

Downing Street Democracy

Our New Labour Government is constantly spouting the spin of democracy. Yet underlying this veneer is the same creeping centralisation that earmarked the Tory years.

The sweeping changes planned for local government are a good illustration of this. Labour say that they want to give more power to local politicians yet they are retaining a form of the restrictive financial 'capping' introduced by the Conservatives, threatening authorities with 'naming and shaming' if they do not follow the Blair agenda. They are going further than any Tony Government did by effectively dictating the amount to be spent on each service. Thus Oxfordshire schools are at risk of being taken over by Tony's privatised henchmen if the county switches any 'education money' to shore up Social Services.

That is not all. We now have the spectre of unelected **Regional Development Agencies**, quangos run by big business for big business. They were meant to be embryonic Regional Governments but somehow their democratic credentials fell by the wayside. These teams of Tony's Cronies are to be given considerable powers and who knows how much cash. It is highly likely that these bodies will also soak up some powers from the existing local Counties, Unitary, City and District Authorities further undermining democracy.

Labour's vague promises to introduce fairer voting systems to local government have also got lost in the spin. The new form of voting introduced for the European elections may well be a marginal improvement over the old system but with its high cut-offs and closed lists of candidates it has still been rigged very much in favour of the status quo. The Greens will probably win a few seats in some of the larger regions but otherwise the MEPs we send off to the EU gravy train are unlikely to be different from the expenses-guzzling MEPs that we will be kicking out.

The future is not bright - it's Brussels!

Please write to **Cllr John Tanner, Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford, and the local press.**

Canal Ramble

Residents of the Oxford canal corridor are horrified by proposals for more new developments. Sixty of them gathered to walk through the threatened land on Sunday 24th January. The area has already been built on, but it is clear that it will change beyond recognition if the proposals are implemented. Protected reed beds will be blocked in by industry and expensive housing, and a new road will increase pollution.

With the city council once again bowing to the demands of developers and profiteers, it is now up to residents and their supporters to speak up for the land. For more info, call the **Towpath Times on: 0958 978 116.**

Join t' Women's Guild

Yet another group has added its voice to calls to legalise cannabis. Oxfordshire Townswomen's Guild has supported the use of cannabis for pain relief in terminally ill patients.

DIARY

February

Tue 2nd • Oxford Community Action Meeting, 8pm, The Elm Tree, Cowley Road.

• Oxford **Greenpeace Meeting**, 7:30pm, The Temple Bar, Temple Street. (1st Tue of Month).

• OCEES **Seminar** at 5pm, Council Room, Mansfield College. **Wilfred Beckerman** on 'Intergenerational Justice and the Environment'

Wed 3rd • Oxford Genetics Action meeting 7pm, East Oxford Community Centre, Cowley Road, Oxford. Contact 424 024.

• **Poverty and Social Exclusion Talk**, 8pm New College, by the Director of OXFAM's UK Poverty Programme

• Oxford **Friends of the Earth**, 7:30pm, Friends Meeting House, St. Giles

• **Poetry Reading** by and for the 'sacked' OUP Poets, 7:30pm, Freuds Cafe, Jericho, £5 / £3.

Thu 4th • Open debate on Third World Debt with Heads of IMF, World Bank, Bill Cash MP, Kenyan High Commissioner at the Oxford Union, 8pm.

• **Auditions** for the production of a brand new piece of theatre for the Oxford Brookes Alternative Festival 5-7pm, Lecture Room 6, New College. All levels of experience welcome.

Fri 5th • Oxford Uni Jazz Orchestra Benefit, 8pm, St Hugh's, for Council For Homeless Action.

Sat 6th • SAVE OUR SERVICES March, 12 noon, meet at Keble Road, later a Rally at Town Hall.

• **National Civil Rights March**, in support of the Stephen Lawrence campaign. From Brixton to New Scotland Yard and Downing Street. From 12 noon opp. Lambeth Town Hall. For info: 07957 696 636.

Tue 9th • GAFFERS, 7pm, Bloomin'Arts, East Oxford Community Centre. Reclaim Art!

Wed 10th • Black Liberation in Cuba! 7.30pm, Oxford Town Hall. See article.

• **Getting Away with Murder - Who? What? Why? Pinochet Explained:** Alan Angel, Latin American Centre and Hella Lopez, Relatives of the Disappeared, 8pm, Christ Church.

Thurs 11th • Opening of Women in Burma Photo Exhibition - A speaker meeting on Women in Burma, 1pm Long Room, New College

• **Rights of the Child**, 8pm Seminar Room, Wadham. Speaker from Amnesty International UK.

Mon 15th • Trident Ploughshares 2000, a mass blockade of Faslane nuclear base, Glasgow. email: tp2000@gm.apc.org

Tue 16th • Public Meeting on New Anti-Refugee Bill, Town Hall, 7:30pm, with Nimala Rajasinghan of JCWI and Abdul Onibilo.

• **Oxford Community Action meeting**, 8pm sharp, Elm Tree Pub, Cowley Road.

Fri 19th • Student Green Lunch, Friends Meeting House, St. Giles, with Cllr. Simmons speaking on Ecological Footprinting.

Sat 20th • National Demo at Hillgrove cat farm, 12 noon, Tel: 0121 632 6460.

• **People and Planet Festival**, Oxford Brookes.

More events inside!

oxyace@hotmail.com

Shipton Quarry Attacked

Seven miles north of Oxford, near Shipton-on-Cherwell, there is a strange and rather magical place. The passer-by sees only the gaunt buildings of a derelict cement works, but climb the wooded bank beside the towpath and before you lies the eerie, lunar crater of a huge abandoned limestone quarry. It is a moonscape which nature is slowly reclaiming. Species-rich fenland and limestone grassland are developing and healing the industrial scar. Streams run down in waterfalls from the edge, lush vegetation growing on their banks, and feed into shallow lakes. The scrubland around the quarry is a refuge for foxes, badgers and deer; and the whole site forms one of the county's most important bird habitats, with 50 breeding species, many rare or endangered.

All this is about to be wrecked. Two weeks ago the Government overturned Cherwell District Council's planning refusal and allowed Rover to develop the site as storage for 8000 cars. The noise of 60 trucks entering or leaving each day, and 24-hour lighting will scare off most of the birds whose nesting sites are not actually destroyed. As a sweetener, developers Transdevelopmental International have promised that after 10 years the site will be "landscaped" into a "country park" with boating lake. Enough to convince theme-park Labour, but conservationists are appalled. Ornithologist John Brucker points out that even if the birds return, the development will destroy the habitats of all the key species.

Nature is quite capable of reclaiming industrial sites without the help of so-called landscapers. Elsewhere in the county, abandoned quarries reclaimed by time, not man, have actually become nature reserves. But at Shipton-on-Cherwell the people of Oxfordshire are being offered a piece of fake countryside in return for a piece of real nature, all to satisfy the whim of a car manufacturer. Let us hope they treat this pathetic piece of greenwash with the contempt and anger that it deserves.

Black Liberation in Cuba!

Colonial Cuba was one of the last countries to abolish slavery and in the early years of this century black people struggled against viscous racism. How is it then, that Cubans volunteered in their hundreds of thousands to fight (and defeat) apartheid's racist army in Angola? What impact did the 1959 revolution have on black people in Cuba itself?

To find out, come to a talk by **Wale Adeosun**, a trade unionist and black activist in London, who is a leading member of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. All welcome: **Wed 10th Feb 7.30 pm, Town Hall, Oxford.**

Ship to Cuba

Oxford's mayor is to launch a Salud Ship for Cuba campaign in Oxford to bring vital medical supplies to Cuba, currently under a US trade blockade. The ship has been organised by trades unions. See www.salud.org.uk.

Local Exchange

Oxford's Local Exchange Trading System (LETs) is a simple trading system for a wide range of goods and services in. For more info write to **Box LETs, 111 Magdalen Road, Oxford, OX4 1RQ.**

"To keep milk from turning sour. Keep it in the cow."

- an 11yr old's exam answer

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OXYACETYLENE

The FREE fortnightly Newsheet for Oxford

Welding the Community Together

Address: c/o Box 6,
111 Magdalen Road,
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Oxy-Wot?

(Oxy-a-set-a-lean)

Oxyacetylene is a newsletter for and about community action in Oxford and beyond. Every two weeks we bring you the real news that affects us all.

Our mission is not just to report, but to raise support for all the campaigns and projects which aim to make Oxford a better place to live.

But there's no way we can do it on our own. We need your news, pictures and energy - offers of distribution help will be very welcome. So let us know what's happening in your end of town - and we'll tell everyone about it in 2 weeks' time!

This special issue was produced in partnership with three Student Campaign groups. 4000 issues have been circulated across Oxford. Would you or your group be interested in a similar project?

Subscriptions

Get Oxyacetylene posted to you first class - just send us stamps and a name and address. To be a **supporter**, send £10 and get it posted first class for a year! £20 for profit-making groups. Subscribe for FREE (or as a supporter - £5/year) using email: subscribe@oxyace.org.uk

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Special **DOUBLE** Issue:
Rights Brought Home At Last?

Justice?

Pages 2 and 3

Oxford leads Fight Against Tuition FEES

Oxford is leading a national campaign to protect free education. The five Oxford students who had been protesting at the government's subtle privatisation of higher education finally handed over their £1000 tuition fees on Monday 25th January. When they announced their decision not to become "martyrs", the university thought it had won.

Then, at 2 o'clock that afternoon, 140 peaceful students occupied the Exam Schools building. The group represented a broad range of political opinions, united around the principle of free education. Noisy crowds of supporters gathered periodically outside on the street, with competitions springing up for the loudest singing.

Protesters finally left at 9 the next morning, linking arms and chanting "They say sit back - we say sit in!"

There were no arrests during the occupation and university authorities say they will not be taking action against any of the students involved. Monday's action was a follow-up to the march and rally on Friday 22nd, when over 2000 students from Oxford Brookes, the CFE and 16 other universities from across the country joined OU colleagues in support of the non-payers.

Speakers at the rally claimed that the government deliberately pushed through fees legislation during university holidays to avoid confrontation; and that instead of demolishing the principle of free education, the government should save money by scrapping Trident or returning higher-rate taxes to 1980s levels. They stressed recent figures suggesting the introduction of fees has already led to an 11% decrease in university applications for 1998/9. The action has received solidarity from many quarters, including the Campaign For Free Education who



stated: "Students at Oxford University are showing the lead... building the sort of campaign that if replicated nationally could sling tuition fees into the history books".

"I think it's very reasonable. It's a fair market price"
- LSE student, on tuition fees

After Monday's occupation, students pledged to continue their campaign of peaceful direct action until the university stops co-operating with the government in support of tuition fees.

At the same time, a mass campaign of non-payment is planned for next year, building on the extensive media coverage of the Oxford non-payers.

Oxyacetylene congratulates the students!

Less Traffic Warning

Council bosses have shocked environmentalists with a radical U-turn on traffic policy. They are to distribute 150,000 leaflets proclaiming: "Change - it'll be terrific without traffic", to publicise the OTS. County transport supremo Roger Williams told the *Oxford Times* "this will achieve something we have been trying for in Oxford for fifty years". **Right on, Roger!**





Oxford University Law Society



and Oxford University Amnesty Group

Present:

Justice?

Direct Action is Britain's oldest democratic institution.

From the Diggers reclaiming commons in the seventeenth century, to The Land is Ours actions and 'Reclaim the Streets' today, from the student sit-ins of the 1960s to Monday's occupation of Exam Schools to protect the right to free education. It is through active opposition to inequality, injustice, destruction and oppression that we have won many of our basic freedoms. The Times (24/12/98) said of Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the Suffragettes: "[she] found that argument alone won her only stormy denials... [The right of women to vote] was won only by the determination of a woman prepared to starve, to be imprisoned and to be beaten for rights that we take for granted today."

Basic human rights are being continually eroded along with the power to preserve them. Today a few powerful institutions are, in some sectors, virtually eliminating small business and securing all trade for themselves. They are turning public streets into guarded shopping malls and river banks into exclusive estates. Genes are being registered as private property. Property is nine-tenths of the law, so as property expands, it appears the law must give way to it.

Protest and direct action were not stopped by the Public Order Bill of 1986, they were not stopped by the Criminal Justice Act of 1994, and they will not be stopped by any repressive laws to come. As public order gives way to a private order, a criminal record will simply become the mark of good citizenship!

Human Rights Act: Rights Brought Home At Last

Basic human rights are to be enshrined into British Law for the first time since 1688. Despite British involvement in drafting the European Convention on Human Rights in 1951, as yet we still do not have a constitutional set of rights to fall back on. The Human Rights Act 1998 (coming into force sometime in the year 2000) will oblige judges to take Human Rights into account. This should save us the embarrassment of being one of the International Court of Human Rights' most frequent visitors.

Some think the articles are too vague or include too many opt-out clauses to be of much use. The crucial question of access remains - will there be legal aid for this - or will it be rights for rich people? Even so, rights will be brought home to play with at last!

Come and find out more from Stephen Grosz, of Bindmans & Co, author of a book on the new act: 8.30pm Tues 16th Feb, Red Room, New College.

New Immigration Bill

After being imprisoned for two weeks, without reason or indication of when you might be released, the most reasonable person is likely to go mad. Up to 800 asylum seekers are detained in the UK at any one time WITHOUT CHARGE OR TIME LIMIT. This contravenes one of the most basic principles of British Justice: No detention without trial. No one accused of the cruelest murder would be treated in this way. Campsfield House (just outside Oxford) detains about 1/4 of the refugees imprisoned in Britain: REFUGEES ARE NOT CRIMINALS.

Most of the detainees are black. Our government sees this as a "regrettable necessity". Campaigners who note detention of refugees to be a racist policy are dismissed by the government as "silly". Until the second world war immigration policies were unashamedly racist. Hitler played the RaceCard so much that overt racism became an unacceptable phenomenon.

As Pinochet's lawyers have reminded us, "justice must be seen to be done" - but not actually done. Our Government must not be seen to be racist, although its immigration policies have that effect. Fortress Europe is doing everything she can to keep asylum seekers OUT. In the past the UK government has gone as far as to employ "virginity testing" to prise out "bogus brides to be".

The new Immigration Bill encourages MORE DETENTION, MORE INDISCRIMINATE REFUSAL OF SEEKERS with false passports (the most genuine refugees are often unable to get real ones) and MORE RACISM. Meanwhile, the Daily Mail and its friends continue to send out the message that while Racism is not acceptable, intolerance to asylum seekers is.

DEMONSTRATE! Last Saturday of every month - noon at Campsfield. National Demo: Sat 27th Feb, noon, the Embankment, London.

Defining Violence

The government recently published a consultation paper on "Legislation Against Terrorism". In the light of the moves toward peace in Northern Ireland they propose to get rid of the temporary Prevention of Terrorism and Emergency Provisions Acts. A great day for British Peace and Human Rights? No more special powers? No more internment? Unfortunately no.

The document states "Animal rights, and to a lesser extent environmental rights activists, have mounted and continue to pursue, persistent and destructive campaigns... While the level of terrorist activity by such groups is lower, and the sophistication of their organisation and methods less well developed than that of some of the terrorist groups in Northern Ireland... there is nothing to indicate that the threat they pose will go away." This includes peaceful campaigners.

The government therefore suggests that permanent UK terrorism laws are required, retaining many of the PTA powers (eg incarceration for upto 7 days without charge), extending them to domestic terrorism.

Terrorism is to be defined as "the use of serious violence against persons or property, or the threat to use such violence, to intimidate or coerce a government, the public or any section of the public for political, religious or ideological ends."

The term serious violence is to be defined to include serious disruption, for example caused by attacks on computer installations or public utilities.

There is no need to condone serious violence to raise objections to this legislation - the Criminal Justice Act is used against peaceful demonstrations all the time. Liberty is very concerned that environmentalists will be caught under the new proposals. It is also proposed to make it an offense to collect, record or possess information which might be useful to terrorists - knowledge that is often necessary for ordinary people to hold their government accountable. Incidentally New Labour has scrapped the Freedom of Information Act.



but not actually done!

The British Police State

British law is filled with Public Order legislation. The last fifteen years have seen the progressive criminalisation of Britain's oldest democratic tradition, as government has cracked down on the Peace movement, the miners, New Age Travellers and the anti-roads movement. The recent Police Act '97 includes "conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose" in its definition of a serious crime.

The discretion granted to the police in the interpretation of these laws give the them sweeping powers. Conventional wisdom is that there is a basic right to protest peacefully under English law. However, the freedom to demonstrate is at the mercy of arbitrary decisions by the police - when they decide it is not to be exercised, the freedom to demonstrate is revealed to be an illusion.

One of the first stages in the development of the modern police state is the centralisation of police services, taking them off a local footing. Policing in Britain is taking place on an increasingly nationwide basis. Try asking a copper for directions at and RTS and they'll almost always tell you they don't know - they're from out of town.

The parallel with police states becomes even more striking in the light of growing surveillance of campaigners. Incoming measures to tackle unrest include the new National Public Order Intelligence Unit, which will pool the resources of existing police intelligence teams tracking Travellers and Hunt Sabs, with those of Special Branch and MI5 to track "the main individuals" involved in protesting.

But rights to demonstrate do not derive from the state. It was against the state that we asserted them over so many centuries: freedom from arbitrary arrest, Habeus Corpus, equality of all citizens before the law, the assumption of innocence until guilt is proven...

In a democracy the police have only the authority we give them. We have to insist on that tradition by refusing to accept the authority of these new laws. There is a general unease about what is happening, but that unease will harden into resignation unless people are prepared to stand on principle and refuse to accept bad laws.

Globalising Rights - Oxford Amnesty Lecture '99

...is happening this term. Look out for posters. Tickets from the Playhouse Tel: 798600. £16 for the week or £3 for each event if seats are available. All lectures at 5:30pm Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street.

Thur 4 Feb • Kwame Anthony Appiah - Prof. of Afro-American studies and Philosophy, Harvard Uni.

Tues 9 Feb • Noam Chomsky, Linguistics Prof., M.I.T.

Wed 10 Feb • Susan George - Author: 'How the other half dies. A fate worse than Debt.'

Tues 16 • Feb Vandana Shiva - Director, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, New Delhi.

Wed 17 Feb • Ivan Illich - Co-Founder, Centre for Intercultural Documentation, Mexico.

Tue 23 Feb • Will Hutton - Editor in Chief of The Observer.

Wed 24 Feb • Homi Bhabha - Prof. of Humanities, Uni of Chicago.

Institutionalised Racism

"When my son was killed, I genuinely believed that those responsible would be caught and be punished for their crime. I waited patiently for this to happen, but it did not. I suppose at the time I secretly knew that this would never happen because my son is black, but I still hoped for justice." Doreen Lawrence.

The failed private prosecution brought by the Lawrences means that nobody will ever serve time for Stephen's death. Even if overwhelming evidence emerges, under English Law, the white youths suspected of the crime can never be re-tried.

The Lawrence Inquiry may be the next best thing: an investigation into the police conduct in the affair, putting the issues of racial violence and police racism firmly in the public eye. A recent poll showed that over 50% of people have even less confidence in the police than when the inquiry began.

Let's hope something comes of the inquiry. How painful it must have been for the Lawrences to have those they believe killed their son, publically deny that they are racists - especially in the lights of video evidence recording one of them saying that "every nigger should have their arms and legs chopped off and left with fucking stumps." The police too have denied institutionalised racism.

Two more racist murders since Stephen's in 1993 have highlighted police incompetence and racism.

In the last few weeks evidence has emerged confirming that the murder of Michael Menson - who was burnt to death by a roadside in Jan'97 - was the result of a racist attack. Police delay in investigating this crime - despite Michael's repeated complaints during the last few days of his life that he had been set upon by 4 white youths - has meant that his killers have never been brought to justice.

Ricky Reel was found dead in the Thames in Oct '97 - by a search party organised by family and friends following the police's refusal to investigate. His disappearance and death followed a racial incident with two white men. The police maintain that Ricky had slipped into the river accidentally and died instantly. They refused to investigate any other theories.

Stephen's father, his lawyer, Ricky's mother and Michael's brother will talk on Thurs 18th Feb, The Union. 8.30pm.

British Justice Week

- Week 5

Tues 16th • The New Human Rights Act, 8:30pm Red Room, New College, **Stephen Grosz**, Partner at Bindmans & Co. Author of a book on the Human Rights Act. For the first time since 1688, Human Rights are being enshrined into British Law. What will this mean?

Wed 17th • Protest and Public Order, 8pm, New College, **George Monbiot**, Leading Guardian Columnist

• Constitution Blues Night. Free Admission. 10pm, Po Na Na's, Organised by the Law Society.

Thurs 18th • British Justice & Racism: The Lawrence Case, 8:30pm The Union. Stephen's Lawyer **Imran Kahn**, and father **Neville Lawrence**, supported by relatives of Michael Menson and Ricky Reel, other victims of injustice, give a personal testimonies and an insight into institutional racism.

Fri 19th • Film: McLibel - Two Worlds Collide. 5pm, New College. The Story of two unemployed Londoners vs The Big Mac.

Sun 21st • Legal Observation Workshop, 2pm New College.

Thurs 25th • Paddy Hill, one of the Birmingham six asks whether there is any such thing as a free trial. 2pm, the Union. Law society.

