

# COUNTER INFORMATION

NO. 8  
DEC 1985/  
JAN 1986  
FREE

*Residents attack Brixton police station in the early stages of the riot on Sat. 28th Sept.*

## WE WANT EVERYTHING!



### A FIRST HAND REPORT FROM THE BRIXTON RIOTS

**Everything started in Brixton with the shooting and wounding of a black woman, Cherry Groce, during a police raid on her house.**

The way in which she was wounded is typical of the criminal behaviour of the police of every State.

7 police burst, armed, into the flat; the woman going to open the door naturally doesn't immediately realise what's happening. The police ask about her son, she takes fright and turns round, perhaps to try and warn her sons who were asleep.

A shot is fired, she's struck in the back. She will be permanently paralysed.

Around mid-day all her neighbours gather outside her house and with the shout of 'Fascist murderers' they march on the nearby police station.

The people in the street don't understand at first then the news spreads that the woman had died and suddenly there appear petrol bombs (full crates!), stones, sticks, metal bolts. This is the signal for the revolt.

From that moment on the mood was 'we've had enough of the murdering police!'

It's difficult to describe the sequence of events from this moment on and it's difficult to follow the logic of the events, but I'll try! I discover that there's a riot going on while I'm sitting having a meal with my flat mates, a normal Saturday evening.

2 friends arrive running, they burst into our house and gesticulating, almost unable to speak, they lead us a short way to Brixton's main street.

There I saw something that I'll never forget...the sight of that street, usually full of traffic, now in flames, with the houses on either side completely swallowed up by the flames and smoke from the burning barricades. And in the middle of it all the people, familiar faces that I know well, neighbours, children, youths, all intent on building barricades, all to cover the other comrades who, in the shops along the street were organising the most joyful acts of looting that I have ever seen. For them and for us all it was a long anticipated carnival.

Juice and soft drinks in abundance for the kids, boxes of sweets and chocolates for the grannies, for the big brothers lots

and lots of bottles of whisky, enough to get the whole of Brixton drunk that night.

#### SANTA COMES EARLY

And this was only for starters, in the course of the night there were people who had obviously thought of, let's say, more long-lasting goods, like jewels, watches and diamond rings. I happened to see a group of young black women standing in front of some policemen waving the most beautiful gold watches, saying that they'd been given an early Christmas present! You can imagine how angry the police were to be so completely ridiculed.

The most amazing thing about this kind of revolt is how it sometimes becomes just like a party or a festival; the sort of thing you see in absurd films. It's enough for you to know that my neighbours, after visiting the little supermarket nearby, organised a party, a party that lasted all night, with the reggae music accompanied by the wailing of police sirens and by the arrival of the fire brigade who were trying to put out various fires burning in the street.

But, you ask where the police?

Well, for a good part of the night it was impossible for the police to control the situation for 2 reasons, firstly because they were completely unprepared to deal with the situation, no-one had expected anything like this!

And secondly because the revolt spread from one part of the area to another with a violence and speed that was impossible to control.

The tactics were typical of street guerilla fighting: mobile groups move from one part of the district to another, they throw petrol bombs at a target, the police arrive, a violent clash, the rioters disperse, they start again in another street and before the police can get there they empty several shops with lightning speed and perfect organisation, then they set fire to the shops so that when the police arrive their escape routes are already available, through the smoke from the fires.

That's how it was in Brixton for the whole night till, around dawn, completely exhausted, we all went to bed. Everything that the papers wrote about how the police easily gained control of the area during Saturday night - it's not true.

It only became quiet when we decided to go to sleep, we left the police to guard the by now empty shops and the still burning barricades.

For a month the papers have been talking about nothing but these revolts and naturally they're looking for an explanation for everything that's happened. However, I think I know the motive and I finish here with the words that I heard shouted at a policeman during the looting of a shop:

**'Leave me alone, police shit, I want to enjoy myself, life is boring, we want the goods, the money, power... WE WANT EVERYTHING!'**

#### 'MINI-RIOTS'

In addition to Handsworth, Brixton, Toxteth and Tottenham smaller scale clashes occurred all round the country.

On 4th November the police station in the South Yorks pit village of Askern came under siege. In the Manchester area clashes have taken place in Salford on the 2 nights immediately after the Handsworth riots, and also in Hulme, Lollyhurst, Cheetham Hill and nearby Stockport.

Other scenes of attacks on businesses and the police include: the Carnwadic scheme in Glasgow on October 15th; Southall, Peckham and Forest Gate in London; Oxford on 4th October; Rugby on 13/18/19th October; Leicester on 10/11th October; Gloucester, Welshpool and Harrogate on 12/13th October; Norwich; Nottingham; Brecon; Knaresboro; Luton.

# RIOTS

**IN THE RECENT riots people have fought back against police racism and violence. This is very positive.**

The riots have NOT been racial conflicts. Blacks, whites and people of Asian origin have fought alongside each other against the police. Women and men, young and old, have all been involved.

The riots have NOT been outbreaks of random, senseless violence. The rioters have been attacking the police for good reason - the police regularly subject people in these areas to racist abuse, harassment, unjustified searches and arrests, beatings, terrifying raids on their homes. Such violent police raids have left Cherry Groce paralysed in Brixton, Cynthia Jarret dead in Tottenham.

To the fore in the revolts have been black and Asian youths, rightly unwilling to tolerate the twin racist and class oppression they are subjected to. Racism exists throughout British society - there's the violent racist assaults by the police and also by fascists, discrimination in employment and housing, the racist immigration laws and related deportations, plus widely-held racist prejudices.

The media are outraged by the looting of shops. But why should

people put up with poverty and inequality in a world of potential plenty?

However, not everything that's happened during the riots is positive. Setting fire to shops next to people's houses is dangerous. In Brixton, 2 women were raped, there were some muggings and house breakings directed against working class people. Such anti-social activities must be actively opposed. Indeed, in Brixton rioters intervened to prevent some muggings.

## EVERYDAY

The riots haven't sprung from nowhere. In areas like Liverpool 8 and Brixton there is everyday conflict between locals and police. In 1981, riots erupted on dozens of towns and cities. Black people in Britain, especially London, have been organising against state oppression since at least the late '60s.

The police threaten to use plastic bullets in the next major riot. The government will try and contain the revolt within certain inner city areas, justifying ferocious repression on the grounds that it's only being used against a minority of 'criminal elements' - similar tactics to those used against inhabitants of the Catholic ghettos in N. Ireland. The media will try and encourage more anti-riot actions like the Council workers demo against Bernie Grant in Tottenham.

But if the struggle is spread to other areas this will prevent revolts being isolated in this way. Riots can be spread to neighbouring areas, as was done in Brixton, and throughout the country, as happened in 1981. And, very importantly, more links need to be created with workers organised in the workplace, and with other communities, e.g. the mining communities. A woman from the Yorkshire coalfield said recently, "I take my hat off to those lads in Tottenham, they've got courage. We've been called 'violent mobs' as well, and we know whose side we're on".

The riots are *not* a local British phenomenon. Since September rioting has broken out in West Germany, Greece and the Netherlands - each time in response to the police murdering a demonstrator. The South African riots are an inspiration. A newspaper reports that "Despite intense policing, the looting of supermarkets has reached epidemic proportions in Brazil".

If mass riots *and* mass strikes broke out simultaneously in many different countries, then possibilities for fundamental social change could open up. Poverty, racism, state repression and police violence cannot be removed by reforms within the existing system; only when people overthrow all ruling classes and states will we all be able to live together co-operatively, free from oppression and exploitation.

# SOUND OF SILENCE

**USING A FORM of strike that was successful earlier this year, women at Zyrardow Stella textile factory in Poland refused to turn on their machines after the breakfast break, in an action that commemorated the historic strike in the Gdansk shipyards on August 27th.**

The silence of the machines soon spread, and the strikers refused to talk with the factory director and reportedly laughed out of the hall the prosecutor who threatened them with jail for an 'illegal' strike.

Refusing to send representatives to negotiate with the Ministry of Labour and Wages, all the women took turns to speak for everybody. They won a wage rise in 2 days and the management agreed to reinstitute free Saturdays as soon as the demand was made.

## HOZE-DOWN

**DOCKYARD workers gave a party of hoses a rousing welcome on Sept. 26th - by holding them 'hostage' and pelting them with water bombs.**

The company chiefs were eyeing up the **Devenport** naval yard which the Government wants to sell off shedding up to 2,000 jobs.

But as soon as the bosses arrived at **Plymouth docks**, thousands of 'yardies' downed tools. Then they:

- Stopped them, getting back on their coaches and showered them with water bombs.

- Locked 10 of them inside a high security nuclear submarine complex for 4 hours.

- Chanted jeered and hurled eggs, tomatoes and drink cans as Ministry of Defence police struggled to keep control.

Finally a tug drew alongside the complex and the 'prisoners' - the heads of top firms like **British Aerospace & Taylor Woodrow** - lined up on the quay thinking they were being shipped to safety.

All they got was another soaking. The crew angry over recent redundancies turned a water hose on them!

Eventually they were whisked away to a chorus of jeers.

□□□□

**In November iron bars were installed in Brixton DHSS to stop claimants smashing down the perspex partitions because of the long delays, lost case papers and non-payment of benefits.**

## AMSTERDAM:

**Angry fireworkers turned their hoses on the Town Hall in November and caused thousands of pounds damage as files and equipment were ruined. A festive atmosphere erupted as foam and water cannons were directed at the bureaucracy administering cuts.**

# HEALTH BOSSES GET A SHOCK

**HOSPITAL WORKERS throughout Britain have been fighting Health Authority 'competitive tendering' schemes.**

Whether such schemes involve private contractors taking over ancillary services or 'in house tenders' put forward by management, the aim of the exercise is to increase workloads *and* cut staffing levels at the same time. If the cleanliness of hospitals and care of patients suffers, the bosses have a simple answer: 'tough luck'.

But they've come unstuck in many areas because ancillary workers haven't been the soft target they've anticipated: although resistance has varied in success, hospital workers' willingness to fight back has clearly given the bosses quite a shock.

## ANGRY

In York, for instance, the Health Authority chairman (also a managing director of Rowntrees) had to abandon two attempts at pushing through tendering at DHA meetings when confronted by a couple of hundred angry health service workers. The decision was finally made in a private meeting guarded by police and security guards.

A series of weekly strikes by domestics at different hospitals was called from 17th October. At the first hospital to strike, Bootham Park, all the strikers were involved in organising the action and in any meetings with management and a vote was soon taken to make the action indefinite. The following week, domestics at York's two other main hospitals walked out, but demoralisation soon set in. This was partly because of a lack of direct involvement by all strikers in all aspects of the action, and partly because management were able to employ divide-and-rule tactics, playing on confusion and uncertainty about the Health Authority plans.

During the 3 weeks of strike at Bootham Park, bus workers, Selby miners, unemployed, students and workers from other parts of the health service supported the cleaners' pickets. Collections were made at several local workplaces, including successful delegations to Wistow and Stillingfleet pits. Although industrial action in York is suspended at the moment, militants in the health service are working for a renewed fight back.

Elsewhere in the North East of England, workers at Scarborough Park hospital walked out and put on pickets when ICC (private cleaning contractors) inspected the hospital. At Chapple Allerton hospital in Leeds, contractors had to withdraw after staff refused to accept cutbacks. In Tyneside there have been major disputes in Newcastle and Sunderland, but union leaders have regarded Health Authority decisions to accept 'in house' tenders as a victory.

Sporadic rank and file action is still taking place, however, as many hospital workers fully realise that 'in house' cutbacks have the same effect as any other

## WARNING

As a warning note to anyone who believes we can rely on Labour local authorities to fight health service cuts, the Labour council in Wakefield have privatised hospital laundries and boilerhouses, and in Pontefract the Labour authority has handed cleaning services to private contractors with the loss of 312 jobs.

Resistance to cutbacks in hospital ancillary services *has* been widespread, and sometimes successful. But the Trade Union hierarchies haven't shown any interest in launching a concerted and co-ordinated national fightback - this will have to come through the initiative of local groups of hospital workers forging links with each other across union boundaries.

# SOUTH AFRICA - SOLIDARITY GROWS

As the struggle for freedom intensifies in South Africa, actions in support of black South Africans have been taking place in many parts of the world. This active solidarity by working class people for other working class people is strengthening the position of the blacks by undermining the economic power base of the white ruling class. We think these actions are a million times more effective than any of the half-hearted actions and words of those governments who mouth their so-called opposition to the South African regime. We hope this support will continue to grow. The following is an account of such solidarity.

In November 1984, San Francisco dock workers refused to handle a shipment of SA goods. This led to the dockers striking for 11 days, despite pressure from both courts and union officials to return to work. They were backed by their local union however, and have now formed the Bay Area Free SA movement. Since the strike no SA goods have entered the docks. In New Orleans too, dockers do not load or unload ships with SA connections.

be extended, resulting in a drastic effect on the SA fruit trade as it moves into its peak period.

## UNFORESEEN INCIDENTS

Similar actions from Barcelona, where dockers boycott ships with any SA connections and urge them to leave port immediately. This is an extract from a letter to the Captain of the S.A. Langenberg. "We are motivated by the policy of apartheid under which a white, racist minority brutally oppress the black population who are dying in defence of their rights. We are in solidarity with the black people in their struggle for freedom and we strongly condemn the cruel policy of apartheid. Our organisation considers your visit unwelcome and we ask you to take steps to leave immediately and so avoid unforeseen incidents".

Other sections of the working class have been equally active. For the past 18 months 11 women workers from Dunnes supermarket in Dublin have been on strike after two women had been suspended for exercising their right not to handle SA produce. IDATU, the shopworkers union, had called for a boycott. So far Dunnes have insisted that if the women return to work they will still be expected to handle SA goods. The women however are equally determined to fight on until they win. (2 of these women start a speaking tour in Britain on 25 November to publicise the issue). As a result of the courageous stand taken by these women, many other workers in Ireland have been inspired to take action. Librarians in a Dublin library have withdrawn information on job vacancies in SA. PTWU branches are pushing for a boycott of mail and workers at Mirror Mirror Boutiques and Catering Ireland Ltd. have forced their bosses to include the right not to handle S.A. produce in their contracts.

## BARAGWANATH HOSPITAL DISPUTE

In the middle of November, auxiliary workers in the Baragwanath Hospital in S. Africa went on strike. The strike was over numerous things, including an 8 pm curfew and also having to work an extra 2½ hours a week without pay.

The workers had held a mass meeting and decided on immediate strike action and so the scene was set for a confrontation between workers and the administrators.

On the day of the strike the administrators called in the police who, as can be expected, went on the rampage. They beat up anyone who was around and whipped nurses who were attending to patients.

After the police take-over of the hospital, which had seen over 700 arrested, most of whom were women, the army was brought in to replace the arrested hospital workers who had been sacked.

**STOP PRESS:** A S. African judge (!) has said the authorities had no right to sack the workers and has said they must be re-instated.

## BOSSES GET THE BOOT

700 workers siezed control of the 3 largest furniture making factories in Zimbabwe.

The workers took the keys from the company cars and told the management to take the buses home, after a High Court placed the company under judicial control.

The workers said the factories will now be run without managers and that none of the work-force will be made redundant.

■■■■■

In Howick, a small town in Natal, the British Tyre & Rubber Company is the only major employer. The metal workers union [MAWA] had organised over half of the workforce and sought negotiating rights.

The management response on the 2nd of May was to sack all the black workers. Despite the fact that picketing is illegal, and enduring great privation, the workers held out for the principle of organising collectively and not accepting the dictates of the company.

Despite the odds, resistance stayed solid with 1,000 strikers arrested and a sympathy strike in nearby Pietermaritzburg which brought the city to a standstill on the 18th of July.

On November 15th, one striker was shot dead by a plainclothes policeman involved in a battle between scabs and strikers.

Sacrifice doesn't always lead to victory but overall the signs are that black workers are increasingly asserting themselves.



Soweto

## COAL STOPPED

In August this year, Southampton dockers boycotted a load of machinery destined for military use in South Africa. In October, South Wales NUM and Swansea dockers stopped a shipment of SA coal. Next day, at the Maritime Unions Against Apartheid Conference on the oil embargo, it was decided that any Company shipping oil to SA would be subject to industrial action. Then in November, Liverpool dockers decided to boycott SA coal, after discussions with miners from Bold Colliery in Lancashire. Members of the National Union of Seamen are refusing to transport any South African goods on the 3 P & O ferries from Aberdeen to Orkney and Shetland. The ban started in late November and will stop the transport of almost all SA food and wine to the Northern Isles.

Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish transport workers began a boycott on all trade with SA in October; a month later Danish Trade Unions imposed a similar ban affecting 5,000 workers in transport, dock, clerical and office sectors. This has already meant that 3 Danish Bulk ships carrying up to 400,000 tonnes of SA coal will be laid up. Initially the boycott is for 11 weeks, but will almost certainly



White residential area

## SMASHED UP

In all parts of Britain shops are facing a growing consumer boycott. Shops in Edinburgh have been hit over the last few months. Goods dumped in trolleys, covered with stickers and dumped in the aisles. People have leafleted inside and outside shops and talked to employees. Actions like these are proving effective. Nationally, the Co-op and Fine Fare intend to phase out SA goods and Sainsbury and Tesco admit they are monitoring the situation.

Other actions - the SA consulate in Copenhagen was smashed up during September and on October 30th following a demo against apartheid it was again attacked together with 2 businesses with SA links. No one was arrested.

In August, in Frankfurt, banks and shops were attacked during a demo against apartheid. No doubt these are only some of the actions that have been taking place. They can only be for the good. It's up to us.

# WOMEN -

## RECLAIMING OUR LIVES

**WOMEN ARE KEPT so apart, so divided, its a wonder we manage to overcome this outrage and shout aloud our anger or whisper truths to each other.**

Our divisions are real and they are many but all women are tormented by male tyranny whether institutionally or in the 'privacy' of our own homes. As poor women we struggle to resist the additional brutal control of our bodies. We are butchered by gynecologists, psychiatrists and doctors through the enforcement of sterilisation, ECT and valium 'treatment'. Welfare 'benefits' prostitution and low paid dirty work keep us poor and dependant at all times. We are harassed daily by the DHSS, named 'unfit mothers' and our children removed by smiling social workers.

Our resistance is often hidden or even ineffective but it is resistance nevertheless. Our

refusal to be the slaves of men has been largely ignored trivialised or unrecorded.

Everyday woman hating must be named and exposed for what it is. Only then can we realise our 'private' or individual defiance is part of the collective struggle of women reclaiming our lives.

- In Italy a few years ago over 15,000 women took to the streets in response to the gang rape and razor slashing of Claudia Caputi. She was trying to break out of a prostitution racket in Rome.

The news of this umpteenth act of violence against Claudia arrived late in the evening. Women mobilised at once and poured onto the streets in a few hours. Through the local radio station, men offered to look after the children - recognising that the women were determined to handle the whole affair themselves. The women in the area are fed up with rapists, and they are sick and tired of being put on daily curfew.



- Last year in Australia on ANZAC day women paraded through the streets of Sydney protesting at ceremonies that glorify war. Their banner proclaimed 'In memory of all women of all countries raped in

all wars'.

- Nashed Fahmy, fed up with taxi drivers in Cairo kidnapping and raping women fed the taxi drivers cakes stuffed with drugs and expropriated their earnings!

## STOP THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Over 160 clothing workers in South Shields have been on strike since 17 September 1985 for union recognition. The Contracts Company which is a subsidiary of French Connection have refused to recognise the union since February 1985 even though there has been over 100 members at the factory since it opened in July 1984 and many have previous membership.

The strikers' leaflet states that: 'Overtime is compulsory. If we don't work it we get the sack. There are no allowances with bonus scheme. We have to use a disc system to visit the toilets. The Company's discretion is used to pay full basic wage. No one can earn bonus no matter how hard they work. Management talk to us like we are dogs. No warnings are given before sacking of employees. The workforce has tried all sorts of methods to urge the employers to recognise the Union, including petitions and challenging them to arbitration through ACAS'.

The Contracts strikers are at present picketing shops throughout North East England that stock French Connection clothes. Exports and imports of French Connection garments are

at present being looked at. The N.U.S. have agreed to black all French Connection clothes when it is found out when and where they take place. Blackings by garment workers, transport workers and shop assistants are needed along with the picketing of French Connection stockists in other areas.

## STRIKE AT SILENTNIGHT

**530 workers at the Silentnight Bedding Factories at Sutton in Yorkshire and Barnoldswick in Lancashire have been on strike since June. The strike started because the boss announced 52 redundancies after workers had agreed to a no wage rise/no redundancies package.**

Since then Silentnight - whose chairman Tom Clarke has been dubbed 'Mr Wonderful' - by Thatcher - have sacked all the strikers. Scabs are being bussed in. Hull dockers are supporting the strike by refusing to handle Silentnight exports. Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures are also active in showing solidarity. In October a coachload of mining women from Pontefract and Castleford joined the picket lines at the Sutton factory.

Info from, and donations to Sutton Silentnight Womens Support Group, c/o Mrs Pat McCormack, Northstead, North Rd., Sutton-in-Craven, Nr Keighley BD20 7PG.

## FRYSTON MINERS RESIST

Good news! At a mass meeting on 9th November Fryston miners declared their opposition to the closure of their colliery. This is in spite of opposition from the Area Agent of the NUM - a true collaborator - and the pressure from big bonuses. Spread the news - **FRYSTON FIGHTS BACK.**

What this decision means in practical terms remains to be seen. However, the courage of the Fryston workers cannot be denied.

Fryston is one of 2 Castleford Area pits that the NCB want to close, the other being Wheldale. Over 1,600 jobs are threatened.

The miners were conned by Union bureaucrats to accept cuts in the workforce so things could get back to normal (for who!). The miners of Fryston are very militant and none have been offered alternative employment at the Selby coalfield. They are to be shoved to Prince of Wales pit (Pontefract) and it seems more than likely that this pit will be the next on the list.

On November 8th two Fryston miners were each sentenced to 3 years each for the attack on scab Fletcher.

Militant miners are being offered redundancy or the dole.

The UDM is set to appear on the scene locally. But the NUM bureaucrats play at being King Canute. The rank and file have now started their own anti-UDM campaign and there is a strong possibility that there will be **STRIKE ACTION** over Fryston.

Counter Information is put together from news, information and personal accounts of resistance to this rotten system. At present it is put together by people in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Grangemouth. We would like to encourage the widest possible distribution and participation in the project, and regular communication between people with a revolutionary desire to get rid of all that impoverishes our daily lives.

The more material we receive, the more able we will be to produce the broadsheet regularly and ensure its distribution as widely as possible. Donations towards costs are much needed and very welcome. We encourage all those who want information and/or bundles of the broadsheet to distribute to contact us.

**COUNTER INFORMATION, BOX 81, C/O 43 CANDLEMAKER ROW, EDINBURGH. (2/12/85)**