

CLASS STRUGGLE

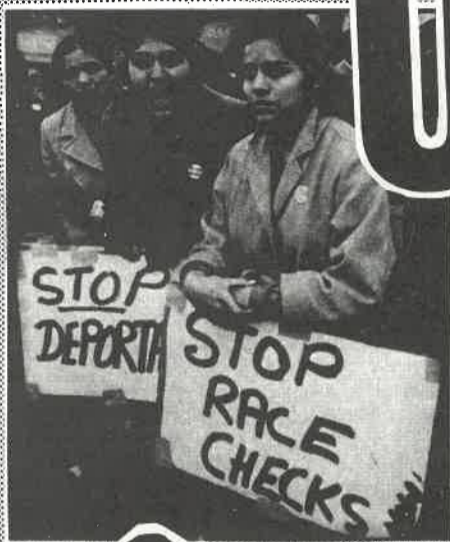


Political Paper of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

VOL.12, NO.2, MARCH 1988

25P

UNITE



THE

MAN



The first two months of 1988 have seen a wave of industrial and workplace strikes and protests. Fords workers went on strike for the first time for ten years and won a partial victory over pay and conditions. We also saw the pit deputies on strike, stopping all production at many pits; seamen on strike over jobs and Landrover workers out over their pay offer.

Every day, there are reports of new protests or actions about the state of the National Health Service. In the Day of Action in the North West, 60 hospitals were picketed. Vauxhall workers joined in, as had Yorkshire miners in earlier protests. In Scotland, over 60,000 took part in protests against the privatisation of hospital services there.

The government has been telling us since before the last election, that the economy is booming. Unemployment, they say, is coming down and we should "be proud to be British again".

All the statistics tell of a widening gap between the rich and poor in Britain today: in jobs and pay; in housing; in health and any other part of our lives you could mention.

20,000 MILLIONAIRES

At the same time, Money Magazine recently published the results of a survey that showed who

are the rich. In Britain today, in terms of personal wealth alone, there are seven billionnaires, 18 families and individuals worth more than £250 million each and 20,000 millionaires. The Queen comes top of the list with an estimated £3.34 billion. However, in general, it is the "self-made" rich, such as Harry Hyman (of Centre Point fame), various pop stars and Robert Maxwell who are now outnumbering those who have inherited their wealth.

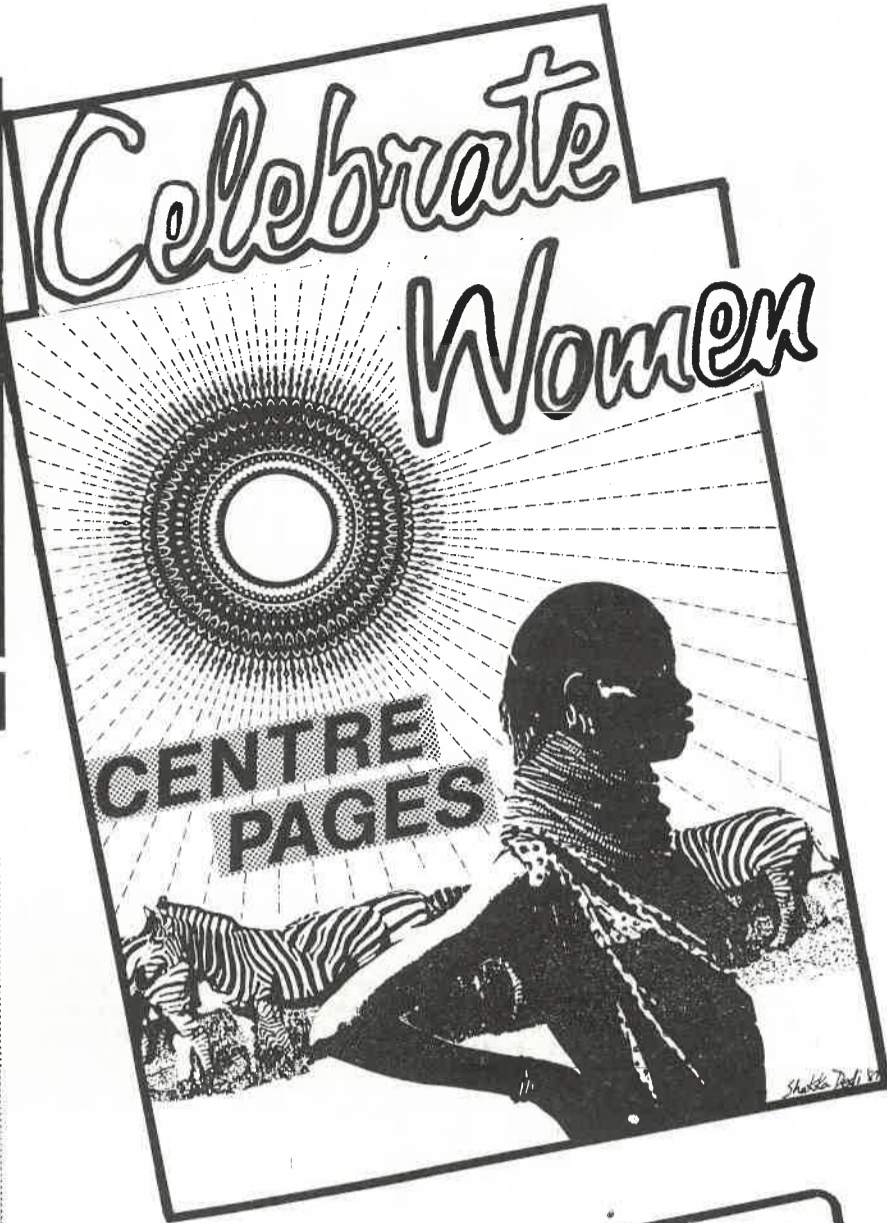
While those who benefit from the boom in the economy may be counting their millions,

there are many others of us counting the cost of the boom to ourselves and our living standards.

Whereas a year ago, much of the anger could be diverted into hoping for a different government and putting the blame on nasty Tories, rather than the whole structure of the system, now the mood has changed. People have begun to realise again that all they have to rely on is their own strength and their own actions.

While we support all struggles by working people to defend their living standards, it is around the health service that the interests of the majority can be united at this time. Most people need an efficient health service and support the demand for free health care for all.

A fight to defend this principle can be combined with the struggle to improve pay and conditions for the thousands of low paid workers, mostly women, on whom the health service depends.



WOMENS STRUGGLES ARE EVERYWHERE....



INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY, MARCH 8th.

In mid-February, 'Class Struggle' interviewed a shop steward in a Birmingham hospital about the state of the National Health Service and the recent upsurge in protests about health service cuts.

CS: The last month has seen an upsurge of protests by NHS workers. Why has this happened now?

Shop steward: Basically, I think it's a result of years of frustration at seeing the cuts building up to a point where the service is really on the point of collapse. Those of us working in hospitals see how bad things really are every day. Everything is being affected. The problems that hit the headlines are only the tip of the iceberg.

Pay and conditions have got steadily worse. Many more would leave the service if only there were other jobs to go to.

Some of the recent strike action has been about pay, conditions and the extension of privatisation to Scotland. However, most of the protests are about the lack of money to run the service.

There have been protests about cuts at a local level for years. But now these are becoming regional or even national.

Years of organising by local union activists to get members involved in a fightback have begun to win widespread support.

It's also clear that the government intended to bring about some fundamental changes in how the NHS is funded. This worried a lot of people.

All these things have come together this year, and that's why the protests have sprung up. There's a feeling that it's have a go this year. Otherwise it will be too late.

CS: How significant do you think the protests are?

Shop steward: In the past, strike action has been about pay. In 1979, the ancillary unions struck against the Labour government. In the 1982 pay strike many more groups of health workers took joint action, admittedly without support from the majority of nurses.

What is different now is that nurses (who make up half the workforce) are becoming more involved.

Also, what we are seeing is that the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is under threat. They are not a proper trade union and in the past, they have only been interested in their own members; not prepared to unite with other sections of the staff. They helped the government divide health service workers after the 1982 dispute. RCN members are beginning to rethink their position and some are joining NUPE and COHSE. This has forced the RCN leadership to ballot its members on the right to strike.

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FREE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

More importantly is the fact that the protests are about defending the NHS.

The whole issue of what taxes should be used for is central. People are protesting in the streets and challenging the government's priorities. The national protest on 5th March, and other regional protests are aimed at influencing what is decided in the Budget.

As in 1982, there is growing support from workers outside the NHS. Action from them can provide economic muscle which the health service workers lack.

We are not fighting for our-

selves but for the rights of all ordinary people. For all its faults, the NHS must be defended. Ordinary people are the ones that suffer as the service is cut back. That the state must provide free health care for all, is a progressive demand.

CS: Obviously, the main target is the Thatcher government. What do you think of the Labour Party's role?

Shop steward: At the grassroots local members are very involved. Many of them do want to help. They feel strongly about the NHS. However, personally, I don't trust the Labour Party.

It sees the NHS as a vote-catching exercise. In opposition, it makes the expected left-sounding noises which are quickly forgotten should it get elected.

The Labour Party and the trade union leadership conveniently forget the record of the last Labour government. It cut NHS spending. The "winter of discontent" saw ancillary workers striking against low pay.

In the run-up to the last two general elections, the message came down from the union leadership: Rely on the Labour Party; put all your efforts into getting them elected. If they didn't get elected, then there was no hope for us. The struggle was diverted away into the parliamentary game.

During the 1982 pay strike, the Labour Party said it supported us but not if we took industrial action. They are saying the same now. Of course, they have been quick to jump on the bandwagon with their 'Make Budget Day NHS Day' campaign.

As far as I can see, looking at the record of past Labour governments, there is no evidence that the NHS would be safer in their hands.

CS: How do you think the Tories will respond?

Shop steward: I don't think anyone should expect a quick change of heart. In January, and again this week, they stated that there is no more money for the NHS. A big change in policy would be seen as a major defeat for their basic strategy of lower taxes, reduced government spending and involvement, private medicine and privatisation.

It's widely thought in trade union circles that the Tories planned to deal with the NHS this autumn. It's something

they do feel vulnerable on; the protests are a problem to them.

However, there is the danger that they will try and turn the argument on its head and claim that all the protests show is that the NHS is no longer viable and there is a need to do something drastic about it.

CS: How do you see the future?

Shop steward: We need to gear ourselves up for a campaign that goes beyond the Budget. We need to be wary of the trade union leadership which is frightened of real action. During the 1982 pay strike, they tried to contain and dilute the action.

We need to campaign for a massive injection of cash. The figure of £2 billion is widely talked about. The cuts need to be halted and reversed. The low wages of all health workers (not just nurses) have subsidised the NHS ever since 1948. To stop staff leaving and to restore low staff morale, wages must be significantly increased. There are many new services that need to be set up.

A massive shift to private health insurance looms high on the horizon. That's care for those that can pay. Our campaigning must be ready to resist this.

We must not let the Labour Party dominate the campaign. What we need to do is to build on the growing support that we are already getting to build a broad campaign that is based on local involvement, taking the argument out amongst the people. This should be combined with regional and national activity.

The right to free health care at the time of need must remain central.



'Class Struggle' correspondent.

Over the last few months, 'Class Struggle' has described how life for the bulk of the population in Britain today, is, at best unsatisfactory and, at worst, just awful.

UNFAIR STATE

Next month, things will get even worse for the large numbers of people who are on benefit or on below average wages, when the new Social Security Act comes into operation. The main features of this will be that the Supplementary Benefit will be replaced by the Income Support Scheme; Family Income Supplement will be abolished and replaced by the Family Credit System and a Social Fund will be set up, under which the present system of cash grants to help people on benefit at times of emergency, will be replaced by a loan system for some and abolished altogether for others.

Everyone over 18 will have to pay the new poll tax. This

will put another great burden on the poorer sections of the community since it is a flat rate payment. It will hit hard at working class families, particularly those with older sons and daughters, or elderly relatives, living at home.

It is clearly the government's intention to reduce what they call "the dependency culture", by which they mean young people being dependent on the state. However, they will not be reducing dependency: young people without a job, or even with a low paid job or studying, will simply become more dependent on their families, many of whom are in no position to help.

KEEPING WAGES DOWN

Details of the government's new "training scheme" have now been released by the Employment

Secretary, Norman Fowler. According to 'The Guardian', the government plans to reduce the unemployment statistics to below two million by the time of the next election. Its new programme will be aimed at all those between 18 and 50 who have been out of work for more than six months, and it notes that moderation in pay settlements is essential for the continued growth of jobs.

Speaking on the Radio 4 programme, File on Four, Patrick Minford, the right-wing professor of Economics at Liverpool University, said: "The

whole object of these schemes from an economic point of view, is to drive down wages. If they don't drive down wages, there is no job creation and

this must be made absolutely clear."

This is at the heart of the government's strategy towards working class youth: using the new scheme to make them work for their benefit and in that way, getting them used to the needs of the labour market and to an expectation of lower wages; with a knock-on effect being felt later by older employed workers.

VICTORIAN MORALITY

Much of the attack on the "dependency culture" is rooted in the Victorian notion of self help and the notion of the poor being in that state because it is their own fault. Much of the language of, and the inspiration behind, this right wing attack on living standards, is American. But the reality behind these fine-sounding phrases is different.

Firstly, you cannot blame young unemployed people if there are no proper jobs or apprenticeships to be had. It is not their fault that companies have rationalised, move away to other countries or introduced new machinery, all in the interests of profit. Secondly, it is not true that you only get what you work for. Anyone who bought British Telecom shares, and sold them shortly after and so made a large profit, did not do any work to get that windfall. And that is only small fry compared to the daily dealings on the Stock Exchange where people can acquire millions of pounds simply as a result of a telephone call or by changes in the currencies of different countries.

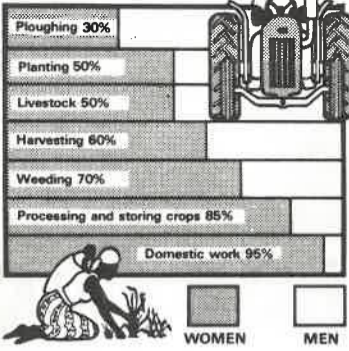
Clearly, individuals are not responsible for the poverty in which they find themselves. It is the capitalist system which is to blame, geared to making ever-increasing profits at the expense of ordinary people.

★ BLAMING THE POOR ★

WOMEN FARMERS

DIVISION OF LABOUR

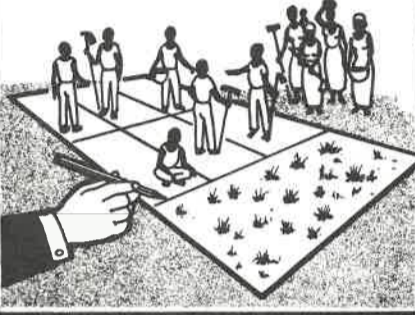
Women in Africa do up to three quarters of all agricultural work in addition to their domestic responsibilities.



Source: UN Economic Commission for Africa

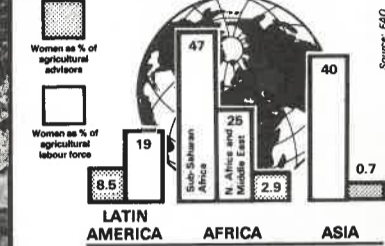
LOSS OF LAND

Many women—especially in Africa—have lost their traditional rights to the land they work because colonial laws and development policies have tended to allocate land only to men.



FEMALE FARMERS

Women grow half of the world's food. But most agricultural advisors are men—who tend to give advice to men.



A Closer Look

Local studies show that national surveys invariably underestimate women's agricultural work.

Country	National figures	Local figures
EGYPT	3.6%	35-50%
PERU	2.6%	86%

GLIMPSES INTO HERSTORY

To mark International Women's Day, 1988, 'Class Struggle' is printing this article, the first in a series. Although the League has for many years paid lip service to the importance of developing and putting into practice a policy on the question of women, it has made little progress so far. This series of articles is intended to help the debate and we welcome comments and criticisms from our readers.

This first article looks briefly at the debate surrounding the origins of women's oppression and at some of the history of women's oppression around the world. It is the struggles of women themselves who have put these questions firmly back on the political agenda in 1988.

WOMEN IN THE WORLD

INTRODUCTION:

Women's oppression affects half the world's population. Women all over the globe are victims of sexism, violence and male domination. And yet their oppression remains largely invisible.

Women have resisted exploitation in all its various guises through the centuries. And yet this history is largely forgotten, hidden or ridiculed.

Women do two thirds of all labour in the world and also the labour of reproduction. And yet women's work is given little value and everywhere marginalised.

The "new" women's movement which has grown up since the 1960's, both in the West and in Third World countries, has produced a wealth of feminist literature and has been active on many practical issues which affect women in their daily lives. Sections of this movement have explored both the origins of women's subordination and the links between women's oppression and the international division of labour as well as the wider issues of its relation to

present day imperialism, the exploitation of the Third world and the working class.

In many liberation movements and in socialist countries, women have come to the fore. But the relationship between socialism and the oppression of women remains theoretically unexplored, with only a few exceptions.

For women in this country - whether they suffer from exploitation in the form of violence and rape, poor pay and prospects, lack of reproductive rights or simply from their undervalued position in a sick society - these questions are of fundamental importance. Yet 'Class Struggle' has, over the years, managed to report on them only occasionally and analyse them even less.

We hope that this series will open the debate on women's oppression, and especially its relation to class and national oppression.

ORIGINS OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

The beginnings of women's subordination by man is partially lost in time. But it seems likely that it came about at different stages in different social organisations, and was always an oppression based on violence. We have to try and take a non-Eurocentric view of this and study the position of women in different societies, at different times in history.

The traditional Marxist line holds that the start of women's oppression coincides with the development of class society and private property. Women's role as the bearers and rearers of children, with the essential tasks of food gathering or growing, clothing and nursing that these entail, earned them equality and respect in pre-class society, where survival was the name of the game. But when the production of surplus led to its appropriation by one class at the expense of another, things changed.

Women's role, which had previously ensured their equality, now ensured their inequality, by excluding them from social production. On this basis, a complex and pervasive ideology of male superiority and female inferiority has developed.

However, this view has been challenged by Third World Marxists such as Samir Amin and Cheikh Anta Diop, as well as by many feminists. Diop's researches suggest that although in pastoral and nomadic societies patriarchy was established very early, it was not so in the agricultural societies which were established in most parts of Africa. In these societies, which were based on subsistence agriculture, with hunting as a luxury extra, a matriarchal system was established which survives to the present day in some areas.

In the great ancient civilisations of Egypt and Ethiopia, women held high positions of state power and there were several influential queens, such as Queen Hatshepsut. In addition, there were matriarchal kin structures and great importance and respect were given to women. These matriarchal systems were overthrown by outside influences: by invasion, influence of religions such as Islam and later by the colonial invasions of European powers and their Christian religion.

It will be argued later in this series that women's oppression today is an intrinsic part of the society that we live in and that women's liberation is an essential component of the struggle to overthrow imperialism. It is also clear that the forms of women's oppression change with the different societies that they are part of. However, what the above examples show is that the exact origins of women's oppression are an important area of debate which recent research has shown to be more complex than has often been held by Marxists.

GLIMPSES INTO HERSTORY

In later history, there are well-documented examples from around the world, of the imposition of women's oppression by force. In Europe, in the so-called Dark Ages, there is evidence that women had built up great skills in healing, as midwives, in controlling reproduction and performing abortions. But these large numbers of strong and independent women were a threat to the emerging bourgeois order. Between the 14th and 18th centuries, the male guilds and rising bourgeoisie managed to push craftswomen out of the sphere of production and millions of women, mostly poor and rural women, were for centuries persecuted and burnt as witches. They were also used as scapegoats to divert the unrest of poor people away from the church and state. The scale of this persecution is undoubtedly much higher than history would have us believe. For example, one prosecutor, Benedikt Carpzov, of Leipzig signed 20,000 death sentences against witches.

In some parts of the world there was relative equality between the sexes before they were colonised. In others, imperialism intensified existing oppression of women. There are, for example, descriptions of Burma when the British first arrived, which tell of a society of freedom and equality for women, and a peaceful society based on Buddhism. It seems the same was true in Senegal, at a similar time, where women traders were in high positions of power.

There is no doubt that the Western colonial powers, Britain especially, systematically destroyed such societies and raped both the countries, and the women. As well as the physical and economic carnage, women were also exploited as potential breeders, and at different stages either prevented or coerced into childbirth. Women slaves in the Caribbean were

at first not allowed to marry or have children as it was cheaper to import more slave as replacements. But toward the end of the 18th century when the slave "trade" stopped the Caribbean women were suddenly under pressure to "breed" to replace the workforce. A similar pattern can be seen in plantations in Sumatra.

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Women have fought back long and hard against all these forms of oppression. The women of the Caribbean and Sumatra, for example, went on a birth strike. This tactic was also used by women in South West Africa rebelling against German invaders. The Herero women reduced their population from 80,000 to 19,962 between 1890 and 1909.

Population control is still a favourite strategy of oppression in the world today with millions of dollars of "development aid" imposing it on Third World countries. Recent campaigns against forced sterilisation and the contraceptive Depo-Provera, which the women's movement has taken up on an

international scale, are modern examples of resistance to the imperialist strategy.

Women in Africa have also fought back in more violent ways. In Eastern Nigeria, in 1910, 10,000 women marched and looted in protest at taxation and ill treatment by the colonial power.

The 19th century women's movement in Europe and the US was sparked off by the contradiction between the universal principles of the bourgeois revolution: freedom, equality and fraternity and the systematic exclusion of women from these basic rights.

In Britain, the second half of the 19th century and early part of the 20th, saw women active in many different fields. The history of the women's movement of this time, which involved women of different

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Women do two thirds of the world's work, five percent of the world's income, and

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"The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the guarantee of the pre-conditions for development."

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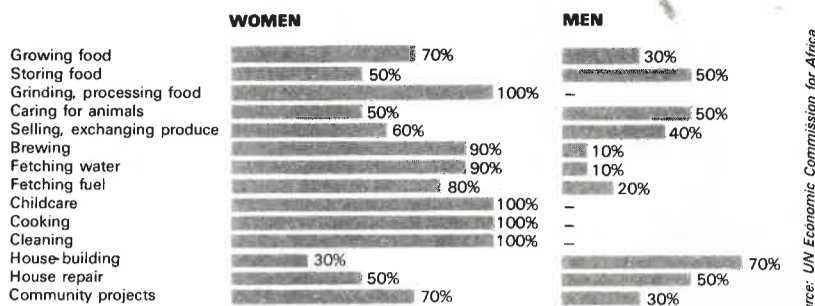
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WOMEN IN AFRICA

In the fields

Between 60 and 80 per cent of agricultural work in Africa is done by women—on top of their household chores. In fact women in Africa do more agricultural work than in any other continent—and twice as much as African men.

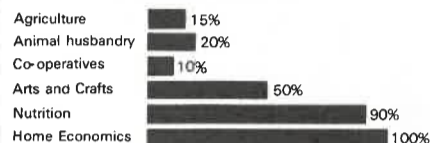


In many traditional African societies it is normal for women to support themselves, their children and their husbands. A quarter of a million households in Egypt, half a million in Kenya and a third of a million in Botswana are dependent on the productivity of their women.

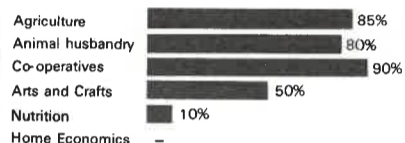
At school

Though African women do the majority of the work, the majority of the education about that work is provided for African men.

Nonformal education WOMEN



Nonformal education MEN



Source: UN Economic Commission for Africa

More work

Development tends to increase women's workload: new tractors lessen a man's work of ploughing; new seeds and fertilisers mean more weeding and hoeing for women. One study found that introduction of new technology in some African villages increased women's work by 25 per cent.



Photo: Werner Gartung



Photo: Mark Edwards

Education can be the key to women's liberation, offering greater equality with men, better understanding of family planning and a chance to work outside the home.



Photo: Mark Edwards

The two boxes are taken from the Third World calendar produced by New Internationalist publications.

class backgrounds fighting for their freedom in many different areas of their lives, has only recently been researched and written up. Later articles in this series will cover this period in more detail. At the same time, a working class women's movement developed, in other countries, notably in Germany, on the Marxist theory that only women's full economic participation in social production would lead to emancipation.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN THE SIXTIES

The "new" women's movement in the West developed in close relation to the other big movements: the movement against the war in Vietnam, the struggle for civil rights, particularly in the USA, leading to the Black Power movement. The women's movement evolved through women in small groups sharing their personal experiences and discovering that they had common experiences which required political action: "the personal is political". Such groups tended to concentrate on issues such as violence against women and sexuality. However, the movement broadened. A particularly important signpost was the strike of women sewing machinists at Fords in Dagenham who came out for equal pay.

The First National Liberation Conference in 1970 took Oxford by storm and demanded a total transformation of society whilst at the same time, challenging the orthodoxy and sexism of the left-wing groups. A year later, women marched for four basic demands: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand and free 24 hour nurseries.

The question of housework was raised, particularly by those who later became known as the "Wages For Housework" group, who challenged the theory that housework is non-productive labour and sparked off an on-going debate.

Later, in 1971, the book "The Dialectics of Sex" by Shulamith Firestone was published in the UK and the "radical feminist" current was born. Shulamith Firestone maintained that the primary cause of conflict between man and woman was in the relations of reproduction, and that woman's biological make-up had made it possible for men to wield power over women even before the development of class society. Women's main enemy is, in this analysis, men and the main aim for women's liberation has to be to seize control over reproduction.

In response to the challenge of radical feminism, there developed "socialist feminism" which started from a basic Marxist view that men oppress women by virtue of their social and economic relations with them. Socialist feminism today encompasses a wide range of views on the exact relationship between sex and class and has made progress particularly when it has drawn on the experience of feminists in Third World and socialist countries.

While there were distinct trends and theories within the women's movement and debates between and within them (which we should come back to in more detail later), there was often unity in action round numerous issues. A fifth demand for liberation for lesbian women was also added to the earlier four. In the 60's and 70's, big campaigns were organised round reproductive rights; rape and pornography, violence against women in the home; equal pay and opportunities; and childcare. An important development was the growth of black women's groups who took up the fight against the immigration laws and other aspects of racism and sexism. They also challenged, in practice and theory, racism among white women. Women were active in the peace movement and the Greenham camp has become famous around the world. In many cases, women's groups have not confined them-

selves to domestic issues but linked up with women around the world, active in the anti-imperialist struggle. Women have organised pickets in support of women Republican prisoners, both in Armagh and in this country as in Durham.

STRUGGLES IN THE THIRD WORLD

In the 20th century, the struggle against imperialist powers has taken the form of national liberation struggles in many countries. Revolutions such as the Chinese revolution could not have succeeded without the full participation of women. In other countries, we can see today a total transformation in the position of women through national liberation struggles such as that in Eritrea or Tigray.

In other parts of the world, small groups of women were meeting and developing their own feminist perspectives. By the Mid-Decade International Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1980, there was a growing militancy and network amongst Third World women and better links with other women around the world. That conference showed how the situation for women around the world was deteriorating. It also marked an escalation in feminist groups world-wide fighting back against such attacks on them such as dowry-killing and rape in India; sex-tourism in Thailand; clitoridectomy in Africa and various forms of machismo in Latin America.

The 1980's have seen the women's movement in the West fragmented while in many Third World countries, it is a growing movement. However, there is a growing realisation of the inter-relationships between the exploitation of women in different parts of the imperialist system, of the international division of labour and women's need to fight for reproductive rights world-wide.

GLOBAL SISTERHOOD

Women's oppression is a systematic feature of the world political economy and ideology.

Feminism and the different forms of women's fightback is found everywhere, too. Western feminism is derived from our own unique historical experience and cannot therefore be applied universally. Thus the analysis and strategy developed by the movement here is not to be denigrated but must be placed firmly in a comparative and historical perspective. There are inequalities and conflicting interests between women, based on class and nation and it is vital that we, as western women, understand that racism and imperialism may prevent us from understanding Third World women's situations. It is not likely that a single women's movement can address all the culturally specific forms of oppression. But any such movement must be aware and non-antagonistic to others.

SEX AND CLASS

It is not enough to say that all women are oppressed by all men. The feminist movement cannot ignore class, or the exploitative international division of labour and imperialism.

On the other hand, most 'left' groups have a record of subordinating the question of women to nothingness. The question of women is seen as subordinate to the class question, or simply as an ideological question to be overcome in time.

The question that is unresolved is the relationship of patriarchy and imperialism. Put crudely, we have to understand the aspects of women's oppression that are common to women of different classes and nations and how the almost universal domination of women by men has developed and can be overcome (patriarchy) and how this interrelates with the structure of class and national exploitation that makes up imperialism.

This is the question that we will have to return to, again and again, in the series of articles. Until we are clear on the basis of women's

oppression, we will not be able to destroy it and build a future society where women are free.

An organisation that really shows itself able to understand and value the labour of women in an imperialist society; to be able to fight the violence against women, to uphold the importance of reproduction as work, to give back to women power over their own bodies and minds and to treat their work in production as of equal value to men an organisation that does that, that shows the way forward, will rally half of the population to their side. And, what is just as important, will stand a chance of building a socialist society where women and men are truly equal.

SOME BOOKS ON WOMEN
AVAILABLE FROM
NEW ERA BOOKS

OUT OF THE CAGE
Women's Experiences in
Two World Wars

G. Braybon & P. Summerfield

Drawing on diaries, memoirs, letters and interviews, the authors bring to life the experiences of working women from all social groups in the two world wars. The pride, hardship and bitter memories of being "let cut" on sufferance are recorded here.

WOMEN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
(Ed.) Christine Qunta

By and about African women, this is a first hand account, in essays, interviews and life stories, of the achievements and struggles of women in Southern Africa, and an informed examination of women's role in African society before, during and after colonialism.

£5.95 + 37p P&P

Minorities suffer from 'a slide towards fascism'

The Indian People's Association in North America (IPANA) organised a Conference in Vancouver in October 1987, at the same time as the Commonwealth Conference held in the same city. It was on the theme "Centralised State Power and the Threat to Minorities in India". IPANA has a proud record of fighting fascism and supporting democratic rights and the struggle against imperialism and the domination of India by both superpowers. The main theme of the Conference is outlined in the following extracts from IPANA's journal, *Wangar*, October 1987 issue:

IS INDIA DRIFTING TOWARDS FASCISM?

"Is India drifting towards fascism?" is the key question every patriotic and democratic person has to ask.

Today the country is facing the most severe crisis of its always weak, fragile and formal democracy. All minority communities - ethnic, linguistic or religious - are under attack. And of these minorities, those that are facing the most intense, system-

In the same issue, IPANA defended the stand of the Conference from various criticisms. In particular, there were critics who thought that Hindu chauvinism was less of a threat than that of "Khalistani fanatics", and that the class question was being ignored in favour of "backward

notions of religion and religious identities of the people".

We re-print some extracts from IPANA's reply.

DEFENCE OF MINORITIES

Minorities are deeply threatened everywhere in today's India. Their legitimate and growing aspiration for equality and justice in the so-called independent and secular India has been meeting with oppressive denial from forces of Hindu chauvinism and the state.

All oppressions are not similar. A Dalit is oppressed because Hindu religion defines his iden-

tity as an "untouchable". His struggle is then fundamentally against this identity that is imposed on him, and against the religion that imposes it. In the case of religious, cultural and linguistic minorities, their oppression is, in fact, an attack on their very identity; it questions their right to be who they are and practice what they do. When a Sikh or a Muslim is attacked or called "anti-national", it is his right to be a Sikh or a Muslim that is attacked.

In this situation, and in view of all the developments identified above, the defence of a minority identity is a fundamental human rights issue, and the most urgent and democratic political task: i.e. the defence of a Sikh's right to be a Sikh without facing any discrimination, stigma or inequality.

In such situations, if someone says that religion is a react-

a section of the Sikh people have been raising the demand for Khalistan. What is our stand on it?

We maintain that Khalistan has become an issue among the Sikh people because the repressive, militaristic policies of the Indian state and the forces of Hindu chauvinism used and promoted by it, have assaulted the sentiments, dignity and human rights of the Sikhs, and have made their lives insecure in India.

We also maintain that it is the right of all people to live in security and dignity, even to the extent of seeking a separate homeland: in principle, the right to self-determination by a people must be recognised. We however maintain that the quest for Khalistan is an incorrect solution at the present time: the solution lies in the united struggle of all minorities, the oppressed people and all democratic forces for a country in which all can live in security and dignity.

We also condemn all violence which victimises innocent people, including the violence of the separatist extremists, because it is essentially anti-people and anti-democratic, and because it vitiates the growth of unity among the oppressed minorities and the democratic forces. Those who are critical of the Conference on the grounds that it might give support to Khalistan must realise that it has been made into an issue by the policies or lack of policies of the state.

PRISONHOUSE OF NATIONS AND OPPRESSED PEOPLES

atic and escalating attacks all over India are the religious minorities: the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Christians.

The mob violence perpetrated on the Sikhs in the form of a brutal massacre organised by the Congress Party in November 1984 has been qualitatively surpassed by the genocidal massacre of the Muslims in Meerut in the month of May 1987. It was after all, the state's own troops (the Provincial Armed Constabulary) who carried out the killing.

While Meerut is an exception in this sense, it is hardly an isolated case. The entire country is caught in the vortex of communal violence targeted at minority communities.

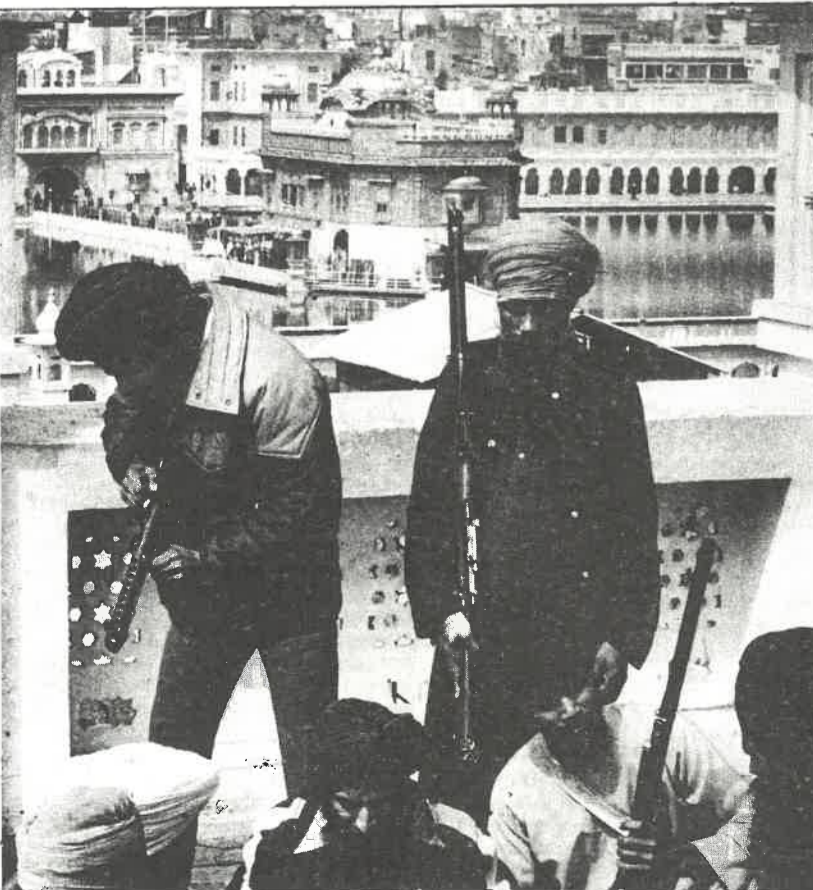
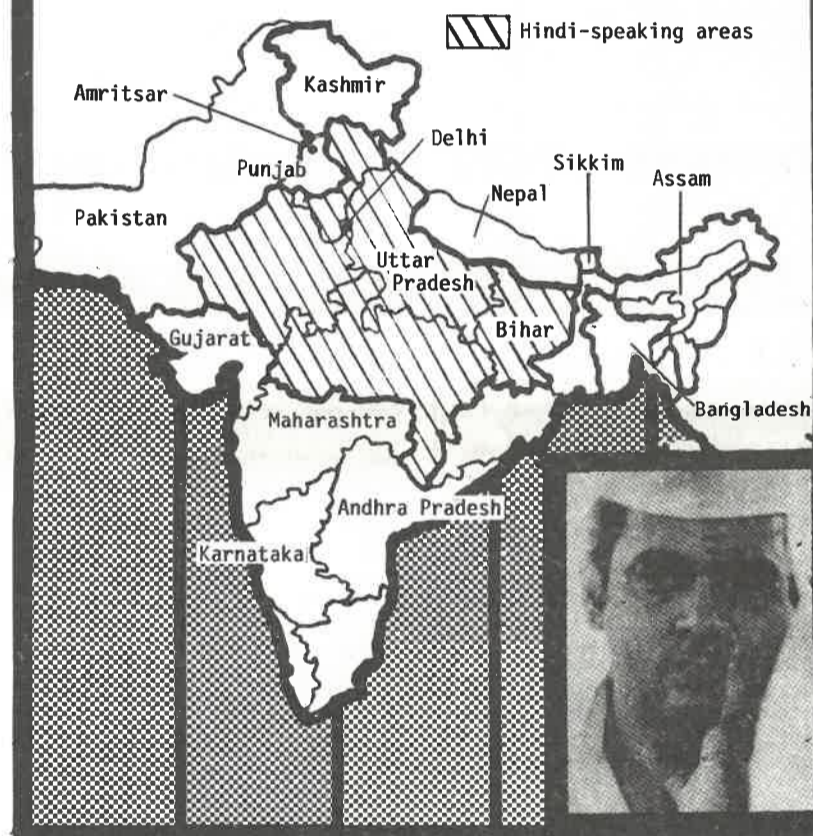
Traditionally oppressed groups like the Dalits (the Untouchables and other low caste people) and the Adivasis (the tribal people) are also encountering growing waves of attacks under the religious frenzy whipped up by Hindu chauvinistic organisations. In the tribal areas of Jharkhand and other regions, Christian churches and missions are burnt down or usurped. Mosques elsewhere are being openly claimed in favour of Hindu temples. Reconversion to Hinduism is being aggressively imposed.

Belonging to a minority religion is often enough to characterise a person as an actual or potential traitor, and a threat to India's national unity and integrity. When members of minority communities assert their fundamental constitutional right to practice their religion, culture and way of life, they are branded as anti-Indian.

PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY AND SECULARISM

This attack on the minorities is mounted through the ideology of Hindu chauvinism which is used, promoted and directly assisted by the Indian state. What is of gravest concern to all democratic people is that this state-promoted violence against religious and other minorities is the product of a growing unity between a centralised and militarised state on the one hand, and the ideology of Hindu chauvinistic nationalism perpetrated by organisations like the RSS, Shiv Sena, Hindu Mahasabha, etc. on the other.

All constitutional pretensions of the Indian state being secular are gradually falling off. What is under the gun in India today are not only minority rights but the very principles of democracy and secularism. It is a slide towards fascism.



Sikhs in the Golden Temple, at Amritsar, 1984.

ionary force, and one should not think of people as Sikhs or Muslims, but only as workers, Panjabis, or Indians, etc. It can only amount to joining hands with those who are oppressing a Sikh for being a Sikh, or a Muslim for being a Muslim. It may seem to be a very progressive, a communist position; in effect, it is idealistic, isolationist and reactionary.

* * * * *

THE QUESTION OF KHALISTAN

It is true that in recent years

* * * * *

DALIT VOICE

An article in *Dalit Voice*, January 1-15, 1988, also pointed to the fact that "the bias towards brahminic-upper caste dominance has been institutionalised in all the organs of the India state system. This is a determining factor in the repeated recurrence of communal flare-up and casteist attacks on Dalits. The state is not only a silent abettor of such crimes. More often than not itself is the instigator." The article goes on to list recent attacks on minorities and continues:

INDIA NOT A NATION

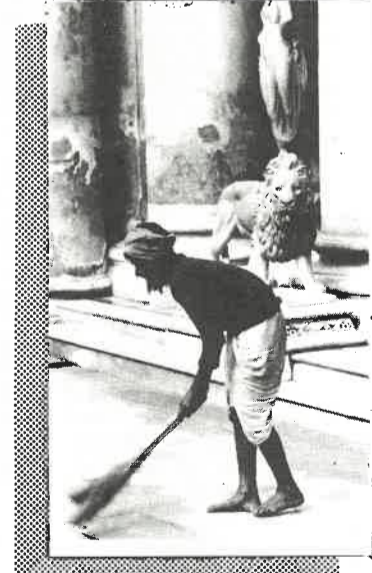
India not a nation: The presence of different religious communities and caste divisions no doubt contribute in a significant way to the heterogeneous character of India. But this heterogeneity is determined at a more basic level by the multinational composition of India. At the root of all anti-democratic brahminic revivalist and hegemonist efforts to force all sections of society to conform to the dominant upper-caste values lies the denial of this multinational character of India.....

The article concludes:

HOW TO DESTROY CASTE

How to destroy caste?: Viewed in the light of this objective reality, it is clear that a proper resolution of the problem of nationalities, religious minorities and Dalits can only be achieved by promoting the democratisation process in each nationality. Overcoming religious strife and annihilating caste is possible through the development and strengthening of different national identities.... In our contemporary situation,

where distinct national identities are denied in the name of an Indian identity, the emancipation of different nationalities through exercising the right of self-determination, the right of each national people to decide their own destiny, is a crucial aspect of this process. And it is in this direction, that one must seek the really radical



and thorough answer to national oppression, casteist domination and religious persecution promoted by the Indian state.

The struggle of different nationalities in India to assert their identities, the struggle of minorities against religious persecution and the struggle of Dalits against casteist attacks all have a common target and meeting point since they are directed against the Indian State with its institutionalised upper caste Hindu bias.

Palestine

THE UPRISING GOES ON

by David Evans

In spite of announcements that things were quietening down, the Palestinian uprising in Gaza and the West Bank was still going on at the end of February. The commercial strike and the strike by workers normally employed in Israel held steady. Out in the streets, the violent clashes between Palestinian protesters and the Israeli army continued day after day, bringing the Palestinian death toll by the end of February to nearly one hundred.

Although the western press coverage of events in Palestine has been better from a Palestinian point of view than at any time in the past, the casualty reports tend to underestimate seriously the true rates of death and injury. Over the weekend of February 20th-21st, for example, the British press reported that four Palestinians were shot dead, and included them in its estimates of the death toll for the rising. Yet the same weekend, Fatmeh al-Hsainat, a young woman who was visiting friends in a village near Hebron, suffocated when soldiers threw tear gas canisters into her friends' house, and 60 year old Ahmad Abu Salhiyeh, of Nablus, died after inhaling tear gas. Their deaths were not mentioned or counted by the British media.

Over 3,000 people have been jailed since the uprising began and the numbers subjected to savage beatings may well be worse. Yet spirits remain high. A taste of their own strength, a feeling of unity and of shared determination, have maintained morale at a high level. Even the second-in-command of the Israeli forces on the West Bank recently admitted that the uprising had changed the situation in the area permanently; things would never return to the way they were before the uprising. (He even used the word "uprising" instead of "riots" and "disturbances".

MORE ORGANISED

When the uprising began, it was a spontaneous revolt against twenty years of Israeli occupation. But if it had not rapidly become organised, the uprising would probably have faded out in a few weeks. As it was, after the first fortnight, the movement had a more and more organised character.

In the first few years of the occupation, up to early 1973, the Palestinians' efforts to develop a sustained armed struggle in Gaza and the West Bank were defeated by military repression. During the mid-seventies, occasional armed attacks took place, but the Palestinians under Israel's rule were basically in a situation where they were looking for new ways to resist. The suppression of the Palestinian movement in Jordan in 1970-71 and the unwilling involvement of the PLO in the civil war in Lebanon in the mid-1970's did nothing for their morale. But they steadily learned how Israel operated and worked out how to fight back effectively.

From 1978 onwards, there was a great expansion in popular organisation. The trade unions steadily built up their membership. Women's committees were established, which worked for the rights and welfare of women, and at the same time raised their level of political

awareness by allowing them to meet together (whether formally or while studying and working with one another) and discuss the things that concerned them as women and as Palestinians. Youth movements also emerged among the generations that had

politics, taught each other ways of resisting on the outside, and also carried on their fight together in prison.

Such experiences have laid the foundations for the sustained uprising now going on. New organisations - popular

They arranged that shopkeepers should open their stores at specific times for short periods so that people could buy essentials and the shopkeepers could earn some money to keep themselves.

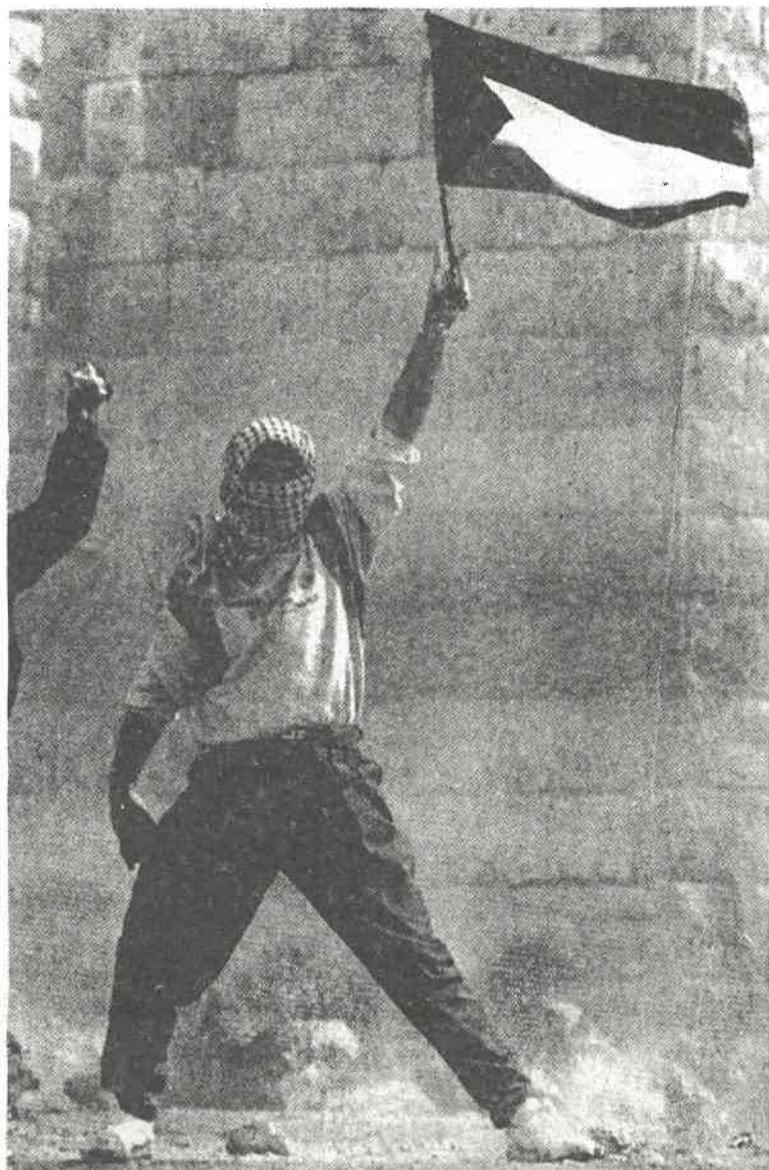
At all levels, a unified leadership exists, joining supporters of the main PLO groups. This leadership has produced regular leaflets concerning the actions to be taken and commenting on the latest events. They appear under doors at night, and their contents are discussed in every community. Israeli troops have carried out numerous raids to try to find the printing presses on which they are produced. But, although the army thought it had captured the presses on which the leaflets were produced a couple of times, they have gone on appearing.

ISRAELI REACTIONS

Most Israeli Jews support their government's repressive actions in the West Bank and Gaza. But some have held protest rallies against it, in which thousands turned out. On one occasion, 600 academics signed a protest letter, and a movement of soldiers opposed to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Yesh Gvul ("There's a limit"), has called on other members of the armed forces to refuse to obey illegal orders to gun down and beat up Palestinians. Yesh Gvul members themselves refuse to serve in Gaza or the West Bank, and many have gone to prison for that. The extent of this dissent should not be exaggerated, but it is significant all the same.

DEMANDS

The fundamental demand of the Palestinians in the uprising is for an end to the occupation and for the establishment of their own state. The Unified Leadership calls for the convening of an international peace conference "with the full participation of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people", cancellation of deportation orders; an end to military attacks on civilians, mass arrests and unjust mock trials, and the release of all prisoners of the uprising; and the lifting of all curfews and sieges of camps and villages, and respect for Palestinian human rights.



no memory of life before the occupation and who did not believe that the great powers or the Arab states would do anything to end the occupation for them. More and more Palestinians went through Israeli prisons. But these become schools of revolution, where prisoners packed together for months and years, discussed

committees - arose all over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They mobilised support for the commercial strike and the strike by the migrant workers. So that the strikes could be sustained, the popular committees organised collections of food and money among those who had one or both, and distributed food where it was most needed

THE VOICE OF THE SHABAB

The shabab, as the young Palestinian generation is affectionately referred to on the West Bank, have been in the forefront in the "revolution of stones".

Below we print extracts from interviews recently printed in the Mideast Mirror:

"The uprising is not the outcome of a particular incident, or of events that took place over a week or even a year.

"It stems from an accumulation of factors over 20 years of occupation, 20 years of Palestinian struggle, led by the PLO."

"What are the demands of the uprising? What can a stateless people under occupation want except a state of their own?"

"Our people in the Occupied Territories are convinced that the United States is Israel's partner in striking at the Palestinian people. I tell Shultz that America must understand that if peace is to be achieved in the area, the Palestinian people must have their full-fledged state. And I do not think the uprising

will stop (unless Palestinian demands are met)."

(Zakaria Mosleh, 23, third year student of commerce).

"Many youngsters who came here, from Europe for instance, were very surprised when they saw the conditions under which we live and Israel's repression of the Palestinian people. In general, all delegations that visit the Occupied Territories and see the facts for themselves, are deeply moved, and when they go back to their countries, they start trying to help the Palestinian people.

"To the Israeli shabab, I say that theirs is a very strong country which has atomic bombs, while the Palestinian people have only stones - a primitive weapon in this era of sophisticated weaponry. They should not be scared, and they should put pressure on Israeli leaders to bring about peace in the area."

(Samir Sbeihat, 30, ex-president of the Bir Zeit Students' Council and a sociology graduate now working as a journalist).

"There are 17 universities and academies in the Occupied Territories. On the other hand, there are 20 prisons. So there are more jails than institutions of higher learning.

"Living conditions in refugee camps as well as in many towns and villages are some of the worst in the world and their inhabitants do not enjoy any of the rights given to other people..."

"So our major demand is to end the situation under which we are living and in which we are denied basic human rights. However, "improving our living conditions" without giving us a state, as some people are proposing, will not work. Sovereignty is a legitimate demand..."

"...As to young people around the world, I wish they would help us obtain basic human rights to which any nation is entitled. After all, aren't the Palestinian people part of humankind?"

(Khaled Abu Sa'deh, 24, fourth year history student).



AS LONG AS NOTHING HAPPENS, NOTHING WILL

Zhang Jie

In this collection of five stories, Zhang Jie dissects some of the more hidden areas of daily life in Chinese society. She writes a biting account of bureaucracy at its most cumbersome, explaining "I feel experiences of failure are just as important as success."

£4.50 + 24p P&P

BLAMING THE VICTIMS
Spurious scholarship and the Palestinian Question

(Eds.) E.Said & C.Hitchens

Since the 1948 war which drove them from their homeland, the Palestinian people have been consistently denied the most basic of democratic rights. This book mercilessly criticises those fraudulent assertions and consistent denials of the truth about this dispossessed people.

£8.95 + 55p P&P

CHILDREN OF THE SIEGE

Pauline Cutting

Eighteen months in the Palestinian refugee camp of Bourj al Barajneh under siege, looking after the sick and injured without medicine, water or electricity, is all described in Dr.Cutting's recollections. One of only four foreign medical volunteers who worked with 40 Palestinian medical staff, her account graphically recalls the nightmare of war, the squalor of the camps and above all, the courage of defenceless people who endure.

£3.50 + 37p P&P

ERITREA: PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN ERITREA

This pamphlet brings together the eyewitness contributions of Eritrean and foreign medical staff to the first international conference on health in Eritrea, held in Milan, 1986. The main aim was to assess the ongoing programme and outline new guidelines for the future.

£3.95 + 20p P&P

THE OTHER FACE OF TERROR

Ray Hill

For five years, Ray Hill, after a lifetime of fascist activity, acted as a "mole" providing information for the anti-fascist magazine, 'Searchlight', exposing the planning of bombing operations by the right wing. This is his story: his rise in the fascist movement, his repulsion from racist politics after his experience in the land of apartheid and his double life reporting on the fascist movement from the inside.

£3.50 + 37p P&P

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Apology to readers. The series on the life and political work of Amilcar Cabral has been held over for another issue, due to lack of space.

FREEDOM FOR IRELAND



DOING A GOOD JOB FOR JUSTICE

It is ironic that British television has been showing a five-part series on the black people's 'civil rights' movement in the late '50s and '60s in the USA. The series 'Eyes on the Prize', gave a detailed picture of racism in the southern states and the courageous struggle of black people, a struggle that began round issues like equal rights to a seat on a bus or a place in school, or at a lunch counter, but was soon to be seen as a struggle for freedom.

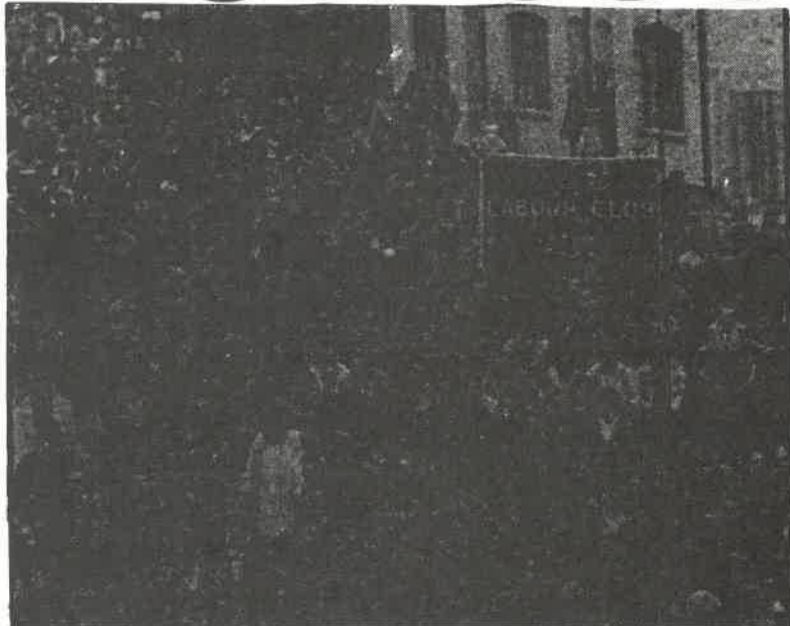
We will probably have to wait some time before we see on our television screens, another struggle that started 20 years ago, around the issue of civil rights for Catholics, rather nearer home, in the sectarian state of the north of Ireland.

TAKING STOCK TO GO FORWARD

Nationalist people in the north of Ireland have been taking stock of the last 20 years themselves. On Sunday, February 7th, a conference was held in Coalisland, to commemorate the civil rights movement. Organised by an ad-hoc committee, it was attended by a variety of groups, including Sinn Fein, People's Democracy, the Association for Legal Justice, the Irish Anti-Extradition Committee and others.

Those attending included veterans of the movement, like Bernadette McAliskey and Michael Farrell and others not even born when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was established.

The main theme of the conference was 'taking stock to go forward'. As Bernadette McAliskey said: "I don't mind walking all those roads again ... but I don't think I can do 20 years walking on one year of commemoration. What I had in mind was something more in terms than '68, something more in terms of generating discussion and widening awareness, something to hold a new generation." As AP/RN (February 11th) reported, she was "calling for the setting up of a campaign to commemorate the events of the Civil Rights year, 1968,



and to highlight the events in the 20 years since."

West Belfast MP, Gerry Adams, took up the same theme. "It is not enough to commemorate and highlight," he said. "We must learn and we must advance. He pointed out the need to continue the struggle to end discrimination, political vetting and repression in all its forms, and to oppose the British forces of occupation "with the understanding that many of us have, that you can't have civil rights without national rights - civil rights equals national rights."

Michael Farrell recalled the events of 20 years ago: "The Coalisland-Dungannon march was in August, the march in Derry that first caught world attention was in October and the Burntollet march that finally exposed the naked sectarian viciousness that the state was founded on was the following January.

"But it felt like spring the whole time. Most of us were young, naive and full of enthusiasm. We were the first generation that had not experienced the bloody repression and terror of the 1920's, the depression of the 1930's, and the bleak wartime years.

"We did things that our parents would not do - because they knew that they would not be let do them. And we had the powerful new weapon of television on our side - something the unionists did not know how to cope with."

He talked about the need to broaden support beyond what he termed "the republican ghetto", as had happened at earlier times. "It is right and fitting that there should be commemorations of 1968 this year, but the commemorations are not enough. There should be discussion and debate about how this occasion can be utilised to try to build again the sort of unity and united action that was the Civil Rights Movement's real strength - adapted of course to the different conditions of today."

EXPOSING DISCRIMINATION

An article in the same issue of AP/RN called 'The Road to Civil Rights' recounted the history of the struggle of two Catholic families to expose discrimination in housing and their brutal eviction by bailiffs and the RUC. This event was one of the first actions supported by NICRA and led directly to the first civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon.

The article brings out the important role played by women in this early protest. Two families squatted in council houses, knowing that they would probably face violent eviction, but wanting the world to see their act of defiance.

One of the women involved, Anne Gildernew described what it was like: "They didn't get me out yet. I got in again through a broken window and my legs were covered in cuts but I was dragged out again.."

"I remember afterwards going up Caledon and my legs were all blood and you know the way you wouldn't go out unless you were well turned out, well it didn't bother me at all, for I felt a foot taller after the stand we took that morning. We knew we were doing a good job for justice.

It was these actions in June 1968 and subsequent protests, that "had the combined effect of blowing the lid clean off the entire can of worms, exposing a corrupt system which had victimised and penalised the nationalist community for decades.

"It was the beginning of a nationalist awakening, which was to rock the structure of the unionist state to its core, leading to the downfall of Stormont and the commencement of this, the final phase of the Irish people's struggle for national freedom, justice and a lasting peace."

The nationalist people in the north of Ireland are reassessing the history of the last 20 years. It is important for us too, in Britain, to look back, understand the complex relations between the struggle of black people in the USA and here; the movement against the war in Vietnam and the renewed struggle for women's liberation, all of which developed to a new stage in the 1960's. We must, at the same time, understand the key role of the struggle for freedom in Britain's oldest colony, Ireland, and its repercussions in this country.



EVENTS

Sunday 6 March

STOP THE RACIST IMMIGRATION BILL

National Demonstration, London.

Assemble 2 pm at Temple Place, Embankment Tube

FAMILY REUNION IS OUR RIGHT

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY PICKET DURHAM PRISON

Saturday 12 March Women Only Events

Sunday 13 March Mixed Picket

STOP STRIP SEARCHES END BRITISH TORTURE

* * * * *

WOMEN IN STRUGGLE: FIGHTING TO BE HEARD

12th & 13th March Weekend Conference

at Women's Centre, 32 Chaucer Street, Nottingham

* * * * *

Thursday 24 March Saturday 26 March

Les Amazones de Guinee Acclaimed African women's band

Part of the Focus on African Women programme organised by Akina Mama wa Afrika and the Africa Centre.

LONDON

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Friday 25 March Leeds

Public Meeting British Withdrawal from Ireland

Speaker: K.Livingstone MP.

Organised by Troops Out Movement. 8 pm Trades Club Savile Mount

* * * * *

BIRMINGHAM WOMEN'S FESTIVAL 1 MARCH TO 13 MARCH

Two weeks of events - talks, music, films, exhibitions etc. To celebrate International Women's Day 1988

NOTEBOOK

The events of January and February, 1988, have caused a few problems in the smooth running of Anglo-Irish agreement between London and Dublin. For many people, they have shown once again that for Irish people, British justice means no justice.

*** In January, the British government announced that no RUC members would be prosecuted for the killing of six nationalists in 1982. The removal of John Stalker from the inquiry into the killings and previous cover-ups meant that this decision was no surprise to most Irish people. The later announcement of a further inquiry by the British police will only be treated as one more scene in the farce.

*** On January 28th, the three judges in the Birmingham Six appeal, including Chief Justice Lane, announced their verdict that the original conviction of the Six was "safe and satisfactory". Gerry Adams summed up the feelings of many when he said: "The judgement was a disgraceful scandal of international proportions" which "should remain in the international conscience as a testament to the racist and inhuman treatment reserved by the British judicial establishment for Irish nationals."

*** On February 16th, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd announced that the Prevention of Terrorism Act would be made permanent from next March. It is estimated that every year between

40,000 and 50,000 people (mainly Irish people) are detained under the PTA at ports. Since 1974, a total of 245 people from the Six Counties and 40 from the 26 Counties have been excluded under the PTA. It has been widely recognised as a racist and inhuman piece of legislation, used to criminalise and harass the Irish community in Britain, as well as a useful information-gathering weapon.

*** On Sunday, February 21st, the British army shot dead 24-year old Aidan McAnespie as he walked through a border checkpoint on his way to a football match. In spite of the various stories that are now emerging about accidental shootings and bullets ricocheting, few people will believe

that this was not deliberate murder. This is especially so because of the long history of the British army's harassment of McAnespie since 1981.

*** Many people have seen the similarity between this murder and that of Thomas 'Kidso' Reilly, who was shot by a British soldier in Belfast in 1983. The British army added insult to murder, by announcing in the same week as McAnespie's killing that the soldier who had been convicted for Reilly's murder, had been released after serving three years. He is the only British soldier ever convicted for a killing in the Six Counties. The time he spent in prison is the shortest time served for murder in British legal history.