

Red South West

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Issue 3 Winter 98/99

£1 waged, 50p/donation unwaged

NEW LABOUR PLC



Red South West

Red SW has come about through cooperation between socialist and anarchist individuals and groups across the SW including: the Exeter Left group, the former Somerset Socialist/Somerset Clarion, Bristol Marxist Forum and Anti-Fascist Action. The aim of Red SW is to encourage dialogue, debate and active co-operation throughout the region. Our pages are open to all.

editorial

Richard Antony & Dave Parks, Exeter Left write ...

This issue seems to focus on the depressed state of the left and of the working class. Nothing new there, you may say. Depending on your political tendencies, you may even consider that there's a causal relationship between these two actualities.

By and large, revolutionaries are feeling out of fashion and out of energy - except of course the environmental protesters.

Those with jobs, as well as those without, are mostly on the defensive in this country, but there is light at the end of the Channel Tunnel. Resistance is not as dead as it's unreported ... as usual.

We bring good news when we have found it. Beyond that, we do what fighters always do at such times - regroup, re-arm and keep putting

out the message that change is still necessary and therefore still possible.

One reason for the above-mentioned despair is the government's hyped-up 'New Deal' - as if it bore any resemblance to Roosevelt's Keynesian rescue-package! So we have a look at how this programme is tied in with increased 'casual labour', job-insecurity and deteriorating conditions at work. We also survey various responses by workers. In the UK, these are still very small and effective only in specific localities.

What's needed is to widen their reach to a national campaign that involves workers, especially militant trade unionists. This might start to overcome the divided and weakened state of the 'labour movement'. The aim should be not to get reformists off the hook, but to restore and revive the connections between activists and working people that have languished since Thatcher broke the back of the Labour Party and let neo-liberals like Blair (aka the old Labour right wing) gain more power than they've had since the 1930s.

Missing from this edition - the continued bombing of Iraq, the shock waves of economic collapse reverberating around the globe, Serbia's fascists now persecuting the Kosovan Albanians. The lack of coverage means either we didn't receive any contributions or there wasn't room. That's the nature of the beast.

If you disagree with what you

read here, send us your own views or sell copies to friends and colleagues and stir them up! *RSW 4* will be out in a couple of months, start writing now.

If you prefer face to face arguments, get to the Revolutionary Socialist Network conference in Bristol. Otherwise look out for our website, which will hopefully be available soon. Meanwhile subscriptions, donations and bulk orders are all welcome. Enjoy!

Contributions and Subscriptions

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or to: -
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Post', PO Box 185, Exeter EX4 4EW
Deadline for next issue 21st April '99.

Subscriptions: £5 for 4 issues
Supporters: £10 (includes subscription)

Cheques payable to **Red South West**
Thanks to Dave (Exeter) for cover art work.

**REVOLUTIONARY
SOCIALIST NETWORK
CONFERENCE
20th February 1999
Great Western Staff
Association Club,
Station Approach, Bristol
for accomm & child care:
Tim Price: 01392 431352**

A Necessary Crisis

**Somerset Solidarity reply
to the editorial in *RSW 02*.**

It may be that the "whole opposition movement has fallen into crisis" (G Barr & D Parks, editorial *Red South West* No.2) but many of us never saw ourselves as an "opposition", but as revolutionaries with a totally different agenda. This is not a pretentious desire to be "lifter than thou" but a simple statement of political & economic necessity.

Those currently striving for social justice via the party & parliamentary system & the orthodox trades union movement should have realised long

before the onslaught of Blair liberalism that parliamentary politics were being framed in such a way as to provide an unassailable (from within the system) "dictatorship of the centre" & that the only alternative is, as it has always been, for the working class to put genuine revolutionary politics into action. Still, for many, the idea of revolutionary politics is akin to barking at a tree, so marginalised are such ideas by the straitjacket of the capitalist media. But, when asked how any worthwhile form of liberation can be gained using methods that have signally failed in the past, people remain silent or talk in terms of "small steps", steps that lead nowhere. It follows that revolutionary politics are the only politics worth promoting. Clearly this has to be related to industrial, social & environmental struggles, but

without the kernel of the revolutionary struggle being recognised, such struggles will be defused in the future as they have been in the past, with a consequent increase in apathy.

We reject the implication that "anarchy" has somehow collapsed with the demise of the Class War group. Class War was a street protest movement that, whilst catching the headlines & channelling the energies of impatient youth, was ever likely to self-destruct, given the limitations of their politics. Anarchism, in the form of continuous grass roots actions & the organised anarcho-syndicalism of the International Workers' Association, is developing. We welcome the arrival of the non-sectarian *Red South West* & look forward to participating in its debates.

Road Protest Recall

Oh yeah - that old Chestnut!
270 years ago, when the "authorities" were beginning to take common land, George Green, Wanstead was fenced round. Many trees were growing there then - among them one Sweet Chestnut, little more than a sapling at the time. Anyway, local people weren't having any of it. They tore down the fence and grabbed back their common.

Grass roots rampage

The Sweet Chestnut tree on George Green was around 300 years old by the time I came into contact with it. I'd arrived there to join the M11 Link Road protest. Once again it was fenced off ready for felling. And again local people - a lollipop lady called Jeanie and a group of schoolchildren - ripped down the fence. As a result of this Jeanie lost her job. She'd been wearing her uniform at the time (sacrilege?). Jeanie, a small but loud Welsh woman put up a fight, of course. She won and managed to reclaim her lollipop, white coat and regular income.

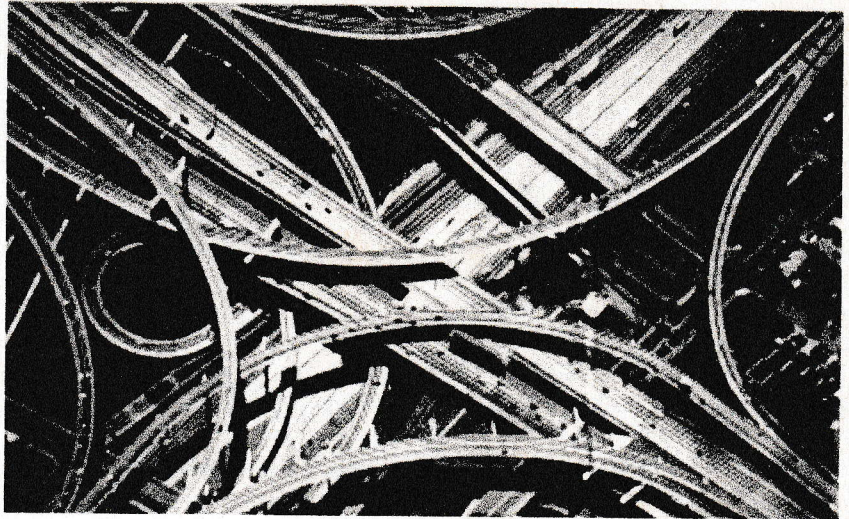
International - or what?

It was a tree at the M11 site, which was first recognised by the High Court as a legal dwelling. This decision meant it couldn't just be chopped down. Fellers would have to go through legal channels to get an eviction order. The court ruled that if the tree had a post box it must be recognised in law as a dwelling place. Well, the tree (I think it might have been the Sweet Chestnut, but can't remember for sure) received hundreds of letters from all over the world. A small book has since been compiled called "Dear Tree", a wonderful 3-level title, for the tree was dear: in that it was the cause of great expense to the authorities; dear: as in well loved by the people who lived near it; and "dear": as in the recipient of letters. The book contains some of the letters the tree received.

Pass the shovel

To my knowledge the M11 protest was one of the first. Certainly the first where bunkers and tunnels were dug - though tiny compared to the tunnels constructed at protest sites since. This site was different to later ones too in that the site was mainly

Emma, a road protestor based at the Birmingham North Relief Road site, writes about the struggle



houses: Grove Green Road, which was to be demolished to make way for the M11; and, of course, Claremont Road, where a whole street, which looked out on to the tube line from one side, was to be flattened.

There was no traffic in this street - it was blocked and not an access road anyway. A few travellers' vans were parked, that's all. The tube line, running the length of the street, gave residents something different to look out at.

Bouncing back

Because the protest included a whole street, it gave rise to some unique forms of defence. One house was filled from top to bottom with old tyres to hold up the bulldozing. Each tyre would have to be removed by hand first. Rubber makes the arms of a JCB bounce back off the roof. Not bad as tactics go. We created further delays by putting nets between houses and trees.

I was living at 58 Claremont Road. Number 58 was situated more or less at the centre of the row. We knew that once the eviction started we would have a bit of time to play with. Expecting those who were evicting us to start from each end and work their way in, we'd prepared a trap door in our place, which was to be closed over the top of the stairs when the bailiffs arrived. We intended to be nailed into place. Already we'd barricaded the

windows with tin sheeting and wood. A huge tower of scaffolding was erected on one roof and was, in fact, the last stand to be evicted.

Bumps in the night

Most of the houses still had electricity, so on the first night of the eviction (it began at 2pm) we were able to watch what was happening on our black and white telly. It felt weird, surreal even, seeing it all on the small screen and simultaneously hearing whirring machinery and crashing noises on the outside. Halfway through the 9 o' clock news our electricity was cut off.

The eviction took four days. Not long when you compare it with the 19-day evictions since, but at the time it was impressive.

Moving house (literally)

Since then I've taken part in other road protests and am now living on the Birmingham Northern Relief Road site.

Recently a posse of police officers arrived on the site. Because they're inexperienced in the art of evicting eco-warriors they'd hit on the idea of asking us how they should do it! Err, how about: "Be gentle with me officer"?

Come and join us - YOUR COUNTRYSIDE NEEDS YOU!! If you can't, a visit with intent to supply food, equipment and warm, dry clothing will do.

Site Mobile phone: BNRR 07970-301978

Friends Of Severn Beach Railway

*"The Severn Beach is a mighty fine line
Clean and friendly and
sometimes on time!"*

These words rattled through my brain every time I took the local train in 1995. The Severn Beach line is Bristol's last remaining branch line and has been under threat for many years. It was kept alive by Avonmouth dockers in the 60s and by the Severn Beach Passenger Line Association in the 80s.

Local authorities were reluctant to subsidise it, but regulars knew its attraction - at its best it was quick and cheap. In June 1995 British Rail hit! Passengers learned that the number of trains running between Severn Beach and Bristol for commuters would be cut. The local media interviewed angry passengers from Severn Beach who organised a petition.

The cuts threatened the whole line. Cyclists, pushchairs, shopping trolleys could not be fitted onto a tiny bus. But who was prepared to defend the line? One morning I sat down and wrote a poem, typed it out with my phone number at the bottom, photocopied it and gave it to anyone who was interested. The response was excellent. A commercial artist at a Bristol poetry SLAM donated a line drawing of the train going through Clifton Gorge; the "Prime Minister of Avonmouth" - a retired docker - put me in touch with two local people, and an ex-motorist threw in his organising energy. Richard, a 24-year old cyclist and disc jockey, helped organise a media event to protest against the introduction of the early morning railbus.

The first meeting of FOSBR was held at the Steam tavern on Clifton Down Station and attracted about 15 people. A railworker suggested we use the train at off-peak times and the Ramblers' Association responded by offering to lead mid-day walks from stations. There were no offers to do any of the tedious tasks needed for effective campaigning.

Various groups and organisations passed resolutions defending the line which made their way to Bristol City Council Transport and Planning

Julie Boston, Bristol, writes about the campaign to defend Bristol's only remaining branch line.



GET ON BOARD!

Committee. Press and television were happy to interview us in the build up to privatisation and we devised creative ways of presenting our case. Dressed as Ugly Sisters and Elves we petitioned the Rail Users Consultative Committee in December 1995, appealing for support to prevent privatisation.

The ad hoc group which rumbled on was struck at the end of 1997 by a transport spokesman of Bristol City Council who said that FOSBR consisted of 3 or 4 people! This taunt forced us to hold a well-publicised meeting in January 1998 and appeal for volunteers to take on the tasks needed to establish an organisation. We now have a bank account, membership cards, a logo, monthly meetings, and a monthly Newsletter. Our 80-strong membership consists of 10 organisations, including the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers' Union, Pilning Parish Council, Valerie Davey MP and 3 local councillors. Our aim is to persuade Bristol City Council that the infrastructure is in place to extend the route from Avonmouth via Henbury to Filton Abbey Wood. This would allow 2 trains an hour in clockwise and anti-clockwise directions.

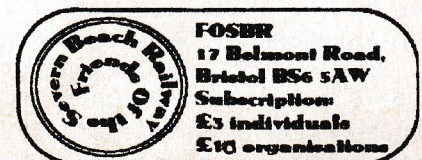
In the past year, Bristol City Council has given the line a creative boost by chartering a train on a Sunday. In March and August about 800 people took the chance of a free day on the train savouring the fresh air of Severn Beach and other on-line delights. At least 100 people completed walks between 4-7 miles

long from Severn Beach and Sea Mills. FOSBR has asked Wales and West to publicise sample fares as they are far cheaper on this line than on the other rail routes.

In common with passengers on the rest of the privatised rail network, Severn beach suffer cancellations and lack of information. But, whereas Filton Abbey Wood workers (who stole the commuter train from us!) have the consolation of a tannoy system and the attraction of MacDonal'd's nearby, Severn Beach passengers are stranded on unlit stations. More cancellations can be expected as our drivers take upgraded jobs on other lines and our guards refuse to do overtime now they have improved basic pay.

The deterioration of the service is the result of privatisation. The line should either be taken back to public ownership or it should be improved by grants on environmental grounds and run as a social service. As the guard said at the first FOSBR meeting in 1995: "Use the line at off-peak times". There are attractions for people of all ages on the Severn Beach Line. Organise a group outing. You'll enjoy it.

**Membership of FOSBR costs £3
(£10 organisations) c/o 17 Belmont
Road, Bristol BS6 5AW**



Just Not In Our League!

Question: What do you do when your daughter has been suspended from school twice? First for being *with* someone who swigged a treble brandy and was tipsy in class? Second time for *receiving* a black eye from a girl who picked a fight?

Answer: You get in first and permanently exclude her before the school gets the privilege of causing another miscarriage of justice. That's if there's a three strikes and you're out policy. As you can imagine, the "punish everyone in the vicinity" discipline of my daughter's school didn't fill me with confidence. The overnight disappearance of mild class dissidents was commonplace. I wrote a letter to the headmaster: "I'm arranging for Holly to attend another school, she won't be coming back."

All the schools are opted out here, so no choice on that count. Plumped for the one on a suitable bus route. I spoke to the Deputy Head from a call box.

"Why have you chosen to change schools?"

"I'm not satisfied with her last school and neither is she. I'd rather move her now before her options."

"OH!"

Began to wish I'd said we were moving to his catchment area. Honesty's my downfall - it's never worked for me yet.

"You're welcome to look round, but we can't promise anything." (Like what - a state education?)

"She hasn't been expelled", I blurted.

"No, no - I didn't think that", he lied, the pip, pip, pip cutting short his "I'll look forward..." niceties.

.... A week later the Deputy Head shook our hands and showed us round the school. Holly doesn't shine on a page. She gets top mark for attendance and the lowest for achievement. Her full marks for effort didn't stand to enhance her chance of a place either, so, as he showed off the charcoaling talent of year 9, I asked the leading question: "What's your opinion of the league tables Mr...?"

"I think they're terrible, terrible." There was passion in his voice. I felt

Janet Scott, Cheltenham, writes on the reality of School League Tables.

hopeful. Later in his office my heart plunged footwards. His transparently loaded questions suggested his league table views might be all theory and no practice. Our social position - bottom of the pile - was showing. I just hoped his civilised tendencies would win over his "survival of our school" urges. Then the hard bit.

"What set are you in for English, Holly?"

"Bottom."

"Geography?"

"Middle Bottom."

"Maths?"

"Bottom."

"History?"..etc.

Holly coped with the humiliation by wearing her "I'm the class thicko but I don't care" look.

"Any hobbies?"

She didn't answer.

"Reading?"

"No."

This was true. Her seasonal carol: "Promise me you won't buy me books for Christmas, mum!" rang in my ears.

"Do you play an instrument, Holly? Cello? Violin?"

More silence.

"The mouth organ", I said. Oh, oh - classic gaffe. She'd had one for Christmas. I'd definitely heard her playing..

"Mu-um", Holly reproached me. At least she had the brain to recognise a wisecrack. I was being literal; he just thought I was irreverent. Felt like Delboy trying to do the best for "Our Rodders".

His "little chat" barely lasted 10 minutes. The time was up and so was our number. (I'll phone you to let you know, he said)

"Not on the phone".

"NOT ON THE PHONE?"

His face read: "This is a feckless income support lone parent family living in a basement flat. (Our address in bold type written in the paper on his lap.... in London a basement might pass for OK.. down here it means substandard)

(Feckless - No Sir)

"Can't cope on benefits" I confess. thought of pleading. We're kind,

we're honest, we do voluntary work, um, um, er....

Holly shares

her sweets. Not the best valued qualifications are they? You'd have thought we were trying for bloody Eton the way he was carrying on. Deputy Head showed us off the premises.

"Where are you parked?"

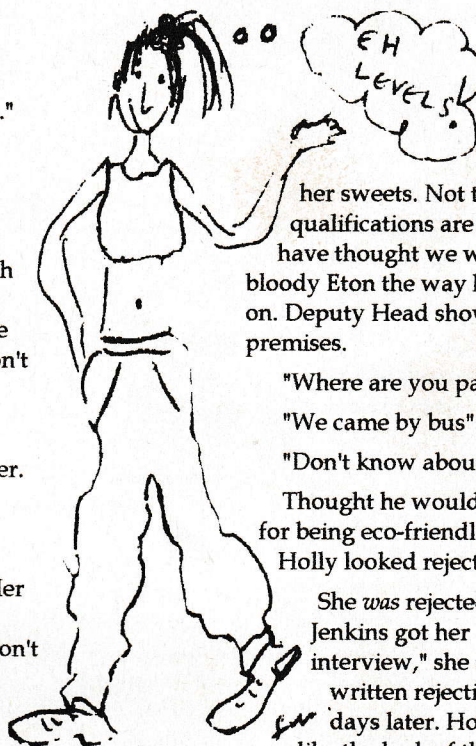
"We came by bus"

"Don't know about the buses."

Thought he wouldn't. No points for being eco-friendly then SIR? Holly looked rejected.

She *was* rejected. "Sarah Jenkins got her place at the interview," she said. The written rejection came two days later. Holly said, "Didn't like the look of the place", and blew a raspberry through the mouth organ. We appealed. An original story of intimidation of poor people by a panel of privileged governors, including one local Conservative Party candidate. We obviously weren't appealing enough for them!

I eventually found Holly a place in an LEA run school. It's in a village four miles away. It took us 5 weeks altogether. We had to sign a contract. It *didn't* say, "I agree not to have my child punished for the offences of others." Still, we had plenty of time to go begging for the price of a new uniform. Tried the DSS... No joy. I chose to move her, they said. Tried for an LEA bus pass. No joy. I chose to move her they said. Bus fares £6 a week. Hmmm. £6 a week worse off. Some choice!



Brian Parsons - freedom at last

In December 1988 Brian Parsons, a building worker from East Devon, was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. It was a crime he did not commit. At the time of writing (December 1998) Parsons is waiting to hear whether he will be released on bail after the case was finally referred back to the Court of Appeal.

On November 28 1987 the rural calm in the tiny East Devon village of Shute Bottom was shattered when the body of 84-year-old Ivy Batten was discovered by a relative at her isolated home.

She had been struck with a hammer and brutally murdered. Her phone lines and electricity cables had been cut.

The outcry from the public and intense media interest in the case meant the police were under pressure from the start to secure a quick conviction.

A week after the body was discovered gloves and a hammer thought to have been used during the murder were found in a field near the murder scene.

A month later, in January 1988, the case was featured on the BBC's Crimewatch programme.

Three days later police went to a building site in East Devon and arrested Parsons while he was at work.

It is not clear why they ever suspected Parsons, who lived close to Ivy Batten and knew the murder victim.

He had earlier given a statement about vehicles he had seen in the area following an appeal for information from the police.

Officers picked up a work jacket belonging to Parsons and took his car in for examination.

Fibres from the murder gloves were apparently found in the pocket of the jacket and in the glove compartment of his car.

A police log of the movements of these gloves was later "lost" by Devon and Cornwall police. More than a decade later another police force would severely criticise the way police handled this evidence. The implication was clear - the

Jon Jones, Exeter Left Group, describes an appalling miscarriage of justice.

gloves were planted.

Ten months later the case came to trial and despite Parsons protesting his innocence the case against him appeared overwhelming. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to life. An appeal soon afterwards failed.

Stephen Nunn, the solicitor acting for Parsons, refused to let the case drop.

For the next decade he battled, unpaid, to get the case re-opened. In the meantime the officer in charge of the case, John Essery, was rewarded for his services to justice. He was given the Queen's Police Medal; an honour reserved for the country's finest officers.

The work of Stephen Nunn led to local and national media coverage of the case.

In 1995 a Channel Four documentary Trial and Error cast serious doubt at the conviction. A study of Ivy Batten's electricity meter - it had been read the day before the murder - showed the power lines to her bungalow could not have been cut until the early hours of the morning of November 27. Parsons was at home with his parents at that time and could not have committed the murder.

The evidence was devastating for the police but instead of throwing in the towel Chief Constable John Evans criticised trial by television and said he would launch an inquiry.

A two-year investigation followed and not surprisingly Devon and Cornwall police cleared itself of any wrongdoing.

The then home secretary Michael Howard refused to refer the case back to the Court of Appeal in 1996.

Clearly the police were well aware by now that Parsons was innocent. Many had known all along. But it served the interests of justice to keep an innocent man in prison rather than admit the system is



Brian Parsons waits for freedom

fallible, let alone corrupt.

Chris Mullin MP highlighted the problem the police faced when he raised the issue in Parliament in 1996.

Criticising the role of assistant chief constable Keith Portlock, who conducted the inquiry into his own force, Mullin said: "He is making no secret of the fact that he sees it as his duty to maintain the conviction of Brian Parsons at all costs and what's more he is being particularly brazen about it.

"It's not hard to see why, because if Mr Parsons is innocent then the fibres from the gloves that led to his conviction were obviously planted by a Devon and Cornwall police officer - and that is a possibility too awful for Mr Portlock to contemplate."

The decision to keep Parsons in prison came right from the top of the force.

But eventually Devon and Cornwall were forced to hand over the case to Hampshire police, which published a devastating 6,000-page report into the case in December 1998.

It listed a catalogue of corruption in the way officers had handled the

(Continued on Back page)

Exeter Students' BNP Invitation!

In mid January Exeter AFA learnt that the Debating Society at Exeter University intended to invite the BNP to speak. If this was not bad enough the Debating Society had the full support of the Exeter Guild of Students (NUS) on the basis that freedom of speech was more important than any anti-racist commitment.

Exeter AFA was rather gob smacked by the level of political ignorance and naivety from both the Debating Society and the Guild of Students in particular. Recently there has been no fascist activity in Exeter for the first time in 10 years, and now the students were inviting them back! This despite the fact that it is entirely against NUS policy nationally regarding no platform for fascists.

Supporting fascism is one thing but to argue, as some did, that inviting the BNP to address a debate was actually a way of raising awareness on racism was really quiet astounding. The debate was on a *racist agenda* - "This house believes that people of Third World origin should be sent home"

The Devon & Exeter Racial Equality Council did a fine job of lobbying and working behind the scenes to try and persuade the students that they were engaging in sheer madness, all to no avail. The first story that broke in the local paper was all about "freedom of speech", and how under the "freedom of speech act" the meeting was obliged to go ahead. These people are supposed to be educated for Christ's sake! Since when has there been a freedom of speech act or freedom of speech for that matter. It took the local plod to point out that legally there is no freedom of speech when it comes to incitement to racial hatred.

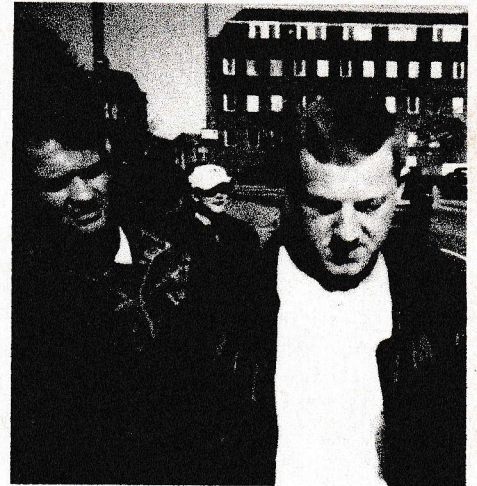
Exeter AFA decided that a full-scale mobilisation would have to take place and went into action to organise a picket of the meeting. Exeter AFA told the Express & Echo that we would be mobilising for the meeting and against the BNP, who we expected to be present in force. "Did we think there would be trouble?" Well actually that did seem quite possible. The journalist then presumably contacted the police and the University authorities and then

Exeter Anti-Fascist Action reports on a most disturbing case at Exeter University.

within a day or so the meeting was officially cancelled. The University authorities had taken advice from the police and refused to let the meeting go ahead. The students and the BNP promptly moaned about freedom of speech.

It remains an incredible fact that a Student Union representing a University with a substantial ethnic minority could ever contemplate backing a meeting with the BNP. For this reason Exeter AFA believes the matter is far from over. Besides, what is to stop the students from finding an alternative venue so that they can invite the BNP?

As many organisations, particularly Student Unions, need to condemn Exeter Guild of Students as possible and pledge support for any demonstration that may need to be called against any future meeting with the BNP. So far Exeter AFA has had a positive response from a number of NUS branches around Devon but we need to get backing



BNP activists Collins and Cowd in Bridgwater

from Student Unions and Trade Unions throughout the region.

Motions and letters should be sent to: **Exeter Guild of Students, University of Exeter, Devonshire House, Stocker Road, Exeter** and copies should be sent to **Exeter AFA, PO Box 185, Exeter EX4 4EW.**

Fascists - Off The Street

A.B, Frome, comments on BNP activity in Street

The nazi fascist BNP is trying to organise in Somerset on the back of widespread rural discontent with state bureaucracy and the decline of agricultural interests following the BSE fiasco. The one or two living in Street wrote to the MP for Wells via their Bristol PO Box claiming that residents leafleted in Glastonbury "and members of the BNP" are concerned that travellers are sponging off the rest of society and why had it taken so long for said MP to realise there was a problem etc., etc. As usual the fascists are attacking some of the weakest and least organised in our society.

This sudden conversion to the concerns of rural life is in contrast to the Schicklegruber (Hitler)-loving street thuggery the fascists are known for and is part of the strategy of 'becoming respectable'. Of course anti-fascists put an end to recent fascist pipe dreams of controlling the

streets of our cities and towns so it became necessary for them to find other outlets for their 'talents'. Writing to MP's is clearly a major step forward for them; joined up writing no less.

The continued policy of No Platform towards fascists, combined with the ongoing programme of education about the realities of fascism, is the only one that can put an end this political scourge. It is important that we all participate in this operation and not leave it to the few. History is littered with the corpses of those who thought they were immune from the Nazis or that the state would sort it out for them. I hope readers of RSW are not so stupid.

♦ *They Must Think We've Got Straw in our Heads* - excellent Somerset Anti-Fascist Newsletter. Send donation to: **Somerset ABC, Box 478, Taunton, Somerset TA2 7YR**

No To New Deal

Workfare has been heading our way ever since Reagan smashed US trade unions in the 1980s. It's an old idea in new packaging: -

NEW, MODERN, FLEXIBLE... make the poor work for their subsistence. But you can ignore all the rhetoric about making the unemployed 'fit for work' or reducing the size of the social security bill. However much satisfaction it may give to right-whingers (*not a spelling error - ed.*) to see "the work-shy" forced to contribute towards their upkeep, or to dick-head liberals in the New Business Party for the help 'New Deal' provides to the "socially-excluded" - none of this matters. They don't care how much it costs, as long as it helps keep down wages and stops workers thinking they can have a say in fixing them.

You have only to look at the £millions the bosses and government are willing to spend on breaking strikes and on other kinds of repression - from police powers to the armed forces - to realise this fact. Pressure on the unemployed operates in the same way as concentration camps for political dissidents - it terrorises the bulk of the population into passive obedience.

WORKHOUSE ... LABOUR CAMP ... 'GATEWAY'... The keywords in modern capitalism are "productivity" and "flexibility" - in other words: increased rates of "extraction of labour" and decreased employee opposition to new methods of exploitation. As BMW's spokesman on Radio 4 said recently: "High unemployment is a result of higher productivity." Also linked are casualisation, job-substitution, "performance-related pay" and local pay bargaining.

The question for socialists is: can we contest this and, if so, how?

GIMME THAT OLD-STYLE REJECTION! There are still local campaigns against implementation of 'New Deal', mostly based on the *Groundswell* network that was set up to fight the Job Seekers Allowance, the main centres of which are in London, Brighton, Edinburgh, Oxford and Nottingham. Despite their relative weakness, such groups should not be ignored. For one thing, they organise the unemployed. For another they have had successes in forcing local councils, charitable organisations and businesses to pull out or refuse support to some of the worst projects.

Another approach is to try to politicise 'New Deal' recruits. This has already produced ones 'martyr' when a member of the Revolutionary

Richard Anthony, Exeter Left Group, takes a look at the links between New Deal and casualisation. Opposite we reproduced a leaflet from the Simon Jones Campaign.

Communist Group, Nigel Cook, was sacked from the job and had his dole suspended for attempting to unionise his fellow-workers. But neither is this necessarily a doomed tactic - in the USA *Work Experience Program* conscripts are now more willing to stand up against employers' gross abuses of their safety and security. This resurgence of militancy amongst casual and marginalised workers, recalling the old days of the IWW, is good news, but its future is still unclear.

NO, TO A SOCIALIST EUROPE? A third angle is the wave of mass action that has arisen in other parts of Europe, especially France, Germany and Greece. Demonstrations, occupations and riots have been the response of thousands of workers, students and unemployed to government attempts to impose the kind of 'reforms' that the working-class has suffered in New Zealand, the USA, the UK, the USSR and elsewhere. Not only have the planners been thrown into confusion, but also these shared battles raise the possibility of a new solidarity between sections of society whose common interests have not come together in this way for some time.

It may be that they have yet to experience the kinds of defeat which brought British workers to heel, or it may be that the diversity of trade unionism means that the TUC-Business Party type of stitch-up is not possible in those countries. While the odds of it happening here are slim for the immediate future, as the Americans have shown, it's not impossible.

THE THIRD WORLD IS DOWN THE ROAD... The main beneficiaries of workfare slaves in the US have been state and municipal governments and other public sector authorities using them to replace former direct employees, or even to re-employ the latter under new 'flexible', unprotected conditions. In the UK, the same process is slowly underway, but the job of administering the system has gone to private employment agencies as we see in the story of Simon Jones (see opposite). Other aspects of New Deal - 'training', etc are to be provided by conglomerates like Grand Metropolitan, formerly, and Reed

International, currently. This continues Thatcher's policy: privatisation of the Employment Service.

Unionisation of workers in this situation is a hard task - it will take the kind of daily grass-roots grind by co-workers that the Wobblies and the fruit-pickers union in California put into practice for years. Life isn't going to get easier in the foreseeable, but ...

RESISTANCE IS USEFUL! - Along with the Groundswell groups there are campaigns against employment agencies and casualisation (see *Cymru Goch*), and against gReed (see HSG). Campaigns, events and contacts:-

June 18th 1999: IMAGINE - International Day of Action Against the Global Rip-Off. Internet: www.agp.org; e-mail discussion: J18discussion@gn.apc.org

Brighton Against Benefit Cuts PO Box 2536, Rottingdean, Brighton BN2 6LX
Cymru Goch (Welsh Socialists) PO Box 661, Wrexham LL11 1QU (monitoring job agencies in Wales)

Haringey Solidarity Campaign PO Box 2474, London N8 (for campaign against Reed Group)

European Marches Association, 104, Rue des Couronnes, 75020 PARIS

Workfairness (USA): e-mail: iacentre@iacentre.org

"Dole autonomy versus the re-imposition of work" very useful pamphlet, £1, from *Aufheben* c/o Brighton Unemployed Centre Ltd, PO Box 2536, Rottingdean, Brighton BN2 6LX

The 10th NATIONAL HAZARDS CONFERENCE - HAZARDS 99 Bristol on 26-28 March 1999.

Hazards is a radical & effective pressure group providing support for trade union health & safety representatives. They have been at the forefront of campaigns for health & safety in the building industry and over the banning of asbestos.

Every year, hundreds of workers are killed, thousands are seriously injured in accidents at work, & thousands are diagnosed with industrial diseases. Most could be prevented if employers carried out their legal responsibilities. Health & Safety representatives make a major contribution to improving workplace conditions. This Conference provides a support network for reps, as well as an opportunity to learn about latest developments. The Conference needs financial support from trade union & other labour movement organisations. For details contact Hazards 99, c/o Fire Brigades Union, SW Regional Office, 158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol BS7 9RE

No To Casualisation

Simon Jones was killed on 24th April 1998, aged 24, on his first day as a casual worker at a Shoreham dock - another victim of our growing casual labour economy. He was sent to work unloading cargo inside a ship - one of the most dangerous jobs in the country - with only a few minutes 'training'. Within two hours of starting work he was crushed by the grab of a crane.

The growth of casualisation, where people are forced into low paid jobs with little or no training, no job security, no sick pay and no holiday pay means bigger profits for companies - and more deaths and injuries for the people working for them.

Simon Jones was taking a year out from Sussex University when he was killed. The harassment Simon got from the dole made him take any job on offer for fear of having his benefit stopped. **Are dole offices going to start checking that jobs are safe before harassing claimants into taking anything on offer, however crap the pay and unsafe the working conditions?**

Simon got the job through an employment agency, Personnel Selection, who should by law have checked that the job was safe for him - they didn't. Throughout the country, employment agencies make huge profits by providing cheap labour to companies who prefer employing casual labour to employing a well trained, decently paid workforce. **Is anyone going to do something about these agencies' profiteering off the backs of low paid workers forced into jobs that can cause them injury or death?**

The government-run Health and Safety Executive is meant to ensure that people's working conditions are safe. But last year only one in 20 serious injuries at work (that's things like being blinded or losing a limb) were even investigated by them, leaving 48,000 uninvestigated. This government claims to be 'tough on crime', but when it comes to big business making profits at the expense of people's health it seems to be a very different story. **Is anyone going to make sure that the Health and Safety Executive do their job instead of letting cost-cutting employers maim their employees and not even get investigated?**

The following text is taken from a leaflet produced by the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign.

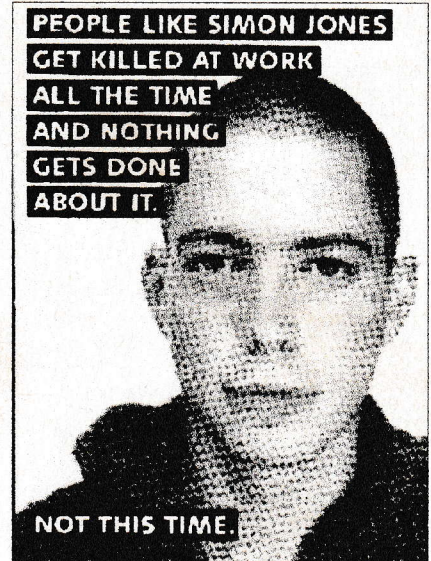
This government is busy creating a low pay economy where millions of people will be forced to take crappy jobs like the one Simon did or lose their benefit. We think this profits-before-people set up needs to be challenged before more people like Simon get killed. That's what we're trying to do. That's what we want you to help us do. That's what Simon would be doing if he was still around.

From the beginning, the memorial campaign set up in Simon's name has been committed to direct action to ensure that politicians don't get away with brushing his death, like so many others, under the carpet. Simon wrote for SchNews, the direct action movement's weekly newsletter, and was involved in supporting direct action in support of the Liverpool dockers' strike against the casualisation of their port. He knew that if you sat back and waited for politicians to put things right you'd have a long wait. It is not a lesson this campaign is about to forget.

- 1st September 1998. On what would have been Simon's 25th birthday, 30 protesters occupy the Shoreham dock owned by Euromin where Simon was killed. Two 80 foot towers are taken and banners reading 'Simon Jones RIP' and 'Casualisation Kills' are unfurled. A wreath is laid by the dockside and leaflets are handed out to sympathetic dock workers. Euromin are forced to close the docks down for the day, sending all their casual workers home on full pay.

- 3rd September 1998. The Brighton office of Personnel Selection, the employment agency that employed Simon on the day he died, is occupied. A banner reading 'Murderers' is hung from the window. Leaflets are handed out asking 'Why should agencies like this take half your wages when you're doing all the work?'. The office is shut down for the day, and again workers are sent home on full pay.

- 20th September 1998. In a highly unusual move - and as a direct result of these actions - a government minister is forced to admit on the BBC that the government's plans for



protecting people at work are "not enough". Discussing the government's intention to spend an extra £4.5m on health and safety inspectors, environment minister Michael Meacher says "I would be the first to say I think these significant increases are not enough". He goes on to say that "I am absolutely outraged that penalties that perhaps are as little as £2,500, which I certainly believe are derisory and insulting, are sometimes awarded in the case of death or serious injury".

Two actions are enough to get the government to admit that the money they plan to spend on health and safety enforcement will not be enough and that dodgy companies aren't being fined enough for endangering their workers' lives. With your support, we want to build a campaign to force the government to draw the obvious conclusion - fine companies who break the law serious money and use the cash to enforce proper health and safety at work.

Will they do it? Only if we make them. Every MP has been written to about Simon's death. Every official body involved has been lobbied. But, as always, it will be direct action that will make the difference. Join us in making sure there aren't more deaths like Simon's in the future.

Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, PO Box 2600, Brighton BN2 2DX

Campaign Against Slovak Visas

On October 8th Labour Home Secretary Jack Straw imposed visa requirements on Slovakia - a country that is a key candidate for European Union membership, and which, only days before, had ditched its autocratic ruler, Meciar, in favour of a democratic coalition.

For the past 12 months, Slovak and Czech gypsies ("Roma") have been seeking asylum in the UK, claiming persecution - only to find reception committees formed by the National Front at Dover dockside, and a government which granted only 20 out of 695 applications.

Racially Motivated Attacks

Since the Velvet Revolution of 1989, when former Czechoslovakia moved from communism back into the capitalist world, under the auspices of respected liberal and former dissident Vaclav Havel, 28 gypsies have been murdered in racially motivated attacks, often by gangs of neo-nazi skinheads.

It comes as a shock to learn that in the new capitalist Czech lands, with a boom economy of 5% unemployment, 1997 statistics show gypsy unemployment at 70-90%. The overwhelming number of Czechs and Slovaks will tell you "...lazy gypsies don't want to work; they're happy living off benefits and stealing". Earlier this year in Javornice, eastern Slovakia, a gypsy ghetto with 100% unemployment was destroyed by flood and 49 people died. Popular Slovak comment was "God's judgement because of their stealing" and "...it was pay-day, they wouldn't have noticed because they were all drunk".

Bridgwater Czech/Slovak Friendship Society

In Bridgwater we know very well Czech and Slovak attitudes to their gypsy minority - not a pretty aspect of our Friendship Society. Formed after the Velvet Revolution, with the aim of bringing together people previously at cold war, we now organise up to 1000 people travelling between the 3 countries each year - Czechoslovakia split into 2 in 1993. One of the main things we can offer Czech and Slovak people is an opportunity to spend time in a multicultural, multiethnic society, where racist views can be challenged, even opinions on the all-embracing benevolence of capitalism, and, since 1997, the benefits of living in a social democracy.

Labour Councillor Brian Smedley, Administrator, Bridgwater Czech-Slovak Friendship Society writes...

Thanks a Bunch Jack Straw!
So, thanks a bunch Jack Straw for bringing in the visas - how do we explain that one? Now the Slovak view is "...bloody gypsies, now we have to pay to go to England because of them!" A visa charge of £40 is the equivalent of a week's wages to the average Slovak.

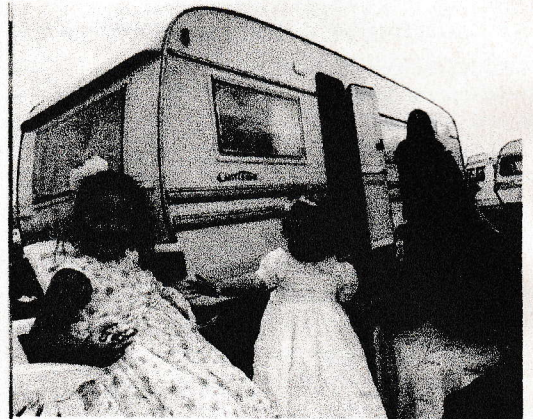
We have no option but to challenge the decision. At the beginning of the crisis in 1997 we had written to the Czech Embassy expressing concern at the level of racial oppression in the Czech Republic and had raised the issue with Home Officer Minister Mike O'Brien and leader of European Socialist Group Pauline Green, expecting a positive and progressive stance from the Labour Party.

Then it was easier to explain. In September 1997 Czech and Slovak gypsies arrived first in Canada and then in Dover following a programme by tabloid Czech TV station "TV Nova", called "Gypsies Go To Heaven", which encouraged gypsies to go to the UK or Canada to claim asylum and receive full benefits. At least one Czech Council backed this up with offers to pay their airfare. On arrival, the reality was proved to be the opposite, with Government Ministers pandering to tabloid calls to "deal with the scroungers" as "economic migrants". Here we surely have a problem - up to 40,000 US citizens and a large number of Brits now live in Prague alone as "economic migrants", taking advantage of the low price economy. Isn't the new Europe all about free movement of capital and labour?

The Historical Context

Gypsy persecution is nothing new around Europe. In Romania they were enslaved for 3 centuries and bought and sold as chattels. Whilst most gypsies are based in East Europe in fixed settlements, many continued to pursue a nomadic life. The big change came with the 2nd World war, when half a million gypsies were killed in Nazi gas chambers, and the subsequent coming to power of the Communists across the eastern states of Europe.

In Czechoslovakia the



Romany Travellers at a site in Staffordshire

Communists tried to meet their labour shortage by moving gypsies settled in Slovakia to the depopulated Czech borderlands - the Sudetenland, from where they'd expelled the German population. This regular source of work was taken up eagerly by the Roma community, and by the 1970s they reached near full employment, although there were documented cases of breaches of human rights, with forced assimilation, restriction of free movement and covert sterilisation.

Collapse Of Communism

In 1989 the collapse of communism brought the realities of capitalist market forces to bear on the previously protected Czechoslovak economy, in an atmosphere of pandemic unemployment. Roma were often the first to go, forcing many into the black economy or crime. Across East Europe, prostitution, Chicago style gang warfare and drug racketeering are rife. This has combined evilly with the post-communist search for a National-ist identity and the attitude amongst many that "...anything the communists said was good must be bad". The consequence has been the rise of neo-nazi groups, with links across Europe to other far-right groups, and a parliamentary presence by the far-right Republican Party of Sladek who makes no secret of his anti-gypsy views. More disturbing is that an increasing number of Czechs and Slovaks see gypsies as "parasites" and "responsible for rising crime rates" and that they should live separated from the rest of society. The Mayor of Usti Nad Labem recently

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What's Going On At Xerox?

In October we were summoned into the conference room by the floor manager who read out a Level 1 Proto (a leaflet telling workers what Xerox planned). The news that there were to be 500 job losses between a number of sites shocked everyone: job losses in Interconnect (where harnesses are produced), Asset Management and Refurbishment (reconditioning old copiers). As well we were told of 250 job losses at the Ven Ray Xerox factory in Holland. The plan is for all the jobs to be relocated to a new plant in Dundalk, Eire.

US Senator Mitchell who took part in the recent peace talks and who is a director on the Xerox Management Board asked if jobs were being sacrificed in Britain to assist the peace process!

After the cuts were announced the Joint Shop Stewards Committee organised a meeting with Diana Organ, our local Labour MP. She said she would get support from MPs in the West Country of all parties and put forward a motion in the House in support of safeguarding the 500 jobs.

I decided to meet up with the local SWP branch and with their help drew up a motion calling for a demonstration in defence of our jobs. The intention being to march through Mitcheldean and past the factory gates.

I went round the people on my floor, sounding out the idea, and there was full support from both union and non-union members.

When the motion was presented to the Joint Shop Stewards Committee it was passed unanimously. However, they refused to agree to the date of the demonstration which I'd set for 14th November. They said they'd need to give it more time and put it to the union membership.

The Convenor (GMB & AEEU) met with representatives of the Department of Industry but nothing conclusive has come from this yet. My fellow workers keep asking for the date of the demo, and all I can say is "not yet". They seem keen to take part in some action.

I think the union is trying to water down any dissent. Their excuse is that they're waiting to see what space Diana Organ has in her diary as they plan to have her leading the march.

My fellow workers are feeling angry and insecure. There's some apathy, of course. A number of people are just shrugging their shoulders and accepting it.

A lot of people won't get any

A worker from Xerox, Mitcheldean, Forest of Dean, reports on the announcement of 500 job losses.

redundancy because they are employed by Manpower. Many of these workers have been at Xerox for as long as 5 years. Manpower holds on to their P45s, and as soon as there are redundancies, look to finding them work elsewhere - immediately. Sounds great, but one woman I know says she lives in an isolated place where there are only 2 buses a day: one to Cinderford and one to Xerox in Mitcheldean. If she's offered a job at Beechams (the second biggest employer in the Forest) she just won't be able to get there. With no transport she'll just have to turn such an offer down and Manpower will class this a refusal regardless. As a result, they'll hold on to her P45 and she won't be entitled to Jobseekers Allowance. 300-350 workers at Xerox are in this kind of Catch 22 situation.

I know people who've taken out mortgages in the last few years, believing their jobs were secure. The overall feeling, before the announcement, was of security, complacency even. No one was expecting job cuts on such a scale. Before it's been 20-50 jobs spread over several departments. You can imagine what the loss of 500 jobs is going to mean for the area. Unemployment is

an ongoing epidemic in the Forest. Public transport here is inadequate and there are few leisure amenities for young people. I witnessed a sudden rise in heroin use here about 18 months ago. The proposed job losses will make everything worse. People are not optimistic.

The towns of Cinderford, Coleford and Lydney are going to be badly affected. Diana Organ has spoken to the Principal of the Royal Forest of Dean College, claiming to be opening up vacancies and career possibilities. We all know that's pretty meaningless.

I believe that united action is the only valid response to the news. As long as everyone stands together we can show that we won't stand for these massive job losses.

I confess I haven't seen much in the way of a fight back at Xerox over the years. The managers like to boast of their "good partnership" with the unions - read what you will into this! When the date for the demonstration is finalised I'll inform *Red SW*. We need the support of other workers, unemployed people and activists in the area.

Campaign Against Slovak Visas

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advocated the building of a wall round the gypsy part of town. It is common to find Roma barred from pubs, discos and other public areas.

Division Of Czechoslovakia

In 1994 the Czech government used the division of Czechoslovakia as an opportunity to exclude as many Roma as possible from citizenship, on the pretext that most were of Slovak origin due to their post-war migration under the communists, and the fact that most Czech romanes had been killed in the holocaust. In Slovakia, Prime Minister Meciar described Roma as "anti-social, mentally backward, unassimilable and socially unacceptable". The Czech Republic, under the Thatcherite guidance of Premier Klaus, and Slovakia under the increasingly demagogic Meciar both sought to join the EU. The Slovaks were put on the slow train by the West, due to concerns about

human rights and economic liberalisation. Both have now been rejected by their own people: Klaus last year in favour of the Social Democrats of Milos Zeman, and Meciar in October 1998 by a hardworking democratic coalition ranging from Christian democrats to the Left block. One of the first acts of the new Slovak government was to issue a proclamation condemning racial intolerance and seeking to redress it - the first act by the British government was to impose visas!

Grasping At Straws

Today, 80% of Roma children are consigned to special schools for the mentally subnormal, although they are lively, imaginative and of normal intelligence. It is little wonder that Czech and Slovak gypsies grasp at any "Straw" to find a life without persecution. It seems the new Labour government is saying "they've grasped the wrong one here!"

A Socialist Conference:

In a sense the Bridgwater conference this November was a chance for the RSN to return to its roots. The Revolutionary Socialist Network started from two conferences held in Bristol in 1993. We've been around the country and round the houses since then: people have come and some have gone; and there's been some falling outs along the way. So it was good to get back to the South West, to the biggest meeting we've had for a while (over 30 people) and to re-affirm that what's good about the RSN is still strong.

There's a bit of a personal angle here for me. I was part of the group, which organised the original conferences, but I left Bristol shortly afterwards. So Bridgwater felt a bit like coming home to me. But dewy-eyed nostalgia aside, it was a great weekend, with 40 people attending.

Glen Burrow's opening on 'Solidarity Lost?' got things off in the right way. I'm probably a bit ultra-left on these things so didn't agree

Dave Backwith, of the Revolutionary Socialist Network, writes about the recent conference in Bridgwater

with all of Glen's conclusions but she gave a well-judged overview of the history of working class struggle in Britain: it was honest, critical but looking for positive ways forward. The discussion was much the same: lots of different points of view, some disagreements but no stupid squabbling and, not least, no undue pessimism. The history was grounded in where we're at now and what we need to do.

It was good. We were sat in a room above a pub talking seriously about the working class changing society. There were anarchists, libertarian Marxists, Trotskyists and Labour Party members listening to each other and exchanging ideas. There were more women than I've seen at an RSN meeting for some time. And the walls were draped with deep red banners. It was how it should be.

As I didn't take any notes I can't say much about the specifics of the discussions. The topics were a good mix. Dave Chapple continued a history of black people's experience in Britain, which he'd begun at our previous meeting in Wigan. Dave's general point is that black people have a rich tradition of struggle which has been neglected by the predominantly white left. But it was a history illustrated with great music; more of which followed in the 'Black Music social' on the Saturday evening.

Dave's first instalment (in Wigan) on Black struggles had indirectly led to the on 'Working Class Culture and Social Change'. From what originated out of (semi-) drunken post-conference blather in Wigan Tony Taylor set up a wide-ranging and insightful discussion about

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The Answer Lies...

R.E. comments on some issues raised at the Bridgwater RSN conference

A point raised at the November '98 conference at Bridgwater was that of the difficulty of persuading people of the validity of revolutionary politics and also the perennial question arose - where are the young? These have long been problems for revolutionaries in liberal capitalist societies where many have a perceived interest, however small, in the continuation of the system, however briefly. Should anyone book a holiday next year?

It is difficult, for some of us at least, to thoroughly understand what it is like to be on the outside looking in on this melange of ideologies. To have to consider joining in the seemingly interminable and often inconclusive debates, and to understand who did what and when and were they right to do so. To grasp the finer points at issue, to care enough, and to wonder how and if

anything practical will come from it all. It can be quite hard going even when you've been in for a while and must be quite intimidating for the uninitiated. Not too surprising then that we are not bowled over by hordes of enthusiasts at our meetings.

One response could be that this is not the way it happens, that people arrive at a revolutionary position having been through the mill of trying to obtain social justice by means of orthodox politics and having realised the futility of such a pie-in-the-sky approach have moved forward from that. Few arrive by means of having individually assessed all the possibilities. This being the case then clearly a degree of patience is called for on our part!

Another obvious response might be that events change people far more than propaganda, that all

revolutionaries can do between social upheavals is to support ongoing short-term struggles and educate without being frustrated at the lack of insurrection every weekend. It looks like being a long haul. However, the sixties changed a lot of minds and broke many of the hierarchical ties that bound people to the ideas and methods of the past; how far we are from anything like a similar situation at present is a moot point but as I recall no-one anticipated the events of May '68 so, comrades, there is always room for optimism.

As to where the young are, has anyone tried to approach them? Who are "the young" anyway, is it a definable category? Isn't it relative? On what terms do we address them? Doesn't revolutionary politics, at a time of non-revolution, require a degree of maturity, or is that patronising? Who was it who said that revolution is the province of the young - just another jaded misquote? Too many questions, too few answers; the usual situation for me.

the RSN in Bridgwater

(Continued from page 12)

whether there was such a thing as working class culture and how it might be characterised. Personally, I think there is but, as I recall, we didn't reach a consensus; certainly not about the relationship between black music and supposedly "crap" white pop. That's one we'll probably return to.

Malcolm Ball cut through the bleary-eyed Sunday morning fog to get people thinking seriously about the current state of bourgeois politics, the global economic instability and what they implied for socialism. We then turned to hurried but inspiring reports of people's activity. There are two things here. First is that Laurens Otter has accurately dubbed the RSN as 'a

talking shop for activists'. So we didn't get around to deciding how we could 'intervene' to save the working class. The second point, however, is that we are socialists and revolutionaries, for us the class struggle is real. I can't do justice to all that people are doing but three reports stood out for me: John Granna on the campaign against council house privatisation in Yeovil; Dave Chapple's discussions with Somali refugees working in the new mail sorting office in Bristol; and Dave Hussey's account of the Four Winds mental health user's group in Cardiff. Maybe they'll all write something up for *Red South West*?

We finished by agreeing to meet again in Bristol next February. Again we've got a good agenda lined up,

including: French/European trade unions, mental health, sexuality and morality and, of course, current struggles and activities. There was a lot of enthusiasm to carry on where we left off, as there usually is. Glen Burrows and Dave Chapple did us proud in organising the event. But the main thing is, what keeps the RSN going, is that it works: socialists of all sorts come together to listen and learn from each other. We're nothing if not open and friendly. If you fancy it and can get to the Bristol meeting you'd be welcome and, who knows, it might be a Saturday well spent. For more info contact either: Glen Burrows (tel. 01278 450562) or me, Dave Backwith (tel. 01638 669551)

ZERO ZERO - LET'S GO!

The Plymouth 00 Let's Go Group, outlines "A revolutionary manifesto for the Millennium"

At the Revolutionary Socialist Network meeting in Bridgwater in November an idea was mooted that the Millennium "celebrations" could be used for revolutionary ends around the slogan ZERO ZERO - LET'S GO! Various reasons for this were suggested:

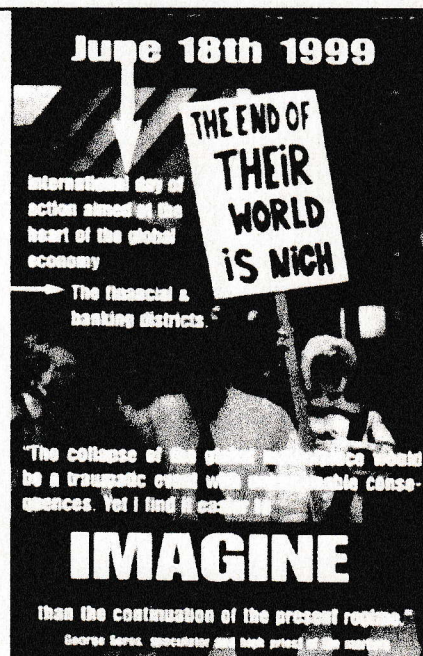
- it is being anticipated by some that there is a "risk" of possible disruption to the smooth running of certain utilities because of the "Millennium Bug" in computer systems. This could lead to a breakdown in communications, fuel supplies, transport and other services
- police forces are discussing with the military how they will be able to cope with widespread social unrest, including how best to deploy their personnel to "hotspots"
- it has been suggested that the emotional pressure from the build-up to the actual dawn of the third Millennium will increase people's sensitivities and sense of their place in history
- there is a sense of increasing disappointment and despair with

the existing political system which has failed to bring the changes people overwhelmingly voted for in May 1997

The ruling class have dominated the last 1000 years and in doing so have shown their inability to progress civilisation for the general benefit of the majority. The advances in production and technology are squandered in capitalism's mad drive to make profit at the expense of the needs of people and planet. This in turn has led to discrimination, exploitation, insecurity, poverty, pollution, hunger and war. The last century of the Millennium is clear evidence of this and hardly requires further comment. However, a recent from a Sheffield steelworker facing redundancy that the majority of ploughs in the world are still made from wood speaks volumes!

These conditions, the crying need for socialist change and the possible opportunity for turning another piss-up into an uprising should excite us.

Plans need to be made for all sections of the exploited working class to prepare to take control of our workplaces, colleges, environment



and communities. Revolutionaries need to spread the word through publicity (media, "00" badges, gigs etc) and forming local groups and networks to link dissidents. These could then spring up internationally as the opportunity the Millennium provides becomes clearer.

It would be a shame if we are still debating the issue as the dust settles and hangovers clear on 1/1/00. We must build for 00 hours on 00 day.

The bitterness, anger, love and power are there to make ZERO ZERO - LET'S GO a reality
Let's not waste it!

Rembetika, the "Greek Blues"

Late one night during the Metaxa dictatorship the 17 year- old Mihalis Yenitsaris was making his way home in the Athens/Piraeus area of Greece. He was, in his own words "stoned, a little demon with horns". He was called over by a policeman in big boots. The policeman looked at him and asked him if he was a hashish smoker. "What's that you're carrying?" he asked. "A bouzouki! Don't you know that it's forbidden to play bouzouki at this time of night?" He then grabbed Mihalis' bouzouki and smashed it to bits. Mihalis was a tad miffed and head butted the policeman, thus earning himself his first prison sentence of six months. This is the very stuff of rembetika.

Rembetika, being a Greek phenomenon, is inevitably, difficult to define and full of contradictions. It is a style of music that has been referred to as 'the Greek Blues'. Its roots, like those of blues, run through a number of times and places. There is clearly a trace of Byzantine music in it. Its more recent roots are to be found in the Greek prisons of the 19th century where music was banned. Prisoners made their own instruments, such as the baglama, which was played quietly so that the guards could not hear it. Its heyday, it is generally agreed, was the 1920's and 30's. The consequences of Greece's failure to conquer Turkey in 1922 were the exchanges of populations between the two countries. Between 1.5 and 2 million Greek speaking residents of Turkey became refugees, mainly crowding into urban ghettos around Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki. Life was hard in this community of the 'sub-proletariat'. What has been described as 'a new music' came out of this experience and along with it a style of life.

'Rembetes' or 'Mangas' were socially excluded. According to experts, 'mangas' can be translated as 'wide-boy' or 'spiv'. The photographs from the late 20's and early 30's show men in gangster style sharp suits that Al Capone and co. would have not found unfamiliar. Although some claim that Mangas were peaceful people and 'Gentlemen', (where have we heard that one before?), many carried knives. To some being a

Following the RSN debate on culture, Sven Papadopoulos, Exeter Left Group, writes on the "Greek Blues".



Rembetes playing music and generally 'hanging out'

Mangas was a vocation: they did not marry and preferred prostitutes. They would meet in cafes and *tekes* (hash dens,) to smoke hash, make music and dance.

The authorities tried to stamp them out. Following one raid on a *teke* Mihalis Yenitsaris was sentenced to 2 years in prison and 3 years in exile on an island, (which he recalls in a lovely song.) The Rembetes' music leaked out into the local populations and their suppression by the authorities aided their appeal to Greece's urban working class. It was a limited music of resistance.

The music is usually made by a small group of musicians playing some combination of the bouzouki, baglama, guitar, zither, accordion and oud. The singers have gravely voices, presumably the result of overdoing it with the nargiles, (water pipe.) The Mangas created their own secret language which makes translation of their lyrics for one with limited key stage 1 Greek almost impossible. However, I am reliably told that most of the songs are about hash smoking prostitutes, prison and the hardship of life. Cool or what?

Well I like it! I came to it crablike as I pursued the Great Greek Fantasy, (GGF,) through which I indulge my petit bourgeois tendencies in the name of coping with my alienation. Essentially this means that I am likely

to get very excited about anything Greek from the seas to the plastic salt pots. This is not to say that I lose all my critical faculties but I found Greek music easy to like. Then one day, Channel Four had a documentary about Rembetika, which, to the regret of many friends and acquaintances, I taped. The tale of Rembetika was narrated by tight buttocks George Dalaras. He, through his own musical abilities and his part in the revival of Rembetika has become a superstar. He was part of new generation, who, in the late 60's and 70's rediscovered Rembetika. That this should coincide with the repressive Colonels' Junta in Greece and the march of hippies in the West should be of no surprise. Songs of rebellion were embraced by the oppressed as a form of resistance.

To what extent there has ever been 'working class culture' is open to debate. Rembetika has been seen in Greece as a music that was popular with the working class. It became synonymous with resistance but seems to have had very little real political content. Its significance as a music of resistance is now only historical. Its incorporation into the mainstream came relatively late. For the petit bourgeoisie it is a curiosity and the working classes are more and more the victims of popular global pap culture oozing in from the west.

If you like blues and are happy to

Y FANER GOCH

Y Faner Goch is the newspaper of Cymru Goch (The Welsh Socialists). It's been going for 20 years, starting life as the left wing of Plaid Cymru, moving left and independent into its current form.

The current issue (No.107) calls for the setting up of a Welsh Socialist Alliance, and abandonment of the old politics of Westminster and Britain. There is a lively debate on "Socialism, Republicanism and Nationalism", which rejects Welsh Nationalism and "a British road to socialism" in favour of a Welsh socialism that is green, democratic and revolutionary.

The centre pages celebrate 20 years of Welsh Socialism through back issues of Y Faner Goch. There's an article on ex-MI5 agent David Shayler, album and gig reviews, poetry - good, refreshing stuff for tired, old British lefties.

You can subscribe for £6 (12 issues). Cheques payable to Y Faner Goch, PO Box 661, Wreccsam, Cymru LL11 1QU

Rembetika (cont)

cope with a bit of the East, you'll probably like Rembetika. If you want to find out more there is stuff on the net or better still get yourself up Green Lanes in North London, to the Trehantiri Record Shop which claims to have the world's biggest selection of Greek music, including a lot of Rembetika. There are numerous compilations which are a good start - 'History of Rembetika Vols. 1-4,398', 'Banned Rembetika 1927-1935', 'Rembetika of the World' and much more. Then, if you develop a taste for it, buy some by your favourite artists. From a rain lashed flat in Exeter it is easy to get romantic notions about the life of the Mangas. Mihalis Yenitsaris is one of my favourite Rembetes. In one song he asks that when he dies, they stand his coffin in the corner and blow hashish smoke over him so that he can enter the other world stoned. This is particularly poignant, as in the video he explains how he would smoke his nargiles in the morning, the afternoon and at night every day until a few months previously when he had a throat operation.

The Agitator

A Directory Of Autonomous, Non-Hierarchical Groups & Such Like in Britain & Ireland

This directory was created by people from Counter Information, Haringey Solidarity Group and the Anarchist Distribution Service, and it contains details of non-hierarchical, libertarian activist groups, magazines, bookshops etc.

The aim of the directory is to encourage "information sharing, solidarity and networking between groups and individuals"

If you or your campaigning group are not on this list then contact the

HSG to add your details. If you are looking for like minded campaigning groups throughout the country then this is a very useful place to start.

HSG and the other groups who have produced this directory should be congratulated for performing a very useful service. Anything that increases solidarity and collaboration is to be very much welcomed.

If the directory lacks one thing, it is contacts for a number of socialist groups who presumably fall in the category of "hierarchical". Perhaps a supplement or appendix could be added?

Send £5 for a copy to: - Haringey Solidarity Group, PO Box 2474, London N8. Cheques payable to "H.S.G"

Notes from the Borderland - New Spookhunters on the Block

BM Box 4769, London WC1N 3XX

Richard Anthony, Exeter Left Group, reviews issue 2 of Notes From the Borderland

This is an interesting addition to the very small stable of British publications of 'parapolitics'. *Notes* is edited and largely written by Larry O'Hara - a controversial figure, to put it mildly, whose name at least is known to many anti-fascists in the UK. The headline feature in this issue is a timely analysis of the antics of the renegade MI-Fivers, David Shayler and his girlfriend Annie Machon. Anyone inclined to think that such defectors are 'a good thing' should definitely read this.

There's a firm belief amongst many of the traditional left in this country that the forces of history are stronger than these clandestine counter-revolutionaries. Those who hold this view often refer to Victor Serge's account, in "What Everyone Should know About State Repression", of how much the Bolsheviks had been infiltrated by the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret service. 'They didn't stop the Revolution in 1917!' goes the refrain. True, but given its subsequent development, the revolution didn't appear to stop them either.

This benign view of the world of spies, agents-provocateur and informers - summed up dismissively as 'conspiracy theory' - is not shared

by those who've been on the receiving end. Ask any refugees from Chile, South Africa or other places where the action got real.

Nor, apparently, was it shared by Karl Marx. According to David Pegg (of whom I know nothing). In 1860 Marx took a year out from writing "Das Kapital" to produce a book called "Herr Vogt: A Spy in the Workers' Movement". He considered it an urgent task because of the activities of this agent of Napoléon III in churning out counter-propaganda and disinformation from his base in Switzerland, which sowed confusion amongst, as well as trying to entrap, revolutionaries and their supporters. Marx was also clear that it couldn't be safely ignored.

NFTB isn't aiming to replace the long-running *Lobster*, or more recent productions like *Open Eye* and *Statewatch*. Under O'Hara's direction it will surely continue to concentrate on British domestic spies and their agents, as well as fascist/antifascist politics. Whether it survives may depend on the quality of his fellow-contributors, as much as on the appetite of readers for this kind of fare.

Subscription £5 for 2 issues, cheques payable to Larry O'Hara

Obituary; John Hale

A tribute by Tim Price, Exeter Left Group.

John Hale died unexpectedly on November 12th 1998. He was aged just 37. He had been an animal rights campaigner and anarchist for many years. He was in many senses an 'ordinary' activist - not a leader. All those involved in the Hunt Sabs movement in Exeter from around 1984 knew John as a warm, intelligent and likeable bloke. He did not intimidate people with his intelligence or use it to gain prestige. He had a good sense of humour as was illustrated by his unwavering support for Notts County. He took his stand on animal rights very seriously and remained a vegan even as many old friends steadily drifted into a less rigorous vegetarianism. He was always willing to get involved in anti-fascist activity even though he was something short of being a bruiser himself. He took an active part in the Anti-Poll tax movement: this notorious photo of his involvement in the burning of the Union Jack taken from the Exeter Guildhall at the first large Anti-Poll Tax demo depicts him having fun. He had great sympathy for the dispossessed and used his social work qualification to work in



John (centre right), helps burn the flag

the voluntary sector with homeless people and later those coming out of prison. John is already being missed, not only by his 3 children and his partner, Sarah, but also by his many friends. Working in the voluntary sector has few financial benefits and he died without any pension rights. Friends have set up a fund. If you knew John and wish to contribute the account is a Co-operative Bank account in the names of Mr B. A. Cassidy and Mr. P. Stubbs, sort code 08-93-00, account number 171-874-53.

Battle Joined At Siston Common

Call for supporters to join new protest camp on route.

First action at Siston Common near Bristol in December, as fifteen protesters took on diggers with D-locks, and tried to block movement of a lone driver. Work stopped for most of the day. No arrests.

We were protesting the building of the Avon Ring Road, in the largest local authority funded scheme of its kind in the country. Supermarkets are planned, and three thousand houses on beautiful unspoiled countryside. An all-out assault on the quality of life of many people living locally.

Even before local TV news showed footage, word had gone back along the cycle track, that Stop the Avon Ring Road (STARR) had got stuck in. "Thank you for all you're doing for us," said the retired couple in Shortwood, who give us the water for our camp. Shit, we only wish it could be more!

We could use a lot of help up here. This battle is another M25, another Newbury bypass in the making. Three separate legal challenges continue in the courts, making it above all a *winnable* fight. But we do need more people here on the ground.

Starting after Christmas, and by the time you read this, there will be a highly "des res" here, smack on route, with all modern conveniences. French cooking! Loads of good support and supplies. Fun-loving, friendly, sorted people. An eco-activist's adventure playground! Come and check it out for yourselves.

Love, green-belt, and solidarity
- Margaret
(For North Star Camp and STARR)

More information: Camp mobile phone 0797-999-0389 Or write to 84 Colston St, Bristol BS1 5BB

Brian Parsons - Freedom At Last (cont)

(Continued from page 6)

case including:

The suppression of 160 pieces of information.

The reliability of the forensic evidence crucial in the conviction.

The failure to pass on evidence to the defence which would never have led to a trial.

The "misleading" evidence given by John Essery - the Queen's Police Medal winner.

When the Criminal Cases Review Commission - the body set up to look at miscarriages of justice - read the report it immediately referred the case back to the Court of Appeal.

At the time of writing Parsons is waiting to see whether he will get bail ahead of the appeal which looks certain to finally clear his name.

When he heard the news Parsons, speaking from prison, said: "I know I didn't kill Ivy Batten but I have still spent 10 years in prison and nobody cares about it out there.

I just want it to happen now. If it doesn't happen then there is something seriously wrong with this system."

Something *is* seriously wrong with the system.

There are lessons to be learnt from what happened to Brian Parsons. He asked for help and he didn't get it. He was left to rot in various jails with only his solicitor showing any interest in the case.

A well-organised defence campaign could have helped to free him earlier. His parents tried to set one up but it was ignored.

There are lots more people like Brian Parsons in prison all over the country.

Socialists have a responsibility to fight for their freedom.

Miscarriages of justice are not isolated legal cases. They are a product of a decaying system which puts profit before people.

Building defence campaigns brings people into the struggle. They raise questions about the role of the police and whose interests so-called justice really serves.

Defence campaigns which are organised on that basis can be part of the wider movement which will one day sweep away the present system and lead to real justice and real freedom.