

THE RED FRONT



THE RED FRONT
a platform for working
class unity

THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION will be the most critical for 50 years. That is why the Revolutionary Communist Party is proposing that all left-wing organisations and individuals work together to rally resistance against the measures of austerity and repression that are likely to follow the election, whichever party wins.

THE RED FRONT will put forward a slate of candidates to challenge all the existing parties — especially the Labour Party. Our platform includes four basic demands around which we aim to unite the working class to defend living standards and rights and to fight for a better way of running society.

- work or full pay
- defend trade union rights
- equal rights for all
- stop the war drive

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Revolutionary Communist Party

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RED FRONT**

*A platform for working
class unity*

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The Revolutionary Communist Party

The Red Front

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1

Why we're standing in the general election

After eight years of Tory rule millions are desperate for a change. This pamphlet argues that we will not get that change by voting for any of the mainstream parties in British politics, but only by building a new movement, one that can protect working class interests whichever party wins the election.

Two factors make urgent the establishment of a new working class party. The first is the combative character of the Tories under Margaret Thatcher. The second is the unprecedented feebleness of the Labour Party and the left under Neil Kinnock. The same factors, fortunately, mean that these are excellent times in which to create a left-wing alternative to Labourism.

Given their inability to halt the decay of the British economy, the Tories have been forced to go on the offensive against their political opponents. The Thatcher government has picked off the unions one by one in set-piece confrontations. It has turned the police into a gang of paramilitary riot squads ready for use against striking workers and black people in inner-city areas. The Tories have used the law to criminalise trade union militancy and public protest and they have turned the civil service into a naked tool of government policy.

The Tories promoted a wave of jingoist frenzy to support their bloody war against Argentina and a climate of chauvinist hostility around the myth of 'Arab terrorism' to justify their complicity in the barbarous US air-strike on Libya. They have created congestion at Heathrow to stir up anti-immigrant prejudices. In the struggle for Irish freedom, the Tories have found a special focus for hysteria against 'terrorism' in general and republican freedom fighters in particular. The Aids epidemic has given them an ideal issue around which to

promote the Victorian family values which Thatcher has for so long cherished.

The Tories have polarised British society and exposed class conflicts that previous governments have sought to disguise. By putting issues like law and order, race and nation, sex and the family at the centre of public debate, they have raised the political temperature. In the short term, as the labour movement has retreated, Thatcher has won the advantage. But an increasingly politicised society is wide open to the intervention of a party which is ready to respond to an openly capitalist attack in terms which unmistakably reflect the interests of the working class and of the oppressed.

The Labour Party has failed to put up any sort of fight against the Tories. The resilience of the Tory Party under Thatcher is a tribute to the weakness of the opposition under successive Labour leaders—Callaghan, Foot and now Kinnock.

While the Labour leadership has pleaded for a return to the consensus methods of the seventies, the left has tried to channel industrial action and protest demonstrations into achieving the same narrow objectives. However, the defeat of the miners' strike and the campaign against rate-capping have shown that traditional bureaucratic methods cannot rally a united militant response. The labour movement's tactics have proved to be no match for the ruthlessness now displayed by the employers and the government.

The labour movement has been slow to recognise the significance of the establishment's propaganda campaigns on issues of morality, crime and family values. In many instances the Labour leadership, and even sections of the left, have failed to challenge these campaigns. The result has been to strengthen the grip of establishment prejudices and to invite further state intrusions.

On defence—British militarism—the Labour Party has played a scandalous role. At the very outset of the Falklands conflict, in a shameful capitulation to nationalist fervour, Foot urged Thatcher to take military action against Argentina. The left either echoed Foot or quibbled over how best to secure British interests in the South Atlantic.

Over the Libyan air-strike, Kinnock turned a tide of public indignation over slaughtered civilians in Tripoli and Benghazi into a fuss about Britain's loss of imperial dignity at the hands of the Americans. Within weeks, Thatcher bounced back up in the opinion polls.

The Tories have thrown the official labour movement into disarray. The TUC has been transformed from a major institution in British society into an irrelevant sideshow. The strategy of the union leaders is to avoid any action that might provoke the employers or the government—and to hope and pray for the return of a Labour administration. After eight years of setbacks to traditional militancy, many trade union activists have come to share this gloomy perspective.

Labour has become more moderate in parallel with the demise of the TUC. After Labour's 1979 election defeat, the right-wing leadership around Callaghan and Healey took the blame. Under Foot, the left temporarily strengthened its position in the party. However, the left could not escape its share of responsibility for the party's landslide defeat in 1983. The result was the election of a centre-right leadership around Kinnock and Hattersley, the 'dream ticket' of the union barons who act as kingmakers in the Labour Party.

Under Kinnock, Labour has moved rapidly to the right. The opinion polls suggest that Labour has won back much of the working class support it lost in 1983 and that its electoral prospects now depend on winning the votes of the middle classes. To this end Kinnock has further watered down conference policies, emphasised slick media presentation and launched a witch-hunt against the left. Through the so-called 'realignment' of the left, the leadership has drawn significant factions (the Tribune group and the Labour Coordinating Committee) and key journals (*New Statesman*, *Marxism Today*, *Tribune*) into backing its middle of the road position.

The drift rightwards, the witch-hunt and the process of realignment have thrown the remnants of the hard left on to the defensive. The defeat of the miners' strike and the debacle at Liverpool council have intensified isolation and despondency. But the left has become so dependent on the institutions of the official labour movement that it has no alternative but to hang in alongside the labour bureaucracy. Hence, despite its continuing humiliation at the hands of Kinnock, the left will carry on campaigning for his election to Downing Street.

Many people share the left's attitude of reluctant and grudging support for Labour. Most Labour voters will vote for Kinnock at the next election because they believe that, after eight years of Thatcher, any change can only be for the better. Despite all their reservations about the current leadership and all their memories about past betrayals, many have faith that a Labour government might provide a better deal for the working class. Others believe that a Labour government would at least create more favourable conditions for the emergence of a real resistance to the capitalist class.



The thoughts of an aspiring prime minister

'I would have liked to join the police, but I think I would only barely have made it because I'm a fraction under 5ft 9in. I like to think of myself as a witty, pipe-smoking, ruminative detective inspector.'

Neil Kinnock, *Police Review*, 25 April 1986

'I would have prevented the film (a BBC documentary of Britain's spy satellite programme) from being shown. There are areas of activity which must be kept secure, and once that decision is made it should be enforced. The government have acted incompetently.'

Neil Kinnock, *The Independent*, 23 January 1987

'If there is reason to believe that people are going to commit acts of outrage, every force must be used to stop them.'

Neil Kinnock on the shoot-to-kill policy in Derry in February 1985 on the same day that two unarmed republican youths were shot dead. (the next step, March 1985)

'Nobody in or associated with Sinn Fein is welcome within a million miles of the Labour Party or anything we stand for.'

Neil Kinnock's response to the invitation of a Sinn Fein councillor to address a fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference.

'I am a father and no matter how much I try to convince myself towards the course of enlightenment I know damn well that, put to the test, I am what people would call a reactionary.'

(*Everywoman*, August 1986)

On what he would say to trade unionists who complained about the harsh policies imposed by a future Labour government

'Tough it's a nasty old world...I never led you to expect anything different.'

(*Financial Times*, 10 September 1986)

But would a Labour government mark a step forward for the working class? In this pamphlet we examine Labour policy in key areas—the economy, trade union rights, on questions of civil liberties, women's rights, racism and gay oppression, militarism and Ireland. We reveal a widening gulf between the policies proposed by Kinnock to win the approval of middle class voters and the measures needed to protect and advance the position of the vast majority of people in Britain.

For the Labour leadership the revival of manufacturing industry comes first. But such a revival, under capitalism, depends on achieving new levels of profitability. How can Kinnock achieve this without rationalising and restructuring, without shaking out labour, raising productivity, cutting wages and intensifying exploitation? How can 'enterprise' be encouraged without reducing the burden of public spending on health, social security and housing? How can Labour's commitment to law and order be squared with the need to protect the civil liberties of workers and minorities?

While Kinnock fumbles over nuclear disarmament, Labour is clear and precise over the need to expand the fleet, improve the air force and strengthen the army. The peoples of Argentina, Libya and Ireland are only the latest victims of the deployment of Britain's vast armoury of conventional weapons. Who will be the first target of a future Labour government?

Would a Kinnock administration create the conditions for a rebirth of the left? In 1974 the left argued that the return of a Labour government would accelerate the emergence of a genuine anti-capitalist current. That, however, did not happen. Harold Wilson skilfully used left-wing ministers like Tony Benn and Eric Heffer to head off rank and file revolt against his austerity policies. By the end of 1978, and the so-called 'winter of discontent', the left had become a discredited and spent force. Five years of Labour government, therefore, provoked not radicalisation, but confusion and despair among those who had looked to Labour to provide some respite from the recession.

The beneficiaries of the return of Labour in 1974 were, in the short term, the British capitalist class and, in the longer term, the Tories. By 1976, Labour's incomes policy had resulted in the sharpest fall in working class living standards since the thirties. As chancellor, Denis Healey then set about the most drastic cuts in public spending since the formation of the welfare state. The Labour government nearly trebled unemployment during its term in office.

In the end many traditional Labour supporters had had enough. Many stayed away from the polls, voted for other parties or supported

Tory candidates. Labour is the reason why Thatcher rode into Downing Street in 1979.

Today the crisis of British capitalism is much graver than it was then and the stakes in the election very much higher than they were in 1974. If Labour loses, the labour movement will be left wide open to a renewed Tory offensive. For a good two years now, everything has been subordinated to the drive to put Labour back in power. Should Kinnock fail, the labour movement will have a lot of ground to catch up and very little time in which to do it.

A Labour victory, however, could have even more damaging consequences. Carrying out Kinnock's pro-business, pro-establishment, pro-war policies would mean the adoption of systematically anti-working class measures. For those who put their faith in Labour as the only hope of progress, the sense of hopelessness would be much more profound than it was after 1974. Then at least militants had the unions—after 1987 there will be nowhere else to turn.

Is there no alternative to waiting for Kinnock? The Revolutionary Communist Party believes there is. We formed the RCP in 1981 in response to the urgent need to build a new party to advance the interests of the working class. Our objective is not merely to represent the working class within the framework of parliament and of British capitalism, but to go beyond both and create a new sort of society.

The worldwide capitalist recession and the resulting drive towards mass impoverishment and war fully expose the dead end the existing system has reached. For the vast majority of people the only hope of securing any sort of decent life—or even of guaranteeing survival—lies in the working class taking control over society and establishing a system of planned production.

The immediate objective of the RCP is to build a revolutionary working class party in Britain. It is several decades since Marxism enjoyed any significant influence in the British labour movement. However, the increasingly open class polarisation produced by Thatcher's policies and style create a greater potential for revolutionary communism than has existed in Britain since the twenties.

The first step towards building a new working class party is to throw off the stultifying influence of the old parties—above all the Labour Party. On everything from incomes policy to war, Labour has long managed to persuade the working class to accept the compromises and the sacrifices required for the continuation of British capitalism. Today British capitalism is in a deeper mess than at any time this century. It

can only endure at a heavy cost to the working class.

The labour movement will not be able to take any effective measures to defend itself, or other sections of society which look to it for support and solidarity, until it settles scores with Labourism.

We are standing in the general election to accelerate the emergence of a consciously anti-capitalist, anti-Labour Party vanguard in the working class movement. Such a vanguard is vital to provide a core of resistance against the inevitable repressive backlash after the election—whichever party wins. It will also provide the forces from which a revolutionary working class party can emerge as a real force in British politics.

In the course of this pamphlet we outline the policies around which the RCP will be campaigning in the election. These all begin from what the working class needs and stress that the only way that they can be achieved is, not through elections and politicians, council grants or government quangos, but through the direct action of the working class itself.

We want to make sure that the election is not just another toss-up between parties that are all too similar. After eight years of Thatcher we cannot afford more of the same from Kinnock.

In 1987 the real choice is not between Labour and Tory. It is between succumbing to the measures required to salvage British capitalism under either of the major parties and taking a stand against them on the side of the working class. We will contest the election on a platform which puts forward the interests of the working class—the majority section of society, and the one ignored by all the other parties.

Our aim is not to win seats in parliament, but to rally a core of activists around a platform that can lead the struggle against the capitalist system before, during and after the election. Whichever party wins the election, the future of the working class depends upon the success of this project.

2

The economy: Labour's realism and ours

We live in an age of industrial decay and mass unemployment. Over the past 15 years British capitalism has gone from one crisis to another. Manufacturing industry has been devastated and is expected to decline still further over the next few years. Unemployment grew rapidly under the last Labour government and rocketed after the Tories came to power. Despite around 20 changes in the statistics since 1979, official unemployment is still well over three million, with the real level closer to five million. Meanwhile spending on health, education and social services has been cut by first Labour, then Tory administrations.

There is no light to be found at the end of the Tory tunnel. Compared to its rivals overseas, British capitalism is weaker today than at any time in its history. Only the shortlived benefits of North Sea oil have prevented an even more precipitate collapse. All the tendencies of the recession can be expected to intensify over the next five years. The inevitable result will be higher unemployment, lower wages and the further deterioration of public services.

The problems facing capitalism cannot be overcome by any of the solutions currently on offer. The system is out of control, both in Britain and abroad. All that any government can do is try to minimise the effects of crisis through a programme of austerity. Whether led by right wingers (Thatcher, Reagan, Kohl), or by radicals (Gonzalez, Papandreou), every Western capitalist government is today forced to pursue similar policies. Stabilising capitalism requires mass unemployment and cuts in living standards.

It is worth remembering that Thatcher did not invent monetarism. The policy of curbing public expenditure and keeping a tight grip on

the money supply was first introduced in Britain by Denis Healey, the chancellor of the exchequer in the last Labour government.

Capitalism can only survive if profitability is restored. In Britain the scope for doing this is so limited that the capitalist class has been compelled to invest most of its resources abroad. Investors have given up on Britain because they know that the economy cannot be turned around.

From a capitalist point of view there is no alternative to the policies of Thatcher. All attempts to discover a more humane economic policy have never got beyond the drawing board. Thus any party which accepts the laws of capitalist accounting will also accept that mass unemployment is inevitable. This is the reason why the Labour Party has never been able to defend the unemployed or even make unemployment a political issue.

Unemployment is now perceived as another part of modern life, like traffic jams, late buses and vandalised phone boxes. Everybody agrees that it is a tragic waste, but that we will just have to learn to live with it. A widespread attitude of resignation to joblessness results from Labour's deference towards the private enterprise and profit system.

Until the 1983 general election, the Labour Party—especially its left wing—tried to have the best of both worlds. It argued that British capitalism could be made efficient while, at the same time, unemployment could be abolished and living standards improved. During the 1983 election campaign, Labour promised to increase spending on public services and to get Britain working again.

Most voters found Labour's promises unconvincing. Many recalled that it was the last Labour government that drove unemployment up in the first place. Others felt that Labour's traditional policies of nationalisation and higher public spending had done nothing to protect jobs and living standards in the seventies.

The Tories had no trouble dismissing Labour's policies as irrelevant. Despite Thatcher's unpopularity, they won the election by a landslide. Ever since then, the Labour leadership has avoided the question of unemployment and let Tory commonsense prevail in the sphere of economic policy.

The 1983 election marked a turning point. Thatcher did not just win by a landslide: she also managed to force the opposition parties to accept her economic policies. Before the election the Tories argued that curbing inflation was the main task even if it meant more austerity and unemployment. In those days, Labour feebly protested that people

must come first and that unemployment was a key issue.

After their election defeat, the Labour leaders underwent a swift conversion. As Roy Hattersley, Labour's shadow chancellor, told a recent Fabian Society conference, 'Most of the Labour Party now accepts that none of the plans for the economy can be achieved without holding down inflation' (*Financial Times*, 28 November 1986). Today the Labour Party is united around the economic principles proclaimed over the past eight years by the Tories.

While Hattersley goes around extolling the virtues of prudent housekeeping, Kinnock is busy telling the world that he accepts the realities of the capitalist market. In a speech to employers in Wales he waxed lyrical on the values of 'enterprise', appealed for more investment in industry, and went on to warn: 'This does not mean that we or anyone else can expect a vast job increase in manufacturing industry itself....Stability or reduction in marginal unit costs obviously means better use of better machines rather than substantial recruitment' (*Guardian*, 1 November 1986). He too realises that profits and jobs don't mix.

Following long-established Tory wisdom, Kinnock argues that the way forward for industry lies in fewer workers working harder surrounded by shiny new technology.

The change in Labour's outlook on economic affairs has been dramatic. At its 1986 conference, the party formally abandoned the goal of full employment that it has upheld for 40 years. Kinnock now promises only to reduce unemployment by one million—and that after two years in power. This pledge merely reveals that Labour now accepts unemployment like bad weather, as part of the British way of life.

Of course, Labour leaders protest that their policies are distinct from those of the Tories or the SDP/Liberal Alliance. 'Social ownership', a trendy substitute for old-style nationalisation, is one example. Social ownership sounds good, but what does it mean? It seems to cover any form of tie-up between the state and private capital, from the coal board through municipal enterprise to consumer cooperatives.

Social ownership is less a real policy than hype designed to make capitalist enterprise more palatable. Kinnock and Hattersley offer social ownership as a signal to the British establishment that they will never take any measures against private industry.

Labour's policies of restricting capital export and increasing taxation on the rich can have no effect in reversing Britain's decline.

British bosses have always been able to evade exchange controls; as long as it is profitable to invest abroad they will continue to do so. Taxing the rich is all very well, but the small amount of revenue acquired this way will do the British economy little good.

The Labour leadership is well aware that it has nothing new to offer. This is why it spends so much time preaching the virtues of caution, sobriety and realism. Kinnock accuses the hard left of believing that a Labour government would mean a 'cancellation of realities' and assures them sharply to the contrary. But if Labour is insisting so much on harsh realities *before* it is elected, what are we in for once Kinnock moves into Number 10?

The gutter press often attacks Labour's economic policy on the grounds that it is too radical. If only this were true! In fact the capitalists are well pleased with Labour's moderate economic policies, for they know that a Kinnock victory would lead to no substantial change in government line. In February 1986, the *Daily Telegraph* congratulated Hattersley on a speech which outlined Labour's pro-business policies:

'If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Mrs Thatcher may find a crumb of comfort at this difficult time from Mr Hattersley's trying on her mantle for size. "Modified or planned Keynesianism"—as Mr Hattersley dubs his new departure—is not so far from the economic theories, explicit or implicit, which have actually guided this government's policy.' (1 February 1986)

New Statesman editor John Lloyd, writing in his old paper the *Financial Times*, has reached the same conclusion. He notes how the right has won 'intellectual hegemony' over the left on the issue of the superiority of the free market system (*Financial Times*, 17 November 1986).

Labour has not bought the Tory arguments because of their compelling logic. It is the logic of the capitalist recession that has done the trick. Anybody who wants to make capitalism work is obliged to do what capital requires. It is impossible to revive capitalist profits and at the same time protect working class living standards.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party the choice is clear. The future of humanity depends on getting rid of the capitalist system. There is no reason why people should not enjoy a prosperous and worthwhile life. All the resources required to build a humane society are available. While millions are out of work, factories are idle and materials are stockpiled. We live in an age of scientific breakthroughs

in information technology and medicine which show the tremendous potential for social progress.

There is no lack of resources. But under capitalism the resources of society are only deployed if they can be used to make a profit for the capitalist class. Private profit, not social need, determines how the products of human labour are used. This is why the RCP advocates the overthrow of the capitalist system. Once the antiquated system of private profit is abolished, society can begin to use its resources in line with its needs.

There is nothing 'extreme' about the RCP's demands for work for all, a decent living wage, adequate housing, and proper facilities for health and education. These are simply the basic requirements for human existence in the twentieth century. Our demands appear 'extreme' because they cannot be achieved without a struggle to rid society of the oppressive structures of capitalism.

It is simply impossible to accept the framework of capitalism and still defend the interests of the working class. Any attempt to reconcile our interests with those of the capitalist economy will lead to major setbacks.

Labour's policies cannot work. As long as we play by the rules of the capitalist game, there can be no hope. That is why even the Labour left remains trapped without an alternative. Left-wing Labour councils which have tried to limit the damage caused by Tory cuts have been defeated by their own commitment to balancing the capitalist accounts. The sordid spectacle of Liverpool issuing 30 000 redundancy notices to its employees reveals the dead end of left-wing attempts to play the system.

The left's economic strategy leads to disaster. It means trying to share out the tiny sums capitalism from time to time doles out to prevent its subjects from revolting. It ensures that people are forced to compete with one another for the limited resources on offer. The result is that we are divided even further along sexual, racial and sectional lines.

Instead of fighting over crumbs, the RCP proposes fighting for the whole cake. Through the struggle to take over all the resources currently available and build a new society, all sections of the working class and the oppressed will be able to unite and work together.

The RCP has no economic policies to offer. If, like the rest of the left, we promised to get rid of unemployment and raise living standards all around, we too would be spouting empty rhetoric. But we recognise

that there are no *economic* solutions to the problems facing the majority of people in Britain. We want to end unemployment and poverty, but we are certain that these objectives can be achieved only through a wide-ranging political struggle against the capitalist order.

This is the only perspective that measures up to the demands of our times.



Fighting for the right to work: workers from the Arbride company, Adrossan, Scotland appealing for solidarity outside the High Street shops which stock the firm's products

● Work or full pay

To survive in capitalist society everybody needs either a job at a living wage, or the same level of income in the form of benefits. We cannot afford to go poor just because employers cannot make enough profit out of our labour, or because the state cannot afford to maintain our living standards. What constitutes a living wage? This can only be decided by wage-earners and those who rely on benefits. We reject all state attempts to regulate wages by means of incomes policy.

3

Halting the union retreat

'We are in the vanguard of change' declared Eric Hammond, the pugnacious right-wing leader of the electricians' union, shortly before the 1986 TUC conference. 'What the EETPU does today, other unions do tomorrow, and very often, what we are saying this year turns out to be the flavour of next year.' Hammond is right. The methods of scab unionism pioneered by the leaders of the EETPU have indeed come to dominate the official trade union movement.

Last year's TUC conference revealed that the union leaders have abandoned even token resistance to the employers and the government in favour of continuing with Tory anti-union policies under a Labour government. Indeed the TUC went further and invited Kinnock to control wages if he ever comes to power. The TUC leaders hoped that a display of deference to a Labour leader proclaiming his contempt for the unions would enhance Kinnock's electoral prospects and hence their prospects of survival. *The Times*, the product and promoter of scab unionism, was impressed by Kinnock's performance at the TUC conference: 'He stared the trade union barons in the face and told them that, if necessary, a Labour government could do without their help' (3 September 1986).

The unions have come a long way since 1982, when a special conference at Wembley resolved not to comply with the Tories' first attempt to curb union rights by law. Since then the Tories have introduced further measures to restrict strike action, picketing and the closed shop. They have also enforced strike ballots and meddled in union elections. Yet, at the 1985 TUC conference, the engineers, backed by the electricians, openly defied the TUC's Wembley policy by accepting government funds for internal elections. The TUC leaders

first threatened disciplinary action, and then backed down and adopted the EETPU/AEU policy themselves. Another special conference six months later finally set the seal on the TUC's capitulation to Tory interference in the unions.

On that occasion TUC general secretary Norman Willis admitted that the unions had 'to a degree' accepted the terms on labour law set by the government. And, in a keynote speech, John Edmonds of the general and municipal workers' union, acknowledged the government's success in putting the unions on the defensive:

'We must be preparing arguments for the future, but if we don't put them in sensible terms, the Tories will continue to muster support against us. We have helped the government by the style and presentation of our arguments, and promoted the remoteness of the trade union leadership.'

The joint TUC/Labour Party policy statement *People at work: new rights, new responsibilities* emerged from the climate promoted by Willis and Edmonds. It is drafted in the terms dictated by the Tories over the past eight years. Labour promises to repeal Tory anti-union legislation—but intends to replace it with an even finer mesh of laws governing trade union affairs.

The only contentious issue at last year's conferences of the official labour movement was the right of the state to insist on ballots before strike action. However, the Labour leaders are so cowed by the success of Tory propaganda on this matter that dissent has been easily overcome. They have granted the state—the collective organisation of the employers—the right to influence the manner in which workers decide to take action against the bosses. They have also conceded the right of the state to stick its nose into internal union elections.

Labour and the TUC want to replace rights to organise collectively with the right of the isolated individual worker to plead for mercy before a judicial representative of the capitalist class. Thousands of miners and hundreds of print workers can testify to the quality of justice that can be expected by militant trade unionists in the bosses' courts.

The 1986 TUC conference endorsed another joint TUC/Labour Party statement, *Low pay: policies and priorities*. Promoted by John Edmonds and Rodney Bickerstaffe of Nupe, it calls for a future Labour government to impose a statutory minimum wage. Yet, as a gesture of concern for the low-paid, it is entirely cynical. The minimum wage proposed is £80 a week—low enough to ensure that it would cost a Kinnock administration little and benefit the low-paid even less.

The real purpose of the minimum wage policy is to proclaim that the unions are ready for an incomes policy. One of the key factors which commends Labour to the British establishment is its proven capacity to get the union leaders to sacrifice their members' living standards in the cause of boosting capitalist profits.

Despite his union's longstanding opposition to incomes policy in any form, Ron Todd of the transport workers used the TUC conference to uphold wage restraint under a future Labour government: 'I admit', he said, 'that we must have our priorities and people will have to wait their turn on pay.' He even acknowledged how difficult it can be for union leaders to persuade their members to accept falling living standards, continuing, 'I will strive to deliver all I can, but I am only Ron Todd. We must get the message across to the rank and file' (*Guardian*, 3 September 1986).

Kinnock's speech to the conference hinted at the price the working class will be forced to pay for another Labour government. He emphasised the need for 'tough measures' to revive British capitalism, for making manufacturing a priority way above living standards, and for taking ruthless action against any resistance to this course. The fact that he won a standing ovation is a measure of how desperate for a Labour government the official labour movement has become. It is also a warning of how unprepared the unions are for what would follow a Kinnock election victory.

The problem is that the approach of the electricians and the engineers is in the ascendant not merely at the TUC, but in workplaces throughout the country. The policy of outright collaboration with the employers influences workers in every sector. This outlook has paralysed the major industrial disputes of the Thatcher years.

The pernicious role of the EETPU in recruiting scab labour to work in Rupert Murdoch's Wapping plant is well known and has rightly been condemned. Yet the influence of the EETPU approach over other unions involved in the Wapping dispute has been widely underestimated.

The dispute started when Murdoch sacked the entire News International workforce of 6000 and set up a new plant with a new workforce at Wapping. At an early stage the other unions, led by Brenda Dean of Sogat, put forward a plan to resolve the dispute which accepted the sort of servile terms agreed by the EETPU—including what amounted to a no-strike deal. As it happened, Murdoch had set his face against re-employing any sacked workers so he threw out the



Arthur Scargill—his bureaucratic methods led the miners to defeat



Brenda Dean—attacked the electricians, but allowed EETPU policies to undermine the fight for jobs at Wapping

unions' peace plan. However, the concessions made by the print unions were significant:

'The index of the EETPU's impact is Dean's plan for Wapping; even though Murdoch rejected it, it was a measure of how much ground the EETPU and its allies had captured—how much, a year after the end of the miners' strike, the trade union map has been re-drawn.' (Philip Bassett, 'End of the decent brotherhood', *New Statesman*, 28 February 1986)

In the course of the Wapping dispute the print unions' pursuit of the EETPU strategy of trying to negotiate a deal on any terms with the employer proved much more damaging than the activities of a few EETPU scabs. Murdoch made clear from the start that the reinstatement of the workers was not negotiable. Fruitless negotiations simply diverted energy away from the measures required to step up pressure on Murdoch and sapped the morale of the strikers.

The EETPU and the AEU have pioneered sweetheart deals with employers, especially in the new technology sector and in newly established plants. They have traded jobs, conditions and long-standing union rights in return for recognition and token concessions such as 'single status' uniforms and canteens.

Radical union leaders have condemned the more right-wing unions, particularly for making deals which exclude other unions and give up the right to strike. Yet, where the opportunity has arisen, most unions have tried to make similar deals. Hence when rival unions complained to the TUC's disputes committee in 1985 about the EETPU's no-strike deals, Hammond compiled a dossier of similar agreements made by other unions, including left-wing unions like the transport workers and Tass, the white-collar engineering union. As a result, the disciplinary measures against Hammond were rapidly shelved.

While open company unionism remains confined to a fairly small number of plants, the subservient mentality personified by Hammond, and by Gavin Laird and Bill Jordan of the engineers, is everywhere to be found. Even in public services, where the scope for such deals is limited, union officials have made major concessions to the bosses.

In-house tenders, put forward as an alternative to the privatisation of laundry, cleaning and kitchen services, are the NHS brand of company unionism. Here union representatives have signed away jobs and working conditions to keep the contractors out and to preserve the managerial framework within which they have always worked.

Pragmatism has blurred the distinction between right and left in the

unions. At the TUC conference it was left-wing Bickerstaffe who proposed the motion in favour of incomes policy, while right-wing Hammond opposed it (on the sectional grounds that it might benefit low-paid public service workers at the expense of better-paid workers in private industry). In general, the left that has modified its position to appease the right.

In the early years of Thatcher's rule, the more radical trade union leaders took their stand in defence of the traditions of the labour movement. However, mass unemployment, a much more combative capitalist class, a bitterly anti-union government and a series of draconian laws have cruelly exposed how inadequate these traditions are.

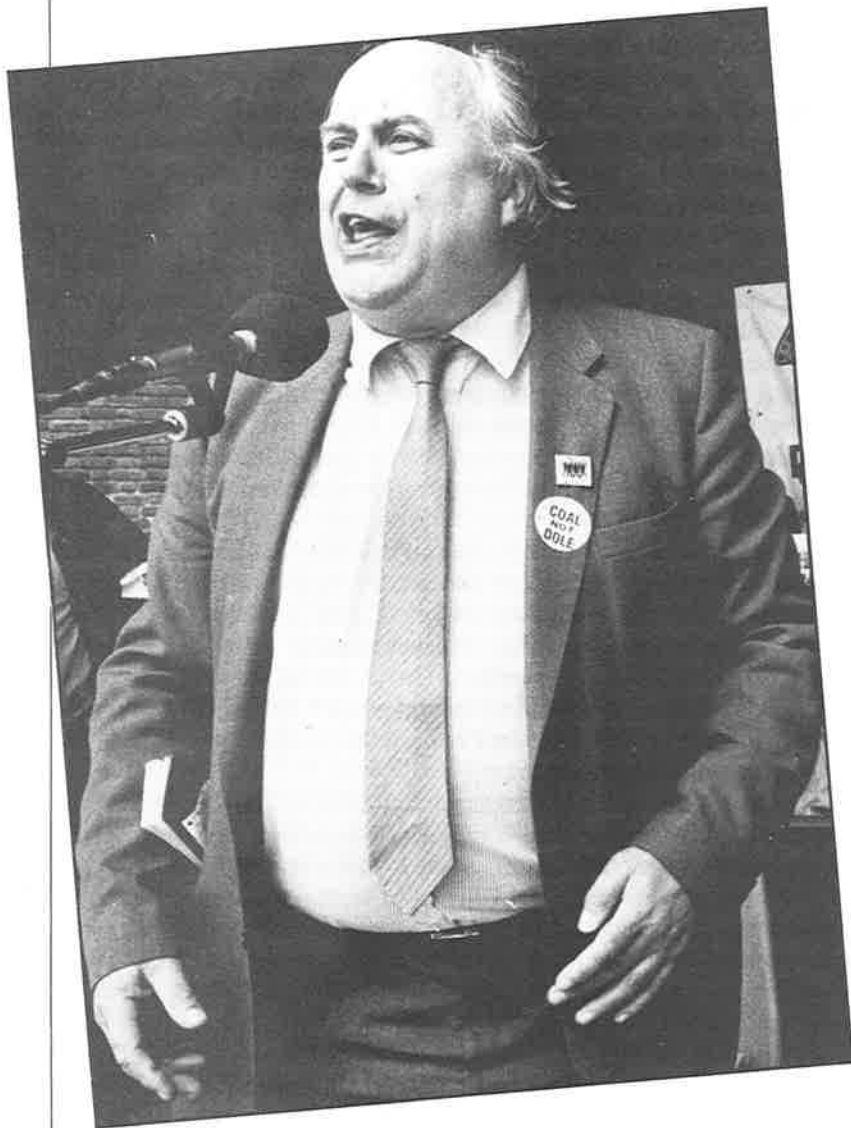
The methods of militancy tried and tested throughout the post-war years have not held up well in the eighties. They have largely failed to rally rank and file resistance, and, when successful in mobilising support, have proved no match for the ruthless and resourceful tactics of the employers.

The capitalist offensive has disoriented the labour movement. It has discredited collective organisation and action and encouraged all sorts of individual responses. Some workers have accepted voluntary redundancy and have taken their chances among the self-employed. Others work long hours of overtime and concentrate on home and family. Declining union membership and record low levels of strikes show that many workers have lost confidence in trade unions and in the efficacy of industrial action.

The recession has led to a deepening division in the working class. On the one hand there is a passive majority which feels that the unions are irrelevant and that the Labour Party is just a vehicle for careerists. In certain circumstances, when the threat of mass redundancy arises or after the defeat of a strike, such workers are vulnerable to the appeal of company unionism. When an election comes along they may vote Tory, Alliance or not at all.

On the other hand there remains a significant minority of workers loyal to union and Labour Party. Indeed the experience of setbacks, of growing isolation and a sense of being on the defensive, often strengthens allegiance to the institutions of the labour movement.

In the past rank and file activists questioned the conservative attitudes of senior officials. Today they are more likely to endorse them. When the very survival of the official labour movement is at stake, now seems no time to push forward; no time, either, for internal



Norman Willis—hoping a Labour victory can save the TUC

disputes. A general desire to keep heads down and stick together has closed the gap between bureaucrat and activist.

The rift between the indifferent and the loyal has become painfully apparent in recent major disputes. In both the miners' strike and the Wapping dispute, significant sections of the workforce crossed picket lines. After the miners' defeat the emergence of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, a scab union based on the Nottinghamshire miners who worked throughout the strike, widened the rift still further. The print unions' failure to disrupt Murdoch's strike-breaking operation has led many print workers to suspect that the EETPU approach is their only hope. The Hammond strategy has already become the norm in the rest of the newspaper industry.

In education the teachers' drawn out campaign of selective industrial action has led to the rapid growth of the non-striking professional associations. This trend parallels developments among nurses and ambulance workers after the defeat of the 1982 health service dispute.

Successive defeats have led union activists to reduce their horizons and accept the narrow purview of the bureaucracy. But there is an increasingly direct conflict between the strategy of the union officials and the requirements of the rank and file. Bureaucrats want to keep sitting around tables with employers; jobs, conditions and rights come a very poor second in these circles.

The left's endorsement of the strategy of the bureaucracy leads it to give its approval to an approach which reinforces its own isolation, deepens divisions in the working class and renders industrial action ineffective. This has been the experience of both the miners' strike and at Wapping.

In the miners' strike the NUM leadership avoided confronting the divisions in the ranks by calling the strike on an area-by-area basis, rather than balloting for an all-out strike. This bureaucratic approach, combined with exhortations to honour militant traditions, destroyed the chance both of united action and of effective solidarity. It critically weakened the strike from the start.

The Notts miners became convenient villains for the NUM. But the real blame for the miners' defeat lay with a leadership which tried to fight the class war of the eighties by a return to the seventies. Moreover, by joining in the finger-pointing at the Notts miners, the left allowed the leadership and its outdated policies to get off the hook. The result was not just a divided and defeated union, but the confusion and demoralisation that still prevail in the coalfields today.

At Wapping the left has echoed the demands of the print union leaders to expel the electricians from the TUC. In this way the bureaucracy has succeeded in diverting the struggle against Murdoch into an inter-union feud. Removing the EETPU from the TUC may allow other unions to poach members on a large scale from the electricians. It may also make it easier for them to sign no-strike deals at the expense of the EETPU. But it does nothing to get 6000 jobs back at News International.

Scapegoating the EETPU distracts attention from the need to challenge the spread of EETPU policies in all the unions. It prevents the sort of joint campaign by rank and file activists in all the unions involved in the dispute—including the EETPU—that is needed to break the bureaucratic stranglehold and organise some real action against the employers. Instead of uniting workers in struggle, the policies of the bureaucracy encourage the dissipation of workers' energies.

The impending election has accelerated the convergence between radical activists and the trade union bureaucracy, as both join in a desperate drive to get Kinnock into Downing Street. Apart from preparing the way for anti-union laws and wage restraint, the unions' policy of waiting for Kinnock postpones all resistance to attacks on jobs, working conditions and living standards. This, at a time when the bosses have not agreed to any pre-election truce in the class struggle.

The Revolutionary Communist Party aims to break the vicious circle into which many trade union militants have become trapped as a result of their reliance on the bureaucracy. The point that must be emphasised is that it is impossible to defend the interests of the working class today through the channels of yesterday. The existing structures and practices of the unions were built up in Britain's post-war boom. In the recession this context no longer exists and cannot be recreated. Only by breaking with the traditions of the past and adopting a systematically anti-capitalist approach will we be able to measure up to the unprecedented scale of the capitalist offensive.

One example of the RCP's approach to work in the unions was our campaign against the spread of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers into Yorkshire and other areas at the end of the miners' strike. While NUM officials and the left adopted a narrow defensive response, we stressed that the only way to fight the UDM was by challenging the methods of class collaboration and bureaucratic manipulation in the NUM that allowed the scab union to grow in the first place.

Labour bureaucrats and their supporters bitterly resented our campaign, branding it as another attack on the union and accusing us of doing the UDM's work for it. Yet, exactly the opposite was the case. Unless we turn our unions into organisations which are accountable to the rank and file—organisations which can effectively defend their members' interests—nothing will stop the spread of scab unionism.

The RCP has played an active role in the trade unions and in strikes ever since the foundation of the party. In the workplace we oppose all forms of collaboration with the employers, all redundancies—compulsory and voluntary—and all deals designed to increase flexibility or productivity and make work even harder.

We strongly support all measures which increase rank and file control over union organisation. Hence we favour replacing management-sponsored closed shops with closed shops enforced by workers themselves. We also oppose the payment of union dues by the check-off system. This hands control of union funds over to the employers and weakens contact between union reps and ordinary members.

We oppose all state interference in the affairs of the working class. We call for the withdrawal of the labour movement from all quangos and standing committees which involve employers and government representatives. We reject state intrusions into union votes. In general we favour the most open and immediate methods of voting, methods which encourage maximum involvement and accountability. Such procedures also allow activists to influence the more passive workers and encourage fast and hard-hitting action. In all circumstances, the labour movement must establish its own procedures, not the state.

We reject all forms of state regulation of wages. Only those who live on wages have a right to decide on how much they need to be paid.

Finally, while we are fully in favour of trade unionists paying a political levy, we are firmly opposed to such levies being paid to the Labour Party. For the best part of a century the unions have financed Labour, an arrangement which has brought great rewards to the bureaucracy, but has constantly held the working class back. The relationship between the unions and Labour has fostered a narrow apolitical militancy in the unions, while allowing Labour leaders to pursue their pro-capitalist programme in parliament without undue interruption from the rank and file.

The different roles assigned to the unions and the Labour Party suit

the bureaucracy but incapacitate the rank and file. It is time we put an end to this cosy arrangement and campaigned for unions to spend their political funds on causes that advance the interests of the working class.

● Defend union rights

We stand for the repeal of all laws that restrict the rights of workers to take action in defence of working class interests. We reject all restrictions on striking, picketing and solidarity action. We reject all state intervention in strike ballots, union elections or any other labour movement activity.

4 Reaction and resistance ●

In 1839 the Birmingham Chartists resolved 'to have no police whatsoever until the working class had a voice in making the laws of the land'. The founders of the working class movement in Britain regarded the very existence of the police as an infringement of basic liberties. This spirit of democracy and freedom is sorely needed by today's labour movement. Civil liberties are being curtailed by the increasingly oppressive activities of the police and the courts—and the working class still has no real voice in making the laws of the land.

Under Thatcher, state repression has expanded dramatically. The police have tooled up with plastic bullets for use against rioters, and lead bullets to be used against anybody, from children to middle-aged women, who is associated with a 'criminal' suspect. Judges have improvised laws to restrict picketing, curb strike action and put militants behind bars. Parliament has given added powers to the police and the courts.

Over the past few years Tory politicians and the media have set about labelling as criminal any deviation from the strict rules governing behaviour in Thatcher's Britain. Trade union militants, hippies travelling to Stonehenge, football supporters going to away games—all have been targeted as enemies of the state. They have been vilified in the gutter press and harassed and intimidated by the police. Many have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, curfew, and imprisonment.

Drug dealers and petty criminals have been blown up into a major threat to society. While the activities of such people are a real problem in certain areas, the establishment preoccupation with them offers no

solution. It merely provides a focus for calls for tougher policing and longer prison sentences to deal with a much wider range of threats to the system. Scares about drugs, muggings and burglaries have been fostered to create an atmosphere of insecurity, one conducive to increased surveillance, dawn raids and mass round-ups.

The growing threat to civil liberties posed by Britain's paramilitary police squads, backed by 'public order' laws, is a matter of great concern to anybody who values the limited freedoms we still possess. Yet the Labour Party has given up any pretence of upholding civil liberties. It has gone to great lengths to throw off the anti-police image it gained when some left wingers had the nerve to criticise police brutality against miners and black people.

Last year Labour's law and order chief Gerald Kaufman went to the Police Federation conference to display the party's fondness for the forces of state repression. Leading Labour politicians have openly praised the police and condemned the resistance offered to them by pickets and demonstrators. Labour political broadcasts now present the police as friendly bobbies protecting children and the elderly and call for more officers on the beat.

Police terror and the threat to civil liberties from repressive Tory legislation and mounting public prejudice are issues that affect all sections of the working class. However, certain sections of society are particularly at risk. Women bear the brunt of bigotry designed to reinforce their inferior status in British society. Black people have been particularly tainted with crime (mugging, drug-dealing) to open the way to harsher police repression. Finally, the Aids panic has led to a sharp increase in attacks on homosexuals and homosexuality in general.

Women

Under Britain's first woman prime minister, women appear to have made considerable advances in public life. More women go out to work than ever before; more play a more prominent role in business, journalism and the professions. Yet the image of progress projected by the media reflects only the advance of middle class women. Working class women continue to occupy the lowest place in the labour market and carry out a growing burden of work in the home.

The rise in women's employment over the past decade has been mainly a rise in part-time work. Part-time women now make up more

than 20 per cent of the workforce in Britain, and nearly half of all women workers are part-timers. Part-time jobs are generally unskilled and poorly paid, and part-timers lose out on sickness, maternity, holiday and redundancy benefits. Often non-unionised, they are more vulnerable to dismissal.

The expansion of part-time work reflects the employers' demand for a highly flexible workforce made up of workers who can be taken on and sacked according to fluctuating market conditions. Far from improving women's status in the labour market, part-time work reinforces women's role as a reserve of cheap labour.

Even in full-time employment women's second class status has been maintained. Despite all the laws on equal pay and sex discrimination, the gap between men and women's earnings has increased. The only consequence of the legislation has been to ghettoise women further into low-paid menial jobs.

While part-time work usually involves difficult and unsocial hours for women, its great advantage for the capitalist class is that it enables women to perform even more unpaid work in the home. Thus women can be fitted into the margins of the labour market, while continuing to bring up children, shop and cook for the household, and look after the sick and elderly. Cuts in nurseries, schools and hospital beds; the early discharge of hospital patients; 'community care' for the old, mentally ill and physically handicapped—all have increased the load on women in the home.

Another key area in which the Tories have increased the pressure on women is in abortion and contraception services. A series of private members bills, culminating in Enoch Powell's proposed legislation on the 'rights' of embryos, has made abortion the subject of considerable public hostility. While all these bills have been defeated, they have increased the pressure on women to bear unwanted babies.

Cuts in national health service facilities and anti-abortion gynaecologists have made access to abortion difficult in certain areas of the country. While abortions in the private sector are booming, many women who cannot raise the cash or face the aggravation are pushed into child-bearing.

Victoria Gillick's high-profile campaign to restrict contraceptive services and sex education for girls under the age of 16 has had a similar effect. Doctors have been discouraged from offering contraceptive advice to young people. At the same time family planning clinics are being closed down to save money, making it more difficult to get

contraceptives and contraceptive advice.

Over the past few years, women have been subjected to a constant barrage of propaganda urging sexual restraint and respectable family values. The media have promoted a series of scares blaming breast and cervical cancer on the pill and 'permissiveness'. Parental responsibility is advanced as the solution for every social problem, from baby battering through drug abuse to football hooliganism. The all-pervasive message is that a woman's place is in the home, being faithful to her husband, and providing moral guidance to her children 24 hours a day.

Politicians, the press and television now take an inordinate interest in child abuse and in rape. This is partly to indulge a prurient public opinion, but it serves a much wider purpose. It encourages a climate of tension and anxiety which leads people to distrust one another and instead put their faith in the authorities.

The police have gone to great lengths to display their concern about sexual crimes, staging televised reconstructions and setting up special incident centres. To overcome their reputation of hostility towards rape victims they go on about new reception procedures, newly sensitive women PCs and newly sympathetic police doctors.

Given the fact that the majority of sexual offences are committed by acquaintances or relatives in the privacy of the home, such innovations will scarcely lead to more villains being caught. The aim is to present a soft side to the image of the police and to win public approval for even further police interference in the lives of ordinary people. The result will not be any lessening of the degradation of women or children, but more intensive surveillance and harassment for everybody.

The need for a militant defence of women's rights at work, in the home and in the wider propaganda war, has never been greater. Yet while the Tories have pushed forward the attack on women, the women's movement has linked up with the official labour movement and sounded the retreat. Feminists and left wingers alike have failed to recognise the danger of the growth of reactionary moralism for working class women.

Instead of rejecting the moralists out of hand, many who call themselves feminists and socialists have discovered much to agree with in the arguments of the right. Many have abandoned the old women's liberation movement's call for free abortion on demand; some have publicly adopted a more positive attitude to the values of family life. Others have echoed right-wing demands for pornography to be

censored and have called for more extensive police action on the issue of rape. These are repressive measures which will not benefit women but which the state will twist to use against the whole of the working class.

The capitulation to anti-women prejudices has gone furthest in the leadership of the Labour Party. In his attempt to cultivate a respectable image, Kinnock has presented himself as a bulwark of sexual and political conservatism. In August 1986 he told *Everywoman*:

'I am a father and no matter how much I try to convince myself towards the course of enlightenment I know damn well that, put to the test, I am what people would call a reactionary.'

He went on to condemn 'the indulgence of what's called permissiveness'. Strictures like these may appeal to middle class voters. But they also play an important role in condemning millions of working class women to the privatised drudgery of housework and to menial jobs picked up on the fringes of the labour market.

Labour appeals for women's votes through its commitment to establish a Ministry of Women. While last year's party conference insisted that the Minister for Women should have cabinet status, not a single woman won a place in the shadow cabinet elected by the parliamentary party shortly afterwards. However, it seems that veteran campaigner Jo Richardson, one of only five women on Labour's 64-strong front bench team, will be elevated to represent women's interests.

However, the Ministry of Women faces much bigger problems than a severe shortage of women in the higher ranks of the party. The Labour Party has only the vaguest policies on questions of women's rights. Most of these are so bland that they would not look out of place in the programme of the SDP, where indeed most of them can be found. It is also not at all clear what resources Labour intends to make available to fulfil its pledges to women. Experienced party-watchers expect to find the Ministry of Women close to the bottom of Kinnock's list of priorities.

A close look at Labour's glossy policy brochures and Kinnock's key speeches of 1986 reveals three definite promises to women. All appear to have been selected for their appeal to the upwardly mobile young mother, a category specially cherished by Kinnock's election advisers.

First, Labour promises to offer a nursery place to all three and four-



Protest against the death of Anthony 'Crumper' Lemard in Notting Hill police station, October 1986



RCP supporters barrack the bigots who want to ban homosexuality from schoolbooks

year olds. This is welcome. Yet, it is precisely in this age group that nursery provision has been expanding under the Tories, for the same electoral reasons that Labour has suddenly become concerned about it. What, though, about nurseries for the millions of younger children whose mothers are unable to go out to work?

Second, Labour is committed to improving the facilities for screening for cervical and breast cancer. Good. But what about improving NHS abortion facilities? This would squeeze out the parasitic private sector and make sure that every woman who wants an abortion could get one. For working class women, this would bring greater and more immediate benefits than the still uncertain advantages of cancer screening.

There are two reasons why this proposal does not appear in Labour's programme. First, it would cost more money. Second, it would force the Labour Party to take on the right-wing moralists who would try to use it to undermine the Labour vote.

Third, in his party conference speech last October Kinnock promised better street-lighting to protect women from rape. No doubt, better street-lighting is highly desirable in many areas. It would however have little effect on the incidence of rapes, the large majority of which take place indoors. Kinnock's empty pledge is merely an attempt to latch on to what appears to be a popular concern in a way which corresponds entirely to the Tories' use of the issue to strengthen the forces of law and order.

Racism

Since Thatcher came to power racism in all its forms has become more prevalent in Britain than ever before. Discrimination is on the rise in every sphere of life. Racial abuse and violent attacks on black people are a feature of life in most British cities. The state leads the offensive against black people with a vast network of immigration regulations. Police brutality and the criminalisation of black youth are the natural outcome of passport checks, special prisons and deportations.

All post-war British governments have played their part in making racism socially acceptable. From the early sixties successive governments have identified immigrants as a problem and have passed laws to stop black people from coming into Britain. However, in recent years there has been a change of emphasis in the state's attitude to black people.

Since the introduction of the 1981 Nationality Act, the government's

attention has turned to the problem of containing the black community in Britain. This shift towards internal controls has led to high-intensity policing in inner-city areas.

Immigration controls still provide the legislative underpinning of British racism. The immigration issue is always there, ready to be activated when the government is in difficulty. The media can then play up the 'flood' of 'aliens' and so rally public opinion around the government.

The Tories used an anti-immigrant panic to considerable effect in August 1986. Television reports showed immigration officers ruthlessly herding Asian immigrants around Heathrow Airport. A subsequent scare about the need for stricter precautions against the spread of Aids from Africa was a particularly lurid example of media-manipulated xenophobia.

Official racism gives a stamp of approval to freelance racists. The racist consensus in British society is expressed in a steady flow of racist jokes, cartoons, graffiti and direct attacks.

Racism is a powerful weapon in the hands of the capitalists. By uniting all classes against a clearly defined enemy, it submerges class conflict and acts as a powerful antidote to class politics. The commonplace notion that people can be divided into 'us' (the British) and 'them' (foreigners) is a constant reminder of how weak 'we' (the labour movement) are as a political force.

Fighting racism must be a central concern of anybody who wants to see the working class become a serious force in British politics. Racism paralyses the labour movement and prevents it from acting as a political force. Instead workers become blind to their class interests and line up with their bosses against fellow workers.

One of the biggest problems confronting the labour movement is that an organised anti-racist current in the working class barely exists. Because militants have for too long avoided tackling this problem, black people have learned not to expect support from the labour movement and have been forced to fight on their own. Confronting racism, especially in the labour movement, and thus fighting to overcome the isolation of the black community—these are our urgent tasks.

The legacy of racism runs deep through all the mainstream parties. On this issue Labour's record is scarcely distinguishable from the Tories. Various Labour governments have given the nod to the racists by imposing immigration controls. The punitive Nationality Act

introduced by Thatcher began life as a green paper prepared by the previous Labour administration. Labour still upholds immigration controls and promises that it will apply them 'firmly'.

Most sections of the Labour Party are uneasy about the party's racist record. The leadership recognises that racism as a political issue can only benefit the Tories. Hence leading Labour politicians have rarely come out with openly racist statements. The party publicly rejects racism and appeals for the votes of black people. Yet, because it is a strongly nationalistic party, Labour has never been able to counter the view that the British should come first. Whenever race comes up, Labour is forced on to the defensive.

The Tory-Labour exchange on immigration in June 1986 was a classic example of how the race issue works in British politics. During a trip to India, Kinnoch got carried away by a desire to impress his hosts and promised that a Labour government would repeal the 1971 and 1980 immigration acts. He told Indians that they would be free to join their relatives in Britain. Tory politicians and the press seized on Kinnoch's speech and warned that a massive influx of immigrants would follow in the wake of the election of a Labour government.

Kinnoch's reaction was predictable. On his return, he took a full page in the *Daily Mirror* to soothe the forces of British racism, reassuring them:

'No one is suggesting that there would be any significant rise or fall in the number of people coming to this country each year.'

Soon enough, shadow home secretary Gerald Kaufman wrote to the *Observer* quoting his own speeches to prove Labour's adherence to tough immigration controls.

It is unfortunate that many anti-racists cannot face the facts of life: many still hold out hope that Labour might one day actually fight racism. Some anti-racists are active in Labour councils, where they take a public stand against racism and promote equal opportunity policies. Others campaign for the recognition of black sections in the Labour Party.

The weakness of these initiatives is that they do not confront the problem of racism. At best they provide a few token jobs and community centres. Sometimes they allow greater representation of black people inside the Labour Party. But because they do not challenge Labour's policy on race, they cannot be expected to go much further than creating a circle of black activists inside the Labour Party.

What good are black sections when, after the disturbances in

Handsworth in 1985, Birmingham Labour politicians unite in their condemnations of black youth? What good are they given Labour's unswerving commitment to immigration controls? The presence of anti-racists inside the Labour Party can only give credibility to the party, particularly among black voters.

It is not the cause of anti-racism that benefits from black sections, but the Labour Party. The campaign for black sections has allowed Labour to project an anti-racist image, while preserving its chauvinist policies on immigration. For the RCP anti-racism means action, not posturing. This is why we set up Workers Against Racism—a campaign that fights against racism and racists.

The point of departure for Workers Against Racism is hostility to all immigration controls. Workers Against Racism fights to remove these controls because they nurture a wide variety of racist practices. Unlike the Labour left, we regard 'non-racist' immigration controls as a contradiction in terms. Britain does not have immigration laws to keep out Australians and Americans—they exist to discriminate against black people.

Winning the working class to oppose immigration controls is of central importance. Once we accept the right of the state to control our movements, we will be unable to stand up against other forms of coercion. By opposing immigration controls workers will end their complicity in the oppression of black people and will be in an immeasurably stronger position to take on the state.

Workers Against Racism organises the physical defence of black people who are subjected to racist attacks. This approach—which we pioneered in East London—aims to mobilise direct action to prevent racist violence. It gives practical meaning to anti-racism by confronting racists with the organised power of the working class. All attempts to use the police, the courts, local councils or any other official agency to counter racist violence have proved self-defeating. Institutions that are part of the racist state machine cannot be used to fight racism. Only the independent action of workers and the oppressed can put a stop to the scourge of racist violence.

For the British working class taking a stand against racism is a matter of self-preservation. Fighting racism is no favour to the oppressed, but the first step towards the liberation of the entire working class.

Gay rights

'I ask why homosexuals freely engage in sodomy—let's be blunt about it—and other obnoxious practices, knowing the dangers involved.' Describing modern society as 'a swirling human cesspit' Manchester police chief James Anderton describes Aids as a 'self-inflicted scourge' and appeals for tougher measures against it. Born-again Christian and professional persecutor of homosexuals, prostitutes, sellers of pornography, drug addicts, protesting students and any other deviants from the austere Thatcherite moral code, Anderton leads the chorus of reaction on Aids.

Other voices, many in even more strident tones, have greeted Aids as 'the gay plague', as God's punishment for a decadent society's acceptance of the sin of Sodom. Some are already calling for Aids victims to be quarantined, for all homosexuals to be screened for the Aids virus and for other repressive measures.

● A significant section of the British establishment has taken advantage of the growing incidence of Aids in Britain to promote openly anti-homosexual and pro-family sentiments. The churches have come out once more against homosexual activity and sexual licence. Influential pressure groups such as the Conservative Family Campaign, the Bow Group and Family and Youth Concern have linked the issue of Aids to their wider preoccupations.

The right-wing moralists are concerned that 'the father' has lost prestige in society because of the spread of marital breakdown, divorce and single parenthood. Restoring parental authority is the Tory solution to a wide range of social problems. The Tories insist on a close connection between the rigorous discipline of a stable marital and family life and the spirit of conformity and order they want to enforce on Britain as a whole.

For the hardline Tory moralists the only answer to the Aids epidemic is chastity before a lifelong heterosexual relationship sanctioned by both God and state. How convenient! The moralists' programme for preventing this killer disease corresponds exactly to the Tories' aim to retain control of a disintegrating society through bolstering up the family unit.

While doing nothing to stem the stream of bigotry issuing from the pulpits and gutter press, the leading sections of the British

establishment have decided to present Aids as a public health rather than a moral problem. Indeed government ministers concerned with Aids have been at pains to distance themselves from the more lurid statements of the moralists. Home secretary Douglas Hurd described Anderton's attempts to whip up a pogrom against homosexuals as 'unhelpful'.

The existence of a flourishing climate of prejudice has allowed the government to project an image of sober and responsible concern. Tory leaders can safely leave the gay-baiting and queer-bashing to others, emphasising instead the need to pull together against a terrifying threat to us all.

The official advertising campaign about Aids launched in December 1986 presented the issue as one of public health. It made no judgements against any particular sexual practices but simply urged caution. It was scrupulously neutral in moral terms—too neutral for many moralists whose protests jammed radio phone-ins and letters pages all over the country.

The government's campaign has been a great success, not in halting the spread of Aids—that was never its intention—but in winning wider approval for the Tory drive to revive family values. The government's public health approach has won support, not only from the quality press, medicine and nursing, but also from the gay movement, the Labour Party, the TUC...and the left.

The public health solution to the Aids problem is 'safe sex'. The drive to encourage people to limit their sexual partners and to use condoms in all casual encounters, particularly if they involve anal intercourse, now unites virtually the entire spectrum of British politics—from Tory grandee Willie Whitelaw to Labour gay rights activist Peter Tatchell.

● The left's defensive response to the Aids panic and its endorsement of the safe sex campaign leads to three problems.

First, the left evades the anti-homosexual thrust of the Aids panic by insisting that the disease is not just confined to gays. But, pointing out that bisexuals, visitors to prostitutes in central Africa and drug addicts are all specially prone to Aids does nothing to counteract the now firmly established prejudice that homosexuality is the root of the problem.

The principal result of the safe sex campaign will be calls for more intrusive controls on the victims and carriers of the disease and more harassment of homosexuals in general. The clamour for special registration and controls on people in 'at risk' categories is already

underway. The safe sex campaign will not persuade the mass of people to use condoms. It will only result in even more lesbians and gays losing their jobs, more abuse and more beating up in the streets.

Second, pointing the finger at other victims of the disease simply offers new targets for reaction. The high incidence of the disease in central Africa has already been used to justify tightening racist immigration laws. Bisexuals have been blamed for acting as a 'bridge' between the blighted world of gays and previously uncontaminated straight society. Some radical gays have pursued the safe sex line to the breathtaking conclusion that everybody should adopt an exclusively heterosexual or an exclusively homosexual orientation.

Finally, the left has pursued its commitment to safe sex to the conclusion of indicting prominent Tory politicians of hypocrisy for not themselves sticking to the sexual straight and narrow. The left's refusal to confront reaction and stand up in defence of lesbian and gay rights leads to concession after concession to the right. While affecting an aloofness from the moral debate, the Tory leadership can sit back and enjoy listening to the left echoing the priggish lectures of the right-wing moralists.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Aids panic is neither a moral nor a public health problem. It is a political challenge to the workers' movement. It is impossible to deal with Aids in a technical way because of the position of homosexuals as an oppressed section of society.

The great majority of homosexuals are forced to conceal their sexual identity, because revealing it would risk loss of job, income, social prestige, even custody of children. As a result, sexual encounters often take place in circumstances which preclude the possibility of safe sex. The problems encountered in tracking the spread of Aids, in identifying carriers and organising treatment are thus largely attributable to the fact that gays are denied basic democratic rights.

To fears about public disgrace and discrimination at work, Aids has added new anxieties about being shunned by workmates, being sacked on the spot and being denied council services. Insurance companies already inquire about the possibility of exposure to Aids before selling life insurance; building societies show similar concerns over granting mortgages. The use of the police to detain known Aids victims in special isolation facilities lurks in the future.

The Aids panic has already had the effect of encouraging closet gays to remain under cover and even for 'out' gays to try to return to the

closet. The only way to defend homosexuals from a persecution legitimised by the Aids panic is by fighting for their rights to live and work openly and freely in society.

Some left-wing gays counterpose immediate life-saving measures on Aids to the defence of homosexual rights, which they put off into the indefinite future. But safe sex will not save lives as long as homosexuals remain oppressed. Indeed the anti-homosexual content of the safe sex campaign can only reinforce the isolation and subordination of gays and continue to make them vulnerable to Aids. Both in the long term and in the short term, the only way to save lives from Aids is by rejecting the panic that surrounds it and by fighting for the rights of lesbians and gay men.

The dangers from Aids have in fact been grossly exaggerated. By the end of 1986 about 600 people in Britain had contracted the full syndrome of whom about half had died. Some 30 000 people are thought to be HIV positive—to have antibodies which suggest exposure to the Aids virus. Nobody knows what proportion of positive carriers progress to the disease itself. Aids is still a rare disease in Britain, virtually confined to London, Edinburgh and a few other big cities.

The principal threat to homosexuals in Britain today is not from Aids, but from the safe sex campaign. While affecting a scientific impartiality, this campaign converges with the bigotry of the right-wing moralists to promote a consensus against any departure from the norms of respectable family life, and particularly against homosexuality. It is significant that lesbians—the lowest risk category for Aids after celibate nuns and monks—have recently become victims of the Aids panic.

The safe sex campaign is a threat not only to homosexuals, but to the entire working class. By emphasising the virtues of heterosexuality and monogamy, it promotes the family values that help to atomise the working class and sap the will to take collective action. By defining the political problem of Aids as a personal matter of sexual preference and willingness to use condoms, the campaign tries to bury the whole question of the oppression of homosexuals in our society.

This year's Labour Party conference approved a resolution upholding the rights of lesbians and gay men. The fact that party managers carefully staged the brief debate to coincide with *Play School* to avoid television exposure shows that Labour's commitment on this issue is likely to remain in the closet. Labour's endorsement of the safe

sex campaign contradicts its conference commitment to lesbian and gay rights.

For us, combating the Aids panic is central to the struggle for the equal treatment of homosexuals and for the unity of the working class against the divisive moralism and phoney public health propaganda of the establishment.

● Equal rights for all

We are in favour of the widest extension of civil liberties and for equal rights for all. We reject all measures which strengthen the power of the capitalist state and extend the interference of its repressive forces in society. We repudiate attempts to criminalise sections of society as a way of winning public consent for more repression.

We oppose discrimination against women at work and call for the establishment of free nurseries, available all day for children of all ages, to free women to go out to work. We demand for free abortion and contraception on demand.

We oppose discrimination against black people in all spheres of society. We call for the repeal of all restrictions on immigration which divide the working class and give official approval to racism.

We reject the Aids panic as a propaganda campaign designed to take advantage of a fatal disease to proscribe homosexual activity and bolster conventional morality. We defend the rights of lesbians and gay men to full equality in society.

5 War and peace ●

The world recession has opened a new phase of international economic rivalries, political conflicts and military confrontations. Faced with declining profitability and stagnant demand at home, all the major capitalist powers are looking to foreign markets and investment outlets. The drive to ensure secure supplies of oil, industrial raw materials and the rare metals and minerals crucial to hi-tech processes forces Western capitalists to establish firm links with third world regimes. However, apart from a handful of booming newly industrialising countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, much of the third world has been plunged into economic chaos and political instability.

The most ominous result of global economic instability is the universal drive towards rearmament. An increasingly frenzied round of Western summits shows just how near to open conflict disputes over trade, budget deficits and interest rates have become. No country can leave anything to chance: all the Western powers, plus Japan, are building up their supplies of weaponry.

The media's growing preoccupation with disarmament talks reflects the concern of the major world powers to appear peaceful while they prepare for war. The collapse of the 1986 summit between Reagan and Gorbachev at Reykjavik exposed how hollow the West's talk about disarmament is. The USA has long used its enormous economic and military superiority to keep the Soviet Union under pressure, while carrying out its wider role as policeman to the world. Reagan was not about to give up his strategic defence initiative: that would give Gorbachev more economic room to manoeuvre, and state-subsidised US manufacturers less.

Recent events have confirmed the long-established view of the Revolutionary Communist Party that the main threat of war today comes, not from nuclear confrontation between East and West, but from 'conventional' Western aggression in the third world. Since the late seventies a series of Western adventures in Lebanon, culminating in the US and Israeli invasions in 1982, have turned Beirut into a heap of rubble. The Anglo-American air-strike on Libya in 1986 was a classic example of the use of coordinated Western resources and technology to devastate the people of the third world.

In Central America, the USA is out to destabilise the beleaguered economy of Nicaragua. It has continued to support the reactionary Contra guerrillas, through both direct funding and international money-laundering. Vicious dictatorships in other parts of Central America—notably El Salvador and Honduras—have been guaranteed US backing for their pro-Western terror. The 1983 invasion of Grenada by the American marines was an example to all the countries of the region of what they can expect if they fail to do Washington's bidding.

In southern Africa, the apartheid state has maintained the Western order by economic reprisals and raids directed against its northern neighbours, and by savage martial law in the black townships at home. The campaign for sanctions, pursued by establishment politicians throughout the Western world, has not only failed to restrain president PW Botha. By summoning opponents of apartheid towards a strategy of relying on Western leaders to take steps against a close ally, the campaign has undermined the potential for effective solidarity.

The popularisation of war throughout the West has largely been achieved through the panic about terrorism, particularly 'state terrorism' in the Arab world. The panic has depicted regimes (Libya, Syria) and movements (Palestinians, Shiites) as a threat to every Western citizen. Hence every Western individual killed, hijacked or kidnapped in the Middle East's struggle against Western domination is made the focus of a major public outcry. Thus the sufferings of a handful of Westerners have been used to justify the brutalisation of millions of Arabs.

While the Western powers cannot agree on economic matters at summits, they can come together to brand third world insurgents as deranged fanatics. The terrorism myth unites the Western powers in support of action against regimes or movements which act as a barrier to the fulfilment of Western objectives in the third world.

Under Thatcher, Britain has not only played a full part in the mounting drive towards military barbarism, but it has relished it.

Britain may be a declining country, especially in economic terms, but it remains a major military power, and a key member of the Western alliance. Britain has substantial and well-equipped conventional forces on land, sea and air. Its nuclear arsenal is small but quite capable of destroying most of Europe. Thatcher's greatest success, however, has been in turning aggression against external enemies into a source of popularity at home.

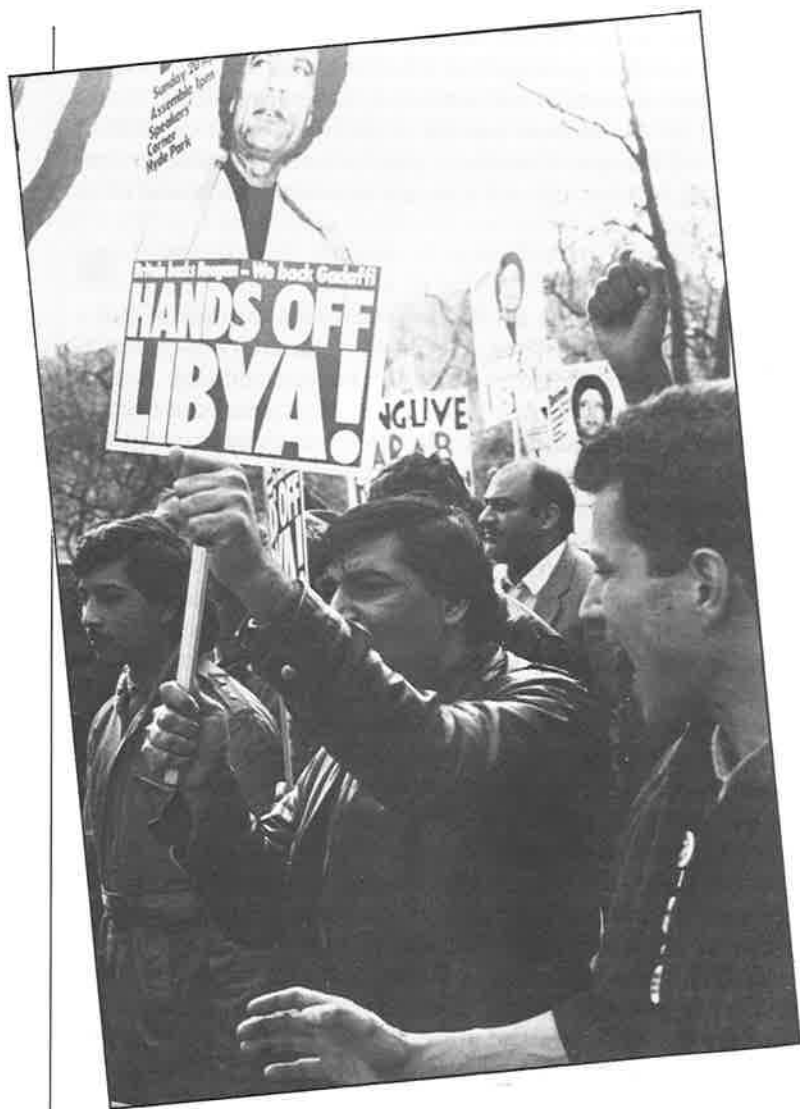
The war against Argentina in 1982 showed that Britain is still a rapacious imperialist power. When Argentina legitimately re-occupied an island that had been stolen from it in the last century, Britain despatched the biggest naval task force assembled since the Second World War. The Falkland Islands were insignificant in themselves, but the principle that Western powers could not allow third world countries to start redrawing the imperialist world map was vital. That was why the USA, despite the damage done to its own relations in the region, backed Thatcher's stand.

By portraying Argentina as a dictatorial power threatening Britain's national interests, Thatcher succeeded in forging a consensus of support for the war. In this she was greatly assisted by the Labour Party, which echoed Tory condemnations of the Argentine regime and merely quibbled over the methods the government used to bring about its defeat. The left favoured economic and diplomatic sanctions to be imposed through the United Nations. Yet once the task force was at sea in a frenzy of flag-waving, Thatcher swept all before her.

The Falklands Factor, the spirit of national unity against any threat to capitalist interests, has become a powerful weapon in Thatcher's armoury. She used it to cast first striking railway workers, then striking miners as 'the enemy within'. The chauvinist consensus constructed by the Tories during the Falklands War was central to their 1983 election victory, and remains a key feature of their success today.

The Tories used chauvinism and the terrorism panic to overcome the wave of popular revulsion that greeted the bombing of Libya. The shooting of a woman police officer outside the Libyan embassy in London had already been used to galvanise public hostility against Colonel Gaddafi and his regime. Labour's attempt to turn spontaneous anger against the air-strike in an anti-American direction allowed the government to escape condemnation for its role in whipping up anti-Arab hysteria and its willing complicity in any imperialist intervention in the Middle East.

The British occupation of Ireland is the most important example of



April 1986: our demonstration in solidarity with the people of Libya



August 1986: the Irish Freedom Movement's commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the introduction of internment in Northern Ireland

how a threat to the British state can be turned into a focus of chauvinist consensus. British troops have now continued their reign of terror in the occupied Six Counties for approaching 20 years. More than 2500 people have died, thousands more have been injured and hundreds have been incarcerated in specially built concentration camps. The Anglo-Irish agreement concluded between Dublin and Westminster in 1985 has strengthened cross-border collaboration against the anti-imperialist struggle and has provided a diplomatic smokescreen for the continuation of British terror in the North.

Yet, by depicting the Irish freedom struggle as a terrorist menace to every British citizen, the British establishment has succeeded in containing domestic resistance to the occupation. Indeed Labour's full cooperation in this approach has ensured that the war has never become an issue in British politics and that it will not be one at the forthcoming general election.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party the campaign against militarism has always been crucial. Under the slogan 'the Malvinas are Argentina's' we campaigned against Britain's invasion of the South Atlantic in 1982. In 1986 we took the lead in organising protests against the attack on Tripoli through the national Hands Off Libya Committee. We have consistently campaigned in solidarity with anti-imperialist movements in the Middle East, Central America and South Africa. We place particular emphasis on unmasking the real purpose behind the terrorism panic.

When the revolt against the Pretoria regime erupted in South Africa's townships in 1985 and 1986, the RCP sponsored the Action Against Apartheid campaign. The object was to win support for direct action against British companies involved in South Africa, particularly those concerned with supplying military equipment to the apartheid regime. Our approach runs directly against the futile liberal line of appealing to the Western backers of apartheid to take action against it.

Because of the pivotal significance of Ireland to British politics, the RCP has always made solidarity with the struggle for freedom in Ireland first item on its agenda. The Irish liberation struggle is a direct threat to the integrity of the British state. That is why it is so vital for the establishment to preserve a united face against it. It is also why winning working class support for this struggle is vital if the labour movement is to dismiss the establishment's lies and start acting as an independent political force.

The RCP gives unconditional support to the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland, irrespective of the tactics deployed by the Irish republican movement. We have sponsored the Irish Freedom

Movement, which mobilises around the slogans 'Troops out now' and 'Self-determination for the Irish people'. Campaigning against the criminalisation of Irish people under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, in solidarity with Irish political prisoners and around other aspects of the Irish War, the Irish Freedom Movement has become the leading force in Irish solidarity activity in Britain.

The Labour Party has a shameful record on Ireland, the key *international* issue of British politics. In government it has pursued as repressive a policy as the Tories; in opposition it has allowed the Tories a free hand to pursue whatever measures they consider necessary to secure British rule in Ireland. The Labour left has either turned a blind eye to the party's conduct, or has pressed resolutions at national conferences calling for the state that oppresses the Irish people to pursue a more enlightened policy.

The left has always joined in the establishment's chorus of condemnation of the Irish republican movement, particularly when it brings its bombs to Britain. For the British left, guerrilla warfare is only permissible when conducted in South Africa or Central America. When the security of the British state is at issue, the left lines up with the establishment.

For Labour, the most important thing is to show how deeply it is committed to the defence of Britain. But the 'defence' of an imperialist power invariably means the capacity to attack its enemies. It is a matter of historical record that Britain has always gone to war when called to the 'defence' of some ally or convenient principle. Britain entered the carnage of the First World War to 'defend little Belgium'; it entered the Second World War to defend Poland against 'Nazi aggression'; it attacked Argentina to defend the rights of a few hundred Falkland Islanders.

Labour leaders nervously recall how the party's anti-nuclear stance became an electoral liability in 1983. There is a widespread feeling that they are vulnerable on this issue in 1987. In fact whether or not nuclear weapons really become an election issue depends more on events than on the hotly debated question of policy presentation.

In the abstract most people have little enthusiasm for war and even less for the nuclear variety. In times of relative harmony in international relations, such sentiments always come to the fore. However, if people are convinced, rationally or not, that Britain is under threat, public attitudes can turn around overnight. This happened before both world wars and again over the Falklands.

Labour's attempts to take advantage of anti-nuclear sentiments arising from the Chernobyl disaster, the cost of Trident and the spread of anti-American prejudices could backfire in the event of the emergence of a real threat to British interests overseas. Another phoney terrorism panic could be enough to rally the nation once again to the Iron Lady.

In an effort to deflect the Tory attack on its defence policy, Labour stresses that its proposals for unilateral nuclear disarmament mean its approval of conventional rearmament. Labour promises to step up conventional armed forces to a level which would render British imperialism an even greater menace to the world than it already is.



More thoughts of an aspiring prime minister

'Without Trident we could afford to build the equivalent of 90 frigates, 500 fighter aircraft of 10 000 armoured vehicles.'

Labour Party leaflet 'Modern Britain in a Modern World', January 1987

'For the cost of four Trident submarines and their American missiles, Britain could build 90 Type 23 Frigates, or 100 Oberon Class diesel-electric submarines; or 500 Tornado aircraft; or 500 Harrier aircraft; or 10 000 Challenger tanks; or 50 000 Exocet missiles.'

Labour's recent policy statement on defence confirms that money saved by cancelling Trident will be spent on frigates, tankers and fighter-bombers. It will certainly not be used for kidney machines, computer scanners and heart transplants, as the left used to demand. The document goes further and promises that, overall, military spending will be higher under Kinnock than under Thatcher. So much for the lesser evil!

Labour insists that Nato must have land, naval and air forces that can 'inflict defeat' on the Warsaw Pact. Labour is committed not only to stepping up British forces in Europe, but also to strengthening its capacity to strike outside the Nato area. After years of criticising the Tories' 'Fortress Falklands' policy, Labour now insists on Britain's 'general responsibility' for undertaking aggression overseas, 'most notably in relation to the Falkland Islands'. The Labour Party thus upholds Britain's right to maintain on the other side of the world a vast military garrison that is a menace to the peoples of the whole region.

Labour's defence policy gives a green light to the deployment of massive military firepower to enforce British interests anywhere in the world. If Kinnock becomes prime minister, the only question will be—where will his task force strike first?

Labour's December 1986 political broadcast was a celebration of British militarism on such a scale that it alarmed many. The party that has in recent years identified itself with the cause of peace is increasingly revealed in its traditional guise as a party of war.

However, the left has come to terms with the drift of Kinnock's policy on this issue as on most others. The *Chartist* sums up the abject capitulation of the Labour Party left, arguing that: 'We must mount a defence campaign which talks in terms of increasing our conventional capacity, strengthening the armed forces and making a greater contribution to the conventional defence of Europe' (January 1987). Likewise John Lloyd congratulates Kinnock on his 'markedly patriotic, and pro-defence' line (*New Statesman*, 12 December 1986), suggesting only that Labour accommodate even further to Tory pressure by abandoning its plans for removing US nuclear bases.

Whether or not Kinnock makes this adjustment before the election, he will certainly make it very shortly afterwards, should he come out on top. American bases in Greece and Spain have shown a remarkable tendency to remain in place, despite the election of governments pledged to expel them.

In a world in which war is already a daily reality for millions in the Middle East, Central America and parts of Africa and a growing threat everywhere, it is vital that the labour movements of the West take a

stand against militarism. In the 1987 general election in Britain, the policies of the Labour Party uphold imperialism and militarism; the policies of the RCP amount to an intransigent rejection of chauvinism and the drive towards war in all its forms. The choice is yours.

● Stop the war drive

We oppose all forms of militarism, both conventional and nuclear, and all alliances among imperialist powers, particularly Nato. We condemn Western military interference in the third world and support countries such as Argentina or Libya against imperialist aggression. We support anti-imperialist struggles, especially those of the Palestinians in the Middle East, black people in South Africa and liberation struggles in Central America. We place a particular priority on supporting the fight for freedom in Ireland.



6 The choice ahead ●

Those who are concerned about the future of the workers' movement will probably agree with many of our criticisms of Labourism. Tens of thousands of militants recognise the conflict between the interests of the working class and the policies of the Labour Party. Few Labour supporters really believe that a Labour government would bring significant advantages for the working class. Even those who fiercely oppose the policies of the RCP have deep reservations about the prospects for the labour movement should Kinnock ever enter Downing Street.

Yet, despite all their reservations, most activists will stick with Labour to the bitter end. Even the few left-wing groups that remain formally independent of Labour cannot resist calling for a vote to put Kinnock in power. For the British left it is axiomatic to vote Labour. No matter how many concessions Kinnock makes to the right, no matter how many left wingers he expels, the left will tail along behind.

Why does the left never even consider breaking away from Labour and building its own party? Why is the idea of challenging Labour's claim to represent the working class so outrageous? It is not that the left has any great faith in Labour's policies: most activists recognise that these are designed more to stabilise British capitalism than to contribute towards building socialism. Nevertheless, some left wingers proclaim that they will stick with Labour no matter what policies it adopts.

The basis of the left's loyalty to Labour is the conviction that, despite everything, it is the only possible instrument for achieving social change in Britain. The left has two additional, but less important, arguments to justify its attachment to the Labour Party. First, there is

the view that Labour is the lesser evil, that though its policies may be reactionary and its leadership in awe of the British establishment, it is not as bad as the Tories. Second, the left maintains that although the party may not be up to much today, it could still change tomorrow.

These two gambits tend to come to the fore in public discussion. Left wingers often assert that they can work constructively within the party machine even though it is controlled by the right. Others suggest that at some stage in the future the party could become a fighting socialist organisation. While these arguments need to be taken on in themselves, it is important not to lose sight of the underlying premise. This is that because Labour is the dominant influence on the working class, it is the only realistic means of changing society.

Once it is accepted that there is no alternative to supporting Labour, all other arguments are secondary.

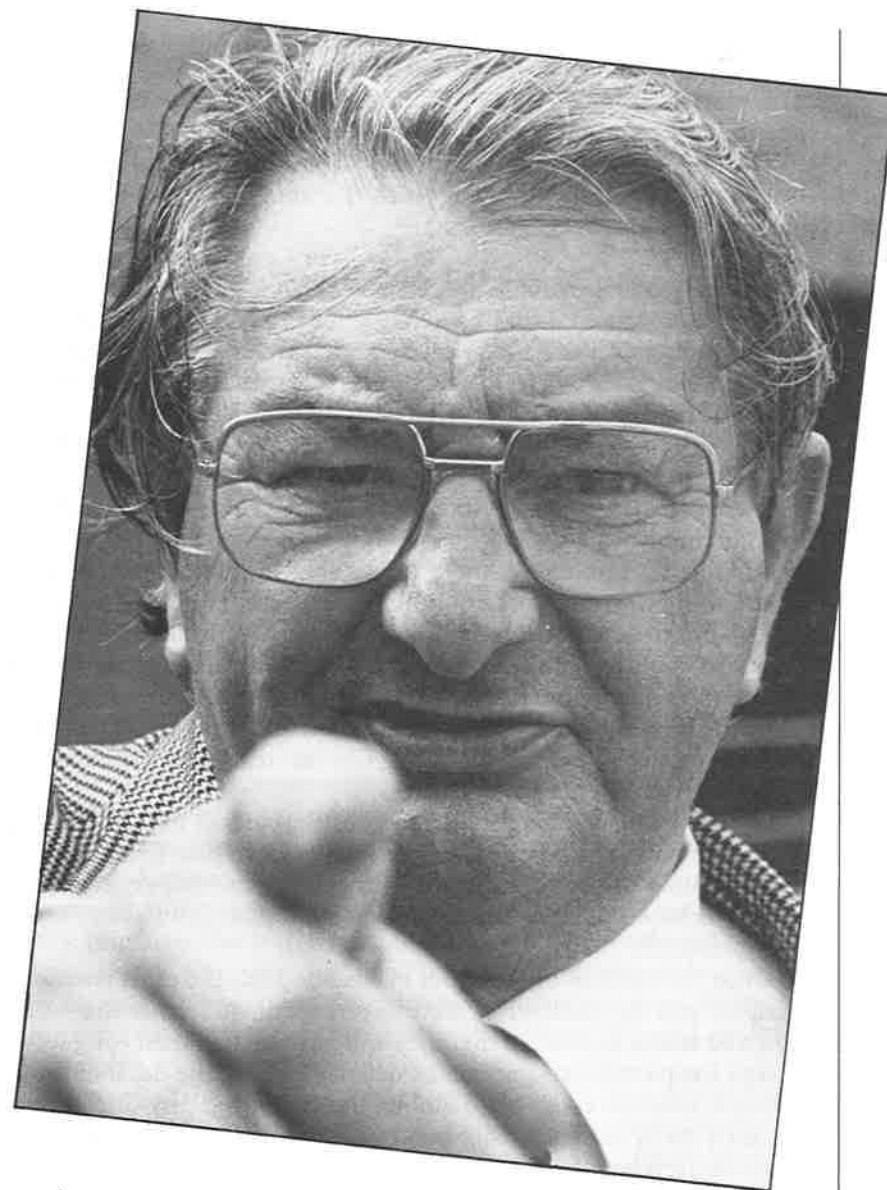
'Outside the Labour Party nothing can be achieved'—this is a view that has led generations of left wingers to support a party that has consistently stood in the way of social progress. Activists have been prepared to swallow the most appalling policies in the belief that the prospect of political change in Britain begins and ends inside the Labour Party.

The left's attitude towards Labour amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy. So long as the left refuses to strike out on its own, there will indeed be no alternative to Labour. The left will never be able to express an independent outlook while the labour bureaucracy is allowed to define the terms of discussion and action.

The Labour leadership has always profited from the reluctance of the left to bring matters to a head. Kinnoch is not afraid of the left, for even when the leaders of Militant were kicked out, they continued to proclaim their unbending loyalty to the party.

Eric Heffer, who lost his seat on the national executive in 1986 following his conference walkout over Kinnoch's abuse of the Liverpool councillors in 1985, has summed up the new balance of forces inside the party:

'What we are witnessing today is the transformation of the party into another SDP, a party which, although retaining a written socialist constitution, finds it increasingly being ignored. The difference between past and present periods of revisionism is that those who carried out the revisionist policies in the past were strongly combated, whereas today they are virtually unopposed, because everyone in the party wants to defeat Thatcherism at the next general election, and no one wants to be accused of rocking the boat.' (*Labour's future: socialist or SDP Mark 2?*)



Eric Heffer: believes that Kinnoch is turning Labour into an 'SDP Mark 2', but still believes in clinging to the party

Though Heffer's account of the past is open to question, the absence of left-wing opposition to Kinnock today is a matter of public record. This state of affairs follows from the left's refusal to countenance the possibility of an independent alternative to Labour.

The urgency of ousting the Tories is the most familiar argument used by the left to justify staying with Labour. This is how one left faction puts it:

'But whatever inevitable problems a Kinnock government will bring, however ill-prepared it may be to tackle the problems it will immediately face, and despite the timidity of commitment and aspiration which the Kinnock leadership will bring to its work, nevertheless the most important thing in British politics in the period ahead is to kick the Tories out and put in a majority Labour government.' (*Socialist Organiser*, 9 October 1986)

Come what may, for the British left Kinnock will always be preferable to Thatcher.

Supporting Labour on the grounds that it is the lesser evil means abandoning working class politics. Instead of asking 'What policies are necessary to advance working class interests?', the left asks 'Which capitalist policies are less harmful?' This approach may appear pragmatic and reasonable, but it also entails taking responsibility for implementing the policies that go with it. This is why those who adopt this approach end up apologising for the reactionary policies that Labour governments always enact.

If getting rid of Thatcher is the 'most important thing', then living with Kinnock's policies becomes a small price to pay. Even those who are distinctly uncomfortable with his policies are not prepared for a major debate, since a public row could damage Labour's electoral prospects.

Once the method of the lesser evil is adopted, the most reactionary policies can be justified as necessary expedients. Thus the soft-left *Chartist* warns its readers that they will have to 'bite their tongues' and accept the party's pro-imperialist defence policy. The habit of tongue-biting is strongly established among the Labour-at-any-price brigade. At least the *Chartist* openly professes its self-abasement. But, while other sections of the left prefer to cover their retreat by proclaiming left-wing policies, it is an elementary fact of political life that those who call for a Labour government are implicated in what it does.

Is Labour really the lesser evil? In a sense it is difficult to imagine that a Kinnock government could be as bad as the Thatcher regime. To be sure, most Labour politicians lack the anti-working class instincts of

their Tory counterparts. Many Labour leaders have a sense of obligation to their working class constituents. However, running the capitalist system 'is not something for fainthearts. No Labour government has ever shirked the ruthless moves necessary to stabilise the profit system.

In another sense Labour is an even greater evil than the Tories. A Kinnock government pursuing pro-capitalist policies could have a devastating impact on the working class. Millions of workers expecting change for the better would be caught off-balance as hope turned into despair. With Thatcher in power, people know what to expect and can get ready to resist; with Kinnock people would be unprepared and vulnerable.

The only way to prevent a new cycle of Labour betrayal in office and subsequent working class demoralisation is to mobilise a coherent alternative to Labour *now*. Such an alternative may not make deep inroads into Labour's electoral support; but it could well provide a signal—a warning that could not be ignored. It would prepare at least a section of the working class for what lies ahead.

Tongue-biters of the Labour Party—break this destructive habit! Building an alternative to Labour is a much more constructive use of energy in the time left between now and the election.

While many left wingers share our assessment of Kinnock's Labour Party, they still believe that it can be changed. It is odd that this view has such widespread influence. The evidence of history conclusively shows that Labour is immune to radical reform. Although the left has won many conference votes, it has never succeeded in overcoming the right's grip over the party machine and over the implementation of policy. Every time the left has become a serious threat to the bureaucracy, it has faced intimidation and expulsions. Numerous campaigns to democratise the Labour Party have all failed to make it accountable to the working class.

In face of all the evidence to the contrary, the left's continuing faith in the possibility of transforming the Labour Party has assumed the character of a dogma. This dogma is not, however, entirely irrational. It arises from the way the party is constructed to provide space for the participation of activists within a framework that denies them any real power.

At the lower levels of the party there is little attempt to curb the enthusiasm of the left. In constituency parties, the left is allowed to pursue the most militant objectives, to make fiery speeches and pass

radical resolutions. When this spirit of radical activism spills over on to the floor of national party conferences it sometimes creates the impression that the left is in control of proceedings. In fact the real decisions are not made at such conferences, but by the handful of bureaucrats who really run the Labour Party.

Richard Crossman, a leading Labour politician of the post-war period, once explained how the party works:

'The Labour Party required militants...politically conscious socialists to do the work of organising the constituencies. But since these militants tended to be "extremists", a constitution was needed which maintained their enthusiasm by apparently creating a full party democracy while excluding them from effective power. Hence the concession in principle of sovereign powers to delegates at the annual conferences, and the removal in practice of this sovereignty—through the trade union bloc vote on the one hand and the complete independence of the parliamentary Labour Party on the other.' (RHS Crossman, Introduction to Walter Bagehot, *The English constitution*, London 1983)

The illusion of real participation is shattered when party leaders, especially in government, openly defy conference decisions. But every time a conference policy is jettisoned, the hope that next time things will be different is rekindled. This hope is sustained by the view that Labour is essentially a neutral organisation, even if it is currently under the control of the wrong sort of leadership.

The left believes that, with different personnel running it, the Labour machine could be used to take on the capitalist system. But in reality the problem of Labourism cannot be reduced to the personalities at the head of the party.

Labour is not a neutral institution. The party was set up and financed, first as the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 and as the Labour Party after 1906, by a clearly defined layer in society—the labour bureaucracy. The same small elite has continued to own and control the Labour Party machine ever since. It is inconceivable that the labour bureaucrats would allow their own creation to be wrested from their grip and used against them. They would sooner see the Labour Party destroyed than run by the left.

The flexibility of the Labour Party reflects the pragmatism of the labour bureaucrats. At times the Labour leaders are more than prepared to tolerate the activities of the far left. At other times they clamp down on even the moderate left. Throughout, however, it is the requirements of the bureaucracy, not abstract conceptions of inner-

party democracy, that define the limits within which the Labour left operates.

The apparent openness of the Labour Party to radical influence has become an important source of strength for the bureaucracy. Constant infusions of radicalism over the years have not changed the party, but those who have tried to reform it. It is the outlook of the activists, not that of the bureaucrats, which is transformed. Over the past five years, left wingers who have drifted into the Labour Party have so adapted to the shift to the right that they now lack any distinctive policies.

While another generation of activists trudges along in the footsteps of its predecessors, the bureaucrats' commitment to capitalism remains as strong as that of Labour's founding fathers, and their grip on the party is just as sure. Meanwhile, the left's devotion to Labour leads to political paralysis. This is no overstatement, for today the left has become almost exclusively preoccupied with its own survival. This is what explains its endless series of appeals for 'realignment' or 'left unity'.

Vladimir Derer, a leading left winger, summed up the grim situation in summer 1986:

'The Labour left at present has no organisation capable of defending them. The left is weak because in recent years it was unable to agree on a strategy to meet the new situation created by Labour's electoral defeat in 1979.' (*Observer*, 20 July 1986)

However, it did not take much to dispel this gloom. In August a new committee—Labour Left Liaison—was formed, bringing together a motley collection of radical campaigns and organisations. Following its launch at a rally in Hampstead Town Hall, Derer was ecstatic:

'What is significant is that attendance at the meeting exceeded all expectations. This indicates that a genuine realignment of the left has a substantial potential.' (*New Statesman*, 22 August 1986)

The fact that one well-attended public meeting in a small hall in Hampstead can be interpreted as an event of major significance illustrates just how little the left now expects to achieve. Apart from a fringe meeting at last year's Labour Party conference, little more has been heard of Labour Left Liaison.

Low expectations now prevail across the British left. Even groups that organise outside the Labour Party machine have fallen prey to this fatalistic outlook. Thus Chris Harman of the Socialist Workers' Party

has tried to give pessimism the stamp of revolutionary approval. For Harman, it is impossible to achieve much at present because 'socialists are no longer part of a sizeable militant minority which is pressing forward. Instead we are part of a much smaller minority that is in retreat' (*Socialist Worker*, 5 July 1986). From this perspective nothing can be done beyond organising an orderly retreat.

The gloomy outlook common to both Derer and Harman is symptomatic of a left that cannot conceive of political life outside the shadow of the Labour Party. It is the outlook of a left which has imprisoned itself inside Labourism—which has allowed negotiations over its own relationship with the party machine to dominate its activity.

Preoccupied with its own survival, the left does nothing to fight for a radical alternative in the wider struggles of the working class. On the contrary, the left's truce with Kinnock gives him a free hand to impose his politics on the labour movement.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has set out to build an alternative to Labour. At a time when class conflict in Britain has reached a critical stage, loyalty to Labour acts as a barrier to working class resistance against the Tories and the interests they represent.

For too long the British working class has had only dead ends on offer. In the general election most people will vote *against* the Tories, rather than *for* something they believe in. The effect is destructive because the working class is never presented with a case for real change. All it can possibly get by choosing among the established parties is simply more of the same. In the long term a class without a positive alternative ceases to exist as a political force. Passivity and resignation are inevitable.

While the RCP is clear of its responsibility to challenge Labour, we recognise that at present our influence is limited. However, this will not distract us from following through our perspective. Instead of postponing to the future what has to be done in the present, we must consider any option which might help to speed up the emergence of an effective alternative.

One such option is the proposal for *The Red Front*. We believe that there are thousands of activists just as concerned as we are about the future of the working class. We do not expect them to agree with the full programme of the RCP. Nor do we expect those with long associations with the Labour Party to change their views overnight. What we propose is a way of giving the working class a voice in the political

struggle around the general election.

At present the working class is taken for granted by Labour and ignored by the other parties. It is merely a spectator in the whole election circus. To allow this situation to persist would be to abandon the field of national politics to those whose aims and actions are hostile to the interests of the working class. As things stand, people will be denied the chance to consider a working class alternative to the other parties.

It is essential that those committed to getting rid of the capitalist system pull together in the coming months to put this point of view across in the clearest possible terms to the widest number of people. This is why we are proposing a platform of basic demands around which all anti-capitalist forces, regardless of their other differences, can work together in the general election campaign.

We believe that the case for *The Red Front* is overwhelming. Unless anti-capitalist forces organise to promote basic class politics in the labour movement, their message will be lost on a whole generation. Without such organisation, militants will lack a political focus and will be isolated even further. We will lose precious time as the emergence of a working class alternative is delayed.

Even those who reject the revolutionary communist analysis of Labour should seriously examine our proposal. They must agree that a successful campaign for workers' interests will put more pressure on the Labour Party than the continuation of the current inertia. At present, there is nothing to prevent Kinnock conceding everything. Only if he faces a challenge to his electoral ambitions and realises that Labour's traditional constituency cannot be taken for granted will he even consider making concessions to the working class.

The aim of *The Red Front* must be to maximise the influence of the forces prepared to fight for anti-capitalist policies. It is a project designed to prevent the working class from hearing only one message—that of the capitalist class. It can reduce the danger of both a Tory and a Labour victory at the polls. It allows the election to be used to launch the labour movement on to a new course.

The Red Front will be simply an agreement of individuals and organisations to fight together around a set of basic demands—work or full pay, defend trade union rights, equal rights for all, stop the war drive. Anybody who is committed to the interests of the working class should support it.

The Red Front is an electoral bloc. It will field a range of candidates,

each of whom will campaign around its demands. Agreement on these leaves open the question of how different supporters of the workers' front choose to fight. *The Red Front* enables the various supporters of its basic platform to campaign in a way that is consistent with their own distinctive positions.

Within *The Red Front* the RCP will put forward our own wider programme. Other organisations will be free to do the same. The important thing is that, by concentrating the focus of anti-capitalist forces, we make an impact on British politics.

The policies of the RCP have both long and short-term objectives. Our long-term objective is the establishment of a communist society in Britain and internationally. There is much to be done before we can achieve this goal. In the short term our policies are designed to prepare the working class to meet the challenges ahead.

We hope to undermine the commitment to the Labour Party of a nucleus of Labour voters. By itself, our intervention will not be able to transform the labour movement into a dynamic force in British politics: years of setbacks cannot be so easily overcome. But we want to make sure that the most active section of the working class learns to cope with its isolation today, so that it can become a coherent political force tomorrow. Unless the active core of the labour movement is strengthened, there is a danger that the period after the election will lead to widespread despair.

We believe that only an intervention around the policies we have outlined above can ensure that Labour's influence is put to the test from the left.

Without such an approach, mass disappointment with Labour will turn to mass rejection of socialism and of collective solutions. Thousands will react to their experience by opting for an individual way out—or by moving further to the right.

Demoralisation can only be prevented if activists anticipate future developments, warn of the perils ahead and explain that Labour's failures are not those of socialism. If Labour is not challenged in this way the job of defending the working class will become immeasurably more difficult. Conservative moods in the labour movement would go unchecked, thus narrowing the basis for the future development of the anti-capitalist struggle.

In the battles ahead, the working class cannot afford to be without a voice. From those whose first loyalty is to the working class, we are fully entitled to demand support for our campaign and our policies. Join us. Help push Labour aside. Make the working class into a force that can change the world.

THE RED FRONT

A PLATFORM FOR WORKING CLASS UNITY

● Work or full pay

To survive in capitalist society everybody needs either a job at a living wage, or the same level of income in the form of benefits. We cannot afford to go poor just because employers cannot make enough profit out of our labour, or because the state cannot afford to maintain our living standards. What constitutes a living wage? This can only be decided by wage-earners and those who rely on benefits. We reject all state attempts to regulate wages by means of incomes policy.

● Defend union rights

We stand for the repeal of all laws that restrict the rights of workers to take action in defence of working class interests. We reject all restrictions on striking, picketing and solidarity action. We reject all state intervention in strike ballots, union elections or any other labour movement activity.

● Equal rights for all

We are in favour of the widest extension of civil liberties and for equal rights for all. We reject all measures which strengthen the power of the capitalist state and extend the interference of its repressive forces in society. We repudiate attempts to criminalise sections of society as a way of winning public approval for more repression.

We oppose discrimination against women at work and call for the establishment of free nurseries, available all day for children of all ages, to free women to go out to work. We demand free abortion and contraception on demand.

We oppose discrimination against black people in all spheres of society. We call for the repeal of all restrictions on immigration which divide the working class and give official approval to racism.

We reject the Aids panic as a propaganda campaign designed to take advantage of a fatal disease to proscribe homosexual activity and bolster conventional morality. We defend the rights of lesbians and gay men to full equality in society.

● Stop the war drive

We oppose all forms of militarism, both conventional and nuclear, and all alliances among imperialist powers, particularly Nato. We condemn Western military interference in the third world and support countries such as Argentina or Libya against imperialist aggression. We support anti-imperialist struggles, especially those of the Palestinians in the Middle East, black people in South Africa and liberation struggles in Central America. We place a particular priority on supporting the fight for freedom in Ireland.

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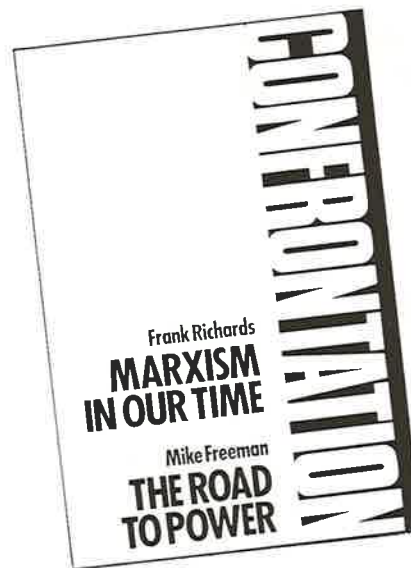


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Election reading

If you want to know more about the politics of the Revolutionary Communist Party, here is a selection of our recent publications. All are available from the address below.



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ALL THE MAJOR parties will spend millions packing and projecting their election images using the latest advertising industry techniques. While we have no desire to compete with them in trying to out-hype the electorate, we do want to get our message across to the widest possible audience.

THE MOST IMPORTANT resource of *The Red Front* will be the energy of its supporters. But to make sure our campaign is as effective as possible we need to produce striking posters, leaflets and stickers by the thousand, as well as pamphlets and videos. We will need hundreds of megaphones and loudspeakers, not to mention badges, rosettes, flags and banners.

Making sure that *The Red Front* makes an impact requires money. Please rush whatever you can afford (cheques, etc, payable to *The Red Front*.)



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