

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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LABOUR'S SEWER



Let's face it,
Gordon,
Scum always
rises to the top

Gordon Brown
Chancellor of the Exchequer;
oversees the Boardroom
Bonanza; 'I have faith in the
system we have created'.

Sir Clive
Thompson:
£1.45m salary
from Rentokil;
new Chairman
of the CBI;
'Distaste for
minimum
wage and
union
recognition';
pays his
workers on
average
£8,727 a year.

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Solidarity
price
£1

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KING RAT AND THE FAT CATS

Labour's spending review: working class made to pay

In recommending Labour's spending review to the House of Commons, Brown boasted that 'we have been steadfast in our priorities - the nation's priorities'. However, as our analysis of previous Labour budgets has shown, Labour's concept of 'nation' is limited to a very select coalition. Every policy statement and every spending decision is designed to ensure that the coalition of forces which elected it to power remains, as far as possible, on its side and intact, as economic conditions deteriorate and unemployment begins to rise again. So, while serving the interests of banking and multinational capital, Labour must at the same time keep the support of the professional, middle and upper working classes. Both the content and presentation of the spending review were contrived to achieve this end.

Financial discipline for the bankers

Brown began his statement to the Commons by referring to two economic reforms Labour had taken to achieve its long term aim of 'high and stable levels of growth and employment and sustainable public services'. The first was to hand monetary policy to an 'independent' Bank of England - that is, putting monetary policy in the hands of the bankers. The second was to impose a new framework of financial discipline on the public sector to achieve a 'current budget balance' and 'prudent levels of debt to national income' - that is, to run the economy in the interests of the bankers. The consequences for the public sector have been devastating.

As a result of the two-year spending limit imposed by Labour in May 1997, core government spending, adjusted for inflation, actually fell by 1% during Labour's first year of office. Brown says that 'this fiscal tightening will be locked-in into next year.' Public borrowing has been cut by £20bn and current budget surpluses are planned for the next three years of £7bn, £10bn and £13bn. Debt as a proportion of national income will fall below 40%. Britain, Brown proudly states, 'is among the most prudent of our G7 partners'. Government spending as a proportion of GDP, at 39.6%, is the second lowest share in the European Union after Ireland. The European average is nearly 10 percentage points higher. Even after the increased spending proposed in the latest three-year review, it will reach only 40.6% of GDP at the end of the Parliament, lower than the 41.1% inherited from the Tories. The bankers will be pleased.

To increase capital investment in the public sector, the government will extend the so-called private finance initiative

(PFI) and privatise public assets in areas where even the Tories would have found it difficult to tread. When the PFI was introduced by the Tories, Labour correctly argued that this was a cynical move to keep investment spending out of public accounts and have it financed

by the end of Parliament. The government's own figures show that the cash increase in these budgets is £17.2bn by 2001-02 and the £40bn is achieved by adding up the increases each year over the next three years, using 1998-99 as the starting point (*The Guardian* 21 July

shortages of doctors and nurses. In 1996-7, health authorities reported a cumulative deficit of £791m, and in December 1997, 28 health authorities and 74 NHS trusts were in 'serious financial difficulties' according to the National Audit Office. Building

be seen. They will only be introduced next April, nearly two years after Labour was elected to power and after an estimated 500,000 pensioners have been in danger of serious damage to their sight as a result of not being able to pay for the tests.

Education

Spending on education will grow by £1.9bn in 1999-2000, £2.3bn in 2000-01 and £1.8bn in 2001-2002, a cumulative rise of £6bn. This represents a real increase of 5.1% each year for three years to 2002, but falls to 3% a year for the length of the Parliament after the cutbacks in the first two years. The proportion of GDP spent on education will be lower than it was at the start of the Tories final term of office, 5.1% compared to 5.3%, and lower than the 5.4% of GDP given over to the education budget during the Callaghan government's final year of office.

In January 1998 there were 484,000 infant school children and 1.4m primary school children in classes over 30. Both figures are up from last year when Labour came to power - the former by 8,000 and the latter by 100,000. Average teachers' pay has fallen from being 36% above the average non-manual wage in the 1970s, to being 6.4%, or £1,436 more than it today. As a result and with the continual intensification and lengthening of the teaching day, unfilled vacancies for teachers rose to 2,359 in January 1998, a 30% increase over the previous year. In addition, applications for teacher training from graduates have fallen by 15.4% for primary courses and 13% for secondary. With Brown's spending review demanding 'further modernisation and reform' as the condition for extra spending, this Labour government has no intention of offering working class children an adequate education.

Making the working class pay

General government spending is due to rise 2.8% in real terms over the next three years, 2% per year for the full Parliament - less than the 2.6% of the last Tory Parliament. With most of the resources going into the two priority sectors of health and education, the rest of the budget programmes will grow only by 1.8% per year over the next three years, less than the growth rate of the economy. Spending on the Home Office however, including police and prisons, will rise by 5% per year in real terms, well above the average trend.

Essential to this spending review is the New Deal - the attempt to force working class people off benefits into jobs paying poverty wages to cut back public spending on social

security, the largest government budget. On page 3 we discuss the minimum wage in the context of the New Deal and show what it means for the working class.

The social security budget will grow by 1.9% a year, in real terms, over the next three years, according to government figures designed to assure Labour's City and business friends that the social security budget is being cut back. But this is another accounting deception. The real rise is 3% a year, once 'working families' tax credit, which replaces family credit, is treated as benefit spending rather than foregone tax revenues. The rise in the budget will be much greater if the economy slows down and unemployment grows. That is why the government is so determined to force through its New Deal measures, and seek other 'efficiency' measures throughout the public sector to ensure that it will be the working class who has to pay.

Public sector pay has fallen some 16% behind the private sector since 1982. In addition, pay increases in the public sector, since the Tory government first froze the pay bill in 1993, have been based on so-called 'efficiency' measures, in reality, a loss of 250,000 jobs. That will continue under Labour and under this spending review. Brown has set new 3-year 'efficiency' targets of between 3% and 10% in all departments, and money will only be released if departments keep to the government plans. With pay in the public sector increasing by 2.6% a year, half the rate of the private sector, the mass of workers in the public sector are being made to pay for Labour's election pledge not to raise taxes on the 'middle classes'.

As the economy slows down, with manufacturing industry already in recession and unemployment starting to rise again, even the minimal increases in public spending outlined in the spending review will eventually have to be cut back by a Labour government acting in the interests of the banks and multinationals, and determined to hold together the coalition which elected it to power. That is why the working class must break with Labour now.

The fight to defend jobs, pay and services in the public sector, the fight against Labour's New Deal and the fight against poverty pay are one and the same fight. It is a fight against the Labour government and the capitalist system it runs in the interests of the banks and multinationals.



Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor Brown - 'obliging agents of capitalism'

more expensively by the private sector. Now it has become part of the creed. As a result, as environmental campaigner George Monbiot argues: 'Much of the extra money Gordon Brown promised... will travel straight into the hands of the bankers controlling the new projects' (*The Guardian* 16 July 1998). Further privatisation of central and local government assets, including air traffic control, the Royal Mint and the Tote, will raise £11bn, handing out windfall profits and large commission fees to the City's financial institutions. George Monbiot is correct to conclude: 'Gordon Brown, is no more than a pliant manager, an obliging agent of the businessmen who have come to run this government.'

A 'public relations fraud'

The presentation of Labour's spending review plans was called a 'public relations fraud' by members of the Commons Treasury committee chaired by the right-wing Labour MP Giles Radice. The government had announced a cumulative increase in the health and education budgets of £21bn and £19bn, suggesting that spending in these key areas of concern to its 'middle class' supporters would be £40bn higher

in 1998). In fact once inflation is taken into account, the real figure is around £11bn. But the government needed to commit this fraud to hide the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to govern in the interests of the banks and multinational companies, while sustaining the economic privileges of its professional, middle class and upper working class supporters. An examination of government spending in the priority health and education sectors demonstrates the real situation.

Health

In cash terms, health spending increases £8.7bn from £36.5bn in the current year to £45.2bn in 2001-02. Once inflation is taken in to account the actual increases are £2bn in 1999-2000, £1.8bn in 2000-01 and £1.6bn in 2001-02, a total of £5.4bn, barely enough to allow the NHS to stand still. A 1% increase of inflation above government estimates would wipe out half of this. Overall health spending is expected to grow by 3.7% a year in real terms for the duration of this Parliament, barely higher than the manifestly inadequate 3% a year growth during the Tory years.

Already the NHS confronts longer waiting lists and critical

new hospitals through the PFI will only make matters worse. So far, all 14 first-wave PFI schemes have involved cutting the number of acute beds by 30-50%. In addition, further reductions in medical and nursing staff will be needed to pay for the higher rates of return which private companies demand for their shareholders and to cover their larger borrowing costs. The Lothian Health Board's proposed deal with a private consortium to rebuild Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary will cost £25m a year to fund, which means losing nearly 20% of its work force, 1,000 doctors, nurses and clerical staff. According to Department of Health consultants, for every £200m spent on PFI developments, 1,000 staff will have to go. Finally, even all this comes at a price, the NHS will still have to improve efficiency by 3% a year to achieve a further £1bn saving, and set new targets for asset sales. This can only lead to ever greater harassment of NHS workers, already overworked, by highly paid professional managers brought in to do Labour's dirty work.

This is the context in which the decision to restore free eye tests to pensioners at a cost of between £30m and £35m must

1. See FRFI 138 August/September 1997 and FRFI 142 April/May 1998 for a discussion of Labour's previous budgets.

King Rat and the fat cats

ROBERT CLOUGH

We have heard Jack Straw boasting about how he is 'worth' £89,000. What of the people whose interests he represents and protects? The new head of the Confederation of British Industry, Sir Clive Thompson, gets £1.45 million per year as chief executive of Rentokil. This is 15 times what Jack Straw gets, and over 150 times the average wage of Rentokil's 83,000 British employees - a miserable £8,727 per annum. And this is the company whose boast is that it is 'Britain's most admired company'.

Like Jack, Sir Clive has no doubt he is worth every penny. He has criticised calls for curbs on boardroom pay as 'inappropriate', 'distortions of the market' and 'undesirable'. He is also in no doubt that his employees are worth no more than what they get - in his opinion, they are paid a 'competitive rate'. This includes the 10,000 or so below the new minimum wage. He complains that the cost to Rentokil of meeting this and new limits on work time would be £10m - an onerous burden given its profits of £400m plus per year. Nevertheless such costs will be passed on to the customer - 'Not a good thing for the economy' he opines - but at least it will cover his wages.

Recent figures show how the

fat cats at the head of British capitalism have continued to monopolise the cream in the last 12 months. Average pay rises for executives of the largest British companies came to 18% - four times the rise in average earnings, and over six times the rate of inflation. Average pay for these bloated parasites is now £800,000 per year, a figure often dwarfed by the money they can make from the share options shovelled into their unprotesting pockets. In one week, they receive as much as the average annual wage. Since 1988, their pay has risen fivefold, nearly three times the rate of average earnings, and well over three times the rate of inflation.

Like a modern-day Uriah Heap, Labour wrings its hands at the revelations, urges moderation, and does nothing. Indeed, how could it? Fawning courtiers gathered round the throne of some mediaeval potentate would have more determination. Look at the fat cats with whom Labour has stuffed its governmental committees:

- Sir Richard Sykes from Glaxo Wellcome. He got £1.72m last year, a 53% pay rise. He obviously knows a thing or two about competitiveness, which is why he is on the government's 'competitiveness' task force.

- Also on the task force are CK Chow of GKN, the arms manufacturer, who got £635,000 after an 11% pay rise; Bryan Sanderson from BP who use armed

goons to protect their Colum-



Sir Clive Thompson - King Rat, hates unions, minimum wage, loves profits

bian oil interests - he took a 7% pay rise to pocket £609,000. Spare a thought (and even a penny) for Tesco's Terry Leahy who received only a 4% rise; however he may be reassured not merely by the £798,000 he got but also by the knowledge that this was 70 times what the average Tesco employee scraped together (£11,944).

- Then there is Sir Peter Davis, 'the man from the Pru', advising on Welfare to Work. His welfare was indeed assured last year, to the tune of £655,000, although he may be troubled by the fact that his pay rise was only 6%. But then what is this compared to the troubles of those to whom

his company mis-sold pensions?

- Lastly, spare a thought for Martin Taylor, advising on tax and benefits: having steered Barclays to a position where its profits fell by 29%, he felt he ought also to take a cut in pay. Not 29%, mind - that would have been vindictive; 10% was the figure his colleagues agreed on. Still, look on the bright side: that still left him with £738,000.

Such figures are of course staggering. Twelve fat cats last year received more than £1m. At £75 per week, it would take someone on New Deal over 250 years to earn this amount of money. However, Labour is

fighting a class war on behalf of the capitalists. It may be temporarily embarrassed by these revelations, but even that is open to doubt given Straw's effrontery. Ministers are far more concerned about attacking 'welfare fraud'. They have now managed to escalate the figures involved from the preposterous one of £4bn per year to an out-of-this-world one of £7bn. Now it has found a new 'figure' to toy with: £3bn 'lost' on sick pay to government employees. Attack, after all, is the best form of defence. Labour will do nothing about boardroom pay; it will not bite the hand that feeds it. Its concern is to how to impoverish the working class precisely to ensure that the fat cats keep their pots of cream. ■

Labour: sweeping the streets clean of the homeless

RICHARD ROQUES

Remember when in the 1980s Michael Heseltine and other Tory grandees, fed up with stepping over the homeless for a night out in the West End, tried to clear the streets of the homeless? The report of New Labour's Social Exclusion Unit has resurrected the idea and gone a step further.

In their usual doublespeak Labour pretend they want to help the homeless, but are preparing the ground by saying that coercion of rough sleepers is possible because the government is determined to crack the problem of rough sleeping. The response of the Tory Party in the nineties is 'We are against coercion. We don't think it is the right approach.'

When the RCG argued that New Labour would be worse than the Tories, many did not believe us but here is a necessary job which the Tories were unable to do which New Labour can get away with. Furthermore, the new hostel places might only be offered to rough sleepers if they sign up to the New Deal. This will help forcibly recruit people to New Deal and add a double coercion - you have to take a job and you have to get off the streets and in to a hostel. Charities working with the homeless have, to their shame, welcomed the report, albeit with reservations. A 'street tsar' is to be appointed to oversee the task and the press has leapt on a suggestion by Tony Blair that members of the public should adopt a seller of the *Big Issue*. 'We are looking at a new project for the public to connect up with homeless people and help them by providing work opportunities and practical advice and support.' (*Big Issue* 6-12 July). This is pretty shocking given that physical or sexual abuse lies behind a significant number of young homeless being on the streets in the first place.

This idea could have come from Gladstone or Disraeli as it exactly expounds the Victorian ethic that the state should not be expected to look after the poor and vulnerable and that this is the responsibility of charities and the philanthropy of private citizens. ■

A new deal or just the same old deal?

DAVID PEGG

As British capitalism heads for recession, Chancellor Gordon Brown, in the recent spending review, has announced the biggest scam in Labour government history. Every penny increase in government spending will be linked to efficiency savings and internal reform, leading to cuts in public sector pay and more schools and hospitals being farmed out to the private sector via the Private Finance Initiative.

Where will the money come from? Clearly, there will be multi-layered attacks on the working class. Brown has already made it clear there will be cuts in child benefit and legal aid, and the government never had any intention of upsetting its business friends by reforming the jobseeker's allowance. In the Commons, Prime Minister Tony Blair made it clear that Labour's spending on social security, health and education were entirely dependent upon the success of the New Deal, a vicious attack on British workers' living standards.

Millions of workers face the prospect of being driven off lousy benefits into poverty pay jobs. When capital is dissatisfied with a corrupt Tory administration, it always turns to the more efficient government offered by that friend of business and the multinationals, the Labour Party. The details of the New Deal show exactly where Labour's loyalties lie.

Unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds face cuts of up to 40% in benefits if they refuse to take up one of four options: short-term subsidised jobs which are basically free labour for business - many of Blair's friends have already signed up to this wonderful scam (eg Sainsbury, Tesco, Asda, B&Q); 'education and training' options with no prospect of real work at the end; jobs with voluntary groups, ie making tea in charity shops; and the government's own version of conscription - the Environmental Task Force, ie picking up litter in order to receive the same JSA payment you always had! Confidential government predictions are that up to 40,000 young people will face benefit cuts for dropping out of the system, despite ministerial claims that the New Deal is so good few claimants will need to be forced to take part. This autumn there will be pilot schemes for over-25s, with the same sanctions if they do not co-operate. Labour's ultimate aim is to extend compulsion to all four million unemployed. Even the Tories are sceptical, with education and employment spokesman David Willetts complaining 'our fear is that here the focus is entirely on job subsidies'.

Those remaining Labour loyalists who hoped the introduction of a minimum wage might help the working class had their illusions ripped apart when a derisory £3.60 per hour was announced. By the time it is available in April 1999, this

will be worth £3.45 at today's prices. Big business pressure will ensure it remains at £3.60 for several years, driving workers deeper and deeper into poverty. The £3 per hour offered to workers aged 18-21 replicates the assault under the New Deal. This is a specific oppression exerted by private capital in alliance with the Labour Party, a crude piece of age discrimination and a wicked attempt to create a two-tier system leading to division in the working class.

The TUC's policy - after considerable prevarication - is for a minimum wage of 'over £4 per hour' but this has not stopped them backing the government's derisory minimum wage plans. The Low Pay Commission, which included both sides of industry as well as so-called economic experts, had some of its key recommendations pared down by Gordon Brown as a ministerial squabble ensued between Brown and trade minister Margaret Beckett over whether to pay 18 to 21-year-olds £3.20 or £3 per hour. The Commission suggested a 'development rate' for young workers, rising to £3.30 in June 2000, but was unanimous on the main rate of £3.60. Despite a UNISON national policy of calling for £4.61 per hour, 'half male median earnings', Rita Donaghy of UNISON gave her support to the £3.60 recommendation. She received an OBE in the honours list just before the Commission reported - no doubt for services about to be rendered. Other

trade union representatives on the Commission - Bill Callaghan of the TUC and Bill Gates (no relation) of the Knitwear Union - gave their full backing to £3.60. Bill Gates' annual salary is £45,000. UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe gets £73,000 per annum.

All revolutionary communists and socialists face an important decision ahead, as the global economy continues to slide into deep recession. Either break from the parasitic TUC and the anti-worker, pro-capitalist Labour Party and join workers under attack, in campaigns such as the Tameside care workers, the Liverpool dockers and the Reinstatement Cook Campaign, or go down with the Titanic of 1990s capitalism. Either fight back against the vicious New Deal and the insulting minimum wage, or condemn our fellow workers to untold poverty. Are you angry enough to do something about it? Help us to build the new movement which is so desperately required.

Finally, while the New Labour cronies continually borrow from the US Democratic tradition (eg communitarianism underpins the new authoritarianism touted by Jack Straw), it looks as if Gordon Brown has got his history wrong. President Roosevelt introduced the New Deal after recession in an attempt to consolidate US capitalism and imperialism. Brown has introduced his New Deal immediately before recession as the countdown to crisis begins.

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

► Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals expropriate superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious - low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.

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

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

► The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. In power it has never defended the interests of the working class. The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally. The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
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Ireland

Orange Order halted at Drumcree

BOB SHEPHERD

The decision of the Parades Commission to refuse permission to the Orange Order to march down the Garvaghy Road was inevitable following the Assembly elections. British imperialism's strategy to stabilise and modernise the Northern Ireland statelet depends on the development of a middle class nationalist-unionist alliance. As we argued in the last issue of FRFI, the abandonment by Sinn Fein of a revolutionary anti-imperialist opposition to occupation gave British imperialism the opportunity to drive through acceptance of the Peace Agreement.



The Agreement legitimises the partition of Ireland and offers nothing to the oppressed nationalist working class. This opportunity has been seized by the Labour government. It allows the isolation of not only revolutionary republicanism but also the backward forces of loyalism, represented by Paisley and the Drumcree marchers.

The fact that a majority of pro-Agreement unionists had been elected to the Assembly even though the Orange Order had opposed it, gave British imperialism the opportunity to face down the Drumcree protests.

After the initial threats and bluster of Paisley and the Portadown Orangemen to bring 'Ulster to a halt', and to protest outside Drumcree church for as long as it took to be able to march down the Garvaghy Road, the protest has fizzled out. This is largely due to the fact that Trimble and middle-class unionism realised that the continued protests at Drumcree were unleashing forces they could not control and which threatened to destabilise and destroy both the Peace Agreement and the new Assembly. In the week between the beginning of the Drumcree stand-off and 12 July there had been 614 recorded attacks on the RUC. Loyalist gunmen had opened fire on them and attacked them with blast bombs and petrol bombs. Homes of RUC members in loyalist areas had also been attacked. The Loyalist Volunteer Force, opposed to the Peace Agreement, were prominent in assaults on the RUC at Drumcree as well as organising sectarian attacks on Catholic areas. In economic terms, the cost of the protest to the Six Counties was enormous. The tourist industry alone is estimated to have lost £40m. The Drumcree protest, aimed at reasserting the Orange ascendancy, was running out of control of both the Orange Order and Trimble.

The turning point came with the cowardly murder of the three young Catholic brothers, killed in a firebomb attack on their home in Ballymoney in the early hours of 12 July. This was the climax of a concerted campaign of intimidation and terror directed against the nationalist community. The murder of the Quinn brothers led to calls from within the Orange Order for the Drumcree protests to stop. As a leader of the Orange

Order put it, the Drumcree protests should be called off because 'we cannot control it.' This was backed up by Trimble who said the Orange Order should 'recognise its responsibilities in the situation'.

Roy Greenslade, writing in *The Guardian* on 15 July, detailed some of the attacks on the nationalist community that took place on one night, 7 July:

- In Carrickfergus, Co Antrim, the last four houses occupied by Catholics on the Glenfield estate were petrol-bombed. The families were forced to flee, leaving all they owned to be burned... The loyalist mob then moved on to attack the town's only Catholic-owned guest house. They then attempted to burn down a Catholic primary school.
- In Lisburn, Co Down, a loyalist mob tried to burn down another Catholic primary school.
- The almost exclusively Catholic village of Dunloy in predominantly unionist North Antrim was put under siege for four hours by 1,000 loyalists from the Co Antrim Grand Orange Lodge.
- On a mainly Catholic housing estate in Lurgan eight firebombs were set off at 1am. One householder, aged 63, was rushed to hospital with chest pains. A young couple and their two-year-old child escaped when their living room caught fire.
- A 50-strong mob smashed the windows of an East Belfast hostel for the homeless.
- The area of Ligoniel, North Belfast, was besieged when trees were felled to barricade the main road. Stick-wielding men, some of them identified as members of the Loyalist Volunteer Force, stoned taxi-drivers, buses and delivery men when they tried to pass.
- In Derry, firemen were prevented from reaching an arson attack at a bar in Donemana by loyalist road blocks.

Greenslade stated that in the 24 hours from 6am Tuesday 7 July there were 412 petrol bombings, 73 houses damaged, 93 other buildings attacked, 136 vehicle hijackings, hundreds of barricades set up and 191 attacks on the RUC and army by Loyalist mobs.

These were the forces that were undermining the Peace Agreement and which British imperialism was determined to confront at Drumcree. It was not going to allow backward loyal-

ist elements to fatally undermine the success of the Assembly elections, and for the moment it has succeeded.

In the elections, Trimble's UUP, with over 175,000 first preference votes (21.3%) won 28 seats, making it the biggest party in the Assembly. The PUP won two seats, giving pro-Agreement Unionists 30 seats. The anti-Agreement Unionists got a total of 28 seats: Paisley's DUP won 20, the UKUP 5 and independent anti-Agreement Unionists 3. The DUP vote, although slightly down on previous elections, still represents a significant section of the Unionist population totally opposed to any accommodation with the nationalists. This anti-Agreement alliance is however not big enough to block the Assembly.

The SDLP, with 177,000 first preference votes (22%), more than any other party, won 24 seats. David Trimble and Seamus Mallon, deputy leader of the SDLP, were duly elected First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Assembly.

Sinn Fein received over 142,000 first preference votes, 45% of the nationalist vote, 17.6% of the total, winning 18 seats. They estimated that 80% of first-time nationalist voters voted Sinn Fein. When the Assembly reconvenes in September they should get two ministerial seats in the new 'government' of the north of Ireland.

Each member of the Assembly will receive a salary of £29,000 plus £15,000 expenses; ministers will get £46,000 plus expenses and a chauffeured car - privileges designed to consolidate support for the Assembly.

The editorial of *An Phoblacht* after the Assembly elections, entitled 'Furthering the revolutionary project', declared that: 'When Gerry Adams made Sinn Fein's opening address at the Assembly on Wednesday, he said, "Our task is to build an inclusive process and work for the construction of a democratic settlement which celebrates the diversity of all the Irish people". That in one sentence sums up the revolutionary project in which Sinn Fein is engaged.'

The revolutionary project that Provisional Sinn Fein began in the 1970s, to kick British imperialism out of Ireland, has been abandoned for an 'inclusive process' in the new Assembly.

The Gandalf trial - no justice

STEVE BOOTH

Green Anarchist (GA) is a magazine reporting on ecological issues, animal rights, road protests. It also reports on other matters like genetically-engineered crops, pollution, the follies of technology etc. GA unequivocally supports direct action.

The state has been attacking activists in cases like the long-running McLibel judicial farce, the Ploughshare trial and then, with 'Operation Washington', the attack switched to GA.

In early 1995, Hampshire police launched Operation Washington, a long sequence of at least 56 police raids up and down the country on eco-activists, animal rights people and radical bookshops. One person in London was raided just for buying a T-shirt off GA mail order. Virtually no mention of this wave of repression was made in the mass media.

Prior to the start of Operation Washington, the compliant media primed the situation by slandering eco-activists. The 1992 Twyford Down anti-motorway protests brought the John Harlow *Sunday Times* 'Summer of Hate' propaganda. This article claimed eco-activists were using 'Vietnam-style booby traps' against road construction staff. In 1992, a lot of media hysteria was stirred up against travellers after Castlemore Common. At the end of 1994, the John Harlow lie was recycled by Jason Bonnetto in the *Independent*. This time, GA was named as the 'terrorist' group responsible. Where journalistic lies flow, secret state repression is not far behind. A few months later, the Operation Washington raids started.

The upshot of this, the Gan-

dalf trial (GA and Animal Liberation Front), began with six people in the dock. Robin Webb, the ALF press officer, was acquitted in December 1996 at the Portsmouth committal hearing. Despite his having already been tried and acquitted on the same evidence in Winchester in 1995, the Hampshire thought-police then got a higher court to overturn the December 1996 acquittal.

The Gandalf trial proper took place in Portsmouth between August and November 1997. Three editors of GA were jailed: Noel Molland, Saxon Wood and myself, Steve Booth. A fourth man, Simon Russell, the former editor of the ALF Supporters Group newsletter, who had nothing to do with GA, was acquitted.

We were convicted of 'conspiracy to incite criminal damage'. The evidence consisted of the GA magazine together with copies of almost every anarchist magazine or animal rights publication put out between 1990 and 1995. There were magazines like the ALF (SG) newsletter, *Arkangel*, *Earth First!*'s *Do Or Die* and many magazines from abroad. Any magazine the state took a dislike to was in there, in 4-5,000 pages of evidence. Exhibit 1,000 was a book on anarchism by Tolstoy.

As I write this (July 1998), the three of us are out of gaol pending appeal, which is set to take place next week. A second Gandalf trial is scheduled for September, with Paul Rogers and Robin Webb again in the dock.

The whole basis of 'conspiracy' is the fact that the police have lumped us together. I had never met Robin Webb, for example, and never even heard of Simon Russell. Yet we were

supposed to be part of the same conspiracy. The cop in charge of Operation Washington, Desmond 'The Loony' Thomas, summed up the legal position on 8 October. 'They are guilty,' Thomas claimed, 'because they sit in the dock together.' This would seem to be an accurate assessment of the legal concept of 'conspiracy'. A conspiracy is 'people acting together with a common purpose'. In other words, the state can criminalise any political group it takes a dislike to. Make no mistake, the Gandalf case is only the start. This is the new Inquisition, where people's ideas are put on trial, not what they have done.

As a result of our trial a campaign was formed - the London Greenpeace Gandalf Support Campaign, which can be contacted at Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP - and political groups from all across the political spectrum expressed outrage at this totalitarian trial. A statement of solidarity was signed in Oxford in September 1997. The mainstream civil liberties group, pseudo-Liberty sent a man to observe the trial for two days out of the 12 weeks and put out a watery statement at the end. The mainstream press were likewise garbage, with just one article appearing in *The Guardian* shortly after we were gaoled. The local Portsmouth paper printed the cops' version and refused to print our side at all.

All of this shows the inherent totalitarianism of the Blair Reich. The Gandalf trials continue. The oppression continues. It is necessary for us to repudiate the legal system. 'It is not for the police to determine the limits of our expression' (The Oxford Statement).

Lords vote against equalisation of the age of consent

RICHARD ROQUES

Whatever we think about the appropriate age for people to express and determine their own sexuality, 14 or 40, it should be the same for homosexuals as heterosexuals. Any difference in the age of consent is sheer bigotry.

On 22 July the House of Lords voted against the Crime and Disorder Bill because it contained an amendment to lower the age of consent for homosexuals to 16. The veto was widely supported by the Bishops who sit in the House of Lords, and has set the stage for severe rifts in the Anglican Church on the issue of homosexuality. This is a matter of great satisfaction to me as the Church (and my own profession with which it has so much in common, showbiz) attracts a large percentage of gay men to its ranks. These men continue to serve within a deeply homophobic institution.

It has also exposed the absurdity of that anachronistic institution, the House of Lords. Now Jack Straw is considering ditching the amendment so that he can get his Crime and Disorder Bill through. This Bill is chock full of nasty, authoritarian measures designed to fur-



ther punish and limit the working class, such as increased powers to lock up young children. To take out the amendment equalising the age of consent (which the government did not table in the first place) is to take out the only progressive thing in it. Gay organisations have quite rightly campaigned angrily against the Lords decision, but as a gay communist I wish that gay groups would take on board the wider issues of increasing attacks on the working class. Fighting alongside working class people openly as gay activists against

poverty pay, filthy housing, cuts in health and education and on AIDS related issues, is the only way in the long term to stamp out the homophobia that exists in the general population and is encouraged by this vile act of the House of Lords and the craven capitulation of New Labour. Last month private company Pride Events UK Ltd decided to cancel the annual Gay Pride March and festival because of 'contractual and financial difficulties' (they were worried they would not make a profit). Tens of thousands marched anyway.

RMT striker victimised – Hands off trade union activists!

While tube workers in the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) have been taking strike action against privatisation, other RMT workers have also been on strike over pay and conditions on the overground railway network.

On 2 July a contractor's van drove straight at a picket line at Euston station. The following morning RMT representative Steve Hedley was picked out by a contractor as the person who damaged a wing-mirror on the van. The contractor described the person who broke the mirror as wearing a bomber jacket, faded blue jeans and brown boots. Steve Hedley provided photographic evidence from a colour newspaper which showed him on the picket wearing quite different clothing. The police have not charged Steve.

Management, on the other hand, are intent on sacking him. First they suspended him, but then reinstated him when a large number of staff took strike action in sympathy. Then they suspended him again, despite promising he could work at the Willesden depot until they had made their enquiries.

On 10 July Steve was called into an investigation at Watford. When he showed the investigating manager his evidence, he was told it 'was not relevant' because 'if ten people saw a car-crash they would describe ten different things'. Steve pointed out that the contractor's statement to the police alleged he had seen Steve clearly for 45 seconds. The manager also considered this to be irrelevant.

At the investigation a further accusation was made. Steve was accused of pushing a strike-breaker during a picket the previous week. No complaint had been made before this point.

This is clearly a case of management trying to break effective union organisation by intimidating activists and threatening them with the sack. As we go to press, Steve faces dismissal and the union's NEC has pledged that it will not call off the ongoing strike action until he is reinstated.

Steve Hedley told FRFI: 'I am very grateful for all the support I have received. I see the attack on me as an attack on union organisation. I would like to encourage everyone reading this to show their support by joining the picket line at Euston.'

■ Next pickets of Euston: 6.30am, Friday 31 July, Saturday 1 August, Sunday 2 August. Opposite Kennedy Hotel, Cardington Street, Euston, London NW1.

■ For further details of pickets and update on Steve's situation, telephone 0181 533 7111.

Japan and the South East Asian crisis A taste for disaster

TREVOR RAYNE

Titanic, Deep Impact, Godzilla and now Armageddon, people seem to have developed a taste for catastrophe as the millennium approaches. Global capitalism seeks not to disappoint them.

The *International Herald Tribune* is getting into the swing of things. Under the front page banner 'A Year Old, Asian Crisis Just Keeps Deepening' the paper reports: 'this crisis advanced so slowly that in November, President Clinton dismissed it as "a few small glitches in the road".' Time and tide move on and some people are getting excited: "This is off the radar screens in terms of severity," said the chief global economist at Primark Decisions Systems, an investment advisory group. "It is the single most negative economic event since the Great Depression."

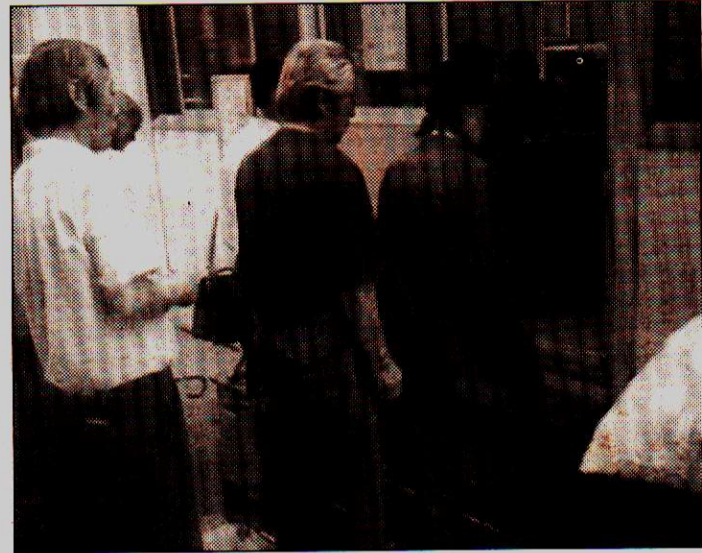
The President's advisers have reviewed this 'glitch in the

road': 'First it was all about Thailand. Then it was about containing this to Southeast Asia. And look where all this is headed in the next year: Russia, Japan, maybe China – the super-powers.' Primark Decisions explains: 'what makes this problem so distinct is that it is not just an economic bust. It is laced with every type of financial crisis and instability that has ever shown up in the real world or any textbook. And while there are some brilliant minds working on it, no one can deal with it – not any single country, not the IMF.' 'The CIA,' one senior intelligence official acknowledged, 'hasn't a clue how to deal with this kind of crisis... where the enemy is the markets'.

All very comic, but the crash isn't something on screens which we turn on and off; governments are toppled, people suffer and die.

Since the Asian crisis broke, five governments or leaders have fallen, in Thailand, South

Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia and Japan. On 12 July the Liberal Democratic Party, which has formed the Japanese government continuously since the Second World War (apart from 1993), was routed in elections.



Queueing for charity

The recent rise of the Far Right in Australia

ANTHONY BIDGOOD

Following the recent election in Queensland, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) is to form a minority government with the support of an independent who had previously been a member of both conservative parties – the Liberals and the Nationals (NP). The outgoing conservative coalition had also relied on the support of an independent, so for some years government in Queensland has been finely balanced between a barely reformist ALP and right-wing coalition. Superficially the electoral suc-



The wharfies' strike galvanised opposition to the Federal government

cess of One Nation, the far-right party launched last year, can be explained by the peculiarity of Queensland politics. One Nation received 23% of the vote, winning 11 of the 78 seats that it contested. One Nation was the second largest party by number of votes; the ALP with 44 seats received the largest number, 39.2%. The three major parties all saw their share of the vote decline. The NP, in its strongest state, saw its vote almost halve from 26.2% to 14.7%; the Liberals lost 6.8% and the ALP 3.7%. Thus One Nation's success came mainly at the expense of the conservative parties. But, though One Nation's current support comes from the right-wing, in 1996 Pauline Hanson, One Nation's leader, won a Federal seat, with 20+% swing, in a

previously safe, urban ALP seat.

It was the success of the Liberal-NP coalition in winning the Federal election in March 1996 that, paradoxically, is partially responsible for One Nation's current success. The present Prime Minister, John Howard, won the 1996 election by claiming that he would represent 'the battler' – an emotive word for Anglo-Celtic Australians who believed that they were 'doing it tough' and deserved better, resonant of the 'pioneering spirit' and the Great Depression. This appeal worked because of the policies of the 1983-1996 Hawke-Keating Federal ALP government. Despite

a serious attempt at Aboriginal reconciliation especially over land rights. Their foreign policy was focused on 'Asia'.

The 1996 election result was a reaction against the Hawke-Keating government's economic and social policies, the latter especially perceived as favouring 'special interest' groups (Aborigines, trade unions, immigrants). Many ALP voters were also alienated by the ostentatious lifestyles and well-paid jobs enjoyed by former ALP and trade union functionaries while they themselves became unemployed, 'down-sized' or lost previously-held 'jobs for life'. Bob Hawke not only resides in a Sydney mansion, but reputedly receives \$A4 million per year from his business consultancies.

When elected in 1996, the Liberal/NP coalition quickly repudiated the ALP's social policies, but deepened the economic policies of the free market, known as 'economic rationalism'. These policies particularly affected rural Australia ('the bush') and country towns where traditional employers such as Telecom, Australia Post, the banks and the railways, were increasingly (and disproportionately) closed down or reduced compared to the main cities. Of the mainland Australian states, Queensland has the largest proportion of its population outside the metropolitan areas.

It was against this background that Pauline Hanson, in April 1997, launched 'a new party' – One Nation. At this stage, Hanson was known only as being strongly opposed to immigration and to the supposedly favoured treatment of Aborigines, whose life expectancy on average is 18 years less than that of any other group in Australia. It was her crude attacks on Aboriginal rights and organisations that led to her deselection as a Liberal candidate. The Liberals, however, did not nominate another candidate and Hanson won.

Sections of the media began

The following day Prime Minister Hashimoto resigned; discredited, unable to do anything about the 'slow motion collapse' of the Japanese economy.

Half of Indonesia's 200 million people are destitute. The economy is forecast to shrink 20% this year; Thailand's will contract 11.6%; South Korea's 7.5%; Malaysia's 5%, with no

end in sight. Japan is expected to record its third successive year of gross domestic product decline, a worse performance than in the 1930s' Great Depression. \$600 billion of bad debt threatens the Japanese banking system, suicides, bankruptcies and unemployment are at record highs.

Across the globe company bond defaults doubled in the first half of 1998. World commodity prices fell 11% in the last half of 1997, metal and agricultural prices are down 25% since 1995, energy prices down 33% since 1996. *Banker* magazine reports that for the first time since capital adequacy rules were introduced ten years ago, the capital base of the top 1,000 banks is shrinking.

If this is what is happening down below, on deck they are partying. The total value of US stocks and shares is now \$12 trillion, double what it was two years ago. Money pouring out of Asia has pushed European stock markets up 30% this year. The scenario is as classic as it is predictable – and unstoppable? ■

to attack Hanson and her views; she had no policies, and her meetings were met by counter-demonstrations. This served to keep Hanson in the public eye and to confirm for her supporters that she was a victim of a media conspiracy and 'political correctness'. This has worked in Hanson's favour. Furthermore, John Howard's refusal to condemn her racist views (he spoke of 'a return to free speech') gave her added legitimacy.

Besides attracting support from far-right groups such as Australians Against Further Immigration, the One Nation party also won disaffected NP and Liberal supporters. By far the largest group attracted to Hanson were those displaced, marginalised and made unemployed because of 'economic rationalism', precisely the discontented section which ensured the Liberal/NP coalition's overwhelming victory in 1996.

More recently, various polls claimed that One Nation's support had ebbed. However the long term causes that led to One Nation have not disappeared, as the Queensland election showed. The few 'policies' presented were populist and protectionist: opposition to Native Title; opposition to the further privatisation of Telstra (Telecom); opposition to a Goods and Services Tax (similar to VAT). Other policies offered were a referendum on capital punishment, looser gun controls and a people's bank offering 2% interest rates to farmers.

If an analogous movement were to be sought, Ross Perot's supporters in the USA appear to be the closest. While One Nation and Perot have attracted supporters from disgruntled sections of the lower middle classes, as did Mussolini and the Nazis, it would be wrong to consider One Nation as fascist: it is too ideologically confused (Hanson for instance supports abortion) and its supporters are too amorphous.

Since the Queensland election, 'mainstream' (ie bourgeois) opinion is that One Nation will not disappear, and that there will be 'enormous growth' in the lead-up to the Federal election. Besides ach-

ieving electoral 'respectability', One Nation has also gained \$A400,000 in government funds, because of its electoral success, to fight the Federal election. Its membership has once again grown and it now claims over 300 branches and 20,000 members. Perhaps its biggest 'success' is in breaking the NP's hold over parts of rural Queensland. In large areas of Queensland, where the NP normally receives 70% of the vote, they had to rely on preferences. NP seats in both New South Wales and Victoria are under threat, with a recent poll (27 June) showing 12% support for One Nation. If One Nation were to replace the NP federally, the Liberals would have to rely on the far right to hold government.

One Nation's electoral success has already had a disastrous effect on Aboriginal rights. The election was followed by demands that the government take a harder line on migrants, refugees and Aboriginal rights (specifically Native Title). Howard's 10-point 'plan' on Wik (a Native Title claim ruled legal by the High Court) – a 'plan' that in reality extinguished many Native Title claims – had already been rejected by the Senate. But Howard pressed his plan, saying if it were again rejected he would call a double-dissolution election – where all seats in both houses are contested. This threat brought independent conservatives into line, claiming that a 'race-based' election must be avoided. On this phoney basis, the most disadvantaged group in Australia is to be legally disenfranchised to benefit giant mining companies and large-scale pastoralists. Such is the 'logic' of bourgeois parliamentarians.

While One Nation's rise is one aspect of the opposition to economic rationalism, widespread support for the recent wharfies' (dockers') battle is another. The wharfies' resistance galvanised many who saw it as a focus of opposition to the Federal government. The task for communists is to prevent such opposition being channelled into electoral support for the ALP, now enjoying a 56% two-party-preferred voting support over the coalition's 44%. ■

South Africa: The 10th National Congress of the SACP Taking the struggle forward

DALE T MCKINLEY

From 1-5 July, over 500 national and 100 international delegates gathered in Johannesburg for the 10th National Congress of the South African Communist Party (SACP). This was an important congress, an appropriate time for the SACP to: reflect on the last several years of the South African transition; assess the performance of the ANC government and the liberation Alliance; begin the process of a much-needed organisational and political renewal and solidify internationalist links and commitment to common struggles.

The timing of the congress was strategically important too, coming less than nine months prior to the next general elections, marking the first five years in power of the ANC government. Likewise, the congress took place in the midst of rising tensions within and between the ANC and its Alliance partners, the SACP and COSATU, over the implementation of its macroeconomic policy (GEAR).

It was within this context that the unexpectedly virulent attacks against the SACP, launched successively by President Nelson Mandela and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki on the first two days, set the tone for the rest of the congress. Wagging his finger, Mandela told the assembled delegates that neither the government nor the ANC would deviate from GEAR, no matter how much the SACP (or COSATU) wished it. He proceeded to inform the SACP that its criticism of GEAR

(and by inference, the ANC government) was 'not acceptable' - the implicit message being that dissent within the Alliance would not be tolerated.

Obviously not content to leave it at that, Mbeki followed with an hour-long assault on the political integrity and organisational *raison d'être* of the SACP. Claiming that the congress discussion documents implied 'that the ANC no longer represents the interests of the masses of the people', Mbeki accused the SACP of 'spreading falsifications', 'telling lies', 'claiming easy victories' and engaging in 'fake revolutionary posturing'. Mbeki concluded his assault by declaring that the 'death of the ANC, which will not happen, would also mean the death of the rest of the progressive movement in our country'. Simply translated - the SACP is nothing, and can be nothing, without the ANC!

Besides insulting and angering the delegates, it was, ironically, the antics of Mandela and Mbeki that spurred the congress to forcefully address the strategic and tactical issues mentioned in the first paragraph. The first challenge became the election of a leadership committed to a strong, independent SACP, with a commitment to struggle practically and without apology for a socialist society. This the delegates did, by electing a new General Secretary, Blade Nzimande, who agreed to step down from his current position as a leading ANC member of the national legislature. Similarly, a new-look Central Committee was elected, filled with a younger generation of

cadres and a greatly increased number of women comrades (now constituting 40% of the top leadership structure).

In the following days, delegates engaged in lengthy discussions in commissions dealing with Party-building; economic transformation; Marxism and building socialism now; building people's power; socialist perspectives on the national democratic revolution and the international situation. Out of these discussions emerged resolutions calling for: a reinforcement of the SACP's rejection of GEAR; a strengthening of internationalist solidarity work, particularly within the Southern African region; the possible establishment of a Young Communist League; putting into place policy formulation capacity; embarking on key socialist campaigns that address the basic needs of the masses; advancement of the theoretical work of the Party on central issues such as the state, globalisation, reform and revolution and gender exploitation.

After intense debate, delegates endorsed a declaration that will provide the general outline for a new political programme. Key sections of the declaration are:

1. *To continue to build and strengthen the SACP as an autonomous formation within the context of the ANC-led alliance through:*

- Effective cadre-building, around our unified programmatic Marxist-Leninist positions developed at this congress. This involves extensive internal political education within our

Party, jointly with our COSATU ally, and with the ANC and other popular formations.

- Implementing our programme of action, that places special attention on transformational struggles at the grass-roots level, where we work, study and live. It focuses upon the need to build people's power, in the context of mass mobilisation that works hand in hand with progressive governance structures.

- The SACP's commitment to the alliance is, in no way, a renunciation of our own autonomous, communist organisation, policies and programmes.

gressive, and remains anchored within our RDP vision.

3. *Economic transformation*

- The SACP reaffirms its belief that the overall thrust of GEAR is not the appropriate macroeconomic framework for our society and must be rejected. We have resolved, in the light of this, to engage with our Alliance partners, other components of the mass democratic movement and government, to ensure that we develop an appropriate macroeconomic framework.
- Reaffirms that macroeconomic policy on its own is

- On fiscal policy, this congress calls for social deficit targets to be prioritised over budget deficit targets, and for the present tax structures, regressive in many respects, to be changed.

4. *Defending the revolution*

- There are counter-revolutionary forces in our country bent on undermining our new constitutional order. These forces must be dealt with decisively.
- The defence of our revolution requires increasing the capacity and coherence of the state, ensuring that it is continually transformed. But this defence of the revolution also requires an active, vigilant and mobilised mass base. The mobilisational programme of the SACP and of our Alliance is directed simultaneously at transformation and defence.

5. *Build people's power, build socialism now!*

- In the coming weeks, months and years, we dedicate ourselves to implementing the programmatic mandate given to us by this congress. In all that we do, we are guided by the understanding that, if we are to succeed in our objectives, we have as a Party to work to ensure that the working class of our country more and more emerges as a force in itself, a class force capable of assuming hegemonic leadership of the ongoing transformation struggle.

For the SACP, there remains a long, hard struggle to forge a relevant organisational and political practice, centred around a clear, proactive socialist programme. However, the 10th National Congress has gone a long way in laying the foundation for such a politics and programme to emerge. The future of revolutionary struggle in South Africa and the region depends on it.

Dale T McKinley is acting editor of *Umsebenzi*, an SACP publication.



On the contrary, a strong communist SACP is a precondition for a strong ANC and COSATU, and vice versa.

2. *1999 elections*

- Our commitment to fighting the elections is not just a general position taken. In the coming months the SACP will instruct all its activists and structures to actively take up the ID book and voter registration campaigns.

- In the coming months, the SACP will also engage actively with its alliance partners to ensure that the ANC electoral platform on which the 1999 elections are contested is pro-

insufficient, and that we need an active, progressive and integrated industrial policy, an overarching and integrated job creation strategy, and social security nets. Any macroeconomic policy must be aligned with these and other transformation policies.

- Calls for the restructuring of the Public Sector Pension Fund, and for a National Retirement Fund.

- On monetary policy, this congress calls for the reduction of the current interest rates, and for the priority of monetary policy to be shifted from reducing inflation to creating employment.

Zimbabwe notes

Corruption spreads

DAVID KITSON

Roger Boka, after whom the largest tobacco floor in the world was named, has been tracked down by the press to a mansion in Atlanta where, it is said, he is undergoing medical treatment. Meanwhile two of his top aides here in Zimbabwe have died 'mysteriously'. The state has decided to honour the promissory notes issued fraudulently on the CSC (Cold Storage Commission) by his failed United Merchants Bank, causing upset among local economists. In a free market economy the victims should suffer.

Another blow to free enterprise has been the state's decision to control the price of maize, followed by price controls on half a dozen consumer staples - not that this seems to have had much effect on soaring prices. What will the World Bank say? Some local economists are really frothing at the mouth, saying that Zimprest (Zimbabwe Program of Economic and Social Transformation) is

already doomed. The state is clearly worried over the prospect of more food riots, like the ones that occurred last January, if prices rise further. The ZCTU (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions) has been preparing itself for a five-day general strike by its 29 affiliated unions in protest against tax rises, following its successful one-day general strike in March. This led to a four-hour meeting between its EC and Mugabe with his advisers. A subsequent cabinet meeting removed the 2½% increase in sales tax, but the development levy remains because it is devoted to drought relief, the cabinet said. ZCTU hasn't announced its response to this yet. This is the time of year for wage negotiations and the unions have averaged an increase of 34%, with some getting over 40%. ZCTU has stated that it is not a political party.

More ominous is the surge of hundreds of Svosve peasants onto four commercial farms which once belonged to their forefathers, taken by force by British settlers about a hundred years ago. Svosve, which is pro-

nounced 'Shoshe' in ChiShona, means ant. Their hereditary chief, a retired headmaster, implored them to go back to the marginal land they came from and wait until the state actuated its resettlement plans, but Chief Ant was ignored. The commercial farmers, who have no love for the government either, provided them with firewood and clean water. Eventually Vice-President Muzenda arrived with a message from Mugabe, and they were persuaded to return to their hovels having been promised resettlement before the start of the rainy season this summer. The peasants of Odzi have been less conciliatory. They withdrew from the farms they invaded on the understanding that they will return in four weeks. This action has spread and ex-combatants are also threatening to seize land.

The state has been dithering over the implementation of the Land Acquisition Act. About 1,200 farms have been designated for distribution to the peasants. Somehow they haven't been handed over for fear of

the reaction of imperialism to this infringement of private property rights. Some land was turned into communal areas for peasants at the time of the Lancaster House agreement, with compensation for previous owners whose title went back to the initial colonisation of Rhodesia by the British.

The intelligentsia is fulminating about the lack of good governance, especially the epidemic of corruption afflicting the country, ruining the chances of progress. Noczim (National Oil Company of Zimbabwe) is said to be riddled by corruption; the NSSA (National Social Security Admin), although relatively newly established, has had its leadership replaced, and so on. Intellectuals are loud in criticism. Thousands of names on the voting list for forthcoming by-elections have been questioned by some of the contestants, at \$20 per query. When I met Trudy Stevenson, a candidate for the Forum Party (a small liberal-democratic party), in a Post Office queue, she said that if they attempted to charge her for pointing out the names of absent voters, she would sue them. The university is likely to be shut for a year following student protests, involving some violence, against the shooting of one of them by riot police, with the student leadership sus-

pending. Apparently there is no money for stipends anyway.

But the peasants have always been the base of support for ZANU-PF, rocksteady. Thousands have been given land in communal areas over the last 18 years. They love the peace which has replaced the vicious treatment they got during the war. During the droughts the government has distributed millions of tons of maize bought in the USA.

They are also subdued by the fear that they might suffer the same fate as the Matabele during the 1980s. Matabele (more properly, the amaNdebele) dissidents went to apartheid South Africa for training and returned as armed bands to carry out the then South African policy of economic destabilisation. The ZANU government sent in the Fifth Brigade, which had been trained first by the North Koreans and then by the British. Allegedly thousands disappeared, thousands of women were raped, thousands remain traumatised. More than three thousand are said to have perished. Last year the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation published a report entitled 'Breaking the Silence - Building True Peace' giving the gory details. The silence largely remains deafening. Mind you, Eddison Zvobgo, Minister with-

out Portfolio, who broke a leg just before the last election through a black dog crossing the road (in local parlance this means that an attempt was made on his life), and an influential party leader in the Masvingo area, apologised publicly, 'in his individual capacity'. He has also announced that he is available for the presidency, should Mugabe go.

Now the peasants are voting with their feet. Some see this as the beginning of the Third Chimurenga (liberation struggle). The First took place at the end of the last century in uprising against colonisation. The British hanged its leaders. The Second was the struggle against UDI, ended at Lancaster House where the British managed to save their assets in Zimbabwe, allowing ZANU to take office in the subsequent election with a majority nobody expected. The more Machiavellian suspect that ZANU itself is behind land occupations, so that the government can say to its international financial backers that they are obliged to hand over the land. More likely, the whole populace is pissed off at the way things are going here, especially the inflation which is hitting everybody, while this country is the most highly taxed in Africa and government mandarins grow fat. As yet no saviour has come forward.

Fighting low pay

On the trail of Jack Straw

In jovial mood, ex-Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, now Prison Reform Trust chair, thanked us for attending its 1998 Annual Lecture on 22 July at the Cafe Royal in London to hear Home Secretary Jack Straw. Of course, he couldn't be too nice about him as he owed loyalty to his own Conservative Party (laughter). In return, Jack paid tribute to Lord Hurd in his term as Home Secretary. But as he spoke, a man stood up in the audience and asked 'Are you against the crime of poverty pay? I am Nigel Cook, a constituent of Jack Straw in Blackburn. When I told him the Employment Services wanted me to work for £1 an hour, he said "I earn £89,000 a year. I'm worth it, you're not". 'Oh, dear,' said Lord Douglas and Nigel, still protesting, was thrown out. 'I know this man personally,' said Jack, 'and he knows me. I've met him on the streets of Blackburn where I go on walkabout amongst the people and I've had a lively debate with him' (more laughter).

Two minutes on, he was again inter-

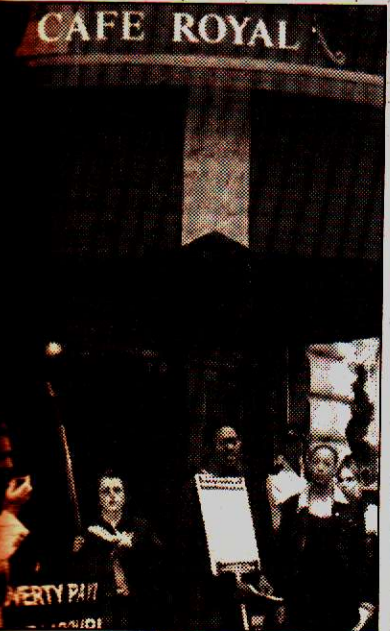


'Oh dear', said Lord Douglas Hurd, born-again friend of prisoners

rupted. 'This man [Straw] is going to tell you "he is not interested in putting a ceiling on the prison population". That is because he wants to lock more people up. Today the prison population is 6,000 more than it was at its highest point under the Tories.' 'Oh, no,' said Lord Douglas, 'this won't do' - and I got thrown out too.

Outside in Regent Street, a picket organised by the RNCC gave out leaflets telling the truth about prisons under Jack Straw and protesting about poverty pay. Jack Straw's speech did not mention privatisation once - hardly surprising as, having opposed it in opposition, he now plans more private prisons. Not a word, then, about the suicide of Dallas Lee and the murder of Milton Manning in these private prisons, nor of the new prison for 12-14-year-old children. As Hurd and Straw made their mug after-dinner speeches and jokes, the 65,000 plus mainly working class prisoners in British gaols were once again left without a voice.

Richard Roques



Blackburn RNCC occupied the local dole office, making the point about poverty pay

RNCC OCCUPIES DOLE OFFICE

On 30 June, the second day of the introduction of the New Deal for those aged 25+, a group of RNCC supporters held a noisy demonstration inside Blackburn Jobcentre to let claimants, Employment Service staff and shoppers know that this scam is just another scheme to make people work for a pittance of £75 a week - a New Labour subsidy to employers that yet again puts shareholders before people's dignity.

Armed with placards, leaflets, megaphone and enthusiasm we exposed the reality of the New Deal. As our message blasted out, Employment Service staff reached for their phones in panic and the security guard (probably on less than £3.50 an hour) bolted to the entrance where he remained for the next 15 minutes until the police arrived.

Meanwhile, we gave out leaflets to some 200 claimants and spoke to dozens individu-

ally. Staff tried to continue their normal duties, but a combination of the megaphone, a panic alarm and the background muzak someone had thoughtfully turned up to drown us out made it impossible.

When four cars and two vanloads of police arrived, we continued with an impromptu street-meeting outside. Motorists hooted in support and hundreds heard our message. After threatening us with arrest, the police had to give in and allow us to finish our meeting.

The response of claimants and passers-by proved people are beginning to listen to our message and it is only a matter of time before they too begin to fight back. An end to this misery can only come about through collective action: our hope for the future cannot be bought for £75 a week.

Paul Webb

Tameside strike Sacked careworkers fight on

In May, 250 Tameside careworkers were sacked for refusing to accept yet another round of paycuts. Below we reproduce an edited version of the speech given by Hazel O'Neil to an RNCC meeting in London on 6 July.

'In 1989 the Labour council of Tameside decided to transfer 12 homes to a trust. We were promised that if things did not work out we would revert back to the council. Then in 1992, the trust, Tameside Enterprise Ltd (TEL), hit financial problems resulting in the workforce taking massive pay cuts. We lost 19 conditions of service, all weekend enhancement and some of our sick pay and holidays.

Five years along the line, we have never had a pay rise or a cost of living rise. In 1997, the union approached Tameside Care Group, as we were now called, to ask for a pay rise, given the company was now making profits.

The company said they were sorry, but Tameside Council had reduced the funding of the beds and further cuts were necessary - of between £1.04 and £2.04 per hour. A week's holiday was taken away and the company sick scheme was done away with altogether.

We said we were not accepting this and we voted for strike action. It is an official dispute, and we have now been on strike three and a half months. We were sacked in May. It turns out we are fighting not only the company but this Labour council. The company's board of trustees includes Labour MP Andrew Bennet and other Labour Party members. It

was the same with TEL - when the council first transferred us, the trustees included local Labour councillors. All of a sudden, Labour councillors who lost their seats in Tameside were given jobs within the company and company cars. That's how they hit the massive financial problems, because the big bosses at the top and these councillors were giving themselves massive pay awards, whilst the workforce were taking cuts. When the company became Tameside Care Group, the Labour council had a golden share in it.

The Lord Mayor of Tameside's wife is actually on the picket line, she's on strike. Some councillors come on the picket line saying that they support us, but none of them will come out publicly or be interviewed and say that. When we held a public meeting, no Labour councillors attended, although we got one Liberal and one Conservative councillor. We've also had a GMB convenor from Manchester council on the picket, who was trying to persuade us to go back! With councillors like that you are flogging a dead horse.

Yesterday we had a national rally attended by Rodney Bickerstaffe of UNISON - we had not heard from him, he had not answered any letters or phone calls during this dispute.

The scandal of low pay in Lancashire

The Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign, based in Blackburn, Lancashire, has never been solely about one man being unjustly sacked but against the increasing casualisation of labour. The May 1998 report by Lancashire County Council and the Greater Manchester Low Pay Unit is a timely analysis of just what that means for millions of working class people - appalling rates of pay and conditions of work.

Surveying jobs on offer at the seven main Jobcentres in the region over a six-month period, the report reveals that:

- 90% of all jobs offered such low wages that a person with one child or more would also need to claim Family Credit to make ends meet.
- Nearly six in ten jobs paid less than £3.70 an hour.
- Average hourly pay for all jobs was a mere £3.83.

These figures would have been even lower if jobs advertised specifically for those aged 16 to 17 had not been excluded on the grounds that 'since pay rates for young people tend to be low, it has been customary to exclude these jobs from a general analysis of pay rates'. 16-17-year-olds are not entitled to benefits and therefore frequently have little choice about accepting jobs at as little as an obscene £1 per hour. The report admits 'the data used in this survey underestimates the number of jobs with low weekly earnings'; by excluding this age group, it covers up the full horror of low pay.

Some jobs did not even specify an hourly or weekly rate. Instead, terms such as 'piece work' or 'commission only' were used which, as the report points out, mean in practice income 'may turn out to be erratic and/or nonexistent.'

The survey reveals how full-time skilled jobs are being replaced with part-time unskilled work:

- 42.8% of all jobs on offer were part-time and overwhelmingly in the unskilled sector - catering, retail,

clerical and cleaning work.

- 25.2% of all jobs were 'temporary' or 'casual'. Casual workers are employed on an 'as and when required' basis and have no employment rights.
- Over a quarter of all jobs in the survey paid less than the National Insurance threshold of £64. This means that people taking those jobs would not be entitled to contributory benefits such as statutory sick pay and maternity pay, jobseeker's allowance or a state pension.

In his 1998 budget, Labour's Gordon Brown announced the threshold for paying National Insurance would rise to £81 from April 1999. This will create a very lucrative incentive for employers to shift employment from full-time to part-time. For example, at the current £64 threshold, a full-time job would need to pay under £128 a week for an employer to be able to avoid paying NI by splitting it into two part-time jobs. The report found that 18% of full-time jobs in the area paid below £128 a week. However, under the new £81 threshold, any full-time job paying under £162 a week could be split in the same way: 62.1% of the jobs in the survey paid less than this. Labour is enthusiastically helping to drive us deeper into poverty and insecurity.

This report offers a bleak insight into the reality of Blair's Britain for the majority of the working class - and shows why campaigns like the RNCC, which fight against low pay and casualisation, are so vital.

Nigel Cook

Join the fight against poverty pay Join the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign

To join the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign contact PO Box 14, Accrington, Lancs BB5 1GG, tel: 01254 679605.

Affiliation rates: £15 TUs, £5 waged, £1 unwaged. Get copies of the campaign's *Fight Poverty Pay!* bulletin, invite speakers to your organisation, send donations.

The campaign also wants details about other companies profiting from poverty pay and about harassment of claimants.

We know he wants to say 'Well done, girls,' and then in a couple of weeks he is going to pull the plug. Well, they can do that, but we are going to fight on.

So as well as this corrupt Labour council and the company, we are also fighting to get our own union to do something about this dispute. If the union had come down earlier and spoken to the company and to this Labour council, run for 15 years by Roy Oldham, who has a finger in everything that goes on in Tameside, we could have been reinstated on the pay we came out on.

So last week, for the first time, we got a strike committee together. We organised a public meeting and we storm every council meeting that's going. We are giving those councillors a dog's life. It is even in the *Manchester Evening News* tonight that says they are stepping up secu-

rity for tomorrow night in readiness for us!

I always thought Labour was for the working class. But they're even worse than the Tories. They are carrying out what the Tories started, but doing it even more. I mean it's privatisation, privatisation and slashing wages everywhere you go. Privatisation means low pay for the working class. We are not just fighting for Tameside workers, we are fighting for low paid workers everywhere. We came here tonight to support Nigel, because we did not know until we came out on strike that this was happening all over the country. It's about time people started fighting back.' ■

Donations and messages of solidarity to UNISON (Tameside Branch), 29 Booth St, Ashton-under-Lyme, OL6 7LB. Tel 0161 308 2452 for details of events. Letters of complaint to Councillor Roy Oldham, Ashton Town Hall, Wellington Road, Ashton-under-Lyme, Greater Manchester.

25 years ago, on 11 September 1973, a military coup deposed the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile. In the ensuing blood bath, thousands of communists, socialists, workers and peasants were murdered, Allende amongst them. The national stadium in the capital, Santiago, was turned into a concentration camp, where hundreds were tortured and shot whilst the ruling class celebrated with champagne parties.

In the following years, the country was ruled by military terror. Torture and disappearances were routine. Political parties and trade unions were banned. Real wages were slashed so that by 1987 average daily food consumption had fallen from its 1973 level of 2,692 calories to just 2,227. By 1996, when the poorest 50% of the population received just 17.3% of national income, the richest 10% got 41.6% or \$4,000 per month. The middle class – 30% of the population – earned about \$1,000 per month, enough to buy the private health and education that the mass of the working class could never afford.

Today politicians such as the British Labour government's Minister for Welfare Reform Frank Field, flock to Chile to study its privatised welfare system; he now extols the virtues of their privatised pension scheme. **ROBERT CLOUGH** examines the lessons of the coup.

A facade of democracy has been restored. General Pinochet, the leader of the 1973 coup, finally retired as head of the armed forces in March of this year; he is now a senator for life, with legal immunity from any prosecution for the terror for which he was responsible. His regime was a vital ally of British imperialism; it provided covert bases for the SAS during the Malvinas war, and it has been an important destination for British arms sales.

The rise of Unidad Popular

All this is a far cry from the situation in 1970 when Salvador Allende was elected President as a self-proclaimed Marxist on a programme which called for the nationalisation of foreign industry and the introduction of socialism. To understand how this was possible, and how it ended in bloody failure, it is important to understand the evolution of capitalism in Chile, its dependency on imperialism, and how this moulded the political character of the parties which led its working class.

In the late nineteenth century, Chile became British imperialism's source of nitrates for fertiliser and explosives. The British-owned nitrate mines in the north of the country employed up to 100,000 workers; when 10,000 of them struck in Iquique in 1907, troops machine-gunned a mass meeting, massacring over 2,000 men, women and children. Between 1904 and 1914, US companies took control of the Chilean copper industry. Kennecott took over El Teniente, the world's largest underground copper mine, and Anaconda, the world's largest open-cast copper mine, Chuquibambilla. US investment rose from \$5m in 1895 to \$200m in 1914. Chile became the world's second-largest producer of copper, its economy completely dependent on the world market for copper, iron and nitrates. By 1929, annual Chilean tribute to the US in the form of repatriated profits on direct investment and servicing of bank loans came to \$100m; in 1940 US direct investment totalled \$592m, second only to pre-revolutionary Cuba in Latin America.

Chile: a neo-colony

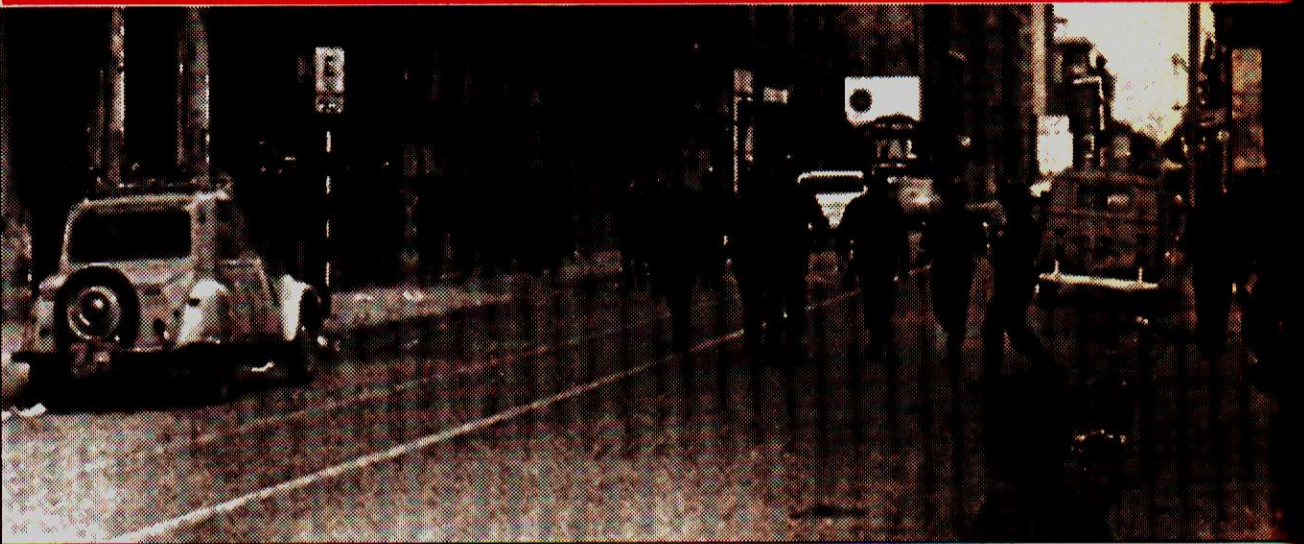
In the post-war period, Chile became little more than a neo-colony of US imperialism. In 1964, the US accounted for \$1bn out of \$1.2bn foreign direct investment. Such investment was fabulously profitable for the US companies involved. Between 1913 and 1963, Kennecott and Anaconda exported \$4.1bn profits. In 1969, Anaconda made profits worldwide of \$99m on investments of \$1,116m; in Chile, it had made \$79m of those profits on an investment of only \$199m. In the six years between 1964 and 1970 Anaconda made \$426m profits, and Kennecott \$178m from Chilean copper. By the end of 1970, US domination was almost total. ITT ran the national telecommunications system through a 50-year concession granted in 1930. US companies controlled 50% of Chilean manufacturing, 60% of the iron, steel and chemical industries, and nearly 100% of engine assembly, radio and TV, pharmaceuticals, and of course copper.

The result was economic stagnation, and deteriorating conditions for the Chilean working class. In 1956, one hour's labour was sufficient to buy a kilo of green vegetables, or a litre of milk. By 1965 this had risen to two hours, and 1969, three hours. In 1965, a married Chilean worker with an 8-year-old child had to spend 66.8% of his earnings on food; by 1969, this had risen to 82.3%. Agriculture was extremely inefficient as a consequence of the pattern of ownership. In 1965, there were 730 estates of more than 5,000 hectares; these accounted for 16,795,000 out of the total of 30,648,000 hectares available for cultivation – more than 50%. On the other end of the scale, 123,696 holdings of less than 5 hectares

1973-1998

CHILE

Lessons of the



totalled only 207,000 hectares. The great landowners were only interested in getting an income sufficient to support their parasitic lifestyle. Consequently 60 per cent of their estates were left uncultivated, and the rest was poorly mechanised. It was sufficient that they had access to a plentiful supply of cheap labour from the landless rural proletariat, which lived in desperate poverty.

The Chilean crisis in 1970

By 1970, Chile had become the second most indebted country per capita in the world (after Israel), owing \$3.8bn, most of it to US banks. Successive governments had borrowed ever more extensively to pay for the lifestyle of the middle class, a quarter of the Chilean population; the dependent ruling class needed their support against the rising threat from the working class. In 1958, a coalition of Communists and Socialists had narrowly lost the presidential election, polling 356,000 votes against the 389,000 of the conservative winner. Fearful of another Cuba, the CIA pumped \$20m into the 1964 election campaign of the Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei. He won by a substantial margin, but only with radical promises of land reform and partial nationalisation of the copper mines.

His government was a fiasco. Having promised to give land to 100,000 out of 350,000 peasant families by 1970, it met only 15% of its target in the face of landowner resistance. The 'Chileanisation' of the copper mines made no impact on production, and whilst the government underwrote mining debts of \$632m, the companies exported profits to the tune of nearly \$620m. Lastly, the economy continued to stagnate: between 1967-70 it grew by only 1%. Such conditions fanned discontent. Illegal occupations of farms and urban areas soared from 24 in 1968 to nearly 600 in 1970. The number of strikes quadrupled to 1,000 a year, most of them illegal. The response was repression: seven protesters were shot dead in Santiago in 1967; in 1969, riot police evicted 100 peasant families squatting land near Puerto Montt in the south, killing nine people in the process.

CIA intervention

This was the context of the 1970 election. Once more, the CIA pumped millions of dollars into the Christian Democrat campaign, buying advertising space in the media, paying bribes to those whose votes could be bought, and funding an anti-Communist press campaign led by *El Mercurio*, the Chilean equivalent of *The Times*. Despite this, Salvador Allende, as candidate of Unidad Popular, a coalition of Communists, Socialists and Radicals, won the most votes, 1,070,000 or 36.2% of the total, with the conservative Nationalists getting 1,031,000 and the Christian Democrats 822,000.

The result created a crisis. The Unidad Popular programme – for nationalisation, welfare and accelerated land reform – represented a serious threat to US interests. However, the Christian Democrat-dominated Congress would have to confirm Allende's victory since he had not won an overall majority. Following the 4 September election, US imperialism went into overdrive to prevent his ratification. The Committee of 40, chaired by Henry Kissinger, and responsible for all covert US actions throughout the world, met to consider the possibility of financing a coup. President Nixon told the Director of the CIA to 'make the [Chilean] economy scream'. The CIA offered unlimited bribes to Christian Democrat congressmen to oppose Allende. The US ambassador to Chile warned that 'not a nut or bolt will be allowed to reach Chile under Allende.... Once Allende comes to power, we shall do all within our power to condemn Chile and the Chileans to utmost deprivation and poverty...' ITT offered the CIA a 'seven figure sum' to finance the conspiracy; company Vice President William Meeriman wrote on 9 October 'approaches continue to be made to select members of the armed forces in an attempt to have them lead some sort of uprising – no success to date'.

Given the choice between Allende and the National Party candidate Alessandri, Frei and the Christian Democrats knew they would have to support the former if there was to be any chance of containing the unrest

of the working class and peasantry. However, they insisted that Allende and Unidad Popular give a number of guarantees which would severely limit their scope of action. These included agreement to maintain the existing judicial and political system, ensure the continued independence and existing size of the armed forces, and prevent state interference in the freedom of the press. A bombing campaign by CIA-financed fascists failed to make the military move; army commander-in-chief General Schneider made it clear that he would support Allende if Congress confirmed his election. When fascists ambushed and murdered Schneider on 22 October, public outrage made Congress's endorsement of Allende two days later inevitable.

Unidad Popular: the first two years

Unidad Popular came to office committed to an extensive programme of industrial, agrarian and social reform. It nationalised mining and metallurgical industries, along with the largest monopolies in the textile, electronics, chemical and brewing industries, and 16 commercial banks. Real wages increased substantially. Universal primary schooling became a reality; the number of children going to secondary school rose 18% annually; those going on to high school rose by nearly 35%. There was free school milk for children under 15, and important gains for women: apart from equal pay, all workplaces with 20 or more employees were obliged to set up nurseries, and women were entitled to a year's maternity leave with full pay. Land redistribution, having stalled under Frei, was greatly accelerated leading to the formation of hundreds of co-operatives.

The rise in real wages stimulated a boom: GDP rose 8.5% in the first year, and unemployment fell from 7.2% in 1970 to 3.9% a year later. However, Unidad Popular's nationalisation of the copper industry became the excuse for a US financial and trade boycott which soon had a dramatic effect on the Chilean economy. With the agreement of the Christian Democrats, Unidad Popular had refused to pay compensation

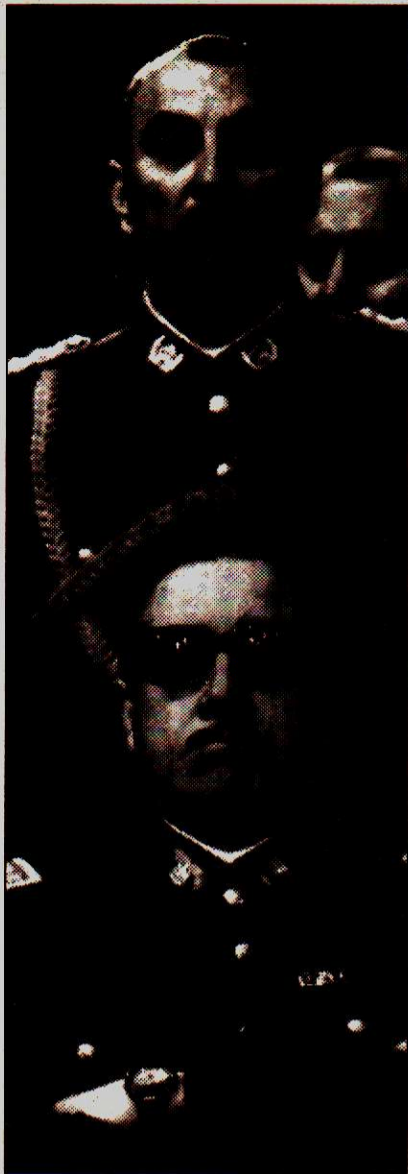


increase food imports as a result of both agricultural dislocation and increased demand. Foodstuff imports rose from \$165m in 1970 to \$383m in 1972 and eventually \$619m in 1973. The US credit squeeze meant that by 1973, the Chilean economy was insolvent.

Although the Chilean ruling class had managed to hamstring Unidad Popular through the constitutional guarantees, it realised that this was not sufficient to restrain the working class and peasantry. Hence, in collaboration with the US, which provided \$40m through the CIA, it waged a campaign of economic and political destabilisation so as to recruit the middle class to its side. Meanwhile, the US stepped up military aid; after South Vietnam, the Chilean military became the second largest per capita recipient of such assistance.

In the face of this offensive, Unidad Popular started to retreat. The principle members of the alliance were the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The Communist Party drew its strength from its base in the trade union movement and amongst sections of the privileged working class both manual and white collar. Throughout the period 1970-72 many of its members were drawn into state administration, whether it was to supervise land reforms or to lead the distribution committees which sought to control prices and distribution of consumer goods. The Socialist Party was split between a section closely tied to the Communist Party and a more radical wing which was supported by other smaller sections of Unidad Popular such as MAPU (Movement for United Popular Action) and the Christian Left.

The Communist Party was very much on the right wing of Unidad Popular; it had argued for the inclusion of the Christian Democrats within the alliance, and when that was defeated, had pushed for the acceptance of the constitutional guarantees which were the pre-condition for Christian Democrat ratification of Allende's presidency. It argued that Unidad Popular could only survive if it managed to recruit the substantial Chilean middle class to its side - farmers, small capitalists, white collar workers and professionals. Hence it opposed moves which might threaten the interests of these privileged layers. Until 1970, their stan-



Pinochet and his generals

dard of living had depended on foreign loans, credit and delayed payments rather than an expanding productive system. In the short term, Unidad Popular had no choice but to continue this arrangement to buy the middle class support it craved as a counter-balance to the pressures from the oppressed. Cynics spoke of a 'transaction to socialism' as Unidad Popular sought to finance the privileged consumption of the middle class; Fidel Castro, who visited Chile in autumn 1971, expressed concern about 'a revolution of consumption, not investment'.

The class struggle intensifies

Yet as production slowed down from 1972 and inflation accelerated, events were to show that it was not possible to satisfy the interests of the working class and poor peasantry and at the same time sustain the privileges of the upper working class and middle class. Shortages of consumer goods, both real and artificial, created a black market whose inflated prices excluded the working class. In response, the government set up Juntas de Abastecimientos Populares (JAPs) to control the distribution of essential commodities. These often acquired a popular character as they policed distribution in working class areas, opposing shopkeepers and other retailers who looked to make money on the black market. More fundamentally, in ensuring that the working class got more, they also ensured the middle class got less, and so became a particular target of ruling class hostility.

In the countryside, expropriation and redistribution of land still faced resistance from the militia landowners, who funded local terrorists the poor peasants and landless workers. And although the reforms were aimed at estates of 80 hectares and above, it was the owners of smaller estates - 40 to 80 hectares - who often proved the most ruthless exploiters and implacable enemies of the poor. In 1971, there were 1,758 rural strikes and 1,272 land seizures; over half of the latter involved farms of less than 80 hectares. There could be no reconciliation between the landless workers and the middle farmers, and Communist Party

appeals to stop the occupations and strikes fell on deaf ears.

In October 1972, the ruling class felt confident enough to organise a nationwide lock-out. The spark for this was a protest by 50,000 lorry owner/drivers at shortages of spare parts. Factories were closed down by their owners; lawyers, doctors, nurses and teachers came out in support of the ruling class. The response of the working class was immediate: it took over factories and organised production on its own account. Militias were set up to police working class areas against fascist attacks, and to defend truck owners willing to break the ruling class blockade. *Cordones industriales* - literally industrial belts - which organised factory committees on an area basis - spread throughout Santiago and the major cities. *Commandos comunales* joined together factory workers, neighbourhood assemblies, women's organisations and slum-dwellers also on an area basis.

Allende and his government were caught between the working class and oppressed on the one hand, and the ruling class on the other. In November, at the demand of the Christian Democrats, military leaders were taken into the cabinet as a guarantee that congressional elections would take place in March 1973. Unidad Popular promised the lorry-owners that their fleets would not face nationalisation. The Communist Party urged a slowing down of the pace of reform in order not to alienate the middle class. It was also concerned that grass-roots organisations such as the *cordones industriales* would undermine the control of the working class it exercised through the trade union movement. The Communist Party Minister of Economics urged the return of all occupied factories to their owners, only to back down when the working class refused to comply.

The period had also seen new forces come on to the political scene - the majority of the working class who were outside of the trade union movement, vast numbers of whom lived in the shanty towns around Santiago. By and large ignored by the Communist Party and Socialist Party, who concentrated on better-organised and more privileged layers of the working class, these layers began to provide political support to organisations on the left of Unidad Popular such as MAPU and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). Whilst electorally they supported Unidad Popular alongside the rest of the working class, in their actions they were forced to go beyond what Unidad Popular found acceptable, thereby accentuating the political crisis it faced.

The coup is prepared

The ruling class went into the March 1973 elections confident that it would gain the two-thirds majority in Congress it needed to evict Allende and his government. The result confounded their expectations: Unidad Popular increased its share of the vote to 44%. General Prats, the army commander, pronounced himself satisfied with the outcome and left the cabinet. The ruling class and its US backers were in turmoil. There was no choice now but to increase the campaign of terror and sabotage as preparation for a coup.

June 1973 saw yet another ruling class lockout; instigated by the truck-owners, it extended to sections of the most affluent miners in the El Teniente mines. Bombings, shootings and terror became the norm. A break-away union of truck owners which supported Unidad Popular and attempted to break the strike came in for special treatment: fascists assassinated its president. Committees of workers and peasants came together to break the ruling class blockade. In the period 17-24 June there were 77 bomb attacks. General Prats was attacked publicly for his refusal to intervene; on 29 June a section of the

army in alliance with the fascist Patria y Libertad organised a coup which was speedily defeated.

This was a signal to the ruling class to redouble its campaign: it was now terrified that unless it moved quickly, it stood to lose everything as workers and peasants were forced in practice to ignore the calls for restraint that came from Unidad Popular and its allies. There were also alarming signs of disaffection within the rank and file of the armed forces. In August, Luis Corvalan, Communist Party General Secretary, denied that working class actions were a threat to the army: 'They are claiming that we have a policy of replacing the professional army. No sir! We continue and will continue to support keeping our armed institutions strictly professional.' At the same time as he was saying this, 43 sailors were arrested in Valparaiso for disclosing preparations for a coup; Allende denounced them as 'ultra-left' and stooges of the MIR. *El Mercurio* called for an 'Indonesian solution' referring to Suharto's massacre of 500,000 Indonesian communists, peasants and workers seven years earlier in 1966. 'Djakarta' became a slogan of the right, painted on Santiago walls; General Prats resigned as middle class women demonstrated outside his home. Allende appointed General Pinochet in his place. The army started searches of factories, housing estates and slums up and down the country allegedly looking for arms. Socialists and activists were arrested and tortured; some were murdered.

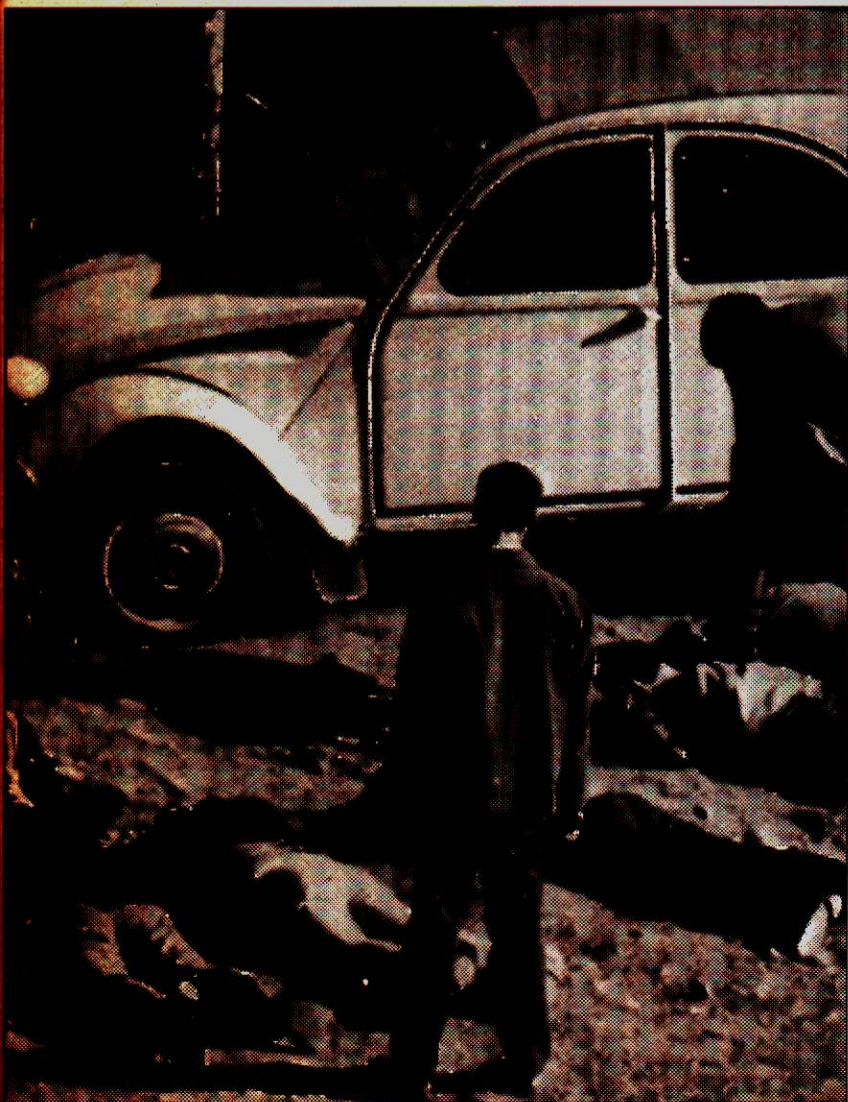
On 4 September 1973, up to a million people marched through the streets of Santiago in support of Unidad Popular on the third anniversary of its election. The mood was sombre and subdued: the participants were aware of an impending coup, but had been given no lead from Unidad Popular. On the night of 10 September, the Chilean navy put to sea from Valparaiso for manoeuvres with US warships; by the time the ships returned early the following morning, hundreds of sailors identified as UP supporters had been murdered, many thrown overboard. At 11am, British-supplied Hawker Hunter jets swooped over Santiago and bombed La Moneda. Within hours, Allende was dead; he and his bodyguard had held off tanks and fully-armed troops for more than three hours. Elsewhere, pockets of workers with a few small weapons managed to resist for up to three days. By that time, thousands were already dead; it remained for the US to offer its support to the new regime which could not have succeeded without the financial and military aid that it had provided.

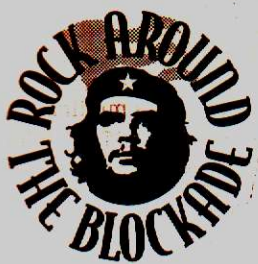
Conclusion

Unidad Popular failed because the main parties in the coalition had no confidence in the ability of the working class to organise and run society in its own interests. It therefore sought to adjust its policies to the prejudices of the middle class, and constantly courted middle class respectability. But the middle class cannot provide any solution to the problems of capitalist society - it will only follow the lead of the more powerful of the two contending classes - the capitalists or the working class. Hence in practice, Unidad Popular found itself paralysed - unable to confront the ruling class, and yet terrified of the revolutionary drive of the working class and oppressed. It tried to hold the balance between the two, which in practice meant holding back the working class and giving space to the ruling class to prepare its onslaught. Although both the Communist and Socialist Parties were mainly working class in composition, their leaderships drew their politics from a more privileged layer altogether. The lesson is that leadership of the working class has to be of the working class, not only socially but also politically. ■

coup

to Kennecott and Anaconda because of the excessive profits these companies had made between 1955 and 1970. The US embargo on spare parts meant that by 1972, a third of all state-owned buses were immobilised, as were a third of the specialised lorries in the Chuquicamata mine. Lines of credit from US banks were cut from \$200m to \$30m. As increasing wages fuelled demand for imported consumer goods, so the balance of payments went into the red. This was compounded both by a fall in the price of copper - from 66 US cents per pound in 1970 to 48 cents in 1972, at a cost of \$500m to the economy - and by the need to





CUBA VIVE

A Cuban communist speaks

Facing the challenge in Cuba today

1 January 1999 marks 40 years of the Cuban Revolution, despite the US blockade. The collapse of the socialist camp in 1989-91 sparked off gleeful predictions in the capitalist press that Cuba would go the same way. Yet, despite the hardship of what is known as the Special Period, Cuba continues to defend its socialist principles and the outstanding gains of the Revolution, particularly in health and education. In a world dominated by the neo-liberal policies of imperialism, where 20 million children in Latin America alone have no access to education and over a billion people lack clean drinking water, Cuba remains an outstanding example of what socialism can achieve. However, that survival has not been without cost. Economic concessions to capitalism, such as joint enterprises with foreign capital and the legalisation of dollars, have had to be made to ensure development. Inevitably, this has led to possibly dangerous social change.

Ernesto Jaquinet is a member of the Communist Party of Cuba and plays a leading role in the the National Recreation Group of the Union of Young Communists (UJC), which organises recreational facilities for young people. Here he explains to FRFI the challenges these changes pose for the UJC in its work with young Cubans, which will be central to its discussions at its congress in December.

Working with Cuban youth

Our Seventh Congress will take place at an important time: we are still facing the continuing Special Period, with all its difficulties, alongside new economic developments in Cuba such as joint enterprises. We are witnessing the appearance of a group of people who, by working in this kind of enterprise or in tourism, can enrich themselves over and above other Cuban workers. And so differences are arising between sections of the population. In a country like ours, a socialist country, people are not used to this. The UJC provides ideological clarification, explaining why this is necessary so as, we hope, to achieve a better future – that we have had to make concessions in sectors of the economy and introduce capitalist mechanisms to ensure economic development and the survival of the Revolution.

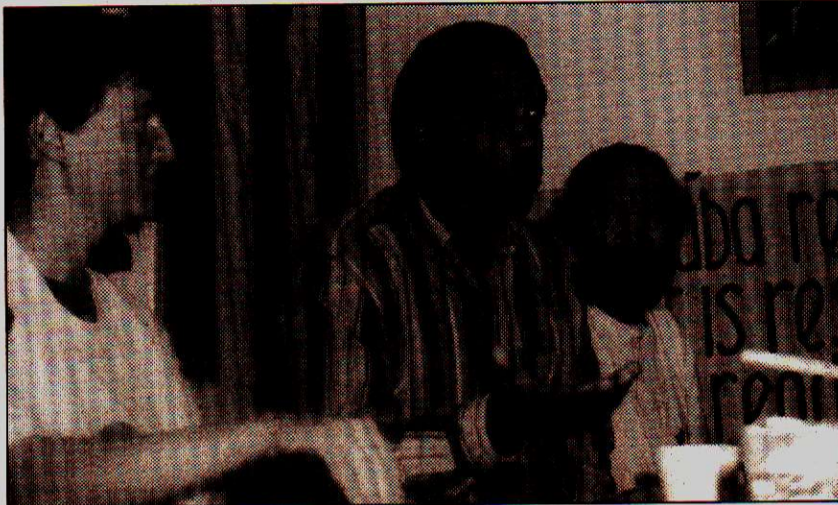
We also carry out extra ideological work amongst young people who work in tourism to ensure they feel part of society and the period we are living through and do not see themselves as in some way part of a different society or different historical epoch. We have to try to fight the development of different classes, which today exist in a far more exaggerated form than before.

However, the vast majority of the young people working in tourism are members of the UJC and contribute a large percentage of their dollar salaries to supporting the state economy, particularly the health sector.

Another major challenge is prostitution, currently at a relatively high level because of the economic situation. The socialist ideals of our society are undermined by its existence. We are working to create a really combative attitude towards it within our branches, so that everyone understands there has to be a better way forward. If our own members do not actively combat deformations within our society, we will not solve these problems. The fight begins in the areas where young people are most accessible, for example in the schools, where we hold meetings, warn them of the risks, such as AIDS

and other diseases, the effect it can have on their future and emphasise moral values – and the real opportunities and true worth women can have in a socialist society. We are also trying to organise more recreational peso facilities, so that young women are less tempted by the possibility of a little more money, of having a better time. We work with the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and the Federation of Cuban Women as well as, in particular, our branches within the tourist sector who have most contact with prostitutes. We are also very critical of tourists who go to Cuba looking to have sex with prostitutes.

Obviously there are those who don't share our socialist ideas, who aren't interested in advancing towards a better society. While we respect their right not to share our ideas, we also need to ensure they are not an obstacle to our work and so try to discuss with them. For example, there is a union in Cuba for the self-employed. We hold meetings where we discuss their rights – and also their responsibilities. And they in



Cde Ernesto Jaquinet speaking at a London RATB public meeting. Further meetings are planned for September – contact RATB for details

turn offer financial dollar support, via the union, to *Las Tropas Territoriales del Pueblo* [the popular militia]. That's important, because they have chosen not to work directly for the Revolution, for the state.

At the same time, the most powerful country on earth continually directs its ideological fire against us. Some of our young people are attracted to the north American way of life, the clothes, consumerism, the hegemony the US imposes throughout the world. In a modest way, we try to counter this ideological offensive, encouraging people to adopt Cuban clothes and styles – for example, the most popular Cuban artists on television will wear typical Cuban clothes as an example. We reserve a number of places at dollar discos in capitalist joint enterprise hotels for our most outstanding young workers to encourage them to feel equal, have campaigns with T-shirts with the Cuban flag on to encourage pride in our national emblems and so on, but we do not have the resources to do this on a large scale. We work, too, to maintain continuity and unity

between the generation who experienced capitalism and made the Revolution and the young people of today, who may take the gains of that Revolution for granted and be attracted to capitalism.

For those young people in Cuba who aspire to a capitalist lifestyle, who think capitalism represents the way forward, we can use the lessons of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many young people used to visit the Soviet Union and saw how it was when it was a socialist country. Today, the economy is in chaos, there are many homeless young people, people dying of cold, veterans of the Second World War having to sell their medals in the street to buy bread. They've seen all this on television and videos, and communists from the former Soviet Union have also visited Cuban schools to demonstrate how vital it is that we defend the gains we have in socialist Cuba today. We are determined Cuba will not follow the same path.

International solidarity

Our country has a history of interna-

tional solidarity. We have completed international missions in Angola and in Ethiopia, in the Namibian liberation struggle and fighting in South Africa against apartheid. Cuban doctors are working in more than 23 countries on five continents – which is more than the whole of the World Health Organisation.

We have also received great solidarity from the working class around the world. Without it the situation our country faces would have been far harsher. Who knows if we could even have survived? But with that help, we continue to resist and to fight for socialism. We are grateful to all those around the world who recognise the importance of our cause, including those in the US who have forced a crack in the blockade. From Britain we receive solidarity from many people. We thank the Revolutionary Communist Group and Rock around the Blockade for all your help, in particular to the Union of Young Communists. Many people when they think of aid think perhaps of a car, or petrol, or medicines, but you have found a really imaginative form of aid in the form of disco equipment for Cuba. A car can help someone go to work, and the medicine may help a number of people, but a discotheque means hundreds and hundreds of thousands and thousands of young people can benefit, and not just for one day, or for six months but for years. For us, music is as important as medicine. The disco system you provided for Disco Amigos in Ciego de Avila, the most rural of our provinces, is the only local peso disco. It caters for 600 people or more every night except Monday. That means 600 people who before would have been standing around on the streets or parks with nothing to do... they say it has even resulted in a drop in teenage pregnancies! As far as I know, you are the only solidarity group which provides such recreational facilities for the mass of young people in Cuba. We think it's great.

I've been interested to see the political work you are doing in Britain, working in an environment hostile to socialism. The majority of the working class here live in exceptional conditions, compared to other countries in the world, because England has benefited for so long from imperialism – it is the oldest imperialist country in the world. Nevertheless, in this very wealthy society where some people can have so much, others have very little, or even nothing. Here people sleep in the streets, in the cold. I've seen people playing musical instruments in the streets to get money. I was also surprised that, even in such a rich and powerful country, a large section of the youth are influenced by US fashion and fads.

The future

Despite the blockade, we have seen a growth in our economy. In the last year, we have also had important visits from, for example, the Pope, the prime minister of Canada and presidents from other Caribbean countries. And, despite the problems, it is important to remember that the vast majority of our young people are supporting and working for the survival of the Revolution. The major gains of the Revolution, in health and education, have been preserved.

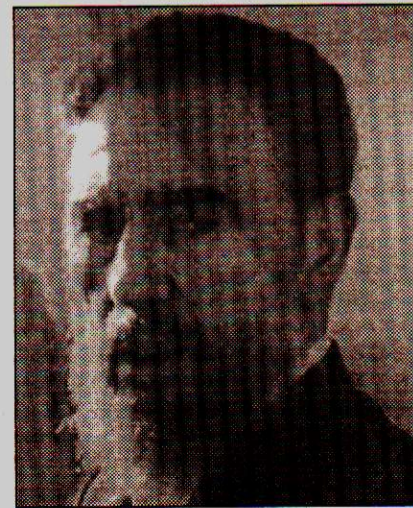
The Seventh Congress of the UJC is in December. We will also be celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Revolution. Despite being blockaded since 1 January 1959, our Revolution has survived for 40 years. That can only be because the population of Cuba supports and loves the Revolution. If not, the Revolution would have died. So the Cuban Revolution will survive. We will do all that is possible. Next year are the Latin American and Caribbean summits. These are all important events that people should know about. I think we will continue to go forward. ■

Castro responds to press lies

'Castro in 3-day coma!' screamed the front page of *The Guardian* on 20 July. Read on a little and it becomes apparent that this stop-press news actually refers to Castro undergoing hospital treatment all of nine months ago, in October 1997, for high blood pressure – a condition which, the correspondent informs us, can lead to paralysis, speech problems, convulsions and even death. Not, to the regret of the capitalist press, in this case: Castro had recovered sufficiently from his 'coma' – actually, the article reveals a few paragraphs on, heavy sedation – sufficiently to hold a meeting with a papal representative next day. Unfortunately, this sensationalist and ridiculous non-news article represents more than the routine idiocies of a slow

news day and is, rather, part of a regular ritual of 'Cuba bashing'. The article is entirely drawn, without any kind of disclaimer, from *El Nuevo Herald*, a Miami newspaper that caters for the virulently counter-revolutionary Cuban exile community. Criticism of Castro's speeches is accredited, as usual, to an unnamed 'source in Havana' – the laziest and most dishonest kind of journalism.

Castro called the article 'a lie from head to toe' and revealed that initial Cuban investigations into a woman with the same name as the 'surgeon' who was the source for the story found she was not a doctor and had left Cuba in 1995. This information *The Guardian* tucked away on page 12. Meanwhile, real news from Cuba – its lowering of the infant mortality



rate to 7.2 per 1,000 live births in the last year, its life-saving meningitis vaccine, remains deliberately unreported and ignored.

IMF takes control

On 8 May the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that Turkey could become the next Indonesia. The Turkish state is exhausting its stock of credit. Action is called for, yet the remedy will further destabilise the crisis-prone political system. **TREVOR RAYNE reports.**

Turkey's strategically important position in the balance of global forces, together with its membership of NATO and the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, give it favourable treatment by the US and European powers. Turkey and Israel are the USA's main Middle Eastern allies. Turkey is a forward base against Iraq and Iran, a channel for diplomacy with and investment in Central Asia. It provides access to Caspian Basin energy reserves and is a major arms purchaser and recipient of multinational companies' investment. British companies intend to increase investments in and weapons sales to Turkey.

But strategic significance does not provide financial stability and bankers cannot ignore their sums; the time of reckoning is due, the IMF steps forward. Turkish capitalism is to be brought into line with 'globalisation'.

In 1997 Turkish government annual borrowing reached \$17bn, 12% of national income, up from \$7bn in 1995. British government borrowing seldom rises above 3% of national income. Debt service payments are expected to consume 75% of government revenue in 1998; they took 60% in 1997. Foreign debt is still \$84.5bn, after \$10.4bn was repaid in 1997. Inflation, fuelled by debt, never below 50% in the 1990s, went over 100% in January 1998, then fell to 91% in June, helped by lower oil prices.

Debt expansion has contributed to the increase in imports and the \$7bn 1997 current account deficit. Denied

IMF loans since 1995, the government has to fund deficits with short-term loans charged at high interest, adding to the budget deficit. The Turkish lira, which stood at an average of TL30,774 to £1 between 1991-95, in July 1998 exchanges at TL440,000 to £1, undermining the role of the Turkish lira within Turkey.

In September 1997 the IMF demanded cuts in public sector borrowing, the imposition of VAT (taxes only amount to 15% of national income compared to a European Union average of 40% and perhaps 60% of the economy is in the informal sector), cuts in subsidies to low and middle income families and the retirement age raised. Any one of these could be politically inflammatory. The IMF also wanted privatisation proceeds to reach \$4bn this year.

Denied \$15bn from the IMF for 1998, the government was forced back to high-interest loans.

While the economy shows over 5% annual growth, much of that growth is speculative and parasitic. Turkish companies and banks increasingly profit from lending to the government rather than investing in production and the private sector is forced overseas for funds, resulting in corporate and banking short-term foreign currency liabilities of \$20bn. As the lira devalues these become more difficult to service without recourse to yet further borrowing.

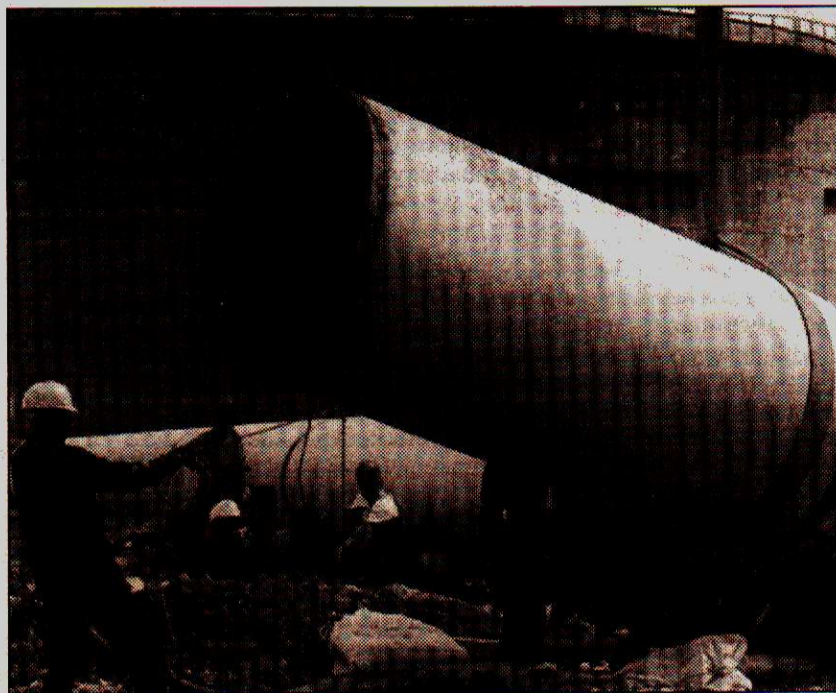
With debt looming, the government reached a deal with the IMF in June. No loan, but the IMF will examine agreed government policy every three months to see that public spending targets, privatisation, tax changes, social security cuts etc, are satisfactory. If the Turkish government is sufficiently compliant, loans can be restored.

Workers' living standards are under attack and inequalities are exacerbated by high inflation. Salaries are adjusted on a semi-annual basis, but with 100% inflation they rapidly lose their value, pushing people to destitution levels. Average per capita incomes in the west of Turkey range from \$3,000 to \$7,400 pa, while, in central and eastern Turkey and along the Black Sea coast, they average \$863 to \$1,361. Consequently, the Kurdish population is further impoverished. As state spending is squeezed the poorest suffer most: the average population per doctor in Turkey is 909 people, in the Kurdish areas it is 2,150. Cuba has 200 people per doctor!

In a gesture to the IMF, Prime Minister Yilmaz has reduced the public sector pay rise, claiming lack of resources. However, parasitic earnings from government debt servicing channel ever more wealth to a handful of corporations and families. It is this growing social injustice that the IMF fears will trigger revolt as in Indonesia.

Privatisation

In March the government stated that telecommunications, petrol refineries and retailers, ports, shipping, banks and energy are scheduled for privatisation in the coming year. Large sections of the economy are state-owned and Turkey is seen as a priority target for multinationals. In 1997 foreign direct investment in Turkey was a little over \$1bn. Privatisation revenues for 1996-97 were \$465m and total receipts since 1985, when the privatisation programme was adopted, are just \$3.7bn, insufficient to match IMF, government and multinationals' ambi-



Turkey is strategic in the grab for Caspian basin energy

tions. This year the government seeks to raise \$12bn.

At the end of 1997 BAT Industries from Britain launched a joint venture with state tobacco and alcohol firm Tekel. This was a tactic to avoid opposition to full privatisation. Over 13/14 May a forum on 'Privatisation, Financing, Regulation and Projects (Gas and Electricity)' was held in Istanbul. Participants included the Turkish Minister for Energy and Natural Resources, National Power, Shell, ABB and the World Bank. The business development manager for National Power said that Turkey is 'an important investment target. It will be one of our biggest investments anywhere in the world.' National Power intends to build gas-fired power stations and operate state-owned coal-fired power stations.

Indebtedness and political considerations make privatisation of the state sector energy concerns a problem for the government.

Coopers and Lybrand, the British accountants and consultancy firm, are drafting a regulatory framework for the energy industry. In February the government ended price controls on oil products, increasing the chances of privatising Tupras, the state-owned oil refinery which controls over 80% of the domestic market, and Petrol Ofisi (Poas), the chain of petrol stations. State-owned oil refineries operate at a loss because the government sells fuel below cost price. Privatised profits from energy production will reflect on prices and living standards as well as causing redundancies in the privatised concerns.

On 29 June the government auctioned Poas to local textile and property development companies, whom the head of Privatisation Administration said would negotiate alliances with international firms to run the petrol stations. Given the scramble by multinationals to develop the Caspian Basin oil and gas reserves this is a strategically important privatisation. The assets were sold for less than half their value.

Opposition to privatisation has come from sections of the ruling class and workers. Legal challenges have come from parliamentarians who cite the 'national interest' and who echo an import substitution phase of Turkish capital accumulation that predominated over two decades ago.

Also, MPs have traditionally used the state sector as a means of political patronage and are reluctant to see this disappear. It has also supplied the private sector with cheap inputs.

Most significantly, the military has come out in favour of the privatisation programme and wants to join in. They have a holding company, Oyak, which participates in a range of Turkish industry and with foreign capital. By encouraging privatisation the Turkish military undermines its ability to present itself as independent and representative of the general national interest, 'protector of the nation' etc, and is seen as identifying with a fraction of the bourgeoisie. This will add to the political crisis in Turkey, which has had eight governments since 1993 and where the military justifies its interventions into the political system on the basis of guaranteeing stability, as it did when ejecting the Welfare Party government last year.

Both the Treasury Minister and the head of Privatisation Administration are former Citibank managers, representing international capital. They plan to use privatisation proceeds to reduce short-term debt: debt will be swapped for capital as Turkey is bought up.

Communists and socialists made opposition to privatisation central to their May Day demonstrations. They also focused on other ways in which privatisation is being ushered in and the working class forced to pay for the economic crisis: they opposed fee-paying education and healthcare. A joint Platform Against Privatisation has been formed. However, trade union opposition to privatisation, such as that of the trade union Petrol-Is against the sale of Poas, tends to be confined to an illusory appeal to national interests.

The state's privatisation programme requires an enfeebled working class and trade union movement; consequently the government has announced anti-union laws which attack the rights to strike and collective bargaining. The public sector union KESK has held widespread protests against this legislation, facing police repression.

Oil and gas

Turkey wants to be the energy crossroads of the region, with US support; the crossroads for resources from the east to markets in the west. The collapse of the Soviet Union has trans-

formed Turkey's strategic position as the energy resources of the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have fallen within reach of the multinationals. The USA wants to avoid the influence of Russia, Iran and European powers over these supplies. Thus, the USA and the Turkish state want to channel oil and gas east from Azerbaijan through Turkey to the Mediterranean. The Kurds - and particularly the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - are presented as a threat to this plan. So, as the October date for announcing the route draws near, the military and propaganda effort against the PKK is intensified. Kurdish rights weigh negligibly in the balance against energy riches.

The main multinationals in the consortium exploiting Caspian oil are BP and Norwegian Statoil. Shell intends to build a pipeline across Iran. The French firm, Total, already operates there, and BP is looking to see if the US government adjusts its sanctions policy against Iran allowing BP to operate as well. BP is the biggest holder of US oil reserves and the biggest overseas investor in the USA; it does not want to offend the US state. In May President Clinton said the US government would waive threatened sanctions against Total; the US is seeking a rapprochement with Iran. Nevertheless, US influence in the Caspian region will be strengthened if Turkey gets a major stake in the oil and gas routes.

The Turkish state is playing a strategic role in manoeuvres for control of reserves and distribution, just as it plays the prospect of privatisations as counters to win more financial and political credit from the international powers.

Militarisation of Turkey

Britain is the world's second biggest arms trader, although the Ministry of Defence has recently claimed that it is now the biggest; Turkey is the second biggest importer of weapons. The Turkish armed forces plan to spend \$150bn on weapons over the next 25-30 years; they are currently in the midst of a \$31bn military modernisation programme and British firms want a share of the orders. The Turkish General Staff discriminate against suppliers from countries that criticise Turkey's human rights record. Vickers Defence Systems is bidding to supply them with 800 battle tanks. If successful this will be Britain's biggest-ever order for armoured vehicles. The chances of Labour's 'ethical foreign policy' extending to Turkey are negligible. British Aerospace, GEC, Land Rover, Short Brothers, Marconi, Siemens Plessey etc have all sold arms to Turkey and are looking to sell more.

Furthermore, the enormous modernisation programme is likely to involve major joint projects with international capital. British firms are seeking not just to sell to Turkey but to establish plants there as well.

While Germany has been most adamant that Turkey is 'not yet ready' to join the European Union - Turkey is too strong an ally of the USA, and liable to send it more Turks and Kurds the racist German state does not want. Not surprisingly, Britain has been the most consistent defender of Turkey's claim to membership. The Labour government has the interests of British big business at heart and is, as ever, pleased to comply with US wishes.

The war against the Kurds costs the Turkish state approximately \$10bn a year. Repression is being extended to the entire working class in Turkey. This is unsustainable without European and US credits and weapons. Socialists in Britain demand an end to Labour's defence of the Turkish state and an end to arms sales to Turkey. We call on people not to holiday there. Tourism deposited \$8.1bn in Turkey in 1997 as eight million people disregarded appeals to stay away - 15% up on the 1996 visits. It is the country's biggest foreign exchange earner. This is intolerable. If tourism revenues dry up, and the credit squeeze continues, plans to turn Turkey into a heavily armed fortress would dissolve. ■

CENSORSHIP OF SOCIALIST PRESS IN TURKEY

The 17 June issue, no 159, of the newspaper *Sosyalist İktidar* (Socialist Power), the weekly central press organ of the Party for Socialist Power, was recently confiscated by the Turkish state.

This act of censorship was carried out under the provisions of the anti-terrorism act which refers to 'propaganda aimed at dividing the integrity of the Turkish republic's land and nation.' This section is notorious for being used against communists, revolutionaries and all progressive movements.

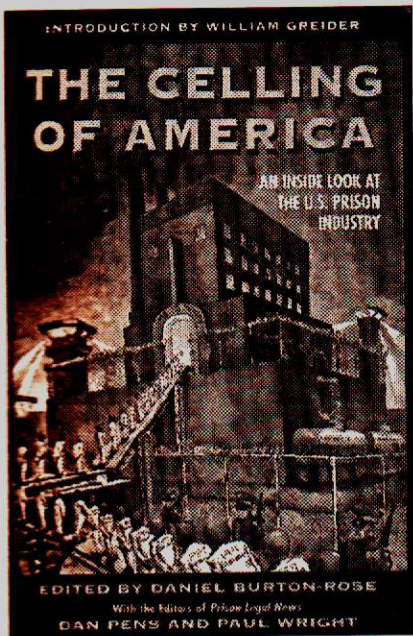
The article in question, entitled 'The knot will be untied by socialism', is a discussion of current tendencies within the Kurdish movement. It examines the Kurdish liberation movement's effect on, and relationship with, the working class movement in Turkey and points to the crucial need for ideological clarification by the Kurdish movement regarding its relationship with the working class.

The article goes on to suggest a political framework within which the revolutionary aspects of the Kurdish struggle can be combined with the working class movement's current agenda. This constitutes, of course, a highly threatening combination for the Turkish bourgeoisie.

THE CELLING OF AMERICA

— an inside look at the US prison industry

edited by Daniel Burton-Rose, Dan Pens and Paul Wright, 1997



The thing about the US is that whatever you've got, they've got it bigger. More wealth, more poverty, more TV channels, more guns, more prisoners... So many prisoners, in fact, that the super-rich, sun-surf-Hollywood state of California is beginning to go bankrupt because of the millions of dollars it is pouring into its penal system. Across the US there are now a million and a half men and women behind bars. Due to longer and longer sentences (they've got those too) many of them will mature, grow old and die in prison.

And the swiftest of comparisons between current British and US penal policy reveals that in almost every area, not only have they got it bigger, but they got it first too: privatisation, 'three strikes' sentencing, diminishing rights and increasing misery, forced labour schemes, Control Units and permanent 'lock-down', boot-camps, chain-gangs, Zero Tolerance, and so on. Whatever extreme form of punishment the US has today, Britain will have tomorrow.

The Celling of America should be compulsory reading for anyone still harbouring the slightest illusion in the democratic credentials of the US. The editors are freelance journalist Daniel Burton-Rose and Washington state prisoners Paul Wright and Dan Pens who edit the excellent monthly newsletter *Prison Legal News*, founded in 1990 by Paul with Ed Mead, who has since been released. Much of the book is written by the editors; other contributors include inspiring political prisoners Mumia Abu-Jamal, still on death row in Pennsylvania, and Ray Luc Levasseur, who writes from the most oppressive US prison: Florence, Colorado.

Three strikes or less

The first 'three strikes' law was passed in Washington state in 1993. Since then 17 states have passed similar laws. Many have been passed by referendum but the appearance that they represent the 'will of the people' masks massive backing from right-wing organisations, who finance advertising, signature-gathering and large donations to pro-gun, pro-heavy sentencing politicians.

In 1994 Larry Fisher was sentenced to life imprisonment in Washington state. He was convicted of putting his finger in his pocket, pretending it was a gun and robbing a sandwich shop of \$151. His two previous crimes were stealing \$360 in 1986 and robbing a pizza parlour of \$100. He did not physically harm anyone. The cost of incarcerating him for the rest of his life will be approximately \$1 million.

In California, which has embraced 'three strikes' with zeal, black people are 13 times more likely to be sent to prison under the law than whites. There is no evidence 'three strikes' reduces crime but plenty that it is overwhelming California's legal system and draining the state treasury.

Britain's first 'two strikes' conviction was handed down to Edward Kelly on 1 May 1998. Kelly intervened in a fight between a gang of youths and a young girl, knocking one of the participants to the ground and kicking him in the head. Twenty years earlier, aged 19, he had been convicted of armed robbery. The judge claimed that the law, drafted by the Conservative government and brought into force by Labour last

October, gave him no choice but to pass a life sentence for a second violent offence.

Access to the media

'The state would rather give me an Uzi than a microphone' Mumia Abu-Jamal

In FRFI we have frequently documented the role the media plays in creating a climate whereby brutalisation of prisoners is accepted by the public. Sensational and selective reporting of horrific crimes and 'luxurious prisons' creates the impression that violent prisoners are having an easy time. The more extreme the propaganda, the easier for prisoners' remaining rights to be removed. Other stock tricks include reporting prison riots and disturbances as 'apparently motiveless' and depicting prisoners' law-suits as 'frivolous'.

Countering this onslaught is never easy. Few journalists are willing to listen to prisoners' accounts and obstacles are constantly put in the way of contact with journalists. In Britain a recent judgement declared 'a prisoner has no right to communicate orally with the media through a journalist'. The judge accepted that this contravened Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) but declared 'that is what imprisonment is about'.

US prisoners have in the past had recourse to the First Amendment to the US Constitution as a weapon against censorship. However, following nationwide broadcasting of Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row* essays in 1995, California eliminated all media access to prisoners and other states quickly followed suit. As with the ECHR, the US Constitution appears to apply only to some citizens.

Getting tough

In 1994 Arizona Governor Fyfe Symington announced a new 'get tough' programme, with 'hell-holes' for prisons. Director of Corrections Sam Lewis boasted that 'trouble-makers' would be forced to perform hard labour in the scorching Arizona desert without tools: 'They will literally be breaking rocks with their bare hands'.

Not to be outdone, Alabama Corrections Commissioner Ron Jones ordered 300 sets of leg-irons at a cost of \$17,000 and declared the return of the chain-gang. By the end of 1995 Alabama, Arizona and Florida all had chain-gang programmes and Arizona had announced that even death-row prisoners would be made to work on them.

The chain-gangs are pure PR as it is difficult for prisoners to do much work while shackled and the security costs (armed guards on horseback) are phenomenal.

The war on drugs

One particularly frightening essay in the book is "Just Say No"? by Philip McLaughlin, where the anti-drugs epithet is turned on its head in an indictment of forcible drugging in prison. For almost any minor infraction of prison discipline, a prisoner can be put on 'involuntary medication status':

'And what happens to those prisoners who... "Just Say No"? If a prisoner on involuntary medication status refuses to take his prescribed drugs, he will be forced to do so by the "goon squad". A group of five or six

guards... in black jump suits, combat boots, helmets, shields, and gas masks... sprays him with a powerful gas that, on contact with the skin, literally gives the victim the sensation of being on fire. It also burns the lungs and blinds. The goon squad sprays again and again until the prisoner complies or passes out.'

Judicial murder

In 1996 3,054 people were on death row in US prisons. Between 1976 and 1994 313 people were executed, a third of them in Texas. Within the state of Texas, the most blood-thirsty place of all is Houston: Dan Pens writes 'If you are put to death by the state in this country, there is a better than one-in-ten chance that your case was tried in Houston, Texas!'

Privatisation

Although privately-run prisons still account for less than 5% of the US penal system, the industry is expanding fast. Leading the race between the various companies is Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), which runs 46 institutions in 11 states. CCA's share price rose from \$8 in 1992 to \$30 in 1997. Second biggest in the field is Wackenhut, founded in 1954 by former FBI official George Wackenhut. Board members have included CIA bosses Frank Carlucci and William Casey and Jorge Mas Canosa, leader of the fanatical anti-communist Cuban American National Foundation.

Incarceration is big business. Weapons manufacturers are moving into the production of electronic tagging devices, stun-guns and even a potential human bar-coding system; transport companies are securing lucrative contracts for moving prisoners between states and Wall Street firms are queuing up to underwrite prison construction through the sale of tax-exempt bonds. American Express has invested millions of dollars in private prisons in Oklahoma and General Electric has helped finance construction in Tennessee.

Slaves of the state

'The effect of the Thirteenth Amendment was not to abolish slavery but to limit it to those who had been convicted of a crime.' — Paul Wright, 'Slaves of the State' (see FRFI 124 April/May 1995)

All prisons use prisoners to do work such as cleaning, cooking, serving food, laundry etc but in Texas entire new prisons are being built using unpaid convict labour. The Texas prisoners work directly for the state itself, an increasingly rare situation as 'partnerships' between private industry and prison administrations burgeon. Some Ohio prisoners are being paid 47 cents an hour for keying data into computers for private company Unibase, while others have been paid \$5 an hour for separating metal from a toxic ash-stream at a power plant with their bare hands.

In Washington, packaging company Exmark used prisoners to shrink-wrap Microsoft '95, Microsoft Office and Microsoft Word. For companies like Exmark, prisoners are the ultimate flexible labour force. Most of their operation is done outside prison by 'free' workers but whenever there is a rush on, prison labour is used. Other outfits have gone further: Lockhart Technologies in Austin, Texas, closed its plant, sacked all 130

'free' workers and moved its entire operation into a private prison. The Wackenhut Corporation actually designed its factory space to Lockhart's specifications and charges the company one dollar a year in rent.

In the two most oppressive US prisons, USP Marion and ADX Florence, a condition of 'progressing' through the system is working for UNICOR, the Federal Prison Industries department. The only work at Marion's UNICOR is production of cable for the US military.

Control Units

Ever since Marion prison was locked down in 1983, Control Unit prisons have proliferated through the US system. In addition to the Federal units, 40 states now have their own. The public rationale is that they house the 'worst of the worst', prisoners who have killed other prisoners or attacked guards for 'no reason'. The reality is that Control Units are designed to house 'subversives', whether they be political prisoners, jailhouse lawyers, rioters or simply men and women who have refused to be bowed by the system.

Control Unit prisoners are locked in their cells 22-23 hours a day. They exercise in concrete boxes. They are denied all human contact and have extremely limited access to books and writing materials. They are expected to 'progress' through a series of stages before they can return to the main prison system. This usually takes years and is frustrated at every turn by impossible demands, humiliation and vindictive, brutal and racist guards. Control Unit prisons are hell on earth.

In February 1998 the British Prison Service opened a series of Closed Supervision Units within Woodhill Prison, claiming that particularly dangerous and disruptive prisoners would be housed there. At least two legal actions have already been filed by prisoners at Woodhill: one was moved there for no ostensible reason; the second is a defendant in a forthcoming mutiny trial and the punitive conditions (he is not allowed a pen in his cell, for example) are preventing him from conducting his defence.

There today, here tomorrow

There is some resistance among US prisoners. Adrian Lomax describes the constant acts of low level subversion and non-cooperation and the book's final chapter revisits some of the major rebellions which have shaken the system: from Attica 1971 to Lucasville 1993 and the series of uprisings which swept across the country in 1995 in response to a blatantly racist Congress vote upholding the disparity in sentences for crack and powder cocaine. Even the writing and production of this book is, like Mumia's Death Row essays, in itself an act of resistance. But overall the picture is an extremely bleak one. The US is hell-bent on locking up its poor, black, Hispanic and working class population in greater and greater numbers. That Clinton's Democrats are as committed to mass imprisonment as the Republicans before them, should leave us with no doubt that the process of importing US-style punishment to Britain, begun by the likes of Thatcher and Michael Howard, will continue apace under the Labour government of Blair and Straw.

Nicki Jameson

'The state would rather give me an Uzi than a microphone'
Mumia Abu-Jamal

'The effect of the Thirteenth Amendment was not to abolish slavery but to limit it to those who had been convicted of a crime.'
Paul Wright
'Slaves of the State'

Campsfield riot trial collapses

What are conditions like in the detention centre?

Campsfield is not a traditional Victorian hell. It's a modern building and looks reasonably OK. I think Ramsbotham [the Chief Inspector of Prisons] made a point about how bare detainees' rooms are and how they didn't have any shelves and couldn't have anything on the walls, so it was very impersonal. But the problem isn't really physical conditions; it's why they are there and that they are there for so long without knowing why. It is that which is behind all the hunger-strikes, all the protests.

The main thing about being in an immigration centre rather than a prison is they are not included in the prison rules. Therefore staff have no official powers, for example, to take out their truncheons and hit people; they have no power over and above the power you and I have to act in self-defence. The only power they have is to keep detainees inside the perimeter fence. So, if a detainee is 'disruptive', they get whisked off to prison, which Ramsbotham said was a 'grossly inappropriate sanction'.

Can you describe the trial and how it collapsed?

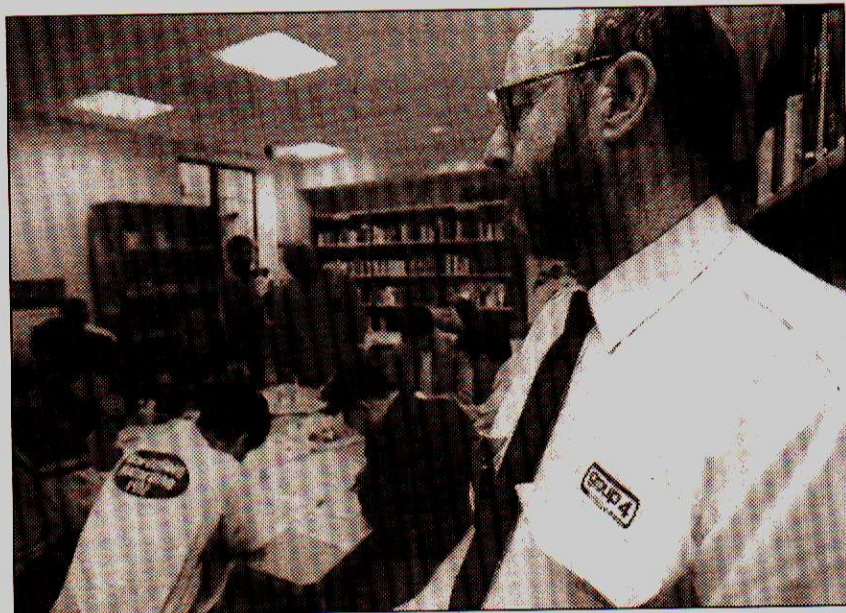
The trial was a farce. I was representing the teenager who was in a psychiatric unit and applying to get him taken out of the trial altogether, as to try him when he was seriously ill was bound to result in deterioration in his mental and emotional condition and he had made a very serious suicide attempt already. The judge initially rejected the application but then the teenager's condition got worse.

The first week was taken up with legal argument and just one witness: the Immigration Officer who is supposed to monitor the contract between Group 4 and the Home Office and be a point of contact for detainees when they ask about their cases. He was dreadful. He had no idea about any of the defendants, if they had been tortured or had psychological problems, and he wasn't interested. He was asked: 'Aren't you concerned about their welfare?' and he said, 'No, it's not part of my responsibility'. Group 4 also said it wasn't their responsibility - 'Welfare is our responsibility, but psychiatric and medical problems are not anything to do with us. You have to ask Forensic Medical Services Ltd', to whom it is sub-contracted. And of course there was no-one there from Forensic Medical Services Ltd to cross-examine about why they give paracetamol to someone who says they are suffering from auditory hallucinations.

The Group 4 guards were sham-bolic and while they pretended to know all the detainees by name and said they saw X or Y doing this or that, it became patently clear that they didn't have a clue who anybody was and that they had simply held all the blacks. Their statements said 'An Albanian did this... A Kurd did this... A Romanian... etc' but who was charged? We were told that after the riot they were segregated into ethnic groups and different groups were then called back into the centre - Europeans, Asians, etc - and the Africans were not allowed back in until everyone else had been shipped out to other detention centres.

The fabrications were shocking. There was this woman, Caryn Mitchell-Hill, who claimed she'd been alone in a corridor and these black men surrounded her and one grabbed her shoulders and they said 'We've got you, you white bitch.'

August 1997 saw the largest scale protest yet by immigration detainees at Campsfield House in Oxfordshire. On 17 June 1998 the trial of nine West African asylum-seekers charged with riot collapsed after guards at the centre were exposed as blatant liars and the prosecution was forced to concede that it had no case. Asylum-seekers have committed no crime and are detained without trial. FRFI spoke to barrister Frances Webber who defended the youngest detainee to be tried:



And also because, with the exception of the minor, they have had their names emblazoned all over the British press ensuring that any of them who might not have been known to their embassies as asylum-seekers now are.

How relevant is it that Campsfield is privately run?

At least in the public sector, there are rules, sanctions and a line of accountability. But here, as I said about the medical procedures, you pass the buck until there is nobody there to answer the questions.

The staff claim to have the welfare of the detainees at heart but they don't know the first thing about the detainees. They are underpaid; they work 12-hour shifts, sometimes seven days a week. They have very rudimentary training. Police officers are supposed to make a written report to their superiors if they draw their batons. Group 4 staff in the witness box were admitting to bashing people over the head and on the jaw, and didn't know anything about written procedure.

The Home Office refused to disclose the contract with Group 4 on the grounds of commercial confidentiality, so we don't know anything about the guidelines under which Campsfield is run, apart from a small paragraph which says that it is being run on the lines of a secure hostel, which Ramsbotham said was ridiculous.

CAMPSFIELD HOUSE

Campsfield is Britain's largest Immigration Detention Centre and designed to hold 200 detainees, 164 male and 36 female. It was built in 1939 as an air-force hospital and housed young offenders from 1952 until 1993 when it was re-opened as an Immigration Detention Centre operated by Group 4.

When the Chief Inspector of Prisons visited Campsfield last October some of the Centre was still out of action following the August protest, there were 105 detainees of whom 22 were Indian and 19 Nigerian; the remainder originated from 20 different countries.

In April 1998 government minister Mike O'Brien congratulated Group 4 on doing 'a good job in difficult circumstances', renewed their contract to run Campsfield for another three years and announced plans for an 'expanded network' of privately-run immigration detention centres.

The Close Down Campsfield Campaign can be contacted c/o 111 Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RQ; 01865 558145; campsfield@ncad.demon.co.uk.

And she had to kneel him in the groin to get away. Beautiful, dramatic story. Didn't happen. Researchers for one of the solicitors watched hours and hours of security video and proved it was physically impossible because she had never been on her own in that corridor, she had always been in the company of other Group 4 guards.

Guard Chris Barry claimed he had been squirted with a chemical which had gone in his eyes and soaked his shirt and he'd been concussed and lying unconscious. But the video showed him three minutes later up and about, dry shirt, looking fine.

Then there were the telephones which the detainees were accused of wrecking. Two guards, Mo Stone and Terence Morley, only admitted under rigorous cross-examination that they 'disabled a telephone' with their batons. 'Did you tell anybody at the time? Did you tell Group 4 or the police?' 'No.' 'Why not?' 'Don't know.'

Then there was the strangulation incident [which sparked off the uprising]. And the most classic quote of the whole trial. A guard who was trained in advanced Control and Restraint techniques was asked to look at the video of the guard who had his hands round the detainee's neck and say what he was doing. After some prevarication, he said, 'I think he was exercising his interpersonal skills, trying to calm the

detainee down'.

It was clear the evidence was completely unreliable. So, the prosecutor just called a halt and said that no prosecution properly conducted could invite a jury to convict on this evidence. Which was true although one doesn't expect to hear a prosecutor say that.

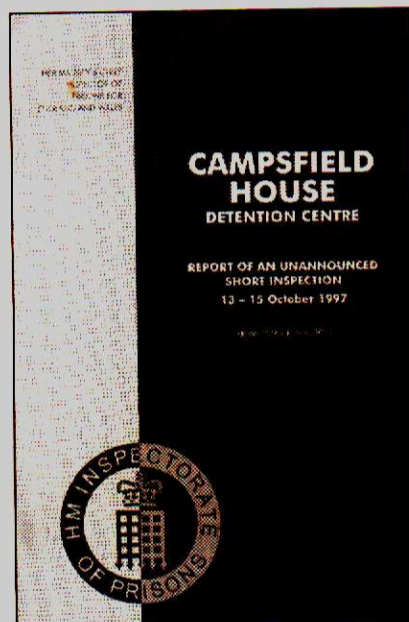
How have the detainees been treated since the trial collapsed?

The person I represented is still in psychiatric care but the Home Office have agreed to let him stay. The ones who were in detention were all going to be deported very quickly after the trial, which came as a great shock. You don't think about it: you think 'We've won. Isn't that wonderful?' But it isn't wonderful for those people who were only still here because of the criminal trial.

Enahora Esemuze has been released temporarily; he made a very serious suicide attempt and there was a big article in The Guardian about him. Stanley Nwadike has been deported. John Quaquah - they have tried to deport a couple of times but further representations have been made and we're trying to get him bail. UNHCR have written to the Secretary of State asking him to consider letting them stay on humanitarian grounds, having had to go through the whole trial and because of the psychological effect on them.

How does the Labour government's stance on immigration compare to that of the previous government?

Labour promised 'firmer, faster, fairer' and we've seen a lot of the firmer and some of the faster but not much of the fairer. The most disappointing things are the failure to restore benefits to asylum-seekers, which has resulted in people living in real destitution, and their vindictive attitude to detention. It's like having the Tories but even worse because of their dreadful self-righteousness towards people who break the rules by overstaying or coming in illegally or using false passports; all of which asylum-seekers have to do. And the Immigration Appeals Review is proposing to abolish appeals against deportation altogether, even for people who have been here for ten years. They say this is all right because they are abolishing deportation as well and just 'removing' them, and they can apply to come back in.



INSIDE NEWS

DNA testing

On 11 June Stuart Blackstock was refused leave to judicially review the May 1997 Criminal Evidence (Amendment) Act requirement for convicted prisoners to provide DNA samples. Stuart, who is serving a discretionary life sentence, represented himself and argued that the forcible removal of DNA is an additional retrospective punishment and a breach of fundamental civil rights contrary to several Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights. Having lost in a British court he is continuing his challenge in the European courts, claiming convincingly that the forced DNA testing of prisoners is the thin end of the wedge:

'When politicians want to introduce dangerous legislation such as this, they generally apply it initially to those sections of the community who will attract little sympathy or support... When it has been widely accepted in this narrow application, it can then be reapplied for other purposes,

becoming wider in its reach and scope. The implications and social consequences in terms of civil liberties are enormous and far-reaching. The power of the state to retrospectively subject the disenfranchised (initially) to civil rights forfeitures, increases the ability of the state to eventually attack (this, as well as other) retained liberties and civil rights of ALL its citizens with impunity.'

Revolt at children's prison

Take a group of the country's most alienated, desperate 12-14 year-olds, lock them up together in a special prison, launched in a blaze of publicity about how these kids are the 'worst' and most 'unmanageable'. Then act shocked and embarrassed when they don't immediately conform and 'improve', but instead smash the windows and furniture and throw things at the guards.

On 25 June nine children in Britain's first gaol for 12-14 year-olds fought back. The 'highly trained' staff immediately resorted to violence, but lacking the muscle themselves, called the local police, who sent in 30 riot-clad cops with dogs. The Medway 'Secure Training Centre' is run by the ridiculously named Rebound ECD (Education, Care, Discipline), a subsidiary of Group 4 Security, which also runs Campsfield House (see main article).

Nicki Jameson

www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk

The Revolutionary Communist Group is now on the Internet with a fantastic new website at the address given above. With eight sections, it holds copies of articles in recent issues of FRFI and gives information about the activities and meetings of the RCG, Rock around the Blockade and the campaign against poverty pay. There is a section on Marxism, which is being steadily built up with past material the RCG has published, including its Counterattack series and material from its theoretical journal, Revolutionary Communist. It will also soon have copies of books which are now unobtainable, such as our manifesto published in 1984, and *Ireland: the key to the British Revolution*.

One section connects to the Worker's Web, where there are texts by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Guevara, Connolly and John MacLean. There is a What's New section which will contain details of updates to the site. Another one will be a discussion area for supporters. Soon there will be links to other sites as well, particularly on Cuba. In the first two weeks, the site recorded 200 'hits'. So, if you want to get up-to-date news, and you have the technology, get browsing...and e-mail any suggestions on new material to us at rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk. Our thanks to Rory for his splendid and continuing efforts on this.

News

The last two months have been busy ones for FRFI supporters, particularly in the campaign against poverty pay. We have had dole office occupations, public meetings, and continued our pursuit of the odious Jack Straw (see page 7). A London public meeting in support of the Re-instate Nigel Cook



Campaign and the Tameside careworkers attracted over 40 people, and had a lively discussion, particularly on the role of the trade union leadership. Two of the Tameside strikers spoke, and made clear that they would not accept any sell-out. They were critical of the role that Rodney Bickerstaffe had played, and were well aware of the way that Unison had undermined the struggle of the Hillingdon workers.

That the Unison leadership are prepared to do a similarly dirty trick at Tameside was evident from the national demonstration it called for Saturday 4 July. Although a national event, it was poorly organised, and with less than 500 supporters, it was smaller than a march organised by the careworkers themselves a few weeks previously.

The Unison organisers quickly set out their stall at the stewards' meeting before the march: banners other than Unison ones should be 'discouraged' - an edict the stewards themselves overturned. However, at the rally, Bickerstaffe reiterated the Unison official position: 'this campaign is a trade union campaign - and that's the way it will stay.' The platform reflected this - Unison speakers all, apart from one from the Regional Labour Party. After the speeches, the chair, a full-time official, switched off the PA system and got it dismantled immediately. No platform for the Hillingdon strikers, despite their journey from London in support, nor for the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign (RNCC) or any other campaign to show their solidarity for the careworkers. Using their own

megaphone, the Hillingdon strikers were able to deliver their message - to prolonged applause from the overwhelming majority of the marchers.

Unison want to exercise a vice-like grip over the strike. This means that they will try to prevent any attempt by the strikers to run the dispute themselves. Such undemocratic methods are completely in character with the traditions of the 'official' labour movement beloved by the left. Not that they are strangers themselves to these sorts of methods. A recent meeting organised by the left-dominated Manchester support group for the careworkers withdrew an invitation to the RNCC to speak. It was all right to speak from the floor - although as it turned

out that proved a bit of a struggle well.

At a discussion after a meeting the fight against poverty pay Chesterfield, a comrade from the Socialist Party accused the RCG 'writing off the trade unions'. So however, the trade unions have written themselves off in the undemocratic and sectarian way they organise. They have not organised one campaign against this vicious Labour government. Nor will they unless there is a massive movement outside their ranks which forces them to do so, implying that the unions are a prime vehicle for any organised resistance, the left are participating in a deceitful charade. The overwhelming majority of workers under the age of 30 are outside of the trade union movement: 94% of those under 21, over three-quarters of those under 30. Young people will be a crucial part of any new movement of resistance to Labour and its big business allies: the left in practice seek to exclude them.

Events

MIDLANDS

Public meetings on Cuba with a member of the Union of Young Communists are planned in Lincoln, Doncaster and Chesterfield at the end of September. For further details of dates, venues and times, either phone 0171 837 1688 or look at the RCG website in the 'Rock around the Blockade' section.

LONDON

All at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; nearest tube Holborn, 7.30pm

Monday 17 August
Readers and supporters group
The minimum wage
- an insult to working people

Monday 14 September
Chile - the lessons of the coup
Speaker: Robert Clough

Monday 28 September
Readers and supporters group: Video showing and discussion, continuing our highly successful season of videos on political themes. More details on 0171 837 1688 or from the RCG section of the website.

NORTHWEST

Blackburn
Readers and supporters group
7.30pm Thursday 13 August, Bangor Street Community Centre.

Public meeting
Chile - the lessons of the coup
2.30pm Sunday 13 September, Bangor Street Community Centre.

Manchester
Public meeting
Chile - the lessons of the coup
Date and venue to be announced. Phone 0171 837 1688 for details, or look at the RCG section of the website.

Fighting capitalist lies...

ROCKING THROUGH THE SUMMER

Rock around the Blockade activists linked up with Squall, the alternative magazine, at a very wet and muddy Glastonbury at the end of June. The Squall crew spun Latin tunes while RATB merchandise decorated their tent. The following week Rock around the Blockade held a stall in Portobello market and were also to be found at the Latin American Gran Fiesta on the South Bank, leafleting wildly for our weekend of events in solidarity with Cuba on 11 and 12 July.

The weekend started off with a sensational sponsored extravaganza to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Two 'columns' of marchers, named after Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos who led the Cuban forces to victory in 1959, marched through London to converge on the US embassy in Grosvenor Square. We wore campaign T-shirts, held street meetings and made speeches about the Cuban revolution and Cuba today along our route, meeting at the Embassy in high spirits after a fantastic day, south London's Che Guevara column blasting out salsa

music over a megaphone, north London's Camilo Cienfuegos column chanting slogans. A lot of new supporters made their first ever speeches over the megaphone and felt a real sense of achievement. Afterwards, we all had a well-needed picnic to the sounds of salsa. The event raised £650 - with one eight-year-old marcher being sponsored by Satpal Ram, a prisoner fighting his unjust and racist imprisonment.

Next day, Rock around the Blockade had a stall at the Cuban Solidarity Campaign fiesta. Overall the event was a washout, with the main bands being forced into a tent due to the appalling weather. Nevertheless, fuelled by high spirits from the previous day, Rock around the Blockade did really well and made £160 through selling our merchandise.

The weekend concluded with a detailed, open and fascinating meeting, 'Children of the Revolution: young people in Cuba today', addressed by Ernesto Jaquet from the Union of Young Communists and attended by 40 people. People took this unique opportunity to ask about everything from CIA sabotage, religion



and the Pope's visit, to how Cuba dealt with the issue of drugs and the importance of music to the youth. Ernesto gave a clear picture of Cuba today, the gains made by the revolution, and the problems encountered in the Special Period. Supporters in the Midlands will have an opportunity to hear Ernesto speak at a series of meetings at the end of September. The speaker from RATB emphasised the importance of socialist Cuba to our struggles for justice here in Britain. The meeting ended with thanks on behalf of the UJC for the work of RATB in Britain.

London Rock around the Blockade also attended the Festival of Global Resistance, held a stall at the Womad festival and celebrated Moncada Day on its eve, 25 July, with a night of Latin American music and dancing. Elsewhere in the

country the pressure has also been on. Fundraising events included the 60-mile Manchester to Blackpool bike ride and a coconut-shy at the Manchester Unity Festival. The bike ride took place during torrential storms but riders proudly displayed their Rock around the Blockade T-shirts. The event raised around £300.

We have also sent over



£1,000-worth of material aid to Cuba in support of a secondary school in Trinidad de Cuba, a nephrology hospital in Havana and a school and association for the blind. We are still collecting material aid for two other youth projects in Trinidad and urgently need toys, coloured paper and paints, camping equipment and much more! Please contact the campaign for a full list of how you can help.

We realise the importance of being at the summer festivals, as our campaign has a lot

to do with music and youth culture. Rock around the Blockade still has lots more events over the summer as we build for our brigade to Cuba in December and raise money for a sound system for Cuban youth. We have reached £3,000 of our £5,000 target - please help us by rushing your donations to the address below. Rock around the Blockade

is also sending a socialist brigade to Cuba this December to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution on 1 January 1959. For information about the campaign and brigade, contact at BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, tel 0171 837 1688 or visit the Rock around the Blockade site at the address given above. Or, if you're in London, come to one of our campaign meetings held nightly on Mondays, 8pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube station). Meetings over the coming months are 10 August, 7 September, 21 September. Whatever you do, get involved, get active!

Pamphlets of Assata Shakur's 'Letter' (See FRFI 143) are still available from RATB for £1.50p (including postage). Please make cheques payable to Rock around the Blockade.

Wear your politics on your sleeve...

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

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

Please send me _____ T-shirts (specify XL, L, M, S) at £7 each and _____ badges each. I enclose a cheque for £ _____ payable to Rock around the Blockade

Name _____ Address _____

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



CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

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One big effort and we can make our target of £5,000. To date we have raised £2,800, and we need to get the remainder within the next two months. You, our readers and supporters, can help us. We have already spent some of what we have received on the new technology we need. But there is more to be done. Our campaigning work needs stepping up. Fighting poverty pay, defending the gains of the Cuba revolution, all this requires publicity. Producing that publicity needs scanners and printers, more PCs and software. These will also help us develop our website, to build our international contacts. So - help us reach that target over the summer. As we said last time, no donation is too small; nor, might we add, is it too big.

Send your donation to: FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications.

Name _____

Address _____

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NHS: 50 years of dodging the issue

I am a health worker in the National Health Service. 5 July was the 50th anniversary of the NHS: we received a cake on my ward with 'Happy 50th Birthday' beautifully inscribed in icing; our internal hospital bulletin was full of praise for long-serving members of staff and people were nominated for prizes.

The 50th anniversary was full of nostalgia and praise for an institution. Nothing, however, was said about the workers from Hillingdon Hospital who have still not been reinstated nor compensated after their heroic two-year struggle to oppose the worsening conditions that came with privatisation of NHS services. They refused to sign a new contract and were sacked. UNISON have not supported their struggle. Many of them had worked for the NHS for over 25 years. Competitive tendering and its casualties are not mentioned.

We are also not told the truth about the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) which is the building of new hospitals by private companies who do so simply because of the profits they will make, encouraged by New Labour. Fourteen schemes have been approved and more are awaiting approval. The Department of Health's consultants estimate that 1,000 staff will be got rid of for every £200 million spent on PFI. How much of

Frank Dobson's £21 billion will go straight into the coffers of big business? How many of the hospital beds, promised as part of reducing waiting lists, will be lost in order to pay for the PFI?

What of the PLAB exam, a requirement for doctors from non-EU countries in order to be able to work in Britain? It tests medical knowledge and competence in English. It has a pass rate under 20%, is expensive to take and is inherently racist - a Nigerian-trained doctor who went through medical school speaking only English is required to pass the exam to work in Britain, while a doctor from the European Union who speaks no English can work in Britain without any extra exams. NHS employment rules state that the latter will be preferentially chosen for the job if all other factors are equal.

These are but a few examples of the NHS 50 years since its inception. We need a forum to discuss health care provision in order to raise people's awareness of the real agenda of capitalism. Those dedicated workers in the NHS of whom we have heard so much in this last month must be awakened to what is going on and join the fightback.

ANNIE HALL
North London

Orange - colour of reaction

There has been much controversy surrounding the question of the Orange parades marching down roads such as the Garvaghy Road in Portadown, Ireland.

The view of Sinn Fein and Michael Farrell, co-chairperson of the Civil Rights Association, is that it is valid for these parades in general to proceed once the local residents don't object to them. This position is one that obscures the real nature of Orangeism in the North of Ireland.

The point is that Orangeism and its parades are of a cultural, ideological and politically reactionary character. Consequently they are opposed by all revolutionary communists. However that does not mean that communists simply take to the streets opposing such marches whether the march proceeds down a staunchly Orange area or non-Orange community. Practical opposition is a tactical matter and must be considered in context such as the kind of support that exists on the ground among the

local masses. As a tactical matter how the practical opposition is to be organised and under what slogans are vitally important. As of present much of the Sinn Fein and Garvaghy/Ormeau form of organising against marching has an opportunist character which rather than trying to raise political consciousness reinforces sectarianism even further.

However communists can engage in propaganda against such marching at any time.

To conclude: the view of Sinn Fein and others seems to be that the Orange Order has a civil and democratic right to march, but not through areas where the marches are found to be offensive to the local community. This position reinforces the existence of Orangeism and its parades and essentially undermines the call for an end to Orange parades.

The issue of civil rights and democracy in this context is an illusory one that merely obscures the real state of affairs. Orangeism, irrespective of the localities they toddle through, is culturally, ideologically and politically reactionary. Consequently universal opposition to both Orangeism and its theatricals is correct - whether the parades proceed through staunchly Orange or non-Orange communities.

REBECCA
Ireland

Unemployed activists take control!

On Monday 15 June, Wales Labour Party offices in Cardiff were occupied by 30 activists from across the country.

While the European Summit, with Tony Blair as president, discussed plans for labour 'flexibility', literally two minutes from the conference the unemployed were making their voices heard.

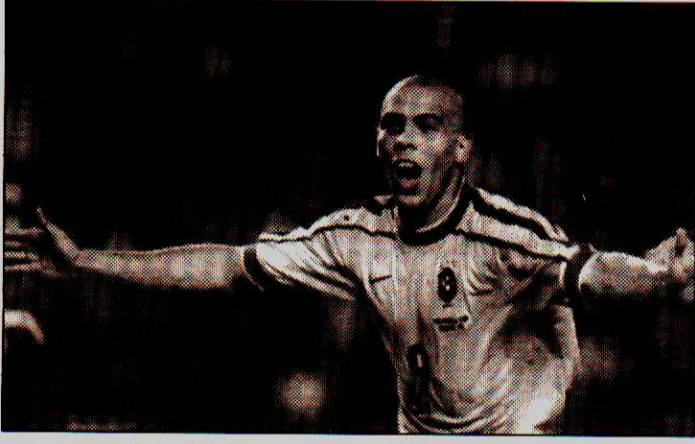
One of the occupants, N Dole, said: 'We don't want Labour's New Deal. New Deal is meant to be about job creation and job security. In fact, it is about lowering everybody's wages and blaming the unemployed for the system's failings.'

'All over Europe in the past years, all the provisions laid out in the Social Chapter have been undermined, due to the convergence

criteria of the Maastricht Treaty. Our struggle against the New Deal should be seen as one amongst many across the continent. A fight against a bosses' Europe!' said another occupant.

'We will not have anyone "solve" the problems of unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion on our behalf - least of all politicians. We have to do it for ourselves.' After some debate, police and Labour Party staff decided to leave the occupiers to it. Banners were dropped by a diverse group of unemployed: some homeless, some students, some disabled. The Cardiff Labour MP left in disgust. The occupiers stayed all day.

UNEMPLOYED ACTIVIST
Wales



France '98: big business puts its foot in it

The world of football is reeling from the disclosure of the intervention of the US shoe firm Nike in the World Cup final on 12 July. In Brazil, where the Beautiful Game offers a few of the toiling masses a way out of the grinding poverty that underlies their rulers' 'economic miracle', the commercialisation of the game and its use for the political purposes of the elite is generally passed over in silence, though by no means without approval. It might be a different matter now that commercialisation has lost Brazil the World Cup. Their star player Ronaldo was left out of the original line-up through illness - he was actually so ill that, as he said later, he thought he was going to die. But he has a contract with Nike, which insisted that he play, so he did - hardly getting a kick in. The French could scarcely believe their good fortune. No team at this level has ever before had a passenger, however illustrious, in the starting line-up. Not a good time to be a Nike executive in Brazil.

Back in England, the commercialisation of the game is less spectacular, but no less odious. In my home town, when the tournament

began, you could buy flags of St George for £3 each in the market - the price of 23 tins of baked beans or 33 tins of spaghetti at Sainsbury's. A nearby pub cashed in by offering 25p discounts for every goal England were leading by; whether they increased the price by 25p every time England fell behind didn't say. Slightly further afield, one firm produced a 'special' beer which doubtless tasted like any other but was called 'England expects every man to do his duty'! And, of course, the record firms made millions out of *Three Lions*, *Vindaloo* and *How Does it Feel?* Sadly for Glen Hoddle's merry men, the ability to churn out moronic football anthems does not guarantee success in the field, even with 'Ince ready for war, *Gazza good as before*, Shearer certain to score and *Psycho screaming*' (emphasis added - as these two weren't in the squad, this bit had me in stitches). But then, what can you expect when foreigners are allowed to compete in international competitions?

EL ARGENTINO
Aylesbury

Fighting poverty pay

Petitioning in London for the Reinstatement Nigel Cook Campaign I have had a number of interesting conversations with people, many of whom have told me appalling stories of the conditions they are forced to work in. One woman told me that where she had worked for several years they had been earning £4.50 an hour. Two weeks before the minimum wage was announced their employer had put their wages down to £3.60 an hour. Coincidence? The minimum wage has legitimised paying poverty wages and in this and other cases will actually drive wages down. Many of those millions earning less than this who are supposed to benefit will fall through the loopholes that New Labour has left for employers anxious to continue to exploit the 'flexible labour market.' Many organisations on the British left have been calling for a minimum wage, setting it at various levels, but the RCG calls for a living wage and fights poverty pay in the knowledge that this is a demand in a fight for social justice which can only be achieved under socialism.

RICHARD ROQUES
North London

Cronies in high places

It's interesting to see where they end up, those Labour Party careerists you see climbing up the student structures. Jack Straw's the obvious one. When I was at university, there was a particularly obnoxious Labour Party careerist, a Blairite before the blue-eyed boy himself even came on the scene. This particularly nasty piece of work had set himself, as Societies Officer, the task of denying or removing society status from all the left groups that he and his chums weren't in, by imposing extra conditions on them, while at the same time awarding Student Union money to his own Fabian Society, with a grand total of three members. He and his mates had carved up the Student Union executive positions between them; one had even taken all the positions the previous year and that year couldn't be bothered to send the motions to NUS conference in the proper format, so dismissive was he of others students' points of view. Nasty sidekick had laughed about that when I pointed out the 'oversight'. His name? Derek Draper. I'm glad your gobbing off about your connections got you into trouble, Draper. Here's to the rest of your chums meeting with similar falls - it's a pity some managed to side-step coming down with you.

ZOE GREEN
South London

PRISONERS JUSTICE DAY

Picket

Stop Prison Brutality! Support Prisoners Fighting Back! Close Down Holloway Prison!

meet 12 noon Saturday 8 August outside HMP Holloway, Parkhurst Road, London N7 Tube: Caledonian Road, Buses: 17, 29, 91, 253, 259

London Anarchist Black Cross 121 Railton Road London SE24 0LR

More on AIDS in African countries

While agreeing that, in the final analysis, 'the imperialist system' is responsible for 'AIDS in African countries, as in all Third World countries', I am disappointed to read that 'it is wrong to blame men, whether they are Western "sex tourists" or not' (Letters, FRFI June/July 1998).

David Kitson's 'Letter from Zimbabwe' in the same issue, writes that 'the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions is demanding a minimum wage of Z\$2,000 a month' for trade unionists, the elite of Zimbabwe's workers. Z\$2,000=£60 per month, or about 36p an hour. Can FRFI imagine the effect of a £30,000 a year sex tourist on a poor Zimbabwean?

When HIV/AIDS first came to Europe from the United States,

actuaries anticipated that it would take off among gay men and drug users, eventually spreading to the straight community. This never happened, thanks partly to safe sex.

Those who did not want safe sex took off for the Third World instead, with the consequences we read about today. After the 'fall of communism' they were also able to gratify their desires in Russia and parts of Eastern Europe.

Why is FRFI covering up for male sex tourists, an unsavoury combination of imperialist economic power and male sexual oppression of women and passive men?

IVOR KENNA
North London

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

A wall of lies and incompetence

The police said they faced 'a wall of silence' in their search for evidence. This was a lie. The internal Police Complaints Authority inquiry concluded the police had satisfactorily followed up every lead. This was a total whitewash.

Within 24 hours of the murder, witnesses were coming forward. At 2pm on the next day, a man told police of a local gang of youths who went around threatening people with knives and gave two names - Neil Acourt and David Norris - and an address. That evening, a young skinhead, given the pseudonym James Grant, named two of Stephen's murderers, Jamie Acourt and David Norris. He indicated two sources: Witness B, who could identify two men he had seen running from the murder scene, and Witness K, who had visited the Acourts' home soon after the murder and seen them changing their clothes and wiping a knife. DC Budgen rushed upstairs to tell his senior officer, Detective Inspector Bullock.

Bullock showed no interest, simply telling Budgen to log the information, and Grant was sent on his way. The record said: 'Acourts call themselves the Krays. You can only join their gang if you stab someone. They carry knives and weapons most days. David Norris stabbed Stacy Benefield a month ago in order to prove himself... a young Pakistani boy was murdered last year in Well Hall Road... one of the Acourts killed [him]. They also stabbed a young lad... He had a bag placed over his head and was stabbed in the legs and arms in order to torture him.' Over the next two days, police discovered that the Acourt brothers and David Norris had criminal records for violent behaviour. Stacy Benefield was traced and volunteered a statement. Meanwhile, letters and phone calls naming the Acourts, Norris and Gary Dobson and, later, Luke Knight, continued to come in.

Detective Sergeant Davidson, who had 25 years' experience, held a number of meetings with Grant. Every 'docket' of information relating to these meetings subsequently went missing. Davidson also interviewed Witness B and dismissed him as a suggestible 'Walter Mitty'. He insisted that Witness K was never named by Grant and had no recollection of meeting him. Grant insists he did name him on the first day and Witness K's parents in fact complained at the time of Davidson's brusqueness in dealing with a young, frightened teenager known to the killers. Witness K was also the source of information for Michelle Casserley, a friend of the Acourts, who wrote in her diary: 'Acourts stabbed a black boy up Well Hall Road. Jamie and Neil, Gary, David, Lukie.' She was not interviewed for nearly two weeks.

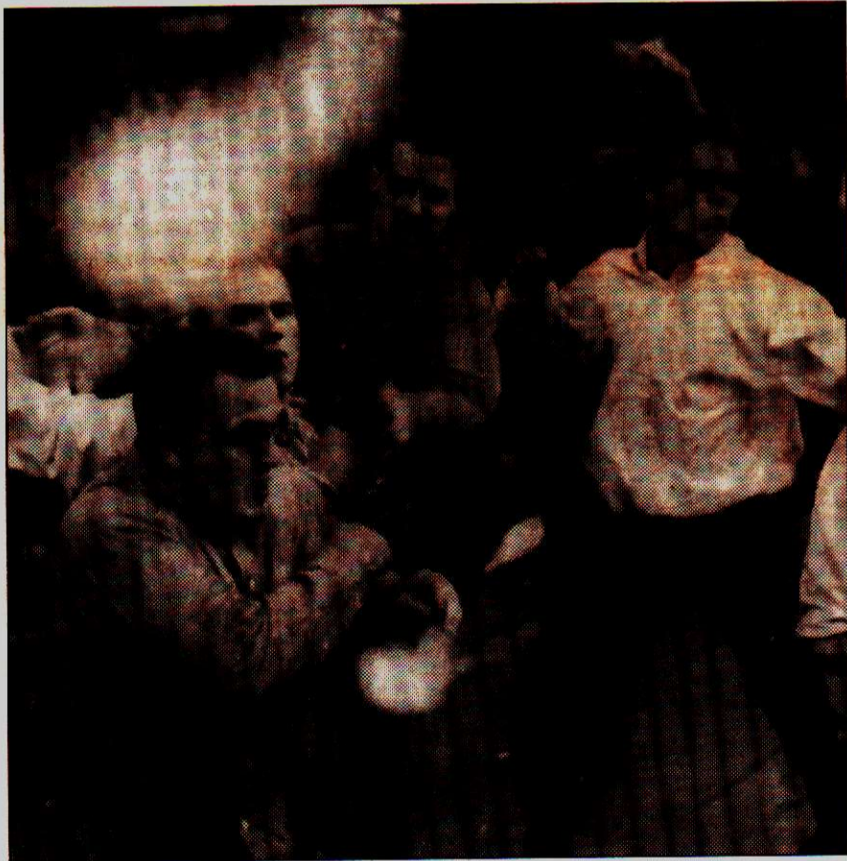
At the inquiry Detective Inspector Owen, controller of police informants at Greenwich police station, contradicted Bullock's claim that he registered Grant as an informer. A registered police informant cannot be interviewed without the permission of his controller. When asked by the Lawrences' barrister, Michael Mansfield, if Bullock's pretence constituted 'a smokescreen' to cover up Grant's evidence, Owen remained silent.

Local people passed on their suspicions to the Lawrence family, who communicated them to the police. When, after ten days, no arrests had

The murder of Stephen Lawrence

A stinking shambles of police racism and corruption

The first stage of the public inquiry into police handling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993 has ended after 57 days of evidence. Each day has brought new revelations of police racism and a negligence so gross that no one can doubt the police deliberately ensured Stephen's killers would never be brought to justice. CAT WIENER reports.



Stephen Lawrence's racist murderers outside the inquiry

been made, the Lawrences approached Detective Chief Superintendent Isley with a list of names. He screwed the piece of paper up into a ball.

The fiasco continues

It is now clear that within two days of Stephen's murder, the police had enough evidence to arrest the five suspects. Unbelievably, after more than 30 years as a police officer, senior investigating Detective Chief Superintendent Brian Weeden claimed he had not known he could make arrests based on 'reasonable suspicion' alone.

Instead, a 'surveillance' operation was set up. The police photographers did not even have a mobile phone to call for backup when they saw the suspects removing bags potentially containing incriminating evidence. The police were playing for time.

However, by 7 May, although the evidence was exactly the same as it had been 48 hours after the killing, pressure was building up. On 6 May,

the Lawrences held a high-profile meeting with Nelson Mandela during his visit to Britain; a potentially explosive march against the British National Party headquarters in Welling was planned for that weekend. (Duwayne Brookes, the key witness who was with Stephen when he was murdered, was to be arrested on that march and that fact later used to discredit his trial evidence.) The five suspects were arrested and a number of weapons, including knives, were seized. But the fiasco continued.

Gary Dobson was interviewed by Davidson and denied even knowing Norris; Davidson was not told about police surveillance pictures that would have shown this to be a lie. An eyewitness who attended an identity parade left after being kept waiting for nine hours. Another witness refused to attend further parades after an inspector called out his name, identifying him to suspects. A police sergeant, who had, apparently, previously discredited the evidence of a key witness in the trial of Rolan



Stephen Lawrence

Adams' murderers, went on to tell a series of lies which discredited Duwayne Brookes' identification of Stephen's murderers.

Small wonder that when the case came to trial at the Old Bailey in July 1993 charges against Jamie Acourt and David Norris were dropped at the committal hearings for lack of evidence, and Neil Acourt, Gary Dobson and Luke Knight were acquitted. In 1996, at the inquest into Stephen's death, all five claimed privilege and refused to answer any questions. In 1997 the Lawrence family brought a private prosecution against Jamie Acourt and David Norris. The judge ruled key identification evidence inadmissible and the two were acquitted without their case ever having gone before a jury. None of the five men can be tried again in a criminal court on the charge of murdering Stephen.

In 1993, the police had attempted to cover their backs by commissioning an internal inquiry. Roderick Barker, who accepted the job after five other senior police officers turned it down, was specifically told to go easy on the police so as not to damage 'morale'. He fulfilled his role splendidly, quoting every piece of information given him by senior officers as fact and concluding that the investigation 'has been progressed satisfactorily and all lines of inquiry correctly pursued'. However, a later review by Kent police dismissed the report as 'highly damaging nonsense' and so inconsistent and vacuous was Barker's evidence at the public inquiry that its chairman, Sir William McPherson, concluded Barker's 'credibility in vital matters has been much undermined... his review is likely to be regarded by us as indefensible.'

What, then, lay behind this sham?

Police corruption

David Norris' father, Cliff Norris, a notorious southeast London gangster and arms dealer now in prison, had a reputation for buying off corrupt police officers. A Police Complaints report revealed his very close connections with a Scotland Yard flying squad officer while under surveillance by Customs & Excise in the late 1980s. The officer was not disciplined. Interestingly, he had worked for Detective Chief Superintendent Ian Crampton, the officer in charge of the first few days of the Lawrence investigation. Crampton had given him a warm recommendation when he was hauled up for his misdemeanours - 'reliable and honest... at no time had I any reason to question or suspect his integrity'. This corrupt officer was put in charge of escorting Duwayne Brookes to give evidence at the Old Bailey. Clifford Norris also ensured his son David's acquittal for the stabbing of Stacy Benefield, helped by a criminal associate, Joey Pyle, a former associate of the Krays. The foreman of the Benefield jury was a relative of Pyle. During a break in the trial, the foreman (later jailed

for cheque fraud) assured David Norris he would be all right. Clifford Norris is also alleged to have given Benefield £2,000 to change his story.

British police, racist police

Throughout, police treated the Lawrence family with suspicion, implied Stephen had been involved in burglary, didn't inform them about the progress of the investigation and attempted to blame and discredit the Lawrence family campaign for 'hindering' the investigation. During questions by the police legal team at the inquiry, Doreen Lawrence stopped proceedings to ask: 'Am I on trial or something? From the time of my son's murder I have not been treated as a victim' and demanded explanations from the police about what went on. 'They're sorry they got caught out, but not about the mistakes they made.'

But at least the inquiry has exposed the blatant racism of the police for all to see. Hundreds of black people who thronged to the inquiry or read the (better late than never) saturation coverage in the mainstream press will have seen their own experiences reflected in Doreen Lawrence's comment that no black person can ever trust the police. A survey showed Londoners' confidence in the police had almost halved.

Senior Metropolitan officers realised they had to engage in a damage limitation exercise. So Assistant Police Commissioner Ian Johnston - who in February 1997 was still saying 'We did all we could' - was dispatched to the inquiry to apologise to the Lawrence family on the Met's behalf. But behind the public relations exercise, the use of CS gas on black protesters at the inquiry shows the police have learned nothing.



Mrs Lawrence, outside the inquiry

Whatever the final recommendations of the inquiry, police will continue to treat black people with contempt. Police harassment will still be routine - black men are eight times more likely than white men to be subjected to stop-and-search procedures. Meanwhile, no police officer has ever been charged for the murder of black people such as Brian Douglas and Wayne Douglas, Joy Gardner or Ibrahima Sey. Police collusion and cover-ups for racists, whether on the streets or in their own ranks, will remain the norm.

The vicious racists who murdered Stephen and were identified by 26 different police informants in the first two weeks; who were captured on video by police in 1994 brandishing knives and fantasising about hacking black people to pieces have only the faintest threat of civil proceedings hanging over them.

But what of the senior officers in the case, now all comfortably retired? Doreen Lawrence has demanded that, at the very least, they lose their pensions. We agree. They should not be allowed to emerge unscathed and untouchable from the stinking shambles of racism, corruption and incompetence that set five vile racists free, no doubt to abuse, torture and even murder again.