

CLASS STRUGGLE



Political Paper of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

VOL.13 NO.2 MARCH 1989

WOMEN IN THE 1990's.....

DECADE OF THE WORKING WOMAN?

The government wants more married women to go out to work. Norman Fowler, the Employment Secretary, has declared that the 1990s "will be the decade of the working woman".

John Patten, Minister of State at the Home Office, has gone one step further. He said recently: "The 1990s, unlike the 1960s, will be a decade in which childcare becomes a substantial part of the pay package of working women....."

A Ministerial Group on Women's Issues has even been set up. All legislation is being reviewed for "equal opportunities" and to see

that it doesn't contain sex discrimination. After all, the Prime Minister told us as long ago as 1982, that women now have equal rights, all that is needed is opportunity.

THE PARTY OF THE FAMILY

Such policies and statements sound strange coming from the party that "upholds family life".

In 1988, Mrs Thatcher spelled this out when she said "...very few jobs can compare in long-term importance and satisfaction with that of housewife and mother. For the family is the building block of society."

There is, of course, a reason for the government's sudden concern with the issue of working women and childcare. And that reason is not the independence of

women or their liberation. Women's real job remains in the family.

LABOUR SHORTAGE

The shape of employment in Britain is changing. As traditional large-scale industry declines, new jobs will come from the service sector, many of them part-time, temporary and low-paid.

There is a labour shortage. In particular, the number of school-leavers is dropping and employers are beginning to ask who is going to do all these low-paid jobs.

So women are expected to fill these jobs. And even the government has realised that, given the high proportion of women already working, something has to be done about childcare.

But the government is not prepared to fund proper childcare. It wants voluntary organisations and individuals to cope.

This will be presented, no doubt, as part of the "caring community".

The government has not even begun to think about help for women who are carers of older dependents. One in four women between the ages of 45 and 64 care for an elderly dependent.

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO WORK

Women have been marched out before to fill labour shortages, notably in the 1st and 2nd World Wars, and during the latter full provision for childcare was made.

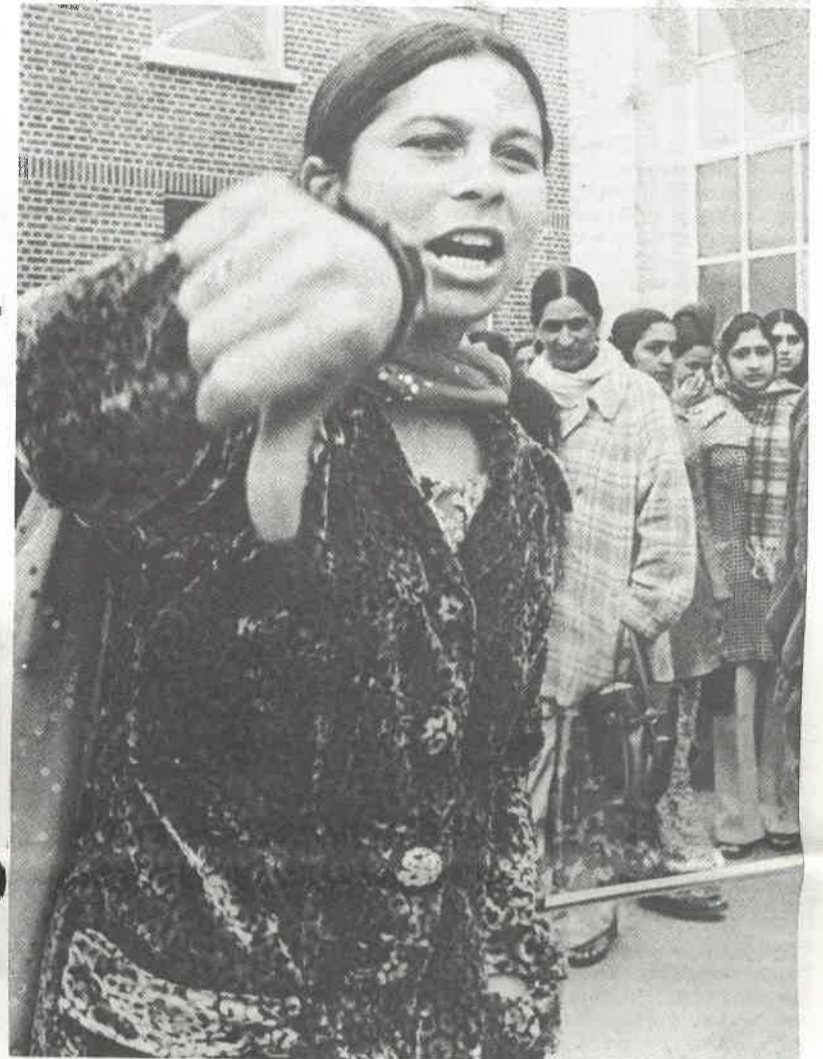
We fully support women's right to work. But we want to work on our own terms, with decent provision for the care of both children and adult dependents.

We also demand that our right to work is taken seriously and that women have access to skills and training for all kinds of work, not just the jobs that no-one else will do.




"We produce, fight and carry on our resistance", by Abd al-Rahman

PALESTINE...
WOMEN PRISONERS SOLIDARITY
PAGE 5



We demand that our right to work is taken seriously and that women have access to skills & training for all kinds of work, not just the jobs no-one else will do.



DEMONSTRATE

STOP strip-searches

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
PICKET of DURHAM PRISON
IN SUPPORT OF IRISH PRISONERS OF WAR
SUNDAY 12th 1:00pm MARCH
Organised by the Irish P.O.W. Campaign

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY.... 4&5

CLASS STRUGGLE

EDITORIAL...EDITORIAL...E!

"You have struck the women
You have struck a rock."

These words are part of a song of the Anti-Pass Laws campaign of the 1960s in Azania (South Africa). Women played a key part in this campaign, as they continue to do today in the struggle for freedom in Azania.

The twentieth century has seen many historic struggles. In the early part of the century, the world's first socialist state was set up in Russia. Following the Second World War, a quarter of humanity was liberated with the setting up of the People's Republic of China. Throughout the century, the great wave of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles has continued, with uneven results in different parts of the world but turning the tide of Western domination of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.



Women have taken part, and continue to take part, in all these struggles, as they have in class struggles in the imperialist heartlands. But they have also organised separately and have had to struggle against men who have stood in their way.

March 8th was first named as International Women's Day by a Congress of Socialist Women held in Copenhagen in 1910. Since then, it has spread and is now marked around the world in solidarity and celebration of women's struggles.

The early part of the century saw a wave of women's struggles in Europe, the USA and in Russia. In Europe, and the USA, the struggle for the vote was one strand and the main theme remembered now. But there were others as women fought to get organised at work and on a whole range of other issues.

1909-1910 saw the famous New York shirtwaist makers' strike - the Uprising of the Thirty Thousand. 1912 also saw in the USA the textile workers' strike in St Lawrence, commemorated by the song 'Bread and Roses' - "Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread, but give us roses."

Both women workers and peasant women played an important part in the Russian Revolution. On 7th March, 1917, it was women workers, soldiers wives and mothers, who launched the general insurrection with their demand for Bread and Peace.

Women in China were an important force in the great anti-imperialist movements of the early part of the century. Women students fought for their right to education and for free marriage. They cut their hair and unbound their feet. Women workers in the cities organised unions to fight the slave-like conditions of work. The Chinese Communist Party took up the cause of women, particularly with peasant women in the countryside. Women's organisations were formed on the twin platform of women's right to own land and to free marriage.

In many countries in the world today, women are in the front-line of the fight for justice and freedom. Women are active, for example, in the liberation struggles of Ireland, Eritrea and Tigray and in Palestine. In the Philippines, a host of different kinds of women's groups come together in the broad coalition, GABRIELA.

In the countries of Europe and the USA, since the 1960s, the women's movement has risen again and taken up the fight against women's oppression in all its forms, social, political, economic and ideological.

The question of how to link the struggle for women's freedom with that of the struggle for socialism and national freedom is a complex one, which we need to study and take part in to understand better. There are many examples where women's struggles have been submerged and forgotten in the general struggle, and examples where women have taken one step forward, only to be pushed two steps back.

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I could hardly believe my eyes when I read that Viscount Colville QC had warned the government about the behaviour of the troops in the six counties.

His complaint: that rudeness by police and soldiers is stoking up long-term resentment towards them.

Colville pointed out that winning hearts and minds should be a "paramount preoccupation" of the armed forces in the north of Ireland.

His comments came in the latest review of the operation of "counter-terrorist" laws - the no-jury Diplock courts, arbitrary search and detention powers and armed troops daily on the streets. He said it was not so much the powers which were in dispute, but the way they were exercised.

The continual "petty" harassment is, in Colville's description, an "irritant". Such "irritants" are a systematic attempt to intimidate the nationalist people.

While foul-mouthed abuse is commonplace, there has been a recent upsurge in the terror ordeal inflicted by British troops during raids on nationalist homes. The catalogue of "irritants" is endless with extensive household damage by the soldiers' use of pneumatic drills and sledge hammers.

Colville's comments on these distressing aspects of British rule is part of the propaganda war by the British authorities in its suppression of civil rights. The review deliberately does not address the main issue. What Viscount Colville QC does not say is that after the last twenty years of war, the issue cannot be presented as "irritants" when it is British denial of the exercise of national sovereignty by the Irish people. That issue is hardly going to go away because of any public relations exercise.

A London reader

Dear Editor,

It was a Saturday, and I was working in New Era Books. The bookshop was fairly busy, so I took little notice of anything happening outside. Suddenly, the door was pushed open and a man shouted: "Phone an ambulance! Quick! A man over there's had a heart attack in his car!"

I looked across the road and saw a car slewed across the street. Its driver was slumped to one side. I dialled 999 and the operator replied immediately: "Which service do you require?"

"Ambulance."

"I'll put you through."

There was a pause and then I heard a voice say: "This is the ambulance emergency service. Please wait, and your call will be answered shortly."

I waited. Across the road, the police had arrived. A man in a blue anorak was pulling the driver from the car. A policeman took the driver's legs and they stretched him out on the ground. Another policeman threw off his jacket and began to pump away hard at the driver's chest. Meanwhile, the voice on the telephone answering machine repeated its message.

A small crowd had gathered on my side of the road. A couple of minutes must have passed and then at last a voice asked: "How can we help you?"

I told the man on the phone what had happened and where the ambulance was needed and then replaced the receiver. It was then that the policeman who had been bending over the driver straightened up and made a gesture of helplessness. A colleague of his from another police car came over and covered the still body with a sheet. Only the man's hand could be seen now and the watch about his wrist. How macabre it seemed that the watch which he had wound up that morning, something of metal and glass, should still be ticking away, when life had ebbed from the body of the one who wore it.

An ambulance arrived and the dead man was whisked away. His car had already been removed. Save for a slightly buckled railing and the fragments of an orange car lamp, nothing remained to indicate what had happened there.

Probably, the man whose name I did not know, could not have been saved even if my call had been answered more quickly. But if the circumstances had been only slightly different, those lost minutes could quite literally have made the difference between life and death.

I don't blame the hospital staff who are overworked as it is. But what sort of society is this which cannot provide the money to hire enough receptionists to take emergency calls instantly? The value system is very wrong when a state which disposes of billions of pounds worth of resources cannot give the highest priority to saving human lives. Perhaps many people feel this. But when a tragedy draws us in, it is impossible not to feel it all the more acutely.

New Era Books worker.

Dear Editor,

The controversy that now surrounds Salman Rushdie's latest novel, *Satanic Verses*, revolves around the twin poles of blasphemy and censorship.

As a bookseller, I have no sympathy for calls for the banning of the book. Arbitrary censorship by the state can never be supported by radical booksellers as it hits at the fragile freedom of expression.

There is a legalistic point that while *Satanic Verses* does offend those with Islamic beliefs, it does not contravene the law, unlike the reported distribution of the anti-Semitic forgery, *The Protocols of Zion*, by the Embassy of Iran.

So, the removal of the book from libraries and bookshops results from a complex mixture of threats, self-censorship and a responsive reaction to Muslim sensibilities.

There is a ground of moral indignation on the content of the novel. I cannot provide a judgement on its content as we have not chosen to stock or sell this work of fiction.

Moral indignation is highly dependent on a value judgement as to what constitutes offence. Christian circles in Britain have called for the extension of blasphemy laws so they cover other religions, including Islam. Such a move would only reinforce the curtailment of the rights and scope of secular, non-believers' writing. Religious belief should be a private affair and not subject to civil sanction protected by the state. People should be free to practice the religion of their choice but equally there should be the freedom to discuss such beliefs.

There is indignation at such a blatant act of chauvinism that proclaims a religious duty to enforce a death sentence or Salman Rushdie. The call for the author's death is deplorable and indefensible. It is this call that has made the *Satanic Verses* a diplomatic issue.

There has been little discussion about the author's own insensibilities, his contemptuous attitude that seems to come from disconnecting from the life-experience of Islamic belief. His own background surely must have awakened him to the possible consequences of such transparent references in his novel to the prophet Mohammed.

... There has been little recognition in the media coverage of Islamic opposition that there is no single face of Islam, thus stirring up broad anti-Islamic sentiments through criticism of one intolerant, isolationist fundamentalist trend closely associated to reactionary Persian political objectives.

The *Satanic Verses* is hardly worth dying for. But equally it is not worth killing for.

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OVERSEAS

HINKLEY C - A NUCLEAR MONUMENT FOR OUR DESCENDANTS

es. correspondent

Registered opponents to the proposed nuclear reactor at Hinkley C, in Somerset, now number 20,000 and the Public Enquiry is in full swing.

The energy, enthusiasm, expertise and pure determination of the opposition must make the halting of Hinkley C a real possibility.

As Greenpeace said, in their opening remarks: "It is clear to us that the CEBG case is so flimsy, so incomplete, that we have no doubt we shall win... the bigger they come, the harder they fall."

The proposed reactor is a Pressurised Water Reactor (PWR), identical to that being built at Sizewell, where the public enquiry failed to stop it.

However, we are now in an age which is post-Chernobyl and pre-privatisation, with the future of nuclear power in the UK hanging in the balance. The Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) has a powerful, dark-suited presence at the enquiry and has allocated £20 million to the job. In opposition are over 80 groups and hundreds of individuals. For many years, opposition has been mounted by Stop Hinkley Expansion which has a centre and full-time worker at the enquiry, funded by Greenpeace, and by donations. The other main opposition group is the Consortium of Local Authorities (COLA) made up of Somerset County Council and twenty other South West and South Wales local authorities.

DO WE NEED IT? IS IT ECONOMIC?

The enquiry started in October and looks set to run for a year. The CEBG rests its case on calculating that the UK will need 20% more electricity by year 2000 and that the government's policy of diversifying sources of power makes nuclear power the only viable alternative. After much argument, Inspector Barnes has ruled that the CEBG must produce figures of the relative costs of coal and nuclear-powered stations. This is still awaited.

The evidence of the opposition has centred on the practicality of both energy conservation and alternative, renewable energy sources which would be cheaper and safer. Hinkley C would cost £1,470 million and has an expected life of 40 years. Objectors described combined heat and power plants which make coal-fired stations up to 50% more efficient. They forced the CEBG to admit that nuclear power is not a solution to the greenhouse effect because 14%, at the most, of total global warming is due to coal-fired stations.

ANGRY OPPOSITION IN CARDIFF

The voices of mining communities were heard best when the proceedings moved to Cardiff for two days. Day One started with two people in white radiation suits, carrying in a black dustbin with a radiation hazard symbol on the side, and dumping it up on the stage in front of Michael Barnes QC!

Many of the speakers were women. A poll of Pontypool was reported where 1730 people had been asked if they wanted Hinkley C. 83% said they did not and only 6% were in favour. Others described how the proposed station would "contribute nothing to the economic development of South Wales and yet threatens a catastrophe". Another woman said: "I don't want my children to be nuclear guinea pigs for their obscene energy." A farmer spoke, whose whole body count in the aftermath of Chernobyl

registered 10 times the normal level. He told the enquiry that there were still 300 farms and 300,000 sheep in the restricted area.

RENEWABLE ENERGY: WIND & WAVES

Only 2% of the CEBG's spending is on renewable sources and the government spends £200 million a year on nuclear power research and only £13 million on renewable sources of energy. Convincing details of wind power were put forward and the CEBG were forced to admit that it could be cheaper than nuclear power. The enquiry heard how British wave energy research led the world from 1976 to 1982 when funding was slashed.

Far from being utopian dream, American experience has been precisely this, and purely for the profit! An executive of the Bonneville Power Administration, in Oregon, USA, described how the company is operating with two nuclear plants and another two PWR reactors "on hold" (they are 70% built). For the past seven years, the company has been paying, persuading and regulating customers to conserve electricity. "Conservation costs half what it would cost to complete the PWRs. It's simple economics. We pay builders up to \$2,000 to build new buildings to our efficiency standards."

An evening meeting at Cannington gave local working people a chance to have their say. And the strength of feeling against Hinkley C broke through the normally stilted and formal nature of the proceedings. Despite many local people working at the present Hinkley site, the villagers were angry at the dangers and the high-handedness of the CEBG. Compulsory purchase orders have been issued on front gardens for bringing through reactor parts for Hinkley C and also on land for new roads to take expected construction traffic. In fact, the CEBG have spent £17 million on materials for the planned PWR, having already ordered the huge reactor pressure vessel! That evening session was finished on this quote: "The pyramids of the Pharaohs have been there for a mere 5,000 years. But, to contain the radiation, your nuclear playground must remain for at least 100,000 years. That is some monument to leave to our descendants, isn't it?"

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Topic Two started in the New Year and the CEBG would have liked it all over in a few weeks, resting its case on the assertion that Hinkley C is a replica of Sizewell and therefore safety factors have already been discussed. However, objectors look set to hold the stage until Easter, despite a tightening up on cross-examination time and a lengthening of the enquiry day.

The "unsafe" objections fall into two broad categories: concern over the health effects of low level radiation from planned and accidental discharges and concern about a major accident. The CEBG dismiss both of these as impossible.

Even as the enquiry was sitting a new report from the Somerset Health Authority revealed a cluster of childhood leukaemia cases around Hinkley Point. In the ten years, 1964-1973, the decade following Hinkley A station starting operations, there were 14 cases of childhood leukaemia, where only four would have been expected. Radiation is a known cause of leukaemia and evidence has already accum-

ulated about similar clusters around Sellafeld, Dounreay, Burghfield and Aldermaston. The onus of proof is now clearly on the CEBG to prove that nuclear installations have not caused this. Days of discussion took place about the level of acceptable radiation, and associated deaths, with the CEBG put on the line, again and again, to defend its present standards.

In calculating health effects of radioactive discharges, the CEBG calculations are based on what they call "reference man", a hypothetical 20-year old hermaphrodite!

Chernobyl has taught many people lessons about what to expect from a major accident and it was by no means a "worst case". But the CEBG maintains it made no difference at all to their thinking as the PWR reactors were designed to be totally safe. They class the Hinkley site as "remote" because only 120 people live within a radius of 2 kilometres. It was pointed out that the Chernobyl accident affected more like a 20-mile radius in which 489,500 people lived.

WOMEN'S VOICES

Although the enquiry hall itself is off-putting to many, like a cross between a church and a law court, Hinkley C is a hot issue locally. Objectors are still registering and preparing to speak and another week in Cardiff has had to be scheduled.

On March 8th, International Women's Day, women will be gathering in Cannington to participate in the enquiry and demonstrate in the streets. Although the stage of the enquiry, the Inspector and help-mates, plus all the CEBG has been male, women have been prominent as individual objectors. And typically, the shorthand team has been mainly women! March 8th will give women a chance to feel more powerful as a mass voice, and to be supported and encouraged by each other.

The Stop Hinkley Expansion worker summed it up when she said: "There is no doubt that the arguments are being won at the enquiry. But that does not necessarily mean the outcome is assured.... How much does Micheal Barnes QC want his knighthood? And will Maggie listen to him any way?"

IF THE ROMANS HAD NUCLEAR POWER, WE'D STILL BE GUARDING THEIR WASTE



SAY 'NO' TO HINKLEY C

STOP HINKLEY EXPANSION
HOCKPITT FARM
NETHER STOWEY
BRIDGWATER
SOMERSET TA5 1EX
0278 732921

Norway, which took over where Britain left off is now generating cheap energy by wave power. The latest wave energy report compiled for the Commission of the European Community showed that 85% of the energy needs of Europe could be provided by wave power alone. Sweden has an energy policy which is based on conservation measures and although nuclear power has accounted for half the total in the past, it is to be phased out completely by the year 2010.

CONSERVATION OF ENERGY: KEEPING PEOPLE WARM

The huge advantages, both economic and human, of conservation measures, were central to many people's evidence. The Bristol Energy Centre showed how building the PWR would result in further disadvantage to low-income families, especially through price increases.

If the CEBG put in loft insulation and draught-proofing, plus more economically efficient heating, such as storage heaters instead of electric bar fires, it would be more cost-effective, and people could afford to be warmer. There are one million low-income households using on peak bar fires. If this demand was displaced in this way, the CEBG could replace 1.7 times the output of Hinkley C at 78% of the cost.

In the USA, there have been no new orders for nuclear plants for a decade and all those ordered before 1974 have been cancelled. Operation and maintenance costs of nuclear stations were three times the level of coal plants.

The Westinghouse PWR is a failed technology that has been abandoned in its country of origin and has not received an order anywhere in the world for the last ten years with the single exception of Sizewell B.

YOUNG PEOPLE SPEAK OUT

Many other voices were raised. One woman described the deep suffering of the Australian Aboriginal people, caused by uranium mining which violates their sacred land and their human rights. The youngest objector, a fourteen-year old, raised his concern about the military use of plutonium produced in nuclear reactors. Hinkley C would produce about 8,000 kilograms of plutonium in a 35-year lifetime. A seventeen year old girl who spoke, was asked later if she was intimidated by the enquiry process. Not at all! "I'm the one that's uncorrupted by money, power, the Old Boy network and wanting a job. I'm just an ordinary girl. I've got the high moral ground."

PLAISTOW FOUR

CHARGES THROWN OUT OF COURT NEWHAM POLICE FOUND GUILTY

We print below a press release received from the Newham Monitoring Project:

On Friday 27th January, magistrates in Newham North West dismissed eight charges of assault and obstruction against four young black men, Ron Springer, Clive Springer, Reynold Mathurin and Steven Vernage - popularly known as the Plaistow Four - having heard contradictory prosecution evidence from eleven police officers.

The courts were picketed by over 60 people and the public gallery was packed throughout the three-day hearing.

The charges arose following a mass police raid on a christening party at David Lee Point, Plaistow on June 5th, 1988. The magistrates ruled that the police had entered the flat unnecessarily when there was no justification for them to believe a breach of the peace would occur.

SYMBOLIC VICTORY

The case had won the official

support of Newham Council and the CPSA of which Ron is a member and over 2,000 people had signed petitions demanding that the charges be dropped.

The Newham Monitoring Project which had organised the campaign to defend the Plaistow Four, held the result as a "symbolic victory" for black people organising and fighting against racist policing. This campaign along with the "success" of Trevor Ferguson being awarded £15,000 compensation after he had an eye cut out by a racist gang, two years ago, shows that through consistent campaigning results can be achieved.

Despite accusations from DAC Wyn Jones that we are the most divisive, dangerous and damaging group in Newham and even individual Labour councillors on the Police Community Consultative Group, who accuse us of being "amateurish disrupters", we still remain the only group who people turn to who will take up complaints and fight against police brutality and racist attacks. We will continue to represent the concerns of our community.....

THINKING AL

Contributed.

March 8th is International Women's Day. On this day, we think of women all over the world who are suffering oppression, both because of the imperialist system and at the hands of men.

In every society on earth, to a greater or lesser extent, women are considered inferior to men. Women's oppression takes many forms: economic, political, social, cultural and sexual. Women are oppressed both directly and by means of ideology. Ideological oppression is particularly effective because it gives women an inbuilt belief in their own inferiority and takes away their will to fight back.

Although it is true that men as a sex oppress women as a sex, men cannot be blamed for being men. It is not their fault that they were born into the inherently oppressive sex: after all, someone had to be! On the other hand, it is very much their fault if, when they become aware of the advantages they enjoy at women's expense, advantages derived from a long history of the oppression of the female sex by the male sex, compounded at various stages in history by class oppression, they do all they can to exploit those advantages to the full. Not satisfied with being members of the sex which in this society dominates the state, the church, the armed forces, the legal profession, the medical profession, the civil service - in fact, every institution which makes important decisions regarding people's lives in this country - they still resort to patronising attitudes, threats, intimidation, physical violence, and in extreme cases, rape and murder, to assert their so-called superiority over women.

There are some individual men in this and other societies who are aware of women's oppression. They fight the impulse to resort to sexism in themselves and criticise it in others. We women welcome these men and the support they give us. But we are aware that they are unfortunately a small minority.

There are also many women, who, because they are victims of ideological oppression, collude with men in the definition of women as inferior beings, and behave accordingly.

RELIGION AND WOMEN

One of the most important tools of ideological oppression in the world, throughout the centuries, has been religion - "the opiate of the people" as Marx rightly called it.

The dominant religion of this country is Christianity, and it has played a significant role in the oppression of women by men.

Christianity is, of course, a male-dominated religion: the central figure Jesus Christ, God, the Devil, the twelve disciples and almost all the main characters in the bible were male. Also male are: the Pope, all the hierarchy of all the different denominations, and until very recently all church ministers, priests, vicars, etc. Women scarcely get a look-in. But it is worth considering for a moment, the role played by the only two female characters of any significance in Christianity: Eve and the Virgin Mary.

Sexism in the bible is clear from the first chapter of Genesis. Adam was "the man in God's image" and Eve was his "help-mate". Part of Eve's



punishment for her sin of disobedience to God was "Thou shalt serve thy husband" because her sin was regarded as greater than Adam's. What exactly was her sin? She ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she gave some to Adam. She wanted knowledge, so that she could make her own decisions, rather than accept the version of reality given her by God and Adam. Not a lot has changed in this respect, especially for Catholic women, who are still denied the right to make decisions regarding child-bearing.

According to Christian doctrine, we are all sinners because we are all descendants of Adam and Eve. So unforgivable was Eve's hunger for knowledge, that every human being the world has ever known is condemned to hell because of it. This is where Jesus comes in. He offers the way to salvation. His mother Mary, in order to be worthy of the honour of giving birth to him, had to be a virgin. An impossible example for women to follow, however hard they tried!

But this is the significance of Mary: just as Eve offers women as "bad" example, Mary offers them a "good" one: that of denying their sexuality, and subordinating their own needs and wishes to those of men. An important aspect of the Christian message is self-denial and service to others: a message which has very definitely been aimed at women rather than men.

At certain periods in European and American history, women who sought and possessed knowledge other than what the church gave them, were persecuted as witches. Most notoriously, in the Middle Ages, nine million European women were burned alive.

Throughout the centuries in this country, women have fought against their ideological oppression. But until this century, their gains have been fairly minimal. History as we know it, has of course been written by men, and it is very likely that many women's struggles have been left out.

MARRIAGE

The other major tool in the ideological oppression of women down the ages, and still going strong, has been the institution of marriage. In some societies, and historically in this society, marriage is a property relationship. It is a matter of debate as to whether it still is. The ritual of the bride

'As women, we all live in occupied men's laws, in a male economy, male terms. If we were a race against men by now, but we're give birth to them.' JUNE LEVINE'S



Mandy's Diary

January 27th: I had a day off work today. I was hoping to get some odd jobs done, which I never have time to do otherwise. The child-minder asked me to swap buggies. I have a single one and she has a double one. Today she has only one baby to mind, and she wants to go to town on the bus.

"It's impossible to hold a baby under your arm and fold up a double buggy on the bus," she said. "And with your other hand find the exact change." I saw her point.

I saw it even more when I got to school with my daughter. Pushing through a door in competition with a playground full of noisy infants isn't easy at the best of times. A single buggy is just about negotiable. A double buggy isn't.

I went to the bank. I couldn't get the buggy through the door.

I went to the chemist. I couldn't get the buggy up the steps.

I went to the supermarket. I couldn't get the buggy through the turnstile.

I gave up and went home. How do women manage with twins?

'We can't afford it,' she said. 'My fella's on the dole. How on earth will we manage?'

'You'll manage,' he said.

"What can I do?" she said. "I was on the pill and I caught for Darren. The sheath broke and I caught for Dean. The coil made me ill. I couldn't get on with it. When this one's born, what then? I can't go through all this again. What can I do?"

"What else is there?" I thought. "Sterilisation? At 26?"

February 3rd: Dean's mother is still with us. A week overdue, by her reckoning. The first day of her last period was April 19th. That makes the due date January 26th. She was at the hospital yesterday. She thought they would take her in and induce her. They gave her a scan.

"You've got your dates wrong," they told her. "You're not due for another fortnight."

"No, I haven't," she said. "April 19th, January 26th. How can that be wrong?"

"Our scans are never wrong," they said. "So you must be."

"John, the baby's not well. He's got earache." "He has a look

"Can't see anything. But you'd better take him to the doctor, to be on the safe side."

I've got a busy day at work today, and it's quite important that I'm there, so I say: "Can you take him to the doctor's?"

"Don't be daft. I've got to go to work."

"So have I."

Then my daughter pipes up: "Mummy's taking him to the doctor because her job's not as important as Daddy's."

"Where did she get that from, John? Certainly not from me."

Five years old and already she thinks that a woman's right to work is not as important as a man's.

How did I come to lose my status as a worker? Before I had the children, when I was working full-time, I was earning more than my husband. We even talked about him staying at home to look after the children while I went out to work. Am I glad we didn't do that! Come home every night after a hard day's work to see the house looking like a tip and the washing-up still standing in the sink? No thanks!

So I take the morning off work and take the baby to the doctor. He's over a year old now, so the baby card which used to entitle him to immediate attention has expired. We haven't got an appointment. There is nothing for it but to wait till the end of the surgery and hope the doctor will see us then. Two hours at least.

The baby gets restless. He cries. Everybody turns round and looks at me. There are no toys in the surgery. He wants to run around. He wants to go where he shouldn't. I have to keep fetching him back. All the other patients sit and stare. By the time we get to see the doctor, he has stopped crying and I wonder why I bothered to bring him at all.

Meanwhile, back at work, the boss is even more convinced than ever that women with children make unreliable workers.

Another fortnight! Two more weeks of treading the weary path to school and back, to the shops and back, with the two-year old in tow. Two more weeks of aches and pains. Two more weeks of uncomfortable sleepless nights.

February 4th: She's in hospital today. In labour.

February 8th: It's 7.30 a.m. The baby's crying. That's nothing unusual.

I get him up, dressed and fed. He's still crying and touching his ear. I have a good look. But I can't see anything wrong. I give him some Calpol. He's still crying.



February 2nd: There's a boy in my daughter's class whose mother is pregnant. Very pregnant. I have watched her drag herself to school over the past few weeks, day in, day out, with three children in tow, and home again with the two-year old. I got talking to her today.

"To tell you the truth," she said. "I didn't really want this one. My fella got made redundant just before it happened. When I found out, I tried to get rid of it - know what I mean? But my doctor wasn't having it. 'You're a healthy woman,' he said. 'It's a healthy baby. No reason why you can't have it.'"

OUT WOMEN



being "given away" by her father to her husband, with the accompanying words "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" still takes place in most church weddings.

Before this century in this country, married women had very few legal rights. Even their children were not legally theirs. Wife and children were the property of the husband. Any property which a wife had before her marriage, became her husband's property when she married. In some working class industries, married women were not allowed to work.

Thus the ideology of the man's superior status within the family became firmly established. It was the man who held power within the family: he controlled the family's finances and made all the important decisions.

Even though the reality has changed in many ways, the ideology still holds strong. The reality has changed because some women's struggles have been successful: in particular, the Suffragists' struggle for the vote, the struggle for married women to own property; for easier divorce; for legal and safe contraception and abortion; for equal rights to children, house and property on divorce; for equal pay in some occupations; for DHSS benefits for single parent mothers and other important struggles. The effect of these legal reforms has been to open up the way for larger numbers of women to fight for liberation and equality in this country.



ed country. We live under where power is defined in art, we'd have taken up arms not. We sleep with men, we R 190)

But there is still a long way to go.

As women gain strength, the oppression becomes more subtle. Women these days are not forced into marriage, they are socialised into wanting it. Marriage is still the social status which gives women respectability, and women who do not conform, whether lesbians, "old maids" or single parent mothers, have lower status than married women. Respectability for a woman is not achieved by earning her own living and supporting herself. It is achieved by becoming dependent on a man. Besides the carrot of respectability, what is it that so successfully persuades women to abandon their independence for the very dubious rewards of marriage? It is, in my view, the manipulation of the most ill-used word in the English language: love.

For women, the message is clear: it's the old Christian message again. If you love somebody, you put their needs first, and deny your own needs.

For men, the concept of love tends to get confused with sexual desire. The phrase "to make love" means to have sex. Tell a woman you love her and she'll do anything you want.

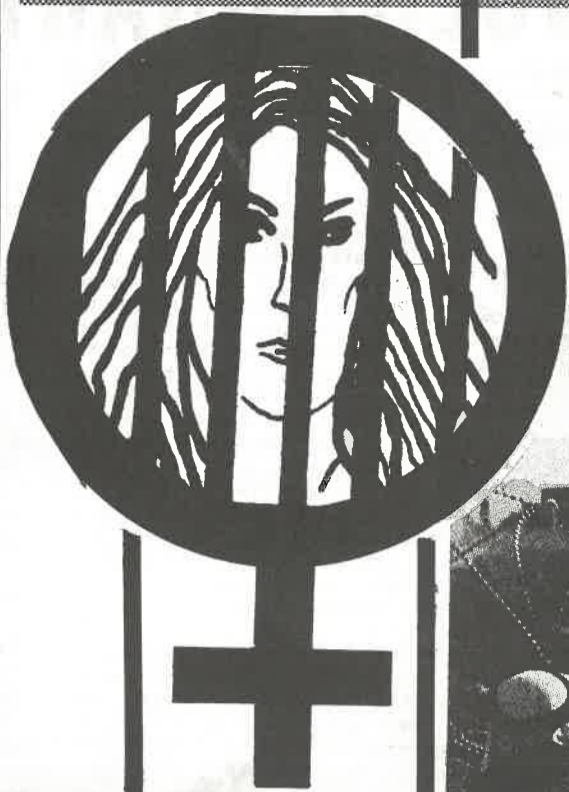
POPULAR IMAGES

A whole host of social and cultural phenomena, products of twentieth century imperialism, further distort the relationship between the sexes, by playing on men's and women's sexual feelings for each other, and their genuine affection for each other. These include fashions, whose purpose, besides persuading people to spend a lot of money, is to overstate the importance of physical attractiveness, to the detriment of real understanding between individuals. Also pop music, which appeals to young women by promoting "love songs" by means of a modern macho image. In addition, there is a range of popular literature aimed at women: women's magazines, teenage magazines, romantic novels e.g. 'Mills and Boon' type, all instilling in women and girls the desirability of catching a man, and the myth that when you are married, you live happily ever after.

Imperialism sees to it that women swallow the bait, and men see to it that they do not live happily ever after.

In a short article such as this, it is possible to make only a few brief points. There is much more to be said about marriage and the family, and how it is oppressive to women. Hopefully, this article will provoke some discussion.

PALESTINE



PRISONERS' SOLIDARITY



...the great majority of Palest-

inians arrested by the Israeli authorities during the Uprising have been men, which has meant that the international publicity which the prisoners' conditions have received has been almost exclusively concerned with those of men in camps such as Ansar 111. But since March 1988, a group of women based in Tel Aviv has been trying to provide support to Palestinian women prisoners and to highlight their situation.

The Women's Organisation for Political Prisoners (WOFPP) is mainly composed of Jewish women from a range of parties on the Israeli left. Although their parties disagree sharply on many issues, the WOFPP has avoided sectarian antagonisms. The members concentrate on working for the agreed aims of the group and have been able to be of great practical assistance to detained Palestinian women.

WOFPP gathers information on the detention of Palestinian political prisoners, distributes it to the media and interested organisations. Some of their reports have been used by the British feminist magazine, 'Spare Rib', for example.

As women are sometimes moved from one prison to another during their interrogation, WOFPP tries to keep tabs on them and has often been able to inform their families and lawyers where the authorities have taken them.

Every Palestinian woman prisoner is adopted by a member of WOFPP who takes responsibility for

organising weekly packages to be sent in with the prisoner's family on visits, offering support to the family and finding out how the prisoner is getting on from the family after the visit.

OBSERVING TRIALS

Trials in Israeli military courts have become increasingly farcical during the Uprising and the military judges are often very dismissive towards defence lawyers and any complaints raised by prisoners. When outside observers have attended trials, it has often made the judges behave in a better way, so WOFPP organises to send observers to trials. The judges are indifferent to Palestinian observers but feel uncomfortable having Jewish women watching what they do.

WOFPP publicises torture and ill-treatment of prisoners and has organised demonstrations and pickets in solidarity with protests by Palestinian women prisoners.

LIFE IN PRISON

The latest newsletter of WOFPP illustrates the issues taken up by the group. It reports obstacles placed in the way of family visits; the detention of four minors and the detention of Kifah Kayal, a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship, with Israeli criminal prisoners who attack her. It tells of "little acts of cruelty" at Sharon prison: "They are not permitted to air out their cells, even during exercise time. Nail 'Ayesh Zakut, an administrative detainee has

been prevented from accepting a woollen rug for her nine-month son (in the cell with her) and is allowed the use only of a straw mat.

"Food is insufficient, dirty and served cold. The cells are chilly and, despite the fact that many of the windows are broken and open to wind and rain, the prisoners have only four thin blankets each. They are not allowed to receive additional blankets from their families. (A WOFPP member asked why and was told by Sara, the prison officer in charge of visits that "in prison, you don't need reasons"). Woollen clothes are not allowed. There is no warm water for washing. High school pupils in prison are not permitted to receive textbooks. Finally, despite promises by the prison director, women cannot embrace their children during visits as they are separated from them by thick wire netting."

During its short existence, WOFPP has built strong ties with prisoners and ex-prisoners. It does not put forward opinions, as an organisation, on the alleged offences of the prisoners (where prisoners are charged with a specific offence: some are administrative detainees, who are imprisoned without charge or trial), but insists on defending their rights under international law and fights for humane treatment for them. Its determination has won it respect from prisoners and hostility from the authorities who regard it as a thorn in their side. They have repeatedly questioned and harassed WOFPP activists. But the organisation has reacted by trying to expand its work.

WOFPP can be reached at POB 31811, Tel Aviv 61318. It urgently needs contributions to help it with its work.



"YOU MAY HAVE MY BODY BUT I HAVE MY CONSCIENCE"

DEATH OF A REVOLUTIONARY

CLASS STRUGGLE CORRESPONDENT



ABUBAKER ASVAT 1943-1989

The assassination of Dr Abubaker Asvat was marked by a memorial meeting in early February, at the Africa Centre in London. He may not have been well known outside of Azania, but in his homeland, Dr Asvat was one of the unsung heroes. His comrades in the Black Consciousness Movement could not let his death go without recognition.

Popularly known as the people's doctor, Dr Asvat was Health Secretary of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO). He was murdered by two unknown assassins at his Soweto surgery on the afternoon of January 27th.

Dr Asvat's surgery was described by a recent visitor as resembling a ramshackle bungalow surrounded by barbed wire defence amidst a derelict area of the township. The people's doctor had survived two previous attempts on his life.

Many of the tributes to Dr Asvat spoke of the respect that those of different political persuasions had for him. As an executive member of AZAPO, he was dedicated to the total liberation of Azania and worked tirelessly for his people. Dr Asvat was well known as the poorest of Soweto's doctors, often providing service to the needy without thought of

payment. It can now be told that during the Soweto Uprisings of 1976, Dr Asvat worked around the clock secretly tending to the injured.

In his work, Dr Asvat challenged apartheid while trying to alleviate the distress and wrongs endured by the black community. He was instrumental in setting up clinics in the squatter townships around the Cape, and launching the community Health Awareness Programme. He involved himself in housing projects, pointing out that adequate health could only be achieved with decent housing, community resources and secure employment. He worked for the day when the Azanian people are masters of their own destiny.

Among the messages of solidarity received at the memorial meeting were condolences from two fraternal organisations of the

RCL: the Norwegian Workers' Communist Party and the Belgian Party of Labour. Besides the contribution from the Balsa choir, and other poetic tributes, representatives of the Uganda National Liberation Front (Anti-Dictatorship), All-African People's Revolutionary Party, the Labour Party Black Sections, Aboriginal Solidarity Group and Namibian South West African National Union addressed the meeting.

A representative of the RCL gave the following address:

The death of a comrade is a time for reflection: a revolutionary has died.

If we were in Azania, we would be offering our condolences to Comrade Asvat's family. As it is, we ask BCM comrades here to forward our heartfelt sorrow to his family and comrades.

The assassination of Dr Abubaker Asvat occurred while at surgery. He died serving the people. He lived serving the people, fighting for a cherished cause: the liberation of Azania.

A cause that millions still strive for. The comrade was not alone. The Azanian people face a protracted struggle, for oppression cannot be reformed away. And others will step forward to follow Comrade Asvat's steps.

For us in Britain, the best way we can commemorate not only his death, but what he lived for and breathed for, is to re-affirm our continued support for the cause to which he dedicated his life: a free Azania.

UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT

On this solemn occasion, the Revolutionary Communist League restates the basic principle that guides our solidarity work.

Our support is unconditional, and given to all the liberation movements.

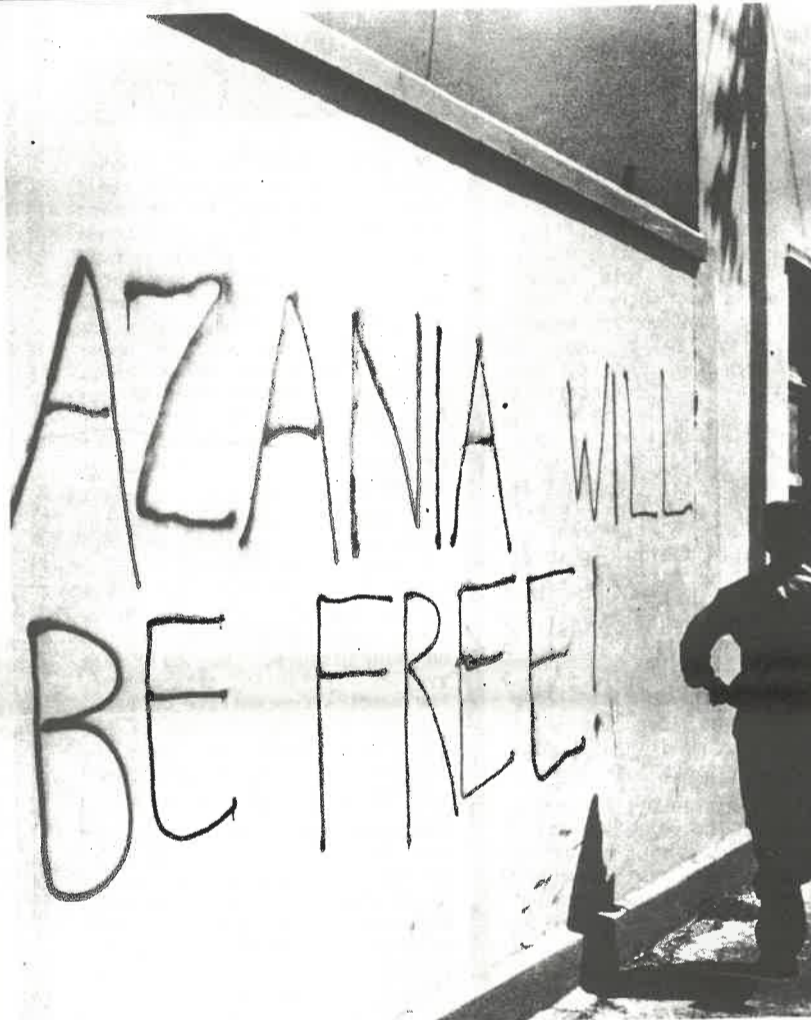
Within the liberation forces inside Azania, there are many competing trends. The death of any Azanian patriot is a loss. It is the sacrifice of the Azanian people that will decide their own future.

We abhor the arrogance that perpetuates a "left" version of the imperialist divine right to dictate to the people of Azania who shall be their leaders. AZAPO, the BCM(A), along with the PAC and ANC have made their contributions to the liberation struggle.

The Revolutionary Communist League will not play the role of king-maker, will not lay down a line on who voices the authentic aspirations of the Azanian people. How can anyone make such a declaration even before the people of Azania decide on the issue themselves.

In commemorating Comrade Asvat, we pay tribute to those who have fallen; we pay tribute to those who carry on the struggle forward; the process is unending:

VICTORY TO THE AZANIAN PEOPLE!



TOP: Soweto 1976
BOTTOM: Soweto 1986

CAMPAIGN COLUMN.

This new feature in 'Class Struggle' will look at campaigns that we support and the perspective of the work they undertake. This month we talked to an organiser of the Philippines Support Group (PSG) about their solidarity work and the problems they face.

From its cramped north London office, the PSG works to raise public awareness about the struggle in the Philippines. Finding the funds for its activities is a perennial headache. But the campaign has found the means to sustain a decade of solidarity work.

Since 1983, PSG has produced KASAMA, the only national journal that covers the Philippines. Its active and supporting members also receive a campaign newsletter, MAKIBAKA. The PSG is a national membership organisation whose members are active in their personal and professional life on issues concerned with the Philippines. This may concern highlighting the continuing abuses of human rights; supporting the anti-bases campaign against the US military presence in the Philippines or establishing trade union links between the KMW 1st of May Movement and trade unions in this country. Besides various union branches, six national unions, mainly in the public sector, are affiliated to the PSG.

While a significant number of the campaign activists have direct experience of the Philippines, it is the links with Filipino organisations that provides much of the material and impetus to solidarity work in this country. The campaign also has contacts with the National Democratic Front (NDF)'s international office in the Netherlands. The NDF is, in its own words, "an alliance of various revolutionary groups and individuals with roots in sectors and regions of the Philippines."

PEOPLE'S POWER ILLUSORY

February 1989 marked the third anniversary of Cory Aquino's assumption of power. Anyone who ousted the Marcos dictatorship was bound to have considerable goodwill. Unfortunately, however, Aquino's "people's power" has proved illusory, with no effort to rebuild Filipino society and the emergence of government-sponsored death squads narrowing the democratic space for legal politics. Last December, Amnesty International issued a Report on Torture by the Filipino Army. While the international reputation of Cory Aquino's regime remains favourable, the

focus is still on her personal morality, blaming atrocities on rogue military units, rather than what is happening on the ground, on the issue of who holds power and the increase in human rights abuses.

Besides the "international goodwill" of the Cory Aquino regime, the PSG also has to battle against the low priority given to events in the Philippines by the British media.

LINKS WITH BRITAIN

There are more links between Britain and the Philippines than may be thought. It is not just the goods imported from the Philippines. (Check your shirt label, tinned fruit and handicrafts, for a start.) Over 50 British companies operate in the country. Britain is among the leading investors, with the US, Japan, Taiwan and the Netherlands, and two billion US dollars are lent by British banks.

Britain can influence financial policy towards the country through its membership of the IMF, World Bank and European Community. Solidarity work in Britain can have material effects on the conditions in the Philippines. Already

British charities support people-orientated development programmes. PSG promotes the work of major mass progressive organisations like the Philippines women's organisation GABRIELA and the coalition forces of BAYAN.

The political left should not need to be urged to support the humanity and creativity of the Filipino struggles. In this one of the more hopeful of third world liberation struggles, there is the need to build support to avert direct US intervention aimed at stemming the revolutionary advance. The PSG is seeking to build links with other campaigns supporting those who face US-sponsored strategy of low intensity conflict, particularly Central American solidarity groups.

Lend a hand in unmasking the US/Aquino regime.

Information about the Philippines, and the contribution you could make by inviting speakers, information stalls or subscribing to KASAMA, can be obtained by writing direct:

Philippines Support Group
11 Goodwin Street
London N4 3HQ.
Tel: 01-272-5317.



A rural health worker.

AFGHANISTAN

THE SOVIET LEGACY

By Edward Leonard



A column of Soviet armour in Kabul in January 1980 at the outset of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan

In December 1979, the Soviet army entered Afghanistan on the pretext of "defending the revolution against outside interference".

When they pulled out in February 1989, that "revolution" was in tatters: the appeal of communism destroyed in the minds of the Afghan people for generations to come and the loss of life, according to one estimate at "more than a million dead among the Mujahedin and their civilian supporters, a quarter of a million on the (Kabul) government side, and at least 15,000 Soviet dead".

Gorbachev may have rid himself of a "bleeding wound" as he referred to the futile nine-year war. But he has failed to secure politically what the Soviet military was unable to do: the survival of the Najibullah regime.

The Soviet Union has made an orderly withdrawal. (The retreat was not the rout that saw the Americans fleeing from Saigon.) There was no guarantee of the survival of its Afghan allies. In the end, the Soviet Union seemed to be talking to every Afghan except for Najibullah. If, in 1979, the Soviet Union lacked confidence in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) led by Amin to stabilise the country, then the chances of the crumbling regime of Najibullah are even slimmer.

The Soviet Union acknowledged this in attempting to negotiate with Islamic fundamentalists like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a major recipient of US aid. The decision was to get out of the country whatever the cost. The Soviet efforts to initiate a "broad-based" government of national reconciliation founded on the simple reality that the Afghan resistance was not interested in sharing power.

"We want a transfer of power in Kabul," a resistance spokesman explained.

HOW LONG CAN NAJIBULLAH LAST?

How long the PDPA will remain in Kabul is the subject of much western press speculation. Undoubtedly, most party members will rally around the former chief of the secret police, President Najibullah. But even the Soviet press writes of the probability of mass desertions from the Afghan army once the Mujahedin push starts. The PDPA announced at the beginning of the year its intention to transform itself "into a liberal, nationalist and democratic party. Its economic policies will be changed. It will no longer be socialist and there will be no reference to Leninism." It has now declared a state of emergency.

It associated the PDPA with the loss of national sovereignty and encouraged a resurgence of clerical power in a political format that did not exist before the "assistance" of the Soviet Union. That "assistance" also created the largest migration of war refugees from one nation since the Second World War. Few refugees have returned home in the wake of the Soviet convoys heading north along the Salang Highway.

WRECKED COUNTRY

What would the refugees be returning to, after nine years of war? Besieged Kabul faces the threat of famine. Refugees who negotiated the areas littered with mines would have to survive amidst the wrecked infrastructure of the country. A

report from a Swiss investigation of conditions inside Afghanistan, said: "Ninety per cent of agriculture has been destroyed, canals have been bombed, animals shot. The roads are in ruins and clean water supplies are just about non-existent."

Refugees are unlikely to return until conditions improve. Another factor deterring return is that the transition from the present unrepresentative regime of the PDPA to a democratic government will not be easy. The refugees are aware of the deep divisions and confusion among the Afghan Mujahedin.

With the withdrawal of the Soviet forces and even an early collapse of the Najibullah regime, there is likely to be



other Gulf states, who are trying to promote their Afghan favourites."

Within the resistance forces, there is no group that is stronger, militarily or politically, than the others, and none can claim a national following. Even given the Jihad character of the war, the religious opposition is fragmented. Iran supports an alliance of eight Shia groups, representing only ten per cent of the Afghan population. These are in conflict with the larger seven-party alliance based in Pakistan. Matching Pakistan's own patronage of the fundamentalist Hezbe Islami (led by Hekmatyar, and feared by others), the minority Wahhabi sect which rules Saudi Arabia has supported the smallest of



President Najibullah issues his call to arms



Afghan Mujahedin fighters

Few people are likely to be convinced of the PDPA's claims to democracy or nationalism after nine years of Soviet military involvement to shore up the PDPA's hold on the country. From the beginning, the absence of a mass base, outside of the armed forces, meant that the PDPA decreed changes and was unable to carry them out. The Afghan "revolution" unfolded as an attempt to impose a social transformation on an unwilling and unprepared population. Where there was popular mobilisation and support was in the war against the intervention of Soviet forces. The Soviet retreat is a victory for the resistance. The final outcome of this victory, however, is far from clear.

The failure to subjugate the Afghan people by the Soviet army has had important consequences for the balance of forces inside the country.

a violent interregnum until a stable settlement is sorted out.

DIFFERENT FORCES IN THE RESISTANCE

Brezhnev's argument for sending in the troops was that "to do otherwise would have been to allow the emergence of a dangerous situation on our southern border."

Now, from across the Oxus River that marks the border, Gorbachev will watch the different forces vie for power in post-war Afghanistan. The Soviet presence served to both keep the divisions between the Afghan resistance in check and encourage foreign intervention in the struggle.

Today, according to one source: "Islamabad is teeming with military intelligence agents from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and

the Sunni fundamentalists, Ittehad Islami.

Given the fragile nature of any political compromise that may arise out of the National Council, the Shura, it may be that the actual commanders in the field may be more decisive in the future of Afghanistan than the exiled political leaders. But, here the same problems emerge: the best known of the resistance generals, Ahmed Shah Massoud from the Panjshair valley, is unlikely to win support from the Pathan people of the south. Whatever coalition eventually emerges from the protracted manoeuvring that has already begun, the problems in national reconciliation and reconstruction will prove to be a gigantic task: the final legacy of Soviet aggression.

FRANK STAGG REMEMBERED

Over 60 people gathered outside Wakefield Prison, West Yorkshire on Sunday, 12th February, to commemorate the anniversary of Frank Stagg's death on hunger strike 13 years ago to the day. The picket, called by the Irish Republican POW Campaign (Britain), was supported by their branches in Manchester and Birmingham, as well as the Leeds and Birmingham branches of the Irish in Britain Representation Group, the Irish Hunger Strike Commemoration Committee (Birmingham), Leeds Direct Action Movement, Irish Freedom Movement and the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration Committee. People had also travelled from Liverpool and Nottingham.

POWs in Frankland Prison sent a message which outlined Frank Stagg's prison struggle:



'After receiving a 10 year sentence Frank's indomitable spirit and courage would not allow him to be criminalised, and so along with his comrade Michael Gaughan, he embarked on a hunger strike to achieve political status and the right to serve his sentence in a prison near his home in Ireland. Both men were subjected to barbaric treatment and force fed, which resulted in Michael Gaughan being choked to death on 3rd June 1974. Frank came off the hunger strike only after being ordered to do so. Around mid-December 1975 Frank began what was to be tragically his last battle with the Brits. Throughout the 62-day hunger strike Frank never wavered in his commitment and maintained his dignity despite the physical and psychological pressures he was being subjected to.

Frank's last message to the Republican Movement was that the war should continue until freedom with justice was achieved, and it is up to us to intensify our efforts on all fronts to achieve that goal.'

In their salute to Frank Stagg and all fallen comrades, Gartree PCWs said that the commemoration was also an opportunity to look forward to examine how the struggle for freedom can be successfully concluded.

A resolute statement from Richard May, Head of Sinn Fein POW Department, said the commemoration served to remind the British establishment of the injustice which it committed:

'Sadly the injustice which Frank and other POWs suffered continues today. The conditions of imprisonment for Republican POWs in English gaols remains one of hardship, isolation, brutality, frame ups, and so on.'

In conclusion, Angela McAndrew spoke of the work of the Irish Republican POW Campaign. She described Wakefield Prison as a symbol of British repression:

'Britain cannot isolate our POWs in English gaols whether they are held in Durham or down on the Isle of Wight... So long as Britain imprisons Irish Republican POWs, we will be outside for them because they are in there for us.'

FREEDOM FOR IRELAND

A PRISONER SPEAKS



JOHN WALKER

I'm more convinced than I've ever been that there is no such thing as British justice. It simply doesn't exist in reality.

We print below an interview that has been sent to 'Class Struggle', with Johnny Walker, one of the Birmingham Six. The interview was given in late October of this year, after the failure of the latest appeal.

JB: As you approach the 14th anniversary of your conviction and imprisonment what are your thoughts and feelings now about the situation with your case, especially since the appeal rejection?

JW: The appeal was a watershed in an important way for me. All six of us went to the appeal with an open mind. We believed that the case for our innocence was now sufficiently strong enough to budge them, and we were understandably quite hopeful or optimistic about the outcome of the appeal. In other words, we felt that all the important legal arguments had been answered or won. Nothing that happened during the appeal, during the actual examination of the evidence, caused us to change our feelings about that. But of course our appeal was eventually rejected out of hand. That was a terrible blow, and one that made me realise that the whole thing was a charade, a game that we were never really going to be allowed to win any way. Now, I'm more convinced than I've ever been that there is no such thing as British justice. It simply doesn't exist in reality.

You know, at the end of the day, the establishment just closed ranks on us in order to uphold our wrongful conviction. They conspired behind the scenes to actually pervert justice. What we were ultimately confronted with at the appeal was a deliberate and calculated cover-up, a brick wall that simply wouldn't listen or respond to the truth. In fact, wasn't really interested in it. As far as I was concerned, it only illustrated what so-called British

justice amounted to - injustice and lies.

JB: How closely affected do you imagine is the fate of your case by the course and development of Britain's military involvement in Northern Ireland?

JW: Well, it's obvious that the British government is intensifying or stepping up its war against the IRA, and I think that this is obviously reflected in the legal system's treatment of, or attitude towards our own case. At the time of our arrest and original trial, we were alleged to be IRA members, and as far as the government is concerned, we are now IRA prisoners. At the very least, we are here in prison because of the war in Ireland, and the question of whether we remain here or are released is

the Birmingham Pub bombings allowed the police to pick up six innocent Irish men and torture confessions out of them. It allowed them a completely free hand to do as they pleased in terms of framing us and then getting us convicted. Now it will be public opinion that ultimately gets us released. I therefore ask ALL progressive groups and organisations who are genuinely committed to the cause of justice to join and support our campaign, to highlight and publicise our case amongst as many ordinary working class people as possible. We desperately need public support, and we need it from all sections of the population, especially from working class people.

You know, since we were arrested in 1974, people's perceptions of the police

recession of whole groups of people by this system, both here and throughout the world. I strongly believe that all of us, the oppressed throughout the world, share a common interest in winning our freedom.

The campaign for our release is politically neutral, in the sense that it appeals to all classes and sections of the population to support us. But although it is organised to highlight our particular case, or based on the 'single issue' of our continuing imprisonment, it should also be an instrument of mobilisation around the whole question of Britain's military involvement in Northern Ireland - the real backdrop so to speak, of our case.

JB: You've been in prison fourteen years. How are you treated by the prison authorities?

JW: Well, let's be absolutely clear about the fact that the prison authorities are fully aware of my innocence. They always have been. But, of course, they continue to keep me locked up.

It's very difficult for me to describe the pain and anguish of being an innocent person locked up in prison for life. The agony and fear of growing older in this place. Of watching and feeling my life pass away when I know deep in my heart that I committed no crime. After fourteen years in prison that agony is becoming progressively worse. Prison is a killer. Everything about it is designed to kill and destroy the human being. And if it wasn't for the love and support of my family, which itself encourages a continuing sense of hope, I'm not sure that I could have survived the last fourteen years of this hell. The support of other prisoners also has been an important factor in my survival here.

I often reflect on that now infamous statement by Lord Denning in which he said, in relation to our case, that it was better that innocent people should remain in prison rather than the integrity of the establishment be called into question. And I start to fear that maybe I'll be here in prison for eternity. That's why it's so vitally important that we receive the help and support of ordinary people as well as sympathetic and progressive governments. Without that support the truth about our case will forever be ignored or denied by the British government and we shall remain, and probably die, in prison.

MARCH FOR JUSTICE AND FREEDOM

**GUILDFORD FOUR
BIRMINGHAM SIX
WINCHESTER THREE
TOTTENHAM YOUTH**

SAT. 18th MARCH

Irish in Britain
Representation Group

Broadwater Farm
Defence Campaign

**Assemble 12 noon Whittington Park Holloway Rd.
Joint Rally Duckett's Common Turnpike Lane.**

obviously bound up in an important way. At the end of the day, I don't think what happens or has happened to us can be separated or looked at in isolation from what Britain is doing in Ireland.

We had hoped that the free state government would take a more active role on our behalf. But the extent of its collaboration with Britain, highlighted in particular by the extradition business, obviously prevent it from genuinely supporting us or the campaign for our release. Before our appeal we got all sorts of messages that the free state government would be really pushing to get us out. But at the end of the day, they've done basically nothing to help or support us.

I feel very depressed about the continuing situation in Northern Ireland and the stepping up of Britain's war there, because it inevitably means that myself and the other five have a long way yet to go before we're likely to ever be released.

JB: How broad-based would you like the campaign for your release to be?

JW: Let me answer that in the following way: public opinion immediately after

in this country have changed considerably. I think that black people, especially, have always known what the British police are really like but now even white working class people are beginning to wake up and the miners' strike in particular forced a lot of ordinary working class people to change their opinions of the British police. I think that today, as opposed to the time when we were arrested, a lot of people are prepared to accept that we are the victims of a blatant injustice. All we now need is for more and more people to actually come out and support our campaign. Because at the end of the day, the struggle for justice in this country is the duty and responsibility of everyone. The working class must fight for justice in all possible fronts, which includes the fight to win the release of innocent Irish people imprisoned in this country on trumped up charges.

Over the years in prison, one thing that I have come to realise and understand deeply is that our situation is but one dimension of a much wider thing involving the suppression of Irish people, and I suppose, ultimately we're talking about the sup-



EVENTS

RACISM AND RESISTANCE
The International Agenda

Third World First
National Conference

Sheffield
March 10 - 12

Speakers include A.Sivanandan, Bernadette McAisley, SWAPO, PLO, ANC; Unmesh Desair (Anti-Fascist Action) and Richard Chirimuuta.

Racism operates on an international level, through the processes of colonialism and imperialism, and through the exploitation of Black peoples and their cultures.

Confronted with this, movements of resistance and struggle have an international perspective on racism throughout the world. This conference aims to create a forum for these organisations and individuals and to express solidarity with their struggle against racism.

For more information, contact:
Third World First, 232 Cowley Rd., Oxford, OX4 1UH
Tel: 0865 245678

NATIONAL ANTI-POLL TAX DEMONSTRATION

GLASGOW
18th March
11 am, Glasgow Green

(Special trains from London)

PALESTINIAN WOMEN AND THE INTIFADA

Saturday 11th March 10.30-5.00
Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way London WC1
(Nearest Tube: Russell Square)
Organised by the Palestinian Women's Group

Fee £3, unwaged £2, delegate £5

April 1st-2nd - London

ANTI-NATO CONFERENCE

40 Years of NATO
40 Years of Danger

BRITAIN OUT OF NATO!

Campaign for Non-Alignment
The Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Rd, London N7 7QG
01-263-9450

Saturday, April 8th,
Health Care Collectives
The Second Conference

Collectives are NHS practices where all the workers share equal pay, power and responsibility and are committed to skill-sharing.

Grays Inn Resource Centre,
1a Rosebery Avenue, London EC1

Sunday, 23rd April
1 p.m.

10 Years On.....
...Remember Blair Peach
Memorial Meeting and March

Assemble 1 p.m.
Southall Park, Uxbridge Road,
Southall.