

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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LABOUR'S THIRD WAY



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BUILDING A POLICE STATE

Labour's police state

The passage of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act represents a new and fundamental attack on our democratic rights. As ever, when it decides on a new round of repression, the ruling class has dressed it up as a measure directed against an external threat. Yet we should have no illusions about this. This was not some panic measure in response to the Omagh bombing, or those on the US embassies in East Africa. It was a carefully calculated act by the Labour government to add to the armoury of repressive legislation that will be available in the event of any serious challenge from the working class in the future. The excuse - that it was needed for the fight against terrorism, international or otherwise - was for the gullible, in particular for the hundreds of Labour MPs who obediently trooped through the lobby to approve legislation which they had only seen on the day it was debated. By the end, they had made a fiction of the right to a fair trial, and of freedom of association, in Labour's Britain.

Under the Act, it is now possible to be convicted of membership of an illegal organisation on the say-so of a senior police officer (superintendent and above). A suspect's silence during interrogation or in court can be regarded as corroboration of a policeman's statement. Conviction can result in up to ten years' gaol. In practice, it amounts to judicial internment. The most probable way a police officer would 'know' that someone is a member of an illegal organisation would be from an informer. In other words, it would be hearsay - and may be hearsay twice removed. The source would never be known, since the informant's identity would be protected. In short, the statement could never be challenged properly in court. It might just as well be made up, which in many cases it undoubtedly will be.

The other critical measures allow for the prosecution of anyone who conspires to commit offences outside of Britain and which are offences in the country to which they relate. These are purported to be measures against the new ruling class bogey of 'international terrorism'. Their need has been buttressed by widespread claims that Britain is a 'safe haven' for Muslim fundamentalists. Given the close co-operation that exists between the Israeli secret police and MI6, this is of course nonsense. In fact, such legislation has its origins in the failure of the last Tory government to expel Mohammed Al-Mas'ari, who had been waging a fax campaign against

the Saudi state, much to the anger of the despots who rule it, and to the consequent alarm of the British state, in particular because of the threat Saudi displeasure might pose to vast British arms deals like Al Yamamah. A private Tory bill to outlaw such activities in 1996 failed; the measures it proposed, however, have been incorporated into lock, stock and barrel in Labour's legislation.

This section of the legislation fits perfectly with Labour's drive to defend Britain's imperialist interests wherever they are challenged: not by accident does it empower the Attorney General to bring any prosecution - as a member of the cabinet, he or she will naturally consult with the likes of the Foreign Secretary over whom to pursue



Jack Straw: New Labour's regime will be one of increasing regulation, compulsion and repression

and whom to ignore. Whilst it is an open invitation for the likes of the Burmese, Indonesian, Saudi or Israeli embassies to submit their hit lists, the Act also allows for the prosecution of British citizens who support the overthrow of tyranny and who may be charged with conspiracy to do anything which vaguely offends a potential ally of British imperialism. As many have pointed out, support for the South African freedom struggle in the past would now be an offence, with membership of the Anti-Apartheid Movement a potentially criminal act.

Labour's contempt for democratic rights is not new. Nearly 25 years ago, it rushed through the original Prevention of Terrorism Act in the wake of the Birmingham bombings. In April 1996, after Straw and Blair were 'briefed' by MI5 about a mythical Easter IRA bombing campaign, they voted to extend the stop and search powers under the Act. Labour had accepted the principles of the Criminal Justice Act, and had made clear it would not tamper with the Tories' anti-trade union legislation. Six months before the general election, FRFI argued that Labour in government would be completely authoritarian in character, that 'in the absence of any working class move-

ment, let alone communism, New Labour has a free hand to establish the sort of dictatorship of capital that is the precondition to salvaging British imperialism's fortunes. New Labour's regime will be one of increasing regulation, compulsion and repression of the working class and poor. No one with a shred of humanity can offer them any sort of support' (Editorial, 'New Labour, new barbarism', FRFI 133, October/November 1996).

Labour's job has been made easier by the backwardness of the British working class movement in relation to the anti-imperialist struggle in general, and that for Irish liberation in particular. The fact is that it has now put in place machinery which will be used against any new movement within this country, whether it is acting in solidarity with struggles elsewhere in the world, or fighting to defend its own immediate interests. The ruling class saw an opportunity, and Labour was quick to take advantage of it. Opposition was pitiful. There was much hand wringing in the liberal press, whilst many Tories found the measures over the top, Alan Clark speaking of 'focus-group fascism'. Yet when it came to the vote in the Commons, only a handful of Labour MP's opposed it - 19 in all. The remainder, who wouldn't know a democratic right if it hit them over the head, voted for a police state.

Let no-one try to argue that this was an aberration, that Labour were panicked into the move. This is sheer deceit. Labour governments' records on democratic rights have always been appalling - for decades they promised to repeal the Official Secrets Act, and did nothing. They took the first steps in tightening immigration laws, and have supported every further restriction since then. Labour now has at its disposal the most repressive range of legislation that any peacetime government has had this century. It has achieved what the Tories could only dream about. No wonder it is the preferred government of the ruling class.

STOP PRESS

As we go to press, seven people from Middle Eastern countries, have been arrested under the PTA (1989). They are being questioned about alleged acts of terrorism, although it is not clear whether these are supposed to have taken place in Britain or abroad.

Clearly these are just the sort of people the state would wish to use its new provisions against in order to 'prove' how essential they are and to get them accepted in a court of law.

Labour government corruption

Friends in high places...

ROBERT CLOUGH

In the dying days of the last government, Labour made much capital out of Tory 'sleaze'. The truth is that corruption is part and parcel of British capitalism whatever government is in office, only nowadays it has become all right because it can be called 'public-private partnership'. Such partnership means that Labour can solicit sponsorship for the gala dinner at this year's conference at £2,000 per table without a shred of embarrassment. Companies which have so far come forward with the asking money include:

- British American Financial Services - one of whose subsidiaries is Allied Dunbar, one of the leading mis-sellers of private pensions;
- Novartis, purveyors of genetically modified foodstuffs and deadly organophosphate dips. Novartis has also been a leading light in the break-up of the NHS drugs pricing system (see elsewhere this issue);
- Enron, which has recently been allowed to take over Wessex Water. Enron's stated personnel policy is to 'depopulate' employees because they 'gum up the works'. Enron is not new to lobbying. In the US, it sponsored Republican Tom DeLay to introduce a bill to deregulate the electricity industry. Its role was so brazen that the bill became known as the Enron Bill. In India, it has organised the imprisonment and beating of Indian peasants protesting at its construction of a power plant near Bombay. In Puerto Rico,

lax standards led to the death of two workers when a propane plant blew up. In Florida, the company was fined for pollution so bad that the state government said it was 'the worst environmental damage from a single project' it had ever seen. Enron paid Lord Wakeham, ex-Tory energy minister and current head of the Press Complaints Commission, \$78,000 in 1997 for advice on buying businesses in Europe.

Backscratching...

Business is made so much easier when you know the right people. Elizabeth Murdoch, daughter of Rupert, and Chief Executive of News International, is friends with Peter Mandelson. So is Matthew Freud, who not only advises BSKyB on public relations, but whose company is another sponsor of Labour's gala dinner. So is Tim Allen, who used to be Blair's spokesperson, and now works for BSKyB. So who imagines that Mandelson, as head of the Department of Trade and Industry, will do anything to oppose Murdoch's takeover of Manchester United? Murdoch would have cleared it before the bid became public.

Talking of friends: Bob Ayling, the union-busting head of British Airways, is mates with both Gordon Brown and Jack Straw. He must be mates with Mandelson by now, since BA have sponsored the Millennium Dome. The Department of Trade and Industry is investigating BA's tie-up with American Airlines. The chances of the DTI rejecting it are as small as the chances were of it rejecting

Enron's takeover of Wessex Water. The DTI already supports BA's claims to buy and sell fabulously profitable landing slots at Heathrow, although in the past these have always been considered public property. Who said air could not be turned into a commodity?

BA is pushing hard in support of the British Airways Authority (BAA) for a fifth terminal at Heathrow. BAA originally opposed this way back in 1982, a view supported by the Tory government at the time. Privatisation in 1986 brought new priorities, and in 1994, with the support of BA, it asked for the case to be reopened. Of course there was huge opposition - 20,000 people wrote letters against it to the public inquiry, and 85% of 300 individuals and organisations who gave evidence also opposed it.

However, they don't count, since they cannot get to those who matter in the Labour government. BAA does, and it lobbied John Prescott on the day after the general election to press the case for the terminal. The government has allowed BAA to raise landing charges to cover the estimated £60m cost of the public inquiry. It has offered no subsidy to opponents, who now cannot afford any legal representation. Planning Minister Richard Caborn has recently attacked the inquiry as a waste of time, giving a clear indication of where the government stands. Earlier this year, Bob Ayling celebrated his 50th birthday party with Brown and Straw.

Clinton bombs Sudan and Afghanistan

US gun club

TREVOR RAYNE

On 7 August simultaneous bomb attacks killed 253 people in Nairobi and 10 people in Dar es Salaam. Of those dead, 12 were US citizens. It is obvious that the cause of the bomb attacks, which targeted US embassies, is US policy in the Middle East. The US government responded with cruise missile attacks on 20 August on a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum and alleged bases run by Omar Bin Laden in Afghanistan.

President Clinton said 'Let our actions send this message loud and clear: there are no expendable American targets. There will be no sanctuary for terrorists. We will defend our interests and our values'. This astonishing arrogance, which justifies the right of the USA to launch missiles against whomsoever it so wishes on pretexts it alone deems fit, is the rule of the bar-



Demonstrators outside the pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum

barian, club law. What were the Nazis' excursions into neighbouring countries if not so justified? What was the blitzkrieg if not the forerunner of missile bombardment? The USA refused Arab countries' proposals to allow the United Nations to inspect the pharmaceutical factory site. The British Labour government supported the US attack.

Former US attorney-general Ramsey Clark visited Khartoum and produced UN documents that showed that the factory supplied antibiotics and medicines for the treatment of malaria, tuberculosis and diar-

rhoea in Iraq. These medications are banned by Britain and the USA, using UN sanctions, from import into Iraq.

Over 200,000 Iraqis were killed by the US and British forces in 1991. Sanctions have killed more than a million more since. This silent slaughter goes on with barely a murmur in the US and Britain. The Palestinian people, the Kurds, Somalis are all considered legitimate targets. The bomb attacks in east Africa were born of a continual war against the oppressed peoples of the Middle East. A war the US state feels it can prosecute without restraint.

Omagh car bomb accelerates 'peace process'

BOB SHEPHERD

On 15 August, the Real IRA exploded a car bomb in Omagh, killing 29 people and injuring more than 200 others. Both the action itself and Sinn Fein's response to it, reveal the scale of the defeat of the revolutionary wing of the Republican movement. It showed how far apart the armed struggle and the nationalist working class have become.

With the nationalist working class suffering continual loyalist terror on the streets of Drumcree and Portadown, the Real IRA action was utterly pointless and, given that the target was a busy market town on a Saturday afternoon, courted the disaster that occurred. On the other hand, it provided the opportunity for Gerry Adams to show his bourgeois constitutional credentials which he seized with both hands, condemning the bomb 'without any equivocation whatsoever'. Mitchel McLaughlin, Sinn Fein chairperson, joined the media trial by claiming that the police on both sides of the border knew who was responsible.

Whatever the intentions of the Real IRA, the bombing has greatly accelerated the 'peace process' by pushing forward the pace of Sinn Fein's integration into the bourgeois political process in the Six Counties. On 1 September, Gerry Adams felt able to declare: 'Sinn Fein is committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means to achieve a way forward. Sinn Fein believes the

violence we have seen must be for all of us now a thing of the past, over, done with and gone.'

These 'peaceful and democratic means' are a reference to the new Northern Ireland Assembly which opened on 14 September. In another important move Sinn Fein appointed Martin McGuinness as their liaison with the decommissioning group. This step will smooth the path for Trimble to accept Gerry Adams as a Sinn Fein minister in the Assembly's executive.

The politically devastating consequences of the Omagh car-bomb confirm the position *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* put forward after the referendum in the Six Counties showed overwhelming support for the 'peace process'. We said that those organisations opposing the 'peace deal' could not carry on in the same old way, and that they had to evaluate and analyse the struggle of the past 25 years to see how the Republican movement had evolved from a position in the 1970s where it was leading a mass working class movement in an anti-imperialist struggle against the forces of British occupation, to a point now where it is about to take up its seats in a new partitionist Assembly.

Following the defeat of the Hunger Strike in 1981, and the development of the so-called 'ballot box and armalite strategy', the armed struggle of the republican movement became more and more detached from the concerns of the nationalist working class. It became a series of separate acts of armed



Omagh: politically devastating consequences

resistance to British imperialism rather than an integral part of a mass movement directed against the forces of repression and injustice. The political discipline and direction the mass working class movement could provide to the armed struggle was lost. The Real IRA's failure to understand this relationship, and to recognise the need for a different approach in a context where 95% of nationalists voted for the 'peace deal', led them into the political cul-de-sac which resulted in the Omagh bomb.

'Armed struggle' acquires legitimacy in the eyes of the people when it arises out of the need for defensive struggle against the forces of a repressive state. The Provisional IRA arose out of the Civil Rights movement in 1968-70 when working

class nationalist families were being driven out of their homes by loyalist mobs protected by the 'B' Specials. As young, working class nationalists organised and demand their communities and demand an end to discrimination and repression, they were met with water cannon, CS gas, internment and finally, as on Bloody Sunday, death at the hands of the security forces. Although the initial actions of the Provisional IRA involved the defence of nationalist communities against loyalist mobs, they soon had to face the RUC and the British Army as the latter moved to protect the forces of loyalism. By 1972, the target of the Provisionals had become the Northern Ireland statelet itself. Their armed actions were not separate from the mass movement, but

an integral component of a broader struggle whose aim was the destruction of the Northern Ireland sectarian statelet. As the mass movement advanced so did the scope of the 'armed struggle'. One of the lessons of this period of Republican struggle is that the 'armed struggle' has to be the subordinate part of the overall struggle, and certainly not separated from it. Otherwise it loses all political direction and purpose.

Political conditions have changed in the recent period but nationalist working class estates and families are still being threatened and attacked by loyalist mobs and the RUC. Even the British Housing Executive in the Six Counties had to reveal in its annual report on 1 September that three times as many families have been forced to flee their homes this year due to loyalist intimidation as compared to 1997. In Portadown, since their failure to walk down the Garvaghy Road, loyalists have continued a campaign of intimidation directed against the nationalist community. On Saturday 15 August, over 500 loyalists gathered along with a band near nationalist homes to hurl abuse and threats. On Monday 17 August a mob of 200 loyalists gathered at Drumcree church and paraded in the direction of the Garvaghy Road. When nationalist residents assembled on their own estate in response they were confronted by RUC in full riot gear. On Saturday 29 August, a mob of 200 loyalists rampaged through the main shopping centre of Portadown shouting 'Fenians get out, this is Ulster.' They attacked local nationalists chanting the name of Robert Hamill. Robert Hamill was beaten to death by loyalists in Portadown on 27 April 1997. They petrol-bombed Catholic-

owned shops, burning two out. The political and physical defence of the nationalist working class has been abandoned by Sinn Fein and the Republican movement in their pursuit of respectability and ministers posts in the Assembly. The INLA, supported by the IRSP, has been forced to recognise the new reality and order their own ceasefire. Yet repression and intimidation have not gone away, and the continued loyalist attacks on nationalist communities and estates will demand organised political action for their defence.

The response of Blair and the Labour government to Omagh has been to use it to push through draconian new anti-terrorist laws. These will allow the courts to convict suspects of membership of an illegal organisation on the basis of the opinion of a police officer. Silence will be treated as corroboration of that opinion. A new offence will now be 'conspiring to commit a terrorist offence outside the UK' which can be directed against any liberation movement or progressive struggle. These measures were an opportunity for the Labour government to make a political statement, to show its commitment to the fight against so-called 'world terrorism', and to lay the basis for future show trials of Irish Republicans.

Sinn Fein continued to talk and negotiate with British imperialism whilst the new anti-terrorist law was being rushed through the British parliament, a measure of its integration into the bourgeois political process. Gerry Adams, in line with the majority of liberal opinion, may have voiced his concerns over the effects of the new law, but for Sinn Fein as a whole, it was business as usual. ■

High crimes and misdemeanours

CAROL BRICKLEY

In the 1790s, Senator William Blount of Tennessee tried to get Indian tribes to invade Florida and Louisiana (then owned by Spain), slaughter a random number of citizens and then force the survivors to pledge allegiance to the British Crown. Sponsorship of international terror easily falls into the category of 'high crimes and misdemeanours' necessary, under the US Constitution, to fuel impeachment, and Senator Blount found himself facing impeachment charges.* Indeed, if today William Jefferson Clinton, President of the USA, were facing charges of initiating and sponsoring international terrorism we could all understand it.

But no. The President's current opinion poll rating (even after the 4 hour 3 minute video showing of his Grand Jury testimony was televised) is over 60%. The President has been producing the goods which please the US electorate: economic boom, internal peace, international bullying. The current scandal and threat of impeachment is not about promoting war and slaughtering innocents (of which the Republicans approve); it is about

adultery and lying about it.

The root of the scandal lies in a sexual harassment law suit against the President brought by Paula Jones, funded by the Republicans. The law suit failed (and will now be appealed), but in the process of trawling for any evidence of Presidential misconduct, the Jones lawyers came up with Monica Lewinsky. Both Lewinsky and Clinton lied as witnesses in this case, claiming that they had not had a sexual relationship. Clinton's somersaults about what does and does not constitute 'sexual relations' hark back to the definition used in the Jones case (more on this later). Meanwhile, Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr was also trawling for evidence against Clinton, pursuing allegations which originated years before in the Whitewater scandal (both Clinton and his wife were accused of bribery and fraud).

Evidence of Lewinsky's perjury in the Jones case became available when Monica's confidante, Linda Tripp, produced 20 hours of tape recordings and notes of Monica's musings about her relationship with 'Handsome' Bill. This was Starr's day. \$40 million later, and having forced Lewinsky to give evidence to a Grand Jury in

exchange for immunity for her perjury, Starr was able to force Clinton himself before a Grand Jury in August. Grand Jury hearings are secret and operate in a similar manner to old-style committals in English criminal law. The witness appears alone without a lawyer (although they are allowed to leave the room to get legal advice) and the object is to test the prosecution evidence before going to trial.

In September, Starr presented a 445-page referral to Congress alleging impeachable offences under four headings: obstruction of justice, perjury, witness tampering and abuse of power. The evidence included Monica's Grand Jury testimony with graphic details of their 10 sexual encounters, a blue cocktail dress tested for semen which matched the President's DNA, all Monica's ghastly love notes and poems and e-mails, White House records of the President's telephone calls and movements, gifts from Him to Her, and Clinton's own Grand Jury testimony on video. The evidence was immediately released and, a week later, the video - breaching Grand Jury secrecy.

Congress is dominated by the Republicans, and the speaker of the House is Newt Grin-



Clinton: 'Would you like to see my Private Office?'

grich, arch right-winger, who will supervise any impeachment proceedings. It is undoubtedly true that the Republicans are out to get Clinton and have destroyed his reputation; whether they will manage to impeach him or end up with a pyrrhic victory is another matter.

Readers will not be surprised to find that no one emerges from this sad debacle well. Lewinsky is publicly reviled, giftless and jobless. How did she manage to remember every detail of their 10 sexual encounters, preserve

the semen-stained dress, tell her friends and family, and end up with nothing? The Presidential gifts (hidden under Clinton's secretary's bed) included a black bag, a marble bear's head, a blanket decorated with the insignia of the Rockettes and a box of cherry chocolates: where are the diamonds?

The relationship does not even have the merit of being adult. First encounter: she showed him her thonged underwear, he said 'would you like to see my Private Office'. Their first

real conversation took place after the sixth sexual encounter! The Leader of the Free World has lied and dodged to try and avoid the impeachment hook: 'My understanding of this definition [of sexual relations] is it covers contact by the person being deposed [the witness] with the enumerated [erogenous] areas, if the contact is done with an intent to arouse or gratify.'

Readers will be amazed that Clinton believes this to mean that if Lewinsky performed oral sex on him, then she had sexual relations with the President, but he, on the other hand, did not have sexual relations with her! Having tried serial grovelling (the broken voice redolent of suppressed emotion, just like Tony Blair) and failed, the President's stubborn defence now relies on semantics: 'that depends on what the meaning, of the word is, is', Clinton replied to another question.

Across the Atlantic, the US ruling class is caught in one dilemma after another: it's a private matter, it's a public scandal; it's a major international embarrassment, it's America's finest hour. This is a society which is founded on hypocrisy: private debauchery and public moralising. They will have to watch out - it will now be open season on adulterers in public office. Meanwhile the bell is tolling for the economy... ■

* The impeachment attempt failed.

Crisis in the NHS

Critical shortages of staff

ROBERT CLOUGH

The commitment to Tory spending plans for 1997/98 and 1998/99 has left the NHS facing a crisis whose full effects will be evident in two to three years time. Already, there are critical shortages in key staff, and they are getting worse:

- There are not enough GPs joining the service to replace those who are approaching retirement, particularly the generation of mainly Asian doctors who work in inner-city areas;
- Already there are 8,000 too few nurses. Nearly a quarter of registered nurses (and even more midwives) will be eligible for retirement over the next two years, yet registrations are falling: from 13,931 in 1992/93 to 11,208 in 1996/97. There is a shortage of applications for training places: in 1996/97, 15,400 people applied to fill 16,100 places.
- The shortage of midwives is already so acute that women are being discharged from a Bristol hospital within six hours of giving birth because they cannot be cared for.
- There are shortages in other professions allied to medicine, such as occupational therapy and speech therapy, where staff are having to be recruited from

overseas. This is now the source of a quarter of new nursing recruits.

The government was spared serious embarrassment last winter because it was relatively mild. The number of emergency admissions rose only 3.3%, the lowest in five years, and the number of deaths in the period from November 1997 to February 1998 was 30,000 fewer than normal. This meant that the pressure on the hospital service was less than it might have been. Yet despite this, waiting lists rose to a record level of 1.3 million by April. Labour then cooked the books in August to announce that waiting lists had fallen by 45,000. In reality, since waiting list changes are calculated at the end of each quarter (March, July, September and December), the real fall between March and July was 10,000 – a drop in the ocean. It is unlikely that the government will be able to meet the revised target of one million by the next election: the disruption to services as a result of the millennium bug will see to that.

What this means is that people who can afford to will turn to private medicine. Recently, a patient turned up for an ENT appointment in Southampton, only to be turned away for being

a year early. He hadn't realised the waiting time was 60 weeks, not eight. In East London, one ENT surgeon had, by early September, just two urgent appointments available for the rest of the year. Private appointments urgent or otherwise were a different matter: two or three days' notice was quite sufficient. The rich will do all right, the poor won't. Those who can afford to can make the twice-yearly visits to the dentist that these bloated professionals say are necessary. However, barely a third of those in the lowest income groups go even once a year because of the charges, a significant fall over the past five years. The proportion of wealthier groups making such a visit has remained unchanged.

Waiting lists and charging are two ways of rationing healthcare. The government has now found a third way: banning treatments altogether. Hence on the one hand it has licensed the use of Viagra, on the other, it has stopped GPs from prescribing it. The annual cost to the NHS, after initially fanciful estimates of £1bn per annum, was thought to be some £50-150m, out of a total drugs bill of £6.3bn. Yet precisely because it has been licensed, it can be bought by those able to afford the £4.84 cost of each pill. So, in

reality, rationing means preventing working class access.

The drug multinationals are now in open rebellion against the government and the way it buys drugs for the NHS. The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation System is a gentleman's agreement between the NHS and the drug multinationals. The system sets profit ceilings for the 45 largest pharmaceutical companies on the drugs they

product licences to Allied Pharmaceuticals, including one for Syntometrine, which controls haemorrhaging during labour, and another for Syntocinon, which induces labour. At the end of June, Allied unilaterally raised the price of Syntometrine eight-fold from 18p a dose to £1.40, and the price of Syntocinon seven-fold. Novartis continues to manufacture the drugs, but can get more by sell-



supply to the NHS – between 17% and 21%, an extremely high rate of guaranteed return. However, the drugs industry is not happy with this, and is trying to break the system up. Although the assault on the scheme is being led by smaller companies, they are being used as cats' paws by the multinationals. The latter have sold licences for a range of commonly-used drugs to these smaller companies, which have then hiked the NHS price up to eight-fold. Novartis was one of these multinationals: it sold 16

ing them to Allied, which has been deliberately set up to front the scam. Both Rhone-Poulenc and Roche followed Novartis, selling licences to firms which then doubled or quadrupled prices to the NHS.

The NHS drugs bill has doubled since 1991 when it was £3.1 billion. Although the government is threatening legislation against the drugs companies, the outcome is a foregone conclusion: the multinationals will have their way, and other drug treatments will be denied to the poor. ■

Manufacturing absence – the media, hurricane and Cuba

DAVID PEGG

During the week of 21 September, Hurricane Georges left disaster in its wake – a deadly path through the Caribbean, smashing through Antigua, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, heading towards Florida. En route it hit the eastern coast of Cuba – but you'd never have known it from the British media.

On Thursday 24 September BBC news told us all about the 100,000 homeless and 70+ killed in the Dominican Republic, the damage in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean... Nothing about the extensive crop damage in Holguin, thousands of flooded homes, the destruction. Nor, despite all that, the low level of civilian casualties due to the preparations of the Cuban state and people, the evacuation of 300,000 people, the mass mobilisation to deal with a national crisis which follows hard on the heels of a drought which has devastated this year's harvests.

Instead, the news leaped from Hispaniola to Florida. Subsequent days brought us saturation reporting on the effects on the USA. The blackout was so obvious. The BBC trailed President Clinton announcing aid to the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Puerto Rico – but not, of course, to Cuba.

Totally disgusted by the continuing censorship, I phoned the BBC newsdesk to ask why Cuba had not been mentioned at all, a clearly political move

related to the US blockade. I then rang Channel 4 with my concerns about the reporting of Hurricane Georges. They decided they were too busy with the Salman Rushdie story which had just broken and, when I persisted, hung up on me! So I complained to C4 Viewers' Complaints and again repeated my point about coverage of Cuba. Apparently, my comments are now in a 'log' which will be circulated to the chief executive of C4! I left my details, but no one got back to me. The ITN reporter I spoke to did express concern that reference to Cuba was 'scanty' and admitted I had 'a fair point'.

Eventually, I contacted C4's *Right to Reply*, with my tapes of TV broadcasts and subsequent phonecalls. I am now waiting to see if Rock around the Blockade can get on the programme to talk about the abysmal TV news bias. Meanwhile, many phonecalls later, my attempts to get information on Cuba's plight had a result in the form of the Red Cross, who said heavy rain had cut off roads and power and there was massive flooding which has destroyed crops in the eastern region. But because the Cuban government puts priority on the safety of human beings, only two people have been killed in accidents with power lines.

The worker I spoke to agreed that the news blackout on Cuba revealed that there was a suspicious case of double standards due to the US blockade. ■

Barzani and USA-Turkey-Israel Co

T KURT

US imperialism's Middle Eastern partners met in Jerusalem in the first week of September. Authorities from the USA, Turkey, Israel and Jordan attended. This co-operation is based, like all capitalist partnerships, on distrust and betrayal.

The partnership – which it is actually appropriate to call 'Barzani & USA-Turkey-Israel Co' – has problems, as each seeks to prioritise its own interests. A sign of this came when the partners attempted to outdo each other on the issue of southern Kurdistan. Barzani is leader of the reactionary Kurdish Democratic Party in southern Kurdistan/northern Iraq.

The cautious Turkish bourgeoisie regards the partnership as a guarantee of stability, while the USA, which views its interests as under threat in the region,

adopts an aggressive attitude.

Disagreement on the Barzani question, which some Turkish 'nationalistic left' people see as a conflict between the USA and a so-called 'independent Turkey', should be viewed in this light. While the USA tries to activate and direct southern Kurds against Iraq and Iran, Turkey does not seem ready to accept this. The USA wants to include Barzani and Talabani (leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in southern Kurdistan) in the Iraq National Congress, which aims to overthrow Saddam, whereas Turkey prefers southern Kurds to maintain their compromise with the Iraqi regime. Barzani and Talabani have already been to Washington for negotiations.

In plain terms, the partners agree about southern Kurds on a single point: to use 'southernism' as an antidote against northern Kurds and the PKK (Kurdistan

Workers Party). That is all they can agree on. Turkey wants to be a 'peaceful' military power that would have a critical regional role, rather than being an extension of the US army.

The USA's requirements go further: in return for its support for Turkey in the war against the PKK and the Kurdish people, the USA seeks Turkey's contribution to the protection of US interests against Iraq and Iran. This requires Turkey to take risks. However, the role that the Turkish bourgeoisie has in mind in the Middle East is that of the 'lazy legionnaire'. Turkish militarism wants to act as a salaried guard of the USA, but to enjoy stability at the same time. The chances of that luxury are getting slimmer all the time: the spectre of communism may have dimmed for the present but may be back soon and what is happening in Russia may force the USA back to its policy of 'containment'. ■

Closure and penalty for Sosyalist Iktidar

The newspaper of the Sosyalist Iktidar Partisi (Party for Socialist Power) has been banned for one week and the editor-in-chief Gamze Erbil sentenced to two years imprisonment by the Istanbul State Security Court. The article which brought the prosecution was in issue 138 of the paper and titled 'Message of Susurluk Report to Kurdish peo-

ple: "I did, I shall do again"'. It was about the Prime Minister's report on 'state gangs'. The article condemned the explicit and insolent approval expressed in the report for the 'dirty war' against the Kurdish people.

The court did not suspend sentence against Gamze Erbil because, to cite the court's decision, of 'her previous commit-

ments for which she is presently being tried in the same court and other courts in Istanbul'. Gamze Erbil and her solicitor did not attend the trial as part of a boycott of State Security Courts being carried out by revolutionary, progressive prisoners and their solicitors.

T Kurt

Reinstate Steve Hedley

HANNAH CALLER

Privatisation and a fragmented railway have not only led to an 82% rise in complaints this year but to increasing casualisation and poor working conditions for those employed in what is considered to be the third most dangerous industry in Britain.

While Railtrack makes £300 million a year profit and engineering contractors GEC Tarmac and Balfour Beatty make over £300 million a year between them, increasing numbers of railworkers take home £134 for a 39 hour week. To be able to live, they work 72 hours. The infrastructure companies are pushing for casual labour, overtime bans and obligatory night work. There is increasing breach of health and safety regulations with many new workers being out on the track with insufficient training.

It was for fighting back and organising within the RMT for better pay and conditions and safe practices that Steve Hedley, chair of the RMT Harlesden Engineering Branch and local staff representative for GEC Tarmac Rail Maintenance (GTRM) workers at Euston, was sacked by GTRM on trumped-up charges. GTRM is determined to break union organisation.

At the TUC Congress in mid-September, Bob Crow, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT, publicly defended the union leadership's repudiation of the unofficial action taken by GTRM RMT workers in August in support of Steve, on the grounds that it broke anti-trade union laws. After Steve's sacking however, the RMT executive had stated their support for Steve and said the strike would not be settled until he was reinstated.

Steve Hedley's case shows to what length privatised companies will go in their drive for profit, letting no militant unionised workers stand in their way. However those who fight back against poor pay and conditions and organise within the union, come up against anti-trade union legislation. When that legislation is challenged the union itself takes the side of the bosses. ■

Defend Steve Hedley against the false charges of criminal damage and intimidation under the 1992 Trade Union Act

Picket Clerkenwell Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 13 October at 9.30am

Messages of support and donations to RMT Strike Support Group, 145 Imperial Avenue, London N16 8HL

Labour strengthens exclusive education

JIM CRAVEN

The Labour government would have us believe their plans for education include the excluded: those people among the poorest sections of the working class who are worst served by the education system. Labour ministers, such as David Blunkett, dismiss as 'claptrap' any suggestion that unequal outcomes in education are due to the inequalities and deprivation of the capitalist class system. They try to maintain the illusion that policies to improve education overall will eradicate the gap between the educationally rich and poor. Recent evidence and research helps to nail this lie. The truth is that educational achievement is directly linked to social class and that, just as the gap between rich and poor widens, so does the gap in educational achievement. An analysis of schools labelled as 'failing' by OFSTED inspectors, showed that 70% of them

were based among the poorest third of the population. Schools serving the poorest 10% of the population were eight times more likely than average to 'fail' their inspections. 59 out of 83 'failing' secondary schools had to cope with levels of poverty which were at least twice the national average and none of these 'failing' schools were in prosperous areas. These so-called failures are not simply a matter of school management and organisation as Labour claims. In many cases their results plummeted after being 'named and shamed'. Even where new 'high-profile whiz-kid' head-teachers have managed to improve results they are often still not back even to their original levels. The inequalities of class society cannot be solved by tinkering with the system.

The 1998 GCSE results showed an increase in the number of top grade passes, but also an increase in the number of young people who got no passes at all. In other words, the education gap at GCSE level is widening.

This is backed by figures from the Institute for Public Policy Research which show that, between 1991 and 1996, the top 10% of pupils increased their average GCSE points score by 9 points whereas the bottom two 10% bands increased their scores by just 2% and nothing respectively. Last year 47,000 16-year-olds left English schools without any GCSEs at all. Almost 40% of these young people remain unemployed and excluded from further education and training. The situation is little better for many thousands of others who achieved four or fewer low-grade GCSEs. The IPPR study demonstrates that such results make little difference to job prospects. At least a third of these young people will face unemployment and Welfare to Work. Of course, the vast majority of these young people come from the poorest sections of the working class; with a disproportionate number from black families and some sections of the Asian population.

The league tables of exam

results, which are supposed to goad schools into raising educational standards, actually en-

tempted to concentrate their efforts on the top pupils and on pushing the mid-range pupils up into the higher grades. The same strategy occurs at primary level too, where the national targets are based on the number of pupils achieving level 4 or above. These targets could be reached by doing nothing at all for the bottom 20%. The much vaunted Summer Literacy Schools (which actually failed

table, private schools increased their high GCSE grades by even more than the national average, with nearly half of their privileged pupils getting the top A and A* grades. These results open up the best places at the country's elite universities for, increasingly, university admission tutors are only making 'conditional offers' of a place to those who have achieved impressive GCSE results. No wonder the bourgeoisie and middle classes are willing to spend up to £15,000 a year for private education; about six times what is spent in state schools.

Of course, Labour has no intention of upsetting its middle class and labour aristocrat supporters. The School Standards and Framework Act will leave the whole elitist edifice of private education, public schools, the Oxbridge Mafia, grammar and grant-maintained schools intact. Indeed, despite Labour's claims that it will not extend selection, the Act will allow specialist schools to choose 10% of their pupils by 'aptitude' (an old euphemism for privilege).

Meanwhile, school exclusions continue to rise. Last year 12,700 youngsters, overwhelmingly poor working class and black youths, were permanently excluded. By one means or another, Labour will maintain the capitalist order.



The Act will allow specialist schools to choose 10% of their pupils by 'aptitude' (an old euphemism for privilege)

courage them to ignore these lowest-attaining pupils. The tables are based on the number of pupils achieving higher grade GCSEs, so schools are

to have any lasting impact on standards last year) were also based on pushing pupils from level 3 to level 4.

At the other end of the exam

SUSAN DAVIDSON

Recent years have familiarised teachers, pupils and parents with the presence of education companies in the everyday life of schools. They may provide services, like Nord Anglia which has made millions out of state education through running careers services, supply teaching agencies and school inspection, or Edexcel, which sells in-service training and examinations. Then there is capital land development especially on prime sites like that occupied by Pimlico school in London [see box]. The newly-launched Education Action Zones (EAZs) open up the state sector even further to private enterprise. They have been set up by the Labour government on the assumption that a booming business sector is looking for new investment outlets and can make a profit from education.

Education Action Zones

EAZs are clusters of secondary schools and their feeder primary schools in which private business is encouraged by government grants to take over much of the running of the schools. The majority of the zones are, as yet, led by local

and Employment (DfEE) assured an audience of NUT teachers that 'there is nothing in the Bill that allows the private sector to run a school for profit'. The reality is different, as an article in *The Guardian* under the headline 'Kindly businessmen helping out schools for

• there are limits on the amount of profit to be extracted from the schooling process of the working class as a whole. While private schools and middle-class peripherals like music lessons, sports, school transport, uniforms etc may be turned into a business, the provision of mainstream education does not directly yield a dividend to the individual capitalist.

The search is on to extend the possibilities for private enterprise by hiving off further segments of state education and controlling wages and conditions of the staff more closely. This is what is being proposed for the Kings Manor school, a 750 place comprehensive school in Guildford. As a 'failing' school it is being put up for sale, and bidders include education businesses Nord-Anglia, the Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) and the US-based Edison Project. Each company has presented its own business plan for the school, but they all include the right to hire and fire staff and select a percentage of pupils. In other words, Kings Manor, which exists beside some of the most affluent and selective schools in England, will exclude some local children, who as a result will have nowhere to go.

All the way with the Edison Project!

The Edison Project does not mess around. It has indicated that its bid for Kings Manor will only go ahead if local education authorities hand over other 'failing' schools. This organisation is a big-time player in the American private school sector. Twenty three of its 25 US

schools were profitable last year, and it is opening 20 more this year. When Edison takes over a school it takes total control. The teachers Edison keeps are retrained along Edison lines and they must stick to Edison's very prescriptive methods. What the Edison Project does not like about the British EAZs is that local education authorities get to keep some of the money. They would want it all, and several action zones on top, to make an investment worthwhile. In the companies' own words, 'the commitment of resources, time and energy necessary to launch Edison UK is disproportionate to the goal of creating a single action zone'. The Edison Project has nevertheless made a detailed bid for Tameside EAZ.

The chairman and chief executive of the Edison Project, Benno C Schmidt Jnr, has been a frequent visitor to ministers at the DfEE over the last year or so and has had frequent talks at the Social Market Foundation, a right-wing think-tank. A full-blooded bid to take over English classrooms and run them for profit looks increasingly likely. The realities of the profit crisis are exposing the pretence that there can be a mutually beneficial business/education partnership. Companies are not likely to continue charitable works in schools in the cold climate of recession and falling profit margins - they want their pound of flesh.

Behind this privatisation of the school system is the political prejudice against state provision which New Labour has taken up so enthusiastically. In the US, however, figures from

nationwide standardised tests on performance in state schools show a continued improvement, particularly among black students and those deprived families - the very people who cannot opt out of the state system. Other evidence shows that improved resources are the key to improved results. In the Tennessee project in the 1980s, kindergarten pupils were put into classes of 15 for three years and their progress compared to other pupils in the standard classes of 22. Results were markedly better.

Good resources democratically utilised in the classroom are what is really needed to improve education. Turn education into a commodity and it is no longer education but schooling designed to produce a profit.



Ofsted's Head: Chris Woodhead

education authorities. However, industry is heading two of them: telecommunications firm Comcast in Middlesbrough, and Shell in Lambeth (although since it announced the closure of its London office as a result of the Asian economic crisis, it may change its mind). Under the legislation, EAZs are not obliged to observe national norms for the pay and conditions of the teachers they employ, nor do they have to follow the National Curriculum.

What about turning a profit?

Recently, Sandy Adamson from the Department for Education

free. In your dreams' showed. A further report in the *Times Educational Supplement* carried the banner 'Zones may fail for lack of profit', reported that most proposed EAZs have failed to attract the £250,000 cash from business to match the government's £750,000. Two truths are becoming evident:

• the private sector is only interested in putting money into education as a profitable investment. A satisfactory rate of return cannot be extracted from a small base and so companies like Arthur Andersen are looking to widen their area of operation and move into several EAZs.

Home Secretary Jack Straw is a governor of Pimlico School in London (a mere 200 miles from his Blackburn constituency). He is also an enthusiastic supporter of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) where private business can make a fortune out of investing in the public sector. With Jack Straw's support, the school governors have been trying to force through a PFI scheme whereby a private company would turn a large part of the school playground into luxury flats, whilst undertaking some rebuilding of the school itself. The almost total opposition of the parents and pupils has not deterred Straw, even though he has been forced to resign as Chair. Reluctant to give up the least fragment of power, he is fighting back. After all, what are playground space or democracy compared to 'Third Way' principles?

David Blunkett has just re-appointed Chris Woodhead on a five-year contract as Chief Inspector of Schools and Head of Ofsted. The salary? £115,000 plus a 10% performance-related bonus. The increase? A mere 46%. Blunkett's action came a week after he had angrily denied rumours of the scale of the proposed increase. Somehow we don't think this will be the sort of offer that will be made to the teachers he is supposed to inspect.

FIGHT POVERTY PAY!

Unison undermines Tameside strikers

In May, 250 careworkers in Tameside were sacked when they went on strike against Tameside Care Group rather than accept yet another round of pay cuts. As their struggle has continued, they have found themselves having to take on not only the company but the Labour-run council and even their own union. First the GMB, to which some of the striking careworkers belonged, called off their support for the strike. The majority of the careworkers immediately joined Unison instead.

Three months on, the sacked careworkers took their fight direct to the home of Alan Firth, Labour Party member and managing director of Tameside Care Group, the man who ordered their sacking. A coachful of some 40 women protesters travelled to the quiet, leafy suburb in Huddersfield and assembled in his front garden. They decorated his house from top to bottom with banners, placards and posters while others visited his neighbours, informing them about Firth's role. This type of direct action, along with regular occupations of the Town Hall and job agencies that supply scabs, has been a central part of the strikers' campaign since the dispute started and demonstrates a clear break from conventional trade union activities.

The following week, one of the strikers noticed that the GMB was recruiting scabs outside the Town Hall; within moments of making one telephone call, 30 women assembled to picket the recruitment team. Noel Pine, a member of the Socialist Party and secretary of Tameside Unison (which represents the strikers), came out of the Town Hall and attempted to break-up the picket by arguing 'We don't want to show the management that there is a split in the unions over this dispute'. The strikers reminded him of the reactionary role the GMB have played, the fact that they tried to force GMB members back to work, even offering to arrange transport to take them across picket lines. Noel Pine then told the strikers that he did not want Unison's name on their placards if they were going to con-

tinue - so the women tore off the word 'Unison'. A short while later the women occupied the Town Hall to protest at the Labour-controlled council using the front page of *Tameside Citizen*, a council paper delivered free to every home, to attack their dispute. The police were then called to evict the women.

To mark the six months of the dispute the strikers and their support group organised a third demonstration in Ashton. This attracted 500 people - though there was a noticeable absence of Unison banners. The speakers included Nigel Cook of the RNCC and Malkiat Bilku of the Hillingdon Strikers, both of whom had been denied speaking rights at the previous Unison-organised demo, when the microphone was switched off shortly after Rodney Bickerstaffe had spoken.

At a public meeting the previous night, organised by the strikers and the support group, letters were read out from residents of Tameside care homes and their relatives detailing the deterioration of conditions as a result of using scab casual workers. Bedsores are not being attended to and one woman had not had a bath for three weeks. A woman with a heart condition had not been given her medicine for 12 days and a senile diabetic had been given sugar in her tea. One relative had been doing the laundry at home because nobody had told her that it could be done at the care home. The fire brigade has been called out on three occasions due to kitchen filters and other electrical equipment not being used correctly.



A manager of one of the homes intimidated a resident by demanding why her name was always in the complaints book. This resident now lives in fear that she will be evicted if she has to complain again.

The meeting passed resolutions making the following three demands:

- The immediate reinstatement of the strikers with all wages and conditions reinstated or the resignation of the directors of Tameside Care Group.
- That the Transport & General Workers Union sever any connection with Jack Thornley's firm of solicitors, until he resigns from and has no connection with Tameside Care Group. (Thornley, a director of Tameside Care Group, is a former

Labour councillor who does a substantial amount of legal work for the T&G.)

• That the membership of the NUT deselect Mike Custance as the branch secretary of Tameside NUT as he is also a director of Tameside Care Group.

A recent Tameside Support Group discussed the implementation of the resolutions. It emerged that Tameside Unison branch (that supposedly represents the strikers) does not officially call for the directors' resignations. This position creates a let-out for other union branches who can argue that if Unison isn't calling for resignations then neither can they. It also came to light that Tameside Unison branch only has two full

members meetings per year, and one of those is the AGM! The rest of the year the branch is run by a committee that meets monthly. So much for union democracy!

It was proposed that a delegation of strikers should go to the next branch committee of Tameside Unison to get them to support the resolutions. The secretary of the Support Group, who is also on the branch committee of Tameside Unison, was totally against this proposal. In an impassioned plea she argued that the council have already announced their intention to withdraw 'facility time'. ('Facility time' allows for Unison representatives to deal with union matters in work time). She claimed that if the branch committee were to support the resolutions this would further jeopardise their facility time. She also admitted that the branch committee 'were not allowed' to inform Unison members about anything related to the sacked strikers; this even includes putting up leaflets on notice boards advertising the strikers' demos and meetings. Tameside Unison branch committee has even adopted the unprincipled stand of adjourning their meetings under the pretence of having 'coffee breaks' so they can discuss matters relevant to the strikers' dispute. There was no vote taken on the proposal to send a delegation to the next branch committee.

By their actions Tameside Unison have put the interests of those who still have jobs first and by doing so are subordinating the interests of the 200 sacked careworkers. This stand by Unison locally is a block on the progress of the dispute. Nationally, Unison are also doing nothing to get the women their jobs back as was made clear by Bickerstaffe when he told some of the strikers at the TUC, 'What's going on with your dispute? Nobody tells me anything'.

With repeated determination and limitless initiative the women themselves have shown that they are capable of pushing the dispute forward. At the same time they have highlighted the severe limitations of the sectarianism and tired old practices of the declining trade unions. Allowing full participation of other workers in struggle and attempting to link their dispute with other issues affecting the working class, the Tameside strikers are pointing the way forward for a new working class movement.

Nigel Cook

REINSTATE NIGEL COOK CAMPAIGN

T&G parrots PolyGram lies

In March 1997 Nigel Cook began to recruit his colleagues into the TGWU under the direction of his union branch and full time officer, with the assurance that, if sacked, he would receive a weekly victimisation benefit, guaranteed by the union's rulebook.

Nigel was indeed sacked for his trade union activities. Why then is the T&G now refusing to pay him the promised victimisation benefit?

Bill Morris, who directed the General Executive Council to reject Nigel's application for the benefit, has consistently refused to give him any explanation. However, a recent reply from the T&G regional secretary, to a letter from Gary Greenwood, a T&G lay official, shows the answer lies in the deep-rooted sectarianism of the trade union movement and its willingness to side with big business against the working class.

For in his letter, Dave McCall, the regional secretary takes up the lie used by PolyGram to arrange Nigel's sacking, that 'the file considered by our Legal Advisers contained evi-

dence that he (Nigel) may have been dismissed arising from an article which he wrote for the Revolutionary Communist Group journal - *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* - in which he attacked the parent company, PolyGram, and subsequently distributed this journal amongst the workforce'.

Nigel has never denied writing the article and the union and its legal advisers have always been aware of the article since the day Nigel was sacked. Indeed, on 11 June 1997, during a telephone conversation, McCall even discussed the article with Jim Bowie, the T&G district secretary who was present the day Nigel was sacked. All relevant documents in the case, including the article, were then sent to Brian Dawson, T&G regional organiser, on 16 June 1997. He then forwarded them to Fergus Whitty, T&G national legal adviser - at the request of McCall!

'Finally', writes McCall, 'I note that your reply to me was also copied to the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign and I must make the point to you that I take the greatest exception to this...it must be patently obvious

that the internal issue of Nigel Cook's claim for Victimisation Benefit has absolutely nothing to do with this external campaign group'. He then closes with the assurance that he will be taking the matter further.

It is clear from all this that the union will go to any lengths to try and prevent Nigel from getting his victimisation benefit and those who take the side of Nigel risk being witchhunted out of the union. If you support Nigel's right to victimisation benefit and are against the witch-hunt, write to Dave McCall, Regional secretary, TGWU, Transport House, Salford Quays, Manchester M5 2SG. Tel: 0161 848 0909. Fax: 0161 872 6067.

Join the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign

To join the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign contact PO Box 14, Accrington, Lancs BB5 1GG, tel: 01254 679605. Affiliation rates: £15 TUs, £5 waged, £1 unwaged. Get copies of the campaign's *Fight poverty pay!* bulletin, invite speakers to your organisation, send donations.

Trades Union Congress 1

Trade unions today

■ Whom do trade unions organise today? As we have reported in past issues of FRFI, mainly the middle aged and the comfortably off. The latest figures produced by Labour Market Trends show that trade unions remain as remote as ever from the new working class - those forced into casualised employment paying poverty wages.

• In 1991, 34% of all trade unionists were managers, professionals or associate professionals and technicians. By 1995, this had risen to 41%, and in 1997, to 42.5%. There are now nearly as many trade unionists amongst managers and administrators (about 850,000) as there are amongst plant and machine operatives (950,000);

• The more highly qualified you are, the more likely you are to be a trade unionist. On the one hand, 38% of those with degrees and 46% of those with other higher education qualifications are trade union members. On the other, only 25% of those with no qualifications are union members, a figure which falls to 23% for those with GCSEs alone.

• Trade unions are organising fewer young people. In 1995, some 1.5 mil-

lion trade unionists were under 30, and 4.2 million were over 40. By 1997, the number of trade unionists under the age of 30 had fallen to 1.3 million, whilst those over 40 had risen to 4.4 million. 94% of workers under 20 are not in trade unions - a mere 100,000 are members.

• Job security and union membership are closely linked. Whilst 47% of those who have held the same job for 10 years or more are in trade unions - a figure rising to 58% for those whose length of service is more than 20 years - only 12% of those who have held the same job for less than a year are trade unionists. This rises to a mere 17% for those who have held their job for between one and two years.

Trade unions are still successfully preventing any struggle against the impact of casualisation, or indeed against anything. In 1997, just 235,000 days were lost through industrial disputes, and a mere 80,000 in the first five months of 1998, involving less than 30,000 workers.

Robert Clough

END CASUALISATION!

Casualisation kills Simon Jones remembered

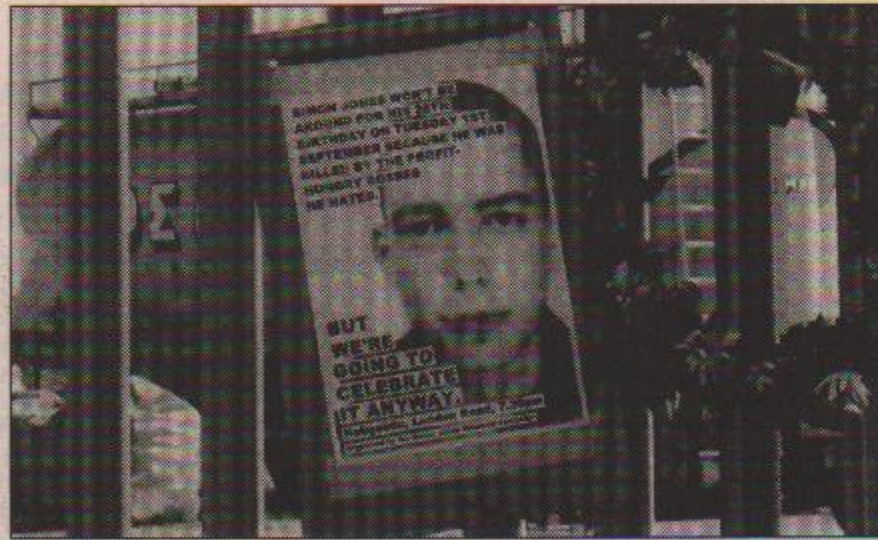
Simon Jones didn't celebrate his 25th birthday on Tuesday 1 September because he was killed by the profit-hungry bosses he hated. He had spent his life fighting bad working conditions - and bad working conditions ultimately killed him.

He died instantly.

Casualisation certainly reduces costs for the employer (no holiday or sick pay, for starters), but for the employees it means lower wages, poorer training, no job security - and worse safety conditions. Moreover, as in the case of Simon Jones, casualisation kills.

Yet Simon will not be forgotten. Simon was deeply involved in Justice?, writing for its national newsletter *SchNews*. He linked the struggles of the road protesters and anti-Criminal Justice Act movement to the Liverpool dockers' strike. The dockers were fighting the same crap-jobs-for-crap-pay system that affected them all. Friends of Simon, those involved with Justice? and *SchNews* have set up a memorial campaign for Simon to highlight the dangers that casualisation brings, saying 'I suppose there was a time when you had unions that went on strike over things like this, but not any more. If we want to make things better it's down to us'.

On Tuesday 1 September members of the Revolutionary Communist Group and supporters of the Reinstatement of Nigel Cook campaign joined the action organised by the memorial campaign at Shoreham. We remembered Simon's 25th birthday when protesters occupied the Euromin dock. Protesters scaled 90ft light rigs displaying banners that read 'Simon Jones RIP' and 'Casualisation Kills'. The protesters locked the gates and



gave out leaflets explaining the nature of the action. The police were called and, after negotiations with the directors of Euromin, decided to let the workers go home and the protesters stay! The action was covered by television, radio and local press. The message was clear. Agency work neglects health and safety, gets done on the cheap and all at the expense of the working class. Emma Aynsley, Simon's girlfriend said 'The protest today was very successful - we managed to close down a really dangerous place.' Joe Steel from Justice? said 'We'll be back!'

The campaign kept to its word and two days later on Thursday 3 September at 9.30am, supporters of the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign

arrived outside Personnel Selection employment agency with the intention of occupying their Brighton office - which we did!

Within minutes a banner was hung from the office window with MURDERERS clearly painted on it. Passersby on the pavement outside immediately started paying attention. Their curiosity was appeased as campaigners explained the reasons behind the protest and handed out leaflets describing the events leading up to Simon's tragic death.

Fifteen minutes after the building had been occupied the police arrived. Initially several officers entered the occupied office in an attempt to evict the campaigners from the building, but to no avail.

The supporters inside Personnel Selection were in full control of the office, answering telephones and informing Personnel Selection clients that the office was indefinitely closed. The staff seemed slightly overwhelmed and didn't try to prevent or disrupt the protest, as most were aware of the raw emotions driving the campaign. Outside more officers arrived, who simply observed the leafleting.

The reaction from the general public was really positive, helped by the local media coverage of the dock occupation. Several members of the public came back to offer support and to find out how successful the occupation had been. The shops on either side of the agency took in leaflets in support of the campaign and to inform their customers as to why there was a police presence on the road.

By 12.30pm, the Personnel Selection regional manager arrived at the office. He tried to reach a compromise with the Simon Jones supporters. But within half an hour of his arrival the employment agency was forced to close business for the rest of the day out of respect for Simon Jones. A notice was placed on the door.

The occupation of Personnel Selection was a definite success! It brought media attention to the wider issues surrounding Simon's death, such as the fight against poverty pay and against casual labour. These issues need to be addressed to combat the development of a low-paid, low-skilled, flexible pool of workers, which is rapidly growing and is under direct attack from the Labour government.

On 5 October the Crown Prosecution Service will give details of any charges against Euromin.

From 5 October the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign will be holding regular Monday night meetings at the Hob Goblin, London Road, Brighton at 7.30pm. Come along and find out about future direct action events!

Write to the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign at PO Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 2DX or phone 01273 685913.

Susie and Natalie



Desperate to get the dole off his back, Simon got work through a Brighton employment agency, Personnel Selection, working on the bins. Within three days he was off the bins and found himself working inside a ship. On Friday 24 April, Simon went to work for his first and last day inside a ship, unloading cobblestones at a Shoreham dock owned by the Dutch company Euromin. He was getting paid about £5 an hour for doing one of the most dangerous jobs in the country - a highly-skilled job that he had never done before. Apart from having no experience, Simon was also put at risk as the equipment was unsuitable for the job he was doing. To change that equipment would have cost the company a few pounds. Within an hour of starting Simon was killed when a 'grab' trapped his head.

Trades Union Congress 2

'Politics of the pig trough'

The week following the publication of a UN report highlighting the widening poverty gap in Britain, 800 trade union delegates gathered in Blackpool under the banner of 'Organising for fairness'. John Edmonds, General Secretary of the GMB and this year's President of Congress, opened proceedings with lots of fiery rhetorical soundbites, referring to fat cat executives as 'bloated rodents' and 'greedy bastards' who had created a 'politics of the pig trough'.

All good stuff for the media hacks, and an even more convenient smoke-screen for the TUC's desired 'partnership' with business - a partnership that aims to make British capital more profitable at the expense of the unemployed and those in crap jobs on poverty pay.

It was no accident that the delegation of Tameside strikers and the Nigel Cook campaign were kept outside behind railings while Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, got to speak from the platform inside. Most of the Armani-suited delegates refused to sign the Reinstatement of Nigel Cook petition or take leaflets from the Tameside strikers. Workers who are fighting back were totally ignored. However, when Eddie George spoke, 'conference listened in polite silence'; not one delegate had the decency to even heckle him.

Inside the conference, there was plenty of praise for Labour's minimum wage. Margaret Prosser of the

TGWU boasted that it was 'a matter for rejoicing' (*Morning Star* 15 September). Rodney Bickerstaffe, General Secretary of Unison was 'cock-a-hoop' about it - despite admitting that '£3.60 before stoppages cannot be fair. It cannot be an acceptable level: it is not enough for food, clothing, rent. Not enough for a night out or to give the kids a treat'. Bill Callaghan, the TUC's rep on the LPC, declared: 'No such work in the TUC has given me as much satisfaction as my work on the Low Pay Commission... I would do it all again if I had to'.

Unison represents the largest number of the lowest paid workers in this country, many of whom are already working for £3.60 an hour or less. The Tameside strikers were sacked for refusing to have their wages cut from £5.65 to £3.60 an hour!

Unison had the largest delegation, with 80 delegates. They held their conference 'knees-up' at the Savoy. When the strikers turned up uninvited they were ignored, again. It is clearly a case of the 'politics of the pig trough' when the Unison TUC delegation dances the night away at Blackpool's most expensive venue and Bickerstaffe stays the whole week in its Presidential Suite - all paid for by Unison members' money - and the Tameside strikers are shunted back to their £12-a-night b&b, paid for out of their own measly £66-a-week strike pay!

Increasingly the trade unions are run like big businesses: frequent mergers, playing the stock market, and fat cat salaries for leaders. TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris, who is blocking my victimisation benefit, has a salary of £71,028 and travels around in a chauffeur-driven Jaguar. He is also on the board of governors of the Bank of England. Unison's Rodney Bickerstaffe is no doubt 'cock-a-hoop' with his £83,000 salary, which includes a £10,000 pension contribution. John Edmonds leader of the GMB earns £71,000. Greedy bastards the lot of them!

Total trade union membership affiliated to the TUC now stands at 6.6 million, its lowest level for 50 years. Having lost nearly 2% in the last 12 months, its membership continues to dwindle. 94% of all those aged 20 and under in work are not in a trade union; nor are 80% of those aged 30 and under. The history of the Hillingdon strikers, Liverpool dockers, my own campaign and more recently the Tameside strikers makes it clear that the TUC will not defend those sections of workers under attack, nor those on poverty pay, the increasing number of casual workers, the youth or the unemployed.

As the poverty gap continues to widen and TUC plc pushes its snout further into the trough, it will be those directly affected who will lead the fightback.

Nigel Cook

New Deal

Political censorship for the unemployed

Misconduct?

I am a member of Brighton against the Benefit Cuts (formerly known as Brighton against the JSA) who was dismissed from the Project Work scheme for having 'spoken out my political opinions' about the scheme; I was subsequently sanctioned by the Employment Service, losing two weeks' benefit. On 4 September, I won my appeal at the independent tribunal, which decided that my behaviour did not constitute 'misconduct'.

While I was attending the Project Works Provider offices, STEP/AVS, I was sent to an interview with Brighton Fringe Festival for a placement. During the interview I put forward my opinions about Project Work and stressed that I was not a 'volunteer'. I asked Brighton Fringe Festival why they were involved in such a scheme.

STEP/AVS panicked. The incident threatened to stir up a long-term controversy between the providers of Project Work and charity organisations about the compulsory nature of the scheme. In fact a campaign by Brighton against the JSA had already persuaded a large number of charity organisations to boycott the scheme and many had pulled out in the previous months. Since the providers are paid for each placement, I was threatening STEP/AVS profits and

because of this I was dismissed by them immediately after my interview with Brighton Fringe Festival.

Censorship

I am not the only person to have been dismissed from Project Work because of their political opinions. Others have been dismissed but have not had their benefits cut off. However, a letter from Brighton Fringe Festival to STEP/AVS, saying 'it emerged that were we to insist that he remained for the session he would be disruptive' was used to discipline me and cut off my payments.

Threats

In my case, the independent tribunal did not support the view that benefits can be stopped for misconduct an employers 'thinks might be caused' in the future. But this leaves the question of what can happen under the New Deal where there is no right of appeal to an independent tribunal. In a letter to the adjudication officer, Brighton Fringe Festival commented 'The rest of the volunteers we have absorbed from the same scheme seem to be enthusiastic about their placements and any political objection they have, they have kept to themselves.' This is the way we are asked to behave under Tony Blair's regime.

FS, Brighton against Benefit Cuts

'The global capitalist system that has been responsible for our remarkable prosperity is coming apart at the seams.'

George Soros testimony to the US Congress 15 September 1998

Panic has replaced the complacent belief, held by international bankers, the IMF and US and European government officials at the end of last year, that the Asian economic crisis could be contained. FRFI has consistently argued that this crisis was never an 'Asian' crisis, but a crisis that arose from the overaccumulation of capital in the heartlands of imperialism.¹ Having ravaged the Asian economies, bankrupted Russia, and spread to Latin America, the frenetic international flows of financial capital, desperately seeking new sources of profit, are spreading the crisis to every part of the world. Chickens are now coming home to roost. The crisis is about to engulf the major imperialist economies of North America and Europe. DAVID YAFFE examines the latest shock waves rocking the world capitalist system.



The collapse of the southeast Asian economies and the catastrophic state of the Japanese economy forced the gigantic circulating funds of financial capital back to the centres of world capitalism, into ever more frenzied, speculative activity on their already overvalued stockmarkets. Stockmarkets boomed to ever new highs and windfall gains kept up spending and growth in the major capitalist economies. As one economist put it 'highly valued stockmarkets are all that is preventing the Asian crisis from tipping over into worldwide recession... The world economy is being held up by its stockmarket boot-straps.' (Martin Wolf, *Financial Times* 26 August 1998)

But this cannot last. The world economy is turning down. Corporate profits are actually falling. The collapse of Asia is taking its toll. World commodity prices (raw materials etc) are at their lowest level in real terms since the 1930s, having fallen by 30% since May 1977. Oil prices have collapsed from nearly \$22 a barrel last September to below \$13 today. Russia, already in dire economic straits and very dependent on the export of raw materials to pay off its burgeoning debt to the international banks, was next to go. The rouble was devalued and a three-month moratorium declared on repayments of its \$140bn foreign debt in mid-August. July's \$23bn IMF rescue plan for Russia had completely failed.

The crisis then immediately centred on Latin America where many countries, heavily indebted to international banks, have been hit by collapsing commodity prices, plunging stockmarkets, and falling export markets since the Asian crisis. Brazil's foreign exchange reserves are haemorrhaging as it desperately tries to defend its currency from devaluation. \$15bn was spent in the first two weeks of September. Capital is flooding out of the country, an estimated \$160bn since the Russian default in August. Brazil is the ninth largest economy in the world and accounts for 45-50% of Latin American output. If it goes, the rest of Latin America will go with it. The IMF, down to its last \$25bn, has announced that a large scale demand for help from Brazil would leave it without funds. The US Republican-led Congress has so far rejected a request by the US President to increase those funds.

No part of the capitalist world can be sheltered from such a severe crisis raging through 40% of the world economy. Falling stockmarkets and the ever-growing threat to the major international banks from collapsing currencies and unpayable loans are carrying the crisis into the heart of US and European capitalism. In two months some \$4,000bn has been wiped off the value of shares worldwide; £300bn in Britain alone. The slightest rumour can send the markets cascading downwards or shooting upwards. At present, while the US, British and main European stockmarkets are see-sawing around a level some 15-20% below their July all-time record highs, the Japanese market has hit a 12-year low, less than half its level in 1989. Cuts in interest rates will see stockmarkets temporarily rise, in the vain hope that lower rates will spur economic growth and profits, but any bad economic news, and there is plenty around, will send them crashing down again with serious economic and political consequences.

Asia ravaged

The crisis in Asia continues to take its toll. Real GDP is expected to fall in 1998 by 15% in Indonesia, 8% in Thailand and 7% in South Korea. Only a dramatic rise in the volume of exports each month in 1998, between 20 and 40% (measured year on year), has prevented an even more drastic fall of GDP in South Korea of an estimated 17%. The outlook is not good, and with increased competition coming from Japan due to a falling yen, the export volume increase is slow-

GLOBAL CAPITALISM coming apart at the seams

ing down, with export growth in dollar terms actually falling. With demand in Asia down, trade conflicts are inevitable as South Korea desperately tries to increase export volumes worldwide. Brazil has already warned South Korea of possible anti-dumping duties. Anti-dumping complaints are coming from China. Similar developments are taking place in Europe, where Korean imports are up 15% in dollar terms. Siemens has recently closed its year-old £1.2bn semiconductor factory in Britain with a loss of 1,100 jobs, saying it was losing money as a result of a global fall in chip prices, which it blamed on undercutting by South Korean producers.

The top 30 South Korean conglomerates made a combined net loss in the first half of the year. Their debt/equity ratio (debt to market value of assets) continues to increase from

the third quarter. Non-performing loans in the banking system have reached a staggering Y151,370bn (more than \$1,000bn), nearly twice the official government estimates and equivalent to 30% of GDP. It is no surprise conventional economic remedies (fiscal stimulus and interest rate cuts) to revive the Japanese economy have had little or no impact. Japan accounts for 16% of world GDP.

As well as having a severe impact on the profits of US and European imperialist banks, Asia's financial crisis is expected to reduce western Europe's total net exports by \$55bn and add \$43bn to the US trade deficit.

The Asian crisis is taking a terrible human toll. Unemployment has increased from 4% to 12% in Indonesia to around 20 million, rapidly swelling the numbers in

own food. A Mafia-driven market capitalism has now been turned into little more than a subsistence economy. Millions of workers and pensioners have not been paid for months on end. This is the barbarism that, with the collapse of the socialist bloc, international capital has imposed on the Russian people.

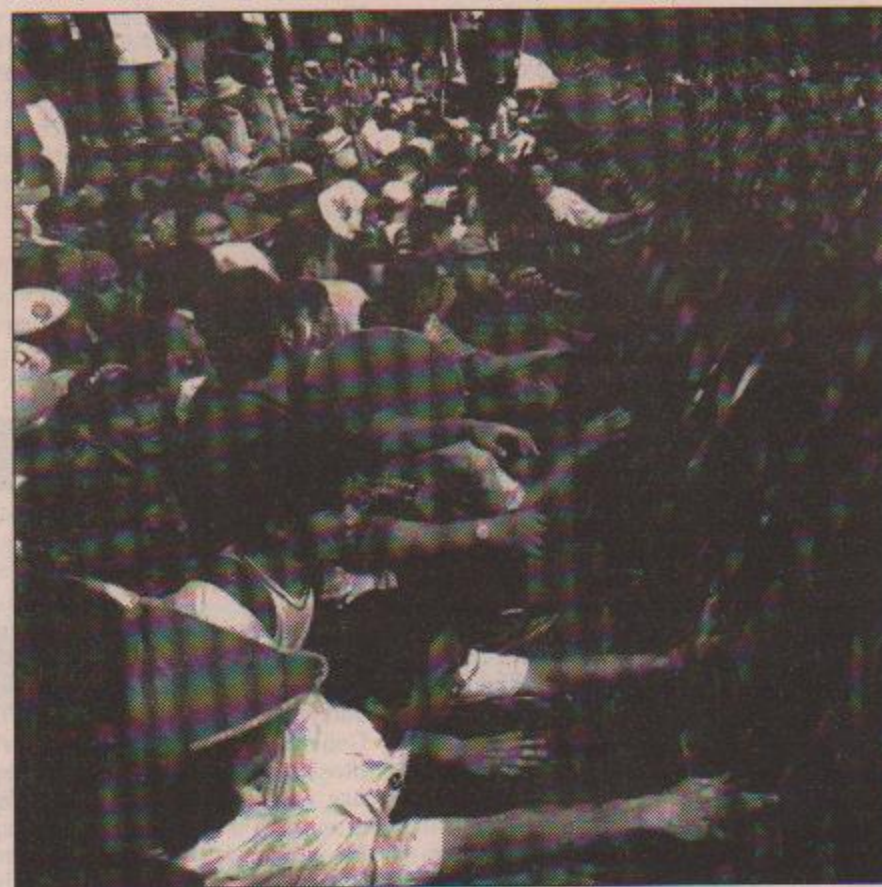
Capitalist financial institutions and multinational corporations have committed more than \$200bn to Russia's corrupt and crime-ridden market capitalism - \$194bn in all external debt and \$11bn in accumulated foreign direct investment and equities. The gamble failed. Foreign investors in the Russian bond market face losses exceeding \$33bn. George Soros's international hedge fund is said to have lost \$2bn as 75% of the paper value of Russia's hard currency bond debt has been wiped out. Major European banks have been hit hard by Russian losses thought to be in the region of £1bn. The Russian stockmarket has fallen by nearly 90% from its peak this year, and is now worth less than the value of the supermarket Sainsbury's on the London stockmarket.

The new Russian government is awaiting the release of the next instalment of its IMF support loan of \$4.3bn. If this does not come soon the government says that it will print money, despite the inflationary consequences, as it must pay off back wages and pensions owed to millions of workers if it is to take the sting out of the mass protest called by the communists for 7 October. We have not heard the last from the Russian crisis as its impact, both economically and politically, spreads to other parts of the world. Meanwhile Yeltsin, like a rat escaping a sinking ship, is said to have bought a chateau in France as a future safe haven from the anger of the Russian people whose lives he has done so much to destroy.

Latin America on the brink

The Russian default immediately had an impact on Latin America. The Brazilian stockmarket crashed downward, with share trading halted on a number of occasions as shares plunged below 'stop-loss' limits. On 10 September, the Brazilian stockmarket was down 61%, the Mexican market down 45%, and the Venezuelan down 65% from their previous 1998 highs. Some recovery has taken place in the last few weeks based on rumours of an IMF/US bailout. It will not last long.

What happens in Brazil will determine developments elsewhere. The prognosis is ominous. Brazil has an unsustainable budget deficit of 7.8% of GDP and a current account deficit of 4% of GDP. Interest rates were raised to 50% on 11 September, a desperate measure, increasing costs by some R\$6bn (£3bn) or 0.7% of GDP. Capital continues to drain out of the country, if at a slower rate than in the days after the Russian default. Its currency, the *real*, is overvalued by some 20-30%. Domestic debt has risen from R\$179bn in January 1997 to R\$305bn in July 1998, with R\$55.2bn due to be paid back in October alone. Brazil's short-term



Indonesian students storm parliament

the already huge 366% to 412%. Non-performing loans of domestic banks are 40% of GDP in South Korea and Thailand and more than 30% in Indonesia and Malaysia. To this must be added the unpayable part of these countries' external debts, estimated at \$30bn for South Korea, \$22bn for Indonesia and \$13bn for Thailand.

The situation in Japan continues to deteriorate. Japanese exports to some Asian countries have halved. Before the crisis some 42% of Japanese exports went to southeast Asian countries. In the three months to June this year corporate profits have fallen by 34% on the previous year and investment has declined by 10.6%. Hitachi has announced a record loss of Y260bn (£1.04bn) for the current financial year, the first time it has registered a loss since 1947. Japanese economic growth has fallen for three consecutive quarters, falling at an annual rate of 3.3% in

poverty from 22 million to 80 million. In South Korea, unemployment has doubled since last November from 5% to 10% and in Thailand, from 1-2% two years ago to an expected 6% this year. 3.5 million workers are expected to be laid off in China as state enterprises are 'restructured'. China will sooner or later be forced to devalue its currency to make its exports more competitive and to stave off spiralling unemployment. If it does, the *yen* will fall and competitive devaluations throughout east Asia will become inevitable, threatening a revival of US protectionism and trade wars.

Russia brought to its knees

Russia has experienced its second economic collapse in less than ten years. Production has nearly halved since Yeltsin introduced 'market reforms'. Half of what remains occurs in a barter economy. Millions of people can only survive by growing their

On 23 September 1998 that scenario was close to happening. A leading hedge fund, Long-Term Capital Management (LTCM) – a misnomer if there ever was one – was bailed out with a \$3.5bn rescue fund from 15 major investment banks after losing 90% of its capital in high risk speculation. Barclays Bank contributed \$250m and has pledged a further \$50m if needed. Barclays Capital had lent money to the fund as had many of the other banks involved in the rescue. LTCM had up to a \$200bn exposure in the markets, between 30 and 50 times its capital base. A failure of such a fund would have sent the financial markets reeling with devastating consequences. Hence the panic.

This is the reality of present day capitalism. It is, indeed, coming

foreign debt of \$80bn is around 160% of its foreign exchange reserves. In Mexico the position is even worse with short-term debt nearly twice its reserves. The situation has much in common with southeast Asia just before the financial meltdown. Like there, it could start with a speculative attack on one of the Latin American countries' currencies.

Staring into the abyss

The great proportion of financial capital careering around the world in a desperate search for short-term profits has an unprecedented autonomy from the real production of wealth. It is a huge, ever-expanding credit bubble built on a relatively declining productive base. A growing proportion of global financial capital is leveraged – based on borrowing many times its real asset base, and engaged in totally unproductive speculative activity. International debt securities totalled \$3,600bn at the end of March 1998. Much of it is used as collateral (for example by hedge funds) on further loans of about \$30,000bn. In addition to this there is another \$30,000bn engaged in interest rate swap agreements, giving a conservative estimate of \$60,000bn in the global credit market – some two and a half times global GDP (*Financial Times* 15 September 1998).

Global hedge funds, like those of George Soros mentioned above, have at their disposal an estimated \$400bn, invested by rich individuals and institutions. There are about 4-5,000 of these unregulated offshore funds, which often borrow five or six times their investors' funds in pursuit of high returns on high-risk speculative activities. Further leverage comes from dealing in highly complicated derivative instruments, an activity which involves betting on the movement of interest rates, currencies, bond prices and so on. Many of these funds have been specialising in so-called 'emerging markets' – rapidly growing Third World countries, including the ex-socialist bloc (*Financial Times* 21 September 1998). They are not alone in doing this. Many banks are also increasingly engaged in such highly leveraged short-term speculative activities.

With the economic turmoil now raging through these markets, a significant part of the collateral (portfolio of debt, securities and currencies etc acting as a security) for the bank borrowing that lies behind much of the hedge funds and speculation in the world stock and currency markets, is falling in value or even becoming worthless. This forces banks to make extra 'margin calls' on borrowers – demand the settling of bills or extra collateral to defend their balance sheets. The amounts can be very large. This in turn forces borrowers to sell assets and liquidate positions in other markets, forcing down prices on the world's stockmarkets. A significantly large failure to come up with the extra collateral by one or more funds could lead to a collapse in the global credit market and financial meltdown, with stockmarkets collapsing in the centres of imperialism.



apart at the seams and even the prosperity it has created was very one-sided, unequal and unjust. The richest 20% of the global population today account for 86% of consumption in the world, the poorest 20% only 1.3%. The 225 richest people in the world have a combined wealth of more than \$1,000bn – equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the earth's population, 2.5bn people. 1bn people do not meet their basic consumption needs. Three-fifths of the 4.4bn people living in the Third World lack basic sanitation, one third have no safe drinking water, one quarter inadequate housing and one fifth are undernourished. In 70 countries nearly 1bn people's consumption is lower today than it was 25 years ago. Yet private and public consumption expenditure reached \$24,000bn in 1998, twice the level of 1975 and six times the level of 1950. Even in the imperialist heartlands the poor have been ever-present: 200m people alive today are not expected to reach the age of 60, 100m are homeless and 37m are unemployed.

As this financial crisis begins to take its devastating toll on the vast majority of the world's population, it has never been clearer that capitalism has long outlived its historical mission. If the barbarism that capital has ruthlessly imposed on the Russian people is not to become the destiny of the vast majority of us, we must rebuild socialism – the only way forward for humanity.

1 See David Yaffe 'Countdown to capitalism's collapse' in FRFI 140 December 1997/January 1998, Editorial 'Southeast Asian crisis: gnawing away at the foundations' in FRFI 141 February/March 1998 and Trevor Rayne 'Indonesia into the vortex' in FRFI 143 June/July 1998. All available from Larkin Publications, each issue of FRFI 80p incl p&p – all three £2.00.

Frankenstein Foods of the Big Profit Multinationals

The first UK arrests of genetic engineering activists this summer have brought the issues surrounding genetically modified (GM) foods into sharp relief. DAVID PEGG reports.

Five women took part in the first GenetiX snowball action in July. They were arrested and released without charge after pulling up GM oilseed rape/sugar beet at a farm in Oxfordshire. Ten days later injunction papers arrived courtesy of the American firm Monsanto ordering them not to pull up or conspire to pull up any more of Monsanto's Roundup Ready test field plants. The company has claimed 'unlimited damages' against the women and is using strategic lawsuits against participation (SLAPPs), which were first employed against green direct action campaigners at Twyford Down and in further road protest campaigns, in an effort to subjugate and intimidate what is a legitimate campaign to protect the natural environment against the vagaries of a multi-billion-dollar multinational company. It is clear that the GenetiX snowball campaign is taking on big business, capitalism and its protective state apparatus through direct action. All socialists should support this important campaign and, by way of direct contact on the ground with the police state, green activists will learn through practice that the capitalist state needs to be taken on.

There has been much written in the capitalist media about genetic engineering and GM foods. The question that needs to be asked first and foremost is 'Who benefits?' Genetic engineering of food is an unpredictable, uncontrollable and unnecessary experiment with our health and environment. The disturbing truth about GM foods is that they cannot be proved safe and the consequences are impossible to predict and reverse. Engineered foods have already triggered allergic reactions and can cause toxic poisoning. Genetic engineering transfers genetic material from one species to another and bypasses the natural processes of evolution, opening the door to the unknown. Campaigners say the GM foods experiment will make us all guinea pigs in the biggest experiment since cows were fed their own offal. And, with no proven health benefits, it's all for profit. Capitalism is no respecter of the environment in its mad rush to accumulate capital, force down wages and exploit raw materials. As one of the activists, Jacklyn Sheedy, speaking from police custody said:

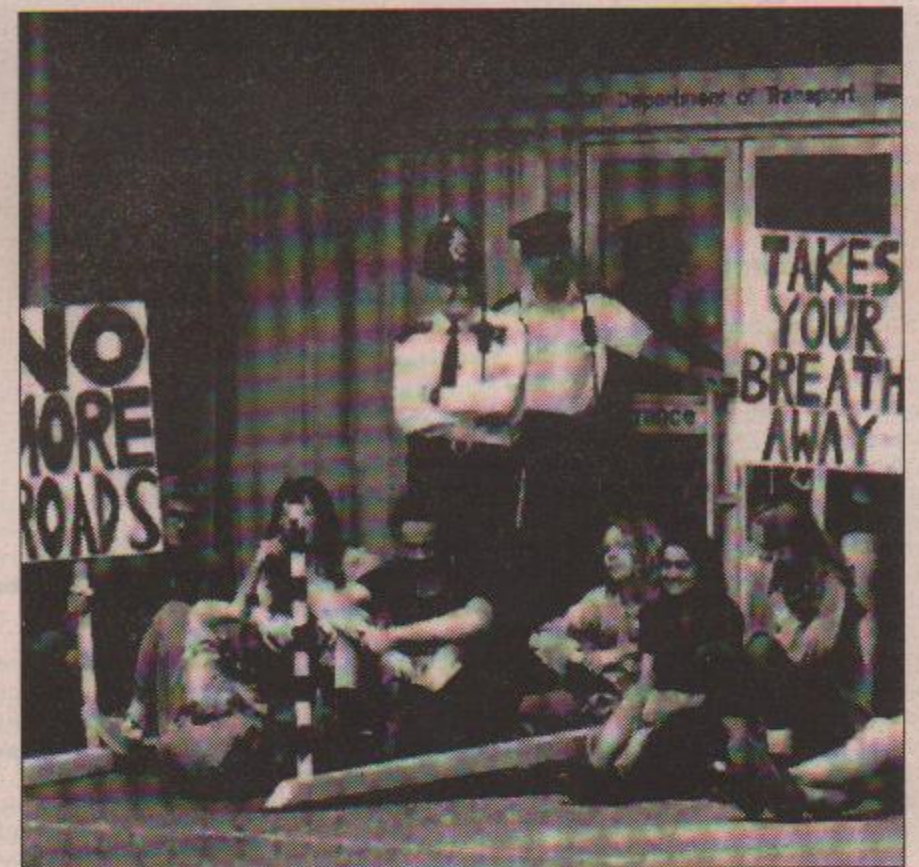
'The real criminals are the multinational corporations who are forcing genetic engineering into this country's food supply in order to boost their profits. The police should not be targeting concerned citizens, who want only to protect the integrity of their local environment. They should instead be questioning why the government took no action themselves to destroy the crop even

though the site was proven illegal in court.'

To date, up to 30 of the estimated 300 genetic engineering test sites have been decontaminated. Activists are turning up the heat to reveal the truth behind Monsanto's involvement before the full commercialisation of new crop types.¹

Monsanto is responsible, in part or whole, for Agent Orange (used by US imperialism's armed forces in the Vietnam war in the 1960s), PCB's, dioxin, 93 Super Fund sites, Nutra-Sweet and genetically engineered soya, corn, cotton and tomatoes. In the first nine months of 1996, Monsanto's worldwide agrochemical sales increased by 21% to \$2.48 billion, due largely to increased sales of the herbicide Roundup. The theory behind Monsanto's 'Roundup Ready' crops is that the fields can be sprayed at any time during the growing sea-

son to kill weeds without killing the newly resistant crop plants. Crop resistance will improve, allowing higher and higher doses. Longer shelf-life, attractive to the big supermarkets, and increased yield will add further to global profits. The effects on the environment and water supplies, the effects of the Frankenstein foods on the consumer – these are insignificant factors for the multinationals. Quite predictable, in fact, if one has an understanding of the depths these capitalist companies will stoop to in order to maintain profits at a time of deep crisis. The fact that companies like Monsanto have as their ultimate aim the subjugation of Third World agricultural sectors should not surprise us.



Roads protesters picket the Department of Transport

In June last year, leading US agrochemical companies, including Monsanto, Mycogen and AG for BIOTECH, representatives of the \$60 billion agricultural exports business in the USA, penned an important let-

ter to President Clinton. The letter demanded that biotechnology issues be placed on the bilateral agenda with members of the European Union at the G8 meeting of world imperialist powers. The letter says: 'It is critical the EU understand at the highest level that the US would consider any trade barrier of genetically-modified agricultural products, be it discriminatory labelling or segregation, unacceptable and subject to challenge in the World Trade Organisation.'

It is clear that a major trade battle is under way between major capitalist blocs, particularly the EU and US. The rights of consumers – on matters such as labelling, for example – are not even secondary. It is also quite clear that taking on the multinational companies behind GM foods is a new important struggle at the very cutting edge of capitalism – a struggle that will broaden and deepen in the coming years, a struggle that has the capacity to draw together activists in the green movement and in the anti-capitalist anti-imperialist left.²

In Britain, pressure groups are targeting Batchelor Foods, a subsidiary of Unilever, which has introduced GE Soya into its Beanfeast products. Batchelor Beanfeast contains extra virus, bacteria and petunia genes. Other Unilever brands will soon follow suit. Activists have started a civil disobedience campaign including snowball direct action against test sites and putting 'contaminated' stickers on Batchelors Beanfeast products.³ Some local authorities are researching the issue and seeking to ban GE school dinners, including over 1,600 schools in Kent. Interestingly, the House of Commons catering committee has confirmed that they will not serve MPs GE food

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Monopoly capitalism 'is, by virtue of its fundamental economic traits, distinguished by a minimum fondness for peace and freedom, and by a maximum and universal development of militarism'
VI Lenin

British forces have engaged in at least 94 separate overseas military interventions since 1945; 27 of these in the Middle East.

Supplying this constant warfare is the arms industry, the biggest and most valuable industry in the world. Britain is second only to the USA as arms trader to the world. Half of Britain's top 20 industrial companies are involved in the arms business.

Britain is the second biggest holder of overseas assets after the USA. Nearly half of Europe's 50 biggest multinationals are British or Anglo-Dutch. The City of London is one of the world's three chief financial centres, earning up to a quarter of this country's income. The ruling class owners of this wealth do not intend to give up their global position, military power is essential to them. To quote the Strategic Review, 'Our economy is founded on international trade. Exports form a higher proportion of Gross Domestic Product than for the US, Japan, Germany or France. We invest more of our income abroad than any other major economy. Our closest economic partners are the European Union and the US, but our investment in the developing world amounts to the combined total of France, Germany and Italy'.

However, armed forces and weapons depend upon the level of production in society. Since Suez 1956, Britain has seen rival capitals surpass its productivity; consequently, the ruling class has turned to the 'special relationship' with the USA to compensate for its relatively diminishing capacity. Plus, while the rest of the economy is thrown to the 'free market', arms producers are protected and subsidised by the state. Britain must be able to 'punch above its weight'.

The 1991 Gulf War and continued use of sanctions and military mobilisations against Iraq show the extent to which the British state is prepared to go to defend the status quo in the Middle East, a status quo benefiting US and British interests. Britain, under Tory and Labour governments, is loyal to the US with troops and diplomatic cover. Like a junior partner, the British ruling class seeks to join the USA in policing the world. 'We must never forget the historic and continuing US role in defending the political and economic freedoms we take for granted. Leaving all sentiment aside, they are a force for good in the world. They can always be relied on when the chips are down. The same should always be true of Britain'. *Tony Blair*

Flexible forces

Approximately 36% of the army and half the navy are based overseas; in Brunei, Malaysia, the Gulf, Turkey, Bosnia, Belize and the Caribbean, the USA, Germany, Italy, the Falklands/Malvinas, Gibraltar, Cyprus, the Indian Ocean, Nepal, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. They focus on

'A FORCE FOR GOOD'

Labour's Strategic Defence Review

Labour governments have been as consistently willing to employ military force in defence of British imperialism as their Tory and Liberal counter-parts. The Strategic Defence Review, published in July, shows the British state intends to extend and quicken the global reach of its forces. 'Rapid deployment', 'expeditionary warfare', 'long-range strike capacity' are the words. 'A force for good', said Labour Defence Secretary George Robertson - a force for killing in defence of a system of exploitation and misery, says TREVOR RAYNE.

strategically significant locations, available for regional interventions. Nevertheless, the lessons of the Gulf War, the conflict in former Yugoslavia and the collapse of the Soviet Union necessitate a Strategic Review. Fixed positions are seen as of potentially reduced value.

The Gulf War and its aftermath demonstrate the critical role of aircraft carriers in projecting a global reach for the armed forces when local bases are denied use by uncooperative governments. The recent US attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan were mounted from the sea.

Labour's Strategic Defence Review is based on the assumption that there will be no significant threat to Britain or NATO in the medium term of 10-20 years. It is assumed there will be 'small scale' wars over resources, ethnicity and inequality. A sound assumption given the grotesque divisions inflicted on the world today, explosive tensions as in Indonesia and the readiness of British firms to sell the potential protagonists weapons.

It is also believed that Britain must be able to intervene on two fronts - two battlefields - at once, if it is to retain its global status. As the Malvinas and Gulf wars showed, this could be an expensive business, beyond the means of the British exchequer unless some more cost-effective methods of fighting can be developed (or resorted to). 'Punching above our weight' was almost beyond the British state against Argentina, and the Gulf states had to foot the bill against Iraq.

The Review also assumes there will be no significant integrated European defence force in the near future. Always looking to the Atlantic alliance with the USA, Labour envisages any integration with Europe as 'a more effective European Security and Defence identity in NATO through the Western European Union'. The Western European Union is to act as a subsidiary of NATO and hence will be restricted by the USA, for the time being. British governments have persistently obstructed moves towards the creation of an independent European defence body, seeing it as a rival to their alliance with the USA. Note the dispute over Westland in the mid-1980s and Michael Heseltine's resignation from the Cabinet as the US United Technologies won out over a European consortium in a battle for the helicopter company.

In Labour-speak, the Review emphasises 'peace-keeping and humanitarian missions'. This is the language used to dress up jet and missile assaults on Iraq, training teams in Indonesia and Turkey, occupation forces as of the USA in Somalia and Panama, Britain in Ireland and former Yugoslavia. Always 'a force for good' carrying out the 'ethical foreign policy' etc, putting machine guns in the hands of Indonesia's death squads, ensuring



Westland is producing 67 AH-64 Apache helicopters under licence from Boeing

the Turkish army can carry on its war against the Kurds, stocking up the Nigerian generals - a foreign policy based on arms sales and repression.

Where overt intervention is not possible there is always private enterprise, as with Sandline and Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea. Or then again, why not just break the rules and try to hide it, as with arms for Iraq and the Pergau Dam affair where aid was tied to arms supplies for Malaysia?

Central to the Review are two new aircraft carriers, costing £4 billion each, which will be twice the size of the current Ark Royal, Illustrious and Invincible. Accompanying each carrier will be two roll-on roll-off amphibious assault ships and a new air-manoeuvre cavalry brigade using US Apache helicopters and jet-bombers. This enormous initial cost is to be spread over a global deployment, prowling the world, ever ready. Technological advance renders distance less relevant and can reduce the need for forces in situ.

The current Joint Rapid Deployment Force is to be changed into the Joint Rapid Reaction Force. Emphasis is put on making this new force integrated, combining the army, RAF and navy. So, for example, all three forces would share the use of helicopters and other weapons. This is the Review's version of

the flexible workforce and just-in-time stock control, adjustable for different requirements and keeping costs down. The idea of stationary forces sitting in bases and unable to act is seen as an unproductive expenditure to be avoided.

Significantly, the Review specifically excludes Trident nuclear submarines and the Eurofighter from consideration. Both were initially conceived as weapons with which to confront the Soviet Union, which no longer exists. These are very expensive weapons; the Eurofighter upwards of £40 billion and rising, Trident even more. They are also very political weapons. Trident, a largely US weapon, is British imperialism's ticket to sit at the top table, one of five permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council, or as Prime Minister Blair put it, 'Britain must retain its historic role as a global player'. The Eurofighter (now to be called Typhoon) is at the centre of attempts to build a European weapons industry, from which British Aerospace, GEC etc do not want to be excluded. It is critical to technological developments from which British capitalism cannot afford to be left out.

With the Soviet Union gone, the four Trident submarines, each with 48 nuclear warheads, have a new priority. The government seeks to retain 'an option for a limited strike that

would not automatically lead to a full-scale nuclear exchange'. Trident must be capable of a 'sub-strategic role'. The British Labour government continues to support the first strike threat, nuclear strikes being seen as aiding manoeuvrability for forces in non-European contexts.

What this amounts to is a preparedness to fire nuclear weapons at Third World targets; a preparedness to launch a nuclear attack on an Iraqi city, for example, a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant, whatever. Is it considered a cost-effective means of war? As Blair said, he is ready to 'pull the trigger'. Where are those CND marches now, those rallies with prominent Labour speakers who were also members of CND? For New Labour they are an anachronism, out of date, unsuitable, unwanted.

Arming the world

While Britain's trade in manufactures went into deficit in the 1980s and has stayed there, the trade in weapons remains in surplus. Labour Defence Secretary George Robertson says that Britain's defence industry is 'one of the best in the world, worth £5 billion a year in exports, with 440,000 people employed in it. We have to show a commitment to it'. Even though 300,000 workers have been shed from the defence industry since 1980 it remains the case that today, as in 1980, one in ten workers in British manufacture works on arms.

British government defence procurement expenditure, which was cut by a third by the Tories for the decade from 1985-86, is barely touched by the Labour Review. Arms chief executives pronounced themselves 'gratified'. As defence budgets have been cut so dependence on export markets to earn revenue to cover the high costs of weapons development has increased. Yet the world market has, on some estimates, halved since 1987. The US share of the world's \$40 billion export market has grown from 7% to 40% in a decade. Britain's has grown from 4% to 15% in the same period.

However, up to 75% of Britain's exports are part of one contract; Al Yamamah, with Saudi Arabia. The approximately \$3 billion a year payments from this contract include 600,000 barrels of oil a day, which are sold on British Aerospace's behalf. As these barrels have almost halved in price so the value of exports dwindles.

The USA is Britain's second largest arms export market, with Britain providing 40% of US weapons imports. Britain sells far more weapons to the USA than any other European state. The Ministry of Defence has set the target of Britain selling \$8 billion of arms abroad each year. On one calculation 68% of British arms sales go to regimes with bad human rights records. If the \$8 billion target is to be reached then there will be no room for consideration of Kurds gassed and burned out of their villages in Iraq and Turkey, no time to worry about the ethics of killing people in East Timor, no place for a conscience about the corpses piling up around the world - this is business.

Arming the world and keeping British forces on global alert have grave consequences for the working class in Britain. The Scott report showed that the British government was prepared to see innocent men goled to cover up breaking its own rules on selling arms. Prime Minister John Major said, 'It may be that the time has come to look at the activities not only of those who actively conspire to commit terrorist acts but also those who from safe havens abroad foster dissent elsewhere in a way which creates a climate in which terrorism can flourish'. He was talking in the context of a Saudi dissident, Dr Mas'ari, based in Britain. Now we have Labour's Criminal Justice (Conspiracy and Terrorism) Act. A nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free. ■



Castro condemns US world terrorism

'the USA has snubbed Cuban offers of cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

For far from being, as the USA and its allies in Britain claim, the 'world's policeman', US imperialism is in fact the biggest threat to peace and democracy in the world today.'

US imperialism's assault on Cuba

It is 100 years since the United States blew up its own battleship, *The Maine*, off the shores of Cuba as a pretext for intervening in Cuba's anti-colonial war against Spain. Having seized Puerto Rico en route, US forces snatched victory from the hands of the Cuban liberation army, barred them from entry into the city of Santiago and negotiated the Spanish surrender for itself in the Paris Treaty of 10 December 1898. The Cuban working class found themselves slaves once again, this time to US imperialism, living in dire poverty, prey to hunger and disease. It took the Revolution of 1959, which overthrew US stooge dictator Batista, and the building of a socialist society to transform their condition.

Castro lists just some of the Revolution's achievements. In education, for example, 98% of children under five are enrolled in the Educate Your Child programme and 96% of five-year-olds are in kindergarten. School enrolment up to age 16 is 94.2%, with the drop-out rate down to 1%. There are 2,400 schools in the remote mountain areas, with one teacher for every 11 students, and 425 institutions for special education. Illiteracy in Cuba was wiped out in 1961, in a single year. In health, infant mortality, which has fallen year on year since 1959, is down to 7.2 per 1,000 live births, and maternal mortality is 2.2 per 10,000 live births. A widespread vaccination programme covers 98.8% of children under two, with the result that 'the indicator for tetanus has been reduced to the lowest in history...the same low indicators exist for meningococcal disease and viral and bacterial meningitis and typhoid fever. There are no reported cases of German measles or mumps'.

He cites 63,384 doctors, 219 maternity homes, 196 homes for the elderly ('It's a shame there aren't enough of these'), increased spending on pensions. Racism, corruption and discrimination have been virtually eliminated and, despite the illegal US blockade and the collapse of the socialist bloc, industrialisation and development continue apace. 'I'd like someone to tell me about other countries where it's like that, even though we're a poor, blockaded country against which economic war has been waged for decades. What wouldn't we have been able to do...if left to exercise our right to have the political, social and economic system we choose?' Neighbouring Haiti, on the other hand, which has never shaken off the dead hand of imperialism, is one of the poorest countries in the world, with literacy rates of only 45% and an infant mortality rate of 94 per 1,000 live births.

'Our target was terror. Our mission was clear. The countries that persistently host terrorism have no right to be safe havens.' So said US president Bill Clinton after launching 75 Tomahawk cruise missiles against an alleged Muslim fundamentalist base in Afghanistan and a pharmaceuticals factory in Sudan on 20 September, killing 31 people and injuring at least 53 more. It was a brutal act - and one of total hypocrisy. For, as Fidel Castro argued in a major speech to mark the 45th anniversary of the attack on Moncada barracks, it is the United States which is itself both a haven for terrorist forces and a major terrorist player on the world stage.

No wonder that the USA - that bastion of democracy which condemns a large section of its own working class to a life of destitution and misery unimaginable in Cuba - will stop at nothing in its attempts to eradicate the example Cuba provides to the oppressed the world over. This includes training and bankrolling Cuban terrorists, as Castro explained.

US backs terror against Cuba

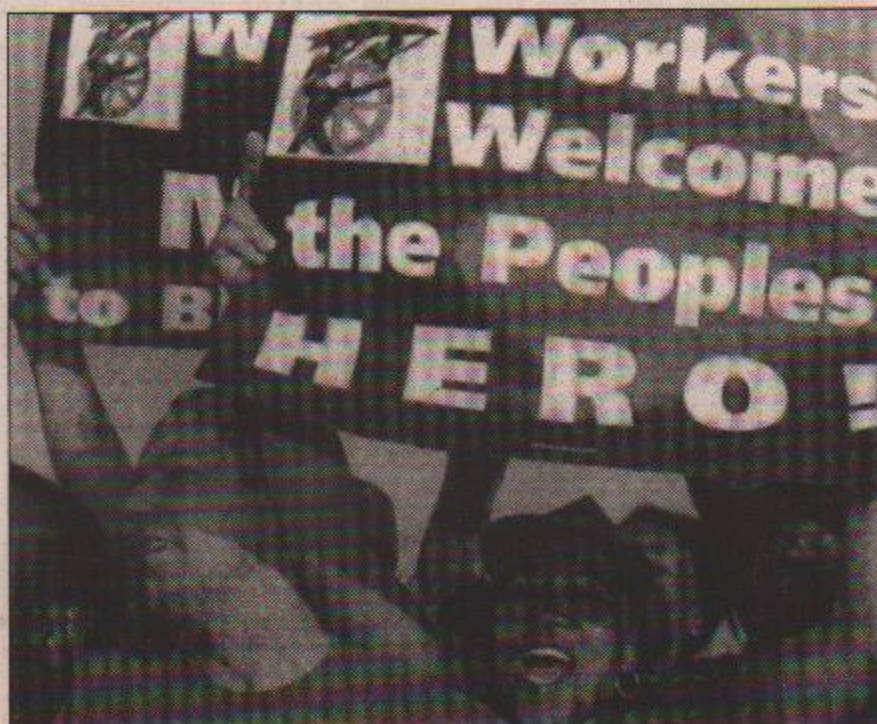
Castro quotes a recent *New York Times* article in which Cuban exile Luis Posada Carriles 'proudly admitted authorship of the hotel bomb attacks last year.' These terrorist attacks on hotels in Havana, in which an Italian tourist was killed, were designed to damage the Cuban economy by targeting tourism and 'sow doubts abroad about the stability of the regime, to make Cuba think he [Posada] had operatives in the military and encourage internal opposition.' The bombings were organised from El Salvador and Guatemala, where an assassination of Fidel Castro at the Ibero-American summit in Venezuela was also planned.

Posada's mercenary and counter-revolutionary career is documented from the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, when he was part of the 'second wave' who never landed, due to the rapid defeat of the CIA-trained forces. In 1963, he was with Jorge Mas Canosa (later head of the Cuban-

Under Reagan, CIA operations were authorised against Cubans in Central America, including the murder of volunteer Cuban teachers in Nicaragua and of Cuban diplomats throughout the Americas. Cuban embassies and commercial offices were also attacked.

American National Foundation, CANF - see below) at Fort Benning, Georgia, where 'the CIA taught us everything...explosives, how to kill, trained us in acts of sabotage.' At the CIA's behest, Posada joined Venezuelan intelligence in 1967 to fight left-wing guerrilla movements. Though he was suspected of smuggling Colombian cocaine via Venezuela into Miami and involvement with counterfeit money, the CIA decided not to pursue the matter because it might compromise his intelligence role. Posada plotted with the Cuban exile group, Alpha 66, to assassinate Castro during his visit to Chile in 1971.

The CIA claimed to have broken ties with Posada in 1976; however,



South African workers greet Fidel Castro on a recent visit

he continued to supply information to them, including plans to blow up a Cubana airliner. On 6 October 1976 a Cuban jet exploded after leaving Barbados, killing the 73 people on board. The bomb was traced back to Venezuela where Posada, along with Cuban exile Orlando Bosch, were arrested. Bosch, a CIA operative, was leader of the Commanders of the United Revolutionary Organisations (CORU), formed to unite Cuban terrorist groups. In 1985, Posada escaped from his Venezuelan prison and went to El Salvador to work with President Reagan's special adviser Oliver North, supporting counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua with covert aid, in what was later to be known as the Iran-Contras scandal. By 1998, Posada was able to boast to the *New York Times* that, despite his record 'The FBI and CIA don't bother me...Whenever I can help them, I do.'

The CIA's war against Cuba

Posada's revelations come as little surprise, given the USA's long history of attrition against Cuba. Immediately after the Revolution of 1959, the CIA set up Radio Swan to broadcast propaganda into Cuba and urge Cubans to commit terrorist acts. President Eisenhower ordered the CIA to train and organise Cuban exiles. After the defeat of the CIA-backed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, President Kennedy set up a special group to oversee Operation Mongoose - another invasion plan to support infiltrated CIA-trained terrorists. Eisenhower and Kennedy allowed the CIA to plan Castro's overthrow by any means, including assassination. Mafia bosses John Roselli and Sam Giancana were

recruited to kill Castro. CIA attacks included hit-and-run raids by air and sea, piracy, planting bombs in public places, murder and sabotage. The CIA actively encouraged counter-revolutionaries to hijack Cuban planes.

In 1964, President Johnson ordered an end to CIA participation in raids against Cuba. Within a month, CIA agent Paul Helliwell set up the Castle Bank and Trust (Bahamas) Ltd and the Mercantile Bank and Trust Company to finance anti-Cuban operations. President Nixon ordered the CIA to increase covert operations against Cuba, including biological warfare such as swine fever in 1971. In 1981, the CIA spread dengue fever, which killed 188 people and, in 1996, *tryps palmi*, which destroys crops.

To compliment the US embargo, ships and companies which traded with Cuba were attacked. With George Bush as director, the CIA set up CORU with Orlando Bosch at its head, which bombed Cubana airline offices in the Caribbean and Central America in 1976.

Under Reagan, CIA operations were authorised against Cubans in Central America, including the murder of volunteer Cuban teachers in Nicaragua and of Cuban diplomats throughout the Americas. Cuban embassies and commercial offices were also attacked. CANF, headed by Mas Canosa, was established by the Reagan administration in 1981. It immediately set up Radio Marti to broadcast counter-revolutionary propaganda to Cuba. CANF serves to attack not only those who actively support Cuba but even those who urge any kind of dialogue between the USA and Cuba. It effectively controls the Cuban-American exile pop-

ulation, receiving Federal grants to resettle Cubans in the US. It has significant influence on US policy, donating large sums of money to rabidly anti-Cuba politicians such as Torricelli and Helms. CANF gave Clinton \$150,000 during his 1992 Presidential election campaign for agreeing to endorse the Torricelli 'Cuban Democracy' Act. In 1996, it supported the activities of 'Brothers to the Rescue' which illegally flew planes over Cuban airspace. While CANF poses as a 'nonviolent' lobbying organisation, Posada claimed he had received over \$200,000 from Mas Canosa 'for the Church'. In March, four men were arrested off Puerto Rico in a boat containing highly-sophisticated weaponry, and admitted they planned to assassinate Castro. The boat was owned by a member of the CANF executive board and one of the high-calibre guns was traced directly back to its leader.

International terrorism

US terror, direct and through the clandestine activities of the CIA, is not confined to its war against socialist Cuba. US hegemony perceives any progressive government or movement in the world as a threat to its interests, most particularly in its 'own backyard' of Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1954, as Castro recounts, the CIA supported a bloody coup against the democratic Arbenz regime in Guatemala.

'What happened, just because they carried out an agrarian reform to help the millions of native people in that country who were evicted from their lands and were living in the most abject misery? 150,000 dead, of them over 100,000 disappeared persons. Who made that counter-revolution? Who supported all those governments that caused the disappearance of so many people?...Who made 30,000 disappear in Argentina? Who supported those who made them disappear? Who was responsible for the 3,000 disappearances and murders in Chile? Who was responsible for the tens of thousands of deaths in El Salvador and Nicaragua as a result of the dirty wars and repressive governments?...Ah, the greatest defender of democracy and human rights!'

The USA launched bloody invasions of Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989), when thousands of bodies were bulldozed into mass graves. During its dirty Contra war, it continued to illegally mine the main Nicaraguan port in breach of international law. It supported UNITA's war of terror in Angola alongside apartheid South Africa and the Indonesian slaughter of over 60,000 people in East Timor in 1975. The CIA officer in Jakarta at the time, Philip Liechty, recalls:

'There were people herded into school buildings and the buildings set on fire...there were people herded into fields and machine-gunned...We knew the place was a free-fire zone and that Suharto was given the green light by the US to do what he did. We sent the Indonesian generals everything they needed to fight a major war against somebody who doesn't have any guns...You name it, they got it. And they got it direct...There was concern East Timor was going to be either leftist or neutralist and not likely to vote [with the United States] at the UN.' (Told to John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*)

In 1991 US forces slaughtered a quarter of a million Iraqis in the Gulf War. Saddam Hussein, a former US ally, had become a threat to US imperialism's oil interests in the Middle East.

Small wonder, then, that the USA has snubbed Cuban offers of cooperation in the fight against terrorism. For far from being, as the USA and its allies in Britain claim, the 'world's policeman', US imperialism is in fact the biggest threat to peace and democracy in the world today.

David Howarth and Cat Wiener

'Quite the most unpleasant cases that we have to decide are those where the evidence is a direct conflict between a police officer and a member of the public. My principle in such cases has always been to believe the police officer and therefore we find the case proved.'

Magistrate delivering his verdict

Labour attacks the right to trial by jury

At the end of July, Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw announced yet another U-turn in government policy - further curbs on the right to a jury trial have now been officially sanctioned and are likely to appear in a new Crime Bill this autumn. These proposals, which Straw in opposition described as: 'Unfair, short-sighted, unlikely to prove effective', affect criminal charges which were formerly triable either in the Magistrates' Court, or by jury in a Crown Court, with the defendant having the choice. Far too many defendants were opting for more costly jury trials - so, what was formerly 'unfair', has become expedient. If the proposals become law, magistrates will have the choice, not the defendant. Readers may judge how likely magistrates are to skip the opportunity for a summary trial. Jury trial, which academic lawyers argue lies at the heart of the English adversarial system of law, is fast becoming peripheral. Alongside changes in legal aid which restrict access to the law for anyone but the rich, Straw's latest 'reforms' will limit justice for the working class. CAROL BRICKLEY explains why.

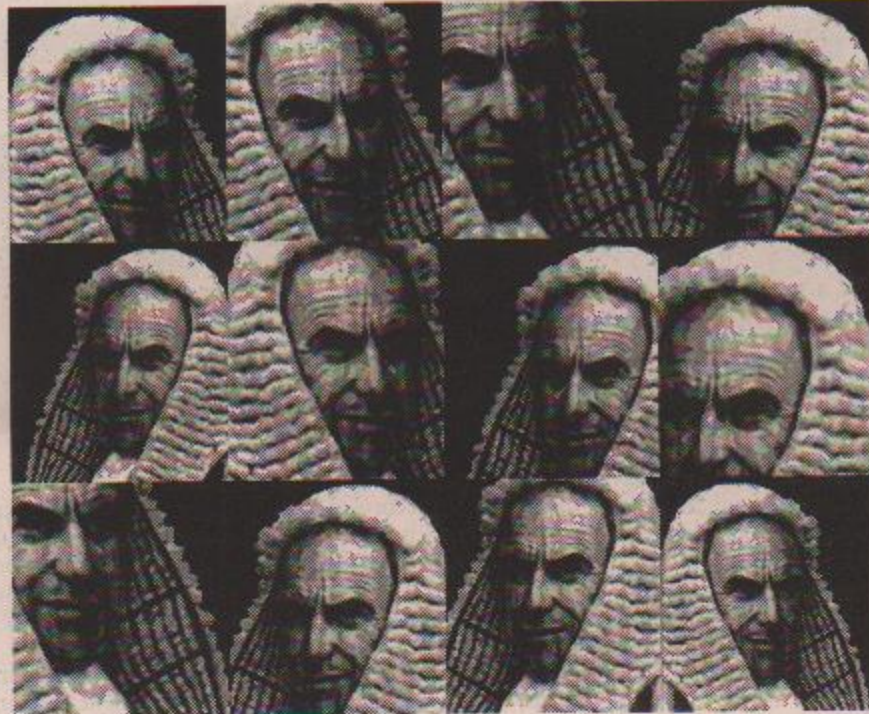
The conscience of the jury

English law owes many of its doctrines and much of its structure to the Norman Conquest. In Norman England, juries were witnesses. Over time their role became to judge the evidence, and eventually it was deemed best that the jury should have no interest in the outcome and no prior knowledge of the evidence. Not that this was judgement by one's peers - an option only available to the ruling class. Juries were drawn from a very narrow, exclusively male, section of society. They could also be intimidated and bullied by judges.

Prior to 1670, jurymen who refused a judge's advice to convict could be punished, either by seizure of land or goods, or by imprisonment. In 1670, at the Old Bailey, a jury refused to convict two Quakers (Penn and Mead) on charges of seditious assembly, against the instruction of the judge. They were locked up without food and water for two nights; then the Recorder of London sentenced them to prison. A subsequent hearing (*Bushell's case*) on a writ of habeas corpus (to free the jury), ruled that the jury was entitled to act on its conscience, regardless of any judicial advice.

This was a vital turning point for juries, reinforced by Lord Mansfield in 1784 (*R v Dean of St Asaph* - another seditious trial). Despite whatever any judge says about the law, a jury can choose to follow its conscience - it can choose justice against oppression. This was forcefully the case in the 18th and 19th centuries when the penalty for quite minor theft was death - juries chose to acquit or to value the property stolen below one shilling in order to avoid an oppressive sentence. It is the most significant power that any jury has, but it is one that the judge never reminds them of. There is rarely any mention in any trial that the jury has such power.

Nonetheless, juries continue to use this power. In 1985 Clive Ponting, Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, was charged under the Official Secrets Act on the grounds that he disclosed information to the MP, Tam Dalyell, that government ministers were misleading Parliament about the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Argentinian battleship, *The Belgrano*, during the Falklands/Malvinas War.



His defence was that he had a duty, in the interest of the state, to disclose the information to a responsible person. The trial judge summed up in favour of the prosecution, ruling that the 'interest of the state' is synonymous with the 'interest of the government' - it was not in the interest of the government to have its secrets revealed, or, more likely, to be shown to be lying to Parliament! The jury acquitted Ponting - a verdict critical of both the oppressive prosecution and the lying proclivities of Her Majesty's government ('one man's ambiguity is another man's truth' argued one government witness when faced with the evidence).

More recently, in *R v Kronlid and others* 1996, three women broke into a British Aerospace factory and caused £1.5 million damage to a Hawk jet fighter plane. They left a video in the cockpit explaining their actions and did not deny they had caused the damage. Their defence was that the plane was destined for Indonesia where it would be used against the people of East Timor, therefore their crime was justified since it was intended to prevent a greater crime - genocide (s3 Criminal Law Act 1967). The British government claimed that the Indonesian government had assured them that the plane would not be used in this way. Nonetheless, the jury acquitted.

In law, the deliberations of any

jury must remain secret, but recent research estimates that 14 per cent of acquittals are 'sympathy' verdicts, where the jury decides that justice lies in a different direction to the interpretation of the law offered by judges in their summing-up.

The composition of the jury

You should not, however, have illusions about the progressive capacity of juries, *per se*. Until 1972, only those who owned land or a leasehold over a prescribed rateable value were eligible for jury service. In consequence, juries were predominantly middle class and could be trusted, by and large, to represent the interests of the ruling class - in contrast the majority of defendants in the dock (except for driving offences) were working class. In 1965, 78 per cent of those on the electoral register did not qualify for jury service and 95 per cent of women did not qualify. The Criminal Justice Act 1972 reformed the law to include all registered voters with no property qualification.

This has been a double-edged sword for the ruling class, who prefer the legal system to operate in their favour. On the one hand, it has relieved the burden on the middle class; on the other, the reluctance of the middle classes to put aside money-making to devote their time to public service (expenses paid for jury service are minimal) means that

jurors are much more likely to be working class and unemployed than at any time in the past.* Given the powers of the jury outlined above, this is perceived as perilous. Defendants are more confident that juries will reach just decisions than that magistrates will - hence the preference for jury trial when defendants have the choice.

The perceived unreliability of juries to reach the sorts of decisions that the ruling class likes, has fuelled a number of 'reforms' of the law relating to juries. Up to 1988 the defence in any trial had a right to challenge three jurors - these were called peremptory challenges. No reason needed to be given and neither the prosecution nor the defence had any information on prospective jurors other than their names and addresses. Quite clearly this allowed the defence at least some possibility of balancing a jury in terms of race or sex, for instance. In 1988 the right to peremptory challenges was removed altogether, and confirmed in 1989 (*R v Ford*) where the judges ruled that 'there is no principle that a jury should be racially balanced'. The principle, argued by the government, was that the choice of the jury should be completely random.

No such principle has been used, however, in respect of the prosecution's rights. The prosecution still has the right to challenge potential jurors (known as 'stand by for the Crown'). The use of this form of challenge has proved much more dangerous to justice than any peremptory challenge by the defence.

Jury vetting

Jury vetting has a long history in the British legal system, although lip service is paid to the principle of randomness. During the French Revolution, for instance, Prime Minister Pitt appointed special juries to crush any incipient republicanism. These special juries of chosen loyalists (paid one guinea each - hence Guinea Men) were used to try cases of sedition. In more recent times, however, the practice was unknown until the ABC Trial (*R v Aubrey, Berry and Campbell*, 1978), an Official Secrets trial, when it became clear, mid-trial, that the jury had been vetted. The jury was dismissed and a retrial ordered. It was then admitted that Attorney General guidelines had existed since 1974

and had been used in more than 20 cases to vet potential jurors for 'loyalty'. Sometimes the only indication that a jury has been vetted is that some potential jurors are asked to 'stand by for the Crown'. It is argued that jury vetting is only used for 'terrorist' cases or those involving state security, where some of the evidence may be heard in camera. Nonetheless, it is believed that the practice is more widespread - for the Ponting case, for instance, where it was admitted that there were no issues of state security, 60 jurors were vetted. So some tinkering with the jury is allowed, in the interests of the state. None, however, is allowed in favour of the defence. In *R v Pennington* 1985, an appeal by a striking miner against a conviction for picketing, on the grounds that a member of the jury was a scab miner, was dismissed. Only the prosecution is allowed to vet the jury, except in cases where the defendants have been police officers, then jury vetting has been allowed for the defence.

The Magistrates

The alternative to jury trial in a Crown Court is summary trial in a Magistrates' Court. At present only 1 per cent of trials are decided by juries (most civil cases are judge-only). Nevertheless, this is 30,000 trials every year, including the most serious criminal charges. The projected changes in the law will affect about 20 per cent of these which will now be dealt with in Magistrates' Courts. A major issue for the government, of course, is cost - £13,500 for a contested jury trial, £1,500 for a contested summary trial. But there is also the issue of certainty - magistrates are much more likely to find defendants guilty (78% conviction rate) - by comparison, the ruling class thinks that juries are fickle.

There are about 30,000 Lay Magistrates (JPs, unpaid) and 100 Stipendiary Magistrates (salaried, 40 of them in London). They hear 93% of criminal charges. They deal with half a million citizens every year, and send about 25,000 of them to prison. The Magistrates' Courts system costs £200 million a year, but it earns £270 million a year from fines etc. This system has big advantages for the ruling class.

Most magistrates support the Tory Party, even in areas where majority support is for Labour. The system of preferment is secret - by and large existing magistrates appoint new magistrates. Political parties can nominate local worthies for the job, but in general, the Labour Party has been dilatory. But, given the nature of today's Labour supporters (ie they aren't very different from the Tories) the biggest advantage of magistrates is their class. In 1977 research showed that only 8.2 per cent of magistrates were manual workers and in 1992 only 2 per cent of them were black. With such class backgrounds, the outcomes of trials are much more certain. As one magistrate admitted in 1974:

'Quite the most unpleasant cases that we have to decide are those where the evidence is a direct conflict between a police officer and a member of the public. My principle in such cases has always been to believe the police officer and therefore we find the case proved.' (*R v Bingham JJ ex parte Jowitt*, 1974).

The experience of defendants is that not much has changed in the last 25 years. During the miners' strike in 1984/5, the local magistrates could be relied on to impose bail conditions, restrictions on movement and generally to tow the line for the government. The same has been true in every major conflict between the working class and the state. The Labour government wants to restrict the right to jury trial because it is cheaper and the outcome will be guilty, in favour of the ruling class.

*Following the introduction of the Poll Tax, an estimated 1.5 million people disappeared from the electoral register

'Labour', promised Prescott, 'will take back private prisons into public ownership ... prisons ... cannot be run by private concerns whose primary goal is profit'.

Private prisons – who profits?

What Jack Straw found 'morally unacceptable' in April 1996, two years later he now describes as 'high performance, efficiency and effectiveness'. Yes, it's the ever-blossoming love affair between the Home Secretary and the private prisons industry which Labour is embracing with increasing passion. ALEXA BYRNE reports.

Latest figures show that in three years' time one in ten prisoners in England and Wales will be locked up in private gaols. The British prison system will rank alongside the largest commercially run penal industries in the world. This represents an abrupt and massive U-turn in Labour policy.

In May 1994 Prescott performed at a POA conference in Portsmouth. He sought to calm the officers' panic over growing privatisation and hence threats to their pay, conditions and comfortable pension schemes.

'Labour', promised Prescott, 'will take back private prisons into public ownership ... prisons ... cannot be run by private concerns whose primary goal is profit'. Whoops! Still, by now he must be used to being publicly dumped on by his colleagues.

By May 1997 Straw was wriggling out of earlier commitments. 'No more private prisons,' he promised, but added, 'We cannot break contracts that already exist'. In October 1997, however, he ordered the building of four new private gaols in addition to the three then under construction (see FRFI 142).



And who's got their fingers in the private prisons pie?

The largest operator, Group 4, is owned by Jorgen-Philip Sorensen, who invited his personal friend, ex-Tory Cabinet Minister Sir Norman Fowler, onto the board. Now former staff from the Home Office and Prison Service are employed to run the gaols.

Securicor, which runs the notorious Parc prison in Bridgend, also profits from prisoner escort contracts and electronic tagging. An ex-Ministry of Defence person, Richard Powell, brother of William (former Tory MP) manages the company. Securicor has links with Sir Peter Imbert (former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police) and George Ness (ex-head of Scotland Yard's International and Organised Crime branch).

And, of course, never missing a

chance to make a fast buck or two, US companies are right in there, showing how it's done.

UK Detention Services is a partnership between the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and a French catering firm, Sodexo. CCA has massive international involvement in running prisons, owning at least 48 across the US, Puerto Rico and Australia, and two in the UK. Thomas Beasley, chairman of the Tennessee Republican Party, is one of CCA's co-founders.

Last, but not least, Premier Prisons is a cosy relationship between Wackenhut of Florida and Serco, a UK management facilities group. Wackenhut makes profits out of four pris-

ons in England and Wales, including Tinsley House, the immigration detention centre at Gatwick airport. Many of Wackenhut's senior employees are ex-CIA and FBI members.

There's money to be made, not least because government law and order policies railroad increasing numbers of people into prison. A report published in December 1997 for the Home Office showed that private prisons are between 8% and 15% cheaper to run than state-owned ones. The main reason for this is because private gaols employ fewer staff, pay lower wages and don't provide the pensions and other benefits found in the state sector.

Any ideas that they give a better

deal to the prisoners locked up in them are nonsense. The same report insists that prisoners in private gaols spend more time out of their cells in 'purposeful activity'. At Doncaster gaol (Premier Prisons) prisoners were indeed purposefully active for 24 hours a week – 70% of this time was spent cleaning.

Catalogue of abuse and unrest grows

- At Parc prison a suicide occurred within two weeks of the prison opening in November 1997. After a second suicide, six months later, prisoners demonstrated and refused to return to their cells. In March 1998 two guards were taken hostage and state prison officers were called in to prevent a riot. There have been seven other 'mini-riots'. The electronic guard system crashes continually and prisoners have been transferred out because the staff are unable to cope.

- In June 1998 nine children rioted at Medway Secure Training Centre (Group 4). Thirty riot police with dogs were brought in to restore control (see FRFI 144).

- Staff working with these vulnerable children receive eight weeks training at the Prison Service College and no experience or specialist training is required for the job.

As barrister Frances Webber said in FRFI 144, following the collapse of the trial of immigration detainees at Group 4's Campsfield House, 'at least in the public sector there are rules, sanctions and a line of accountability...' But Straw and the Labour government care nothing for these in their rush to build, fill and run British prisons, preferably at minimum cost and maximum profit. ■

Inside News

Three men convicted of Full Sutton mutiny

On 27 August, after seven hours deliberation, a jury at Hull Crown Court pronounced Gary Griffin, Raymond Kennedy and Mark Hargreaves guilty of Prison Mutiny. The three were convicted of participating in the revolt at Full Sutton prison on 21 January 1997 and had all been on C wing of the prison where the protest began. They will not be sentenced until after the trial of nine men who were on B wing, which is due to take place in October.

A fourth defendant, 'Porky' Edmunds, whom the prosecution case repeatedly cited as the instigator and ringleader, was also due to stand trial. Having completed the sentence he was serving at Full Sutton, he was on bail and had attended the committal hearing, but did not turn up for the trial itself, much to the anger of the judge, who observers say has been extremely biased against the defendants throughout. They also report that a large amount of the evidence given by prison officers was contradictory.

FRFI censored

This year so far we have had more problems with prison censorship than in any other period since the early 1980s. Issues of FRFI have been withheld from prisoners at Long Lartin, Whitemoor, Stafford and Parkhurst and a prisoner at Nottingham has been refused a copy of *Strangeways 1990 – a serious disturbance*.

The Long Lartin ban centred around issue 141, which contained an article by Domyk Noonan announcing the relaunch of the Prisoners' League Association. However, when we investigated further we discovered that some prisoners had also had other issues withheld from them.

Following complaints to the Long Lartin administration by Larkin Publications and the Prisoners Advice Service, we were able to get the majority of the impounded copies returned, although one prisoner moved from Long Lartin to Frankland, who was told that his FRFI was in his property, discovered it was not only missing but had been sent to Bristol in the property of another prisoner.

FRFI takes all attempts to ban our newspaper extremely seriously and we will always contest any acts of censorship which are brought to our attention.

There have also been problems with letters from prisoners reaching us, although we think that mail sent by us has generally reached its destination. Letters from prisoners in Full Sutton, Wakefield, Durham and Frankland have failed to reach us and a prisoner in Belmarsh has had a letter addressed to FRFI withheld under Standing Order 5B 34 2, which refers to 'Plans or material which would tend to assist or encourage the commission of any disciplinary offence or criminal offence'. He is adamant that it contained nothing of the sort and is currently seeking legal advice regarding a possible judicial review of this punitive decision.

News from Woodhill Control Unit

Since the Woodhill 'Closed Supervision Centre' (CSC) opened in February 1998, FRFI has been monitoring developments in what is now arguably the most punitive corner of the British prison system.

June Prison Reform Trust director visits unit

The Prison Service encouraged this visit by Stephen Shaw to their new control unit, obviously hoping that the PRT would be uncritical of the unit as a facility for 'treating' the system's most 'difficult' and 'disruptive' prisoners. However, in the Summer 1998 edition of *Prison Report*, Shaw attacks the regime, saying 'there is no intervention on C wing (the Intervention Centre), no structured regime on B wing (the structured regime unit) and no regime at all on A wing (the restricted unit)'. And in a letter to Prison Service Director General Richard Tilt, he says that 'far from reinforcing good behaviour, the absence of any privileges or regime...is encouraging in prisoners allocated there a sense of injustice, legitimate grievance, withdrawal, antagonism and aggression.'

July Phase One prisoners shipped out

Less than six months after it opened, the new Woodhill unit decided to ship out all the prisoners formerly held on Phase One of the regime.

The obvious reason for dispersing the prisoners to other locations was the dirty protest which the prisoners on Phase One engaged in during July and their total and absolute refusal to co-operate with and recognise a regime which denied them their most basic rights. This protest was provoked by a form of control and punishment that is both arbitrary and unlawful and clearly designed to psychologically destroy those whom the prison system sees as uncooperative and defiant.

All the prisoners ghosted from Woodhill were told that their 'lay-downs' elsewhere would be for a period of two months, after which they will presumably be returned to even more repressive conditions in the unit. One of the prisoners transferred, Nigel Robinson, has been being held in a cage-like cell at Wakefield prison.

The protests at Woodhill will continue because of the viciousness of the regime operating there and the courage and determination of some prisoners to confront and resist it. We salute their actions and send them best wishes and solidarity.

August First woman prisoner at Woodhill

During August the spur of the Woodhill unit which has been designated for women received its first prisoner. Contrary to the public hype about who is sent to Woodhill (which is not true for the men either) she was not a multiple murderer or someone who had grossly offended against 'prison discipline'; instead, she was a young Irish woman on remand, innocent in the eyes of the law, arrested on suspicion of 'terrorism'. She remained in Woodhill for three weeks before being released on bail.

September Prisoners challenge Woodhill regime in High Court

On 11 September four prisoners instigated legal action to judicially

review the February 1998 change to the Prison Rules under which the Woodhill control unit was set up. The High Court agreed to allow two of the cases to go to a full hearing. The prisoners challenged both the punitive regime in the CSC and the arbitrary process which determines which prisoners are 'selected' for the unit.

FRFI will continue to watch what is going on at Woodhill. All reports from prisoners inside the unit will be favourably considered for publication.

Most of the above article was written by John Bowden, who is currently in the segregation unit at HMP Nottingham, following changes to the regime there. John and other prisoners sought to oppose the changes by entirely legal and peaceful means, including mass use of official prison procedures such as applications to see a governor. The authorities panicked when confronted with the possibility that these procedures, designed to individualise and fragment dissent, could in fact, if invoked by enough prisoners simultaneously, become a method of collective protest action.

Organise with FRFI

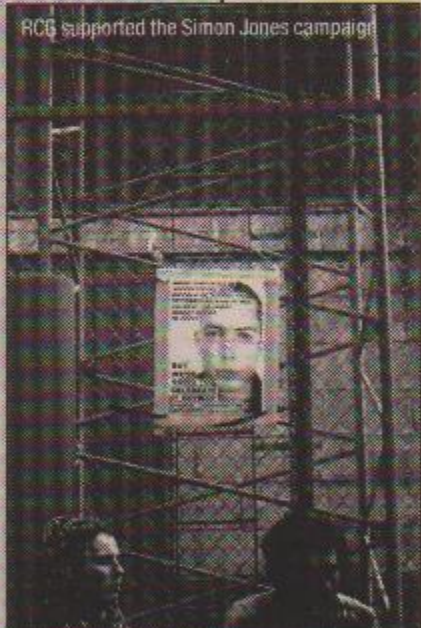
The FRFI fund drive has now reached £4,000 this month. We have £1,000 to go, so rush in your donations so we can achieve our target by the next issue. Many thanks to all our readers and supporters who sent in their donations over the summer period. It has enabled us to buy the PCs and other equipment we need to see us through the millennium without any problems.

FRFI supporters continue their high level of activity - witness the reports on Tameside, the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign, the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, and from Rock around the Blockade. The fight against poverty pay continues to expose the complete inadequacy of the trade unions as vehicles for working class struggle at present. The fact that only 80,000 days were lost through industrial action in the first five months of this year shows that they are maintaining their suffocating grip on the working class. It is yet a further reason why the ruling class has decided that Labour is their preferred government: they know how the trade union leadership will try their utmost to prevent any challenge upsetting their alliance with the Labour Party.

The activities of the Tameside careworkers are like a refreshing breeze in this situation. Their challenge to the local Labour Party, to the GMB, their willingness to go beyond

the traditional boundaries of trade union struggle have brought them up against the equally traditional forces of the British left. Having committed themselves to a strategy which prioritises the trade union movement as the locus of any new movement, the left cannot tolerate activities which break the norms of trade union struggle. They tailor their politics to ensure they are not under the slightest threat of being isolated by the trade union leadership. So inevitably, they are drawn into protecting those forces which they claim to oppose. Noel Pine (see page 7) was acting for the British left, not just on his own account. We need to see more Tameside workers, more opposition to the bankrupt tradition of British trade unionism, more inventiveness and independence. Only then will we know a new movement is coming into being.

Don't forget our website: www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk. We apologise for the absence of new material recently - the comrade who manages the website has moved country recently but will be back in operation by the time this issue hits the streets. We will then continue to keep the site updated with new material.



RCG supported the Simon Jones campaign

Events

LONDON

All at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, starting at 7:30pm; nearest tube Holborn.

Wednesday 14 October. FRFI Readers and Supporters Group: 'A force for good' - Labour's strategic defence review
Speaker: Trevor Rayne

Wednesday 28 October. FRFI Readers and Supporters Group: Is there a place for revolutionary violence?

Monday 9 November. Public Meeting: Coming apart at the seams - capitalism's world crisis
Speaker: David Yaffe

NORTHWEST

Preston

FRFI Readers and Supporters Group meetings take place in the University Library. Next dates: Thursday 8 October and Tuesday 3 November, both at 7:30pm.

Manchester

FRFI Readers and Supporters Group meets at the Beer House, Angel Street/Rochdale Road in the centre of Manchester. Next meetings: Thursday 15 October and Thursday 12 November, both at 7:30pm

Blackburn

Next meetings of the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign are at 7:30pm on Tuesday 13 October and Tuesday 10 November.

Venue: Bangor Street Community Centre, Brookhouse, Blackburn.

MIDLANDS

Leicester

FRFI Readers and Supporters meet on Saturday 10 October and Saturday 7 November, starting at 1:30pm. Venue: St Peter's Tenants Association, St Peter's Shopping Centre, Melbourne Road, Highfield.

Lincoln

Cuba Solidarity/Rock around the Blockade meeting: Monday 5 October. For details, phone 01400 230 151.

Lincoln

FRFI supporters will be attending a dayschool on Iraq and Palestine at Sheffield University on Saturday 24 October. Anyone wanting further details or transport should phone 01400 230 151.

FIGHTING CAPITALIST LIES...

ACTIVELY CAMPAIGNING IN SOLIDARITY WITH SOCIALIST CUBA

Over the summer, Rock around the Blockade had the privilege of having Ernesto Jaquinet, a member of the Union of Young Communists, in Britain (see FRFI 144) and organised a speaking tour to give supporters around the country the opportunity to hear him speak.

The two meetings in Lincoln were very successful. At the University many Latin American students joined in an enthusiastic discussion which centered round the unity of their countries with the Cuban people. In the evening over 40 people attended a meeting held together with the Cuban Solidarity Group in the Labour Club. Two classes of A level students arrived with well-prepared questions which led to an in-depth and knowledgeable discussion. RATB sold 10 T-shirts and 25 FRFI from its stall as well as literature on Cuba.

In Doncaster Ernesto spoke about the problems arising from the dual currency situation and the importance of international solidarity to an interested audience who pledged further solidarity with Cubans to raise money for the sound system.

In Chesterfield a local band came together with Rock around the Blockade to provide entertainment for a social evening with debate. 30 people enjoyed the Cuban experience of music and political discussion. With 65% of the island's population aged under 30, the importance of supporting the UJC's work in providing music could not have been clearer. Rock around the Blockade has al-



ready provided two sound systems to Cuba and will be providing a third this December.

The University of Central Lancaster Rock around the Blockade Student society hosted Ernesto at its first meeting of the new academic year. Around 20 people enjoyed a lively question-and-answer session following Ernesto's speech. Ernesto talked about the impact of the blockade on everyday Cuban life and the way the USA is attempting to 'rub out the example of Cuba from the earth'. He also spoke of the importance of campaigns like Rock around the Blockade and told the meeting of the enormous pleasure that the sound systems have brought to the youth of Ciego de Avila province.

Rock around the Blockade spent two days at the seaside this summer! The first visit was to join Brighton Cuba Solidarity Campaign's annual

fiesta on the seafront. RATB successfully sold 12 T-shirts, three Che pendants, 55 badges, five Assata Shakur pamphlets and 20 FRFI, as well as literature on Cuba. Our second visit was to join the new RATB group in Hastings. On a glorious Saturday we held a stall in the town centre followed by a meeting. This was well attended and the new supporters have pledged to collect material aid for Cuba and work with RATB.

In London a sensational salsa night, *Rockisimo*, was held at Bar Cuba, Kensington High Street and attracted a vibrant crowd of revellers who danced till two in the morning, raising over £450 for RATB. Thanks are extended to Bar Cuba and to DJs John Armstrong and Nick P for their generosity. We hope to repeat this success on a more regular basis working along side the Cuba Vive society at University College, London. At Queen Mary and Westfield college, freshers' fayre, 26 people gave us their names - so look out for a new Cuba Vive society. Rock around the

Blockade sends a call out to any one else who can put on fund-raising and fun-raising events, as these mean that more sound systems can be taken to Cuba!

We received further encouragement for our work in the form of a letter to the organiser of our lively Moncada event in July from Cuba's Radio Havana, thanking Rock around the Blockade, on behalf of the Cuban people, for our efforts.

London RATB fortnightly meetings have continued with a quiz activity to help raise everybody's understanding about Cuba, a question-and-answer session with Ernesto and a discussion of Castro's Moncada speech (see page 11). A massive thanks to Ernesto and translator Zoë for their fantastic input into the work of Rock around the Blockade over the last three months. They have now returned to Cuba where we wish them every success and look forward to receiving reports on Cuba from them for publication in FRFI.

Rock around the Blockade has many events planned over the autumn to continue building solidarity with Cuban socialism and collecting money for a sound system for the Cuban youth of Trinidad de Cuba. We have reached £4,000 of our £5,000 target - please help us by rushing your donations to the address below.

We are also sending a socialist brigade to Cuba this December to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution on 1 January 1999. For more information about the campaign and brigade, contact us at BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, Tel 0171 837 1688 or visit our website <http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk/ratb/> We have groups around the country and at many universities - get in contact, find out where your nearest group is - and get active!

London campaign meetings: fortnightly on Mondays, 8pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, London WC1 (Holborn tube); 5 October, 19 October, 2 November, 16 November, 30 November. Saturday 17 October: CSC picket of US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1 2-4pm.

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX
Telephone: 0171 837 1688. Website: <http://www.rcgfrfi.easynet.co.uk/>

CHOOSE THE RCG

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

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

I would like to join an FRFI Readers & Supporters Group

Name _____

Address _____

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LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX tel: 0171 837 1688 e-mail: rcgfrfi@easynet.co.uk

In defence of the Chilean Communist Party

I am replying to misrepresentations made about the Chilean Communist Party in FRFI 144.

Communist Party members, who were necessarily members of trade unions, came from the entire spectrum of the working population, including manual workers, white-collar workers and members of the middle class. All industrial workers had to be members of a union. Other sectors of workers, such as agricultural, health and domestic workers, also had their own unions that they could choose to join. Trade unions were united in their demands for improving pay and conditions. For example, they had won the right to one year's maternity leave on full pay for women in all sectors of work. The majority of trade union leaders were members of Unidad Popular, which was led mainly by CP members. The second largest grouping in the trade unions were the Christian Democrats.

It is not true to say that the CP was on the right wing of Unidad Popular. The CP did not argue for the inclusion of the Christian Democrats within the alliance - that would be like mixing oil and water - it argued only for discussions between Unidad Popular and the Christian Democrats.

Saying the CP pushed Unidad Popular to continue 'to buy the middle-class support it craved' is an insulting comparison with the ugly actions sponsored by the CIA. The CP respected the rights of working members of the middle class to what they had earned through their own efforts and not appropriated from members of the working class.

The *cordones industriales* were formed by the trade unions themselves, with the full support of the CP within Unidad Popular, to defend industry from sabotage attacks. I myself, as a CP and trade union member, founded and was elected to lead one of the first to be formed, that in the automotive industry in the Vicuña MacKenna district of Santiago.

Fidel, during his visit in 1971, respected that each country has its own path, that Chile had not had an armed revolution, but was taking steps down a socialist path. Chile was not in conditions at that moment to proceed to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Communist Party general secretary Luis Corvalan made his statement of support to the army precisely because it had speedily defeated an attempted coup against the Unidad Popular government only a month earlier. It was in the next month, in the days just before the coup, that 43 sailors were arrested for being members of socialist nuclei, which would have fragmented the army into camps of different allegiances.

This letter is not to claim that the Communist Party was perfect. Indeed, we committed many errors,

which arose from our conviction that it was possible to change Chilean society in a nonviolent way. Events initially confirmed this, with the vote for Unidad Popular increasing from 36% to 44% from 1970 to 1973. Later events, however, proved that the ruling class will never accept the working class governing a society in its interests.

In our party congress in exile in Mexico City in 1975, which had been postponed from October 1973 by the coup, we fully and frankly discussed what happened and the errors we made. No other grouping within Unidad Popular has done this.

SERGIO LAGOS
London

Response to Comrade Lagos

Comrade Lagos does not take up the key arguments contained in the original article. Of course the CP included huge numbers of working class people within its ranks, and was the major partner within Unidad Popular. That makes its influence and role even more significant factors in the defeat of Unidad Popular.

I'm not sure on what grounds he disputes that the CP was on the right wing of Unidad Popular. It certainly argued most consistently for compromise when the going got tough, and even before then. The 'discussions' the CP proposed with the Christian Democrats had exactly the purpose of forming an alliance against the Nationalists. And the CP was the most vitriolic in dealing with the left, both inside and outside of the UP. And I would reiterate the point about the middle class: in periods of crisis, their privileges can only be maintained at the expense of the working class.

The argument is not whether Chile could proceed to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is about how an alliance between the working class and oppressed, including the poor peasantry, could be established, and how it could defend its interests which could not be maintained through parliamentary negotiations. A proper Communist Party would have rejected governmental responsibility, knowing that it would be an arena of compromise, and not of liberation.

Corvalan's statement on the army was made as the armed forces were finalising their preparations for a coup. Cde Lagos says that the CP 'fully and frankly' discussed the errors the CP made - this appears not to have been one of them. Nor does the justification of the arrest of the 43 sailors. Surely communists would have welcomed the fragmentation of the army into camps of different allegiances - it would have left it completely paralysed as an instrument of counter-revolution?

Much of the CP discussion about the period 1970-73 has focused on the role of the left, and how it allegedly undermined UP and played into the hands of reaction. Such errors as the CP has acknowledged are so qualified that they are in practice irrelevant.

Robert Clough

MUFC: Murdoch United Financial Corporations

The imminent sale of Manchester United by the board of the plc and the 60% of City institutional shareholders to Rupert Murdoch's BSKyB/News Corporation Group is another step towards the domination of global media and entertainment industries by 'vertically integrated' businesses such as News Corp, that aim to control platforms and distribution of their products. In Murdoch's case, power and control are the key.

He is able to use his global power due to the cohesion and help of international capitalism and the governments which represent it. In Britain his success in taking over Man United is virtually assured, due to his New Labour friends, including Blair and Mandelson; it is doubtful whether the government will act in any way to obstruct the deal.

What about Manchester United Football Club? What is happening to the professional game? How will the sale affect the true fans?

Since the launch of the plc the club has been taken further and further away from its loyal support and now decisions affecting the club will be

taken on the other side of the world. MU plc will be just another of the almost 800 separate companies across 52 countries owned and manipulated to further the business interests of the Murdoch empire.

The success of this empire depends in part on the way these companies' revenues are moved around the globe to avoid paying tax. In 1996-7 Murdoch paid only 7.8% tax on his companies' profits. Manchester United's revenues are as likely to be found in Mauritius, Fiji or India as in Alex Ferguson's transfer fund. The financial picture of News Corporation is so complex and intricate even Murdoch once conceded some of his most senior executives were confused.

The record of News Corporation globally is one of ruthlessness against any individuals, groups or even governments who try to block its advance: witness Wapping. Blair and Mandelson are counted amongst his acquaintances and supporters - that fact alone shows as much about the higher echelons of New Labour as it does about Murdoch and his managers - anti-working class heroes all.

Can Murdoch be trusted to act in the best interests of MUFC? Murdoch will act in his own interests, not those of the club or its fans. Past experience of Murdoch-owned sports clubs does not augur well - this goes from rugby

to baseball. In the latter for example, the Brooklyn Dodgers became the Dodgers in Los Angeles when taken over by Murdoch's Fox Group, leaving thousands of New York fans stranded.

Will Alex Ferguson be left to manage without interference? Every Friday Murdoch receives weekly financial reports filed by each of his far-flung divisions. He then makes decisions, often on nothing more than a whim. Managers who defy the boss's wishes don't last long: his flagship paper *The Times*, for example, has had five editors in the last decade.

Despite denials, there have already been reports of Murdoch's men negotiating to buy a Japanese player for Man Utd without Ferguson's knowledge - no doubt to increase sales for Murdoch's Star Corporation TV sports channel in Japan! If results at United take a downturn, what then?

It would be comforting to think the takeover can be stopped. Perhaps it can, but not by the New Labour pals of Murdoch. It's sad, but whatever happens now, it can only be stopped by a higher bid to the plc greedy fat cats, moving football further and further from its working class roots.

MIKE PEARSE, lifelong MUFC supporter, Manchester

Here's to the demise of Labour!

After watching the recent TUC conference on television and listening to all the pathetic speeches made by union leaders (with the notable exception of Arthur Scargill), the most sickening sight of all, however, was the obnoxious Labour MP for Oldham, arch-Blairite Phil Woolas.

Woolas, a former leader of the National Union of Students, was the main BBC studio guest and the resident expert (what a joke) on union affairs. However, know-it-all Woolas

seemed very weak in the history department. After Scargill made his conference speech, which correctly attacked the TUC barons for their apathy, the smug Woolas dismissed the NUM leader as a dinosaur who was out of touch with the TUC movement and, unbelievably, blamed Scargill for destroying pit jobs and for the general demise of mining communities! Is this brainless MP claiming that the mines would not have closed if the miners had not taken strike action in 1984?

The main reason for the demise of pit communities was not the actions of the NUM leadership during the

great strike, but the abject failure of the Labour Party and people like Woolas to support the NUM during their historic struggle and for their lack of effort in not trying to get a general strike organised.

The slippery Woolas is obviously making all the right noises for promotion to a junior ministerial post, hoping to catch the eye of the king of all crawlers, Tony Blair. Here's to the demise of both the political career of Phil Woolas, along with the wretched Labour Party.

STEPHEN MARVIN
Mansfield

Speaking up for political prisoners

While the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa may have ended and political prisoners there and in other places have been released, in the USA there are still many political prisoners from this era serving harsh sentences because of their committed political activities in support of the liberation struggles in Central America, South Africa, the USA and elsewhere.

Progressive and revolutionary minded people can help them be heard and released by writing to the US President Clinton, Washington DC, urging that they be pardoned or given amnesty.

Without such support they will continue to rot in prison, serving sentences of up to 53 years. Many have already served many years for the crime of violating the unjust policies of the US government.

In 1985-86, Raymond Luc

Levasseur, Thomas Manning, Richard Williams and Jaan Laaman were tried and convicted for conspiracy and bombing unoccupied military and corporate facilities (there were no injuries). These United Freedom Front actions were part of an effort to bring the public's attention to corporate and government criminal activity in South Africa and Central America. Sentences ranged from 45 to 53 years imprisonment. All four remain confined in maximum security prisons including the government's infamous Administrative Maximum (ADX) in Florence, Colorado.

Write to them at: Ray Luc Levasseur, 10376-016, PO Box 8500 ADX, Florence, CO 81226-8500; Tom Manning, 10373-016, Box 1000, Leavenworth, KS 66048-1000; Jaan Karl Laaman, 10372-016, Leavenworth; Richard Williams, 10377-016, 3901 Klein Blvd, Lompoc, CA

STEVE KATSINERIS
Australia

Fight racism now!

On Saturday 29 August, Rebekka and I went on a trip to Brighton with Rock around the Blockade to raise money for Cuba. The people at the stall gave us a board with Che Guevara badges on it to sell to people. When Rebekka started to sell her badges, she came to a man and said to him 'Would you like to buy a badge for 50p?' 'No', he replied, 'I hate Cuba.' 'Why?' says Rebekka. 'Because it has Cubans in it, loads of filthy Cubans.' She went absolutely ballistic and shouted at him 'You idiot! You racist fool!' And do you know what? I think she was right!

Then I went round on my roller-blades wearing a big Che Guevara T-shirt and I sold one T-shirt, 20 badges, four Assata Shakur letters, some pamphlets on the history of Cuba and some other things as well. I had a really nice day out!

IKAMARA LARASI (aged 9)
London

continued from page 9

because they are unsure of the health and safety issues! But what is good enough for wealthy MPs clearly isn't good enough for the working class. A recent report by the Food Poverty Network underlines the point that food poverty kills more people at this time than poisoning. Poor people, according to the report, have increased chances of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and most cancers due to poor diet. The overall lifespan of people on low incomes is 10 years less than the middle classes.⁴

It is inevitable in a society based on capitalist social relations of production, with its consequent exploitation and brutality, that our natural environment, the air we breathe, the land and water, plants and animals, in short, the environment within which human beings interact, will be polluted, raped and destroyed if this enhances profit making. Stewardship of the planet and nature is no part of

the capitalist agenda - the maximisation of profit always precedes any systems of regulation to protect the environment. The issues of global warming, ozone depletion, air pollution, acid rain, nuclear pollution through radioactive waste and more - all are necessary by-products of an unplanned, anarchic system of capitalism. However, this is not to say that the ecological imperative should not inform socialism. Any credible socialist movement today needs to be able to address ecological issues, not dismiss them, and it is likely that questions of sustainability and the precautionary principle will be part and parcel of any future communist society.

At the same time, a balance needs to be struck regarding attitudes to science and technology. When science is used for the benefit of all humankind and in a benign way towards the environment, there is every possibil-

ity it can be a positive force. When science is used to aid exploitation and to maximise profits and to assist war-mongering, it invariably becomes unsafe as it is an instrument of ruling class power. Marxists ought not to be primitivists - the advancement and progress of life is crucial, but sustainability and ethical considerations need to be paramount. We would welcome an informed debate on these issues in FRFI.

As we approach the 21st Century, there are great opportunities to bring together those fighting the environmental damage caused by capitalism with those fighting capitalism per se. Members of the Reinstate Nigel Cook Campaign, fighting poverty pay in Britain today, and particularly targeting the music industry multinational PolyGram, are fighting the same struggle as the GenetiX snowball activists in their battles with Monsanto. We also know, in any event, that the

state's armed instruments will be used against any successful anti-nuclear or environmental groups, and the local and secret states will be watching. Therefore, on this count alone, the direct link between red and green is unavoidable, if, as yet, improperly drawn.

1 The Genetic Engineering Network produces GenetiX Update, a free subscription is available by writing to GEN, PO Box 9656, London, N4 4JY, Tel: 0181 374 9516. Genetics information is also available on the web, at www.envirolink-org/orgs/shag/action.html. A further GenetiX Harvest took place in Cambridgeshire on 19/20 September. There is to be a Gene week from 2nd to 15 October, including supermarket actions, Batchelors is a biohazard, GenetiX snowball, Say no to Monsanto day. Gene week is the British counterpart of global days of action. The organisers say 'the general idea is to draw attention to the ridiculous fuck-up that is propelling us into the genetic mil-

lennium'. Details from the above phone number.

2 The letter, dated 18 June 1997, is the 'agribusiness letter to Clinton = Get tough on Biotech', on website www.netlink.de/gen/zeitung/970618a.htm.

3 The 'Batchelors Contaminated - Protect your food' campaign is available on hotline 0171 865 8222, supported by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Genetic Engineering Network. Interestingly, Monsanto's own hotline (0800 092 0401) has dealt with 2,717 calls to date, but Ann Foster, Director of public and government affairs for Monsanto, says they were totally unprepared for the hostility. Apparently, those ringing Monsanto to attack their propaganda offered nothing but 'pure vitriol'. How unfortunate!

4 *Food Poverty: What are the options?* is available from the National Food Alliance, 94 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PF, Tel 0171 837 1228. The report itself is written by Jacqui Webster of the Food Poverty Network.

**FIGHT
RACISM**

FIGHT IMPERIALISM

Justice for Ricky Reel

On 14 October it will be a year since the death of Lakhvinder (Ricky) Reel, aged 20. His body was recovered from the Thames a week after he went out with some friends and didn't come home. The police had been contacted the following morning and so were aware his friends had reported being racially abused by two white youths, running away and losing each other. However, the police response was that if someone over 18 years old is missing they can do nothing for 24 hours.

It took a week for a Serious Incident Room to be set up and when Ricky's body was found, having been in the water for seven days, the police said that no further investigation was necessary. No attempt was made to trace the two white youths. The police told Ricky's mother, before the postmortem, that it was likely he fell into the water while urinating and died immediately. A pathology report commissioned by the family indicated that Ricky fell into the water backwards, did not die instantly but tried to swim and that the involvement of another person could not be ruled out.

The Justice for Ricky Reel campaign is demanding answers to why the police took seven days to respond, why the racial incident was not investigated immediately and why a reconstruction of the event has never taken place. Mr and Mrs Reel plan to make a submission to the second part of the Lawrence Inquiry.

To contact the campaign, telephone Sukdhev Reel on 0181 843 2333 or Mukhesh Solanki on 01753 532980 or write to Justice for Ricky Reel, c/o SMG Unity, PO Box 304, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 5YR (donations welcome - cheques to Justice for Ricky Reel).

Hannah Caller

Standard bearer for racism

'Refugee crime wave', 'aggressive beggars', 'organised racket', 'child pickpockets' - the message screamed out by 17 September's *Evening Standard* and echoed on billboards across the capital was clear: the foreign poor on London's streets are scum and the public should give them nothing.

The only named sources in reporter Matthew Beard's stream of racist vitriol are Metropolitan Police officers, depicted as kindly, well-meaning community bobbies, anxious for the safety of tourists and lamenting the lack of resources, funding and sufficiently draconian legislation.

The *Standard*'s potted racism for commuters is completely in step with government policy. Announcing its White Paper on asylum and immigration in July, Home Secretary Jack Straw pledged to be 'a lot tougher' and claimed that 'as a constituency MP, I am seeing a great growth of people abusing the asylum system simply to evade immigration control or because they are economic migrants'.

And, of course, neither Straw nor the *Standard* would concede that any of the refugees fleeing war-torn Eastern Europe might need to beg, that they might be destitute. No, not only are they illegal immigrants, but dole-scroungers as well, who 'live in DSS hostels and... are begging to supplement their income'.

Articles such as the one in the *Standard* incite racist violence. There have already been National Front 'anti-gypsy' marches in Dover and it will not be long before gangs of racist thugs, like those who murdered Stephen Lawrence, Ricky Reel and Michael Menson, begin to target East European asylum-seekers.

British police: RACIST TO THE CORE

The British police force is permeated with racism at every level. As the second part of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence opened on 24 September, the inquiry chairman, Sir William MacPherson, announced that one of his central findings would be a 'collective failure' by the Metropolitan Police to tackle racism. MacPherson rejected the judgment of the Scarman Report following the 1981 Brixton riots which concluded that police racism could be explained away by the presence of 'a few bad apples'. Earlier this year, *Statewatch* magazine published its analysis of a report the Home Office had attempted to bury, revealing that black people are up to eight times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people. Murders of black people continue to be investigated badly or not at all and victims treated as criminals or suspects. Police racism is not just a case of 'a few bad apples' - the whole barrel is rotten to the core.

Racist policing the truth revealed

Race and the Criminal Justice System 1997, the first nationwide systematic analysis by ethnic group of stop and search, arrests, cautions and homicides, was launched in December 1997, accompanied by a bland Home Office press release which did not mention race or racism. The report's staggering findings might have remained hidden had it not been for the work done by Statewatch.

The report records the total number of people stopped and searched in England and Wales in 1996/7 under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, broken down by police force area and by ethnic appearance into four categories: White, Black, Asian and Other. It also gives figures for arrests and cautions in all areas except Cheshire and Greater London. For some unfathomable reason neither area's police force was able to supply any data.

Stop and search

The overall recorded rate of stop and search in England and Wales is 17 per 1,000; however, its use varies greatly between areas. Four police forces stop and search less than five per 1,000 of their population, while Northumbria, Dyfed Powys and Cleveland stop and search 30-48 per 1,000. Analysis of stop and search according to ethnic group reveals a massive disparity. While white people are stopped and searched at a rate of 14 per 1,000, 108 out of every 1,000 black people are stopped, as are 25 out of 1,000 Asians and people of other ethnic origin.

Just as general use of stop and search varies from area to area, so does the degree of racist targeting. Four police forces stop and search more than 100 per 1,000 black people

(in other words more than one in ten): Merseyside (189 per 1,000), the Metropolitan Police (141), Cleveland (135) and Dyfed Powys (118). A comparison of rates for different ethnic groups in different areas reveals the most overtly racist police forces to be those of Surrey and Merseyside. Black people are eight times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched in Surrey and seven times more likely on Merseyside.

Although Asians are targeted less than black people, Gwent, Norfolk, West Midlands, West Mercia and the Met all have stop and search rates for the Asian population of more than 30 per 1,000. In the Thames Valley, Asians are over four times as likely as white people to be stopped and searched and in Bedfordshire three times as likely.

Arrests

The overall annual arrest rate in England and Wales is 37 per 1,000. Again this varies tremendously between areas: Cleveland, Northumbria, Merseyside and Gwent arrest between 53 and 60 per 1,000, while Surrey and Hertfordshire only arrest 15 and 18 per 1,000. It also varies dramatically according to ethnic group: the overall arrest rate for white people is 34, for black people 155, for Asians 47 and for other ethnic groups 64 per 1,000. In other words, the arrest rates for all ethnic groups are higher than for white people and that of black people is nearly five times as high.

In Sussex, Kent, the Metropolitan Police area, Norfolk, Staffordshire, Merseyside and Dyfed Powys arrest rates for black people exceed 200 per 1,000 of the population. This is equivalent to one in five black people in those areas being arrested once a year.

Racist policing

Whatever caution should be applied when reading any set of statistics (and *Statewatch* points out that the blanket category 'White' renders it impossible to see the extent to which Britain's largest ethnic minority, Irish people, are targeted) there is no way the figures in *Race and the Criminal Justice System* can be interpreted as anything other than a clear exposé of the British police's persistent racism.

Jane Nicholson

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The study quoted here appears in the May-August 1998 edition.

DEATHS IN CUSTODY

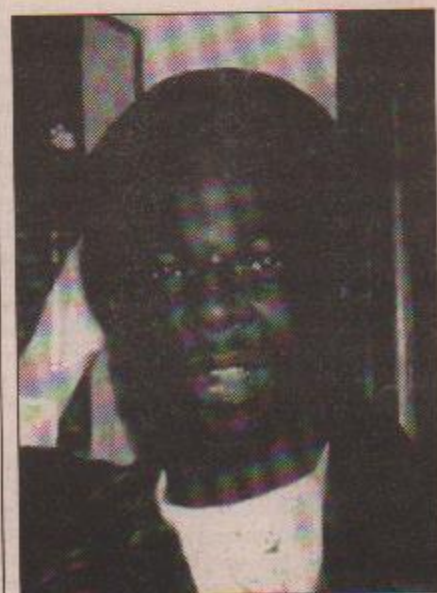
Another Home Office report, published 30 July 1998, reveals there is a death in police custody at least once a week. While the majority of deaths (87%) were of white people, the particular circumstances surrounding the black deaths are alarming:

71% of black people who died had been restrained on arrest, compared to 26% of the white people

47% of black deaths occurred in the presence of a police officer, as opposed to only 7% of white deaths

The report also reveals that 72% of people who died in custody were unemployed and that people arrested by the Metropolitan Police were seven times more likely to die than those arrested in other areas.

The murder of Michael Menson - more racists go free



Michael Menson - murdered by racists

The four white youths who set light to Michael Menson in north London in January 1997, did so safe in the knowledge that the killers of Stephen Lawrence had got away with murder. Michael was found walking around the North Circular, almost naked, his clothes burned from his body and his back still smouldering. He was well enough to tell the first police officer on the scene, WPC Joanna Walsh, that he had been attacked. Twelve hours later his brother told police that Michael had described being attacked by four white youths. In the 16 days it took him to die a slow and agonising death, Mr Menson told nine people that he had been attacked. The police nonetheless chose to act as though he had deliberately set himself alight. By the time he died they had still not interviewed him. Two forensic scientists and two pathologists testified to the coroner's inquest that it was inconceivable that Michael Menson had set fire to himself as the burns were restricted to his back. The jury at the Hornsey Coroner's court returned a verdict of unlawful killing.

Four junior police officers involved in the investigation had what Scotland Yard described as 'words of advice and constructive discussion with senior officers' and three middle-ranking officers retired before a disciplinary investigation could be concluded. No further disciplinary action is to be taken against any of the police involved. Protests from the Menson family and the glare of publicity surrounding the inquest verdict have forced the police to announce a further inquiry by another force.

The Metropolitan Police submission to the Lawrence inquiry denied there was institutional racism in the police and tried to shift some of the blame for what happened to their son onto Stephen Lawrence's family: 'Mrs Lawrence had been anti-police for years'. Is it any wonder?

Richard Roques