

THATCHER'S CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR THE HOMELESS

BY CHRIS MCBRIDE

NINE years of Thatcherite policy on housing, employment and social security is the basis of the development of a wide layer in the working class whose struggle to maintain a roof over their heads is a never-ending job - a way of life.

Over 50,000 of these (enough to populate a town larger than Milton Keynes) live literally on the streets, concentrated mainly in the urban areas, especially central London.

They live a pitiful existence, hanging out at burger bars, shopping centres, and down the tube to keep warm. Beggars can now be seen regularly at most tube stations and in other places.

The prospect of getting council accommodation for these people is nil.

Tory legislation and the active collaboration of local council leaders has led to the decimation and privatisation of whole council estates. Areas with chronic housing crises, such as Lambeth and Southwark in south London, are being turned into property goldmines for yuppies. Even the housing co-ops are under attack as council grants are slashed.

Millions of families are being forced into squalid temporary accommodation. Far from being a temporary crisis, homelessness is accelerating at an alarming rate. The number of homeless families has more than doubled since the Tories came to power in 1979.

The figure reached in 1986-1987 was nearly 400,000. The number of single homeless people is now in excess of two million. This staggering total includes the 'hidden' homeless - those who stay with friends, relatives etc.

Well over 30,000 families are living in temporary accommodation, many of whom are crammed into squalid bed and breakfast hotels run by landlords who make a handsome living ripping off these unfortunates as well as the local councils.

The number of single, young,



John, Mandy and friend try to keep warm under the bridge at the Embankment. Mandy is four months pregnant, and they are both homeless.

homeless people is rapidly on the increase as the problem is fuelled by new Tory legislation which takes away the right to social security benefits for 16-17 year olds, and money for deposits (which all landlords demand) for flats.

Many of those who sleep rough in the streets are aged 16-19.

Despite all-out efforts by charity run hostels over the Christmas period, more than 3,000 people in this age group will spend the season of goodwill on the streets without food or money.

Sleeping rough is not confined to the unemployed homeless. Many of those sleeping on the streets are working, but low wages and high rents (£50 a week for a shabby bedsit in London) sees to that.

The 16-19 year olds are today in a worse situation than in Victorian days, as the new 'work for your

dole' scheme does not include the roof which old workhouses used to provide.

Nick Hardwick from Soho's 'Centrepoint' hostel told Workers Press that 1988 will be the bleakest ever for homeless young people.

'The problem is that, unlike in

the past, people stay homeless,' he told us.

Few realise how great the problem is among young women. These are as numerous as homeless men but they usually stay in temporary accommodation with friends to begin, and end up

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE TO ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS

Workers press sends warmest Christmas greetings to all political prisoners throughout the imperialist world and those in jails in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for their struggle against the repressions of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Especially in our thoughts at this time are those prisoners in Ireland, South Africa, Chile, Iran, Turkey, El Salvador and those thousands of Palestinian freedom fighters held in Israel. Nor do we forget those incarcerated in British jails, for their struggle for an independent socialist Ireland. We call upon workers internationally to redouble their efforts to win freedom for these heroic victims of capitalist repression.

Workers Press

Capitalism, Children and Christmas

HALF a million more children died in the last year than in 1987, millions more are malnourished and tens of thousands have been forced to drop out of school as the economic decline of what bourgeois economics call the 'Third World' accelerates.

What they really mean are the colonial and semi-colonial countries still in the grip of the capitalist monopolies who control the wealth of much of the world.

For one sixth of human beings on this planet - some 900 million people - 'the march of progress has now become a retreat', according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) executive director, Mr James Grant in a report, 'The State of the World's Children,' published just before Christmas.

Nearly 30 per cent of children in Mali, Mozambique and Sierra Leone, for example, die before the age of five. Living standards in Africa and Latin America have fallen by between 10 and 25 per cent since the early 1980s. In the 37 poorest countries, spending per head on health has been reduced by a half and on education by a quarter over the same period.

UNICEF goes on to blame the 'policies' of the International Monetary Fund for the untold misery that lies behind such figures. 'Allowing world problems to be taken out on the growing minds and bodies of young children is the antithesis of all civilised behaviour.'

This is just the point. Capitalism has demonstrated throughout the present century that it does indeed threaten the entire past conquests of humanity: whether by war, famine, environmental pollution or disease. Its murder of young children on this vast scale is perhaps the most graphic expression of its decadence and decline.

And, contrary to what this UNICEF report claims, this has nothing to do with the particular 'policies' pursued by the ruling class.

To believe so is to believe that capitalism can be reformed, 'humanised', transformed into something that can serve the interests of the vast majority on this planet. This has been the lie peddled by the Labour and trade union leaders for decades.

Chief amongst the liars is the Stalinist bureaucracy. Stalinism has long preached the virtues of 'peaceful co-existence' with this violent and outmoded system.

Only the Fourth International, the movement founded by Leon Trotsky in the struggle against Stalinism, says loud and clear to the working class and the exploited of the world: your only salvation lies along the road of revolution. Only by overthrowing capitalism world wide can the developments of science and technology be employed for the benefit of the whole of humanity.

WORKERS PRESS FIGHTING FUND

In so far: £786.23

AT THE time of writing this column we are on the verge of the Christmas break. Reports indicate that we will reach our target of £1,500 for the Fighting Fund by the end of the year.

We have made a special appeal for a further £1,000 for urgent international work. Please give that bit extra to raise this sum.

Workers Press has plans for big changes in 1989: the return to a tabloid paper with special features and articles on our programme and taking up the struggle against Thatcher's onslaught on democratic rights. Let's have a good break at Christmas and prepare for these vital days ahead.

Many many thanks to all who contributed so generously throughout 1988. Good wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Dot Gibson

Send donations to: Workers Press Fighting Fund, PO Box 735, London, SW9 7QS

The Editorial Board sends seasons greetings to all our readers. Our next issue will appear on Saturday 7 January 1989

THE latest issue of 'Tasks of the Fourth International' is now available. It contains Cliff's Slaughter's report to the extended meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International's meeting last August, together with the transcript of Michel Varga's (Balasz Nagy's) speech to the London meeting called to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Fourth International in 1938. Copies of this issue are available from PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS. Price £2.40, including P&P.

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Name.....date.....

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WORKERS PRESS welcomes letters on all subjects, but please be as brief as possible. Only in exceptional cases are we able to print letters longer than 200 words. We also welcome new contributors of articles or reviews. Workers Press, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS

News briefs . . . In mysterious ways

HOW'S this as an example of heavenly guidance? A youngster, aged 16, from Mexborough, applied for various 'vergers' jobs but without success. Owing to his lack of experience he kept being turned down.

In his hour of need he turned to the divine Youth Training Scheme and, lo, his prayers were answered.

He has been given a place as trainee verger with Sheffield Cathedral. A story to gladden all our hearts at Christmastide.

Peace and goodwill

According to a number of opinion polls held recently a majority of West Germans appear to think that defence is a less important priority than it has been for the last 25 years.

The latest, held in Bonn and conducted for the defence ministry, 'defence of the Federal Republic from external threats' was placed bottom of a list of 17 'social concerns'.

75 per cent of those approached believed the Soviet threat was not to be taken seriously.

Cancer risk confirmed

An official report published last week finds that incidence of childhood cancer among people living near the Hinkley Point nuclear site, in Somerset, is higher than expected.

The period covered in the report was the first ten years after the site became operational in 1964, and the age group concerned being those under 25.

The investigation, headed by Dr John Urquhart on behalf of the Severnside Campaign Against Radiation (SCAR), confirms an earlier unpublished report produced by objectors to the Central Electricity Board's plans to build a third station there.

Christmas cheer

A SPOKESMAN for the National Coalition for the Homeless has publicly rebuked New York Mayor, Ed Koch, who proposed that people on benefit or in casual employment seeking refuge in any of the city's 24 temporary shelters should pay up to 30 per cent of their income towards a bed for the night.

Koch is reported to have proclaimed 'There is nothing free in this world'. At the present time it is estimated that some 10,200 homeless people rely on the facility every night.

SRI LANKA POLL UNDER GUN LAW

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

TROTSKYISTS in Sri Lanka are calling for urgent organisation of workers' defence to counter right-wing terror.

Right-wing President Premadasa was returned in elections held last week under the shadow of armed terror by chauvinist gangs and the state.

At least 15 people were killed during the elections, in several cases by unidentified gunmen who simply opened fire on voters going into the polling stations.

Although there was a 50 per cent turn out nationally, this fell to below 15 per cent in some rural parts of the south, where threats and killings by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) were blamed.

In the northern Jaffna peninsula, still a stronghold politically of the Tamil Tiger guerrillas despite - or perhaps because of - ruthless suppression, the poll was below 10 per cent.

Combining fake 'left'-sounding language and reactionary racist incitement originally a movement of rural youth and students inspired by a mixture of Guevarism and Sinhala nationalism - spent the months leading up to the election assassinating both government supporters and working-class leaders.

Among their victims was R.A. Pitawala, a leading militant of the Revolutionary Communist League, (Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International, to which the WRP formerly belonged.)

On December 8, gunmen attacked a rally for United Socialist Alliance presidential candidate Ossie Abeygoonsekera, killing five people.

The government blamed the JVP for the bloody pogrom against Tamils in 1983, in which thousands were killed or wounded, and properties looted and burnt.

It was later established that those organising the pogrom were members of the ruling United National Party (UNP) of Jayawardene. More recently, the state has used the JVP as a pretext for its own terror.

During round-ups of alleged JVP suspects, thousands of people were herded into detention, and many killed.

On polling day, armed police and troops toured some southern towns announcing through loudspeakers that anyone who had not voted by two pm would be regarded as anti-government!

Army Lt. Colonel Pathirana boasted that when catching JVP supporters with weapons 'we have no mercy. We kill them. If they are posting threatening letters, or putting up subversive

posters, we also kill them, even if they are defenceless.'

Significantly, however, the JVP has called on what it refers to as 'patriotic armed forces officers' for support, against the 1987 India-Sri Lanka accord, and went so far as to demand replacement of the UNP by a 'patriotic military government'.

JVP intimidation of voters in the countryside mainly seems to have hit the UNP's bourgeois opponents, as this was where Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's candidate, had hoped to do well.

In a statement urging mass mobilisation under working class leadership to 'smash the neo-fascist JVP', a recently formed Workers Front for Organising Struggle Against Neo-Fascists in Sri Lanka blames the left parties' failure to develop struggle against the Jayawardene government for the growth of the JVP.

The Workers Front statement, drafted last month, says over 80 members or supporters of the Lanka Sama Samaj Party, the CP, the NSSP, and their allies had been killed.

Accusing the JVP of using death threats to persuade workers and students to stay home, and shopkeepers to put up their shutters, in phoney 'general strikes', the Workers Front says a number of railworkers and transport drivers were killed for refusing to take part.

Pointing out that the JVP had dropped any anti-capitalist slogans, such as it might have espoused in its infancy (its youth uprising was brutally crushed in 1971), the Workers Front says the JVP leaders had secret talks with government ministers and with reactionary politicians.

The Workers Front says the JVP aim now 'is to destroy physically the trade unions, left parties and groups,' on behalf of the bourgeoisie, whose rule is in crisis. 'The function of this neo-fascist movement is to prevent the proletarian revolution through counter-revolution.'

While condemning the Jayawardene regime's introduction of martial law measures - including shoot-on-sight powers for the military - the Workers Front say the most immediate task is to mobilise workers' defence against the fascists.

It has called for a conference of trade unions, left-wing parties, youth, student and peasant organisations, together with Tamil movements, to prepare the struggle. (The RCL has similarly called for a conference of left-wing parties to form a united front.) The Workers Front is urging formation of workers' defence squads in every factory and workshop, and on the plantations. It says squads should also be organised to protect trade union and party premises, and it wants arms and military training for workers.

Poll tax powers destroy civil liberties

BY HILARY HORROCKS

ANTI-POLL tax campaigners in Strathclyde Scotland discovered this week that the Tory government had issued social security offices with instructions to cut benefit payments from claimants who refuse - or are unable - to pay the tax. The new measures, which were leaked to the Strathclyde Anti-Poll Tax Federation were confirmed by a Scottish Office spokesperson, who said they would be in place early in the new year.

They give the power to DSS officers - after a court order had been obtained against a defaulting claimant - to dock benefit amounts at the 'maximum amount permissible.' It is believed that the statutory addition of ten per cent for overdue payment will also be extracted in this way from claimants. The governments new instructions also force DSS personnel to reveal names and addresses of claimants to poll tax registration officers.

Accompanying the imposition of this punitive tax, are measures which gravely undermine civil liberties and the right to protest - measures which were never available to the government under the old rating system.

Thousands of low income families, who will be hardest hit by the new tax, would be deprived of even their right to claim subsistence level benefits.

These families will have noted the abjectly cynical response of MP Brian Wilson chairperson of Labour's now defunct 'Stop it' campaign, who said: 'This simply highlights the futility of trying to avoid the tax once your name is on the register.'

Community groups campaigning against the tax will be seeking the support of trade union members who are under Tory orders to reduce benefit. A spokesperson from the CPSA in Glasgow commented: 'Our members feel very unhappy about deducting benefit without the claimants consent.'

A letter from Long Kesh



The following letter was sent to Workers Press by **Eddie O'Connor**, an Irish Republican Prisoner of War in Long Kesh. It highlights the total injustice of the repressive British state and its inhuman manipulation of republican prisoners and their families, in its attempt to destroy all resistance to its rule.

IT WAS once said that one of the best ways to judge a government's contribution to humanity is to investigate its treatment of prisoners.

In this letter, I will be hoping to uncloud the mystique which swamps this issue - firstly, because I am an Irish Prisoner of War (PoW) incarcerated in a British jail; secondly, because the struggle, which I as a Republican am involved in, has from time to time placed prisoners and their struggle in a pivotal role.

Unfortunately, I am unable to cover here many aspects of the special select treatment afforded to Irish PoWs, i.e. refusal of the British government to repatriate Irish PoWs jailed in England, or the continuing violation of female PoWs through strip-searching, the special courts and special sentencing procedure, or even the various torturous regimes which Republicans have been subjected to. Neither will I deal with how the British government, aware of the importance of prisons and prisoners, have them as an important component part of their overall imperialist strategy.

What I will say is that, ever since the introduction of internment in 1971, the aim of British imperialism and its Orange establishment allies, in their treatment of prisoners, has been to break the back of any resistance to the status quo. Part of this strategy was, and continues to be even to this day, an attempt to draw an indigenous bourgeois nationalist element closer to itself with a view to implementing an internal settlement.

'...ever since the introduction of internment in 1971, the aim of British imperialism and its Orange establishment allies, in their treatment of prisoners, has been to break the back of any resistance to the status quo.'

The British prison strategy was part of their response to the fact that, after 20 years of struggle, the Republican movement - far from being 'isolated' as the British had hoped - continues to grow, and indeed even to consolidate its position.

Initially that response involved the increased use of paid perjurer evidence. Then the SAS death squad operations. In the longer term came the Anglo-Irish agreement (AIA) as a means to assist in bringing a much favoured

internal settlement to fruition.

Moreover, within this new political climate we had the Free-State government talking long and loud about the alienation of the nationalist community - from the state in general and administration of justice in particular.

Britain, realising what was at stake, recognised that some 'carrot' would have to be given, to secure both Free-State and six-county nationalist support for the concept of a rejuvenated Stormont regime within the apartheid statelet.

In 1985, Private Ian Thain became the first British soldier to be sentenced to life for a killing that occurred whilst on 'duty'. (Of course, he only ended up serving 26 months, and was then put back in his regiment). Nevertheless, he was a sacrificial lamb upon the high altar of the AIA; they hoped to use him to enhance the illusion of change in the administration of justice.

'At the start of this year, we began a campaign in conjunction with our families and friends, to expose the review procedure as inherently unjust, and rife with sectarian discrimination and political bias.'

One could be forgiven for thinking that all was well within the jails at this time - but nothing could have been further from the truth.

The history of prison protest is well documented - especially the blanket protest and its culmination in the hunger strikes - and no repetition is needed here. But not many are aware that to date, while opposition to repressive prison policy remains constant, what has changed is the attitude of Britain and its surrogates in the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). From our various protests they have learned a valuable lesson: that such opposition needs to be isolated within particular prison regimes.

Thus the forced integration in Magilligan prison of Republican PoWs and Loyalists. Also, the continued obscene practice - initiated in Armagh's female prison - of strip searching women comrades, now extended to Maghaberry.

In the H-blocks at Long Kesh, oppression assumed a more subtle form: one aspect of it

being the use of prisoners as political hostages, under the review procedure for life and Secretary of State's Pleasure (SOSP) prisoners. This affects over 200 Republican prisoners serving such sentences, and their loved ones.

The background to the review procedure is this:

1. Written into the AIA was a clause obliging the Free-State and Britain to give 'special consideration' to the question of prisoners and prisons.

2. The collapse of the paid perjurer system was claimed by Social Democratic Labour Party and Free-State government as a victory for the AIA, in that its demise was brought about by pressure exerted by them through the 'channels' opened up by the agreement.

The Free-State government and the SDLP hoped that if prisoners or their families had complaints about justice, or any facet of jail life, then they would see the best chance for their resolution in having them processed through the 'channels' opened up by the AIA.

What they hoped for was an undignified scramble by individual PoWs with complaints, whose cases they could pursue. What they ignored - or more exactly what they intended to target - was the fact that any gains won in jail had been achieved as a result of unity in action by Republican PoWs, and that any future gains would and could only be attained in the same manner.

'...the imperialist authorities hope to induce prisoners to disassociate themselves from the Republican movement. They play on the natural emotional sentiment of prisoners and their loved ones, their hope of being re-united after years of separation.'

Given the nature of the H-blocks, the review system was always likely to be contentious. We believed that, sooner or later, a decision would have to be taken to give public expression to the prisoners' disquiet about the system, a disquiet based on the hard realities of an analysis - and our understanding that our lives, our futures, are but pieces of 'political currency' in the hands of the British government, to be used when it is politically expedient to do so.

At the start of this year, we began a campaign in conjunction with our families and friends, to expose the review procedure as inherently unjust, and rife with sectarian discrimination and political bias.

I mentioned earlier how Britain sacrificed Private Ian Thain, so as to entice the Free State government, and its allies within the apartheid

1989: THE STRUGGLES AHEAD



Norman Willis, TUC General Secretary (centre), being enthusiastically applauded by Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party (extreme right) at a rally in defence of sacked GCHQ trade unionists. Thousands turned out in support of trade union rights, but, as our interviews show, with no confidence in this leadership.

POST STRIKE SHOWED THERE IS A WILL TO FIGHT

THIS was a strike that just had to happen. The job that most postmen do has changed a lot over the last few years. It is much tougher and management have become very arrogant. There had to be a conflict.

Even though the union leadership persuaded us to go back after a fortnight, nothing has been solved.

When you consider the media campaign against it, and the way the Labour leaders are trying to create the impression that industrial action can't win since the miners' strike, the vote for strike action was very decisive.

The issue was DRAS (Difficult Recruitment Areas Supplement) - the extra payment made by management without any union agreement, in areas where there are alternative jobs and the low wages in the post office lead to a high turnover in staff.

The union was forced into it. Tuffin (general secretary of the UCW) and the executive never led anything except the return to work. Management introduced DRAS by executive action, which was bound to be seen as a threat to national pay-bargaining.

Despite the overwhelming majority vote for industrial action, it was clear the executive would not go for a national strike to get DRAS removed.

The one day strike they did call was virtually 100 per cent solid. But management were not going to let the UCW call the tune. Guerilla strike action would have seriously disrupted the service without the members losing too much money.

So, knowing they could rely on the fears of the union executive, management provoked an all-out strike. They went for the most militant areas and introduced temporary staff to shift the mail.

They knew they were provoking a

In this last issue of Workers Press in 1988, an Edinburgh member of the Union of Communication Workers, involved in the fortnight-long postal dispute in September, begins a look back at recent struggles - and forward into 1989.

strike, though they may have been surprised by the magnificent response of the membership. Every major area came out - maybe 120,000 people.

None of them was called out by the union leadership. All the initiative came from below - even in the areas which do not have a militant reputation, like Edinburgh.

It was a really encouraging response. Of course the leadership ran scared and did a deal which was no deal at all.

They said they had got an agreement to discuss DRAS. To discuss it, not to have it removed! It is still in place and if Tuffin starts talking about industrial action in the new year, as he no doubt calculates, there will probably be a much weaker response.

But the return to work showed that the management have not broken the strike at local level. Tuffin said, negotiate the conditions of return locally, knowing that this would progressively isolate the more militant areas.

But in Liverpool, Glasgow and elsewhere the resistance continued until local management were forced to limit their most arrogant demands.

We have to find a way of drawing up a balance sheet and learning the lessons of what has happened in the unions during the Thatcher years: not just the UCW, but the steelworkers, the miners, the printworkers, the dockers and so on.

It is not that the will to fight is not there in the working class - the postal strike showed that. But at every turn the leadership is found wanting.

In the UCW they decided you couldn't win an all-out strike, so they went for guerilla action. But the management took the initiative from them and they were left with no perspective but to cave in.

We need some sort of forum, some sort of nationwide organisation of the rank and file to develop an alternative perspective. I don't mean just what used to be called rank-and-fileism. We have to discuss things politically.

For example, one surprising development this year has been that the UCW, on the initiative of the Edinburgh branch, is nationally committed to support a campaign of non-payment of the poll tax.

We lobbied the special Labour Party conference on this question in Glasgow just after the strike: we were disgusted at the way that was run and by the complete opposition of the Scottish Labour leaders to any form of illegality.

No wonder they lost the Govan by-election to the Scottish National Party.

There is a Broad Left in the union, but I'm not convinced that it is the answer. Anyway we don't see much of them here.

The question is: 'Where is the union going?' With this government in office we have to assume that some form of privatisation is in the offing. They have split up the way the Post Office functions in a way which will make it more manageable. They've already tried privatising with Girobank.

Maximise profits and work within diminishing budgets: that's the policy. But they still haven't broken the union, and we have to find ways of getting a leadership that will reflect the determination of the rank and file to stop them.

1989: THE STRUGGLES AHEAD

'The path of struggle is correct'

IN 1988 the battle for the leadership of the union started for the NUM. As in most matters that have faced miners over the last years the 1984 strike dominated the election campaign. This made the presidential elections quite different from any previous leadership struggle in the NUM.

The issues between candidates were simple - there was Walsh who wished to capitulate totally to the strategy of British Coal and Scargill who advocated fighting. I believe that the fact that Scargill won at all represented a significant heightening in the consciousness of miners since his first

BY DAVE TEMPLE

election.

Of course those purveyors of doom and gloom will say that this is ridiculous; a reduction of 75 per cent to 55 percent in Scargill's vote must represent a defeat.

There is however a world of difference from Scargill's election in 1982. In 1982 miners voted to a great extent on the basis of wages militancy - that Scargill would frighten the board into giving the wages and conditions they deserved.

This year when miners voted it was on very different issues.

For the first time

unionists voted for the trade union leader, not because they thought he could deliver the goods but because they were convinced that the path of struggle was correct and that the role of conciliation was wrong. When we consider the hammering that British Coal have given us since 1984 you can see how remarkable the vote for Scargill at the beginning of this year really was.

Some miners found it remarkable that the Stalinists of the British Communist Party in the Scottish leadership and the ex-communists in the Welsh leadership lined up with the right wing in this contest. I say lined up with the right wing

because that was the effect of their so-called neutrality. This is now demonstrated beyond doubt in the recent ballot for the overtime ban. Here there was no pretence of neutrality. Both Welsh and Scottish leaderships openly campaigned with the right wing against Scargill and the left.

The strategy of these leaders is to frustrate any action against British Coal. They hope the increased pressure of the cost of living on miners will force them to accept the Board's conciliation scheme and a reconciliation with the scab UDM. This they hope will make Scargill's position impossible and he will be forced to resign.

If there is one general lesson of 1988 it is to understand the depths to which these leaders, once regarded as the spearhead of the miners' left, have sunk. They preside over the destruction of the miners' industry in their areas like kapos.

Any who resist their line of capitulation are ruthlessly victimised. The harder they grovel before British Coal the more British Coal treats them with contempt.

As I said, the strike still dominates. It was a tremendous testing ground for the British trade union movement

When the state tried to smash our union they tested everyone almost to the point of destruction. Bolton and Clark, Duffield, Rees and their mentor Howells were exposed for what they were.

Their left words were just rhetoric - they ended the year actively fighting alongside the likes of Trevor Bell and Walsh to prevent miners fighting British Coal. These individuals have to be condemned for the traitors that they are but we will never understand their degeneration unless we understand the role that Stalinism has played in the British trade union movement.



Postal workers support the nurses at P

'CHRISTMAS CAN BE A VERY LONELY TIME'

BY NORMAN HARDING

'I EXPECT on Christmas day no one will cross my doorstep.' The sadness in Nellie's voice reflected the fact that it would be her first Christmas since her husband had died.

Nellie was only one of many old people who because of a broken leg or hip found themselves in Ward 68 at 'Jimmy's' - St James's Hospital, Leeds.

All of them had to struggle as youngsters, working in service, factories or mills. They came through two wars and brought up families.

Their dour determination came across as they struggled to get well again. There is always someone trying to walk down the ward with the aid of a Zimmer or the arm of a nurse.

'I don't know how she will get along on her own at home,' said a nurse pointing to a lady battling her way to the toilet, under the watchful eye of a nurse.

Why is it that these elderly people have to end up in hospital before they get any care and attention?

The ward social worker said that the machinery and facilities for providing proper care and attention is very

inadequate. And, in the back of their minds, it isn't pity the nurses and social workers feel, but anger.

In spite of everything, the staff are making sure that Christmas day will be a lively one. They are busy raising money so that every patient gets a gift and that the ward will be as bright and as cheerful as possible.

At the local club on the estate, 90 to 100 pensioners get together every Tuesday afternoon.

Even the innocent fund raising event of bingo brings out their true feelings.

In the past when the number 10 was drawn it was followed up by a simple 'Downing Street'. But now it elicits such comments as 'Get her out!' Only the other day I heard one sweet old lady say 'Shoot her; drown her!'

Edwina Currie comes in for similar treatment. Her advice to old people to knit themselves woollen hats, scarves, etc. in preparation for the winter did not go down well here.

Louise, 83, sees red every time Currie's name is mentioned. Her hatred of this Tory 'lady' is very clear. Another pensioner suggested that Currie should knit herself a barbed wire hat and scarf, and she should be made to wear it!

'I WILL

DEBBY THORNTON is a nurse at Prestwich psychiatric hospital where there was a three-week strike over re-grading.

I have been a nurse for 7 years - I trained first as a general nurse, and am now doing post-registration training to qualify as a psychiatric nurse. I can expect a grade D at the end of my training, about £8,000 a year.

I have lost out by doing further training because if I had not bothered and stayed as a general nurse I might have been on a grade F by now, earning £10,000 a year.

I will remember 1988 for all the action at the beginning and the end of the year. The year ended the same way it started, lots of anger amongst nurses but not enough backing from our union.

But it was good to see unity at workplace level and this is something positive

1989: THE STRUGGLES AHEAD

FIGHTING TO EXPOSE THE ROTTEN LEADERSHIP



ALAN CLARK spoke to GEORGE HALL and his wife CAROL who were both sacked during the printworkers dispute at Wapping. George was the Father of the Chapel (FOC), clerical section of 'The News of the World' and 'The Sun'. Carol was the deputy MOC of 'The Times' clerical chapel. Both were members of the biggest union in the dispute, SOGAT.

George and Carol found it hard to find work after the dispute because of their union activities during the strike. At one point Carol had to find work outside the trade. George has been unable to get regular work. He claims he has been black-listed by the management, and in confirmation, while he was working temporarily at the 'The Guardian', a full-time position arose for which he was the only applicant.

Even though he was perfectly suitable, he was passed over following a long and hostile interview by the personnel manager. Chapels at 'The Guardian' protested about this to the managing director Jim Maverick, but to no avail. George then found himself swiftly removed from his casual job. The union is still pursuing his case. George, in the meantime, has found casual work on another newspaper.

Looking back on the dispute, George and Carol agree that Murdoch set out to smash the print unions at his plants.

He knew that to win any major strike, the unions had to take on the Tory government, and the weakness of the union leaderships. They said that the rest of Fleet Street should have been called out and a national print strike called. The dispute was about the future of the print unions and the working class in general.

George and Carol went on to



Carol and George Hall

say that lack of TUC support for the strike was a major reason why it was lost. The real solidarity came from the Support Groups. If there had been a lead given, the printers could have got a lot more support.

Both Carol and Bob were instrumental in setting up the Fleet Street Support Unit (FSSU) which played a leading role in calling for Fleet Street to come out, as well as fighting to expose the rotten London leadership. They also fought for the setting up of a properly run strike committee.

George said 'the FSSU warned that it would be open season for the rest of Fleet Street employers to take the unions on if the News International dispute was lost.

'A lot of work needs to be done to rebuild the print unions. This can't be done without a change of leadership at local and national level.'

George felt that the Stalinist-led London leadership of SOGAT panders to the TUC bureaucrats. Regarding the policing at Wapping during the dispute, George and Carol agreed that the police were provocative and brutal.

George thought that it was a conspiracy from the very top and that it exposed the cowardice of the trade union and Labour leaders in allowing their own people to be battered in the way they were without any response.

Carol said that the police officers being charged now by the crown prosecutor for allegedly assaulting demonstrators on the picket line at Wapping in January last year are the scapegoats, and that all but a handful of police had behaved with great viciousness.

They both criticised the leadership of Neil Kinnock by saying that in his haste to yuppify the Labour Party he forgets who he is supposed to represent. 'If we really want to challenge the Tories and change society, people like Kinnock and Willis have got to go,' they said in conclusion.

REMEMBER 1988'

for the future.

Nurses of all grades were standing together at demos and picket lines - nursing assistants, charge nurses and midwives - whereas traditionally in nursing there have been too many distinctions.

But we needed more union backing to sustain the strike, and they should have called on other trades unionists and ancillary staff. I've never been on strike before, and would never have considered it before 1988. I didn't think it was right for nurses to strike.

But looking at our professional code of conduct I thought it was unethical to stand back and see the destruction of the NHS going along.

I thought we had to take a stand for the patients, where we can keep staff, attract more staff, and have better standards of equipment and provision.

Otherwise I can see governments of whatever party turning round and saying 'We haven't got the staff, the service is disintegrating, the buildings and equipment are crumbling, let's close down hospitals and rely on private care.' I am critical of the NUPE and COHSE leaders because first of all at the rally before the budget, they marched us all into Hyde Park to listen to Claire Rayner; they didn't want any nurses up there to put their views.

Over the re-grading, COHSE and NUPE decided what they were going to do and didn't care what the members were saying. The officials were against strikes.

They want us to rely on appeal procedures which no-one has any confidence in - the early part of 1989 will show this to be justified. More nurses have left in the last few months and more will continue to leave.



1989: THE STRUGGLES AHEAD

SIMON PIRANI reports on

CHRISTMAS IN BELFAST

THE BRITISH army have been reminded of the IRA's ingenuity with a 300-pound car bomb, which they defused. So there are road-blocks everywhere, and long traffic queues. It's Christmas in Belfast.

An army look-out post, perched on top of the Divis flats, has just been blown up, and a pair of helicopters buzz above the city centre, carrying building materials for the new installation. This is like Birmingham and Managua rolled into one.

On the Falls Road, the foot-patrols are out. They move in groups of six, carrying the standard issue AS80 automatic rifle. Outside the Sinn Fein office, I joined a minibus-load of Republican prisoners' relatives to visit Long Kesh, Europe's biggest concentration camp.

As the bus waited to move off, a young soldier trained his rifle on the passengers. Everyone else was so used to this they ignored it.

My own understanding of the role of British imperialism, learned in the first place from books, is infinitely enriched by incidents like this.

The women who troop up to 'the Kesh' give unstinting support to the prisoners. On the way there they carry Christmas dinners and greeting cards. On the way out they carry 'chocs' in their mouths - rolled-up cigarette-papers carrying those messages the political prisoners don't want the censors to read: some to Sinn Fein, some for forwarding to addresses overseas, some for loved ones.

Soldiers

To Mrs Thatcher and the bourgeois world at large, these men are murderers and criminals; to Belfast's nationalist communities, they are soldiers resisting an occupying army and its auxiliaries in the RUC.

These men, who took sacrifice and courage to its limits in the blanket protest for political status and the 1980-81 hunger strikes, are studying.

'Republican News' is blocked by bloody-minded prison authorities, but virtually all other literature gets in; only three weeks ago a left-wing publishers' representative was detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act after dropping off a consignment.

What are the successes and failures of the various national movements? How will the Irish revolution be carried through? Is the 'stages' theory valid, or are national liberation and socialism inextricably-linked goals?

What was Connolly's position on this? How should twenty years of armed struggle be evaluated? All these points are under discussion in Long Kesh - and the disputes are anything but academic. No-one criticises the Republican leaders more frankly than these prisoners. One group has broken from Sinn Fein and publishes their own journal, 'Congress 86'; others remain within.

There have been a series of raids in nationalist areas recently - and the prisoners' families are targets for special harassment.

In the north Belfast nationalist ghetto, Ardoyne, a prisoner's wife returned home from going to a wedding party with friends last month, to find a squad of British soldiers in the living-room, reading her letters from her husband.

They had broken in the front door, and smashed holes in the kitchen, bedroom and spare room walls.

The contents of the cupboards had been strewn on the floor; they had deliberately laid her underwear out around the sitting-room.

Wedding

Up the street, an ex-prisoner who was married got the same treatment on the morning of the wedding. In another recent raid, a soldier smashing a kitchen wall with a sledgehammer said: 'I would willingly work all week, if someone would pay me £200 a week to do this to you paddies.'

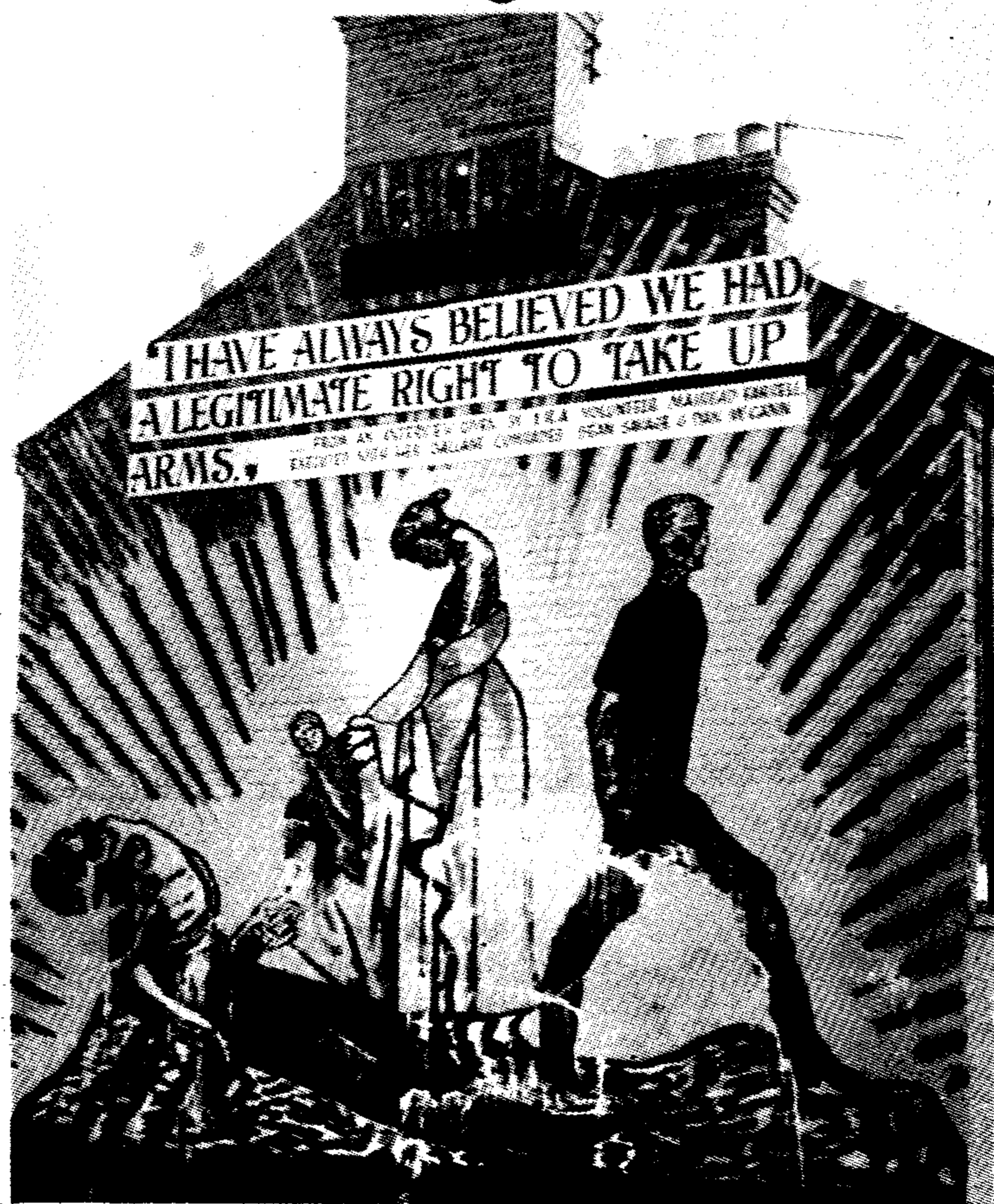
All this is worth repeating the next time somebody tells you how awful it is that the IRA are attacking soldiers' families.

As for another prisoner's sister, she has been stopped and searched dozens of times in the last six months - since joining a committee which demands release dates for the prisoners serving life or 'Secretary of State's pleasure' sentences.

The committee is highlighting the use of release dates to blackmail the prisoners. For at the moment, the only way to a release date is to renounce links with the Republican movement.

Otherwise you might spend your adult life inside for such offences as attempted murder or hijacking a car - while, for example, members of the loyalist 'Shankill butchers' convicted of torturing and killing Catholics at random have already been released.

The women fighters of the Republican movement support Father Ryan's fight against extradition. But they are convinced that twenty-six county premier Charles Haughey only refused to hand him over, to pave



the way for a more effective clampdown on scores of young activists who live in danger of extradition - and inevitably, if Britain believes they are in the IRA, a very long sentence. Another reason for Haughey's decision: there is an election coming up in the south and his economic policies have hardly filled voters with enthusiasm.

It's only too plain to see what drove a generation of nationalist youth into the IRA. Bad housing conditions are everywhere. Unemployment is everywhere.

And repression is everywhere. I was speaking to a Sinn Fein activist when a young man came up and showed an enormous bruise on his chest. He had been jabbed with a rifle while being 'questioned'. Why? Because he saw a woman's foot being run over by an army land-rover last month (she had the lower half of her leg amputated). The soldiers are trying to 'persuade' him not to give evidence in court.

Murals

That's Ardoyne. A few hundred yards away, the murals change from those of Nelson Mandela, Mairead Farrell and James Connolly to those of King Billy and the Battle of the Somme. This is the protestant Shankill Road.

Here, too, are socialists, activists in the trade unions. They are discussing the implications of the imminent privatisation of Harland and Wolff. This is no ordinary shipyard whose huge crane dominates the Belfast skyline.

It is the bastion of protestant privilege, the 'privilege to be better than Catholics'; it was the

starting-point of loyalist jamborees, of anti-Catholic and anti-socialist pogroms, of the reactionary Ulster Workers' Council strike of 1974 - and also of the massive marches against anti-union law under the Heath government.

Now the shipyard is threatened with closure. It recently tendered for a £10-million order to build a dredger, in the expectation that the government subvention fund would still be there - but Thatcher said no, you're about to get privatised. The order went elsewhere.

Now the corporatist worker-management buy-out plan, inspired by yard boss John Parkes and acquiesced in by trade union officials, could fall flat.

Thatcher is demanding that the workers 'stand on their own two feet': and they could end up doing just that - outside the dole office. The threatened closure would not only destroy 4000 jobs in the yard and perhaps the same again outside. It would have a mind-blowing impact on protestant worker psychology. Without the shipyard what would there be left to be 'loyal' to?

Back in the nationalist ghetto there is great scepticism about the prospects for uniting the working class. There have been a lot of petrol bombs thrown at people's houses.

Much rests with the British workers. When they raise their voices with a cry of 'down with imperialism and the occupation of northern Ireland' - not a miserable whimper of 'Time to Go' - the Irish struggle for national self-determination and socialism will take another leap forward.

tatelet, into its designs.

In this same (carefully orchestrated) 'new political climate', we witness the new tactic of using the prisoners as 'political capital' in exchange for 'political concessions' - whilst within the nationalist communities our people are being fed an illusory dream that the leopards' spots are changing.

So in the first six months of this year we have seen ten Republican Life or SOSP prisoners having their cases referred to the judiciary for 'rubber-stamping' - whereas over the previous 18 years of political conflict we have had only 18 Republican prisoners released in all.

The official British government/NIO line on the 'life sentence review procedure' (LSRP) is that it is non-political, fair and un-biased. Quite clearly this does not stand up long enough to be knocked down.

The whole nature and structure of this LSRP - from executive level ('life sentence review board', judiciary etc.) to the administrative level (yearly reports compiled by prison staff) - is based on secrecy and arbitrary, subjective judgements.

'They are saying to our loved ones outside: 'bring pressure to bear on the force that opposes our position in Ireland, desist from struggle, denounce your political aspirations, forget about national self-determination and socialism, give up your rights, and become once again humble weak creatures.'

Yearly reports are done on each individual life/SOSP prisoner. At no time are these made available to him/her in order that the content can be challenged.

And don't forget the circumstances in the orange sectarian apartheid state: 99 per cent of the prison officers are invariably drawn from the Unionist and establishment traditions. So by the very nature of the beast, these yearly reports and governors' reports, which LSRB hearings are based on, are clearly open to all sorts of biases - political, religious, personal etc.

The governor is a proxy-representative of the LSRB in the jail. He conducts the interview with the prisoner, and then drafts a report and submits this, along with other 'secret reports' and his own recommendation, to the selective and secretive LSRB. No legal representative is allowed for the prisoner, at either the interview or the LSRB itself.

It is important to note the two reasons why Republicans are serving such lengthy terms of imprisonment, and subjected to 'special treatment' in the review process. Firstly, it is a tactic by which the imperialist authorities hope to induce prisoners to disassociate themselves from the Republican movement. They play on the natural emotional sentiment of prisoners and their loved ones, their hope

of being re-united after years of separation.

They are saying to our loved ones outside: 'bring pressure to bear on the force that opposes our position in Ireland, desist from struggle, denounce your political aspirations, forget about national self-determination and socialism, give up your rights, and become once again humble weak creatures.' And the consequence of ignoring this is even longer periods of incarceration and separation.

Within the prison, it is more subtle and pronounced. At the LSRP, our political beliefs are severely questioned, likewise our views on political violence, and indeed the very nature of our existence within the jail.

On top of this there are constant attempts to upgrade the price of securing release. They pressurise prisoners to move to the recently-opened Maghaberry prison, which does not have the political history synonymous with Long Kesh, and which they see as a 'breakers' yard' of Republican resistance. Implicit in any voluntary transfer to Maghaberry is enhancement of the prospect of release (that is the carrot); then comes the stick, that the move will mean integration with loyalist prisoners plus compliance with draconian rules and regulations.

Now on the Life Sentence Review Board itself. This body is accountable to no-one, except the Secretary of State. It is chaired by an under-secretary of the NIO, and staffed by NIO functionaries. A chief medical officer or consultant psychiatrist may have an input, but only when there are physical or mental problems with an individual prisoner; so may a chief probation officer, if the prisoner requests.

The decision to set a provisional release date is entirely dependent upon the chairman, who in turn represents the political interests of the Secretary of State.

Like the yearly reports, the LSRB procedure is entirely cloaked in secrecy. The prisoner has no right to know the identity of those on the panel, to which his only input is a written submission; he receives no indication as to why a provisional release date has not been forthcoming, or reasons for a decision that his case will not be reviewed for between one and five years - the equivalent of a ten-year prison sentence!

So while the British government and NIO say the LSRP is fair, unbiased and nonpolitical - it can be shown that it is secretive and open to political manipulation.

Witness the double standards, and the stark reality of political discrimination against Republican PoWs, in the following examples:

PRIVATE IAN THAIN: convicted in 1986, while serving as a member of the British army, of shooting dead an innocent civilian. Received a mandatory life sentence. Earlier this year, he was released, after serving only 26 months - and taken back into his regiment! British ministers defended this, saying that he

was 18 at the time of the offence, which was 'a tragic error of judgement'.

PAID PERJURER KEVIN McGRADY: was serving a life sentence for the killing of three people in different incidents. In May this year, he was released after serving six years. Like the decision on Thain, a clearly political one.

JOHN SOUTHWORTH: charged and convicted in May 1979 of rape and murder of a young girl. Sentenced to life imprisonment, with a recommendation that he should serve at least 18 years. The NIO has confirmed he is to be released in the spring of 1989, after nine years..

The following are Republican PoWs:

BRENDAN MAILEY, from Ardoyné, Belfast: Arrested in 1973 at the age of 16; charged with being an accomplice to an alleged murder. Tried in a Diplock court, convicted on the sole evidence of a statement, and given an SOSP sentence. In January 1987, having served 14 years, his case was put before the LSRB. They decided to review it again in two years' time, when he will have served 16 years and still have no indication of when (if ever) he will be released. An adult, charged along with Brendan, received a life sentence with no recommendation of the time he should serve: he was released in 1986!

MATT LUNDY from Turf Lodge, Belfast: Arrested in 1977 at the age of 16; charged with attempted murder; was tried in a Diplock court, given an indeterminate life sentence. In Matt's case, there was no life lost - yet he still received a life sentence for an offence which by definition of law does not carry a life-SOSP sentence. In 1987, after serving 10 years, Matt went before the LSRB and his case was put back to be reviewed again in two years, by which time he will have served 12 years in prison. The adult charged along with Matt, and sentenced to life imprisonment, had his case referred for judicial approval, i.e. 'rubber stamping' in June this year.

BRENDAN WILLIS, from Falls Road, Belfast. Arrested in 1976, at the age of 25; charged with possession and bombing a commercial premises. Tried in a Diplock court, convicted on the sole evidence of a verbal statement; received a non-mandatory life sentence. In 1986, after serving ten years, Brendan's case went before the LSRB and like his comrades mentioned above, he was put back 'to be reviewed again' in three years' time ... by then he will have served 13 years, again with no indication of when, if ever, he may be released.

In the light of all this, the Campaign for Lifers is seeking support for six basic proposals, which if adopted we believe will accede to every Life/SOSP prisoner (irrespective of religion, politics, or offence) access to the principle and procedure of natural justice, as opposed to the injustice which is the predominant feature of Britain's treatment of Irish prisoners.

These proposals are aimed to put an end to the political manipulation of our lives and our families, and end the hostage factor.

1. Ending of the indeterminate sentence.
2. Right to legal representation.
3. Right to know the reasons for unfavourable decisions.
4. Publication of objective criteria for release.
5. Ending of secret reports.
6. Right to challenge the make-up of the review board.

It is our sincerest hope that readers of this letter will now have a better understanding of this issue. If you believe that what is happening is unjust, please support our campaign by any means appropriate; and open to you. We especially appeal to trades unionists, political activists, student unions, local councils, and all radical organisations and those genuinely committed to the cause of justice.

For further information please contact 'Campaign for Lifers', 5-7 Conway Mill, Conway Street, Belfast. Please send donations to the same address.



Christmas confessions

'THIS being the commercially sponsored festive season', remarked a friend who is one of this column's severest critics, 'why don't you give the readers a bit of light relief?'

I did have some such idea in mind, I replied. I'd thought of writing about Edwina Currie, whose personality and politics I detest but who seems to me to have come out of the salmonella affair with much less egg on her face than those greedy egg producers that are after her blood and want the problem swept under the carpet for ever.

'Is that your idea of light relief?' cried my friend, brandishing under my nose reports that there are between 1,500,000 and 2 million cases of mild salmonella poisoning in this country each year; that more than 4,000 infected eggs are produced each day; and that at least one person a week dies from eating eggs infected with salmonella.

So I moved on swiftly to another idea: a piece on the editor of the 'Mail on Sunday', who has suddenly discovered that the British police are not, after all, paragons of courtesy and rectitude.

He made this discovery when he tooted his horn in a traffic jam and was arrested by an aggressive cop, who twisted his arm behind his back. Told he was hurting the bemused journalist, this police officer retorted: 'I mean to hurt you.'

The following Sunday the editor regaled the middle-class readers of his paper with trenchant observations on power having eaten like acid into that cop's soul. He was

now, he added, beginning to understand what black people and others without power have to put up with at the hands of the constabulary.

My text for the piece, I suggested, would be a sentence, not inappropriate for Christmas, culled from the gospel according to St Luke: 'Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.'

My friend shook her head sadly. Police arrogance, police brutality, and police racism were altogether too serious, she insisted, to be a proper subject for a light, frothy, Christmas confection.

I had to agree. So had she got any suggestions?

'A few weeks ago you mentioned the Confessions of Engels. Why don't you answer the same questions that Engels answered? That would be a really personal column, for once.'

It was my turn to demur. It could be argued, I pointed out, that there were certain aspects of the Confession game as played in the nineteenth century that might strike us today as sexist.

For instance, Engels had to state separately his favourite quality in man ('to mind his own business') and in woman ('not to mislay things'). What's more, asked to state his aversion, he replied: 'affected stuck up women'. Why not 'affected stuck up people'?

'Engels was brought up in a patriarchal age and couldn't be expected to overcome all its prejudices', my friend countered loftily. 'Anyway, it's only a game, and I dare say readers will be willing to make allowances for your prejudices.'

Here, then, are my Confessions, not to be

taken too seriously.

Favourite virtue: loyalty.

Favourite qualities in man: honesty, intelligence.

Favourite qualities in woman: intelligence, honesty.

Chief characteristic: punctuality.

Idea of happiness: making a discovery; becoming a grandfather.

Idea of misery: being interrupted while working.

The vices you excuse: carelessness, unpunctuality.

The vices you detest: hypocrisy, cruelty.

Your aversion: gurus of all persuasions.

The characters you most dislike: Jeffrey Archer; practically all MPs; practically everybody in public relations.

Favourite occupation: listening to traditional music on traditional instruments.

Favourite hero: Touissant Louverture.

Favourite heroine: Nanny.

Favourite poets: Shelley, Blake.

Favourite prose writers: James Baldwin, Edmund Wilson.

Favourite flower: cyclamen.

Favourite colour: red.

Favourite dish: steak and kidney pudding.

Favourite maxims: 'Not to laugh, not to weep, but to understand'; 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'; 'Speak, hands, by me.'

Confessions can be played as a party game, when television and other pastimes pall. It works best if you answer the questions anonymously on slips of paper, swop them round, and then guess who has given which set of answers.

I wish all readers of Workers Press a relaxing break and a 1989 of steady political advance and achievement.

AS I SEE IT

BY TOM OWEN

The curious case of the firemen and the madonna

I ONCE lived in a town which was dominated by a high moorland hill. Over this hill, the clergy erected a tall wooden cross to remind us of Christ's sacrifice.

One night some godless youths had soaked the cross in petrol and set fire to it. This event took place before the immigration of Asians into the town, so that it was seen as a straightforward piece of sacrilege rather than a demonstration by the Klan.

There was a deal of official indignation and the local press proclaimed the onset of the new dark ages. Later on the Christmas Eve of that year an even greater abomination took place.

It was the custom of the Corporation to construct a 'crib', a representation of the adoration of Jesus and Mary by the Magi in front of the town hall. That particular Christmas morning the police discovered the mutilated remains of Mary,

the boy Jesus with his chest caved in and the wise men decapitated. Again the godless youth were blamed.

However, I know the truth to this story. It was not an outbreak of genuine iconoclasm.

A fireman's wife told me in confidence that there had been an electrical fault in the wiring of the haloes, and that Mary was already smouldering.

Two firemen returning from their duty attempted to save the Holy Family from burning. Unfortunately they had taken some Christmas cheer from their hip flasks earlier and were particularly clumsy in their use of those rubber-handled axes.

Tom Owen recommends the following poems by Georg Weerth which have been translated, by his friend and colleague Rik Kavanagh. Georg Weerth (1822-1856) met Engels in Bradford and became a close associate of both Marx and Engels. He had left his native Germany to take up a position in for a textile firm. He wrote his poetry in order to further proletarian solidarity.

There was a penniless tailor

There was a penniless tailor who sewed himself crooked and dry.

He sewed for over thirty years

and still he didn't know why.

And when at last of a Saturday another week had passed him by,

his tears of a sudden began to roll and still he didn't know why.

And he took those gleaming needles and those glinting scissors, aye, broke those scissors and needles and still he did not know why.

Many a stout threat he took and around his neck did tie and he hung himself from a rafter and still he did not know why.

He did not know - but the bells rang out, rang out to the evening sky, the tailor died at half past seven and still nobody knows for why.

There was a caster of cannon

The hills with dew lay heavy hung, and as the lark did sing, the poor woman gave birth, gave birth to her poor son.

And when he reached his sixteenth year, his arm grown all the firmer, there he stood in a workshop drear with leather apron and a hammer.

He ran the oven's belly through

with heavy iron bars, and brightly from the slag and smoke the metal streamed its stars.

Cannons he cast, many a one, that roar out over seven seas, through them the Frenchies were undone and India brought to her knees.

They hurled the heavy shot with ease right through the Chinaman's ribs, they trumpeted Britannia's great victories with iron maws and lips.

And still the hearty blade the thundering cannons cast until the hand of age had laid its seal on vigour past.

And when his hand could lift no more, no mercy then was shown, he was shown promptly to the door and among the lame and beggared thrown.

He went - his breast with anger torn, as if there a thunder growled from all those mortars born he'd from their castings rolled.

But soft he spoke: 'The day will come, you accursed scoundrels, when we will cast for our own fun those four-and-twenty pounds!'

RESHAPING THE PAST IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

LOUIS Malle's 'Au Revoir Les Enfants' which can be seen over the Christmas period in selected cinemas is not a movie to write at length about, because, without stylistic complexity, it says everything for itself.

The purpose of a review must therefore be to encourage readers to see it. It is clearly a film that the noted French director had long wanted to make. The story is based on his personal experience as an 11 year old at a school for the children of rich Roman Catholics not far from Paris.

It is 1943-1944, and Julien (the Malle character, brilliantly played by Gaspard Manesse) is a reluctant boarder. Occupied Paris is too dangerous a place to be.

Through a process of adolescent sparring - the details of which make up much of the film - he makes friends with his principal intellectual equal in the class, a somewhat unexpected new arrival, called Bonnet (Raphael Fejto, who is also excellent).

Bonnet, we quickly suspect, and are soon told, is an assumed name for 'un juif', whom the monks running the school have agreed to protect. The dramatic tension of the film - given that we know that the German defeat is well over a year away - lies not so much in whether disaster will strike, but rather in how and when.

The makeshift school, in a convent near to woods in which

**'Au Revoir Les Enfants' (PG);
1hr45mins. Written, produced and
directed by Louis Malle. French
dialogue, English subtitles.**



wild boar roam, is in itself a threatening environment. In it, however, the boys manage to be boys, though Malle, authoritatively establishes the significance of the main story by avoiding even a trace of voyeurism in his sub-theme of awakening sexuality.

The matter-of-factness with which the presence of the Germans is made clear; episodes of banter between some of the boys, 'collaborateurs', and even occupying soldiers; and the unusual avoidance of caricature in the

portrayal of the inevitable Gestapo officer, all add to the authentic feel of the film.

It is no substitute for a history lesson, since it assumes in its audience a sensitivity to the basic situation; and in the general scale of things, it deals with small events.

Yet the unmelodramatic integrity with which the story is told conveys a gripping sense of history, and its importance.

Perhaps Malle himself somewhat

underestimates this aspect of his own work.

He has written that, while this should perhaps have been his first film, it was only after four decades and a long career in cinema (including 10 years in the US) that he felt his memory of the events was sharp enough.

He says he has at last felt able to reshape 'the past, going beyond mere historical reconstruction, in search of a truth that was to be both haunting and timeless.'

He tried 'to rediscover that first and closest of friendships that was so rudely destroyed, as well as my introduction to the absurdities of the adult world with its violence and prejudices. 1944 was a long time ago, but I know that the youth of today will be able to share my feelings.'

If this history is true, it is to be hoped that the youth will be inspired to think much more about the roots of the incidents portrayed here; and about why it is now after so much time that so skilled a film-maker feels compelled to make such a movie.

For, despite Malle's talk of timelessness, and his artistically very proper avoidance of anything remotely like propaganda, I think this is very much a film about our times, about our history - and, in its own beautifully understandable way, about the tasks posed in the epoch in which we live.

Terry Brotherstone

LETTERS

Revolution in Palestine

LAST week's Workers Press editorial said: 'Quite correctly, Marxists have given unconditional backing to every struggle against Israel as the agency of imperialism. But the PLO was never a revolutionary movement. Its leaderships, bourgeois or petty bourgeois, aimed to force the great powers to recognise the rights of the Palestinians whether through military action or diplomatic manoeuvre.'

I believe this is an inadequate explanation of the matter.

The PLO began as a guerrilla movement which made terrorist attacks on Israel in the name of the Palestinian nation.

The defeat inflicted on Israel at Al-Karamah in 1968 caused thousands of Palestinian and non-Palestinian Arabs to flock to the PLO, which they saw as the only force prepared to

stand up to the Zionist state.

If we recall this period of the PLO's history, the statement that it was 'never a revolutionary movement' sounds one-sided and meaningless. The PLO was revolutionary, in the sense that the struggle for national self-determination (the social content of which was, mainly, the question of the land) flowed through it.

It was reactionary in the sense that, even at that time, the political programme of its leadership was that of bourgeois nationalism: socialism was excluded from its perspective, and the working class was seen not as the motive force of revolution but as a passive body of support for guerrilla fighters.

Objectively, the Palestinian struggle confronted imperialism; subjectively, its leaders advanced a bourgeois programme, the opposite of the socialist programme on which that struggle will be carried through to an end.

We always learned in the Trotskyist movement that

'individual terrorist' politics were the reverse side of the reformist coin. The turn by Yasser Arafat in the mid-70s, from 'individual terrorism' to diplomatic negotiation, and readiness to talk to Israel, showed how.

Now as Palestinian youth confront Israeli troops on the West Bank, Arafat condemns 'terrorism and violence of all kinds' at the UN, and advances the two-state position. In public the US appears to be twisting his arm, but as we have correctly said in Workers Press the real dirty dealing is being done by the Soviet bureaucracy.

Trotsky's writings on the permanent revolution teach us that the national bourgeoisie is unable to carry through the struggle for the nation - here is a good (or rather, tragic) example.

Let's discuss the painful lessons of this and not blunt our arguments with one-sided declamation.

S. Pirani

Half serious homage to Tom Owen

When, in the worker's papers,
They start writing poetry -
Poetry which stirs -
Then will the masters quail
Behind their masters bush;
Then will they run back to the
country
And cower beneath twigged
roofs.

But the workers, mastering
New technologies, will make
Fire from a distance,
Burn the roofs. And the
masters,
Naked as emperors, will
Wail that, told there was no
alternative,
They had abolished thatchers
long ago.

(Tom Owen's 'Fantasia' appeared in 'Workers Press' on Saturday, December 3rd, 1988 - the first original poem to be published by the paper.)

Terry Brotherstone

THATCHERS CHRISTMAS GIFTS TO THE HOMELESS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
opting for unsafe, unstable squats or bed and breakfast. Black women suffer especially because of the racist attitude prevalent among landlords.

Joe Coleman, information officer for SHELTER, told Workers Press that government attacks are aimed mostly at those already in the greatest need for housing.

'There has been a dramatic increase in homelessness and bed-and-breakfast users.

'They have no chance of getting homes. They are under attack on all sides; from the poll tax, housing legislation and the changes affecting board and lodging payments and the funding of hostels.'

A survey carried out by the TV programme 'Network 7' suggested that, out of 112,000 homeless young people who are placed in temporary accommodation, 85,000 will end up back on the streets.

Squatting in empty council property is now becoming almost impossible. Cuts in spending means getting rid of squatters in order to squeeze as much rent out of housing estates as possible.

Drew McAlistair from Brixton, who is at present homeless, has had to squat for the last five years.

'I'm sick of being kicked out of squats every few months. It makes me sick having to live like this. Some people think that squatting is fun and freedom, but that freedom is now turning into jail sentences.'

Mandy and John are a young couple who live in the notorious 'cardboard box city' on London's Embankment.

They have no home and no possessions. Mandy is four months pregnant. 'We've been to all the hostels but they won't put us up because of our age group.

'They say we are too old to qualify. We have no money and where we are now is regularly attacked by National Front skin-heads.

'This Thatcher government is stupid and pathetic. It spends money which should be for the homeless on its own luxuries.' Asked about how they will spend Christmas John told us, 'We'll be lucky to get a Christmas card.'

Mandy said, 'There is no place to wash or change our clothes. The toilets are all locked up at 12 o'clock and we have to piss in the street. We've even been flung out of the church.'

John described the conditions. 'You have to sleep with your eyes open and there are rats everywhere. We've lost our dignity.' Many of the others sleeping in cardboard city were respectable middle-aged people who were embarrassed about speaking to us for fear of humiliation if their friends found out about their situation.

More than one hundred years ago Engels, in his book 'The Housing Question' proved that to really settle the housing question, like all other social questions, it is necessary to change the mode of production, to end the exploitation of wage labour.

For this the conquest of political power by the working class is decisive.

Edwina and the eggs

or - Mrs Be-done-by-as you-would-do

BY SARAH HANNIGAN

THE GOVERNMENT is to spend almost £20 million over the next month to protect egg farmers' profits and compensate them for destroying eggs and hens. At the same time £500,000 will be used to urge the public to start eating eggs again. But the warnings that accompany the advertising campaign indirectly admit that eggs are likely to be infected.

Tory junior Health Minister Edwina Curry was sacked last week, not because she was wrong, but because her statement threatened farmers' profits by making the public aware of the epidemic salmonella infection in eggs and poultry.

A microbiologist from Leeds University has claimed that at least one person a week dies from eating eggs infected with salmonella.

Professor Richard Lacey, a member of the Department of Health's veterinary products committee, bases his estimate on unpublished figures from the Public Health Laboratory Service which show that on average 3,000 people a week catch salmonella from eggs.

Yet no one is proposing to compensate families who have lost members from salmonella poisoning.

The outcry from the farmers and egg producers over loss of sales which is echoed by Tory MPs in the Commons, carries with it no apology for those who have suffered serious illness, and the Department of Agriculture refuses to admit just how widespread is the threat to public health.

But the farming industry had been unable to refute evidence from public health scientists and doctors who have recently reported their concerns in medical periodicals.

The 'British Medical Journal' editorial (17 December) said that throughout the 1980s food poisoning from salmonellas had increased dramatically in Britain. It went on:

'Between 1982 and 1987 the incidence of human S(almonella) enteritidis infection reported annually in England and Wales increased sixfold from 1,101 cases to 6,858 cases.' Eighty per cent of these infections were identified as being caused by poultry.

'...An extensive nationwide outbreak by S. enteritidis type 4 (specific to hens' eggs) has clearly been taking place in Britain over the past two years, with contaminated poultry meat being a major food vehicle in its spread...'

Until two years ago, the article said, S. enteritidis 'infections in Britain had usually affected holidaymakers who had been in Spain and Portugal'.

Two weeks earlier, 'The Lancet' (3 December) had warned that the public should consider all eggs 'including intact clean eggs... as possibly infected'.

The problem of salmonella in eggs and chickens is not new - it has been a source of disagreement for at least 10 years.

Controls to regulate the production of animal protein feed for poultry, to introduce measures to reduce infection, were rejected by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1979, shortly after the Tories won the election, because they were considered too dear.

Present regulations do not prevent the use of salmonella-contaminated materials, nor are there requirements for production to ensure that clean and infected materials are separated to prevent re-infection of the finished product.

Scientists know that the treatment of hen food with formic acid can significantly reduce contamination - but it costs an additional £3 per ton - and is considered too costly by the producers.

The fact that egg producers are to be compensated for loss of sales and loss of public confidence in their product, is a clear measure of how little the Thatcher government cares about public health.

Mrs. Curry was popular as long as she espoused health theories that required no government spending - better eating habits, more winter woollies, no smoking, etc. - and individual responsibility. But as soon as she tackled an issue that involved profits for big business she was dumped unceremoniously.

Consider just how £20 million could be spent this winter to really alleviate some health problems

- it would build thousands of new homes for families condemned to live in bed and breakfast accommodation, or young people living on the streets; it could provide more adequate community services for the disabled, the old and the sick or it could be used to give nurses an adequate wage. But none of these things will be done.

Iran, Iraq, Turkey campaign

IRANIAN, Turkish and Kurdish Workers' Associations in Britain are planning a public campaign for the first six months of next year. It will link opposition to the mass executions of left-wing opponents by the Khomeini regime, with support for the rights of Kurdish people in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Also highlighted will be the plight of Iranian political refugees in Pakistan and Turkey. Both these countries are moving towards closer links with the Iranian government. A preliminary meeting last week established a basis for campaigns on the following slogans: Condemn the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds! Stop executions in Iran and Iraq! Release all political prisoners in Iran and Iraq! Condemn the regimes of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey! End harassment of political refugees in Turkey! Self determination for the whole Kurdish nation!

Just how free is the free state?

BY CHARLIE POTTINS

In the Free State JUST how free are Irish people in the 26 counties - the 'Irish Republic' that Republicans prefer to call derisively by its old name, the 'Free State'?

One case drawn to Workers Press' attention concerns a Dungarvan, County Waterford man, Terence Moroney.

Mr Moroney first got involved with politics during the 1981 Irish General Election campaign. One of the H-block Hunger Strikers, the late Kevin Lynch, was a candidate in the Waterford constituency, and young Terence Moroney joined the campaign.

Joining the Irish Republican Socialist Party, he took part the following year in a March for Decent Jobs, from Cork to Dublin, and over subsequent years was active in various campaigns,

ranging from 'Munster Trade Unionists Against Reagan's Visit' to working for a 'yes' vote in the divorce referendum.

On February 15 this year, plainclothes and uniformed garda searched Terence Moroney's home. Seven months later, he was charged with possession of 'Incriminating Documents' under the Offences Against the State Act - namely, five 1988 calendars, 17 posters, 3 booklets on the IRSP, and two songbooks. All items that could be purchased legally and openly in Ireland or Britain.

On this basis, he was also charged with membership of the Irish National Liberation Army.

The Dungarvan Anti-State Oppression Committee says the case is a backdoor form of internment, and it 'shows the naked fear of the 26 County establishment of anything that may endanger the status quo and bring forward the day of emergence of the working class on to the political arena.'