand, and 2000/01 is undoubtedly going to

be the hardest year on record for NHS funding.

Blair's response to the NHS crisis and Lord Winston's criticisms was to appear on TV and promise a real annual increase of 5% for the next six years in NHS funding, to raise health expenditure from 6.8% of GDP to the European average of 8%. However, closer study shows that the cash increase would need to be closer to 6% per annum, and Blair has anyway tied such increases to the state of the economy – there are not going to be income tax increases to support it. It is another New Labour mirage – like its 1998 promise of 7,000 new doctors which turned out only to be the number already in training, or the 1998 '£21 billion extra for the NHS' – the result of counting several times an increase of less than half the figure.

## Squaring the circle

If the NHS cannot satisfy the middle classes and privileged sections of the working class who form Labour's electoral base, those who can afford it will desert to private medicine, and those who can't will turn against Labour. This is New Labour's nightmare, and why it is so sensitive to campaigns such as the *Daily Mail's* 'third world hospitals'. Currently, only 11% of people in Britain – the rich – have private health care. Adequate coverage is extremely expensive because of all the loopholes insurers write into their policies. Hence the allegiance of the relatively well-off to the NHS is very real. To maintain this, Labour has embarked on a 'consumer-friendly' modernisation programme which includes:

- The establishment of the NHS Direct call centre service;
- Development of internet medical information services;
- Implementation of airline-style hospital outpatient booking services and privately operated walk-in centres;
- The formation of a National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to assess new drugs and procedures and recommend which will be affordable and of any benefit;
- The creation of a Commission for Health Improvement to carry out checks on hospitals and the introduction of revalidation for doctors both for discipline and to reduce expensive medical negligence claims.

The Royal College of General Practitioners and the GP committee of the British Medical Association has sent out consultation documents to every GP defining what is expected of a good doctor. 300 Personal Medical Services schemes are being piloted with salaried GPs employed directly by the Health Authority. The purpose is to discipline the clinical workforce and if necessary force consultants and GPs off the contracts conceded to them when the NHS was established. To help this, Labour has passed control of 80% of spending to primary care groups – local GPs, nurses and others who run primary care services. The aim is to get them to control access to more expensive hospital care.

The whole process is about accessibility, discipline and perceived standards. Yet none of it addresses the problems of insufficient numbers of trained nurses, understaffed ITU beds, nursing shortfalls and the reduction in the number of doctors in training. It is a fact that however NHS services are delivered, real spending on health has to increase by NHS inflation plus 3% at least to stay still. Labour has not delivered this and cannot given its commitment not to increase income tax. It cannot square the circle.

Hannah Caller