

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

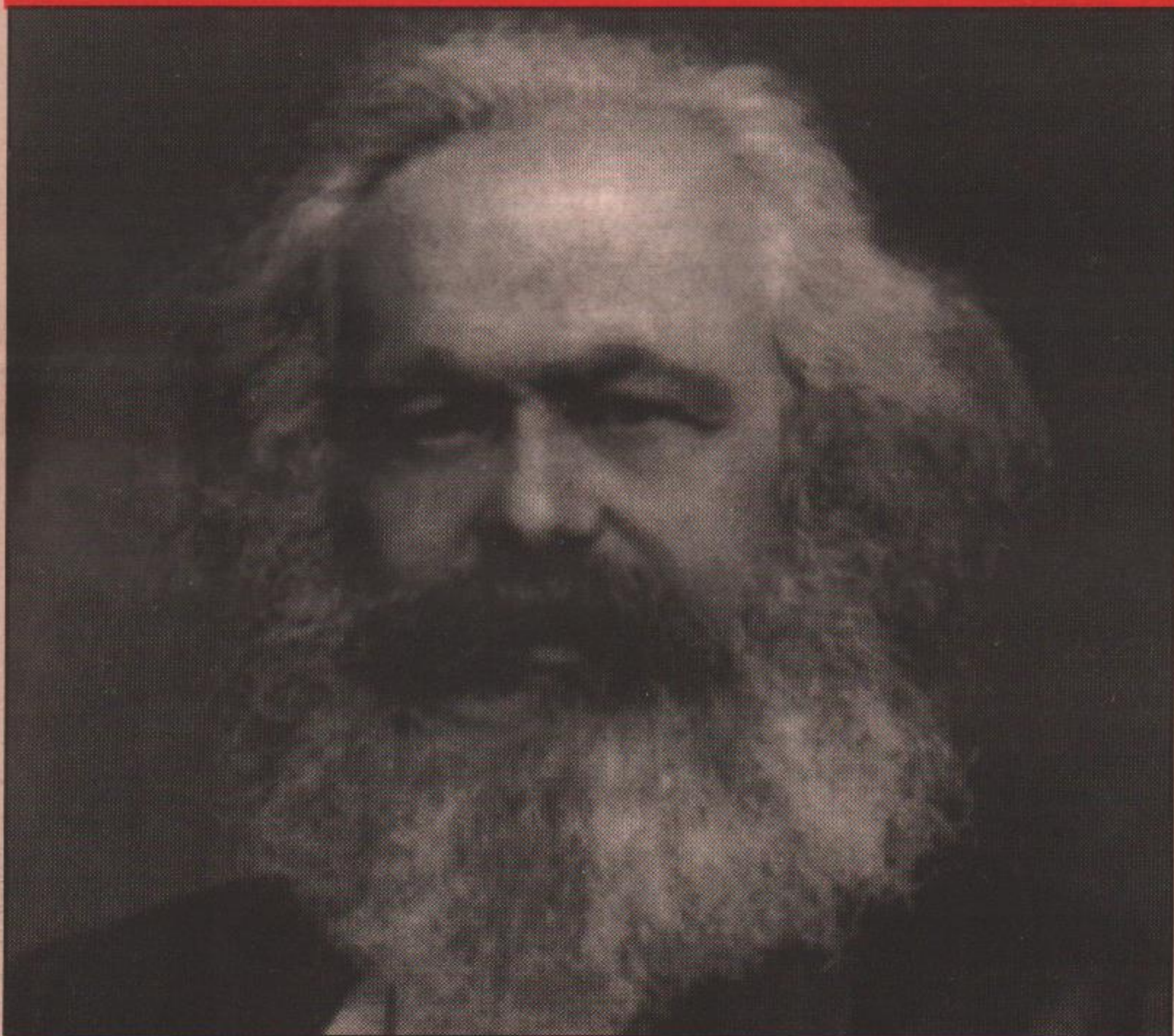
Revolutionary Communist Group

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## KARL MARX

Hope for the next Millennium



***'Let the ruling class tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win'***

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Ireland

# Republican movement crosses the Rubicon

After over ten weeks of the Mitchell Review, Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) finally agreed on a process that would lead to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Central to this was the acceptance by Sinn Fein that 'decommissioning is an essential part of the peace process'.

In crossing this Rubicon, Sinn Fein and the Republican movement are seen to pose no real threat to the interests of British imperialism in the Six Counties. The only potential opposition to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement came from a section of the Ulster Unionist Party led by its deputy leader John Taylor. As a gesture to this section of Unionism - and an indication of the contempt Labour has for the nationalist working class - on 24 November the RUC was awarded the George Cross for 'gallantry'. Part of the citation described the RUC as 'a recognised world-class police service that has given professional and impartial service to all the people of Northern Ireland since its inception!'

Let us remind ourselves of that gallant, professional and impartial service. This is the same police force who:

- batoned Civil Rights demonstrators off the streets in the 1960s;
- killed and maimed nationalists with plastic bullets;
- colluded with fascist loyalist groups in murder and the terrorising of the nationalist community;
- colluded in the murder of Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson
- sat and watched as a loyalist mob kicked Robert Hamill to death in Portadown.

As Peter Mandelson said of the award, 'it is right, it is deserved'.

On 16 November, at the end of the Mitchell Review, Sinn Fein spelled out its position:

'We are totally opposed to any use of force or threat of force by others for any political purpose... In the executive the two Sinn Fein ministers will make and honour the pledge of office which includes a commitment to nonviolence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means... We reiterate our total commitment to doing everything in our power to maintain the peace process and to removing the gun forever from the politics of our country'.

This was followed the next day by a statement from the IRA which acknowledged 'the leadership given by Sinn Fein throughout this process'. Following the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, 'the IRA leadership will appoint a representative to enter into discussions with General John de Chastelain and the International Commission on Decommissioning'.

George Mitchell then spelled out the sequence of events that would lead to the implementation of the Agreement and the beginning of the decommissioning process in his concluding statement: 'Devolution should take effect, then the

executive should meet, and then the paramilitary groups should appoint their authorised representatives all on the same day, in that order'.

The decision by Trimble and the UUP negotiating team to accept this sequence of events was finally ratified by the Ulster Unionist Council on 27 November. It marks a retreat from their long-held position of no seats on the executive before decommissioning, and has opened up major disagreements within the UUP. But the Unionist 'retreat' is a reflection of the confidence imperialism has that Sinn Fein is no longer a threat. This reality, reflected in cosy meals and chats in the US embassy in London during the review, was summed up by a comment from one of Trimble's advisers: 'Do you really think



Trimble, UUP leader

that, having hung out in the White House and dined in the best restaurants, they will be going back to safe houses and fry-ups?'

Sinn Fein is committed to the Good Friday Agreement and all it entails: devolution, meaning the acceptance of partition; seats on the Executive, meaning being part of a government that will be using the RUC (or 'Northern Ireland Police Service') to maintain partition and attack the nationalist working class; decommissioning, meaning the delegitimising of the armed struggle and the Rubicon that, once crossed, leaves Sinn Fein as no more than a radical version of Fianna Fail.

As David Ervine of the Progressive Unionist Party put it, 'I am listening with interest to Gerry Adams and the Republican movement being prepared to copper-fasten British rule in Northern Ireland, indeed to help administer British rule in Northern Ireland'.

During the Mitchell Review, Sinn Fein has had assistance from imperialist forces in dealing with any challenges. In the Twenty Six Counties the Irish police and Special Branch arrested ten dissident Republicans training in an underground firing range. Guns and ammunition were also seized. In the Six Counties the RUC

launched an operation which they claimed had smashed the Orange Volunteers and Red Hand Defenders. Arrests and the seizure of pipe-bombs occurred in Belfast and Lurgan, where a vicious campaign against the nationalist community has been taking place. An Orange Hall in Stoneyford, Co Antrim was raided, and military intelligence documents containing details of 300 Republicans recovered. Six arrests were made and it was reported that the RUC had an undercover unit of 50 officers working on the operation.

For imperialism, organised opposition to the Good Friday Agreement, whether from dissident Republicans or fascist loyalist terror groups, has to be broken. And in doing so it strengthens the hand of the pro-agreement parties, in particular Sinn Fein. The Agreement offers the hope of stability for big business and the Unionist and nationalist middle class. As Gerry Adams put it in classical new-management-speak:

'The reason that Sinn Fein has stretched ourselves and our constituency is because we have always had our eyes fixed firmly on the prize. We want a New Ireland in which all the people of this island will be cherished equally and in which everyone will be politically, socially and economically empowered.'

The reality for the nationalist working class is that there is no indication that the agreement will fundamentally change their daily lives. In the same issue of *An Phoblacht* that reported the breakthrough of the Mitchell Review, loyalist pipe-bomb attacks were reported in north Belfast and in Belfast's Lower Ormeau Road. In Derry petrol-bomb attacks were made on a Catholic church and the home of a Catholic pensioner who lived in a predominately Loyalist area. In South Tyrone the RUC and British army are engaged in a campaign of harassment and intimidation of the nationalist community, with the setting up of random roadblocks.

As we wrote in *FRFI* in August 1994 following the announcement of the IRA ceasefire: 'The struggle is not over. The economic, political and social problems which keep forcing the national struggle onto the political agenda still remain. The Six Counties is a sectarian statelet. British imperialism has not left Ireland... The nationalist working class faces massive economic deprivation and discrimination, with unemployment levels more than twice those of the loyalist working class. Should the Sinn Fein leadership be drawn into any "New Ireland" administration, in the Six Counties or Twenty Six Counties, and have conferred upon it the status of privileged bourgeois parliamentarians, it will find itself in conflict with the nationalist working class - those people of no property who have always been the bedrock of the anti-imperialist struggle'. (*FRFI* 121 Oct/Nov 1994)

## News

### World Trade Organisation Summit

# Sleepless in Seattle

TREVOR RAYNE

It's the cutting edge of the modern world, the home of Microsoft, Boeing, *Frasier* and the Seattle Coffee Company: lifestyle is big in Seattle (though it doesn't have the Dome). What more fitting venue could there be for the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to hold its summit meeting? What about Bombay, Mexico City or any of the other wretched mega-cities that the world trade system has spawned? When the last round of trade talks began in 1986 they passed almost unnoticed, but they won't do so in Seattle. There is going to be a battle between the giant multinational corporations in one corner and environmentalists, aid organisations, trade unions, human rights groups, consumer organisations and underdeveloped countries in the other.

The issue is 'globalisation'. A massive demonstration is planned for 30 November as the WTO meets, with simultaneous demonstrations planned elsewhere. The WTO enforces rules on the conduct of trade with mechanisms to resolve trade disputes.

That this meeting is being targeted for protest is an excellent development, but also indicates the gravity of the issues being discussed. Shortly before the summit demonstrators mounted the roof of the WTO headquarters in Geneva to unfurl a banner reading 'The WTO kills people. Kill the WTO.'

Significant is the number of WTO members, 135 states when China joins. The small club of industrialised countries that belonged to the WTO's predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, has been joined by the underdeveloped countries. Things will not just go quietly the multinationals' way.

WTO envoys could not agree an agenda before the summit because the members are divided. Differences between the USA and European Union (EU) prevented the Multilateral

Agreement on Investment being reached in 1998. Divisions run between the USA, EU and Japan, and between the rich countries and the poor.

The multinationals intended the summit to be about more free trade, leading to more competition, new technologies, cheaper prices and more prosperity all round. This lie is looking worn.

There are trade imbalances between the major industrial blocs tending towards protectionism. The USA has an annual trade deficit of \$314 billion, Japan's surplus is \$126 billion and Germany's surplus is \$71 billion. Recent disputes between the EU and USA over bananas and hormone-treated beef imports into Europe almost triggered a trade war. The USA is desperate to sell more genetically modified crops to Europe but EU governments protect EU farmers from cheaper US products. Japan protects its fish and forestry products industries from foreign competition. The USA already has 300 'anti-dumping' duties on imports defined as 'unfairly' cheap.

With markets overcrowded from overproduction, the major capitalist powers are desperate to knock each others' protectionist walls down; if they cannot then they will turn on their own public services and the underdeveloped countries. Up for discussion is the General Agreement on Trade in Services. If ratified this will require governments to open up public sector services and their funding to world financial markets and multinational companies. Governments will have to introduce private provision into education, health and social services.

Critical for the poor countries is removing the rich countries' barriers to their products. Total industrialised countries' agricultural subsidies amount to \$353 billion a year. Cheap products are exported to destroy local producers in the underdeveloped countries and these countries are unable to export to the industrialised countries. The USA sells cheap maize to the Philippines, local producers

cannot compete and are driven out of production and the Philippines becomes yet more dependent on the USA. The Philippines' foreign debt is 65% of its national income. It cannot sell anything to earn the income to repay the debt; in fact, the Philippines needs to borrow more...

Trips (Trade-Related Intellectual Property agreements) will be promoted by the multinationals. Trips patent life forms. Under patent already are potato, rice, wheat, maize, cocoa etc. Multinationals can use these patents to produce new products that will replace those bought from the underdeveloped countries. The new products can then be sold to the poor countries. For these countries, agriculture employs as many as two thirds of the workforce and earns one third of the national income. Foreign debt is already 72% of Africa's and over 40% of Latin America's national incomes. What is at stake is the survival of these countries beyond being names on a map.

Intellectual property rights are being used to kill the poor directly. Patents are used to prevent poor countries developing cheaper versions of medicines made by the multinationals that are too expensive for them. The Thai government allowed local producers to manufacture cheaper versions of HIV and meningitis treatments. In response the US government imposed duties on imports of Thai wood, microprocessors and jewellery. Thailand's foreign debt is 70% of its national income. The US government and former EU commissioner Sir Leon Brittan pressured South Africa not to buy 'parallel imports', pharmaceuticals from countries where they are sold more cheaply, in this case HIV treatments. Thailand and South Africa are in the grip of HIV epidemics. As far as the multinationals are concerned their people can pay up or die. The WTO is unlikely to raise the issue of access to medicines. More power to protesters. There is one enemy - imperialism and the multinationals that are its engine. ■

## Justice for Sarah Thomas and Harry Stanley - murdered by police

HANNAH CALLER

Sarah Thomas, a 35-year-old black woman, was arrested by plainclothes police officers outside her flat in Holloway, north London, in August and died in the intensive care unit at the Homerton Hospital. She never regained consciousness after collapsing at Stoke Newington police station. Harry Stanley, a 46-year-old white man, was murdered in Hackney by the Metropolitan Armed Response Unit in September, after a 999 call suggested he was carrying a weapon. It turned out to be a wooden table leg wrapped in a plastic bag he was taking to be repaired.

He was shot dead as he left a pub; he had not threatened

police and he was not armed.

Two campaigns have been set up in Hackney to demand justice. Regular meetings aim to use local outrage to fuel the fight for justice, to keep spreading the information and to work together to demand the suspension of the officers involved (at present they are simply on 'desk duty') and for an independent inquiry. James Stanley, Harry's brother, raised the issue of investigation at the October Hackney Community and Police Consultative Group (CPCG), saying: 'Surrey police are investigating the Met, while Hampshire police are investigating Surrey police because its Assistant Chief Constable, according to a Sunday paper, is facing four charges relating to sexual harassment. Who is investigat-

ing whom?' Surrey police are also under investigation for shooting a man dead earlier this year. Only an independent inquiry can prevent the whitewash of a police investigation.

At the November Hackney CPCG, the Justice for Harry Stanley Campaign revealed that the Surrey police investigating his killing are intimidating teenagers of 13 and 14 and asking them to sign statements that they saw or heard nothing on the night in question. Under pressure from the campaigns, all the CPCG has agreed to do is write to Home Secretary Jack Straw calling for an independent inquiry.

Justice for Harry Stanley tel: 0181 507 0657 or 0181 986 7070; Justice for Sarah Thomas tel: 0181 806 0742. ■



# Paddington crash: an accident waiting to happen

ROBERT CLOUGH

At ten past eight on the morning of 5 October, the 8:06 Thames Train service from Paddington to Bedwyn collided with the uptrain from Cheltenham a short distance from the terminus. 30 people died in the crash and subsequent fire that engulfed carriages of both trains. By tragic coincidence, it took place the day after the public enquiry into the 1997 Southall train crash opened.

For a moment, the government reeled. For two years it had promised action on the chaotic state of the privatised railways, but had done nothing. Legislation to toughen the regulatory system had been shifted to the back of the queue. Now Labour's reluctance to take on its big business allies had become a political liability: middle class people were being killed. Even the proposed privatisation of the air traffic control system was thrown into doubt.

The Paddington crash was a direct consequence of privatisation. The pension funds and financial institutions, which own the railway companies through the stock market, insist on a return of 20% per annum. Given the refusal to purchase any new stock until the last few months, railway operating companies have achieved this by sweating existing assets: cramming more people on to ageing

rolling stock and increasing journey times to reduce penalties for late running. There is no incentive to increase capacity; hence companies increase their revenues by raising fares and cutting costs. Railtrack doesn't want to allow more trains onto its tracks: it just increases operating difficulties where 97% of the payments it receives are fixed. Instead it wants to pass on as much as possible of the public subsidy it receives to its shareholders. Its success in this regard has seen its value soar from £2.5bn at privatisation to £6.5bn today. Yet the condition of the track is deteriorating. An independent report by Booz Allen Hamilton shows that Railtrack is renewing 1.3% of track per annum compared to the continental average of 2-3% and the 2.2% quoted in its 1995 business plan. It comments: 'it is likely that there has been a decline in underlying quality of the network assets as a whole.'

Following the Paddington crash, it was revealed that 642 signals had been passed at danger in 1998, an 8% increase over the previous year, whilst 22 signals have been passed at danger more than five times over the past eight years. In early August, the Health and Safety Executive announced that the number of broken rails had risen 21% to 973. Later that month, the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee reported that punctuality had deteriorated



Reclaim the streets protest against tube privatisation

30% over the previous year.

It appears that the immediate cause of the Paddington crash was that the Thames train had also passed a signal at danger. Subsequently, it was revealed that this signal, number 109, had been passed at danger eight times in the previous six years. Sightlines to it are obscured by a maze of gantries. Its visibility is made worse in the early morning since the rising sun shines directly on to it. The whole track layout outside Paddington is complete chaos. Designed in the late 1980s, it allowed for high speeds, with trains able to travel at 100mph up until the last two miles. Yet one of the design assumptions was that trains would be fitted with Automatic Train Protection (ATP). This never happened because the Tory government and privatised companies deemed the £1bn cost too high. The situation was made worse by the new Heathrow Express.

Not only did this increase the number of train movements, but it necessitated the construction of more gantries to take the overhead power lines. In these circumstances the Thames Train driver was in an impossible position: it was an accident waiting to happen. If ATP had been fitted to his train, the collision would not have occurred.

Shortly before the accident, Labour had called on the railway companies to fit a cheaper protection system, TPWS, by 2003. More egg landed on its face after Paddington when it was reported that TPWS is unreliable at speeds greater than 70 mph. The Cheltenham train had probably been running at 90 mph, and the Southall train at a similar speed. The fact is that Labour will hope to ride out this storm with the minimum of commitment to transport reform, and with the minimum of financial burden for its big business friends.

# Internment for asylum seekers

ALEXA BYRNE

The racist, inhumane policies pursued by Labour against asylum seekers took a sinister turn in October when the Home Office announced plans to intern refugees in an old army barracks at Oakington, Cambridge. 400 men, women and children a week will be 'processed' on a 'fast track' whilst warehoused in the privately-run barrack blocks which have been 'hastily adapted'. The numbers of refugees in detention will rise by more than 50%.

Home Office estimates of one week to complete 400 applications are glaringly inaccurate. Latest asylum figures show that 45% of claims take at least six months just for initial decisions. As Nick Hardwick of the Refugee Council said, 'This is a detention centre in all but name in a country which already has a reputation for detaining without judicial review more people for longer periods of time than the rest of Europe.'

Lies from the Home Office that the camp will be 'relaxed with minimal physical security' have been exposed. There is already an internal barbed wire fence around the barracks to keep 274 empty houses 'out of bounds to refugees' because the government doesn't want to engender 'a sense of permanence'. In other words, they



Asylum seekers will be interned

want to detain people in the worst possible conditions.

Labour will also be in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it has ratified. This states that 'the best interests of the children must come first. They should only be detained as a last resort and never arbitrarily.'

Oakington internment camp will be no different from Haslar Detention Centre, Hampshire, or any other in the country where conditions for refugees are barbaric. But Barbara Roche, Jack Straw et al don't give a damn. They just want to imprison asylum seekers at minimum cost, out of sight and off the streets.

For information about future activity in opposition to Oakington contact the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns at 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B19 1NH; 0121 554 6947; ncadc@ncadc.demon.co.uk.

## British beef

# Safe... but not digestible

CATHERINE GOUGH

As news seeped out of Britain's latest 13-year-old victim of vCJD, the British government, after months of 'diplomatic effort', stitched up a deal with its French counterparts to allow the export of British beef. The two-month-old 'beef war' had produced a groundswell of anti-French xenophobia, boycotts of French products and a great deal of hot air, together with gruesome revelations about France's own livestock farming standards.

The EU had given approval for the ending of the ban on exports of British beef on 1 August, provided that the exported beef met certain regulations on age and was dealt with by a small number of designated abattoirs. By October, France and seven of the 16 regional governments in Germany were still defying the EU and refusing to accept imports. The Berlin government claimed it needed time to bring its regions into line (regional authorities have control over food safety), and France had referred the question to its own food safety agency which had declared the meat unsafe.

French intransigence and time-wasting, under the guise of concern for public health, unleashed torrents of French xenophobia in Britain. Boycotts of French products were announced; the Tories championed counter-measures amounting to a trade war and 51% of a Mori poll called for Britain to leave the EU. Journalists, never ones



to miss a trick, traced the history of British hatred for the slippery French back to the Napoleonic wars, if not William the Conqueror. What sport! France is the favourite 'enemy', regardless of the fact that, apart from Germany, many other countries still operate a ban on British beef - among them Australia, Canary Islands, Costa Rica, Hungary, Japan, Poland, Russia, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA.

By the middle of November, however, the affair had ended not with gun boats, but with semantics. After weeks of negotiations on what the British called 'technicalities' and the French called major issues of safety, France agreed to accept the beef as long it was labelled 'British'. This is entirely counter to EU rules which do not allow country-of-origin labelling within the EU. Nonetheless, the EU was able to approve on the grounds that the labelling was not a designation of country of origin but a sign that the beef had satisfied all the new regulations!

Hairsplitting apart, however, the real issues remain. Fourteen years after the first outbreaks of BSE, thousands of cattle in Britain are still dying of BSE every year and no one knows what the scale of vCJD will be. The drive for cheap meat, using hormones, antibiotics and cheap animal fodder still dominates farming not only in Britain but throughout Europe. France's own livestock standards have been attacked by the EU, with use of sewage (possibly human) in the manufacture of animal feed cited as illegal. Following investigations into the French poultry industry, commission officials are threatening legal action.

In reality agribusiness throughout Europe is driven, like any other industry, by the need to increase profits, not by the needs or safety of consumers. As we go to press, another batch of 'scientists' have declared that there is no conclusive evidence that the use of organophosphates in pesticides and sheep-dip is harmful to humans. Once again the victims are being ignored.

# In search of Palestine

A report on the annual conference of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

It has not always been the case, but there is something deeply depressing about conferences on Palestine these days. As one speaker after another gives their account of the different aspects of the Palestinian situation, the progress and the prospects, a disturbingly bleak picture - ten times worse than what it was ten years ago - begins to take shape. A heavy atmosphere of frustration and helplessness, noticeable in the tone of both speakers and participants, fills the room. You soon start thinking of going outside for a coffee or a cigarette.

This was more or less the atmosphere of the Palestine: International Perspectives conference, organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in SOAS on 6 November 1999. Speakers included Palestinian writer Ghada Karmi, Palestinian 'ambassador' to the UK Afif Safieh, Middle East correspondent Graham Usher and Chris Doyle for the Council for Arab-British Understanding.

Traditionally, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign gave its support to the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian People. Since Oslo, the PLO has essentially been in limbo, existing only in the person of Arafat. The latter is effectively the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority: a ruthless and repressive force of 125,000, constituting 18 security services whose sole mission is to police 2.5 million Palestinians. Their ruthlessness has earned them the praise of both the CIA and

the Israeli government on many occasions. One of the consequences of the PLO's transformation into the PA is that the PSC and similar organisations find themselves within a political no-man's-land. This is simply the impasse in which international support for the Palestinian struggle generally finds itself at present.

It is apparent how uneasy both the speakers and the organisers are about continuing to support a phoney PLO, but it is also obvious how hesitant they are to denounce it. The tension resulting from this contradiction, I think, asserted itself repeatedly during the proceedings without being expressed or addressed. The result was a conference where what was not said was more important than what was said.

The speakers went on to explore the different possible scenarios likely to emerge from what is commonly referred to these days as the 'final status negotiations' between Arafat and Israel. Gradually, however, the tone of the conference came to strike one single note of fear: what part of the Palestinian struggle (or what is left of it) is Arafat going to sell out this time? Jerusalem? The right of return of the refugees, those Palestinians who sacrificed their livelihood and gave their children to make up Arafat's PLO? These questions could be felt in the tone of the participants and were constantly implied in the discussions.

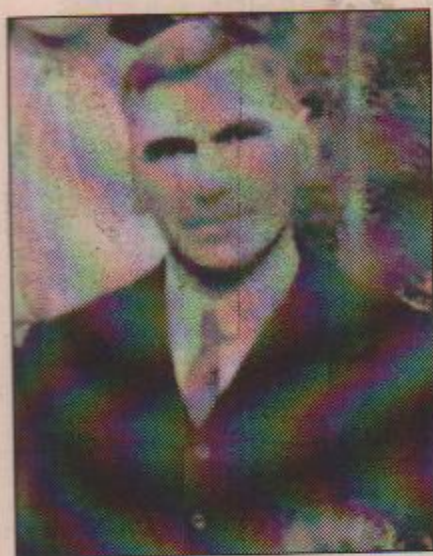
The thing is that the facts are clear and undisputed, and most of those present seemed well

acquainted with them. In the current balance of power with Arafat, Israel is too strong and arrogant to be contemplating genuine peace. Israel - the 1973 war, the Intifada and presently the Lebanese Islamic Resistance confirm it - never gives back any land it occupies unless it is forced to. The power-brokers, the US and Europe, are satisfied with the peace process as a public relations exercise and are happy to keep it going for another ten years. Arafat does not have anything that remotely looks like an ideological framework of any sort. He is neither a nationalist, nor an Islamist, nor anything else. In fact, his five-year rule in the Occupied Territories can be seen as a systematic assault on Palestinian political culture and its institutions, and their gradual replacement with regressive and degenerate tribal and extended family structures. With these facts floating in the background, the conference's analyses and predictions were little more than a futile academic exercise enumerating its defeats without any attempts to prevent them.

The benefit of doubt that international solidarity campaigns have given Arafat has been more than generous. It is time, if we want to prevent it from turning into collusion, to adjust our support to the present needs of the Palestinian people. Top of that list is for an alternative leadership to be found among the opposition, whether in Syria, Jordan, or the Occupied Territories, or even within the ranks of Fatah itself.

Fouzi Slisli





# Organise for the working class Organise against Labour

Maclean only broke with the Labour Party in the last year of his life. His political work amongst the unemployed, radicalised by the experience of war, led to this critical and progressive development. While Labour gained in municipal and general elections, its completely reactionary character became clear to the poorest sections of the working class. Labour councillors and MPs ignored, manipulated and conspired against the poor and those who stood with them.

Political progress for the working class means more than just withdrawing support for Labour. It means organising consciously against Labour. Maclean was successful in beginning to draw hundreds of people into an open fight against the Labour Party. Then and today, this struggle represents the only way forward for the mass of the working class. Labour represents the privileged minority of the working class in alliance with the middle class, an alliance cemented by imperialist profits. Maclean's most important contribution as a communist was to challenge the political representative of this corrupt, decadent and violent alliance – the Labour Party. This challenge remains the central political issue and is the foundation of our organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Group.

### Fight or starve!

1920 saw the beginning of the economic depression predicted by Maclean. The war boom was over and unemployment increased rapidly. From a total of 691,000 in December 1920, it had risen to 1,355,000 by March 1921 and reached a peak of 2,171,288 in June of that year. The recent Unemployment Insurance Act had provided a bare subsistence for a limited period. As poverty and starvation became widespread Maclean acted and established the Glasgow Unemployed Committee.

Across Britain the police clashed with the workless as they protested outside town halls or attempted to seize and occupy workplaces. Maclean convened the first demonstrations in the city with the aim of putting pressure on the local authorities to provide boots and clothes for the children, food for the hungry and shelter for the homeless. He united direct action for practical measures to relieve poverty with popular political agitation and serious Marxist education and debate. It was a powerful and effective combination; a sound example of communist work amongst those who were suffering the reality of capitalism. From a gathering of around 200 in October 1920, 3,500 jobless were meeting at the beginning of 1921. In February a meeting of delegates from Glasgow, Dundee and Edinburgh formed a Scottish Committee with Maclean as Secretary. The demands were economic and political:

'Among the decisions arrived at were: The urging of a joint conference to recommend a general strike; the opening up of trade with Russia and the granting of independence to Ireland, India and Egypt; the exemption from payment of rent for the unemployed; the maintenance of the present rate of wages; and the release of all political prisoners.'

At the end of the month the first large demonstration was held, led by a banner proclaiming the present reality for the poorest sections of the

working class: '1914, fight: 1921, starve!' At Maclean's suggestion thousands would form up behind this slogan and head for the West End with the declared aim of 'frightening the bourgeoisie'. While there was no justice, there would be no peace!

Maclean was able to organise a significant political force in a short period, leading it openly as a communist and an anti-imperialist. His general view of the political direction of the masses was being confirmed in practice, yet its progress would require not just describing but directly challenging the false friends of the people; the Labour Party. Maclean did not yet recognise that this would have to be a conscious political development:

'Let us remember that although the trade union and political leaders of the working class have been afraid to be as audacious as the leaders of capitalism, have failed, as ever, at the critical moment and will do so again, nevertheless the mass of people are coming more and more to our position... Therein lies salvation. The safety of society rests not in the hands of a few... but in the masses of mankind, conscious or unconscious.'

### The Labour Party and the unemployed

Maclean had led an early version of Stop The City through Glasgow's Stock Exchange in 1910 when he was last organising with the unemployed. He had angrily condemned the Labour MPs' sudden agitation in Parliament over the Osborne Judgment's threat to their wages:

'Why did they not do that on behalf of the unemployed millions two years ago? Why did they not get thrown out with Grayson, and do as he did afterwards? Why did they not fight for the Tyneside engineers or the Belfast dockers?' *Justice* October 1910

Yet up until 1923 Maclean advocated the tactic of continued electoral support while fighting to expose the Labour Party before the working class. Indeed he had stood as a Labour Party candidate on his release from gaol in 1918. Lenin argued that communists should affiliate to the Labour Party and support it 'as a rope supports a hanged man' without refraining from attacking its opportunism. He was concerned that communists maintain the closest links with the 'masses' whom he understood were represented in the Labour Party through the trade unions. Maclean's newspaper, *The Vanguard* of November 1920, expressed his attitude to the Labour Party:

'...to defeat Labour is positively criminal. A Labour Town Council will respond to our pressures more readily than a bourgeois one. If Labour fails then a forceful revolutionary fight is the logical next stage.'

This next stage faced the unem-



Poplar, 1920: tenants with a hand out of bread

ployed; political reality was moving towards the point where supporting Labour and defending the workless could no longer be reconciled. Despite the election in Glasgow of 44 Labour councillors, the delegations from the workless were shut out from the Town Hall. The Labour councillors did not come out to support them. The struggle of the unemployed demanded organisation and the communist standpoint of Maclean provided this. The Communist Party of Great Britain's official biography of Maclean (1943, Tom Bell) was anxious to belittle his role:

'Unfortunately Maclean did not belong to any powerful trade union, or any well-organised body capable of intimidating the government.'

The unions were intimidating no one at this stage; unemployment and the recent defeat of the miners had seen to that. However, the working class is more than the trade union movement and Maclean fought to provide politics and organisation to those outside it. Asked at his trial in October 1921, how he came to organise the unemployed, Maclean replied 'because no one else would'. He was sentenced to



Sylvia Pankhurst

12 months' imprisonment for urging people not to starve but to take the food they needed. The 'powerful' trade unions did nothing for the poor or for Maclean. In allowing the defeat of the poorest sections of the working class they prepared the way for the crushing defeat of the whole organised working class in the General Strike of 1926.

### Prison again, 1921

From his cell Maclean fought as a candidate for the Unemployed Committee. His credibility was such that he came out ahead of Labour gaining 2,241 votes to their 1,885. This was repeated at elections up until his death and refutes the lie that Maclean found himself isolated from the working class. Immediately after his release in 1922 he increased his vote to 4,287 in a municipal ward and polled 4,027 in the General Election. His address began:

'I stand in the Gorbals and before the world as a Bolshevik, alias a Communist, alias a Revolutionist, alias a Marxist.'

It ended with a request that those unable to agree with his programme should vote Labour! This contradiction was about to be resolved. Labour gained 142 seats and Glasgow sent off 10 'Red Clydesiders' to Parliament to abolish poverty. It is recorded that on the train down these MPs were concerned chiefly to discover if being thrown out of the House of Commons meant a loss of salary. Abolishing poverty was one thing but joining the ranks of the poor was not their intention.

### The break with Labour, 1923

'Pink Labourism is of no use to the workers, never will be. Your poverty and misery are more intense today than ever before.'

Maclean finally broke with Labour and formed the Scottish Workers Republican Party (SWRP) in 1923. The new organisation attracted the unemployed, the youth and women

in large numbers – a definite contrast to a labour movement composed of old, male, skilled workers! Maclean was still able to beat Labour into third place at 2,008 to Labour's 1,865. The vote scrounging opportunism of Labour, particularly its left wing, the Independent Labour Party, disgusted Maclean. The Communist Party of Great Britain, had led the local Unemployed Committee into supporting Labour:

'...as all realise now that a deadly fight has started between the "Pinks" and the "Reds". Against us were the Trades Council, the Labour Party, the ILP, and the CPGB – the last-named playing it very dirty.'

Such methods, which were to become an endemic part of political practice in the British labour movement, persist today. Maclean and the comrades organised openly, amongst the people, directly against Labour and its apologists. Sectarianism was not their weapon. The SWRP led demonstrations in support of Harry McShane, now of the CPGB, when he was evicted. They campaigned for the release of another CPGB member, Tom Hitman, who had received a prison sentence of 15 months for activities amongst the unemployed.

The Irish revolutionary Constance Markievicz campaigned for Maclean, as did Sylvia Pankhurst. A leaflet published by Pankhurst exposed the role of the Labour left and the CPGB. A protest by the unemployed had led the Poor Law Guardians in Poplar, London to call the police. The dire situation of the poor had led them to abandon the traditional and 'respectable' methods of the labour movement; they had locked the Guardians in and demanded food and work. 52 people were wounded as a result of repeated police baton charges. The Guardians were ILP members overwhelmingly and two were members of the CPGB. Maclean called a counter-demonstration when Wal Hannington of the CPGB spoke in Glasgow. Hannington attempted to explain away the incident but such was the anger at the use of police against the unemployed that the meeting had to be abandoned. Pankhurst described Maclean at this time:

'He had gathered around him latterly a big movement in Glasgow. When we saw him a month ago he was holding great meetings and seemed stronger and more confident than ever.'

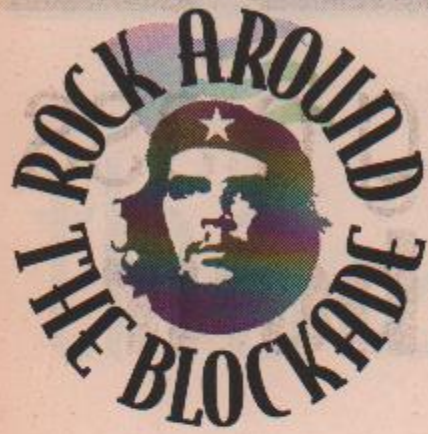
But Maclean had been weakened by years in gaol, brutal force-feeding and ceaseless political struggle. He died on 30 November 1923 aged 43 and his funeral drew 10,000 mourners. Lenin's words should serve as an epitaph to this courageous working class fighter. His memorial must be the movement he fought for: 'Communism is the intelligence, conscience and honour of our times'.

Long live John Maclean!

Michael McGregor



# CUBA AT THE UNITED NATIONS: demanding justice



In FRFI 150 (August/September 1999), we described how the war in Serbia had forced Cuba to reject decisively a political alliance with European social democracy. Instead, we wrote, it was looking to 'forge new alliances, to create new anti-imperialist blocs, while at the same time maintaining an uncompromising political position'. The address by new Cuban foreign minister Felipe Roque to the 54th session of the United Nations General Assembly took a further step in this direction.

### A world of growing inequality

'Gathered here in this hall today are representatives of wealthy countries and also representatives of poor countries, who constitute the majority... from countries whose per capita Gross Domestic Product is \$25,000 and others where that figure is a mere \$300. And that difference is growing.' Roque points out that if a handful of developed countries, accounting for a mere 20% of the world's population, can control 86% of its GDP, 82% of its export markets, 68% of direct foreign investments and 74% of all the telephone lines on the planet, then what is left for the remaining 80% of the world's people, whose countries 'were colonised and plundered for centuries to increase the wealth of the former metropolises'? How can we accept a world where 900 million people go hungry and 1.3 billion live in poverty while a wealthy minority squander \$12bn on perfume and \$17bn on pet food every year?

It is laughable to speak of the great opportunities for trade and development opened up for poor countries by the Internet when there are, for example, 'over 600 telephone lines for every 1,000 people in the United States, Sweden and Switzerland, yet only one telephone per 1,000 people in Cambodia, Chad and Afghanistan'.

This obscene inequality is perpetuated by the balance of power, reflected at the UN.

'There are in this hall today representatives of the Group of Seven countries with a combined population of 685 million whose economies add up to a GDP of 20 trillion US dollars.

'But also present are we representatives of the other 181 countries with more than five billion inhabitants and a combined GDP of barely 10 trillion dollars.

'Are we all equals? According to the Charter of the United Nations, yes. In real life, no.'

While the economies of the poor countries are devoured by the unsustainable burden of a foreign debt that has reached almost two trillion dollars and continues to grow, the US is permitted to live 'with a current account deficit that is now around \$300 billion, without the IMF imposing upon it a single one of the severe economic adjustment programmes that are impoverishing the third

world nations'. On the contrary, north Americans 'save less and spend more than anyone else in the world'.

'In 1998, they imported \$124 billion worth of cars and spent \$8 billion on cosmetics, largely due to the fact that they control 17.8% of the votes in the IMF, which gives them a virtual right of veto... How can we explain to the people of Tanzania, for example, that while this was happening, they were forced to spend nine times more on servicing the foreign debt than on primary health care, and four times more than on primary education?'

### A more dangerous world

'The current international economic system is not only profoundly unjust but absolutely unsustainable.' In its drive for profits, imperialism is devouring the planet. Since 1970, the world's supply of drinking water has shrunk by 40% - yet there are today 2.3 billion more people in the world. Forests are being destroyed. Resources and technological developments are used to export the unsustainable 'irrational consumption patterns' of the wealthy nations to the developing countries, rather than diverted to ensure a decent standard of living for all.

Meanwhile, in a world dominated by a single military and technological power - the USA - 'we are less safe today than during the difficult years of the Cold War.' The US-led NATO alliance views the rest of the world as its 'Euro-Atlantic periphery and thus they will never have to endure the devastation of massive bombings by invisible attackers acting under what has come to be known as the New Strategic Concept of that aggressive military organisation.'

In a unipolar world, the biggest threat to the poor nations is the attempt to impose notions like the limitation of sovereignty and 'humanitarian intervention' - the new cloak for ruthless imperialist interests. And, as Roque suggests in a



clear reference to the bombing of Serbia, the Security Council has essentially acted as a conduit for those interests. He argues powerfully for reform of the Security Council 'so that it serves the interests of all nations equally', to make it more transparent, more democratic and increase the number of permanent members so that the Third World countries, the majority of the world's population, have someone to represent them. Cuba is opposed to the

### UN votes against blockade

For the eighth year running, an overwhelming majority - 157 countries approved the annual United Nations vote condemning the US blockade of Cuba. Only two countries, the US's client state of Israel and the USA itself, voted for the blockade. This huge support shown for Cuba was, again, in spite of menacing letters sent to various governments by the US administration to attempt to force them to vote with the US.

right of veto enjoyed by permanent members and so routinely abused by the USA but argues that, if veto there must be, its use be restricted so that a single country cannot override the will of all the other UN members.

'In order to survive we must oppose the view that we are merely the Euro-Atlantic periphery, and the labelling as a global threat of the problems we face as a consequence of colonialism, underdevelopment and the consumerism of the wealthy countries, or even as a consequence of their recent or current policies.'

### For a new and just world order

'The wealth of the three richest people in the world is greater than the combined GDP of the 48 least developed countries with their 600 million population, whose representatives are present in this hall today demanding justice.'

Throughout Roque's speech runs the call to the oppressed to demand justice: not a tinkering with the system but a new world order.

'While some in this hall talk insistently of the need for a new international financial architecture, our countries suffer the impact of a system that allows daily speculative operations amounting to \$3 trillion. That architecture is beyond repair. It is not a question of renovating it but rather of demolishing it and building a completely new one.'

The current 'chaotic financial system', this 'ghost economy, which produces nothing and is sustained by selling and buying things that do not exist', needs to be demolished. The resources of the world and technological potential should be rationally and fairly distributed. Roque stresses again that the poor nations of the world need to unite for their very survival, to challenge the world dominance of the US and prevent the World Trade Organisation from

becoming a US 'fiefdom' where the 'interests of a powerful minority are imposed to the detriment of a silent majority which is too divided, confused and unsuspecting to understand the dangers of a cold and dogmatic liberalisation of world trade.'

### US guilty of genocide

Following the lawsuit issued in May by Cuba against the USA for human damages arising from its campaign of attrition against the Revolution, Roque throws down a new challenge to US imperialism. Detailing the human cost of the blockade, assassination attempts, biological warfare and sabotage, Roque accuses the USA of institutionalising genocide against the people of Cuba. He quotes the results of a study by the American Association for World Health (AAWH) in 1997:

'[the blockade] appears to violate the most basic international charters and conventions governing human rights, including the UN Charter, the charter of the Organisation of American States and the articles of the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of civilians during wartime... the Geneva Convention, to which 165 countries are parties, including the United States, require the free passage of all medical supplies and foodstuffs intended for civilians in times of war. The US and Cuba are not at war... Nevertheless, the AAWH has determined that the embargo's restrictions signify the deliberate blockading of the Cuban population's access to food and medicine - in times of peace.'

Roque lists the various articles of the Geneva Convention, including that which prohibits the starvation of civilians as a means of warfare, which have been trampled by the USA and concludes that:

'the economic blockade imposed by the government of the United States on Cuba constitutes an international crime of genocide in accordance with the definition stipulated in the Convention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1948.'

Cuba states its right to try the accused in its courts and calls on the international community to support it in its struggle to 'defend the most elemental principles of justice, the right to life, peace and the freedom of all peoples.'

Roque's speech was greeted with prolonged applause. Cuba's stance clearly struck a chord with many representatives from the developing world, who queued up to congratulate him. While in New York, Roque addressed a number of other meetings with ministers from third world countries. It is clear that in a world dominated by US hegemony, Cuba continues to give the lead in promoting an alternative alliance aimed at challenging imperialist domination and creating a fairer and more equal world for all.

Cat Wiener

## Bacardi supports genocide BOYCOTT BACARDI

In the run-up to the festive season, Bacardi advertising has been hard to miss. Unashamedly trading on its Cuban roots, it promotes Bacardi Rigo as 'cut the Cuban way', its rum as 'Established Cuba 1862' - despite the fact that Bacardi has neither produced nor sold a drop of Cuban rum since fleeing the Revolution in 1960. It is now targeting youth - 'entry-level drinkers' in advertising-speak - through a new aggressive marketing campaign. The angle the admen have come up with is to use boxing as a metaphor - again, trading on the fact that Cuba produces some of the best boxers in the world, no thanks to the crippling US blockade so enthusiastically endorsed by Bacardi.

Round 1 will feature a £1.5 million 'hard-hitting' nationwide poster campaign aimed at 20-30-year-olds, 'reinforcing Bacardi's stature & heritage - established Cuba 1862'. This is to be backed up by Round 2, a £7 million TV and cinema campaign. But key is Round 3, with its 'hit-squad sampling in 580 city centre young people's venues' and 'a massive spend through on-trade activity' - giving out free Bacardi in pubs and clubs. Oh, and there will be free keyrings, car stickers and CDs too. The message? That Bacardi is cool, hip and oh-so-very Cuban. But behind that glossy image are young Cubans denied basic educational materials and medicines, let alone CDs and nightclubs, by a criminal blockade supported by Bacardi. The death and suffering caused by the blockade has led Cuba to charge the United States with pursuing a policy of institutionalised genocide against the island. To drink Bacardi is to support genocide. It's that simple. And that's the message we have to be taking to every one of the 580 'city centre young people's venues' that Bacardi will be targeting over the coming period.

We've already confronted Bacardi at Cardiff University's 'La fiesta de Bacardi' promotion night, where we were kicked off the premises for giving out Boycott Bacardi leaflets. Let us know of any Bacardi promotion nights in your area and we can help organise an intervention. If you're in London, join us on 18 December for our Bacardi Bar Busting Blitz, targeting Cuban theme bars that sell Bacardi. (see page 14 for details of the Boycott Bacardi campaign).

Other Bacardi products to avoid include: Martini, Dewar's Scotch and Bombay Sapphire gin.

Richard Roques



# War and revolution:



Lenin recognised the importance of the role of the labour aristocracy and the split in socialism

**A century of war and revolution passes. Sacrifice on a scale unimaginable at the start of the twentieth century has failed to deliver the planet from capitalism. Valuable experiences have been achieved with lessons for the century to come. Socialism has raised its banner, only to have it torn down. For as long as capitalism exists it will deny the achievements of socialism in the twentieth century, but they will haunt it, until finally capitalism is surpassed by socialism. TREVOR RAYNE examines the lessons of 100 years of struggle.**

The dazzling scientific advances marking the nineteenth century continued into the twentieth century. This terrific resource and creativity has produced a century exceeding all others in wars – 250 – and war dead: over 110 million – six times as many as killed in wars in the preceding century. Human productivity has accelerated beyond anything recognisable in earlier epochs. In 1900 world gross domestic product stood at \$1 trillion; today it is approximately \$40 trillion (at 1990 \$ prices). In the first 50 years output quadrupled, in the last 50 years it has grown tenfold. Amidst this vast production of wealth, 80 countries – almost half the countries of the world – are getting poorer. One billion of the planet's six billion people cannot meet their daily needs to survive; one in five have to live on less than a dollar (62 pence) a day. Half the world lives on less than \$2 a day. In 1820 people in Britain had six times the income per head that people in Ethiopia have today. Almost 200 years ago, before most of the great benefits of empire and industrial revolution, British people's incomes exceeded the incomes of one third of the world's countries today. To talk of progress, of development for much of humanity in this century is a lie.

The great forces of production brought into the twentieth century now threaten to destroy the capitalist relations of production that direct their use. All that capitalism achieves is turned against humanity and the planet. Just as the productive forces offer the prospect of release from want and deprivation, so they are used to generate new reckless wants among youth. The poor are encouraged to imitate the excesses of the richest country in the world, while basic needs are left untended. World expenditure on marketing now exceeds half that spent on education. The number of televisions per head of population has doubled in twenty years. Films and TV shows are now the USA's biggest export. In the last thirty years computers, satellites and telecommunications have combined to transform communications. They are turned to warfare, the tyranny of the \$55 trillion derivatives market and the \$1.5 trillion a day currency casino. In 1998 the click of a mouse wiped \$2 trillion off world output: 13 million people were thrown out of work in East Asia and real wages cut by 40-60% in Indonesia. Global organised crime is estimated to gross \$1.5 trillion a year, about the size of the British economy. Police and governments are entwined as the radius of its power expands. Money laundering is put by the International Monetary Fund at 2-5% of world gross domestic product – all done in the blink of an electronic eye.

Just as science offers the prospect of the amelioration of our relationship to nature and solutions for diseases,

so its products are directed in a systematic war against the sustainability of human life upon planet Earth. Water availability is 60% of its 1970 levels. Forest coverage is also down 40% in 30 years. Global warming accelerates, deserts spread, species loss proceeds. Storms grow in frequency and intensity: flooding, devastation, crop failures. Air pollution kills three million people a year, the incidence of cancer increases, new cancers appear, diseases thought to be eradicated return to places they ravaged a hundred years ago. As the productive forces are developed so the relations of production demand of them ever more irrational and destructive uses – nature takes its revenge.

What fate awaits us if we do not change course? Just when the mad destruction of nature must be slowed down, capitalism presses harder on the accelerator. Warning signals have been flashing for 40 years. Is humanity unable to save itself? Will half the planet accept their function of ensuring the well-being of a parasitical elite? Will they accept hunger and hopelessness, being objects of pity and charity – or are they going to do something about it? Are the only routes out of poverty and despair going to be crowded with gangsters and murder, or are the oppressed going to recognise their common enemy and combine to remove it?

The majority of scientists are employed by multinational corporations. Is the mass of humanity going to allow science to be used by these monsters to find diabolical new ways of exploiting and killing us, or are we going to take science and use it to solve our problems?

If people will not resist, then socialism was a fine idea but it has no future. If people want to fight, they need socialism if they are going to win.

## Imperialism: monopolies and militarism

What socialism has to offer is a theory about how the world develops and a guide to how to change it. It offers the most complete understanding of society and conforms with the interests of the many not the few.

Lenin saw capitalism develop into imperialism as the twentieth century began. All the achievements of capitalism in raising living standards in a handful of oppressor nations have been bought by the misery of many more people in the majority of oppressed nations. Central to imperialism and the twentieth century have been giant monopolies that dominate capitalist production and markets. These, not the lies about free markets and competition, dictate reality. A mere handful of companies control the world trades in oil, grain, metals, cotton, sugar, telecommunications etc.

The combined assets of Deutsche Bank, UBS and Citibank exceed the size of the British economy. Shell is

bigger than Greece, General Motors bigger than Thailand and Wal-Mart bigger than Colombia, comparing company sales with national economies. These monopolies must expand or die. They are thrown into conflict, spheres of influence are fought over and states mobilised to pitch armies into battle. The forces of production become the forces of destruction. Monopoly capitalism is distinguished by a maximum devotion to militarism and a minimum fondness for peace.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Britain, Germany and the USA carved up Samoa. Britain annexed Somalia, Tibet, the Boer republics in South Africa and large parts of Africa; the USA annexed Colombia, Panama, Haiti and the Dominican Republic; Japan seized Korea and part of Sakhalin island; Belgium took the Congo; France got Thailand, parts of Africa and so on. On the eve of the last decade of the century the USA mounted its biggest military operation since Vietnam to invade Panama. In the last decade of the century US troops were deployed and then withdrawn from Somalia; they re-entered Haiti and Colombia. France, Britain and the USA manoeuvre behind local armies in the battle for the Congo. BP has taken back in the Caucasus what it had to surrender to the Bolsheviks, and Shell has bought into Kazakhstan's gas reserves. The former socialist countries are pounced upon by these wolves. Yugoslavia torn limb from limb. US and British planes continue to patrol the Iraqi skies, enforcing a blockade that kills 4,000 Iraqi babies and children a month. The symmetries between the beginning and the end of the century are disgusting. What testimony to the reactionary, destructive role of capitalism today and vindication of Lenin's analysis.

The century of mass production produces violence and barbarity on a scale never seen before. The First World War cost \$2.85 trillion and took 10 million lives, including over one million British lives, 3.16 million German lives and six million Russian lives. The Second World War cost \$4 trillion and took 80 million lives, including 450,000 British lives, 408,000 US lives, two million Japanese lives, 6.22 million German lives, 6 million Jewish lives and 23-27 million Russian lives. It closed with the threat of global annihilation in the mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The explosive power of the current nuclear stockpile is 1,600 times the explosive power used in World War Two. It cost over \$9 trillion. Does humanity accept this century as a model to be built on, are we going to put up with more of the same? It is not possible.

Inter-imperialist rivalry is intensifying; the different positions taken in the Gulf War, the scramble for the Balkans, the recurring threats of trade

war, revived military budgets point to a cataclysm beyond even the horrors of the twentieth century. The frequency of wars is accelerating: in the 1950s the annual average number of wars was 10; in the 1970s 10-20; in the 1990s the average is over 30. Two world wars bought only a temporary respite for capitalism. Its underlying structural problems remain unresolved.

## The Bolshevik Revolution

'The actuality of the revolution: this is the core of Lenin's thought and his decisive link with Marx.' Lukacs

Lenin saw that imperialism alters the structure of the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Superprofits are used to create a labour aristocracy in the working class, a section of the class with an interest in imperialism. This has been the mainstay of stability for capitalist rule in imperialist nations and critical in allowing the bourgeoisie to wage war against the oppressed people. The division in the working class has its political expression in the development of social democracy. Social democratic parties dragged the working class into the First World War and have been effective instruments of capitalist rule since, supporting war efforts from the North of Ireland to the Gulf, the Malvinas/Falkland Islands to the Balkans.

The October 1917 Russian Revolution was made against the war policies of the social democratic government. Its slogans of 'Peace, land and bread' and 'All power to the Soviets' are needed by the mass of humanity today. The Bolsheviks nationalised the banks and the land, workers took control of the factories, inherited wealth was abolished, equal rights for women proclaimed and the church separated from the state. The poor took command. Eighteen foreign armies invaded Russia. The RAF gassed Red Army troops at Archangel. By 1922 the internal and external armed counter-revolutionaries had been defeated by the Red Army led by Leon Trotsky. The socialist revolution swept through the old Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union was created. Germany's revolution was drowned in blood in 1919 and its leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht murdered by the social democratic government. Nevertheless, although the failure in Germany was a terrible blow, Lenin credited the international working class with doing enough to weaken the hand of imperialism, thereby allowing the new socialist state to survive.

With a series of five-year plans the Soviet people eliminated poverty and hunger, raised education standards and reached a level of production able to compete with imperialism. This was a tremendous achievement for a previously poor, mainly rural, semi-feudal country. Under imperialism Russia would have sunk into the dis-



July days 1917 in Russia



80 million died in World War II



Intifada in Palestine



# the 20th century struggle for socialism



The Cubans have not renounced the principles of socialism.

trass inflicted on India or Brazil.

Whatever its problems the Soviet Union was an inspiration to humanity and source of progress. Its very existence was a warning to the capitalists, an incentive for them to make concessions when they could afford them, such as welfare expenditure in the imperialist countries and formal independence in the colonies. The existence of the Soviet Union created space in which anti-colonial struggles could advance.

The costs borne by the Soviet people in defence of their land and state are staggering: what a debt is owed them for confronting and repulsing 90% of the Nazi army stationed on the eastern front. As the Red Army drove on towards Berlin, the US and British ruling classes mobilised not to defeat fascism but to defend their interests as much from socialism as from German and Japanese imperialism. British, US and other European governments were content to stand by and watch German and Italian fascists support Spanish fascism against democracy in 1936-39 when 1.2 million people were killed. Communists and the Soviet Union gave the greatest support to Spanish democracy. Communists' role in defeating fascism in Europe was and is an inspiration. Between 1945 and 1948 100 million people in eight countries over a quarter of Europe's land area joined the socialist camp. To the east China was about to rise up. History was turning towards socialism. Humanity was hauled back from an abyss of capitalism's own making.

## The national liberation struggles

For much of the last half-century the main battle between imperialism and socialism has been fought out in the oppressed nations, in the struggle for national liberation. For China the cost

was over five million people killed in the war against Japanese occupation, and 1.5 million people killed in wars between the pro-US Kuomintang government and the Chinese communists before the People's Republic was declared in 1949. The Long March of 1934-35 led by Mao Zedong is an epic of military history and human endurance whose impact will reverberate through the coming century. Four million people were killed in Korea between 1951-53 resisting US and British-led forces. Chinese volunteers helped roll back the invaders to South Korea. In 1959 Cuba rose up right under the noses of US imperialism. Horribly surprised, the US mounted the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion which was quickly overcome. With Soviet help, the Cuban revolution survived. From 1964-73 Vietnam and Indochina withstood three times as much destructive fire-power from the USA as was unleashed by all sides in World War Two. Four million people were killed before the Vietnamese claimed victory in 1975. In the wake of the Vietnamese advance a revolutionary wave swept through thirteen countries between 1974-80: Laos, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iran, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome, Cape Verde, Zimbabwe, Grenada and Nicaragua. Imperialism marshalled its response. How the socialist bloc responded would be crucial.

## Counter-offensive and retreat

Social democracy in the main imperialist nations did nothing to help the newly-liberated countries. It sided with imperialism. During the first half of the 1980s the US military bombed and shelled Lebanon/Syria and Libya with impunity and invaded Grenada in 1983. The most reactionary and racist killers from El Salvador to

Angola, Cambodia to Afghanistan were plied with money and weapons and social democracy in Europe hardly murmured. Over one million people were killed in Mozambique, three quarters of a million in Angola, a quarter of a million in Central America and 1.5 million in Afghanistan to drive these peoples away from socialism. When popular revolts did occur in Haiti and the Philippines, imperialism acted quickly to replace its unpopular front men, Duvalier and Marcos, to retain control. Between 1980-88 not one revolutionary movement came to power.

US military spending in the early 1980s was triple the rate of the late 1970s. It was paid for by huge borrowing, funded by west European and Japanese purchases of dollars and investments in the USA. By this time Soviet military spending consumed 17% of national income. Imperialism intended to break the Soviet Union with record military budgets and by raising the costs of supporting the national liberation movements. Between 1950-70 Soviet industrial production grew at triple the rate of US industrial production, but by the late 1970s the Soviet economy was lagging behind the main capitalist countries. During the 1970s the USA proposed a policy of 'linkage' in which arms reductions would be exchanged for shifts in Soviet policy towards the Third World. These were deals similar to that struck by the USA and Soviet Union over Cuba in 1962 when the Soviet Union agreed to remove missiles from Cuba in exchange for an assurance that the USA would not invade the island.

Soviet premier Khrushchev's 1956 'peaceful coexistence' with capitalism, but with 'competition' between the two systems, turned into Andropov's 1983 line that Third World socialist states would have to rely on their own resources; this in turn was superseded by Gorbachev's 'common human interest' of the different systems and their 'common class interests' as 'interdependent states' - a far cry from Marx and Lenin's understanding of the predatory nature of capitalism. By 1986-87 Soviet New Thinking had it that imperialism was not necessarily hostile to socialism; capitalism could flourish in the Third World - witness the Asian Tigers; Third World revolutions did not aid the security and development of the Soviet Union and Third World socialist states should join the world market to develop. Conferences were held in Moscow to overcome the divisions between the communist and social democratic parties - divisions that Lenin insisted upon. This is the road that was followed: from international class solidarity of the workers and oppressed to desertion of the southern African revolution; to encouraging the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1988 to come to a 'two states' deal with Israel;

to withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and then on to unbridled Great Russian chauvinism attacking Chechnya, nationalism and racism rife in the former Soviet republics.

It is said that socialism failed in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe because it was overthrown or committed suicide. Capitalism has never succeeded there except for a small minority of people. If it is said that the socialist experiments in the different states and republics failed, what does capitalist success look like? In 1999 Russia's national income is forecast to be \$167 billion, making it smaller than Belgium's, a country of 11 million people. Russian output is now half the 1991 level. Of 12 former Soviet republics all have undergone a fall in output: Ukraine down 65%, Moldova 70%. For eight of the republics output has halved or more than halved. Of 13 east European countries, 10 have seen output drop: Latvia down 40%, Bulgaria 34% etc. All of this destruction has taken place under policies of privatisation, price liberalisation, trade liberalisation, introduction of competition, banking reforms and introduction of stock markets.

Russia is now the most unequal society in the world in terms of wealth distribution. Its health and education services are wrecked. Life expectancy among Russian males has fallen more precipitously than for any other country recorded in peacetime, from over 65 to under 58. Western human rights groups report that torture is now routine in Russian police stations. Half of all detainees are subjected to asphyxiation, beatings and electric shocks. This is the triumph of capitalism and failure of socialism.

The Russian revolution lost many of its best workers defeating counter-revolution and fascism. The bourgeoisie entered the communist parties, self-serving careerists who turned those parties into means of securing privileges above those of the workers. The working class lost control of the party and the state. Workers' democracy, so critical for the advance of the revolution, was lost to a caste of party officials, state and industrial managers, scientific and cultural workers. In short, capitalist norms and relations of production reasserted themselves. It would only be time before their political expression reared up to challenge the state when it became a barrier to their enrichment.

## The century ahead

Were capitalism able to meet the needs of humanity then there would be no need for socialism. If capitalism is able to raise living standards for the majority of people in the imperialist countries then there is little prospect of a struggle for socialism here. However, capitalism cannot meet the needs of the majority of people and is increasingly unable to meet the needs

of a growing proportion of the people in the imperialist countries. Inequality is growing, poverty is growing in Britain, USA, France, Germany, Japan, Sweden etc. Crisis is confronting the system.

Financial instability precedes a depression. The 1929 Wall Street Crash resulted in a 65% drop in world trade within four years. By 1932 capitalist countries had up to 50 million unemployed. Germany's unemployment rate reached 44% with a further 26% on part-time work. Fearing revolution, Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank swung behind Hitler and the Nazis to save German capitalism. Ultimately, this is where capitalism leads if it is not replaced by socialism.

In 1987 over \$500 billion was wiped off Wall Street in a single day. The Chicago futures derivatives market dropped 36% in two days. Tokyo's Nikkei Dow market fell 49% in 1990; it is now less than one third of its 1990 level. In 1995 came the Mexican peso crisis with its \$50 billion bail-out. 1998 saw the Asian Tigers crash in a massive implosion of debt; there followed the collapse of the Russian banking system, then the threat of Brazil's banking system being blown away in this blizzard of speculation. Half of all US households now own shares worth \$7 trillion, 40% of the US stock market. Their incomes, pensions, standards of living are resting on this precipice. One more speculative storm and poverty may not be the curse of a few in the midst of plenty, it will be the lot of the majority. Then where will the people turn? Will fascism once more wade through the rubble into world war?

## Socialism lives in Cuba

Socialism's banner still flies in Cuba. The Cubans have not renounced the principles of socialism. This small country has not surrendered to imperialism. Cuba showed the world the spirit of Che Guevara and internationalism when Cuban soldiers repulsed the South African Defence Force from the capital of Angola in 1975 and then broke its teeth at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988 when most of the socialist bloc were getting ready to surrender. Guided by socialism, not one school or hospital has been closed in Cuba despite the merciless US blockade and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cuba's people have not had their lives plunged into ruinous poverty as have the people of the former Soviet Union. Imperialism ensures that they have difficulties, but in Cuba the priority is not private profit, the enrichment of a few at the expense of the many, but social solidarity. Cuba sees itself rallying the oppressed against imperialism. Struggling against the tide, we can learn from Cuba's example. This is the trench from which we can turn the tide. With the defiance of Fidel Castro: Socialism or Death.



The wretchedness of religion is at once an expression of and a protest against real wretchedness. Religion is the sigh of an oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. »

Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", 1844

...in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. »

The German Ideology, 1845-1846

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: ie the class, which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. »

The German Ideology

Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1 that the existence of classes is only bound up with the particular historical phases in the development of production; 2 that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3 that this dictatorship itself constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society. »

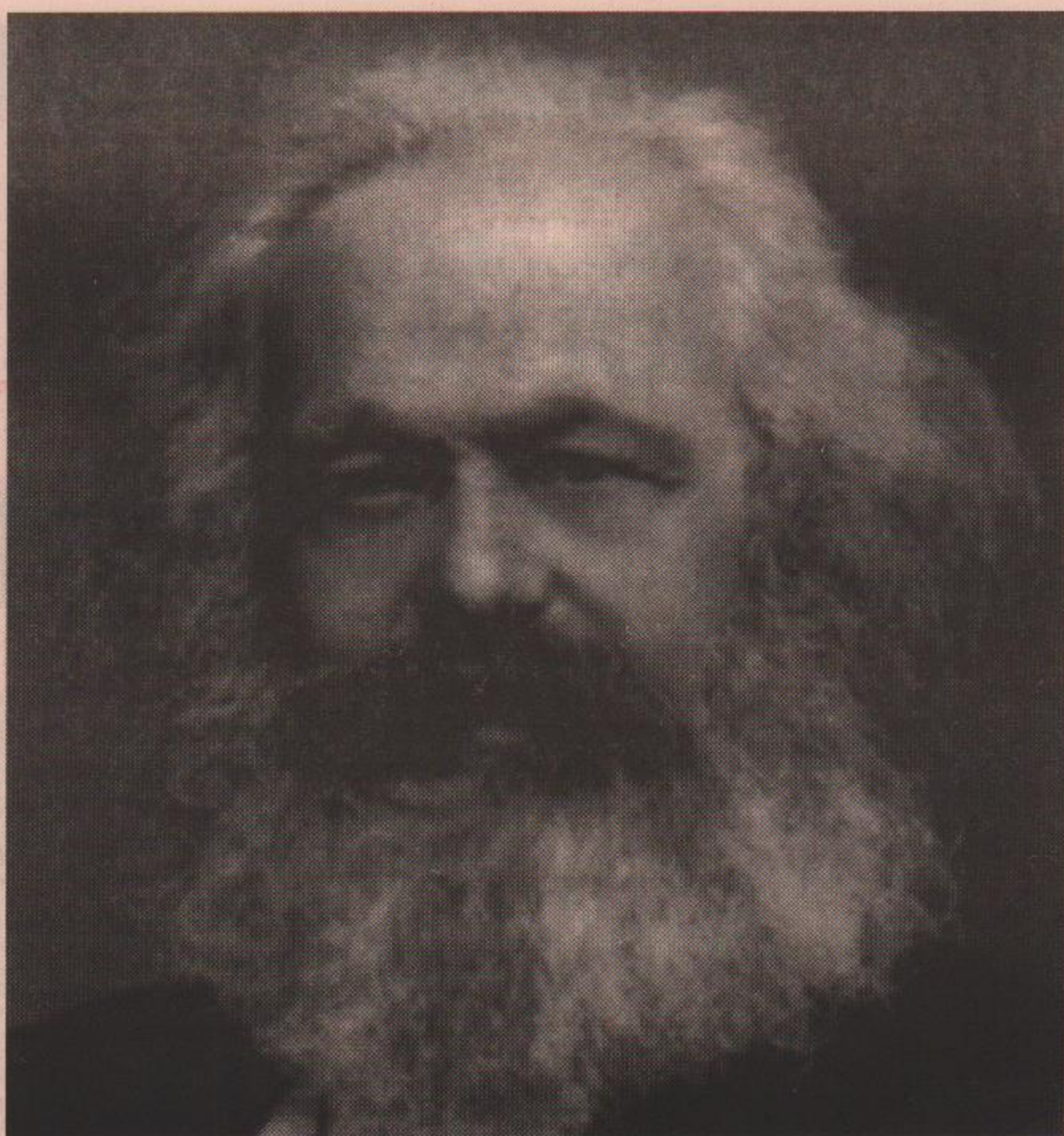
letter to J Weydemeyer, 5 March 1852

...the social production which men carry on they enter definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but in the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. »

Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859

...I have become more and more convinced – and the only question is to drive this conviction home to the English working class – that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland most definitely from the policy of the ruling class, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish but actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union and establishing a free federal relationship. »

letter to Kugelmann, 29 November 1869



The first short biography of Karl Marx could be said to have been produced by his great friend and collaborator Frederick Engels on 17 March 1883 in a speech heard by the ten other people gathered together in Highgate Cemetery for Marx's funeral. It offers very clear guidelines to those who would take it upon themselves to write future biographies. Marx, said Engels, was before all else a revolutionary:

'His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success such as few could rival.'

So the appearance of yet another biography of Karl Marx, this time by *Guardian* columnist Francis Wheen,<sup>1</sup> claiming that 'it is time to strip away the mythology and rediscover Karl Marx the man' (p1), should put us on our guard. For Marx the man cannot be separated from his real mission in life and the dedication and commitment that invariably accompanied it.

### Faint praise

A biography like any other 'commodity' has to have a market niche. Another tabloid-style denunciation of the man and his works would have little mileage. Neither would a revolutionary vindication of Marx. Wheen knows his punters – he writes weekly for them in *The Guardian*. They reject Thatcherism and a Labour Party gone Thatcherite. They are disturbed by untrammelled market forces, corporate domination, financial speculation and increasing stress and insecurity at work. They are alarmed by environmental destruction and Third World poverty but want well-stocked supermarkets supplied by global markets.

They want to see change but not revolutionary change. Wheen's Karl Marx is the man for the job.

Wheen tells us that the more he studied Marx, the more topical he seemed to be. Marx was already on to globalisation in 1848. Long after Marx had been written off by fashionable liberals and post-modernist leftists, a wealthy investment banker, writing in the *New Yorker* in October 1997, considered Marx to be 'the next big thinker' with much to teach us about political corruption, monopolisation, alienation, inequality and global markets (pp4-5).

*The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Wheen argues, reveal the 'workings of a ceaselessly inquisitive, subtle and undogmatic mind'. They demonstrate how alienation and poverty, growing concentration of capital, intense competition and overproduction are ever present features of capitalist society even under favourable conditions of growing wealth (pp68-70). *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) foresaw globalisation. Wheen quotes liberally from the well-known passages: The bourgeoisie 'has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade'. The exploitation of the world market has given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones (pp120-122). None of Wheen's points are original. They were all made during the many discussions of the *Communist Manifesto* on the 150th anniversary of its publication in 1998.

*The Communist Manifesto* was, however, written for the Communist League whose aim, adopted at its second congress, was 'the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the abolition of bourgeois soci-

ety which rests on the antagonism of classes, and the foundation of a new society without classes and without private property (p118)'. This, clearly, is far too radical for run-of-the-mill *Guardian* readers. And yet, it is all there in the *Communist Manifesto*. 'What the bourgeoisie, therefore produces, above all, is its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable' (p120). And not only there, but also in Marx's major scientific work on capitalist society, *Capital*, as an historical tendency of capitalist accumulation. 'The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production...Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.'<sup>2</sup>

Wheen is quick to reassure his readers. With the complacency that hindsight allows, he states that at the time of the *Manifesto*, what Marx took to be capitalism's death throes 'were in fact nothing more than birthpangs', even though, as Wheen acknowledges, revolution did break out within days of the *Manifesto*'s publication across much of continental Europe. 'But it was doused just as quickly and bourgeois triumphalism began its long reign.' So not to worry dear readers! 'Marx's optimism was misplaced, even though his vision of the global market was uncannily prescient' (pp121-2).

### Whimsical tomfoolery

So how could Marx be so wrong and yet so right? Here, Wheen is simply out of his depth and takes refuge in sophistry so reminiscent of his columns in *The Guardian*. He compares Marx's thinking to that of a chess player who, in working out how he will checkmate his opponent six moves ahead, fails to notice that his

opponent can mate him far sooner. It requires the other player to make a mistake if Marx is to win. Propitiously, Marx had similar problems with actual games of chess. In support of his argument, Wheen conjures up a comrade of Marx, Wilhelm Liebknecht, who recalls that, in chess, Marx's technique was to try 'to make up what he lacked in science by zeal, impetuosity of attack and surprise' (no source given), a description, Wheen says, 'that might be applied to the *Communist Manifesto*' (p123).

But what of *Capital*? Can that be dismissed so shamelessly? Here Wheen simply threshes around like a drunk unexpectedly fallen into a swimming pool. 'More use-value and indeed profit can...be derived from *Capital* if it is read as a work of the imagination: A Victorian melodrama, or a vast Gothic novel whose heroes are enslaved and consumed by the monster they created...; or perhaps a satirical utopia like Swift's land of Houyhnhnms...' (p305) He goes on to say that the absurdities in *Capital* while reflecting the madness of the subject, not the author, should be treated like a shaggy-dog story. The first chapter should be regarded as a 'picaresque odyssey through the realms of higher nonsense'. It reminds Wheen of the last lines of Marx's beloved *Tristram Shandy*:

'– L—d! said my mother, what is all this story about?  
– A Cock and a Bull, said Yorick; – and one of the best of its kind ever heard.' (p307)

It is not *Capital* which is full of 'abstruse explanations and whimsical tomfoolery' (p308) but this biography of Marx that has got out of its depth.

Wheen makes great play of the influence of Marx's extensive literary reading on his work. But like the nonsense above overplays his hand. The opening passages of the 18th Brumaire were taken, almost word for word, from a

# KARL MARX

## Before

The millennium is possibly the supposed anniversary of the birth mark the occasion: millennium theme park. The bourgeois megalomania is to make more profits, the bourgeoisie has the opportunity while the vast majority work, alongside Frederick Engels, to mark the new century and needs all humanity. Such a challenge

Marx described communism as still haunting, and even 117 years after Marx's life and thought. Below we offer our readers a selection of ideas

'The philosophers have only interpreted



# KARL MARX

## 1818-1883

# ...and the victory of the proletariat?

the emptiest of bourgeois celebrations. It marks the birth of Jesus Christ, but the ruling class is unsure how to celebrate. Domes, fireworks, ferris wheels – all the trash of the media have trailed the last thousand years in search of the meaning or purpose. In a society where the highest ideal of the bourgeoisie sees the millennium as another money-making opportunity of humankind has little to celebrate. As communists, we mark the new millennium with a tribute to Karl Marx whose writings gave hope that society can be changed to meet the needs of the people. We would really give all of us cause for celebration. As a 'spectre' haunting the bourgeoisie. That spectre is Marx. After his death, the ruling class would like to trivialise his legacy. We review their latest attempt, a 'biography', and offer our views which express the Marxist purpose.

Francis Wheen wrote to Marx on 3 December 1851 and were not directly connected with a passage from Marx's satirical novel 'written under the pseudonym of Tristram Shandy' (p26). 'Estrangement' and 'alienation' of human labour in Marx's economic writings had roots in German romantic idealism and later Hegelian philosophy. Such literary parallels as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a monster which turns against its creator, were used by Marx in his letters and writings as a literary device to illuminate his point (p71). This has been noted, without the exaggeration and hyperbole of Wheen, in a serious work of scholarship, *Karl Marx and World Literature* by S S Praver (1976), a book which refers to only once and briefly.

### ...and the victory of the proletariat?

At the beginning of this biography, Wheen tells us how his many friends regarded him with pity and incredulity for wanting to write a biography of such an apparently discredited, outmoded and irrelevant figure as Karl Marx. Countless wiseacres, after all, had declared that we had reached the end of history and communism was as dead as Marx himself. They see the good-curdling threat with which Marx concluded the *Communist Manifesto* is no more than a quaint historical relic: 'Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite!' and they add: 'The only fetters binding the working class today are mock-iron watches, but these latter day proletarians have much else they'd hate to lose – microwave ovens, holiday time-shares and satellite dishes. They have bought their council houses and their shares in privatised utilities; they made a nice little windfall when their building society turned into a bank. In

short, we are all bourgeois now. Even the British Labour Party has turned Thatcherite.' (p4)

Despite all this, the steadfast Wheen carried on to write this biography, although he appears to share the disparaging view of the 'countless wiseacres' about the proletariat, at least in countries like this one. 'In the England of today toffs and workers alike buy their food from Tesco superstores and watch the National Lottery draw on Saturday nights' (p206). At the same time, towards the end of his book, he makes an intelligent defence of Marx's position on the 'progressive immiseration' of the proletariat in the chapter on the General Law of Capital Accumulation, pointing out that the pauperism referred to is not of the entire proletariat but the 'lowest sediment' of society – the unemployed, the ragged, the sick, the old, the widows and orphans. These are the 'incidental expenses' which must be paid by the working population and the petty bourgeoisie. And, he asks, can anyone deny that such an underclass still exists? Likewise, he states, Marx was predicting a relative decline of wages when he wrote 'in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse' – a point self-evidently true. But, other than saying Marx's definition of poverty is as much spiritual as economic, this is all hanging in the air and in no way contributes to an understanding of the political role of the working class. (pp299-301)

Wheen tells us that even Marx's view of the English proletariat 'oscillated between reverence and scorn'. So Marx could laud the British workers' support for the North in the American Civil War and, after a Hyde Park demonstration in July 1866, rail against their moderation in a letter to Engels, arguing that only after a really bloody encounter with the ruling powers would 'these thick-headed John Bulls' get anywhere. Wheen cannot

throw any further light on this. Ridiculously, he quotes the historian Keith Thomas who suggests that 'the preoccupation with gardening, like that with pets, fishing and other hobbies... helps to explain the relative lack of radical and political impulses among the British proletariat.' (p206) Yet the very writings and letters of Marx and Engels which Wheen cites hold the key to an understanding clearly beyond his grasp.

Marx and Engels' relations with the Chartist leader Ernest Jones deteriorated when Jones called a conference between the Chartists and bourgeois radicals to bring about political reform. Eventually they broke off relations with him when he failed to take their advice that such alliances would disorganise the Chartist movement and lead to its demise. Engels' letter to Marx on 7 October 1858 about Jones's action is quoted by Wheen, but he misses out a crucial section. Engels said that Jones's new move, together with other more or less successful attempts at such an alliance, is bound up with the fact that 'the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat as well as a bourgeoisie.' Wheen quotes this (p206) but then stops, missing the real significance of what comes next. Engels continues: 'For a nation which exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain extent justifiable. The only thing that would help here would be a few thoroughly bad years, and since the gold discoveries these no longer seem so easy to come by.' [my emphasis] Here Engels associates opportunism, 'bourgeois infection' (p206) within the working class movement, with Britain's domination of the world market. He gives it a materialist foundation.

This significant point was developed by Marx and Engels in their later writings and the importance was particularly drawn out through their remarkable political work on Ireland in the First International, later the inspiration for Lenin's writings on imperialism.<sup>3</sup> From this we can appreciate Marx's remarks at the Hague Congress of the First International (1872), which Wheen thinks were unproductive or even sectarian (p343). They concern the attempt by some English representatives to deny credentials to Maltman Barry on the grounds that he wasn't 'a recognised leader of English working men'. Marx replied that 'it does credit to Barry that he is not one of the so-called leaders of the English workers, since these men are more or less bribed by the bourgeoisie and the government.'<sup>4</sup> This accusation has been substantiated (see Royden Harrison's *Before the Socialists* 1965). The possibility of bribing the upper strata of the English working class movement to take the side of the bourgeoisie and the government came from the profits from

Britain's monopoly of the world market and the colonies. Engels' comments on the state of the organised working class movement, in a letter to Kautsky on 12 September 1882, make this clear:

'You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general: the same as the bourgeoisie think. There is no worker's party here, you see, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies.'

Marx and Engels' work on Ireland is totally left out of Wheen's discussion of the First International. Nor is there a considered discussion of British colonialism or any reference to imperialism. This is hardly surprising from a writer who recently took the side of imperialism in the war against Yugoslavia, supporting NATO's bombing of Serbia under a cloak of humanitarianism and writing an article in *The Guardian* 'Why we are right to bomb the Serbs' (7 April 1999).

Today we live in a world of imperialist domination, obscene inequality and threatened ecological disaster. It is a world where a small minority of humanity, mainly living in the western imperialist countries, wallow in extreme wealth, while the vast majority, including growing numbers of people within the wealthy imperialist countries themselves, are denied their basic needs. A new biography of Marx could only do justice to his life's achievement and work if it started from a commitment and determination to change this state of affairs. Building on Marx's own political thought and action, it would have to show how, and under what conditions, the working class will take up the political fight again to overthrow capitalism, a fight, as Engels stated at his funeral, that was Marx's mission in life.

Wheen could not write such a biography. He is too committed to a status quo which, in spite of its inequity, serves him and the class he represents rather well. As a consequence his biography has created a Marx without revolutionary significance.

David Yaffe

1. Francis Wheen *Karl Marx* Fourth Estate London 1999. Page numbers in the text refer to this book unless otherwise stated.

2. *Capital*/Vol 1 *Collected Works* Vol 35 p750.

3. See David Reed, 'Marx and Engels The Labour Aristocracy, Opportunism and The British Labour Movement' in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* 27 March 1983 and David Reed *Ireland, the key to the British revolution* Larkin Publications 1984. For a discussion of the British Labour movement and imperialism see R Clough *Labour a party fit for imperialism* Larkin Publications 1992.

4. *The Hague Congress of the First International (1872), Minutes and Documents*. Lawrence and Wishart 1976 p124, p37 and p702.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.'

*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 1852



No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.'

*Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* 1859

The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself. It is the fact that capital and its self-expansion appear as the starting and the closing point, as the motive and aim of production; that production is merely production for capital, and not vice versa, the means of production mere means for an ever expanding system of the life process for the benefit of the society of producers. The means – unconditional development of the productive forces of society – comes continually into conflict with the limited end, the self-expansion of capital.'

*Capital*/Vol 3 1863-7

The Trades Unions are... an aristocratic minority – the poor workers cannot belong to them: the great mass of workers whom economic development is driving from the countryside into the towns every day – has long been outside the Trades Unions – and the most wretched mass has never belonged; the same goes for workers born in the East End in London...'

1871

...and the world in various ways; the point however is to change it'



# Venezuela – A Third Way?

**D**espite a rise in oil prices, the Gross Domestic Product will fall this year by at least 7%. A \$35 billion foreign debt swallows 30% of the state budget, whilst inflation is running at 20%. 70-80% of all companies have incurred losses. This disaster results from an economic system built to meet the needs of US and European corporations.

## The Chavez coalition

The popular electoral revolt arose from a 40-year struggle between the people and a succession of completely corrupt governments. At its head is Hugo Chavez, a 'left wing' ex-parachute regiment lieutenant colonel, who twice attempted coups against the government in 1992. The process started on 9 November 1998 when the traditional parties won only one third of the seats in the congressional elections. In December, Chavez was elected President by the poor with 56% of the vote (33% of those of voting age). In April 1999, a referendum called for a new Constituent Assembly to rewrite the 1961 Constitution. On 25 July, Chavez's coalition – the Patriotic Pole – won 121 of the 128 seats in a new National Assembly, with 40% of voters backing him. The elections completely destroyed the two ruling class parties, Democratic Action and Copei, neither winning a single seat.

There is immense popular pressure on Chavez to change the system. Seventy per cent of the population is under 30 years of age and demanding action. But as soon as the new National Constituent Assembly was convened in August, the traditional parties called upon the army to defend the existing constitution. On 10 August, Chavez sacked the army commander, and two days later declared Venezuela 'in emergency'.

## Constitutional reform

Chavez's reform of the constitution – the 26th in Venezuela's history – is entirely bourgeois in content. Property rights will be respected, but economic planning will be introduced to assure 'balanced' development involving state and market. Large land holdings (*latifundia*) will be prohibited. Public financing of political parties is prohibited, and there is recognition of the right to civil disobedience. Underlying the reforms is the naive idea that Venezuela can escape the devastating consequences of imperialism without confronting the US and Europe, and without the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. It represents an attempt to seek out a 'Third Way' which can reconcile the interests of the poor and oppressed with those of the foreign multinationals.

Already Chavez admits that he cannot meet '100%' of the people's demands, but his priority is to destroy the old way of governing. He claims his task is 'to offer a clean country' to foreign investors and that 'those who are frightened will lose a great opportunity'. He continues: 'If I were a serious investor...who wanted to invest in the great project that is Venezuela, petroleum, tourism, etc I would be happy...In the last 30 years how many have stopped investing! But in all of this there is no economic plan that begins to address the needs of the poor.'

## The 'clean up' campaign

The governing coalition points out that in the last 20 years at least 50

Like many Latin American countries, Venezuela possesses immense natural wealth. Yet although it holds the sixth largest oil reserves in the world (more than 75 bn barrels, sufficient to last 60 years), and although it is the largest foreign oil supplier to the USA, the overwhelming majority of its people – 80% of its 23 million population – live in poverty. Other figures give a graphic demonstration of a country held to ransom by imperialism:

- **70% of the people earn less than \$2 a day – twice as many as 25 years ago;**
- **36% get less than \$1 a day;**
- **a quarter of the adult working population is unemployed;**
- **the poorest fifth of the population consumes only 3% of the GNP;**
- **the infant mortality rate is three times that of Cuba.**

Such wealth as exists is in the hands of the few: 60% is owned by the richest fifth of the population. Recently, however, a new electoral coalition has broken the back of the two 'traditional' ruling parties. The key question is what will this mean for the working class and poor? Will the new government be able or willing to meet their aspirations?

times the value of the Marshall Plan has been earned by oil exports, yet the country is one of the most debt-ridden in the world, systematically looted by its own ruling class. In Britain, *The Economist* agrees in its own way: Venezuela was 'a corrupt and bloated corporate State run as a kleptocracy by...two parties, and sustained only by a high oil price'. (31 July 1999). A 'clean up' is in no way antagonistic to imperialism's broader interests: the US has already legislated against collaboration with corrupt practices, and the EU is about to. The reason is not hard to find – it costs multinationals an estimated \$45 billion a year.

The Chavez government has already begun its task with 'energetic' and 'prudent' investigations into corruption at all levels of the state. To date this has included a purge of the Customs Service and an audit of the property of 2,000 leaders of the corrupt trade unions (three thousand unions with two million workers were receiving \$24 million a year from the state to suppress militancy). By September 1999, 3,130 claims of judicial corruption or incompetence lay before the Courts' Inspector General. 195 judges had been sacked by November. The judicial system was in complete chaos: 80% of all prisoners are those on remand, some held for 20 years without trial, most in appalling conditions with murders a daily occurrence. A high percentage of these simply cannot pay fines or bribes, others are just forgotten.

The thoroughness of this campaign has raised some alarm abroad: for instance *The Economist*, after its smug assessment of 'populist, but

unthreatening, gestures' last year, now writes of an 'elected dictatorship', branding Chavez's actions as 'Caribbean Jacobinism'. James Foley in the US Department of State also has 'growing concern' over 'excessive accumulation of power' (this from a country that intervened 748 times in Latin America between 1800 and



would 'NATOise' the Colombian civil war. He suggested he could discuss directly with the two chief Colombian revolutionary movements, FARC and ELN, and negotiate the security of Venezuela's borders with Colombia. His purpose is to put pressure on the Colombian and other Latin American governments to accommodate domestic pressure for change.

## The economic programme

How is it possible for the poor of the oppressed and weaker nations to improve their lot, especially when the gap between rich and poor in the imperialist countries has widened so much over the past 25 years? Any attempt to change the situation in Venezuela in favour of the workers must bring it into conflict with imperialism. Already the political change under Chavez has led the

big private proprietors to slow down activity and stop investments. International banks have followed suit. Compared to 1998, Venezuelan exports to Colombia had fallen 50% by September 1999, and imports by 31%.

## Foreign policy

On 17 November Chavez submitted the next year's budget to the Constituent Assembly. It effectively allows the President to spend up to 2% of the GDP. But how will this game of being a big spender in a market economy actually resolve the crisis of the poor? This question is made even more pertinent by the fact that heavy expenditure has been promised on the prison system and a new national police force – a modern force to police a 'mixed' market economy!

Other Latin American countries facing similar political problems to Venezuela, and fearing similar electoral shifts, watch Venezuela anxiously. Chavez knows that it is too late for the 'old regime' and that a new approach has to be adopted to prevent economic crisis from becoming the source of widespread revolutionary violence. Thus on 20 August he denounced proposed regional manoeuvres which he claimed

Up to 25% of Venezuelans may be called 'middle class'. They want the state apparatus to be cleared of corruption, but they fear the economic programme that Chavez is preparing. They want the promised 'massive public investment in the health sector, in education and security', because they believe it will start an economic recovery, not because the mass of the people do not receive health care or education. They do not want the state to be the entrepreneur; 'the productive sector' must be in private hands. Hence the middle class wants an end to a situation where the state owns twice as much property as the private sector (\$4 trillion as compared to \$2 trillion). It regards this as an obstacle to the creation of wealth. Its idea of 'real' reform is more private property, private initiative and private profit. But Chavez is not master of his destiny. He has to look on the one hand to the masses and on the other to the interests of imperialism and the foreign investment needed to maintain growth.

A visit Chavez made recently to nine states in Europe and Asia showed two of his major concerns – first, to confirm his political legitimacy in the face of increasing US anxiety and second, to build new economic links outside of the old oligarchic network. One step was to secure an agreement with OPEC, in particular Saudi Arabia and Mexico, to restrict oil output and so stabilise its price. This is of particular importance given that PDVSA, the state-owned oil company, provides 40% of the state's income. During his trip Chavez spoke of invigorating the manufacturing sector but at the same time actively sought new foreign investment. Hence talks with Totalfina (Italy) and Elf Aquitaine (France) foresee \$4bn investment in the Orinoco basin. New contracts are being offered in the gas industry (\$8 billion over the next 10 years) with Shell Gas involved. The petrochemical industry is to be expanded over 10 years in joint ventures with US and Italian companies to exploit cheap gas reserves (95 cents per barrel compared to 141 in the US).

## All power to the workers!

The new leadership is not seeking to escape from its enslavement to foreign capital, but rather to intensify it, in an 'uncorrupt' way. Chavez is trapped, as promises to the impoverished masses compete with commitment to the immense power of international capital and its domestic allies in the ruling class. His aim is to create a modern, properly functioning bourgeois republic. This 'Third Way' has been tried innumerable times in Latin American countries and has always ended in disaster. The fact is that a government such as that of Chavez has to take one side or the other. If it does not challenge imperialism, then it will have to attack the working class and oppressed. 'Development' today under imperialism requires the degradation of the mass of humanity. Hence communists support every demand of the Venezuelan workers for work and justice, which must include the democratic use of all Venezuela's natural resources for the benefit of all its people.

**All power to the workers!  
Expropriation of all private means of production!  
All economic production for the needs of the working people!  
Imperialism out of Venezuela!**

Alvaro Michaels



# Reviewing the Troubles

## ■ The IRA

Tim Pat Coogan, Harper Collins, 1995, £9.99. Previous editions 1971, 1980, 1987, 1993.

For a British reader there is something liberating and even exhilarating in reading these well-written and comprehensive histories. Coogan has no problem with his Irish identity. He is a product of the post-British Free State and was allied for many years with the constitutional Republicanism of Fianna Fail whose paper, *The Irish Press*, he edited until its demise. From this perspective he turns a withering and uncompromising gaze on the duplicitous, venal and class-ridden culture of British rule in Ireland. Not for Coogan the dubious advantage of trying to see both sides of the story or the futile striving after balance which marks the writings not only of British journalists themselves but of Six Counties' writers from a nationalist background such as Jack Holland and Matt Dillon.

When I read: 'But in those days inexperienced countrymen... could still be overawed, in the daunting confines of a TV studio, by opponents armed with nothing more than the weapons of condescension and imitation British upper-class accents' and 'The United Kingdom is an area where authority, deference, and secrecy have traditionally flourished. British society is such that accent is commonly used both as a means of control and as an indication of social superiority', I raised a hearty cheer as I remembered the times when I myself had been talked down to by BBC interviewees with their cloned Oxbridge accents.

Coogan's perspective in both volumes is that of Irish nationalism, and is indeed sympathetic to Republicanism. Both books are a rich source of material about Ireland this century, although there is considerable overlap between the two. *The IRA* has constantly been updated since its first publication in 1971, and indeed the history of the IRA is largely the history of Ireland. Coogan must be regarded as authoritative. People have spoken to him and he has been given access to documents such as the IRA's court martial procedures and the 'IRA Green Book', an internal document setting out the history, aims and methodology of the movement drawn up for new recruits during its tactical reorganisation in the 1970s. Coogan has also had access to British Army intelligence reports such as General Glover's *Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends*, a top secret document from 1978 whose evaluation of the IRA differs wildly from public pronouncement.

There is of course an immense body of writing about the Six Counties. If the situation could be resolved by the printed word, it would have been sorted out long ago. A great deal of this material is an amassing of raw data, much of it so lacking in analysis it is almost anthropological. The Republican Movement seems not to have developed its own analysis of ongoing events from an ideological perspective, with the rare exception of the 1987 publication of *Questions of History*, written by POWs and now impossible to find.

Most writing is of the problem-solving variety, of which commen-



## ■ The Troubles: Ireland's ordeal 1966-1996 and the search for peace

Tim Pat Coogan, Arrow, 1996, £9.99.



Gerald Conlon of the Guildford Four after his release outside the Old Bailey, 19 October 1989

taries on the peace process are the latest example. There is a real issue as to the extent to which this apparent availability of information actually obscures issues and makes a coherent perspective more difficult to arrive at. Coogan is a case in point. Whereas his biography of Michael Collins actually served to rehabilitate Collins by its access to documents not previously seen, the new material in these books is firmly embedded within a pragmatic nationalism.



Battle of the Bogside, August 1969

What is not said is crucial. Coogan's nationalism overrides the class question at every juncture; economic issues are hardly ever discussed. Although *The IRA* reprints the 1916 Proclamation in full, the actual words: 'We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be sovereign and indefeasible' are glossed by Coogan as a 'distillation of the traditions and hopes of Catholic Ireland leavened by Connolly's socialism', as if socialism were an optional ingredient in cake-making, to be left in or taken out at will.

Similarly an early declaration that Sinn Fein in its conception was 'neither Republican nor revolutionary' is not pursued although all the documentation that Coogan produces points to the fact that the IRA has always been more radical and ideological than its supposed 'political'



Provisional IRA leaders on 23 June 1972

wing. Instead Coogan paints a scenario whereby the IRA comes to prominence only when 'politics' have broken down. Coogan's own political affiliation may cause him to pull some punches here. He shows that the 1985 split in Fianna Fail actually led to the legitimisation of partition at Hillsborough in 1985, while the peace process itself has been subjected to a huge number of scandals around the Free State government. Much of this points not only to the unviability of the Free State but to its actually being a tool of British colonial rule in the Six Counties but Coogan does not draw this conclusion.

In *The Troubles* he allows his feelings to come movingly to the surface. After writing *On the Blanket* about the Hunger Strike of 1981, he was so affected by what he had witnessed that he could not write anything else for seven years. He is outraged by the injustices of the Six County statelet. Yet even here he espouses a purely nationalist perspective: he sees the loyalist paramilitaries as mirror images of the IRA and echoes O'Neill's remark about Ulster nationalism being a kind of 'Protestant Sinn Fein'.

Coogan himself wrote a key passage in a speech by the then Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch in 1971 in which Lynch offered to amend aspects of the Irish Constitution which 'give offence to liberty of conscience'. This was denounced by the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, as an attempt to 'conform to the patterns of sexual conduct in other countries'. Comical enough when one thinks of Ian Paisley, but a clear indication of the enormous power of the Irish Catholic Church in

the 1970s. Coogan does not pursue this, simply remarking 'That took care of any move on legislative change for many a long day.' There is, as far as I know, no single book on the very important matter of the undue influence of the Catholic Church on the Free State, whether in respect of social legislation or by more covert pressure. Yet massive influence undoubtedly exists and has allowed the British to trigger crises like the affair of Brendan Smith, a priest on the run in the South wanted by the RUC for child abuse, which brought down Albert Reynolds' government and discredited the first peace process. Reynolds preferred to

defer to the sensibilities of the Church on the question of pederasty; his government fell in the subsequent scandal and he was replaced by the anti-republican John Bruton. Coogan locates the momentum of the search for peace in the loss of life suffered by the IRA in the ambush policies of the British exemplified by Loughgall and Gibraltar in 1989, rather than in internal shifts within Sinn Fein towards a pan-nationalist alliance. This can be plotted in Gerry Adams' speech of 5 March 1990 calling for a non-armed movement to work for self-determination in Ireland as a whole followed in November by the publication of 'Scenario for Peace'. This led to the response of Peter Brooke, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, declaring that the UK had 'no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland and was prepared to accept unification by consent'. (One feels the accent in this particular sentence must fall mainly upon the word 'selfish'). Nine years later, where is self-determination for the whole of Ireland? Where is a peace which is more than an absence of war?



City devastated by IRA bomb, 24 April 1993

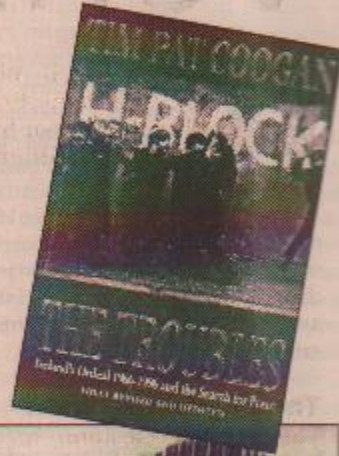
At the core of the IRA Green Book is the following: 'We do not employ revolutionary violence as a means without being able to illustrate that we have no recourse to any other means'. The earlier truce of 1975 was a catastrophe for the IRA, as one volunteer confirmed to me: it sapped morale and allowed volunteers to expose themselves and become known to the police and army who even issued permits for them to carry guns. This present truce has, of course, lasted much longer. It appears that the armalite and the bal-

lot box strategy developed by Danny Morrison as early as 1981 has decisively given way to the ballot box only. Coogan does not subject the peace process to any rigorous analysis, being content to create a somewhat confusing chronology. His strength is his unmitigated contempt for the British expressed in *The Troubles*: 'From the fall of the power-sharing executive of 1974 until the IRA ceasefire of 1994, Britain presided over a political vacuum that spawned a violent degeneracy not seen elsewhere in Europe since the end of World War II'. Coogan holds the British ultimately responsible for all the violence in the Six Counties; but the global contempt of 'degeneracy' puts him into the bourgeois liberal camp of his Fianna Fail/SDLP friends. For him, in spite of the trajectory of his own analysis, there is apparently no difference between the violence of the British Army, Loyalist terrorists and the IRA.

Coogan is splendid on the failure of the British media, stressing the truth of Jonathan Dimbleby's comment that BBC policy 'made it impossible for the British public to understand what was happening in the Six Counties'. Over the last few years the media has served the British government well as the different tone adopted by interviewees has seemed to 'dislodge the terrorist paradigm and make Adams, McGuinness and McLaughlin into statesmen at the expense of Trimble, Maginnis and Paisley'. (See Rita Lago 'Interviewing Sinn Fein' in *Media, Culture and Society*, Sage 1998). Adams is now a politician invited to give his views rather than someone treated as a hostile witness.

Alas, the media is no place to resolve social conflict. According to Coogan the Republican Movement is no longer making revolutionary demands. Sinn Fein has adapted itself to a bourgeois democratic process. It would be a mistake for the British puppet-master to draw too much comfort from this. In 1974 General Glover commented: 'Our evidence of the rank and file terrorist does not support the view that they are mindless hoodlums.' In my own experience, the best and most dedicated were drawn not into the ranks of Sinn Fein but into the IRA. And they are still there.

Jacqueline Kaye





Supporters of FRFI have been particularly active in support of Cuba over the past two months. In addition they have attended many other events. In London these have included support for the Justice for Sarah Thomas Campaign and attending the anti-imperialist picket of the US Embassy 'From Chiapas to East Timor' as well as the 'Mumia must live' rally. Elsewhere there have been street events as part of the campaign against poverty pay.

What has been particularly evident over the past few weeks however is the pitiful state of the left. The Scottish Socialist Party invites an open fascist onto its platform and touts him as a radical and no one turns a hair. The Socialist Workers' Party finds yet another way of supporting Labour, this time by supporting Ken Livingstone's campaign for becoming Labour's candidate in the London mayor election.

Both these organisations have a shocking record in fighting imperialism. The Scottish Socialist Party is dominated by former members of Militant which opposed the struggle for Irish liberation. Indeed, Militant frequently counterposed what it saw as working-class Orangeism to what it slanderously called the 'green Toryism' of the republican movement. This was because some of its leading lights came from loyalist Belfast, a fact that helps explain Militant's strength in Liverpool and Glasgow where there are large Orange communities. Given this political tradition, it is not surprising that the SSP recently invited Billy Hutchison, former UVF prisoner and its reputed commander-in-chief, to speak at its Socialism 2000 rally in Glasgow in his capacity as leader of the Progressive Unionist Party. The SSP are portraying this fascist as a son of the working class, as a standard bearer for a new radical loyalism. Never mind his political history, never mind his insistence on his 'Britishness': he is now more 'socialist' than New Labour because the PUP has a commitment to the common ownership of the means of production.

The SWP is no better. It supported the Labour government in sending troops to the Six Counties 30 years ago. Now it supports the so-called Peace Process by argu-

# Forward with FRFI

ing that 'ordinary people' will be 'hoping for an end to the war which has blighted their lives as politicians continue to haggle over a peace deal this week' (*Socialist Worker* 20 November). The same editorial asserts that 'Both Catholic and Protestant workers...thirst for real change. They want to live and work alongside one another in decent jobs, and for an end to discrimination against Catholics'. Partition no longer matters for Socialist Worker, and neither does the loyalist terror reported weekly in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. What they want is the social democratic norms that they are used to - those of trade unionism and voting Labour.

If the SWP is able to ignore the blood-stained hands of British imperialism in Ireland, no wonder it should have so little difficulty in convincing itself that Livingstone's support for the onslaught against Yugoslavia is of little importance when it comes to the London mayor election. There is no principle that the SWP would trample on in order to campaign for Labour. Livingstone's record will be set aside because it is inconvenient. The blood of Yugoslavian people is an expendable memory when it comes to forging alliances with the left of the Labour Party. When the SWP's John Rees says that 'in the course of the campaign to get Livingstone elected we can help to shape its direction and to push for a broader socialist campaign', he expresses utter self-delusion. How does he propose the SWP force the Labour Party in London to adopt a 'broader socialist campaign'? It is just windbagery. The SWP never, ever imposes conditions on the Labour left: its relationship is one of an obsequious, fawning admirer.

Outside the larger organisations of the left there is a complete swamp. When Ally Black from the SSP spoke to a gathering organised by the Merseyside Socialist Alliance in Liverpool, no one apart from

FRFI and People against Global Imperialism took up the issue of Ireland or imperialism. Instead the majority wanted to see the SSP as a model of how to build a new social democratic party in England. These 'independent' socialists may want to be radical, but above all they want to be respectable. Thus a 'debate' between Chris Bambery of the SWP and *Red*

*Pepper* editor Hilary Wainwright on whether we should celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall proved to be no such thing. To debate one must have two contrasted positions. But both agreed: the collapse of the Berlin Wall was a good thing. Never mind the appalling consequences for the working class of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, never mind

the role of social democracy in ensuring imperialism's triumph. The SWP chair of the 'debate' tried not to take any FRFI speaker, but failed due to comrades' persistence. And then to prove the headline of their 20 November *Socialist Worker*: 'They've made democracy a farce', SWP members proceeded to heckle our comrade throughout his short intervention.

## FRFI FIGHTING FUND

Since we launched our fighting fund last issue we have managed to raise £700, over our target of £500. Thanks go to a number of supporters who raised the amount of their regular donations, to Manchester comrades who raised £100 with a car boot sale, and London supporters who raised £350 with a club night.

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

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

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

Don't forget to take out a subscription.

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Please make cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications and send to FRFI, Fighting Fund, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

### London FRFI

Public meeting: Wednesday 19 January, 7.30 pm  
Karl Marx, Man of the Millennium  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (nearest tube Holborn).  
Phone 0171 837 1688 for details of London FRFI Readers' Groups.

### Preston FRFI

FRFI Readers' Group meetings at The Stanley Arms (upstairs), Lancaster Road, Preston, starting at 7.30pm: Wednesday 8 December, Wednesday 26 January.

### Manchester FRFI

FRFI Readers' Group meetings at The Hare and Hounds (upstairs), Shudehill, Manchester starting at 7.30pm Tuesday 25 January.

### Midlands

Lincoln Rock around the Blockade Wednesday 19 January 7.30pm. For further details, contact 01400 230 151.

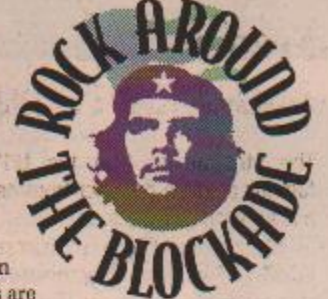
Leicester FRFI Readers' Group: Saturday 15 January 2.00pm Venue: St Peter's Tenants Association, St Peter's Shopping Centre, Melbourne Road, Highfield.

### Dundee FRFI

Public meeting: Wednesday 26 January, DVA Office, Kandahar House, Victoria Road. Starts 7.30pm, topic to be announced.

## Fighting capitalist lies...

# Gonna rock, rock, rock



Campaign materials are available from the address below. Some activists, particularly in the northwest and Midlands, have also found paint and marker pens inspiring when contemplating Bacardi's widespread billboard lies. Meanwhile, if you're based in London, sign up for our Bacardi Bar-busting Blitz on 18 December. The idea is to get sponsored for demonstrating outside every Cuban theme bar that sells Bacardi from Hackney to Waterloo, dressed in bat costumes, shaking buckets and generally spreading a little seasonal cheer! For a sponsorship form tel: 0171 837 1688. We are also planning a Smash the US blockade! Boycott Bacardi! national dayschool in the new year, with a provisional date of 12 February - contact us for more details.

### Rocking all over the town

In London, regular club nights of hip-hop, funk and Latin music at Harpers Bar near Turnell Park in October and November raised over £700 for Rock around the Blockade and are fast becoming an unmissable item on the London calendar! The next is planned for Saturday 12 February - join the party! On 1 November we held a meeting to commemorate the 32nd anniversary of the death of Che Guevara. We've held stalls at colleges in central London and at a Che exhibition at Barnet College as well as at the Cuba Solidarity Campaign's postcard campaign to mark (a little belatedly) the 40th anniversary of the Cuba revolution, where we narrowly resisted eviction by irate CSC stewards. Our next campaign meeting is on Monday 6 December, 8pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

In the Northwest, Rock around the Blockade held its annual sponsorship walk

over Kinder Scout, planting a Cuban flag at the top and raising £250. At the University of Lancashire our Cuba Vive society signed up lots of new members, and stalls were held at the Manchester Metropolitan and Manchester University. We've joined People against Global Imperialism for a stall in Liverpool and attended the Sheffield Raise your Banners event, where we raised around £200. To get involved in Rock around the Blockade in the northwest, phone 01254 679605.

In the Midlands, Rock around the Blockade attended the human rights fair at the University of Lincoln and showed *Rhythmic Revolutionaries*, the late-night Channel 4 programme made by brigadistas Jim Carey and Dave Holman about their experiences on last year's brigade. A number of people at the university were so inspired they now plan to set up a Lincoln Cuba Vive society. Midlands comrades have also held boot sales to raise funds and street stalls in Nottingham, Birmingham and Lincoln and at the end of November held a Boycott Bacardi meeting in Sparkhill, Birmingham. For details of Midlands events, contact Jim Craven on 01400 230 151.

In Bristol, the well-established Cuba Vive society signed up loads of members at the freshers' fayre at the beginning of term and held its first, well-attended meeting in November. More events are planned - contact Naz on 0117 927 3981. Meanwhile in Cardiff despite all attempts by the student union bureaucracy to stifle the new Cuba Vive society, comrades have fought back against the prejudice and hypocrisy of SU members to hold well-attended meetings, leaflet students and organise some timely activity against a Bacardi promotion night at the college. They have finally succeeded in winning official recognition for their society. Contact Viktor: 01222 259 823.

All this activity means Rock around the Blockade has so far raised £2,500 towards a sound system for youth of Guantanamo in Cuba. It's good - but it's only halfway there. We need your help to raise the full £5,000. We're encouraging activists all around the country to take part in a sponsored swim and Make a Splash for Cuba - phone 0171 837 1688. Or perhaps you could organise a



car boot sale? Or send us a donation - all amounts gratefully received (cheques/POs payable to Rock around the Blockade). And if you're not yet a member of Rock around the Blockade, then fill in the box below!

### Brigade to Cuba: a unique experience

Rock around the Blockade's fourth brigade to Cuba will be leaving for Guantanamo, southeast Cuba on Saturday 15 April, returning on 29 April (though there are a limited number of places for a 1 May return, for those who want to stay on for the May Day celebrations in Havana). The brigade's time will be split between agricultural work, political meetings, visits to hospitals, schools as well as recreational events. The cost will be around £650. To be considered for inclusion on this brigade you need to be able to commit yourself to working in solidarity with Cuba, before the brigade goes out and after its return, and be prepared to raise money for the sound system. For more information, contact us at Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX.

## YOUR CHANCE TO SUPPORT JUVENTUD REBELDE, NEWSPAPER OF CUBA'S COMMUNIST YOUTH

Juventud Rebelde, the newspaper of the Union of Young Communists, is looking for someone to translate its material from Spanish into English for its webpage. Pay is likely to be the basic Cuban peso wage but the arrangement should include accommodation. Might suit Latin American/politics student on year out. Applicants need to be fully in support of aims of the Cuban Revolution and, obviously, have good Spanish. Write to Rock around the Blockade explaining why you are interested and think you would be suitable.

Juventud Rebelde also needs the following software: Ventura, Corel Draw, Quark Xpress for PCs. Can you help?

I would like to join Rock Around the Blockade

£10 (waged) £4 (low waged) £2 (unwaged) delete as appropriate (Cheques/POs payable to Rock Around the Blockade)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Return to RATB, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX



# Private Prisons – more abuse, more chaos, but cheaper

FRFI readers will recall how Home Secretary Jack Straw, when in opposition, found private prisons 'morally repugnant', vowing to bring them back into public ownership once in power. But having ditched this embarrassing commitment, he has gone hell for leather down the privatisation road. **ALEXA BYRNE** reports.

**A**gainst the advice of his own civil servants, Straw has just renewed Premier Prison Services' contract to run Doncaster prison. A classified Home Office report seen by *The Observer* shows that a public sector Prison Service bid was 'operationally superior' to Premier's. This didn't bother Jack Straw.

## 'Doncatraz'

Premier has run Doncaster prison since it opened in 1994. Doncaster has one of the highest suicide rates in the country and there is currently an inquiry into the death of an 18-year-old found hanged in his cell last year. The secret Home Office report shows endemic self-mutilation, particularly amongst young prisoners; a serious lack of education provision and prisoners not being allowed enough time out of their cells. Despite this, privatisation Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, praised Doncaster, while Prisons Minister Paul Boateng insists that 'impressive programmes are in place to tackle the problems of self-harm and suicide.'

## Premier Prison Services, aka Wackenhut Corrections Corporation US

Premier is 50% owned and 100% operated by the Wackenhut Corporation. Wackenhut was founded in 1954 by former FBI official George Wackenhut, and Board members have included CIA bosses Frank Carlucci and William Casey, and Jorge Mas Canosa, founder of the fanatical anti-communist Cuban American National Foundation.

Wackenhut has been running jails in several US states, to disastrous effect. Prisoners are locked down for

hours on end in metal cages, denied education, training, books and radios. Wardens are given minimum training and paid just \$7.95 an hour. Recruitment problems have led to teenagers, too young to drive, being employed as guards. They show their suitability for the job by seeing who can smash a prisoner's head hardest into a cell wall. Soon after the Santa Rosa jail in New Mexico opened last year, guards repeatedly kicked a shackled prisoner in the head, watched over by the deputy warden. The guards were sacked but the warden was moved to another of Wackenhut's jails.

Wackenhut cares nothing for prisoners' welfare and little more for that of its employees. Ralph Garcia, a newly 'trained' guard at Santa Rosa, was stabbed and bled to death during a riot. Wackenhut's response to criticism of its policy of one guard per 60 prisoners (as opposed to two in state-run prisons) was, 'We'd rather lose one officer than two.'

## Cheap brutality

Gregory Palast, writing about Wackenhut in *The Observer* noted, 'Brutality is cheap – humanity expensive.' But the truth is, Wackenhut's claim that it can 'house, feed, guard and educate inmates for \$43 a day' is a lie. Every time prisoners smash cells or riot against brutality and oppressive conditions, the state has to send in riot police to regain control. A riot by 200 prisoners in April cost New Mexico's Treasury thousands, with the state threatening to bill Wackenhut in future for riot control costs.

In September Wackenhut was fined £400,000 and lost a Texas jail contract after prison staff were accused of sexually abusing prisoners.



Stabbed guard being taken to hospital from New Mexico private jail

Florida too has pulled the plug on Wackenhut contracts and Australian contracts are also under threat.

## Never fear – Labour's here

But, hey guys! It's OK. Jack Straw still thinks you're nice people to do business with, and is not deterred by the British Prison Service's own bad experience with Wackenhut, whose contract to run prison industries at HMP Coldingley was abruptly terminated in February, following allegations of gross mismanagement.

So now there's Doncaster; Tinsley House Immigration Detention Centre at Gatwick; Lowdham Grange Prison (though you do face an £83,000 fine for 20 assaults there); you even run Scotland's only private prison (though we'd better not go into last month's sit-in protests and cell fires); and there's the planned Marchington prison with your name on it.

And while a Wackenhut Juvenile Detention Centre in Texas faces charges that 'offensive sexual contact...and rape were rampant and residents were physically injured, hospitalised with broken bones',

## 17 years too long on death row – Free Mumia Abu-Jamal now!

The struggle to free the US's most famous political prisoner from death row has entered a new phase.

Mumia Abu-Jamal was sentenced to death in 1982, following his framing for the shooting of a police officer. He had been well known to the police since he was a teenage activist in the Black Panther Party. As a journalist he had sympathetically reported on the struggle of the MOVE organisation, of which he became a member, and on the campaign of terror and murder waged against MOVE by the Philadelphia authorities and police.

In 1995, when Mumia was just days away from execution, worldwide protest helped secure a fresh appeal. This process was exhausted this year and a new execution date set for 2 December 1999.

On 15 October Mumia's lawyers filed a petition for 'habeas corpus', citing 29

Premier opened a new children's prison here in County Durham at the end of September, courtesy of the Home Office.

## Cost, cost, cost

Paul Boateng, another born-again private prison fanatic, says there will be a 'continuing and expanding role for the private sector'. When challenged over the renewal of Doncaster's contract with Premier, Boateng insisted the decision was 'not just a question of pounds, shillings and pence'. Oh no? The classified Home Office report showed that Premier could run the prison for £189 a year (52p per day) less, per prisoner, than the Prison Service.

Indeed, Group 4 lost its contract for Buckley Hall in Rochdale, last month, when the Prison Service showed it could run it with greater 'cost effectiveness'. This despite pay rises for prison officers of more than £1,600 a year, a generous pension scheme and better holidays! Watch this space for the effect on prisoners.

Group 4 was shattered. 'It's a tremendous blow for our staff,' whinged Jim Harrower, executive vice president. But he won't worry too much. Group 4 has annual profits of £86 million, new security contracts at the Pentagon and GCHQ and a forthcoming contract for a 3,000 place prison in South Africa. And as Harrower gushed, the company has 'never received anything other than encouragement from Jack Straw, even when Labour was in opposition'. They're laughing all the way to the bank. ■

violations of his constitutional rights and requesting a federal court hearing at which all the witnesses and evidence excluded from his original trial by the rabidly pro-police judge, could be produced.

On 26 October Judge Yohn granted a temporary stay of execution. He then gave Mumia's lawyer until 7 December to add legal argument to the petition, the state attorneys 60 days after that to submit their reply, and Mumia's lawyer a further 20 days to reply to the reply, taking the process up to 2 March. After this the judge will set a date for the first full court hearing, at which Mumia will be present.

How events will progress after that is unclear, but what is certain is that activists around the world now have three months in which to ensure the name of Mumia Abu-Jamal is on everyone's lips and becomes a synonym for US imperialist injustice.

Nicki Jameson

London events: 2 December 8pm Public Meeting at University College London, Gower St, WC1. Organising meetings: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, second and fourth Thursday every month, 7.30pm. More info from [www.callnetuk.com/home/mumia](http://www.callnetuk.com/home/mumia) or Mumia Must Live! BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX.

# PRISON NEWS

## Free Satpal Ram

The campaign to free Satpal Ram is growing in strength. Satpal has served 13 years for the self-defence killing of a racist who attacked him. Solicitor Gareth Peirce is currently preparing a submission to the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC), while writer Irving Welsh

and DJ Annie Nightingale have joined Satpal's staunch supporters, bands Asian Dub Foundation and Primal Scream, to publicise his unjust imprisonment. Canadian supporters recently demonstrated outside the British Embassy.

FRFI has known and supported Satpal since 1994 and continues to support all initiatives to have his racist conviction overturned.

Write to Satpal Ram (E94164), HMP Full Sutton, Moor Lane, York YO4 1PS. For campaign information e-mail [FreeSatpalRam@ncadc.demon.uk](mailto:FreeSatpalRam@ncadc.demon.uk) or write to Free Satpal Campaign, 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B19 1NH.

## Not fit for children

The wrath of Jack Straw descended on the Chief Inspector of Prisons when he said the two children sentenced to life imprisonment for killing James Bulger should be released before they reach 18. Ramsbotham's complaint wasn't about the illegal interference with the length of the boys' sentence by both Michael Howard and Jack Straw, but about the appallingly brutal nature of the Young Offender Institutes which they face transfer to. Straw demanded an apology for the suggestion that Her Majesty's fine prisons might not be suitable places to grow up in. Sir David, being anxious to keep his job, duly backed down.

Meanwhile, the two young men face a life in oppressive institutions, where they will continue to be used as political pawns by 'law and order' Home Secretaries.

## Dessie Cunningham – inquest verdict

In September a jury at Wisbech Coroner's Court heard harrowing details of the last hours in the life of Dessie Cunningham, who was found hanged at Whittemoor prison on 31 December 1998. They returned a verdict of 'suicide while the balance of his mind was disturbed', the Coroner having ruled out 'suicide aggravated by neglect'. However, anyone listening to the evidence would have realised the Prison Service was guilty of neglect. Prison officers openly admitted being told to keep an eye on Dessie that night as he had been 'acting strangely' and 'hearing voices'; yet managed to interpret this as merely carrying out the same two-hourly checks they would on any Category A prisoner on any night. The Prison Service has a series of fine-sounding policies for monitoring potentially suicidal prisoners but at the end of the day cares nothing for those in its so-called care.

## Clemency for Ana Lucia

FRFI is supporting the campaign to free Cuban-American political prisoner Ana Lucia Gelabert, who has been serving two concurrent life sentences in a Texas prison since 1984. Ana Lucia is 61 years old and has no

previous convictions. This would make her a prime candidate for release, were it not for the political nature of her convictions.

Letters asking for Ana Lucia's sentence to be commuted from life to 'time already served' should be sent to: John B Holmes Jr, Harris County District Attorney, 201 Fannin Street (Suite 200), Houston, TX77002, USA and Governor George W Bush Jr, State Capitol, Austin TX78711, USA. A model letter and list of other addresses to write to is available on FRFI's website. Ana Lucia's prison number is 384484 and you can write to her at 1401 State School Road – RS Gatesville, TX 76599-0001.

## FRFI for prisoners

As part of FRFI's commitment to the prison struggle, we provide the paper free to all prisoners who request it. Several years ago, we launched a drive to encourage FRFI subscribers to contribute towards the cost. We are

now attempting to double the number of prisoners' subscriptions paid for and are asking all our readers to consider paying for an FRFI subscription for a prisoner. Please send cheques for £10 to Larkin Publications at BCM 5909, London, WC1N 3XX.

## STOP PRESS – Ronnie Easterbrook on hunger strike

As FRFI goes to press, Ronnie Easterbrook is entering his third week on hungerstrike in protest against the CCRC's refusal to refer his case back to the Court of Appeal. Ronnie is 69 and was sentenced in 1988 to life imprisonment, following his participation in an armed robbery set up by a police informer and filmed for a TV 'exclusive'. Send letters of support to Ronnie Easterbrook B88459, HMP Highdown, Sutton, Surrey, SM2 5PD. ■



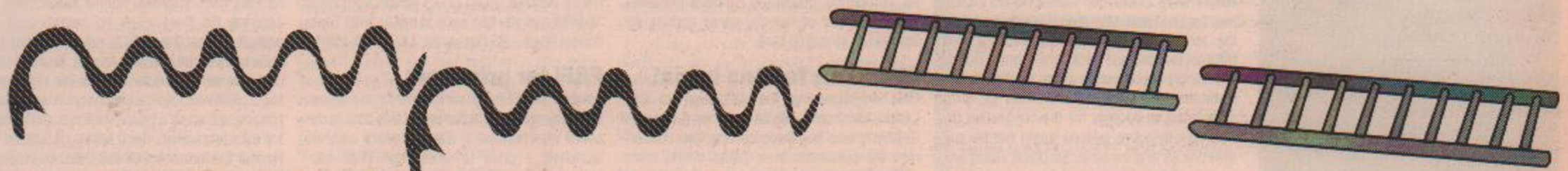


# END OF MILLENNIUM SNAKES & LADDERS

2000 <b>FORWARD TO THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION</b>	1999 East Timor wins independence. NATO war in Yugoslavia	1998 Labour government elected	1997	1996	1995	1994 Elections in South Africa	1993	1992 Soviet Union falls. Gulf War	1991
1981 Riots in Brixton, Toxteth. Hunger Strike in Ireland	1982 Falklands/Malvinas war	1983 US invades Grenada	1984 Miners' strike starts	1985 Miners' strike ends	1986 USA bombs Libya	1987 Stock market crash. Start of Intifada	1988 Gibraltar 3 shot by SAS	1989 Berlin Wall comes down	1990 Mandela released from gaol. Poll tax riot. Strangeways uprising
1980 Tito dies	1979 Thatcher elected	1978 Shah of Iran deposed	1977	1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa	1975 US defeated in Viet Nam. Mozambique & Angola win independence	1974 RCG formed. Take an extra turn if you land here!	1973 Coups in Chile	1972 Bloody Sunday	1971 Murder of George Jackson. Internment in N. Ireland
1961 Cuba: Bay of Pigs Invasion	1962 Cuba: missile crisis	1963	1964 Malcolm X murdered	1965 Freedom march to Jackson, Mississippi	1966	1967 Che Guevara murdered	1968 Tet offensive. May 1968 student uprisings	1969 British troops sent to N. Ireland	1970
1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa	1959 The Cuban Revolution	1958	1957	1956 Suez crisis	1955	1954 CIA-backed coup in Guatemala	1953 Death of Stalin	1952 Mau Mau uprising in Kenya	1951
1941	1942	1943 Victory at Stalingrad	1944	1945 End of World War II. Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombed	1946	1947 Indian independence	1948 Creation of state of Israel	1949 Chinese Revolution	1950 Korean war
1940 Murder of Trotsky	1939 World War II begins	1938 Germany annexes Austria	1937	1936 Spanish Civil War begins	1935 China: Long March	1934	1933 Hitler comes to power in Germany	1932 Japan invades Manchuria	1931
1921 Irish Civil War	1922 Mussolini comes to power in Italy	1923	1924 Lenin dies	1925	1926 General Strike	1927	1928	1929 Great stock-market crash	1930
1920	1919 Treaty of Versailles. Murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht	1918 Votes for Women	1917 Russian Revolution led by Bolsheviks	1916 Easter Rising, Ireland	1915 World War I starts	1914 Second International socialists betray the working class	1913 Dublin Lockout	1912 First International Women's Day	1911
1901 Queen Victoria dies	1902	1903 Bolsheviks and Mensheviks split	1904 First Russian Revolution	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910 Mexican revolution

This End of Millennium game of Snakes & Ladders is designed to fill in all those bleak moments over the New Year when the bourgeoisie's millennium festivities are revealed as completely pointless and idiotic. We have selected some landmark dates over the last century: you will be able to add others. The snakes and ladders mark dates which have been significant for the working class. There are extra snakes and ladders below to cut out and stick on any other dates you choose.

Equip yourselves with coloured counters and dice. Each player takes turns to throw the die and whoever rolls the highest number goes first to Square 1901. On your turn, roll the die and move your counter forwards by the number of squares thrown. If you land on a square at the bottom of a ladder, move up to the top of the ladder. If you land on a snake's head, you go down to the tail. More than one counter can occupy a square. If you throw a six, take an extra turn. The winner is the first to reach the millennium, 2000. You must roll exactly the right number to land on 2000. If you throw a higher number, you must move forward to 2000 and then back out again.









**FIGHT  
RACISM**

**FIGHT IMPERIALISM**

## Who wants to be Mayor of London?

# Turn again, Livingstone

Lord Archer wanted to be mayor – until a small matter of attempting to pervert the course of justice got in the way of the sleazeball's ambitions. Newspapers are now devoting pages and pages to London's mayoral election even though it will not take place until May next year. But what is in it for the working class? Nothing at all. Such elected dictators have become a byword for corruption in other countries such as the US. It will not be any different here. The mayor of London will be able to assign huge contracts on a budget of £3bn per annum. Companies will offer the successful candidate many favours as they try to get on the gravy train of 'public-private partnership', the euphemism for legalised corruption. Hence it is not surprising that Archer lied about past skeletons in order to get the Tory nomination – he could smell the money that would come his way.

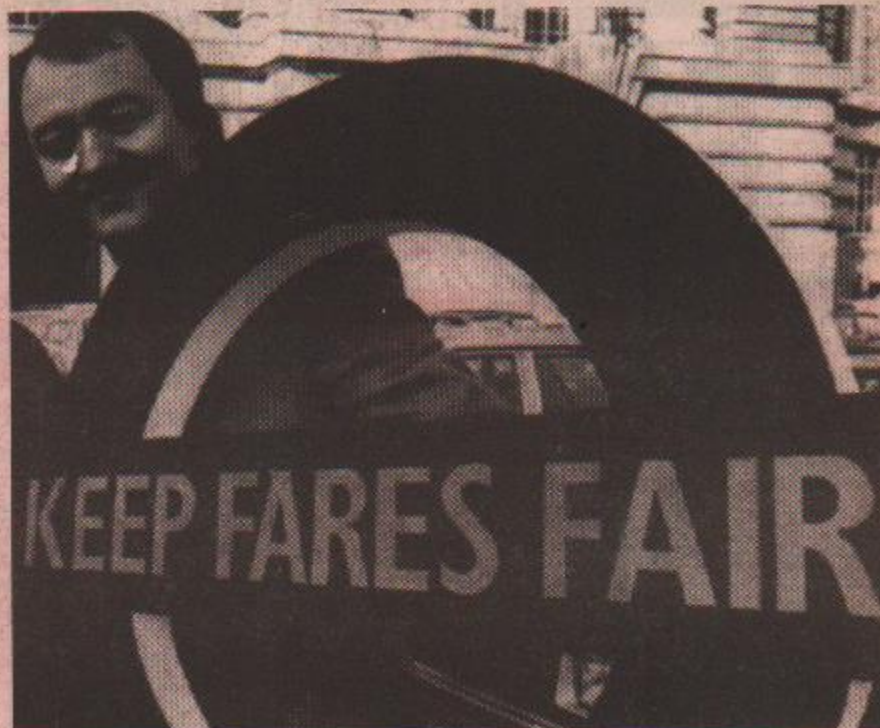
Labour has managed to get itself into a complete pickle over its preferred candidate in its desperation to rule out Ken Livingstone. Not that Livingstone would present any serious challenge to it: he has made that clear time and time again. However, Blair had to work hard to find a remotely credible alternative. In the end, he could only persuade Frank Dobson by demonstrating that he would put the entire Labour Party

apparatus at the former Health Secretary's disposal. First Blair changed the selection procedure by replacing 'one member, one vote' with an electoral college. This handed a third of the votes to MPs and MEPs – by definition overwhelmingly pro-Blair; a third to trade unions who were expected to cast their block vote in favour of Blair's candidate, leaving members with the remaining third. When unions like MSF and Unison decided they would ballot their members on the selection, they were suddenly found to be in subscription arrears and immediately barred since they would probably have ended up pro-Livingstone. Now it seems that Labour HQ has illegally allowed the Dobson campaign access to the Party membership list to send out a maildrop.

Livingstone's popularity has two sources: firstly, memories of his leadership of the Greater London Council (GLC) in the early 1980s, in particular the Fares Fair policy; and secondly his opposition to the privatisation of the Underground. Together these give him the image of a rebel, willing to stand up against the government whatever party is in

office. Yet in reality, Livingstone has been content to talk a good fight rather than conduct one. And his ambition to be mayor has led him to trample on any principle which might allow socialists to give him any support. In particular, he signalled his desire for respectability by supporting NATO's military campaign against Yugoslavia. Not only that, he announced that his 1991 opposition to the Gulf War had been a mistake. His stand confirms the fact that if you scratch a Labour left-winger you will find a shameless imperialist, particularly if they are close to any position of real power.

What is striking is how little separates Livingstone from Dobson as Labour candidate. It all boils down to the privatisation of London Underground. Of course socialists oppose the privatisation of the Tube – it would be a disaster like the railways. But the idea that Livingstone is going to stop it is completely absurd. To do that he would have to put himself at the head of a campaign against the Labour government. He would have to break from the Labour Party. He has repeatedly made it clear he won't do this. On the other hand, the left



clearly has illusions that he will. John Rees in *Socialist Worker* says 'some people think that because Ken Livingstone supported NATO during the Balkan War we should now have nothing to do with him. But revolutionaries have to look at the totality of the situation. Livingstone has become a focus for tens of thousands of people who want to give Blair a bloody nose'. It is funny how for the SWP being 'revolutionary' involves voting Labour at every opportunity.

The fact that Blair has moved heaven and earth in a failed effort to prevent Livingstone from being shortlisted is not the issue. Blair's manoeuvres may have shocked sections of the middle-class who had illusions in his democratic credentials, but the greater concern of

socialists must be with Labour's onslaught on all our rights – the Asylum Act, curfews and anti-social orders, the new anti-terrorism legislation and the removal of rights to jury trial. A Labour government for which Livingstone is at pains to express his support is undertaking all of this. It is a further reason why *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* does not support Livingstone. There may be tens of thousands of people who want to give Blair a bloody nose, but they cannot give him a bloody nose in the ballot booth – they have to be out on the streets involved in mass direct action. Licking the boots of Livingstone demonstrates the most craven illusions in Livingstone and what he represents.

Robert Clough

## Labour takes away our rights, hammering the poor

**For all the hullabaloo about the abolition of the House of Lords, we are now living under the most punitive, anti-working class government for the last 50 years, and probably longer. We have fewer rights than at any time in the past 50 years, and those that remain are going to be eroded even further. Yet such is the pathetic state of the British left that they still urge us to vote Labour, and support charlatans like Ken Livingstone. Labour's conference and the recent pre-budget statement from Gordon Brown makes quite clear that there will be no let up, as ROBERT CLOUGH reports.**

In the absence of any opposition, Labour has been able to attack sections of the working class with impunity. Eligibility for disability benefits is to be reduced and they are to be means-tested under the new Welfare Act. The closure of Remploy factories that provide employment to the disabled is another cost-cutting exercise in the absence of any meaningful legislation on employment discrimination. The vicious attacks on asylum seekers in Dover; Straw's outburst against travellers, the mooted removal of the right to strike from firemen protesting against service cuts, Labour's overall penal and prison policy, the nonsense of the Freedom of Information Bill, are all examples of a totalitarian government determined to crush dissent before it emerges.

Labour is as much committed to a deregulated economy as the Tories ever were. But the government's dominant position in parliament is allowing to consider what was unthinkable to the Tories – privatising air traffic control and the Underground. It allows Gordon Brown to cut £700m from planned pollution taxes whilst giving pensioners just 73p a week more – a pitiful 1.1% increase. This is being, in Brown's words, 'pro-enterprise, pro-competition' with a vengeance. Yet this is not all. In his pre-Budget statement he announced cuts in capital gains tax on buying and selling business assets and shares from 40% to 10% if they are held for more than five years. He will also set up what he calls



Enterprise Management Initiatives which allow companies to award up to £1m share options tax free, changing the current position where payouts on share options have been limited to four times annual salary. Furthermore, all employees holding shares for five years will be exempt from income and capital gains tax. From April 2000, employers can make a tax-free gift of £3,000 worth of shares to an employee, whilst employees can buy up to £1,500 tax-free.

Yet there is an aspect of Labour's policy which is very different from the Tories, and that is its approach to the impoverished sections of the working class. There are a large number of initiatives dealing with what it describes as 'Social Exclusion'. The

latest is the tests for three-year-olds, but they include Sure Start, Quality Protects, Education and Health Action Zones, Health Improvement Programmes, housing and regeneration initiatives. One thing these all have in common: they do not give money directly to the poor. Quite the opposite: Labour is, not pretend to raise levels of benefit, extend eligibility or restore the link between pensions and earnings. Instead it is engaged in a process of social regimentation. The Tories were content to leave the poorer sections of the working class to stew in the ghettos of social housing that could not be sold off. Labour is not: it wants to discipline the poor, to hound them into submission. Hence the curfews for

children, social control orders, Youth Offending Teams, youth ID cards: there will be no hiding place, no refuge from the forces of the state.

Active policing will be the order of the day. 10,000 or 15,000 extra police will be recruited depending on whose figures you believe. There will be legislation to extend the national DNA database so that it has samples from 3 million supposedly 'active' criminals – as opposed to the present 650,000. Compulsory drugs testing will complement compulsory DNA testing. Those in breach of community service orders will have their benefits stopped. The oppressive regime of the JSA will be extended to the over-25s. People who are suspected of benefit fraud will be required to sign on daily. And if they are hauled before the courts, they will have lost the right to jury trial if they are accused of 'either way' offences.

A deregulated economy demands a highly regulated workforce, and Labour is demonstrating its commitment to the repressive legislation necessary to ensure that entrepreneurs can flourish, new millionaires spring up. Once more we have to ask ourselves: how can the left continue to support Labour? How can they begin to think that campaigning for Ken Livingstone will make the blindest bit of difference when he has made absolutely clear he will not break from Labour? The only position that socialists can adopt is one of outright opposition to this racist, imperialist and anti-working class party. ■