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FIGHT RACISMS FIGHT IMPERIALISMS

Revolutionary Communist Group

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(unwaged 20p) 40p

VIRAJ MENDIS



NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION
 VIRAJ MENDIS WILL STAY
 SAT 28 MAY
 MANCHESTER
 CENTRE PAGES

MAY 68
 all things to all men
 the tet offensive
 PAGES 6 & 7

SEAFARERS STRIKE
 LEFT TO FIGHT ALONE
 BACK PAGE

REMEMBER
SOWETO
 THURSDAY 16 JUNE
 surround the racist embassy
 trafalgar square 6-9 pm

Viraj Mendis: the decisive time is now

The RCG salutes our comrade Viraj Mendis. For 16 months from his sanctuary in the Church of the Ascension, Manchester, he has waged a steadfast and principled fight against Britain's racist immigration laws.

As we go to press, the result of his final appeal against his own deportation, to almost certain death in Sri Lanka, is imminent. Whatever the outcome of the appeal, the RCG pledges to continue the fight begun in May 1984 to secure Viraj's right to live here free from the threat of deportation.

FIGHTING THATCHER'S RACISM

Viraj's determination, his selfless dedication and the example he has set have given hope to thousands of black people confronting these same racist laws. He and the VMDC have shown that a sustained and effective resistance to Britain's racist immigration laws is possible. The VMDC's stand and its work with other campaigns has already been instrumental in securing victories for 15 campaigns. Since Viraj's sanctuary began, five others have taken the same path and won.

This alone would explain the government's determination to deport Viraj. The fact that he is a communist and a member of the RCG has added to the government's resolve and ruthlessness.

AN OPEN CAMPAIGN

Viraj's membership of our organisation has ensured that the RCG's political strategy has been the driving force in the campaign. Its success is measured by the extraordinary range of political groups and individuals involved. This has enabled it, whilst sustaining the 24 hour sanctuary, to organise a 500 strong anti-deportation conference, build the biggest ever anti-deportation march in Manchester and win the Labour Party NEC and Conference to opposing Viraj's deportation.

The RCG's strategy has two major components. The organisation and mobilisation of the oppressed sections of the working class as the crucial force in drawing in all other anti-racist forces, including churches, trade unions and political parties. Secondly, the successful fight for open and democratic structures in the campaign which allow all involved organisations and individuals to contribute to formulating the campaign's strategy. A point recently acknowledged by Janet Batsleer in *Critical Social Policy* (No.22, Summer 1988) when she said:

'Clearly the RCG have played a central role in the Defence Campaign and, given the experience of many campaigns led by aspirant vanguards, this could have been a fatal flaw. In fact one of the reasons that the campaign has been able to sustain a broad alliance which

stretches from the Archbishop of York to IRA prisoners, is that the RCG is committed to open and democratic organisation within the campaign. This means that although members of the RCG retain a commitment to the RCG's collective line, this is expressed and argued openly alongside the perspectives of other groups.'

OVERCOMING SECTARIANISM

Our strategy while based on the most determined and consistent anti-racist forces has allowed much broader and traditional forces to play an active and valuable role in the campaign. In four and a half years of its existence, the

VMDC has played a unique role in unifying broad sections of the working class in the anti-racist struggle. Such a development is a pre-condition for beginning to build a real socialist movement in Britain.

In spite of this, the majority of Britain's self-proclaimed marxist organisations have stubbornly refused to commit their members, supporters and followers to win the fight of a black communist to stay in Britain.

These organisations have been unable to overcome their own sectarianism. Their 'principles' and prejudices prevent them from joining the fight.

The Socialist Workers Party would be more positive about the campaign if it, like them, relied on the well tried and failed forces of the official Labour and trade union movement. On the very few occasions that *Socialist Worker* has given space to the VMDC it has felt it necessary to attack it.

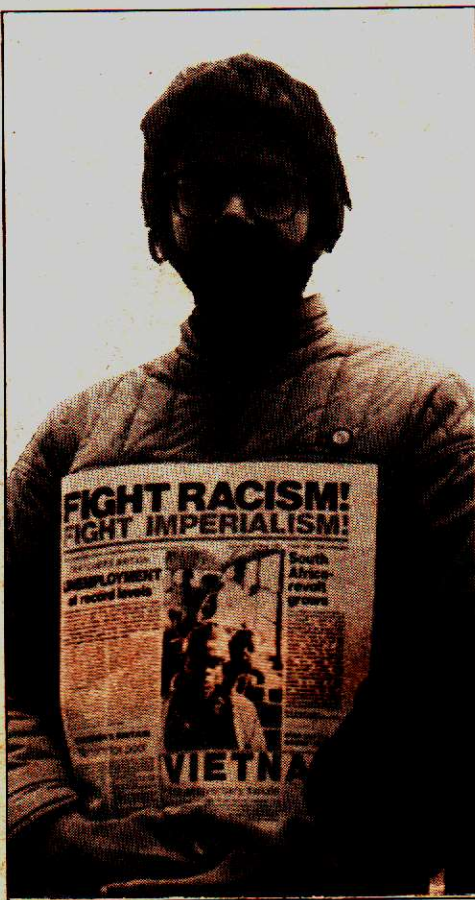
The RCP only sneers at the campaign. Viraj in sanctuary - a historic battle in the fight against the racist Thatcher government - is described by these self-indulgent middle class poseurs as 'hiding out in a Manchester church in a bid to avoid deportation'. Their language, sneers and contempt differ little from that of the British gutter press - *The Star* and the *Mail*.

THE DECISIVE TIME FOR VIRAJ

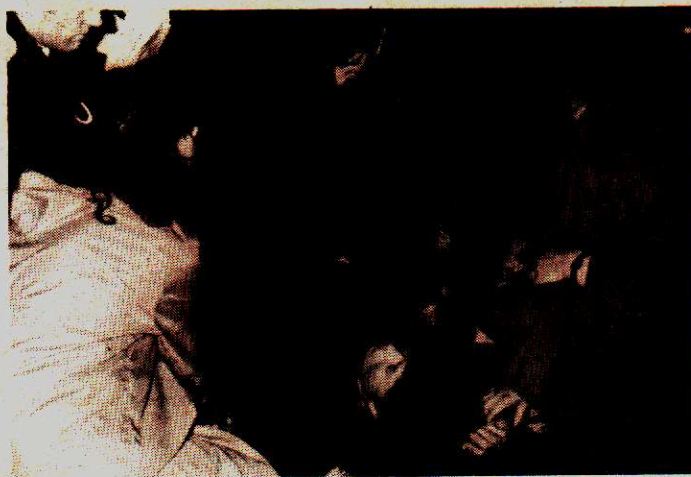
The VMDC is now at its decisive point. The deportation of Viraj could be stopped if the whole socialist and anti-racist movement unreservedly throws its resources into what could be the last battle of the VMDC. A victory for Viraj would mean the first major political defeat for the Thatcher government in 9 years. If a black communist can resist Thatcher's plans for 16 months and then finally defeat the deportation order, thousands will gain in confidence and strength in the future battles.

The VMDC has an emergency programme of action (see centre pages) for the coming month. No socialist, no anti-racist, no democrat could refuse to join the mobilisation to meet this challenge.

The decisive time is NOW.



PAUL MATTHEWSON



Student lies unconscious after police attack.

Manchester cops defeated

The victory of Frank Logan over the Manchester police is an important step towards turning the tide against the wave of police harassment unleashed when they viciously attacked a demonstration against Leon Brittan on the steps of Manchester University Student Union in 1985.

Totally unconnected with the student union and not himself a student, Frank was swept into the battle when two police officers approached him near his home in Hulme and asked him to burgle Sarah Hollis' flat.

At the time Sarah Hollis and Steven Shaw were being subjected to a campaign of police

harassment for their involvement in the so-called 'Battle of Brittan'. This harassment included: sexual assault; beatings; death threats; and Steve having his anus ruptured during an interrogation in Manchester's notorious Bootle Street police station.

The police brought a charge of 'perverting the course of justice' against Frank when he told *The Guardian* newspaper what they had asked him to do. The charge is the same as that brought against Steve after they had driven him out of the country and which he faces should he return.

Frank has been supported throughout his ordeal by the *Justice for Steven Shaw Campaign* (JSSC) who have organised demonstrations and picketed the court during the hearings. Frank's victory is a victory for

Police guilty of murder

NICK LEWIS

On Wednesday 4 May the jury at Liverpool Crown Court unanimously found Police Constables Hamish Montgomery and Patrick Shevlin guilty of murdering Owen Roberts, who they beat and kicked to death while unconscious in a police cell.

Both PCs denied attacking Roberts, but neither could explain how fibres from the dead man's shirt found their way onto Montgomery's truncheon and Shevlin's shoe. A pathologist stated that the cause of death was bleeding over the brain as a result of a rupture of an artery in the neck due to sustaining a very severe beating.

Despite the fact of being found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, the two PCs officially remain police officers. A formal internal disciplinary hearing is to be held shortly to discuss their continued membership of the force, while Mike Prunty, Deputy Chief Constable of Lancashire, stated that the force would be 'reviewing its procedures for dealing with unruly prisoners.'

Like Private Ian Thain, the only British soldier convicted of murdering a civilian in the six counties of Ireland, who was also sentenced to life imprisonment but was released after only two years, we should not be surprised if Montgomery and Shevlin serve considerably less than 'life'. For the time being at least two uniformed thugs are off our streets but there are 137,998 left. ■

25 to hang?

CAROL BRICKLEY

In May twenty five black South Africans were found guilty of 'complicity of killing a policeman' in the Northern Cape during the countrywide uprisings in 1985. The defendants face the death sentence. The convictions were reached using the same criterion of 'common purpose' as in the trial of the Sharpeville 6. In November 1985 the people of Paballelo township marched on the house of a policeman after

police had used tear gas to break up a meeting to protest against rent increases. The policeman fired his shotgun at the demonstration. He was disarmed, and hit on the head with the butt of his own gun, which killed him instantly. The 25 men and women were found guilty on the basis that they participated in attacking the policeman's house. There is no evidence to show that any of them took part in the killing. The hearing will convene on 1 June to hear pleas of mitigation.

FREE THE FRAMED PRISONERS!

South African invasion halted

CAROL BRICKLEY

Talks started in May aimed at ending the 13-year-old war in Angola. The war is referred to in the British media as a 'civil war' but in fact the war began when South African forces tried to invade Angola immediately after independence in 1975.

The People's Republic of Angola asked for aid from Cuba and successfully repelled the South Africans. Every year since the South Africans have invaded, and both the apartheid regime and the USA have given massive backing to UNITA bandits who masquerade as a liberation army in Angola. In fact UNITA would not survive long

without imperialist backing. The South Africans have agreed to talks simply because, despite their massive resources in arms and technology, they have failed to make any headway in the war. Despite the appalling costs of the war both human and economic, Angolan and Cuban forces have halted the latest South African invasion and prevented the seizure of the strategic air station of Cuito Cuanavale.

The Angolan government is insisting that the only basis for negotiation is the withdrawal of South African troops, the cessation of US and South African aid to UNITA and the independence of Namibia which South Africa occupies illegally. ■

Steve Shaw and a victory for us all. FRFI congratulates Frank, and the JSSC for its solidarity. FRFI have consistently supported JSSC. Frank Logan talked to Ed and Ben about his victory.

How did you win?

With the support of JSSC... if I'd been on my own, just me in the courtroom, I may never have won. That's what the police wanted.

Why did the Manchester police want to prosecute you?

What I said must have hurt their feelings and discredited the police force. They wanted to discredit me and get one back... They came to the solicitors and asked for a copy of the affidavit to *The Guardian*. As a result of this they decided to prosecute... because I named the two officers who asked me to do Sarah Hollis' place. *The Guardian* wanted it all legal and required it in an affidavit. That's why I was prosecuted for perverting the course of justice.

What hope is there for Steve now?

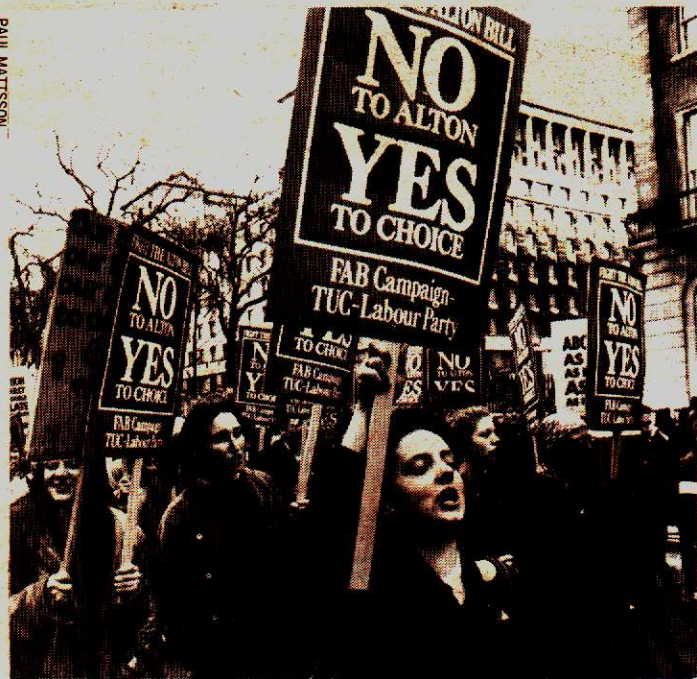
JSSC are doing all they can. It's up to Steve now to do something himself, come back and either face the charges or hopefully they will be dropped. Because he's on a winner.

Do you think there should be a demonstration?

All the demonstrations have done a lot of good for me so I think there should be one massive march for Steve now... It's not enough to just tell people, you've got to go out there and do something.

Do you have a message for Steve?

Yes, to come back... because he'll only win in the end. Every day of my court case I was on the edge but being acquitted was like having a noose taken from around your neck. I certainly think he should come back.



Alton bill defeated

LORNA REID

On Friday 6 May David Alton's abortion amendment bill was effectively killed in the Commons when it failed by twelve

minutes to reach a vote on an amendment to outlaw abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy. It finally fell on 13 May. The start of the five hour debate was delayed by 20 minutes due to points of order and eleven

petitions presented by MPs. By the time the debate had to close MPs had only reached and voted down the amendment banning abortions after 26 weeks of pregnancy.

Alton described the MPs who spoke at length against his Bill as 'procedural muggers... frightened of a vote on the substantive issue.' Jo Richardson, Labour's spokesperson on women, defended the use of petitions as the 'only way in which constituents can get their signatures recorded in the annals of Parliament.'

Alton's grief at his Bill being blocked because of 'filibustering' by MPs is a hypocritical denial of history. In 1958 a private member's Bill to legalise abortion was 'filibustered' out by the anti-abortionists. Had the 1958 Bill been passed, thousands and thousands of women would have been saved from injury and death at the hands of back street abortionists.

Although Alton's Bill has effectively been defeated the struggle to defend a woman's right to abortion must continue and unite all sections of the progressive movement, inside and outside Parliament. ■

50,000 march against Clause 28

RICHARD ROQUES

On 30 April 50,000 people marched against Clause 28. On the day before the march 7,000 marched in Holland against this repressive piece of British legislation. 30 April was the biggest ever demonstration by lesbians and gay men.

Clause 28 has been introduced to coincide with the anti-gay bigotry fuelled by the government and the media around the AIDS epidemic. It must be seen as the opening shots in an ongoing campaign of repressive laws aimed at once more criminalising homosexuality. The Labour Party has now reversed its original and instinctive position when Jack Cunningham, front bench Labour Party spokesman declared 'we don't want to change [Clause 28] in any way.'

Their change of heart is a result of the massive mobilisation of lesbians and gay men on to the streets in defiance of the Clause. Jo Richardson and Bernie Grant were both forced to say that parliamentary activity alone would not defeat the section.

Interestingly enough the march went nowhere near 10 Downing Street where on the occasion of the last march there was a spontaneous sit-down protest and the police moved in on horseback and brutally arrested demonstrators. The stewards were frantically working with the police to prevent the sit-down. In Manchester the organisers thanked the police from the platform and then issued a press statement congratulating the police.

The Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists formed to fight the section is already split as to how best to fight the clause. There are those who want to



limit the whole campaign to 'lesbian and gay issues', a single issue campaign. As lesbians and gay men we are also black, unemployed, Irish, low paid

workers, homeless and trade unionists. This is where the only hope of a successful campaign lies. In drawing in ever wider forces into the struggle as they identify with this attack on our sexuality.

Hundreds, possibly thousands of people have come out for the first time. For the first time these people are involved in political activity. Their first act as openly gay women and men has been to confront the repressive nature of the government. These people must be aware of all others who face increasingly repressive laws and unite with them. We must also make common cause with the oppressed all over the world fighting British imperialism, particularly the Azanian masses fighting against apartheid and the Nationalist community fighting British occupation of the Six Counties in Ireland.

The Revolutionary Communist Group marched with City of London Anti-Apartheid Group and the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign. As lesbians and gays we must combat homophobia by taking the fight against Clause 28 into the whole community and linking with their struggle. ■

Philby: socialist fighter



Kim Philby in 1955

MAXINE WILLIAMS

The death of Kim Philby has been greeted with relief by the British ruling class. His obviously happy life in Moscow and occasional resurfacing in the press had rubbed salt into their wounds since his escape in 1963. His sin was doubly great in their eyes - not only had he caused havoc to British intelligence services but he was 'one of their own' who had abandoned them to serve the working class. The Burgess / Maclean / Philby / Blunt episodes have remained a running sore for the ruling class since the 1960s.

Philby's commitment to communism began in the 1930s at Cambridge. He was one of a sec-



SOCIAL SECURITY LAWS

No concessions to the poor

DAVE BURTON

As the Tories' new social security laws begin to bite, Thatcher appeared to make a concession on Housing Benefit (HB) cuts. The savings limit before HB is cut off was increased from £6,000 to £8,000, and 'transitional arrangements' were introduced to protect those losing over £2.50 per week.

While this may have embarrassed Thatcher, who had maintained 'people who have largish sums of money should use their own', this 'climbdown' was designed only to buy off Tory backbenchers (55% of HB losers live in Tory seats).

The 'concession' will be of no value to the poor. Over five million people will suffer cuts, as the total HB is reduced by £540m. 'Transitional arrangements' for losers - like other temporary measures - will simply be scrapped piecemeal once the heat is off. Tory consciences come cheap.

Above all, the 'concession' leaves the structure of the Social Security Act intact. This Act - a declaration of war upon the poor - aims to destroy the welfare benefits system. This dream of Thatcherism is best seen in the so-called 'Social Fund', which replaced single payments for one-off items like cookers and furniture.

Single payments totalled £350m in 1986-7, while the (anti) Social Fund is set at £203m. The fund is cash limited, so budgets take precedence over need. In place of statutory

tion of the intelligentsia which saw the evils of capitalism and fascism and contrasted these with progress in the Soviet Union. His work was, however, not the normal communist political work. But his task was equally difficult, requiring enormous self-control as he lived his double life in political isolation for over 30 years. Later many of his contemporaries abandoned communism. In contrast he chose his path and stuck to it tenaciously and with honour.

Later, whilst working as the top operative liaising between Britain and the CIA, he had full access to cold war plans to parachute agents into socialist countries. Three six-man parties were dropped in the Ukraine. He described the operation as a

rights, the Fund is a discretionary system with no right of appeal. Only £60m of the Social Fund is for grants - the rest is loans which have to be repaid. Claimants could lose £12 a week from their benefits.

Claimants will be forced to compete for benefits, the poor against the very poor, and will only be 'helped' if families or charities cannot help. Thatcher claims the Fund will remove claimants from 'the culture of dependency': straight into the arms of the loan shark.

Over 400,000 have lost Housing Benefit Supplement - and with it entitlement to free health benefits. 61% of extra payments for fuel will be lost, according to the Right to Fuel Campaign. Single mothers will be forced out of work as new rules do not allow for child-minding or travel costs. Women who try to escape domestic violence will lose benefit as half the value of the house they leave will be treated as capital. The Disability Alliance states that HB and special allowance cuts mean up to a million disabled people will lose. Massive cuts have affected thousands of young people.

New Income Support rules mean that claimants are required to show passports if they, or a family member, have moved to Britain in the last five years. Mark James, welfare rights adviser and chair of the Committee for Non-Racist Benefits, said: 'DHSS staff have been asked to become immigration officers and perform the role of the Home Office.' Thus the DHSS strengthens its role as Home Office policeman. ■

'Western-inspired plan for a bloodbath in the Balkans.' All the agents were captured, '... to the extent that I played a part in their deaths, I have no regrets', he rightly said. He is also credited with warning Albania of imperialist invasion plans.

There are many ways of serving the cause of progress and communism. Philby's contribution was a very concrete one - to protect the Soviet Union against imperialism. He never regretted the choice he made as a young man:

'as I look over Moscow from my study window. I can see the solid foundations of the future I glimpsed at Cambridge.' ■

News notes

In the local elections Labour gained 106 seats and now controls 9 of the 211 councils in the election. The SLD took a hammering, losing 63 seats, and the SDP were almost obliterated with only six councillors left. The Tories, in fact, did better than expected, winning only four seats and gaining control of seven councils. Kinross must go still further to the right to win a general election. The Scottish National Party doubled its vote to 21%, pushing the Tories into fourth place. This is due to its support for a non-payment campaign against the Poll Tax.

The Appeal Court in April instructed Tower Hamlets Council to reconsider its racist decision to evict ten Bangladeshi families. They reconsidered... and decided to evict the families anyway. Another 60 families await the same fate.

A study by PB Beaumont and R Harris reveals that non-unionism among manual workers in Britain nearly doubled between 1980 and 1984, from 16.3% to 29.7%. Manual trade union membership in given establishments fell from 83.7% to 70.3%. In Scotland it fell from 85.4% (above the 1984 average) to 67.2% (below the 1984 average), and in the East Midlands from 93% to 63.1%.

A fifteen year old black school student was remanded in custody for a month accused of stealing 84p (that's right 84 pence). He was only released after uproar from the Walsall black community and a High Court application.

'I do draw the line at sexual relations between races... Half castes are a bit like the mule: they have a tendency to lower academic standards... my best students are blond and blue-eyed.' No, this is not an extract from a Nazi handbook for teachers, it's the thoughts of Carey Palmer, Head of a private tutorial college in Richmond.

RUC top cop Sir John Herman's 1987 Annual Report reveals that 1,793 complaints were 'fully investigated' and 26 - a magnificent 1.45% - were substantiated. This achievement ranks with the best efforts of the Met.

Our police spy tells us that Cannon Row, the Met's 'lighter, brighter, more welcoming' centre of stripsearching, racist abuse and assault, is to get lay visitors. They can enter a given cop shop at any time to make sure the boys are behaving themselves. Cannon Row's lay visitors are in for a busy time.

Ask a silly question. PC Stephen Christopher has been given a £23,000 grant to discover why people attack the police. The peevish peeler has himself been attacked three times. He will not be questioning attackers himself, he says, 'As these are people who have something against the police, I thought it would be impossible to get full co-operation. It was a policeman who spoke to them.' This boy is promotion material.

And finally... They're not just pretty faces down at the RCP. After months of intensive research into the P&O strike, they revealed, in a world-exclusive front page headline: 'All employers are exploiters' (tms 13 M 1988). Well, knock me down with a tube of hairgel. Next week: 'The world is round.'

Republican march in Edinburgh

On 3 May the Labour controlled Lothian Regional Council banned a march planned for the following Saturday to commemorate Edinburgh-born Irish revolutionary leader, James Connolly. The Labour Council had given way to loyalist threats and anti-Republican hysteria whipped up by the Scottish media, especially Robert Maxwell's *Daily Record*. On 3 May this 'newspaper' had a front page article condemning the march as 'an IRA victory parade for the killings in Holland'.

Labour not only banned the march but also banned Edinburgh MP Ron Brown, due to speak at the commemoration, from commenting on their decision. The march was organised by the Rising Phoenix flute band. Johnny, a band member, talked to FRFI about the banning and the fight for democratic rights in Scotland.

What was the march about and how did you go about preparing for it?

James Connolly was born in Edinburgh, and there's never been a major march commemorating him here. We thought it was about time that this great socialist and revolutionary was recognised in his home town.

We organised a leafletting campaign, getting round all the left-wing groups.

How did the opposition to the march get organised?

In February, when we first announced the march to the police, they must have been right on the phone to James McLean the leader of the loyalist coalition in Edinburgh because on the Sunday there was an organised phone-in on the local radio against this pro-IRA march and the *Sunday Post*, Scotland's best selling Sunday paper, had a front page trying to whip up opposition to the march.

I think the loyalists realised that there were that many people coming, that many people being organised, that they wouldn't be able to stop it, so they tried to create hysteria.

How did the Labour council react to this pressure?

We told all the councillors beforehand about the march... and despite police objections the councillors voted 30-14 in favour... of the march. They said that to ban the march would be to deny folk their democratic rights...

However in the week before the march they did cave in. On the Tuesday the *Daily Record* had a full front page article calling for the march to be banned. Councillors were getting threatened, Ron Brown got threatened, there were even threats being made against councillors' families by the loyalists. It was an organised campaign. There were local council elections on the Thursday, and just before them the labour council banned the march...

It really shows you, specially coming up to the elections, that folk can't put faith in Lab-

our councillors. Councillors end up being just as anti-democratic as the state.

How are the band going to react to this ban?

We're going to fight for our right to march. There's now a three month ban on 'sectarian' marches in the Lothian Region, but the loyalists were allowed to go ahead with a wreath laying ceremony on the day of our march... Last year there were 57 loyalist marches in Lothian region... If the Labour councillors were serious about banning sectarian marches, why did they give permission for all those loyalist marches? The Republican bands are totally opposed to sectarianism, we see it as a way of dividing the working class, but Labour councils encourage sectarianism.

We're going to be getting together to see what we can do about fighting the ban, because if they can ban our march it'll be gay marches or anti-racist marches they ban next.

Do you see any links between what you're doing and other struggles?

We're totally opposed to racism, we see racism in the same way as sectarianism, as anti-working class. Republican bands from Scotland have gone to support marches for the Broadwater Farm campaign and the Viraj Mendis Campaign in Manchester. The way blacks are being criminalised by the immigration laws is just like the way the Irish in Britain are criminalised by the PTA.

James Connolly was an internationalist, and we think it's important to recognise the anti-democratic things going on in South Africa and against the uprisings on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The citizen's army that James Connolly set up was recognised by Lenin as the first working class army, and we follow in his tradition of internationalism.

What do you make of the political situation in Scotland?

The poll tax is going to be hitting Scotland first and the Lab-

our Party is supposed to be taking a lead against it with the Stop It campaign, but Labour councils are already busy implementing the tax. Working class communities can't put any faith in Labour councils or governments, they have to use their own power to organise collectively, getting organised with things like the Anti-Poll Tax Union to get good results. We're going to be getting involved with the people at the front end of that struggle to make the links with Ireland.

What sort of hope do you have for the future?

Like James Connolly said, 'We shall rise again'. If we're going to beat this ban we're going to have to keep building support in the communities here, and get the people we support in England to come up and support us. Some people on the left tell us to forget Ireland and get down to trade unionism, but that's useless. If rank and file unionists want to do anything they have to realise they've got more in common with the Irish people than with the trade union bosses. What's wrong with the British left... is that they've given up supporting the Irish and going on the offensive in the tradition of James Connolly. Quite a few of our members were involved in the Edinburgh Irish Solidarity Committee a few years back, and we used the same methods of leaflets, posters, getting ordinary folk involved, in building for our march... That's the way to win, not the magic roundabouts and promises from the trade unions and Labour Party. ■

Ron Brown from Parliament

In April Ron Brown MP, much to the delight of the poor all over Britain, made a protest during the Parliamentary debate on the social security cuts. During his protest the 'mace' (no, we don't know what it is either) was damaged. For this 'crime' Ron Brown was thrown out of Parliament for four weeks. You can treat the poor with as much contempt as you like but not the mace. Ron Brown talks to LORNA REID about his protest, the cowardly reaction of the Labour Party leadership and AEU, and the fight against the Poll Tax.

What exactly did you do and why?

I don't think it's a big issue. The capitalist media have attempted to make a mountain out of a molehill. What happened was that Tory minister Michael Pertino was giving the government view on the social security bill in the evening. He arrogantly refused to listen to the views of the Labour MPs present. At the end I picked up the mace intending to place it on the Tory bench. I said 'This is a load of rubbish. Parliament has become a rubber stamp for the Tories.' The mace fell out of my hands on to the floor and I walked out leaving it there.

With hindsight I could have done it better but it was instinctive. If Labour MPs aren't angry with the Tories then there's something wrong. I

was certainly angry. My action reflects my feelings from my work in Leith working with pensioners and other working class people who are on the breadline thanks to the Tory government and the crisis in the capitalist system.

You have been pilloried by the Labour leadership and the Amalgamated Engineering Union have withdrawn their sponsorship of you. Was your protest worth it?

Any protest against the Tories is worth it if it raises the political understanding of the working class which the action clearly did. I've received hundreds of letters in support. It struck a raw nerve in the working class movement.

The Parliamentary Labour Party and the AEU have misunderstood the mood of the working class. Having a go at me won't help the working class, it exposes their class collaboration with the Tories.

Have you had any support from within the Parliamentary Labour Party and the AEU?

The left wing in the PLP supported me and rallied round to vote against my expulsion from the Commons. I wasn't present at the AEU national committee despite requesting an opportunity to have a hearing. A substantial minority on the National Committee voted in favour of sponsorship of Leith Labour Party. This 'punishment' is suffered not by me as such but by the party. Some individuals in the hierarchy of the AEU believe that financial inducements will affect voting patterns but I wasn't selected or elected on that basis.

What has been the response from within your own constituency and from your own Labour Party branch?

In the main Leith Labour Party think it's a storm in a tea-cup bolstered by the capitalist media to have a go at the left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions.

The vast majority in the constituency are in favour of what I did. I've only received one letter out of the hundreds supporting me which expressed concern. I've not had any hostility.

The Poll Tax is a major issue for the working class in Scot-

land. What has been your response and do you intend to carry this opposition into Parliament?

One of the reasons there was opposition to my expulsion from the Commons is because I believe in total opposition to the Tories on wide ranging issues including the Poll Tax. At the end of the day you say to the working class don't pay because the Poll Tax is a class law which benefits the rich at the expense of the poor. At the Mound in Edinburgh I took part in a ritual burning of government information leaflets on the Poll Tax. I believe this represented the fire and hatred of Tory Party policy in general and not just the Poll Tax.

The difficulty in Parliament is the procedures prevent you presenting your case as fully as you could. The Poll Tax needs organised opposition so that the employed, the unemployed, students, pensioners are all united in opposition on the question of non-payment. Historically Parliament was set up to impose class rule and anything gained has been from the direct struggle of the working class. This must be developed because at the end of the day it is the working class which will change things and not a few MPs at Westminster.

This is not the first time you have been suspended from Parliament. In 1981 you were suspended for a week for calling the Scottish Solicitor General a liar after he denied the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against two sellers of Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism! Do you see yourself being disciplined again?

I don't look to be disciplined. On certain occasions an issue may arise and I don't think I should stick to rules I don't agree with if it prevents an issue being raised where it can't be raised outside of Parliament. The seamen's dispute is a case in point because now we should be demanding that the TUC General Council should be calling a general strike against the Tories in support of this group of workers.

All these things can only be changed if we challenge the source of them - the Tories - with the strength of the working class movement remembering that unity is strength and if we pussyfoot around like the right wing in the PLP it will lead to further defeats. Speaking as one of the few MPs who turned up on the picket speaking to the seafarers, men and women, they want action they want the Labour Party to put their words into action.

How would you see MPs using Parliament to represent their constituents?

I think MPs should use every opportunity to put forward the case which has to be linked to the overall struggle against the capitalist system otherwise it won't be effective. Socialism is about changing and replacing capitalism to provide real democracy for the vast majority of people in this country and other countries. ■





PAUL MATTHEWSON

Zola runs home to apartheid

CAROL BRICKLEY

When *Daily Mail* editor, Sir David English, used his influence with the Tories in 1984 to secure British nationality for South African runner Zola Budd in a record ten days, he and his pal Leon Brittan intended to destroy the sports boycott against South Africa. For the last four years they and every media hack in Britain susceptible to wining, dining and sob stories have attempted to convince the world that Budd was running for Britain not apartheid. Budd's return to South Africa in May ended the tangle of lies.

Budd came to Britain in April 1984 just in time to qualify for the August Los Angeles Olympics where, instead of winning the medals expected of her by her sponsors, she knocked Mary Decker, the prospective gold medallist, out of the race. Later in August she returned to South Africa where she stayed for the next 19 months.

It was not until March 1986 that she came back to Britain – 'this time I intend to stay' – in an attempt to qualify for the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. Her chances were ended by the boycott by black Commonwealth nations and her failure to meet residential qualifications.

In the next 16 months, up to January 1988, Budd spent 11 months in South Africa. She returned to Britain in January to try to qualify for the Seoul Olympics and the cross country championships in New Zealand: 'I have completely cut my ties with South Africa'. Her prospects of run-

ing in New Zealand were quickly ended by threats of a boycott. Budd withdrew clearly hoping that this would clear the way to the Olympics. The British Amateur Athletics Board (BAAB) praised her decision as a great sacrifice for British athletics.

By this time however, black members of the International Amateur Athletics Federation were questioning her activities. She clearly 'participated' in a race in Brakpan, South Africa, as reported in the *Brakpan Herald*: 'One of the high points of the day was when Zola Budd came and ran a couple of laps. She really made people's heads turn and soon had the crowd in a buzz.' Equally open to question, was Budd's decision to sack her English coach and replace him with a South African, take on a South African business sponsor and employ a South African doctor. The IAAF decided to ask the BAAB to suspend Budd for a year.



'I have completely cut my ties with South Africa'

Uproun ensued as Budd's supporters accused the IAAF of 'hi-jack' and 'blackmail' and the BAAB instituted a month-long enquiry which they predicted would come down in favour of Budd. 'She is now even more determined to stay' said her trainer a week before Budd threw in the towel and returned once more to South Africa.

The press was cluttered with articles about Budd's 'nervous exhaustion', 'dead parrot', 'love of animals', 'sick mother', 'sick father', 'cash problems'. Poor-little-rich-girl unfairly targeted by anti-apartheid activists was the message.

But Budd was never running for anything other than apartheid. In 1985 her latest coach, former mayor of Randfontein, said 'She may now be a British athlete, but the world knows her as South African. Zola has given this country the best publicity possible.'

Over the four years that Budd has been breaking the boycott, the British AAM has distanced itself from the protests against her. City AA, on the other hand, has always maintained that Budd should be stopped and has repeatedly demonstrated when she has run in Britain. Its last intervention at Gateshead early in 1988 was reported enthusiastically in New Zealand where anti-apartheid activists were preparing to demonstrate if she turned up for the cross-country championships. Budd's British citizenship is a permanent insult to the thousands of black people who are still waiting for citizenship or who face deportation. If Budd ever returns she will be reminded of that ■

Why the sports boycott is necessary

DEAN JACKSON

By any sporting criterion, any black person born in South Africa is entitled to represent the country of his or her birth if he or she is good enough. Education, literacy, tribe, social customs and all the other apologetics used by white South Africa for various forms of apartheid are transparently irrelevant where sport is concerned.

Let's take a case of two men identical in every respect. They have the same physique, sporting talent, IQ and even birthplace. If both are white, then both obviously occupy much the same level in South African sport, whether their chosen sport be rugby, cricket, surfing or tennis. But if one of them is black, then even if South Africa – and it never will – removes all the purely sporting barriers to equality, the crippling effect

of the overall apartheid policy is quickly apparent.

The average white, for instance, can afford a balanced diet. The average black cannot. The white probably had good sporting facilities at school. The black had none. Even in the better-paid areas of commerce and industry, the white will almost certainly earn – purely because of his white skin – at least four times what the black earns.

Similarly, the white will get home during daylight in summer and can train on weekdays. The black will get home after dark. In many cases the white may well have his own pool or court for swimming and tennis. The black will not. At weekends, the white will belong to a sumptuously equipped white sports club (tended by blacks). The blacks' sporting facilities will be primitive by comparison,

and so on.

Yet both these men are born in South Africa and distinguishable only by the colour of their skin. Proof enough that in South African sport, as in every other field of human endeavour in that country, the anti-black policy of apartheid dominates all other factors, regardless of what the white minority propaganda might pretend. A fact which places a dilemma at the door of the IAAF whenever they decide to discuss South African participation in world sport. Quite clearly, white South African society itself ensures that although the blacks are in the majority, the whites have all the unsporting advantages and will doubtless continue unfairly to dominate in sport, simply by nobbling the black competition from birth, through laws made solely for whites.

Two years of the Non-Stop Picket

On 16 April City of London Anti-Apartheid Group celebrated the second anniversary of the Non-Stop Picket outside the South African Embassy. A thousand people joined the march from Hyde Park to the South African Embassy in Trafalgar Square. As the march reached the Embassy, two members climbed the scaffolding at the National Gallery and hoisted a banner calling for freedom for the Sharpeville Six. Minutes later two other members climbed to the roof of the Gallery, took down the Union Jack and hoisted a picket banner calling for the release of Nelson Mandela. They were later arrested. The police attempts to move the march on to the Embankment failed when demonstrators made it clear that they intended to stay put outside the racist embassy. Thirty demonstrators were arrested for sitting in the road.

Sectarians routed at NUJ conference

TERRY O'HALLORAN

On Thursday 21 April at its annual conference in Sheffield, the National Union of Journalists voted by a massive majority: ● to support all forces fighting the apartheid regime; ● to support both COSATU and NACTU; ● to support both the AAM and the Non-Stop Picket; ● to continue support for Moses Mayekiso. The NUJ is the first national trade union to adopt a principled non-sectarian position of support for all forces in the liberation struggle in South Africa and Namibia and support for all anti-apartheid campaigns in Britain.

London Farringdon Branch, dominated by the *Morning Star*, aided and abetted by Seumas Milne, *Guardian* reporter, had other ideas. They wanted to delete NACTU, delete the Non-Stop Picket, delete Moses Mayekiso. Delete, in short, anything and anyone not on the approved list drawn up by British sectarians.

This time, however, the sectarians were routed. Support from Lionel Morrison, President, ensured that the National Executive Council supported the motion. The union has links with the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA) which is affiliated to NACTU. Throughout the conference the left co-operated on the issue to maintain maximum opposition to the sectarians.

Even at a fringe meeting organised by the sectarians themselves, we won. Paul Blomfield, AAM EC member, attacked the Moses Mayekiso campaign and called for recognition of the ANC as the leaders of the struggle. The comrade from ANC, sitting beside Blomfield, refused to join in and said: 'The ANC is not in the business of dictating to solidarity movements.'

Comrade Mathata Tsedo, Deputy President MWASA, was not invited to the meeting but turned up anyway. He warned Blomfield that people in South Africa were fed up with being told who their leaders were. 'The job of people in Britain,' he said 'is to support the liberation struggle not one particular organisation in that struggle.'

All of London Farringdon's amendments were either withdrawn or defeated. Before the debate began comrade Tsedo told the conference that London Farringdon's attitude was 'a leftover from the British imperialist mentality'. In the end some five or six out of over 300 delegates supported the sectarians. The rest voted decisively for the principled, democratic and non-sectarian fight against apartheid.

The success at the NUJ confirms that when the sectarians are confronted in open battle they can be defeated even on what they regard as their 'home ground' in the trade unions. The victory in the NUJ should now be followed up in every

union where there are supporters of the Non-Stop Picket.

* A comrade from SACTU was invited to the conference but not allowed to speak. When I heard of this I moved an emergency proposal to instruct the union President to write a letter of apology to SACTU. This was agreed.

CP attack on South African trade unions

TERRY O'HALLORAN

NACTU, an independent black trade union federation with some 420,000 members, is under attack not only from the apartheid regime but also from British sectarians.

In *7 Days*, weekly newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), Terry Wilde, CPGB executive and National Communications Union Executive, says: 'What is interesting is that NACTU is not included in the list of organisations banned on 24 February... NACTU plays into the hands of apartheid, by making permanent racial divisions... A lot of black South Africans believe that NACTU will disappear into irrelevance – or would have done before last month's clampdown, which could help it.' (*7 Days*, 12 March 1988).

To say that NACTU should be opposed because it has not yet been restricted is to allow the apartheid regime to decide who should be supported. Terry Wilde forgets that SACTU has never been banned. He also ignores the detainment of NACTU comrades in apartheid jails.

The CPGB, and the AAM, initially opposed COSATU saying that SACTU was the only legitimate trade union federation. It was City Group that fought for the recognition of COSATU.

To say that NACTU makes permanent racial division will come as a surprise to the white members of NACTU-affiliated unions.

Finally, Terry Wilde implies that the regime deliberately left NACTU unrestricted to 'save' it from 'irrelevance'. As a matter of fact the first trade union body to organise public protest against the restrictions placed on COSATU was... NACTU. In many areas COSATU and NACTU supporters are working together in both industrial and political campaigns.

Terry Wilde's real objection to NACTU is simply that NACTU refuses to subordinate itself to the apartheid tradition. It seeks friendly relations with all liberation movements. Its principles include political independence, support for sanctions, and support for the liberation struggle.

The problem for anyone attempting to assess the lessons and events of 1968 is to make sense of a mass of disparate protests, sit-ins, strikes, occupations, demonstrations occurring over a few years in major advanced capitalist countries at the end of a long period of boom. Four men, Tariq Ali (late Trotskyist of the IMG, now 'independent marxist'); David Caute (historian, academic, formerly literary editor of the *New Statesman*); Chris Harman (editor of *Socialist Worker*); and Ronald Fraser (Left leaning oral historian) have each attempted to assemble the pieces of the jigsaw. Despite common themes, each has ended with a different picture.

We should not be surprised at this. Revolutions, rebellions and social upheavals are all things to all men. All classes and strata of society can be involved. The Russian Revolution in 1917 was the culmination of decades of social unrest which affected the students, intellectuals, military, bourgeoisie as well as the working class and peasantry: only story book revolutions are a simple fight between the workers and the bosses. But not all social upheavals lead to revolution - let alone socialist revolution. The outcome will be determined by which class is leading the struggle. Communist revolution also require communist organisation.

Two of the books in question, David Caute's and Ronald Fraser's purport to be histories of events. If you want to know about the alternative culture of the period read David Caute for an over-detailed assessment of the antics of drug-crazed hippies who wanted to destroy capitalism by blowing everyone's mind. Caute's conclusions are in line with some of his source material: the abiding legacy of 1968 is cultural not political - 'The battle for sexual-erotic liberty in life, literature and the arts has been largely won in the West . . . despite inevitable backlashes' (p406).

Ronald Fraser has chosen 175 'leading' participants in the 1968 events and assembled the history from their contributions. What is interesting is how each of the contributors now defines his/her political affiliations. The majority belong to no political organisation and a large proportion define themselves as 'independent marxists', 'independent socialists' and non-aligned.

Tariq Ali's book, described as an 'autobiography of the sixties', is an account of the life of a revolutionary jetsetter. Born into the Pakistani political elite and transported to Oxford University in the early sixties to keep him out of political trouble at home, Ali manages for the next ten years to place himself centre stage. He visits Bolivia as part of an expedition to visit Regis Debray in jail; North Vietnam for Bertrand Russell's War Crimes Tribunal, Germany on behalf of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, Pakistan to advise on impending revolution and he would have been in France in May 1968 if he hadn't been in difficulty with his immigration status. He meets Malcolm X, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, Marlon Brando, Bhutto, Stokely Carmichael, Bertrand Russell, and a whole coterie of European intellectuals, mostly it seems in restaurants and at social functions. With a bit more push he might have seen Ho Chi Minh. This is all served up in an entertaining fashion and the book is worth reading if only for his account of his visit to North Vietnam at the height of the war and his account of his meeting with Malcolm X.

Chris Harman's book is another story altogether. Four hundred pages cover the period from 1960 to 1976. Harman's book is a political assessment of the period in line with the politics of his organisation the SWP (International Socialists (IS) at the time). Centre stage for him is the organised working class: all other movements are judged by their relationship to it.

These four books are in agreement on the major events of the period: the black civil rights movement in the USA; the Vietnam war; May 1968 in France. Very little attempt is made to analyse why in the late 1960s, a movement, spurned and disregarded by the 'Old Left' CP and left labourites, centred on internationalism, anti-racism and anti-authoritarianism, came into being and grew to mass proportions. Yet this was the central issue of the period which introduc-



MAY 1968

May '68 the year of street fighting men, France in turmoil, the black movement in the USA, the universities occupied, the student sit-in and the Tet offensive. CAROL BRICKLEY examines four books on the 1968 upheaval. TREVOR RAYNE analyses the Vietnamese struggle which forged ahead against the mightiest imperialist power.



ed a whole generation to the politics of mass action, revolution and Marxist theory. Where did the spark come from? From young men like Tariq Ali, Rudi Dutschke, Dany Cohn-Bendit? From 'red bases' in the universities? From LSD, cannabis and pop music? From the organised trade union movement? Harman is the only one to attempt an answer: disillusion with the capitalist West and the bureaucratic East.

The SWP has long held to its slogan 'Neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism'. Spanning the twin imperialisms of East and West is

the international working class which will rise up against both bureaucracy and capitalism. The student revolt in 1968 Harman argues was simply an adjunct to the workers' struggles which were taking place at the time.

And the fault of the student movement, or indeed the black movement, women's liberation movement, anti-Vietnam war movement etc etc, was according to Harman that they neither had the power (to strike at the point of production) nor did they connect with the organised working class (trade union movement).

Such an explanation is the Noddy story book version of Marxist theory. Yes, the post-war boom generation was raised on Cold War politics (not least of all IS) and cultural austerity, but the prime moving force was not a rejection of the communist East, but a rapid realisation that the freedom and democracy of the West were only skin deep and did not extend even so far as all its citizens.

The spark in the USA was the struggle for black liberation which, in the early sixties, mobilised black students and in turn their white compatriots. The anti-Vietnam war movement grew in solidarity with the communist North Vietnamese, aided in the war by the socialist bloc. The drafting of black men into the army divisions which sustained the most casualties fused the two issues, sent the universities into revolt and threw the US into crisis: 'No North Vietnamese has ever called me a Nigger'.

But for Harman the black movement, repeatedly referred to as 'lumpen proletariat', failed because it did not make connections with the working class. The USA's eventual withdrawal from Vietnam - a victory for the oppressed which still reverberates today - is passed off as President Johnson's simple method for ending the crisis in the US.

Nowhere in his book does Harman ask the question why the movement failed to mobilise the mass of workers - by Harman's definition white, male trade unionists. For the black working class in the USA's industrial ghettos, forced into unemployment and shit work, and the black agricultural workers in the South who could not even register to vote, the answer would have been obvious.

There was of course one universally accepted exception to the theory that student revolt was an isolated petty bourgeois rebellion - May 1968 in France. Begun early in May as a result of student revolt at appalling standards and authoritarianism in French higher education, the response of de Gaulle and the French government ensured that the revolt grew. Repeated, bloody, street battles with the notorious French riot squad (the CRS) following the closure of Nanterre university and the Sorbonne, drew the support of Parisians. Many young workers joined the students at the barricades. Working

class support forced the CP-led CGT (trade union movement) to call a one day strike.

French workers who were the lowest paid in Europe added their demands to the movement. But the workers were not content with the CGT's token strike and during the week following, factories began to be closed. The CGT at this point was more than anxious to ensure it remained in control and so placed itself at the head of the strike committees. To ensure that the student revolutionaries were marginalised, CGT stewards guarded the factories to prevent the students from entering.

By 18 May two million workers were on strike and the French government was under siege. On 24 May mass demonstrations were called all over France to coincide with de Gaulle's statement to the nation. One demonstrator in Lyons recalled how youth from the underprivileged housing zones joined the march: 'I felt a collective shiver go through the demo. It was as if people from another world, people you normally never met in the city, were joining in.' (Fraser p198).

By now 9-10 million were on strike. On the following day, Prime Minister Pompidou conceded a 35 per cent increase in the minimum wage (affecting two million workers) and a 10% increase across the board with a gradual reduction of the working week to 40 hours. Trade union leaders emerged from the talks confident that their troubles were now over. But the workers rejected the deal.

On 29 May the workers and students, still without a strategy for finally removing de Gaulle from power, marched on a CGT-led demonstration to the Elysée palace. The palace was empty. Speculation reached fever pitch that de Gaulle had conceded defeat. But the wily President had only flown as far as West Germany for a meeting with his Generals and to ensure the loyalty of the French army garrison. On his return to Paris on 30 May he called on French citizens to take civil action to prevent subversion and 'totalitarian communism', and ordering an emergency election. The choice he posed was between de Gaulle and civil war.

Loyal workers were given the afternoon off to participate in a festival of reaction. Right-wing demonstrators through Paris sounded horns to the rhythm of 'Algérie française' and chanted 'Cohn-Bendit to Dachau'.

During the next three weeks, despite continued resistance from workers and students, the CP and the CGT rushed to prove their patriotism: 'self-management is a hollow formula: what the workers really want is immediate satisfaction of their claims'; 'No, the ten million strikers did not seek power, all they wanted was better conditions of life and work'. When the government outlawed 11 student organisations and expelled 150 foreign students, the CP congratulated themselves for forcing the government 'to remove the trouble makers

on the eve of the elections' (Caute pp223-4), and criticised the students for their lack of 'national feeling'.

Such knee-bending to the right-wing (typical of social democracy everywhere as any cursory examination of Foot's Labour Party on the Falklands, or Kinnock's Labour Party on the miners strike shows) only served to demonstrate their weakness. The election was a Gaullist landslide, celebrated by the release from prison of extreme right-wing generals who had championed *Algérie française*.

Harman's view of the defeat of the movement is characteristically narrow:

'Yet there was no objective need for the movement to fall away as it did in the first week of June. It did so because the most powerful political and trade union organisations within the French working class threw their weight into procuring a return to work in the key public services. . . Secondly, to say that May had revolutionary potential is not to say that the choice was, as General de Gaulle posed it on 29 May, between elections on his terms and civil war. There was a third option - the extension and deepening of the movement in such a way as to make the government continue to hold back from using the armed forces of the state.

This would have meant encouraging forms of strike organisation that involved all workers, the most 'backward' as well as the most advanced, in shaping their own destinies - strike committees, regular mass meetings in the occupied plants, picketing and occupation rotas involving the widest numbers of people. . .

At this point we must ask Harman who was to lead such a 'deepening of the struggle'? Certainly not 'the most powerful political and trade union organisations'; this would be a demand for them to change their spots. Certainly not the student movement, which despite the courage of its participants fighting the CRS, and a great deal of socialist rhetoric, could pose no concrete way forward either for themselves or the workers. Graphically, Fraser tells of Cohn-Bendit's clandestine return from Germany at the height of the May events:

'All the way in the car to Paris I was wondering what to do, what to say, how to find a second wind. . . I went up front. There was no reaction. Then I took off my glasses. After a few seconds there was a tremendous ovation. People were standing, shouting: 'Les frontières on s'en fout!' (fuck all frontiers). It went on a long time, my eyes filled with tears. But in fact I had nothing to say. The main point of my being there was to defy the government, show it was powerless.'

No leadership existed which was prepared to face de Gaulle's threats or

which was determined to win power. Harman argues for a third alternative: the concentration of the struggle in the factories and workplaces would answer the problem. But without a decision to confront de Gaulle's threats, nothing of the sort would be possible. The movement had grown to mass proportions, not because the workers had focussed on their own economic demands, but because they had found common cause with a generation of students who rebelled against the regime on every level. It was from the end of May onwards that the government and the 'Old Left' were able to deepen the divisions between students and workers which Harman subscribes to.

This was part and parcel of IS's theory in the late 1960s, as it is today, 20 years later - the self-activity of the workers. Tony Cliff's lecture in those days, always overflowing with metaphor, was a description of the working class which, like Sisyphus (of Greek myth) condemned to pushing boulders up

hills only to see them roll down again, would be involved in strike after strike which it might well lose. But in the process it would build its muscles, until, eventually a real He-man, it was able to knock-out the bosses. The SWP will wait forever for such a revolution. There is no love lost between Tariq Ali and his contemporaries of IS. In his book, Ali describes IS as Eurocentric (not surprising after one IS member at the LSE told him to go back to Pakistan) and despises their contempt for the international revolution, and revolutionaries like Guevara and Castro.

Tariq Ali took a central role in the organisation of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC). But the student movement never reached the same level as France even in its own terms. Occupations at Essex, Hull, the LSE, Hornsey College of Art and many more did not lead to street fights with the police or win the sympathy of the organised workers - among the most privileged in the world. A more significant legacy of

1968 was Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech, the subsequent support he received from the working class muscle from the docks, Smithfield and Billingsgate markets, and the Labour Government's introduction of the first racist immigration laws.

The VSC ended not with a bang but a whimper. Its second demonstration in October 1968 culminated in a full scale battle with mounted police outside the American Embassy. But by the third demonstration, in March 1969, the organisers were happy, amidst scare stories from the media that the demonstrators intended to seize 'key installations in London', to lead 100,000 demonstrators away from the US Embassy to Hyde Park. 'A small Maoist breakaway march' to Grosvenor Square was castigated by Tariq Ali for ultraleftism.

In the years that followed, the 'new left' formed from the student revolt decided to 'turn to the working class'. Much of Harman's book is devoted to this. The Sisyphus theory of class struggle

was the order of the day and has remained so ever since. The IMG hung on to its internationalist credentials a little longer than the SWP before coming to rest in the lap of a Labour Party which is even to the right of Wilson. Today, the street-fighting youth, especially if they are black, are dismissed by SWP and IMG alike as lumpen proletariat. Tariq Ali, who called for the abolition of money on the BBC in 1968, will not now face a little aggro with Channel 4, his bosses, in order to give public support to Viraj Mendis.

But dismissive though one could be of the British 1968, it was in part of the islands which Britain claims as its territory that a working class movement was prepared to challenge the might of the British state. In the North of Ireland in 1968, a civil rights movement was born, modelling itself on the black movement in the USA. The black ghettos of Detroit were the Catholic ghettos of Derry. Working class men, women and children, and students

were on the march against bigotry and oppression. Tariq Ali does not think it worth a mention - there were no Northern Irish Mick Jagers to have lunch with. Harman makes allowance for the Irish movement, which is more than IS did at the time - welcoming the British troops as peace-keepers.

He goes on to describe the inevitable 'degeneration' of the movement which had the (mistaken) temerity to take up arms to defend its community and which failed to organise Protestant and Catholic workers against the bosses -

'Protestant workers, whose own struggles were at a low ebb as the decline in the province's traditional industries sapped their militancy (! CB) were rarely drawn into struggle against big business and the state, and did not question their old sectarian Loyalist allegiances. So the Catholic minority fought alone, and saw the Loyalist workers as on the side of its enemy.' (Harman p257).

Such lies disguised as theory have guided the SWP ever since. They are not alone: it is a theory which predominates on the British left. Not even a crack on the head from the RUC would convince them that the Loyalist workers are not neutral. Taking the side of the Republican movement in Ireland requires a direct challenge to the British state: the British 'new left' proved no more able to do than the 'old left' in Paris. It is the measure of the British left generation of '68 and after that it failed to aid the struggle in Ireland. ■

1968: a student generation in revolt
 Ronald Fraser, Chatto & Windus, hb, 370pp, £14.95.
 Sixty-Eight: the year of the barricades
 David Cate, Hamish Hamilton, hb, 464pp, £14.95.
 Street Fighting Years Tariq Ali,
 Fontana/Collins, pb, 280pp, £3.95.
 The Fire Last Time: 1968 and after Chris
 Harman, Bookmarks, pb, 406pp, £6.95.



Tet offensive prelude to Vietnam's victory

'The Tet offensive marked a turning point in this war, as our president said. It burst like a bubble the artificial optimism built up by the Pentagon.' General Giap, Commander of the People's Liberation Army

By 1968 the US had deployed half a million troops in Vietnam. The combined strength of the US-Saigon command was 1,200,000 men. Between 1965-67 the US had spent \$26 billion

on the war. The low intensity strategy had been escalated to all out warfare, involving the use of every type of weapon other than nuclear. With an economy that accounted for a third of the world's industrial output pitted against a population of 31 million people, 80 per cent of whom were peasants in a country no bigger than the state of Florida, the US strategists counted upon their weaponry to bring them victory. From August 1967 onwards US B-52s bombed Hanoi and the northern port of Hai-phong almost constantly: day and night.

In the last days of January 1968 on the eve of the Vietnamese lunar new year - the Tet Festival - the People's Liberation Army launched a countrywide offensive throughout South Vietnam. It was co-ordinated with popular uprisings in the major cities and enemy

bases. On the night of 31 January the liberation forces struck at Saigon, capturing the main headquarters of the puppet army and blowing up Saigon radio. US war planes and military installations were destroyed. Police stations were ransacked. Five of seven floors of the US embassy in Saigon were occupied. Revolutionary control was established for several days in five out of Saigon's nine boroughs. All routes into the city were severed. Saigon remained encircled for weeks.

The old imperial capital of Hue was attacked and its fortress captured. For four weeks the revolutionaries held it, beating off combined US-Saigon troop assaults. The US Air Force flattened large parts of the city. Liberation forces laid siege to the US base at Khe Sanh, a garrison of over 6,000 marines. US Commander-in-Chief in Vietnam, General Westmoreland, responded to an enquiry from the Joint Chiefs of Staff about what to do in Khe Sanh: 'I visualise that either

tactical nuclear weapons or chemical agents would be active candidates for employment.' It was not until 9 July, 170 days after the siege began, that the US forces managed to evacuate, having abandoned all attempts to keep the base.

News of the Tet offensive flashed around the world: for a moment the giant US war machine seemed paralysed and helpless. As it tried to recover its composure the Pentagon began to peddle the myth that Tet was an appalling catastrophe for the patriotic forces with 'staggering losses sustained by the Viet Cong.' In fact, the offensive was a major political victory: in many places the puppet administration collapsed completely; 169 garrisons defected to the liberation forces: in just one week more soldiers of the puppet army defected than during the whole of 1966. US troop desertions also increased. General Westmoreland was recalled to Washington and replaced. In an election year President Johnson declared he would not run for office again. The US was brought to the negotiating table.

NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL RESISTED

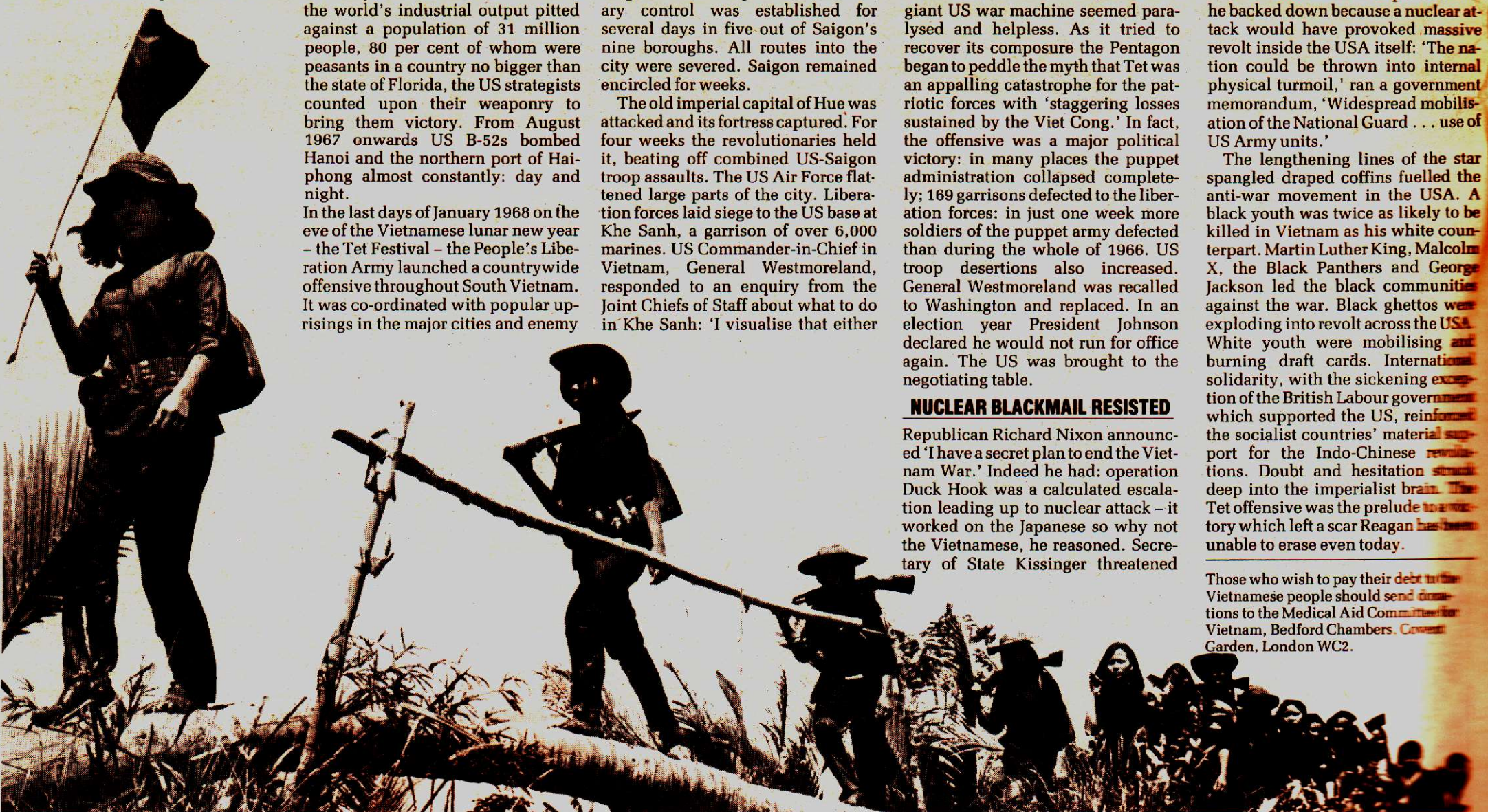
Republican Richard Nixon announced 'I have a secret plan to end the Vietnam War.' Indeed he had: operation Duck Hook was a calculated escalation leading up to nuclear attack - it worked on the Japanese so why not the Vietnamese, he reasoned. Secretary of State Kissinger threatened

North Vietnam with nuclear attack if they did not cease operations in the South by 1 November 1969. In October the US went on full scale nuclear alert for the first time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The Vietnamese revolutionaries refused to submit to nuclear blackmail.

Nixon himself later explained that he backed down because a nuclear attack would have provoked massive revolt inside the USA itself: 'The nation could be thrown into internal physical turmoil,' ran a government memorandum, 'Widespread mobilisation of the National Guard... use of US Army units.'

The lengthening lines of the star spangled draped coffins fuelled the anti-war movement in the USA. A black youth was twice as likely to be killed in Vietnam as his white counterpart. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and George Jackson led the black communities against the war. Black ghettos were exploding into revolt across the USA. White youth were mobilising and burning draft cards. International solidarity, with the sickening exception of the British Labour government which supported the US, reinforced the socialist countries' material support for the Indo-Chinese revolutions. Doubt and hesitation struck deep into the imperialist brain. The Tet offensive was the prelude to a victory which left a scar Reagan has been unable to erase even today.

Those who wish to pay their debt to the Vietnamese people should send donations to the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam, Bedford Chambers, Covent Garden, London WC2.



VMDC fights back

In anticipation of Viraj's appeal and the Home Office threat to raid the sanctuary, the VMDC mounted an intensive campaign to mobilise support.

- Over 250 people have signed the VMDC's emergency pledge. £1,300 has been donated by signatories who include the Bishops of Hulme, Coventry and Southampton, MPs Keith Vaz, Jeremy Corbyn and David Nellist, football manager Brian Clough, playwright Harold Pinter, NUR General Secretary Jimmy Knapp, Deputy General Secretary of CPSA John McCready, Mick McGahey (NUM), Lord Kirkhill, Tom Robinson and many others.

- VMDC speakers addressed over 30 meetings throughout the country including: Bradford University, Tameside Technical College, St Albans AA Group, Labour Party Branches in Barlow Moor, Chorlton and Stockport, Rochdale Youth and Community Workers Union, Islington ARAFA, NALGO 'kitchen meetings' and NALGO and NUPE shop stewards.

- At 9am on 12 April Liverpool's immigration offices were occupied by 20 people. Mainly from the Liverpool

Anarchist Group, they unfurled banners in solidarity with Viraj and against immigration controls. The media's reports of a 'siege' and a 'hostage' were exposed by the lone 'hostage', Joyce who said that the demonstrators were 'all very nice'.

- Four activists climbed onto the roof of Manchester Town Hall on 9 May to unfurl a banner announcing the appeal. Declan said: 'We had to show support for Viraj and also show that people in Manchester are not going to sit down and allow the government to commit murder in our name.' Despite being chased by police two demonstrators got to Deputy Leader Val Dunn's office. She climbed to the roof and with banner in hand escorted the demonstrators down at the end of the protest.

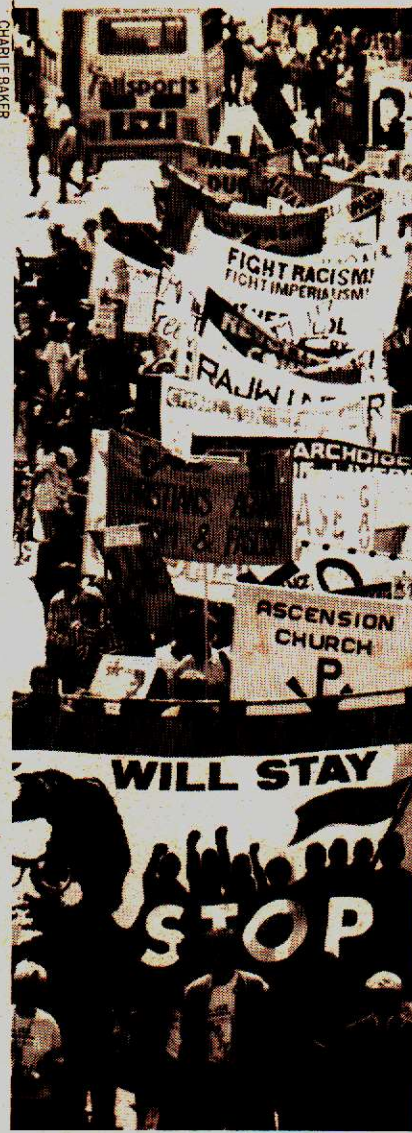
- On Saturday and Sunday 7/8 May the Gronigen Charter Group met in the Sanctuary. Supported by the World Council of Churches, the Group is attempting to co-ordinate sanctuary work in Europe. Group member John van Tilborg, MEP from Holland, stated that if Viraj loses his appeal he will put down an emergency motion before the European Parliament.

30 day non-stop vigil

50 people, including Deputy Council leader, Valerie Dunn, launched the VMDC's 30 day non-stop vigil outside the sanctuary on 10 May. The vigil will be built into a massive presence to defend Viraj against any attack.

Already support for the vigil is growing. Lots of young people have become involved with the VMDC for the first time. Passing the vigil, people have given £10 and £20 donations. Young Luke gave all his pocket money of 50p. Hulme Labour Party has pledged to do five hours a week on the rota and other organisations are being encouraged to fill slots. Manchester RCG has committed itself to the Thursday evening slot and its members will be doing many others.

The vigil has featured on national TV and local radio. ICR, a pirate station broadcasting to the black community, is carrying hourly reports. **JOIN THE VIGIL! HELP DEFEND VIRAJ'S LIFE!**



'I am determined to stop the Thatcher government attempt to deport me to my death. I urge all those opposed to Thatcher's reactionary policies to make common cause with us.' Viraj Mendis

SUPPORT FOR VIRAJ

'We are convinced that the effect on this community were the deportation order to be enforced would be very serious. Contrary to some people's expectations, the sanctuary is gaining considerable local support on humanitarian grounds. Similarly if the situation goes on without a compassionate and reasonable solution, the already strong feelings of hopelessness, desperation and resentment by many people here may well boil over into a series of major confrontations which we would all seek to avoid.'

From letter by Hulme and Moss Side Christian Fellowship to Douglas Hurd, 9 May 1988

'As a Sri Lankan and a Tamil, I know that the deportation of Viraj Mendis would be nothing more than sending him to his death.'

K Sivanandan, Director of Institute of Race Relations, Editor of Race and Class

'If Viraj were white and could run 100 metres in 9.9 seconds we wouldn't be here today.'

Father Bobby Gilmore, Irish Chaplaincy at Viraj's appeal on 10 May

'The NEC of the CPSA recognises the dangers to Viraj Mendis if he were to be deported. We call on the Home Office to drop its deportation plans.'

Motion passed by CPSA NEC on 9 May 1988

'The Viraj Mendis case is an example of the way in which we are becoming less open to refugees and I hope very much the government will think again.'

Bishop of Kingston

THE VMDC IS ORGANISED TO FIGHT!

Viraj's appeal exposed the limits of British justice. A man's life was at stake but all attempts to present new and more conclusive evidence that in Sri Lanka Viraj would be in greater danger than ever before was excluded. With only four days' notice, Viraj's well-briefed barrister was unable to attend. Ian Macdonald QC, who stepped in, was challenged by the Home Office, backed by the judges, every time he even hinted at such evidence.

The hearing therefore revolved around a 1984 letter from the Sri Lankan High Commissioner which was then presented by the Home Office as vital evidence guaranteeing Viraj's safety. Ian Macdonald noted that the Sri Lankan government was hardly

likely to publicly announce its intentions to persecute Viraj. Placing reliance on the letter was obviously unreasonable. If the judgement goes against Viraj he will continue the legal fight for his right to stay by applying for leave to appeal to the House of Lords.

Outside the court the VMDC kept up an all day picket, while in Downing Street the VMDC Religious Support Group organised a prayer vigil. Inside, the public gallery was packed with supporters including leading representatives of the RCG, Father John Methuen, Viraj's MP Bob Litherland and Mr Maharasingham of the Tamil Action Committee. ■

In the four days leading up to the appeal the RCG initiated an intensive

VMDC campaign to mobilise for a court picket and launch the 30 day vigil at the sanctuary. In Manchester and London phones were borrowed to contact every supporter. City AA lent a phone and 20 City AA members helped with the job. With emergency leaflets supporters went knocking on doors in Hulme and Moss Side to alert the community. Intensive effort was also put in to contacting the press, organisations, MPs, councillors and church groups.

By Tuesday morning the results were evident. ITN and BBC TV News, BBC Radio Manchester, Breakfast TV, Black Londoners, IRN, BBC North West, the *Manchester Evening News*, the *Daily Telegraph*, *Times* and other newspapers

carried reports of the appeal and interviews with Viraj. In the House of Commons Bob Cryer tabled an early day motion and many other MPs, Bishops, MEPs and other public personalities made solidarity statements.

But the most important result was the fighting picket of the court and the successful launch of the 30 day vigil. The Home Office was warned - the VMDC is organised and will do everything to ensure that Viraj is not deported. ■

Independent Public Inquiry

On 9 May, an Independent Public Inquiry was announced into whether Viraj Mendis has 'a well founded fear of persecution in the event of his removal to Sri Lanka'. The four members of the panel - Lionel Morrison (former President of the National Union of Journalists), Gordon Nardell (solicitor), Dr Robert Bradnock (Chair of the Liberal Party Foreign Affairs Panel) and Rev David Haslam (Secretary of the Community and Race Relations Unit of the British Council of Churches) - are expected to announce their findings next month after having taken submissions orally and in writing. The panel can be contacted at: The Secretary, Viraj Mendis Inquiry, c/o NUJ, Acorn House, 314 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1.

Why Tariq Ali will not be marching

Tariq Ali, famous for his 'street fighting years' of 1968 refused to make a solidarity statement for Viraj. He claimed it would allow opponents of Channel 4's 'Bandung File', of which he is a producer, to undermine the programme. Asked to make an exception given Viraj's life was in danger he replied 'There's no point in trying to persuade me'. Once a revolutionary, Tariq Ali now prefers to look after his television career. Shame on him.

Keeping company with Tariq Ali was left-wing Labour MP Chris Mullin. He

insisted on finding out what organisation Dave, who phoned him, belonged to. When Dave said the RCG, Mullin refused to make a statement on the grounds that the VMDC was a 'front' for the RCG.

Roy Hattersley, Labour's Deputy Leader, managed to make a racist joke about Viraj's sanctuary on Radio Four's *News Quiz*. He suggested that Richard Ingrams should 'play the organ and drive him out'. Labour's NEC supports Viraj's fight to stay. Perhaps they should drive him out. ■

STOP THE DEPORTATION

'I hope that the Tamil community here in Britain will raise its voice against the deportation of Viraj Mendis, because we know what fate can await a Sinhalese who raises his voice in support of the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka.'

Former Indian Government Foreign Secretary AP Venkateswaran

RAJ MENDIS

LIFE OR DEATH?



What you can do

- Join the VMDC's 30 day vigil outside the sanctuary to defend Viraj's life from attack.
- Join the VMDC's national demonstration on Saturday 28 May. The entire socialist and anti-racist movement must mobilise for it.
- The Labour Party NEC and Conference have voted to support Viraj. Now is the time for them to act. Put pressure on all Labour MPs, councillors and organisations to join the 30 day vigil and national demonstration.
- Invite VMDC speakers to meetings of your organisation, collect and send donations, write to the press and do whatever you see necessary to ensure that Viraj is not deported.

Unite and fight to save Viraj's life!

The long battle to save RCG member Viraj Mendis's life is entering its most dangerous stage. His last recourse to the courts was on 10 and 11 May. With the judgement imminent, the Home Office told the *Daily Telegraph*:

'We have not found it necessary to go into the sanctuary, but if the appeal goes against him [Viraj Mendis] his deportation will be effected as soon as can be done.'

A highly organised police operation against the sanctuary is being prepared right now to send Viraj to his execution in Sri Lanka.

Viraj has lived in Britain for 15 years, all his adult life. A supporter of the Tamil liberation movement he would, in Sri Lanka, be a target for Eyewardene's security police and the Sinhala chauvinist death squads. He has a right to remain here without fear of deportation.

The VMDC and its sanctuary have already achieved tangible results for the socialist movement. It has built one of the most significant forces in the struggle against the racist immigration controls. Its open, broad based and non-sectarian organisation and its understanding that an effective movement can only be built by starting from amongst the most oppressed and extending to all other spheres of society has already borne fruit.

In 1987 inspired by the VMDC Rajwinder Singh in Bradford, Renoukaben Lakhani in Leicester and Salema Begum in Chorlton entered sanctuary

to fight deportation. Salema and Renoukaben have won and Rajwinder is on the way to winning. This year five new sanctuaries were started. Days before Viraj's appeal the British Council of Churches' Community and Race Relations Unit produced 'A Statement on Sanctuary' to co-ordinate churches prepared to offer sanctuary. Home Office Minister Timothy Renton rounded on them:

'... I find it surprising and regrettable that there should be any advocacy of a policy that takes people further outside the framework of immigration law... The one or two cases in which I have granted exceptional leave to remain to people who have sought refuge in churches owed nothing to their attempts to delay removal.'

This is a barefaced lie. Without sanctuary Rajwinder, Renoukaben and Salema would all have been deported

immediately. With sanctuary they won.

The VMDC's work has begun the process of building an effective anti-deportation and sanctuary movement. With the government's new Immigration Bill sanctuary will become an even more important weapon in fighting deportations. This is why the Home Office is determined to defeat the VMDC and is prepared to sacrifice Viraj's life.

ACT NOW!

The Home Office can be stopped. In the next few weeks every left and progressive organisation must commit its resources and members to securing a victory for Viraj. A defeat for the VMDC will mean death for Viraj. It will severely set back the anti-racist and socialist movement. A victory will consolidate and take forward the work begun by the VMDC. ■

■ On 14 April Barbara Ahmed won her three-year campaign to be reunited with her husband.

■ On 26 April the Adedimeji family went into sanctuary in Handsworth. The Home Office are reviewing the case.

■ Baba Bakhtaura has won a year's leave to remain in Britain despite an appeal by the Home Office to the High Court and House of Lords.

These pages were compiled by Eddie Abrahams and Nickl Rensten. For this issue of *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* write to BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION MANCHESTER

Viraj Mendis Will Stay!
No to Death in Sri Lanka!
No to Police Attacks on Sanctuary!
No to Deportation!

Organise and mobilise to save Viraj's life!

Saturday 28 May
Assemble 12 noon Albert Square
March to the Sanctuary

London—York Way, Kings Cross, 7am
Tyne and Wear—Central Station, Newcastle, 7.30pm
Glasgow—George Square, City Centre, 7am
Nottingham—Salutation, City Centre, 9am
Birmingham—Cambridge Street, City Centre, 9am
Leeds/Bradford—Norfolk Gardens Hotel, Bradford, 10am

Lancaster—Dalton Square, 10.30am
Also from: Edinburgh, Dundee, Bristol, Rossendale, Leicester and Liverpool.

For more information about transport and the VMDC emergency mobilisation contact VMDC c/o North Hulme Centre, Jackson Crescent, Hulme, Manchester M15 5AL (phone 061-234 3168)

DEPORTATIONS

'I appeal to the Home Office at the 11th hour to show some sense and some compassion and to allow Viraj Mendis to stay. You have hounded him for long enough.'

Chris Smith, MP

'As a black MP involved in fighting against deportations, I give my wholehearted support for Viraj Mendis. The sanctuary he has taken has encouraged many black people in this country. I firmly believe that Viraj Mendis should be given the right to stay in Britain.'

Keith Vaz, MP

'I pledge my continued support to Viraj in the knowledge that he faces persecution if deported to Sri Lanka.'

John Pilger, journalist



Racist repression in West Germany

'Just like Kurdistan'

A new wave of terror has been launched in West Germany against Kurds sympathetic to the Kurdish National Liberation Front. Up till now over 30 Kurds have been arrested, 15 of them imprisoned awaiting trial under 'suspicion of membership in a terrorist organisation and other offences'. They are being held under the harshest prison conditions in isolation cells in West Germany's notorious high-security prisons. As many of them have no family here, they are deprived of visits altogether. SYLVIA and EMINE report.

Prior to these arrests, numerous homes of patriotic Kurds along with the offices and clubs of the various Kurdish Workers Associations and committees were raided by specially armed 'anti-terror' squads. Doors were smashed in and furniture damaged, materials and items were confiscated, the terror squads showed themselves up in their true fascist colours by beating the Kurds up and arresting them at gun point. One of the Kurds arrested and held in solitary confinement stated that he felt like he was back home in Kurdistan.

The Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) representation in Europe has said:

'... the spokesman for the Chief Federal Prosecutor, Kurt Rebmann, declared... that a Kurd had been kidnapped with the intention of bringing him before a "people's

court of justice" of the PKK in Cologne. This declaration is absolutely ridiculous and is based on false information... in order to criminalise the just struggle of the Kurdish people, several plots and operations have been started.'

The PKK representation in Europe has declared that the Kurd is a police informer, working for the Turkish Secret Police (MIT). The MIT and the West German Secret Police always work closely together. The statements that this Kurd made provided the Federal Crime Authorities with the ideal opportunity to launch their latest attack.

The papers, name lists and contact addresses confiscated in the summer raids of 1987 have proved most useful, not only for the Turkish authorities to which they were passed on, but also for the West German authori-



Kurdish fighters demonstrate their strength

ties in determining precisely which Kurds should be arrested in the '1988 Offensive'. Most of the Kurds imprisoned since February 1988 are active members of the Kurdish National Liberation Front.

Western European countries have always supported the fascist Turkish state in the annihilation of the Kurdish liberation movement, whether in Turkey/Kurdistan or here in Europe as the following information shows: **1984 Kurdistan** - the armed struggle is taken up by the Kurdish liberation units

Sweden - eight Kurds arrested as 'terrorists', PKK labelled 'terrorist organisation'. Culminates in accusation that Olaf Palme assassinated by the PKK

1986 Kurdistan - Turkish airforce bombs Kurdish villages in Iraq from where it is claimed the PKK has been launching its armed attacks. Hundreds of civilians massacred

West Germany - a young Kurd is set-up and framed with planning to blow up the Turkish consulate in Hamburg **1987 Kurdistan** - the ARGK (Peoples Liberation Army of Kurdistan) conduct a successful summer offensive against the Turkish fascist colonialists

Switzerland, France and West Germany - Mass arrests, raids on private homes and offices of Kurdish organisations

1988 Kurdistan - 5 February 20 Kurdish political prisoners condemned to death. 2,000 political prisoners in Kurdistan and Turkey enter hunger strike

West Germany - 5 February the commencement of the latest wave of mass arrests, raids and imprisonments.

Putsch General Kenan Evren and Turkey's Prime Minister Turgut Özal regularly call upon European nations to hinder Kurdish 'separatist, terrorist activities' in Western Europe; failure to do so is threatened with the breaking off of economic relations and Turkey's departure from NATO.

The latest wave of imprisonments in West Germany was planned and carried out in collusion with the Turkish authorities. No sooner were the Kurds held in isolation cells when Turkey's Minister for Internal Affairs, Mustafa Kalemli, paid a sudden visit to West Germany in order to deliver his very own personal 'thank you' message to the West German authorities for having carried out this dirty work for the Turkish fascists. Interestingly, this visit was reported in all

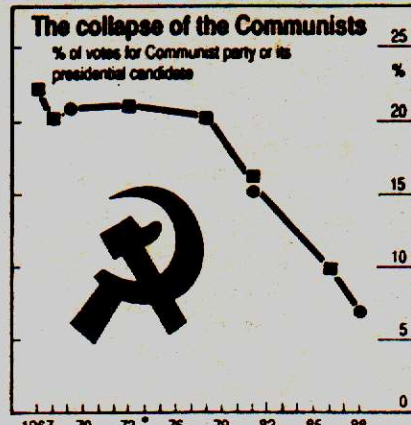
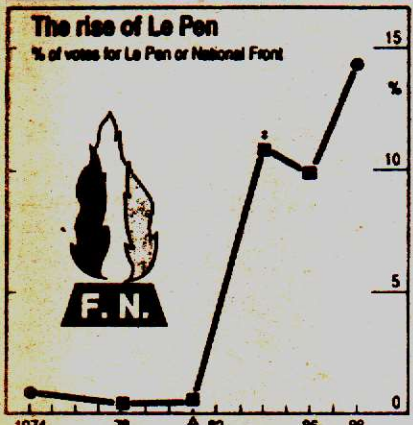
the Turkish newspapers available in Europe (*Tercüman, Hürriyet, Milli-yet* etc), but in none of the West German newspapers.

400,000 Kurds live in West Germany alone. It is estimated that between 25,000 and 30,000 Kurds support the various political and cultural events in solidarity with the Kurdish National Liberation Front. More and more are gaining a political awareness and national identity during their time as immigrant workers in Western Europe. It is clearly in the interests of governments of nations like West Germany to destroy and isolate this revolutionary potential in the heart of imperialist Europe.

Characteristically during a recent demonstration in Bonn in protest against the criminalisation of Kurdish patriots attended by over 5,000 people, the police launched a familiar attack on the demonstrators - not at the Kurds, however, but at a small group of West Germans marching with the Kurds. Brandishing batons and using tear gas, they stormed into the demonstrators, beating them up and driving them apart from the rest of the Kurdish demonstrators. Eleven were arrested for 'assaulting policemen', one having to be admitted to hospital with a broken leg after a police officer had jumped on him. ■



Above: Fascist Le Pen; below left: 'Socialist' Mitterrand; below right: Gaullist Chirac



Le Pen: Fascism on the march

COLETTE LÉVY

François Mitterrand retained the French presidency and confirmed his move to the right by naming Michel Rocard as Prime Minister. Rocard is known as the 'dream breaker' for his blunt free market views and fierce opposition to the Socialist Party's 1981 programme of radical reforms. However, it is the rise of fascism in France that is now revealed by the results of the first round of the presidential elections which gave 14.5% of the vote to Le Pen, the National Front's candidate! This represents the votes of 4 million people, located in all parts of France and belonging to various social classes. Le Pen won the votes of many small farmers who feel threatened by EEC policies. He gained 20 per cent of the votes cast by the miners of Alsace. He outpolled Mitterrand, 26.91 per cent, with 28.34 per cent in Marseilles where there is a concentration of North African workers living alongside large numbers of 'pied noirs', the ex-OAS from 'French' Algeria who never forgave de Gaulle for being forced to grant that country its independence. In 1981 the Communist Party topped the poll in Marseilles; this year it lost half of its vote in the city. Le Pen also won in the Mediterranean ports of Nice and

Toulon. But most alarming is the vote of the workers in the 'Red Belt' of Seine-Saint Denis, around Paris, who traditionally voted Communist, who this time cast over 20 per cent of their ballots for the National Front candidate. Le Pen has also succeeded in rallying to him many young people and students.

Le Pen calls for mass deportations of immigrants, law and order and the removal of social security benefits. He tortured Algerians during the national liberation struggle. He openly hates Arabs, Jews and black people. National Front members have carried out racist murders. A year ago Le Pen described the Nazi extermination of six million Jews as 'a mere detail of history'. He is recorded as saying 'Uncle Dolfie [Adolph Hitler] didn't do enough'. 'Les Arabes à la mer' (throw the Arabs in the sea) is one of his favourite phrases. This man announced the 24 April poll 'a political earthquake' and now vies for leadership of the French right in opposition to President Mitterrand's government.

FRENCH LEFT'S OPPORTUNISM

The rise of French fascism is directly attributable to the failure of the left to combat racism and support the immigrant workers, particularly the Algerians settled in France. Since Mitterrand's 'socialist break-through' in 1981 the government has moved

steadily to the right, imposing austerity measures that hit the unemployed and low paid workers. In 1983 the wage freeze led to numerous strikes in the car industry. These were initiated by militant immigrant workers. The Communist trade union, the CGT, did their best to quench the militancy of the strikers, not to embarrass the Communist Party ministers who shared the government at the time! After the Talbot defeat, 20,000 jobs were lost and thousands of immigrants forced to leave France. It is only at the end of 1984 that the CP broke from the Mitterrand government, by then its collaboration with the so-called socialist government had completely tarnished its image.

Municipalities, including those led by the Socialist Party and Communist Party, have applied racist policies on housing imposing quotas on the number of immigrants, with a Communist mayor actually leading a gang of thugs to 'clean out' a reception area for immigrants in Vitry in 1980. The Communist Party has trailed the worst chauvinistic traits in the French working class, appealing to a nationalistic defence of French industry. It has refused commitment to the liberation movements in the Caribbean, Saharan Africa and New Caledonia fighting against French imperialism. It has pandered to the needs of electioneering rather than the needs of the most oppressed in the working class. It has sought respectability, and ingratiated itself in Mitterrand's government in an attempt to court the middle-class and more affluent workers. It has paved the way for Le Pen who now garners the voters it once had. Concessions made to the right have strengthened it rather than undermined it. ■

Afghanistan treaty

BOB SHEPHERD AND TREVOR RAYNE

The Economist was positively triumphant in its assessment of the 14 April Geneva agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the USA: 'the Soviet Union has lost in Afghanistan... for the first time ever the borders of communism will be shrinking because Russia has been beaten.' Thus excited, The Economist dared to dream of further prizes: Central America, Angola, Ethiopia. The Wall Street Journal foresaw 'trouble for the Soviet Union' with a counter-revolutionary victory 'stirring up the 35 million Moslems in its Central Asian Republics'.

The agreement has four parts and two private 'understandings': Afghanistan and Pakistan pledge non-interference in each others' internal affairs; over 3 million refugees will return from Pakistan; Soviet troops commencing withdrawal on 15 May, half of them to be removed in 3 months, the rest within 9 months; the Soviet Union and USA to act as guarantors. Privately, the Soviet Union accepted the US demand for 'symmetry' in aid: that is, the US will continue to supply the counter-revolutionaries while the Soviet Union supplies the government; and

the UN will try to negotiate a coalition government between the ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and the counter-revolutionaries.

Over a million Afghans have been killed out of a population of 15 million since the counter-revolution was launched in 1979. There are 6 million refugees. The US and Britain have sent money, weapons and advisers to the counter-revolution. Against this background, and following an initial failure at land reform, which proved divisive, the PDPA went on to implement major reforms in education, health and social policies - in particular unburdening women of part of the feudal yoke. The Geneva agreement, although allowing the Soviet Union to withdraw its 115,000 troops, places the gains of the revolution at risk: both from forces in the country willing to join a coalition government, and from counter-revolutionaries based in Pakistan.

Fortunately, there are serious divisions in the counter-revolutionaries' ranks, although as yet they all swear to fight on until the PDPA is defeated. A defeat for the Afghan revolution would be a major blow to anti-imperialist forces world-wide, and an encouragement to the imperialists' global counter-revolutionary offensive. As of now the revolutionaries appear to be concentrating forces into defensible positions. The US has stepped up its arms lift to the counter-revolution, including Stinger missiles.



Palestinian youth continue to fight the Israeli fascists

SIX MONTHS OF REVOLT 'Abu Jihad was the Palestinian people'

The assassination, on 16 April, of top PLO leader Abu Jihad by an Israeli military squad in Tunisia, did not and could not halt the Palestinian uprising. Abu Jihad, 52 years old, who was Yassir Arafat's deputy in Al Fatah, had major responsibility for co-ordinating external support for the uprising. He was machine-gunned to death in his flat, in front of his wife and daughter, while one of the killers filmed the event. EDDIE ABRAHAMS reports.

'Abu Jihad was not just Abu Jihad. He was the Palestinian people. We shall not forget this' said a Palestinian youth as thousands of people on the West Bank and Gaza poured into the streets to stage symbolic funerals and confront Israeli troops. In the most fierce fighting since the uprising began, 15 Palestinians were shot dead on the day of the killing and over 500,000 were placed under curfew.

Abu Jihad fell in one of the most momentous periods of the Palestinian liberation struggle. The five month uprising in the heart of Palestine has created a new generation of leaders and organisers of the mass popular movement who will, against all the odds, continue the battle which Abu Jihad helped begin when he organised the PLO's first military

operation against Israel on 1 January 1965.

RESISTANCE GROWS

The popular committees and organisations that the uprising has created continue the work of leading the resistance, organising strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and funerals. In five months, the uprising has produced a new movement which no amount of Zionist repression can now destroy. Leader of the Israeli fascist Tehiya Party, Geula Cohen admitted as much when she said she fears the Palestinians leading the uprising 'more than (those) from the headquarters of the PLO. They are producing not bombs, but time bombs. They are producing leaders, propaganda and ideology.' In their long history of collaboration with imper-

ialism and Zionism, Arab reaction will now find it more difficult than ever to manipulate and abuse the Palestinian revolution to secure a sell-out settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While the resistance continues, Palestinian casualties rise as Zionism's iron fist is brought down on the masses with hardly a murmur of protest in imperialist capital cities. The death toll now stands at more than 290, at least 30 by asphyxiation from CS gas. Use of gas by Israeli soldiers has resulted in 60 recorded miscarriages. Over 7,000 more have been injured and 17,000 have passed through Israeli prisons. Thousands of prisoners are held in concentration camps. The most notorious is the Israeli military camp in the desert near the Egyptian border - Kitzza'ot. The 3,000 prisoners held there live in 12 squares of 8 tents each, with open sewers and no communication allowed between the squares. They are forced to work in the sun for 15 hours a day with only one bucket of water for every 25 people. For refusing to work, detainees are handcuffed and kept in the sun all day.

Abu Jihad's funeral in Damascus on 20 April brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets in a demonstration of resolve and determination to continue the battle. Abu Jihad's teenage son, on arriving for the funeral expressed the stand of the entire Palestinian people: 'We are now more determined to continue fighting until we liberate the whole of Palestine.' ■



Soviet troops leaving Afghanistan after fighting counter-revolution

SWP welcomes 'defeat' of Russians

TREVOR RAYNE

'Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism' reads the mast-head of Socialist Worker. 'Just as socialists welcomed the defeat of the Americans in Vietnam, we welcome the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan' concludes Chris Harman in the 16 April edition.

THATCHER EMBRACES TURKISH FASCIST

Following her April visit to Turkey Thatcher has invited President General Evren to Britain in July. Britain will be the first West European nation to play host to this butcher. Evren led the 1980 military coup that tortured over 100,000 political prisoners and executed dozens: 400 still await approval by the National Assembly for military court orders of execution. The Organising Committee to Prevent General Evren's Visit to the UK calls for support and sponsors: it can be reached at Liberty Hall, 489 Kingsland Rd, London E8 Tel: 01 249 6930

Erase from your judgement any honest assessment of the forces involved in history or their achievements, cast aside any doubts about aligning yourself with Thatcher and Reagan, immunise yourself with a theory and blind yourself to its chauvinism, and you too can side with counter-revolution in the name of 'international socialism'. For you see the world's great revolutions were led by imposters, and their followers, just dupes. Thus,

'The Afghan Communists were not based on the country's small working class or its mass of impoverished peasants... Their aim was not workers' or peasants' power, but to modernise the country and create the conditions for the accumulation of capital. In this way they were like the followers of Nasser in Egypt in the 1950's, of Castro in Cuba and of Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam'.

Socialist Worker readers might care to ask themselves, why is it that imperialism spend billions trying to destroy these efforts at 'capitalist accumulation', and why is it that the Socialist Workers Party sides with their efforts? ■

This is Sri Lanka!

- More than 20,000 people killed in the past four years;
- National Security Minister Athulathudali reports 815,000 refugees out of a total population of 2.2 million in the north and east of the island;
- A further quarter of a million refugees are scattered across the globe;
- Half a million stateless people live in Sri Lanka;
- 100,000 Indian troops, one for every thirty Tamils, are stationed on the island;
- 3,000 Tamil and Sinhalese political prisoners remain in detention in contravention of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement;
- 'Methods of torture include, hanging people upside down while beating them all over the body, and insertion of chilli powder in the nostrils, mouth and eyes and on the genitals...' Amnesty International;
- On a single day, 24 January, this

year, 1,154 Sinhalese and 890 Tamils were held without charge under the Prevention of Terrorism Act;

- 'A blot on the statute book of any civilised country': the International Commission of Jurists on the PTA;
- 'The Special Task Force, armed police and militia stormed a JVP jungle hide-out and killed five men... The bodies were displayed in front of the police station where they were doused with petrol and burned': an incident earlier this year reported by the British Refugee Council;
- Ruling UNP politicians and supporters have been killed at the rate of two a day for six months;
- The JVP have sworn to kill all who support the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement or the Tamil liberation cause;
- Israeli Mossad and the ex-SAS of KMS Ltd. remain in the service of the government in contravention of the

Agreement;

- The Attorney-General's office is to take action against 80 students accused of 'whipping up unrest' on Sinhalese university campuses. Forty were imprisoned earlier in the year;
- Martin Ennals, Secretary General of the World Human Rights Organisation International Alert, was refused permission to land at Katunayake International Airport on a fact finding mission into Indian troop atrocities. Mr Ennals was formerly head of Amnesty International;
- 'Ninety per cent of the population are pro-LTTE. If the people were not pro-LTTE there would be something wrong with them.' The Tigers are the 'social projection of the accumulated grievances of the island's minority Tamil community for the past 4 years. The LTTE has fought for the honour and safety, and it is part of the parcel of the society'. Major General Sardesh Pande, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, 30 March 1988.

VICTORY TO THE LIBERATION
TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM!
VICTORY TO VIRAJ MENDIS!

Prisoners attacked in Long Lartin

John Bowden and Alan Cooke write about recent events in Long Lartin 'I was transferred here to Bristol a couple of weeks ago under the terms of CI 10/74, and shall probably remain here for an additional fortnight.

... during the brief time that I was held in the segregation unit at Long Lartin while an escort and transport was organised to bring me here, there was a collective protest which resulted in damage to a number of cells and the deployment of a "control and restraint" team of warders, I, and probably a few other prisoners afterwards, was eventually removed "under restraint", ie in body belt and ankle straps...

John Bowden
HMP Bristol

'On 14 April I was being held in the segregation unit following an incident on the wing. Whilst in segregation the "gest:po" were proving very difficult.

'Meantime, next door, our friend John Bowden is having a similar problem with them. I understand he was ambushed by a dozen or so "brave" staff while en route to the gymnasium. During our rebellion we caused some minor destruction to the cells. This act of rebellion urged others to follow suit and methodically rearrange the seg unit.

'Inevitably the rebellion was attacked by Long Lartin's "1st regiment" who stormed my cell. They struck my head releasing a flow of blood and causing other bruising to my body.

'Following this brutal assault, myself and John were ghosted out within the hour, my head still losing blood. On arrival at Cardiff I received four stitches to my head injury and it's now healing in solitary.

'I can only assume my allocation here was an intentional move to destroy any possibility of my wife visiting me.

'I have only decided to write this because it portrays the absolute need for the "independent and impartial" investigatory power I recently mentioned (see *FRFI* 77), also because of your support for John who has obviously shared half the burden of this incident.'

Alan Cooke
HMP Cardiff



POPPERFOTO

The struggle for prisoners rights

Prisoners are their own worst enemies for they permit themselves to be divided. When Gov Whitty made his infamous declaration I ask in all curiosity... how many Long Lartin prisoners did anything but moan? BRUCE CHILDS from Parkhurst prison contributes to the debate on prisoners' rights.

I agree, many prisoners have families to think of; many prisoners were doing a long time; many were only serving short term sentences and didn't wish to be involved. How many wrote a complaining letter, phrasing it in such a manner it would be suppressed? Having to have a call-up, and be issued a re-write! How many then made an application and lodged an official Governors complaint? How many requested a petition on the following day? To write to the Home Office and state Witty had violated ESMR regulation 27 para 2... 'Collective punishment shall be prohibited!' How many then requested a further petition (which cannot be refused under SO 5C-10D) reference suppression of mail? How many wrote to their MP? How many got Whittakers Almanac from the lib-

rary? Copied out names of MPs and systematically wrote an identical letter to as many as their pittance wages could accommodate? (I wrote to 69).

With the exception of a few prisoners of character, the majority of prisoners did nothing. Perhaps, as is usual, they allowed their spite and anger to be directed at other prisoners? Instead of at the Establishment - their enemy, whether they have family or sentences short/long term.

It is fully time prisoners came to their senses, stopped being manipulated by devious staff. There are many prisoners whose crimes are obnoxious (many of them wear false coats) but that is none of your affair. It is not your place to beat them up... do the screws dirty work on their behalf. Don't allow your anger to be diverted, you were not sent to prison by your

equals, but rather by the monied class. By them and their cronies and their lap-dogs the screws, (traitors to the working class) we have all been equally condemned for the rest of our lives, so let's have a bit of unity amongst ourselves. If you don't like a guy, ignore him, who are you to beat his head to pulp?

Prison only works because we permit it to work, we are too disorganised: if we try we can bring things to a halt, we can certainly improve our lot, and you don't have to go out on a high visibility limb either; there are three burning issues as I see it:

1. Half remission for all fixed term prisoners; life sentences to be on parity with EEC countries.
2. Prisoner brutalities to cease.
3. Overcrowding to cease.

Feel sorry for your brutal jailer, for he, unlike you, has no ambition at all. He is content to willingly enter jail every day of his life, this is what he thinks of himself and his kids get beaten up at school. Ah well! ■

Wandsworth report exposes conditions

The Wandsworth Board of Visitors 1987 Annual Report exposes Wandsworth prison as an overcrowded, degrading and oppressive institution unfit for human habitation. TERRY O'HALLORAN reports.

In 1987 there were 1,555 prisoners in space for 1,259 (p1).

The hospital wing should have a staff of 42. At the beginning of the year there were 30. Twelve more were promised by the end of the year. Four arrived. So 23 beds went unused.

the windows. This, however, was stopped (p7).

Prisoners have to wash their hands after using their buckets in the same water used for washing their eating things (p7). When the BOV visited B Wing there was no hot water and D

'The disgraceful state of the recesses disgust the Board... Prisoners and Officers frequently have to paddle through other men's urine.'

Dental and optical clinics were frequently cancelled (p4).

Integral sanitation was to be installed but has now been postponed to 1991/2. The BOV write: 'The disgraceful state of the recesses disgust the Board. They are degrading for prisoners to use... Prisoners and Officers frequently have to paddle through other men's urine...' (p7).

Prisoners wrap up excrement in paper and dispose of it through the windows. The prison responded not by putting in integral sanitation but by fixing wire meshes over

Wing had had none for two days (p10). Of B2 central washing up area, they say, 'if Crown immunity did not exist... it would be closed down immediately' (pp10/11).

They note that in 1986 the room provided for Muslim prisoners' worship was 'a dirty, badly decorated classroom'. After protest the room was refurbished and kept clean. However, the Muslim prisoners have now been allocated another classroom in the same condition as before (p13). There were 66 Muslim prisoners.

Astonishingly, the Report publicly admits the existence of the 'ghost train' though they call it the regional 'roundabout system'. They write: 'This is a programme set up by the South East Regional Office... Prisoners are moved from prison to prison spending a few months at each. Some are able to live in the main part of the prison; the behaviour of others is such that they live permanently in the Segregation Landing.' (p18) The Home Office has always denied that any such system exists.

They note that in November there were three inquests on prisoners all of whom had hanged themselves. One was found to have twice the normal level of Valium in his body and despite questioning by the Coroner this was not explained. They describe three suicides in a short space of time as a 'remarkable coincidence' (p22).

FRFI first exposed conditions in Wandsworth four years ago (see *FRFI* 37 March 1984). Nothing happened. Now the BOV complain that 'recommendations seeking fairness for prisoners and the barest minimum acceptable standard of washing and toilet facilities... are either seemingly ingored or result in promises of action which do not materialise' (p1).

This will always be the case as long as there is no organisation of prisoners and no solidarity movement outside. Only organised force will bring about any improvements. And when, we ask, will Labour MPs use this Report to raise the issue of prisoners' rights and conditions in Parliament? ■



INSIDE NEWS

Electronic tagging

A year ago the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, made up of Tory, Alliance and Labour MPs, agreed proposals to study the use of electronic tagging as an alternative to prison. On 6 May this year, Douglas Hurd said 'The offender must be put, at the very least, to some considerable inconvenience, perhaps... made subject to a curfew with his movements monitored through electric tagging.' Tagging in the US has led to rising rates of drug abuse, alcoholism and battering of spouses and children among those put on 7pm to 7am curfews.

Mentally ill suffer in police cells

Hector McFarlane, a young Londoner, spent 2½ months suffering from acute schizophrenia, alone, in police cells. His solicitor Ms Julia Holman said 'He was filthy, very smelly and ragged. He never had a change of clothes and once when it was snowing he arrived in court barefoot.'

Another of her clients, Winston Hollett (27), also mentally ill, was moved around several police stations - one 200 miles away in Doncaster and medical reports have still not been done, a month later. Latest Home Office figures show 1,400 remand prisoners in police cells.

ALEXA BYRNE

Censorship at Frankland

The censor's office is situated in the landing office which is also used as a tea-room by officers on duty. There are many occasions where landing staff go into the censor's office for a cup of tea and casually begin to censor inmates mail. You can often find them discussing and having a good laugh together over the contents of the letters they are reading. Officially there are two members of staff: a senior and a junior officer who are detailed daily to carry out the duty of censorship. No other officer has the authority to participate.

When I challenged the governor about this he denied that it was happening. I also told the governor that considering the censor's office is situated where other inmates have access to it, he is placing our families and friends in great danger.'

JIMMY BUTLER

● Jimmy has now begun to be victimised himself. Rule 37a allows a prisoner to correspond with his solicitor on 'legal matters' without the letters being censored. Jimmy has the right withdrawn and had been told he has to define the words 'legal proceedings' in order to have the decision reversed.

BIRTHDAYS

15 May Joe O'Connell 338635 HM Prison Albany, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 5RS

29 May Patrick Magee B 75881 HM Prison, Welford Rd, Leicester LE2 7AJ

PRISONERS FUND

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! is the only newspaper which consistently covers the brutality and the fightback within the prisons. FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! goes into nearly 40 prisons in Britain, Ireland and throughout the world. Every month new prisoners write in to ask for the paper to be sent to them.

Each month it costs £66 to send our newspaper into prisoners. A subscription for a prisoner costs £7.50 and prisoners cannot afford to pay this. We are appealing to our readers to take out a subscription for a prisoner, or better still make a regular monthly contribution to our Prisoners Fund (please send for a standing order form)

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GIBRALTAR:

Thatcher stifles media

The government continues to display acute sensitivity to revelations about the Gibraltar murders. Immediately after the SAS shoot-to-kill operation a high powered Cabinet committee was set up to handle problems, such as the inquest. As a steady stream of witnesses testifying to cold-blooded murder have emerged, it has been kept busy. Their response has been to try to terrify the media into silence on the issue. MAXINE WILLIAMS reports.

Thatcher's reaction to the IBA and BBC decision to screen interviews with witnesses was unprecedented. She accused them of prejudicing the inquest and 'trial by TV'. No such principle held back the government, Labour Party and the media from proclaiming, immediately after the killings, that the Gibraltar 3 were guilty and had to be shot. Thatcher's press secretary Bernard Ingham said that the media was guilty of 'institutional hysteria' and followed the 'false gods of invention and malice.' Geoffrey Howe expressed 'deep regret and disquiet' that the programmes should have been shown.

It is a rare and creditable event for the media to withstand such pressure. IBA chairman Lord Thomson accused the government of threatening free speech. The IBA and BBC's firmness was also prompted by fear of repetition of the strike action that forced transmission of 'Real Lives' in 1986. However, most of the press, particularly the Murdoch press, has taken

Thatcher's line. In a classic dirty tricks operation they tried to discredit eyewitnesses to the murders, particularly Carmen Proetta. She revealed on *This Week* that she saw two of the IRA volunteers shot without warning and with their hands in the air. As a result of her testimony she has been labelled 'Carmen the Tart' as the *Sun* and other papers accused her of prostitution, anti-British prejudice, having a drug smuggling husband etc. The *Sun*'s sister paper, *The Sunday Times* has also read like a government broadsheet, reporting that 'sensational evidence', yet to be revealed, would totally exonerate the SAS.

Although the Gibraltar police are supposed to be investigating the events, it was *This Week* who tracked down various witnesses. These included a British lawyer who saw Sean Savage shot in the back whilst fleeing and shot again whilst lying wounded. None of the witnesses saw a challenge from the SAS (or Geoffrey Howe's claimed 'suspicious move-



Thatcher: now editing Irish news

ments' by the volunteers) instead their evidence supports the existence of a shoot-to-kill operation. The purpose of the government and press campaign is clear - not just to discredit but to frighten potential witnesses.

The government's total determination to prevent the truth emerging at all costs stems from the fact that Thatcher's Cabinet gave permission and

oversaw the SAS operation. They knew quite well what the SAS would do, after all, the SAS does not have powers of arrest in Gibraltar. Their murderers are the British Cabinet. Thatcher cannot allow the world to recognise what has long been clear to the Irish people - that a war is being waged in Ireland.

ical issues on which the government is seriously vulnerable.

Meanwhile the IRA delivered its answer to Thatcher. A series of operations in Holland and Germany resulted in three RAF men being killed and others wounded. Ministers hastened to condemn attacks on unarmed soldiers, seemingly oblivious to what had happened in Gibraltar. The IRA warned the British government: 'We have a simple message for Mrs Thatcher, disengage from Ireland and there will be peace'. ■

Commemoration

On 5 May 1981 IRA Volunteer Bobby Sands died on hunger strike murdered by British imperialism. Nine others were also murdered for demanding political status: Raymond McCreesh, Joe McDonnell, Kevin Lynch, Thomas McElwee, Francis Hughes, Patsy O'Hara, Martin Hurson, Kieran Doherty and Micky Devine.

FRFI salutes the memory of these selfless revolutionaries. Their courage and determination live on in the memories of those fighting imperialism throughout the world.

FRFI also remembers the eight IRA men murdered in an SAS shoot-to-kill operation in Loughgall in May 1987. Tony Gormley, Paddy Kelly, Padraig McKearney, Gerard O'Callaghan, Declan Arthurs, Seamus Donnelly, Jim Lynch, Eugene Kelly gave their lives in the cause of Irish liberation.

British terror



BOB SHEPHERD

The Six Counties has seen a surge of loyalist violence culminating in the brutal sectarian murder of three men - Damien Devlin, Paul McBride and Stephen McGahan - on 16 May. A loyalist gunman killed them and injured nine others by spraying a nationalist bar with semi-automatic fire. An eyewitness reported that a nearby UDR patrol did not pursue the killer. The previous week, Terry McDaid, was shot at his house. On 2 April Thomas Kelly was stabbed to death. Homes have also been petrol bombed and on 5 April 50 loyalists attacked nationalist people in East Belfast.

Not to be outdone, on 6 April a British army patrol on Springhill Avenue opened fire indiscriminately with plastic bullets smashing car windcreens. In nearby Divismore Park Jimmy McManus a 12 year old boy was assaulted by a soldier while he was playing football. On Saturday 9 April a British army raiding party wrecked the home of the McIlroy family on Divismore Crescent. They came at 6am, ripped up floorboards, partially demolished the kitchen ceiling, pulled up flagstones in the back garden and even demolished the dog's kennel.

Following the IRA attack on the Crown Court building the Markets area was placed under a virtual 48 hour curfew over 21/22 April. All people entering or leaving the area

were searched and detained, and over a dozen homes were raided. One house raided had been raided over eight times in the previous six weeks. At the same time in the Ardoyne area the Docherty family home was raided by machine gun wielding RUC men. Chris and Patricia Docherty and three friends were held hostage for four hours while the RUC ransacked the house. Patricia Docherty, who is eight-and-a-half months pregnant was refused medical attention until the raid was over. On 23 April an elderly couple's house was petrol bombed by loyalist thugs, fortunately they were out and the fire was extinguished.

On 26 April loyalist workers at Shorts aerospace factory handed out leaflets threatening ten Catholic workers with death unless they handed in their notice. Shorts is owned by the British government and with over 95% of its workforce Protestant is a by-word for sectarian discrimination.

In Derry on 11/12 April part of the Creggan estate was placed under siege with raids taking place on over 60 houses. The home of Joan Sheils was raided twice in eight hours and wrecked by the RUC.

British terror carries on unabated in the north of Ireland.

BRITISH REVENGE

In the aftermath of the killing of the two British soldiers, who attacked the funeral on one of the Milltown cemetery victims, at least 18 people have been arrested. Two men have been charged with murder, the others with various offences including assisting the IRA. The chief steward of the funeral has been arrested, the pressure on his family has been so bad that his wife attempted to slash her wrists while he was being held.

All the arrests are the result of the RUC studying the video pictures of the funeral handed over by the BBC and ITV. The whole affair is an attempt by the British army and RUC to gain revenge for the two killings against the nationalist community of West Belfast. It's a revenge they will not savour.

BIRMINGHAM SIX:

Legal steps exhausted

PAUL MCKINLAY

On 14 April three Law Lords refused permission for the Birmingham 6 to take their appeal to the House of Lords. No reasons were given for this decision. After serving thirteen years in prison, the six have now exhausted all the legal processes in their battle to prove their innocence. The result comes as no surprise following the original Appeal Court judgement which found their convictions to be satisfactory. The decision leaves the six men, some of whom are understandably suffering from severe strain, facing the dreadful prospect of spending the rest of their lives in prison.

Public opinion both in Ireland and in Britain believes them to be innocent victims of a police frame-up. The weight of this opinion however has proved insufficient to force their release. Part of the responsibility for this situation lies with the Twenty Six Counties government. Instead of forthrightly backing the six, recognising their innocence and threatening to break relations with Britain if they are not released, the Haughey government has simply 'made representations'.

Even after the refusal of the appeal to the Lords, Irish Foreign Minister Brian Lenihan merely asked the government to consider releasing them on 'humanitarian grounds'. Given that the British government has consistently turned a deaf ear to such 'representations' the Twenty Six Counties government call is tokenism indeed.

The end of the legal road also poses hard questions to the campaign for the six. It has concentrated its energ-

ies so far on lobbying sections of the establishment in Britain. Whilst in Ireland, marches and other forms of public protest have been held, this has not been so in Britain. That is why FRFI, alongside others, including Maire O'Shea, argued for a demonstration to be held in Britain this year. This proposal put at a recent



More action needed

meeting of the various Birmingham 6 committees, was supported by Paddy McIlkenny, brother of one of the six, and passed by the meeting. The demonstration was to be in Birmingham on the anniversary of the bombings, to be led by two priests who would lead prayers for the victims of the bombings, including the six men wrongly convicted. However, a hate

campaign was immediately launched by the *Daily Mirror*. The attack was centred on Fr Joe Taaffe and entirely misrepresented the demonstration. Fr Taaffe, supported by members of the Irish community defended the march and stated his belief in the injustice of the convictions. However, some sections of the campaign are calling for the march to be cancelled.

This would lead to demoralisation amongst Birmingham 6 supporters. It would mean that reactionary newspapers are being allowed to dictate that tactics of the campaign. It would mean that those who want to do something in support of the six would have virtually no opportunity for action. FRFI repeats its call for a major national march in support of the six. If the campaign does not now seize the initiative and move forward the future looks bleak indeed. ■

FREE THE GUILDFORD 4

Statements have recently been made by the Guildford 4, victims of another Birmingham 6 style frame-up, calling on the government to act on their cases and release them. Paddy Armstrong's statement says: 'I am here in prison along with three other people, for a crime we did not commit. We are here not because we are guilty but so that the legal establishment can continue to protect its name.'

The relatives of the Guildford 4 have stated that the Home Office review of the case currently under way is a whitewash and that they have no faith in its results. They have called for an intensified campaign. Paul Hill, one of the four, is suffering from ill health which has caused his weight to fall to nine stone. He has been waiting for an operation since 1978. In the thirteen years he has spent in prison he has been moved 120 times between cells and 46 times between prisons. He has spent over four years in solitary confinement.

Irish women POWs speak out

Once again the issue of abortion is hotly debated both inside and outside the confines of Parliament.

The 1967 Abortion Act did not, as most people believe, give women the automatic right to have an abortion. It does not make abortion 'legal' but allows it to be permissible under certain conditions backed up by the opinion of two doctors ie that to continue the pregnancy would present a risk to the health of mother or child. Like so many areas of the law it is subject to interpretation - in this case of the two doctors concerned.

David Alton's Bill is not a new phenomenon and many MPs have previously taken out similar Private Members Bills in an effort to dismantle the existing abortion laws and further erode the rights of women. Alton's major objective is to try to cut the time limit during which abortions are carried out and to have an 18 week maximum, yet he himself admits to be totally opposed to abortion in whatever form/time limit and seeks to overturn the 1967 Act.

The fact that it is safer for women themselves to have abortions earlier in their pregnancies and that approximately only 4% of all abortions carried out, either via the NHS or private clinics, are done so after 18 weeks appears to do little to convince David Alton and his supporters that it's only extreme circumstances which make a woman seek abortions after 18 weeks. Indeed, administration delays and the fact that women have to travel from countries like Ireland and Spain where abortion is illegal accounts for an extremely high percentage of late abortions.

The legal position concerning abortion in the Six Counties stems from the 1929 Infant Life Preservation Act which allows for a few women to have abortions on the National Health ie if the life of the woman is in danger. Anti-abortion feeling is extremely high and there are several groups and individuals who actively campaign against its use even in life threatening circumstances eg if a woman becomes pregnant after she has been raped - the rape must first of all be proven before she can be given the choice to terminate the pregnancy. Given the delays in the court procedure coupled with the fact that many rapists are looked upon favourably in courts and it is the victims who are put on trial and punished, means that the woman's pregnancy is so far advanced she will be unable to have an abortion anyway.

It is ironic that when the current abortion debate reached the Six Counties several months ago we saw Unionist politicians and the Catholic hierarchy sharing the one viewpoint - 'that

FRFI has received a statement from Republican women prisoners on abortion. The anti-Republican British left frequently accuses Republicans of being anti-abortion. The women's statement, a working class defence of the right to abortion, gives the lie to this. The statement has been slightly shortened for reasons of space.



Republican women in Belfast announce the death of an IRA volunteer.

the 1967 Abortion Act should not be put on the statute books in NI and any move to extend the Act to here should be thwarted.' It is a further irony that most of the campaign's proponents were men - which goes to show that it matters little what political perspective one holds when women's rights have to be curtailed and denied to them. We see this attitude prevalent even within our own Republican communities.

Because of the war situation in the north of Ireland there has been a trend for our communities to shelve issues such as abortion and other such topics relating to the rights of women. We believe there is a new trend developing within the Republican movement itself which recognises the importance of re-educating both ourselves and our people in order to broaden our awareness and realisation that these issues must be challenged now and we must actively campaign to ensure that women's rights are upheld. To deny a woman's right to choose to have an abortion or not is to deny her a basic human right to which she as a member of society is entitled. We cannot claim to fight a war to uphold the rights of people whilst ignoring the fundamental rights of over half the

population.

The Ulster Pregnancy Advisory Association was set up in 1971 and gives women counselling and advice on how to have abortions in England. However, not all women have either the financial or practical means whereby they can travel there and therefore their choices are (1) they continue with an unwanted pregnancy (2) they travel to England for an abortion or (3) they put their lives at risk by having a back street abortion. However limited and repugnant these choices may appear for women in the Six Counties, the choices for our sisters in the Twenty Six Counties can only be described as worse!

Any issue which concerns the rights of women in the Twenty Six Counties is directly in the hands of one of the most biased anti-women structures which exists - the Catholic church! Because of the close working relationship between church and state women find themselves oppressed on all fronts. No divorce, no contraception, no abortion - even counselling on abortion is illegal. There is little or no sex education in schools and therefore it is not surprising with so many draconian measures

existing on the statute books that the number of women who find themselves faced with unwanted pregnancies is alarmingly high. One has only to cite the example of the 14 year old girl who was found dead alongside her newly born baby, also dead, after she had gone to a grotto close to the chapel grounds to administer the birth herself, to illustrate how tragic the whole situation is.

In 1987 the Hamilton judgement added to the tragedy concerning women's rights in the Twenty Six Counties. It forced the closure of the Open Line counselling on abortion in the Well Woman centres and anyone who continued to give any type of counselling on the issue was liable to prosecution. There has been an on-going campaign to have to have the service reopened, but in the meantime thousands of Irish women are travelling to England to have abortions with no idea where to go - never mind the trauma of the experience.

Because these women have no one to turn to in order to seek advice about financial and practical arrangements there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Irish women seeking late abortions in England and it is for these women that the Alton Bill, if passed, will have severe implications. An increase of more than 50% of Irish women seeking late abortions has been noted since the Hamilton judgement took effect last year. The media and other individuals and organisations have shown their support for the government's stand, and the women who are spearheading the Defend the Clinics campaign face huge difficulties in their fight, yet their determination in face of such opposition inspires everyone who seeks equality for all.

To conclude, then - it is clear that David Alton's bill, if it goes into effect through Parliament and succeeds in being passed, will affect women everywhere - and especially those women in the Twenty Six Counties. It will mean that the burden of unwanted motherhood will be forced upon all those women who cannot afford to pay the price of illegality be it in high medical fees or worse, the dangerous back street methods.

A coherent education plan on issues like birth control, sex education in schools and women's health choices is what is needed to reduce the need for any woman to have an abortion - because let us not forget that it is not a decision which is taken lightly and can have long term physical and psychological effects for some women. Prevention is always better than cure but until we have a society where abortion is no longer needed or desired by women, we must be sure of one thing and that is - the woman's right to choose.

Is mise le meas
Women Republican Prisoners
Maghberry and Durham Gaols

ORGANISE WITH FRFI



LORNA REID

Creating a movement for our times is the theme of the second Socialist Conference to be held in Chesterfield on 11/12 June. The briefing document sets out the aim of the Socialist Conference:

'It will consider a whole range of policy statements that are now being prepared, covering many of the central problems that face working people and their families in Britain... The re-election of Arthur Scargill, the Transport Workers' Executive Election, the huge campaigns to save the NHS and against the Poll Tax, the strikes in the car industry and amongst the seamen, and the campaigns against the Education Bill and privatisation are all signs of a movement that is looking for political expression. This is what the Socialist Conference is aiming to do, and we believe that the time is right to do it.' Tony Benn.

A survey carried out on one third of those who attended the first Socialist Conference has provided the following results: the average age of the participants was 38; 72% were members of trade unions; 5% were unemployed, 5% were black; 7% were students; 8% were pensioners and 77% were members of the Labour Party. In other words the forces of the working class who are 'looking for political expression' - the youth, the unemployed, black people - were poorly represented.

Following the first Socialist Conference local conferences have been held. RCG comrades were involved in the preparatory discussions for the North London conference. The potential of the Chesterfield movement to provide a forum for debate amongst different tendencies and co-ordination of action was squandered because of sectarian manoeuvres by some of the conference organisers. The platform speakers and most of the discussion at the conference were confined to the SWP and the Labour Party. The SWP, in the run up to the conference, successfully opposed having a speaker from the Soviet Embas-

sy on the grounds that it was like 'inviting a member of the ruling class to a workers' conference'.

David Kitson and the VMDC were invited to address workshops which is a recognition of the forces they represent but there are many different sorts of campaigns and fights springing up that must be represented.

Missing from the North London conference was a political analysis of British imperialism and the split in the working class: the SWP argued forcefully that the political retreat can only be halted by socialists concentrating on working within the trade union movement, a repetition of their tried, tested and failed method of political organising amongst the working class; the Labour left know there is something wrong but their allegiance to the Labour Party and the movement it represents prevents them from making an objective analysis of the current political retreat. For as long as an analysis of imperialism and the split in the working class is excluded from the Socialist Conference its organisers and participants will be unable to even recognise the problem confronting them - the cause of the rapid retreat to the right by the organised labour movement and its consequences.

RCG members at the North London conference attempted to provide this analysis at the sessions on Women for Socialism and Defending Local Government and Services. We successfully argued against the SWP programme for restricting any organised resistance to the trade union movement. We contributed positively on the role to be played by all genuine socialists in mobilising the oppressed sections of the working class into an effective challenge to Thatcher's attacks on the poor and unemployed, on trade unions, on the welfare state, on gays and lesbians. Our contributions to the discussion drew from our experience in City AA and the VMDC extending their political lessons to all issues facing the working class.

From our assessment of the first Socialist Conference (see FRFI 73) and the North London conference we are preparing our intervention at the second conference at Chesterfield. Our supporters groups will be discussing the issues to be raised at the conference.

LETTERS



PAUL MATTESSON

Provocation

Responsibility for a number of arson attacks and attempted bombings in Wolverhampton has been claimed by an individual who said he represented a 'Black Liberation Front' or 'Black Action Front'. However, the real Black Liberation Front has stated in its paper *Grassroots* that it is in no way connected with these events.

Searchlight magazine observed that a similar campaign was carried out in the Midlands in 1966 by the nazi group Column 88, with the aim of provoking a racist backlash. However, *Grassroots* pointed out that Wolverhampton police have a motive for slandering the black movement. By creating these incidents and attempting to pin them on the BLF, they could draw public attention away from their own guilt for the murder of a young black man in February 1987. The officers who killed Clinton McCurbin were not prosecuted, and have returned to duty. JONATHAN COHEN London

Little Justice for Robeson

I agree that *Song of Freedom*, reviewed by Dale Evans, did Paul Robeson little justice for his work in American civil rights. I too am an admirer of Robeson but unlike Dale I realise that he was ideologically suspect. When Robeson talked about the history of race discrimination within America and the need to defeat capitalism to secure the freedom of the oppressed peoples of the world from the hands of the imperialists he was obviously correct. However, Robeson at the same time saw the Soviet Union and the surrounding Eastern bloc nations as beacons of democracy. He never openly criticised Stalin's purges or the anti-semitism which festered in the Soviet Union, Poland and

Czechoslovakia. In fighting racism and prejudice we have to attack both imperialism and bureaucracies. Unfortunately, Paul Robeson failed to do this. In solidarity MARK West Yorkshire

Question Time

The Cayman Islands are a Crown Colony administered from Whitehall. It is famed as an international offshore banking centre and for its secrecy. How surprising then that the Cayman Islands' Department of Tourism's records show that Honduras supplied more 'tourists' than the rest of Latin America put together. Any inquisitive MP might care to put a question to the Commons as to whether these 'tourists' have anything to do with those contras stationed in Honduras named by the *Tower Commission* and the *Wall Street Journal* as being involved in drug running. TREVOR RAYNE London

FBI invades Puerto Rico

On 30 August 1985 250 FBI agents invaded Puerto Rico and kidnapped 13 independence fighters. Further arrests followed. Today 15 patriots, accused of being members of a clandestine organisation Los Macheteros (the Machete Wielders), are held thousands of miles from their homes awaiting trial scheduled for the end of the year, to be held in Connecticut, USA. Los Macheteros is the organisation allegedly responsible for the multi-million dollar robbery of the Wells Fargo Security Company in 1983; the funds being used for the independence struggle. The Puerto Rico Support Committee has appealed for solidarity with the patriotic brothers and sisters. For

further information write to, Puerto Rican Support Committee, Latin American House, Priory House, Kingsgate Place, London NW6 4TA (A donation of £1 is required). Puerto Rican 15, Att. Linda Backeill, 135 Oxford St., Hartford, Connecticut, USA. 06105. PUERTO RICAN SUPPORT COMMITTEE London

Thatcher's hit list

I am writing to tell you about the Thatcher government's lies. Recently she ordered the murder of three Irish people in Gibraltar and they were unarmed; she tried to silence Mr Stalker because he exposed the cover up of the RUC shoot-to-kill policy; she tried to stop the publication of Mr Wright's book, *Spycatcher*. This was all done in the name of national security. The Thatcher government is a laughing stock. Thatcher refused to intervene on behalf of the Sharpeville Six and supported the fascist Botha regime in South Africa. If these six young innocent people are hanged Thatcher will have their blood on her hands.

The workfare programme is a so-called work placement scheme. Thatcher is exploiting the unemployed and trying to massage the unemployment figures. We have got to fight back with those on Thatcher's hit list. We have seen the health workers and teachers organising to defend their services. There will be more fightbacks to follow.

We have maintained the Non-Stop Picket outside the South African embassy for over two years. We have got to build a progressive movement in order to smash British collaboration with apartheid. Our struggles in Britain are linked with the struggles of the masses of South Africa. Keep up the good work. ERROL BAPTISTE London

FRFI welcomes letters from readers. Please send them to: FRFI BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX

Fighting the Housing Bill

Thanks for the informative articles on the recent changes in Social Security regulations and on the implications of the new Housing Bill. The viciousness of the attack now being waged by this government against the poor in Britain is forcing people to begin the process of building a fightback where it matters: at grassroots level.

Our Tenants' Association has responded to the proposals contained in the Housing Bill by starting a campaign to make sure that all residents on the estate are informed of what the government's proposals will mean. Private landlords will be able to purchase any of the council's housing stock and tenants will only have a limited right to object. Once a tenant has gone over to a private landlord rents could be increased and tenants' rights decimated.

The aim of the Tenants' Association is to build a much stronger organisation to enable us to fight these proposals effectively by speaking to each and every tenant and publicising our opposition to any privatisation.

We must also try to strengthen the campaign by uniting all local fightbacks such as this. Any growth in community organisations and unity now will be useful in the future not only to challenge the Housing Bill but also to smash the Poll Tax and eventually to build real representation for those hardest hit by Thatcherism who at present have no voice in British politics. ANDREW PACEY Brixton, London

Our most recent day-school on productive and unproductive labour connected the current attack on the welfare state to a marxist analysis of the capitalist crisis. David Reed introduced the session on productive and unproductive labour to show why the ruling class is forced to try to cut back state expenditure. He showed how from the mid-70s onwards an ideological campaign against public sector workers prepared the way for today's attacks. He established that the political and economic analysts on the left had abandoned marxism and were therefore incapable of defending the working class in general and public sector workers in particular. Terry O'Halloran introduced the history of the welfare state, particularly the NHS, and established that the welfare state has always been under attack since its formation when the 1945 Labour government sold out to consultants and other interests. He explained that precisely because much of the expenditure from the stand point of capitalism is unproductive and therefore costs must be kept as low as possible the NHS has always relied on the most oppressed sections of the working class to work long hours for low wages: primarily women and black workers. The present attack on the NHS was begun by the 1974-1979 Labour governments and, Terry explained, the trade unions have consistently betrayed the fight of NHS workers to defend their jobs and services.

Our series of dayschools is arming our members and supporters to intervene both in forums like the Socialist Conference and the campaigns in which we are involved.

The Conference on the Soviet Union held in Nottingham on 7 May was addressed by David Reed from the Revolutionary Communist Group, Harry Powell, Revolutionary Internationalist Contingent and Mike Banda from the Communist Study Group.

David Reed opened the conference with a talk on the national democratic revolution emphasising the need to go beyond the Stalin/Trotsky controversy which was increasingly fruit-

less. Instead, he said, there were three positions on the Russian revolution - the Bolshevik, the Menshevik, and the Trotskyist. He refuted the Trotskyist myth that in April 1917 Lenin had adopted Trotsky's theory on permanent revolution. However, most of this fell on deaf ears.

The assembled Trotskyists and Maoists simply rehearsed their usual list of 'Soviet crimes'. The Trotskyists not only denounced the Soviet Union but also national liberation movements - indeed every real struggle against imperialism.

Our comrades not only defended the Soviet Union against the Trotskyist and Maoist idealists but also argued with those who refuse to make any critical analysis of the Soviet Union's role in the world today. The conference showed it will be a hard fight to establish serious discussion on the Soviet Union amongst the British left although the conference organisers should be congratulated for trying. ■

Join the action join the RCG

- Take the side of all those struggling against imperialism - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built in Britain in solidarity with the struggling peoples of Ireland, South Africa, Palestine, Central America. Help us to do this - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built here in Britain which stands with the oppressed fighting racism, repression and poverty. Help us build this movement - **Join the RCG!**
- A movement must be built which challenges and defeats the treachery of the opportunist leaders of Britain's Labour and trade union movement - **Join the RCG!**

I wish to join/receive more information about the RCG

Name _____

Address _____

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■ **TALKING POLITICS WITH THE RCG.** Supporters groups meet alternate Sundays 5-8pm Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street (nearest tube Russell Square) London Next meeting Sunday 29 May 'Creating a movement for our times' - Why the RCG is going to the Socialist Conference.

■ **MANCHESTER RCG FORUMS** Held fortnightly on Thursdays 7.30pm Church of the Ascension, Royce Road, Hulme, Manchester.

■ **MANCHESTER RCG STREET MEETING.** All day sponsored event to raise money for FRFI Special Fund. Saturday 4 June, starts 11am. Market Street. **No to racism! No to apartheid!**

■ **LONDON VMDC SUPPORT GROUP street meeting.** Saturday 21 May starts 11.30am Southall High Street, outside the Post Office.

■ **LONDON VMDC SUPPORT GROUP regular meetings.** Every Friday 7.30pm, Camden Town Hall, Euston Road, WC1

■ **RALLY organised by the PALESTINE POST on the 21st anniversary of the Israeli**

occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Tuesday 7 June 6.30-8.30pm. The Grand Committee Room, House of Commons, Westminster SW1. Further details from Palestine Post, PO Box 196, London WC1A 0AT.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST GROUP Communist Forums on South Africa

Soweto Uprising - 26 June Communist International - 31 July

Both 5-8pm at the Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street (nearest tube Russell Square) London

AFRICA LIBERATION DAY Speakers, films, discussion, culture.

Sunday 29-Monday 30 May Bay 63, Acklam Rd, London W10

Organisers: Africa Liberation Committee, All African Peoples Revolutionary Party. Info: 01-969 0687; 021-777 4783; 061-832 6560

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■ **SOM RAJ MUST STAY.** Stop the deportations. National picket 26 May, 10am Thanet House, 231 The Strand, London Called by NUJ and Som Raj Defence Campaign

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The following books are available from Larkin Publications:

The revolutionary road to communism in Britain (Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist Group) 175pp, £1.50 (40p p&p)

Ireland: the key to the British Revolution by David Reed. 450pp. £3.95 (75p p&p)

Miners Strike 1984-85 People versus State by David Reed and Olivia Adamson. 144pp. £2.50 (40p p&p)

South Africa: Britain out of Apartheid! Apartheid out of Britain! by Carol Brickley, Terry O'Halloran and David Reed. 64pp. 95p (30p p&p)

Viraj Mendis Must Stay! Published by VMDC edited by Terry O'Halloran 32pp. 75p (30p p&p)

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McCLUSKIE CALLS OFF SEALINK ACTION TO KEEP UNION FUNDS

Strikers left to fight alone

1988



P&O STRIKE

On Thursday 12 May the National Union of Seafarers (NUS) executive called off solidarity action by Sealink workers, leaving the Dover P&O strikers isolated. At a mass meeting in Dover on Friday 13 May the strikers voted to fight on.

The cause of the P&O strike is clear: P&O want to impose on their workers an agreement which would lengthen their working day, intensify their work and cut their pay.

P&O want:

- to increase hours worked from 2,256 pa to 2,928 pa (30% increase in the working day) with no pay rise;
- to abolish certain overtime payments and bonuses such as short-hand money;
- to oblige all crew to be available at all times for recall when off-duty and to have phones installed (at their own expense) for this purpose;
- to reduce the guaranteed rest period whilst on ship;
- to impose a rostering system that would mean in order to get 14 consecutive days off (for holidays) crews would have to work 14 consecutive 24 hour shifts: 336 hours non stop.

To work 2,928 hours pa is equivalent to working 366 eight hour days a year. P&O also want to lose 400 jobs and reduce minimum crew numbers per trip, intensifying work for the crews.

Profits paramount

'Sterling says safety is paramount. The only thing that's paramount in the eyes of Sterling is sterling: pounds, shillings and pence.' (Vic, sacked assistant cook)

On August Bank Holiday 1987 the *Pride of Bruges* (formerly the *Pride of Free Enterprise*) was so shorthanded that there was only one firefighting control group instead of the required two.

The bow and stern door warning lights installed after Zeebrugge frequently malfunction. The microswitches used for these lights are the type ruled against by the Zeebrugge inquiry. On 1 January this year a ferry sailed despite the fact that the warning lights showed the doors open. Ferries have sailed so shorthanded that there is only one crew member to work the lifeboats when there should be two.

Officers and crew are already experiencing serious exhaustion towards the end of duty tours. One officer was so tired last year that after coming off duty he nearly drove his car off the road. In 1987 there was at

The P&O strike has once again raised the crucial political issues facing trade unionists who want to mount a serious fight for jobs and conditions in Thatcher's Britain. TERRY O'HALLORAN reports. Interviews with strikers were carried out by Jenny Sutton and Terry O'Halloran when they visited the picket line.

least one near miss involving a ferry in the Channel.

In December 1987 officers sent a memo to P&O saying that officers were so tired that 'safety of life at sea is being compromised.' P&O have not replied.

If crews are dangerously exhausted now, what state will they be in if forced to work 30% longer hours in 24 hour shifts?

Behind the sell-out

The strike began on 12 February. For weeks the NUS leadership left the P&O workers to fight alone. It was six weeks before Sam McCluskie even visited the picket lines.

'We've had to fight the management, the government and the media without much direction from the union.'

'This policeman said, "I know you're a militant. I heard you shout 'comrade' on the picket line.'" Susan Haynes, sacked stewardess

It was not until 21 March that the NUS executive ordered a national ballot for industrial action. P&O then had the ballot declared illegal. The NUS locked away returned ballot papers in a safe. It is believed that the returns were running 2:1 in favour of a national strike.

Nonetheless, by Friday 29 April sympathy action was stopping Sealink sailings and had spread to all but

P&O Chairman Sir Jeffrey Sterling is adviser to the Department of Trade and Industry. P&O gave £100,000 to Tory Party funds last year.

200 of 5,000 NUS members working on ferries and deep sea oil rigs. At the same time, however, hundreds of P&O workers had signed the new contract and P&O had enough strike-breakers, including newly-recruited untrained 'people', to run some ferries.

When we visited the strikers on 29 April Susan Haynes (sacked stewardess) explained that though she was angry with the strike breakers she also felt that the lack of direction from the union had encouraged demoralisation.

Her words were confirmed even

while we were in the Deal support committee office. That morning Dover strikers had persuaded Harwich workers to come out. The next news was NUS official Roger Wilkins on Radio Invicta ordering all Sealink workers back to work in order to avoid sequestration of union funds by Sealink. Only pressure from Dover and Deal forced Wilkins to retract.

On 3 May Sealink succeeded in getting the £2.8 million NUS assets sequestrated. The union was also fined £150,000. On 11 May it was fined another £150,000. Sam McCluskie greeted the sequestration with defiant words about escalating the dispute.

'We've got one of the coppers going round with a camera taking photographs of everyone. I said, "What's that for?" "Oh", he says, "it's just to make sure that all the policemen are here".' Melvyn Price, sacked quartermaster

In fact, from that day on he tried to cook up a deal with Sealink to allow him to order all non-P&O strikers back to work on a promise by Sealink to employ some of the sacked P&O workers. McCluskie even tried to use the pressure created by the lorry drivers' blockade not to help the P&O strikers but to do a deal with Sealink involving a promise by the lorry drivers to use Sealink for three years.

The Merchant Shipping (Certification and Watch) Act 1982 states that watch crews must be 'sufficiently rested' to carry out their duties.

Such an approach by the union leadership was bound to encourage scabbing. When, on 11 May, Sealink stepped up the pressure by issuing an ultimatum to its employees to return to work by Friday 13 May or be sacked, the submission of some Sealink workers to the threat was inevitable.

After the decision to call off secondary action the TUC and Labour Party leadership started talking about a 'commercial' campaign against P&O. Norman Willis appealed to the public to 'sail safe and say no to P&O' (*The Independent*, 13 May 1988).

It had taken 14 weeks of strike

before the Labour Party leadership felt able to express support for the strikers.

P&O have now bypassed the union altogether. A company spokesperson said: 'We are no longer directly or indirectly connected with the NUS.' (*Financial Times*, 13 May 1988).

Defending the P&O strikers

'We've come this far. There's no point in stopping now.' (Melvin Price, sacked quartermaster)

The lessons of this dispute are already clear:

- trade unionists cannot win a serious dispute and remain within the law;
- trade unionists fighting to defend jobs and basic conditions have to confront not only the leadership of the Labour Party and TUC but also scabs within their own ranks - the working class is divided;
- trade unionists can only create a force capable of fighting the employers, the laws and traitors in their own ranks by refusing to be confined to the traditional structures and building support in all sections of the working class, whether in trade unions or not.

These lessons largely escape those like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) who reduce all such strikes to a simple issue of rank and file versus leaders.

They advise the rank and file to do the obvious: to picket and spread the action. To the leaders they say 'Pigs must fly':

'Instead of wishing for negotiations McCluskie, Willis and Todd should be organising mass pickets and solidarity to stop union busters.' (*Socialist Worker*, 7 May 1988)

McCluskie, Willis and Todd represent the interests of the labour aristocracy and will not take any step that jeopardises their own position or the electoral interests of the Labour Party. In this they have the support of a considerable section of the organised labour movement who will defend

'This is meant to be a free-thinking, free-speaking country and it's not. If the Tories have their way we will be back to Victorian days when they look after the rich and the poor can look after themselves. Thatcher would like to see us all grovelling in the gutter and in the bins looking for a crust of bread.'

'They're talking about saving £6 million down here when the big white chief himself, Sterling, accepts a £33,000 pay rise. He needs the pay rise to keep his mistress in London.' Betty Murray, sacked stewardess

their own jobs and conditions even at the expense of other workers. The SWP simply refuse to face this reality.

The only way forward for the P&O strikers is to reach beyond the confines of the traditional labour movement. This means not only organising mass pickets and fighting for sympathy strike action but also actively seeking the support of other sections of the working class, especially the most oppressed, ignored by the labour movement and the SWP alike.

The creation of women's support committees in Dover and Deal, based on the lessons of the miners' strike and the advice of Kent miners is a step in the right direction.

The strikers and their supporters now need to build such committees wherever possible in order to mobilise sufficient force to continue the battle against P&O, the government, the laws and the traitors in their own ranks. ■

