

tms
the next step

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THE POWELL BILL MEANS...

Women's rights down the tube

Enoch Powell's Bill to ban embryo experiments is part of the Tory drive to restrict women's access to abortion and contraception

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Family life

One thing Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock agree on is the sanctity of marriage and the family. Both have contributed to 'VIP tips for married bliss' in the latest edition of the British Medical Association's handbook *Getting married*. 'In the end', writes Thatcher, 'the warmth of your family and keeping that relationship bright and alive will mean more to you than anything else.' According to Kinnock, 'a political career involves a lot of time spent away from the family but it should always be possible to maintain closeness and familiarity with day-to-day happenings at home'.

'Warmth' was one thing missing from the Hurst household on a south London council estate earlier this year. Thirty-one year old Helen and Natasha (11) and Michael (13) all died from hypothermia after being overcome by gas fumes. The heating system on the estate was always breaking down and the Labour council was five months behind on a renovation scheme. Staying alive and keeping together is a struggle for many single-parent families in Thatcher's Britain, especially if they are black.

'Closeness and familiarity' have been difficult to maintain for the Maguire family over the past decade. Anne and Patrick Maguire have just been released after 10 years in prison on charges of handling explosives. Their two teenage sons also received custodial sentences and their daughter was left to grow up without her parents. The charges were based on the forced confession of a relative (subsequently retracted) and forensic tests (subsequently discredited). They have never had any connections with any republican organisation and have constantly proclaimed their innocence. But as Irish people the togetherness of their family has never been of much concern to the British establishment.

Blaming Nature

The more the British ruling class destroys ordinary families, the more its political leaders and hack journalists are enlisted to proclaim the virtues of family life. To judge by the media, the British way of life is under threat from surrogate mothers, teenagers on the pill, carriers of AIDS, and football hooligans. The common themes running through all the moral panics are the elevation of the family, parental responsibility and respect for law and order.

At a time of mass unemployment and social instability the new morality serves a useful purpose for the establishment. The success of the moral campaigners means that evils resulting from the capitalist system are blamed on nature, not the way society is run. It is easier to target gays or Millwall supporters than to identify the hidden hand of capitalist market forces that condemns millions to a life of hopelessness. The family plays a key role in maintaining social stability for the ruling class. Family values provide a conservative alternative to collective action. Throughout the miners' strike the press praised any scab who returned to work and put family before union and class. A nation of families is a collection of private individuals. As atomised individuals workers are no threat to the system. The bosses aim to make the

family a mechanism for self-control of the working class. It was Labour leader James Callaghan who first raised the banner of the family during the 1979 election campaign. But Thatcher has made the issue her own over the past five years. 'Think about the family' she told her ministers, as she set up a special 'family policy group'. Thatcher's aim was to encourage 'personal responsibility and a sense of individual self-respect'. This was necessary to compensate for the destruction of welfare services recommended by the Tory think tank in 1982. Since then many of these recommendations have been carried through.

Women carry the can

The new morality is good business. The Tories have saved billions by making the individual rather than society responsible for looking after children and the sick, caring for the elderly, the mentally ill and the handicapped. The responsible family carries the burden for cuts in the health service, education and local authority services. The new morality has encouraged attacks on homosexuals, restrictions on doctors prescribing the pill and researching into embryos. It has created a climate in which conformity is acceptable and experimentation a crime. Censorship has been extended to cover sex education and even medical research. This morality has gained acceptance in the most unlikely quarters. Sections of the women's movement have adopted many of the assumptions of the new morality. It has become fashionable in feminist circles to denounce promiscuity and to extol the virtues of motherhood.

The main victims of the new morality are women. Women carry the burden of the increased work inside the family. A heavier load in the home reduces women's capacity to get work and participate in the wider life of society outside. Restrictions on access to contraception and abortion reduce women's freedom to escape from the drudgery of child-bearing and child-rearing. Women, too, carry the burden of the cares of holding the family together under the pressures of the recession. These pressures make many women the victims of domestic violence, leading to divorce and family breakdown. These are the realities of family life behind the platitudes churned out by Thatcher and Kinnock.

For many, family relationships are a source of affection and intimacy and fulfilment. But the pressures of decaying capitalism are turning the family into a prison for many people, especially for women. Communists are often accused of being anti-family. We are not against the family as such, but we are against its use as a prison to control the working class and restrict the rights of women.

The most effective way to oppose the new moralists and their backward-looking family ideology is by fighting to defend women's rights. The immediate focus of that struggle is the resistance to the Powell Bill (see page 4). The national demonstration on 27 April is an important occasion on which to stand up against the whole drive by the British establishment to divide and demoralise the working class and to drive women back into the home.



Jo Bostman (reilly)

Miners in jail, on the dole Locked up and locked out

'I was sent to prison on remand and did three weeks in solitary.' This young miner has to remain anonymous because he is still facing serious charges in the courts and the possibility of a longer stretch in prison. Last week he spoke to *tns* about the police, the courts and the union.

Like every miner who ended up behind bars and out of a job, John X played an active role in the strike. He was picked up in a mass swoop by the police which pulled in more than 100 miners:

'The police used the usual tactics. They got one lad in, then they got other names. They were telling people "we'll give you bail if you give us names, any names". People were confessing to things they hadn't done. They told me I was going to get life imprisonment.'

The police wouldn't let John speak to a solicitor for three days. When he did, it didn't do John much good. He got 15 weeks on remand in prison. He spent three weeks in solitary confinement with no explanation:

'That was hell, it really was. I thought I'd go off my head talking to myself. I had no contact with anybody for three weeks. I had to eat my food in my cell and I got one shower the whole time I was in there. I got exercise every three days for 15 minutes. They gave me a bible to read — it's quite readable when you've nothing else to do.'

The day before the miners returned to work and three days before he got out of prison, John got a letter telling him he was suspended from work. When he complained to management that he couldn't be suspended without pay they said 'fair enough, you're sacked'. John is living on donations from men at his pit. But he thinks that it shouldn't be up to his fellow miners to pay him out of their wages: 'It was the union who called us out on strike and it was the union who sent us picketing so it should be the union who pays us. I can't see why they called the levy unless it was just an excuse to get the union leadership out of having to pay us. The unions' still got millions in the bank.'

John is counting the days until he's up in court again. He thinks he'll be sent back to jail. Jailed miners are counting the weeks and years before they get out of prison. Sacked miners are looking ahead to a grim future on the dole. The miners' leaders are putting the

past behind them and deserting the men who paid a heavy price for fighting for their jobs.

Many sacked miners are counting on their local officials or the government arbitration body Acas to do a deal with the pit manager. They have given up waiting for the national leadership to launch a campaign to get them reinstated. Last week the NUM executive threw out a motion from the Kent area demanding a national campaign and conference in defence of the sacked men. There was only *one* vote in support of Kent's initiative. At the Scottish TUC, NUM leaders Mick McGahey and George Bolton could only offer their 207 sacked members goodwill and moral support.

Sacked miners everywhere are still being refused unemployment and social security benefits by the department of employment and the DHSS. They are relying on collections and loans to get by. The authorities are still undecided about whether the miners' strike is over. Sacked miners are expected to live on air until they make their minds up. The NUM is putting them off with vague promises of a national trust fund some time in the future.

Jailed and sacked miners deserve solidarity not sympathy from the labour movement. They are not ordinary prisoners. They were arrested because they were prepared to take on the employers, the government, the courts and the police to defend their jobs, their dignity and their class. They were charged with extraordinary offences such as riotous assembly and conspiracy under laws enacted to defend the employers' class. They were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment by the bosses' courts to teach the rest of the working class a lesson. They have earned the right to demand special treatment from the labour movement. Support the campaign demanding:

- **Amnesty** for all prisoners of the class war
 - **Reinstatement** for every victimised miner
 - **All-out union support** for the prisoners.
- Members of the civil service union, the CPSA, should organise in their branches to pay out full benefits to imprisoned and victimised miners and their families until they get their jobs back.

Send details of successful motions, donations and messages of support to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to **Class war prisoners**

ACTION

Pit provocations

'They're giving the miners hell'

'W'e've had six weeks of hell and we can't take any more,' Jud Roberts from Askern colliery in Yorkshire told us last week. The coal board is out to provoke militants into action so that they can isolate and victimise them. *Joan Phillips* reports from the coalfields.

'Every day there's somebody having a go at you,' says Ian from Westoe in South Shields. Last week miners at Askern and Westoe put their foot down against management provocation and came out on strike. This week they are back at work thanks to the efforts of their union leaders. The NUM has submitted to the coal board's regime of terror at national, area and local level. The result is that the militant minority are hitting out in isolation while the majority of miners have become demoralised. Many feel that nothing can be done to defend jobs, wages and conditions. But a lot could be done if only the miners' leaders would get their act together. Miners need a national strategy to resist the coal board clampdown.

● The transfer trap

'From now on they're going to transfer you and transfer you until you get sick of moving and pack it in yourself,' says Mick from Frickley. Miners are moving round the coalfields like commuters. The militants are being sent packing to short-life pits and given a hard time. Two miners who transferred to Armthorpe from Brodsworth in the Doncaster area were told: 'You might have been underground fitters at Brodsworth, but here you're pit top fitters with pit top pay'. Last Friday they packed their bags again and returned to Brodsworth to face an uncertain future.

● The slippery slope

'Jobs are disappearing like hot cakes,' according to one miner from Bates colliery in Northumberland where 280 jobs are on the line. More than 1200 more are up for the axe in the north east coalfield and more than a quarter of the area's 22 000 miners have decided to take the money and run. Last week every Brodsworth miner got a 'personal message' from the colliery manager telling them that 'to make Brodsworth a viable pit' 520 jobs had to go through transfers and voluntary redundancies. At Frickley, where the men got the same message a week earlier, the NUM has told its members to get out while the going is good.

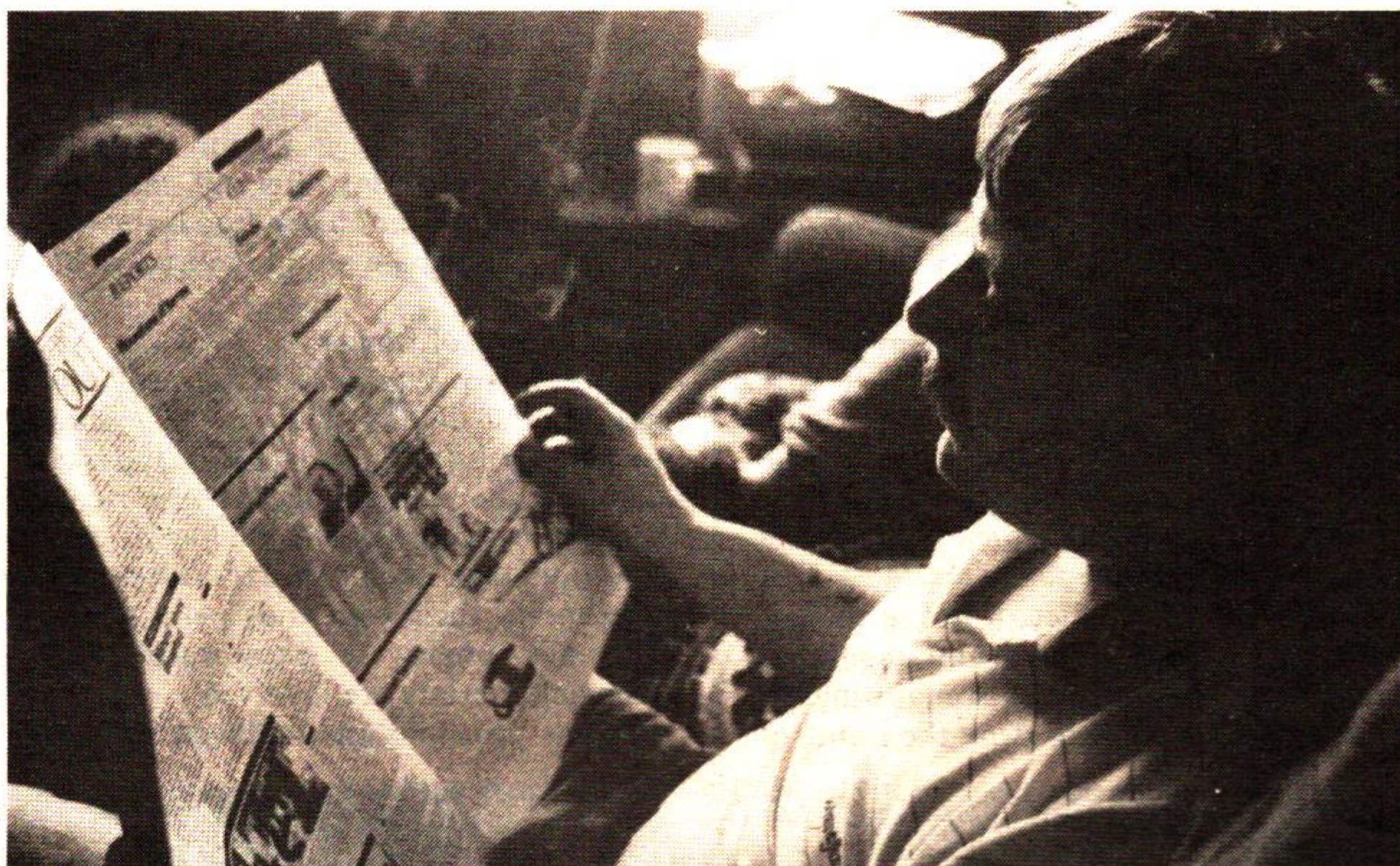
● Pricing miners out of work

'We're on a day wage now, £80 a week, no bonus, no water money, no money for shift reports, no nothing,' David is a miner at Askern. Last week 72 miners at his pit refused to work a new face until management paid them bonus money. The pit manager decided that if one unit wouldn't work nobody would work and locked everybody out. The union officials worked hard to get the men back to work. At a meeting with colliery manager Buxton the day after the strike started, branch officials agreed to order the facemen to return to work immediately. But their powers of persuasion were no match for the men's anger. 'They told the union that they didn't care what their recommendation was, they weren't going back to work until they got their bonus agreement,' reports Jud Roberts. The Askern men are back at work but they are angry at the union's readiness to toe the management line.

● Broken promises

'Agreements are being broken right, left and centre and it's causing real aggravation,' says Pete from Yorkshire Main. The coal board is removing customs and practices built up over many years. Decrees and ultimatums have taken their place:

'We were told "there's four shifts — if you don't do it you're out" and that was it.' (Tony, Keresley, Midlands)



'Management are walking all over us': Jud Roberts, Askern, Yorkshire

'Management came along and said "we're not going to pay you your £16 for filling out shift reports, but you've got to keep doing it". Things are coming to a head.' (Nigel, Frickley, Yorkshire)

'Nothing was said, they just stopped our half an hour riding time.' (Kevin, Betteshanger, Kent)

● Crackdown

'Management are getting away with murder,' says Ian from Hatfield. 'Last Friday they hauled one man into the office after he was caught picking coal and threatened him with the sack.' The week before management at Frickley showed what they meant by natural wastage when they sacked a miner for the same thing. The coal board has hired private security firms to do its dirty work: 'They sit in their vans watching. Sometimes they stand at the shaft side at the end of a shift. If you come out with a little bag of coal you've had it'.

Management is out to discipline the militants. Last week at Westoe in South Shields the whole pit walked out in protest at the sacking of strike activist Kevin Smoult for alleged assault on a working miner. The men were out for 24 hours before the union got them back to work. Kevin Smoult's fate will be decided at a meeting this week between the area management and the union. Activists everywhere have been hauled before management to answer charges of 'gross industrial misconduct'. 'They strip you down, make you look like a pillock, and make you miss a shift,' said Martin from Rossington.

● Striking back

'You have a job finding a union man these days,' says Michael from Brodsworth. The union machine has fallen apart in many pits. Union officials are keeping their heads down and putting up very little resistance to management attacks. One miner from Bold

said that the strike had opened a lot of miners' eyes: 'Before it seemed like the union was militant. The strike changed all that and they let us down. It's not that the union has changed, it's just that now we can see that we've got problems whereas before it seemed alright.'

Many miners were disenchanted with the union at the end of the strike, but now they are becoming cynical. To stop the rot we've got to reorganise the union and regroup our forces:

● We must make sure that any action we take in response to provocation is coordinated at a national level and that we win the arguments necessary to guarantee all-out support. Miners are rightly wary of calls for lightning strikes at individual pits after 12 months which exposed the folly of area-by-area action. We need to strike hard and fast, but we need to strike together.

● We need a national strategy and a national lead to combat the bosses' closure and transfer programme.

● Many miners have fallen into the redundancy trap because they can see no fight coming from the union. But the miners did not fight for a year to be told by their union officials to get out before the going gets rougher. Rank and file miners must make opposition to all redundancies a practical reality.

● Don't let them pick us off section by section. We must get together in mass meetings in every pit to ensure maximum unity.

● We must match the coal board in its contempt for past procedure and its disregard for the rule book. NUM officials are advising us to use Acas and the courts to enforce local agreements. We know that we cannot expect anything from the courts except a kick in the teeth.

Phone in information about what is going on in your pit to Joan Phillips on 01-729 3771 and find out what is being organised in your area.

SCARGILL COOKS THE BOOKS

Who rules?

ARTHUR SCARGILL'S RESPONSE to the problems the NUM faced during the strike is to change the union rules. The new draft rulebook is up for approval at the NUM's special rules revision conference in July. But bureaucratic manipulation is no substitute for political leadership. Scargill's rule changes are an excuse for avoiding real problems and the action required to tackle them. The new rules

● Specify that the union president has no casting vote 'in any capacity'. This will allow Scargill to remain in office for life without standing for re-election. Scargill's decision



Chris Black (relix)

to put himself out of arm's reach of his members reflects a lack of confidence in his leadership and policies. The consequence is to make the union leadership even less accountable to the rank and file.

● Require a two thirds majority of conference delegates, executive members and individual members of the NUM before any national official can be removed from office. This puts the appointment of area officials under national control and enshrines the principle that union officials should be appointed and not elected. It avoids confronting the problems that are a barrier to uniting the union in moderate areas like Nottinghamshire.

● Arm the national executive with power to call out any area or areas on official strike. This ignores the central lesson of the strike — the need to win all-out national action through a political campaign among the rank and file.

● Indemnify union officials from court fines and legal action and forbid any member from taking the union to court without first going through an elaborate grievance procedure. Any militant wants the bosses' courts kept out of union affairs, but the NUM leaders' position would be stronger if they stopped resorting to the courts to resolve internal union conflicts.

● Create a new category of 'associate members' which can include women's support group members or any other 'persons who in the opinion of the national executive committee are suitable to be

associate members'. The new membership category will not give women a vote and it will not allow them to stand for election to union positions. The miners' leaders didn't let women have any say in the running of the strike when it really mattered and the new rule merely formalises the bureaucratic control imposed on the women's groups.

The new rules have already provoked a backlash from the moderate areas and laid the union open to attacks from the right. They should be rejected by the rank and file who have no interest in perpetuating the rule of leaders who are not fit to lead.



The £ in your pocket is worth more in ours. If you really want to see your money work invest it in the weekly *tns*. Rush donations to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques payable to RCP Association.

Special thanks this week to Tom Richardson, Middlesbrough and Jerry Moss, London

EVENTS

Powell and Warnock

Embryos don't have rights

This week Enoch Powell's Unborn Children (Protection) Bill looks set to reach the last stage of its parliamentary life. Powell wants to ban experiments on embryos, while Dame Mary Warnock wants the test-tube baby business to be tightly controlled. Although Powell's Bill probably won't become law, everybody is talking about embryo rights. But what about women's rights?

Louise Brown, the world's first test-tube baby, was greeted as a great achievement back in 1978, but she was a real threat to the establishment. Contraception had long separated sex from child-bearing. The new reproductive technology now separated child-bearing from sex. Artificial insemination, *in-vitro* fertilisation and surrogate motherhood opened up the possibility of any woman having any man's baby. These scientific advances threatened the whole basis of family life.

'Against this background of public excitement and concern' the Warnock commission was set up in 1982. Its report was published last summer and legislation on its proposals is expected shortly. Warnock's object was to work out a way that the new technology could be used to enhance rather than undermine the family.

The Tories are keen to promote the family to look after all the casualties of the crumbling welfare state. They also look to the family to provide order and stability in a society increasingly disrupted by conflict. The family is a boon for the bosses, but it condemns women to the burden of work in the home and forces them to accept second-rate jobs outside it. The new morality fostered by Warnock and propagated more stridently by Powell seeks to reinforce women's inferior position in society.

The Warnock committee recommended a ban on experiments on embryos after 14 days, a ban on commercial surrogacy and a new definition of parental rights. But its attempt to establish principles only exposed the hypocrisy of conventional morality.

● The sanctity of life

Warnock claimed that 'a society which had no inhibiting limits, especially in the areas with which we have been concerned, questions of birth and death, of the setting up of families, and the valuing of human life, would be a society without moral scruples'.

It sometimes seems that the only sort of life that is sacred to the British establishment is that of embryos in test-tubes. The power of the British ruling class is based on its success in liquidating millions of lives in its wars of conquest and exploitation around the world. Today its moral scruples are easily suspended when it comes to the sailors in the *Belgrano* or teenage joy-riders in West Belfast. The thousands of human lives wrecked every year through industrial accidents merit not a fraction of the concern given to a few microscopic cells.

A glance at recent history is sufficient to make clear that nobody's life is sacred if they stand in the way of the ruling class. The establishment proclaims the sanctity of embryo life only to deny rights to women.

● Embryo rights

The Warnock committee held long discussions on the fraught question of 'when does life begin?' It concluded that 'although the questions of when life or personhood begin appear to be questions of fact susceptible to straightforward answers, we hold that the answers to such questions in fact are amalgams of factual and moral judgements'. The hardline moralists believe that life begins at the moment of conception, but the pragmatists settled on the arbitrary 14-day limit. In practice different considerations govern who is deemed to be a person. Many people who uphold the rights of the embryo concede that abortion is

justified on the grounds of rape or if severe congenital abnormality is diagnosed early in pregnancy. It is common practice for babies born with abnormalities which would lead to them being mentally retarded, incontinent and unable to walk, to be allowed to die. In other words social, not metaphysical or scientific factors, really decide who lives and who dies.

It is absurd to talk of the rights of the embryo. Rights only have any meaning for individuals in society. Human life as we know it can only begin at birth, a fact acknowledged in practice, if not in theory, by all but the most fundamentalist theologians. The only point in endowing the embryo with rights is to deny the rights of

the woman, in whom this clot of cells is located, to dislodge it by any means — including the morning after pill, the coil, or by a later abortion. This indeed is the whole object of the debate about embryo rights.

● The dignity of women

According to Warnock 'it is inconsistent with human dignity that a woman should use her uterus for financial profit and treat it as an incubator for someone else's child'. The report considers it 'liable to moral objection' that 'people should treat others as a means to their own ends', and that this 'becomes positively exploitative when financial interests are involved'.

If this principle was followed the whole

capitalist system of exploitation would collapse. Warnock is perturbed at the idea of a woman's womb being used as an incubator for someone else's child. But is this not the experience of working class women? One of the main functions of women in capitalist society is to produce a new generation of workers who can be exploited for financial gain. One of the main functions of marriage and the working class family is that the woman's uterus should be of service to the ruling class, in the same way as the rest of her anatomy.

Enoch Powell's Unborn Children (Protection) Bill, which got its second reading in February, is an attempt to pre-empt Warnock. It proposes a ban on 'pure' embryo research and regulations that all doctors carrying out *in-vitro* fertilisation must get the written permission of the secretary of state before implanting a named woman with an embryo.

Powell's Bill aims to give rights to embryos from conception, with the implication that post-coital contraception and abortion could be deemed illegal. Although it won a majority on its second reading (44 Labour MPs backed Powell), there was never much chance of it becoming law. Its role has been to stir up prejudices about evil scientists cloning embryos or creating hybrids or otherwise tampering with the species. Two million people signed a petition to parliament backing Powell's stance.

Now that Powell has created the right climate the way is clear for new legislation along the lines recommended by Warnock. The whole debate is a threat to women's rights because it celebrates women's role in the family. Those who support Powell do so in the name of motherhood and family values. Most of his opponents uphold embryo experimentation on the grounds that this will overcome the problems of infertility and allow all women the fulfilment of childbirth. The only effective response to Warnock, Powell and the whole debate is to fight for women's right to contraception and free abortion on demand, to free them from the tyranny of family life.

Kate Marshall



Chris Black (reflex)

Keep it in the family:

Dame Mary Warnock is worried that womb-leasing will break up happy homes

CAMPAIGNING AGAINST POWELL

Abortion is the issue

SATURDAY'S national demonstration against the Powell Bill is a step forward in the fight for women's rights. Yet when the Bill was first debated in the House of Commons in February the only protest was organised by revolutionary communists. It was not until the Bill was going through its committee stages that the National Abortion Campaign began to move into action on the issue. Why the delay?

When Nac supporters at a meeting in Leeds were invited to join the early protests against Powell, they refused. They argued that the issues at stake were confused. Some maintained that 'male doctors experimenting on embryos from women's bodies' was as bad as 'male doctors trying to control women's fertility'. In fact there is nothing confusing about the Powell Bill: It is a straightforward attempt to elevate the rights of embryos over the rights of women as part of a wider drive to tie women more securely to the family. The confusion is entirely in Nac and the wider women's movement of which it is a part.

Nac has been in hiding since it split with the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign in October 1983. But the forces of right-wing reaction have not called a truce

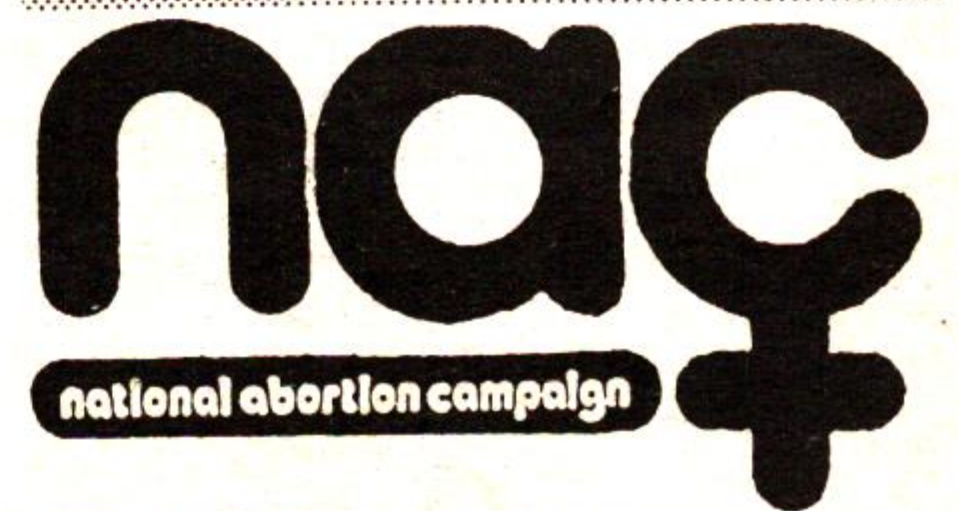
over the last 18 months. The Tories have put the squeeze on the health service, with the result that women have increasingly been forced to turn to the private sector for abortions. The moralists have swung the climate of opinion in favour of the family and against abortion. Motherhood has become a more fashionable cause than abortion even in feminist circles. But where was Nac when women needed it?

At Nac's tenth anniversary rally in March the campaign's leaders explained that they had been busy in the miners' strike, their supporters had drifted away and they had no money. Now the miners' strike is over and the left is looking around for new issues, the Powell Bill provides a useful focus. The problem is that Nac's narrow approach is no match for the wide ranging right-wing attack.

The thrust of Nac's criticism of Powell is that his proposal will make it more difficult for infertile women to conceive. As a leading Nac representative puts it 'we oppose the Bill because it damages an important technique that has brought hope to many childless people'. Yet the real aim of the whole embryo debate is not to deter pregnancies, but to create a climate of opinion within which it will become increasingly difficult

for women to avoid or terminate them.

In its desire to please all its diverse supporters, Nac continually misses the central point. Nac emphasises that the Bill's provisions constitute 'an invasion of privacy and doctor-patient confidentiality' and reprimands Powell for his 'attempt to pre-empt any sensible and rational discussion' of the Warnock recommendations. Our point



is that we are not interested in any discussions of any recommendations that can only result in further restrictions on women's already limited access to contraception and abortion.

We welcome Nac's belated decision to join the resistance to the Powell Bill. But we hope that Nac supporters will recognise that to defeat whatever measures follow its demise, we will need to fight on a wider front, for free abortion on demand and nothing less.

Ann Burton

IRA—fact and fiction

The IRA is a bunch of 'brutal, barbaric' terrorists which does not have the support of Catholic nationalists in Northern Ireland and is not the force it once was, according to the latest Royal Ulster Constabulary report published last week. But the annual publication of the republican roll of honour, listing the fallen IRA volunteers of the last 16 years, indicates the IRA's true status as a flourishing national liberation movement with deep roots in the nationalist community.

The RUC's yearly report, penned by chief constable Sir Jack Hermon, claims that 'terrorist violence' in Northern Ireland is now at its lowest level since 1970. Only 64 people died in 'the troubles' last year, compared to 467 deaths in the peak year of 1972 and the 77 killed in 1983. Hermon claims that the number of IRA bombings and shootings has also been sharply reduced.

The RUC report tries to rebuff the notion that the nationalist community is increasingly alienated from the Northern Ireland state and willing to back the IRA. On the contrary, Hermon asserts, there has been a 'substantial' increase in the number of Catholics joining the British security forces to fight against the republican movement.

War as normal

Hermon's swaggering tone reflects the limited success which Crown forces have recently achieved against the IRA. In the 15 months up to March, 15 IRA volunteers were gunned down in an RUC/SAS shoot-to-kill campaign — a casualty rate not matched since the mid-seventies.

The drop in the level of IRA activity has allowed the British authorities to introduce measures which they hope can give Northern Ireland the appearance of a 'normal' part of the United Kingdom. Shoppers can now enter Belfast's city centre without being searched. And the RUC has replaced the British Army as the public face of the security forces.

But British boasts about the 'decline' of the IRA amount to little more than propaganda based on twisted facts and carefully massaged statistics. The IRA today is a more efficient outfit than the force of the early seventies. It is capable of achieving results with less effort. Almost half of the casualties in the Irish War last year were members of the Army, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the RUC, assassinated by the IRA.

After the spectacular mortar attack on the RUC station at Newry, which killed nine Loyalist officers in February, the RUC insisted that it was tightening up to ensure the IRA never achieved such success again. Yet this month the republican movement went back and bombed the Newry court house, killing an RUC man and a security officer.

Behind the facade of normality which the British authorities have tried to erect, the republican threat to British rule in Northern Ireland means the Crown forces still have to act as an army of colonial occupation. The troops who once manned the security gates in the centre of Belfast have merely moved and set up armoured pill boxes across the hills of South Armagh. And the RUC men proudly patrolling the streets of Belfast and Derry would not dare set foot outside their barracks without the constant companionship of British troops dodging from corner to corner in a ring around the police.

Republican roll of honour

How has the IRA managed to sustain its campaign against the British war machine since 1969? If Hermon was right about Catholic acceptance of the Northern Ireland state and willingness to join the RUC, the republican movement would have collapsed long ago. But Hermon is wrong, and he knows it. The nationalist community recognises Northern Ireland as an artificial British creation, set up to deny the Irish people their right to national independence. Nationalists hate the British and Loyalist

forces which enforce their oppression. In the ghettos of West Belfast and Derry's Bogside, and in the Catholic towns which line the Border, they give their support to the IRA as the leading force in the fight for Irish freedom.

This week brings the anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, the battle from which the modern IRA emerged. The anniversary is always an occasion for the republican movement to remember its dead. A brief survey of the roll of honour which lists volunteers killed since 1969 shows the IRA's durability and breadth of support.

The roll of honour exposes the British myth that republican soldiers are a handful of hardened 'men of violence' who steal across the Border from the Irish Republic in the dead of night, plant a few bombs and then run back to their bolt-holes. The majority of the 255 republicans listed were young, working class people who lived their whole lives under British tyranny in the cities of Northern Ireland.

Keeping the faith

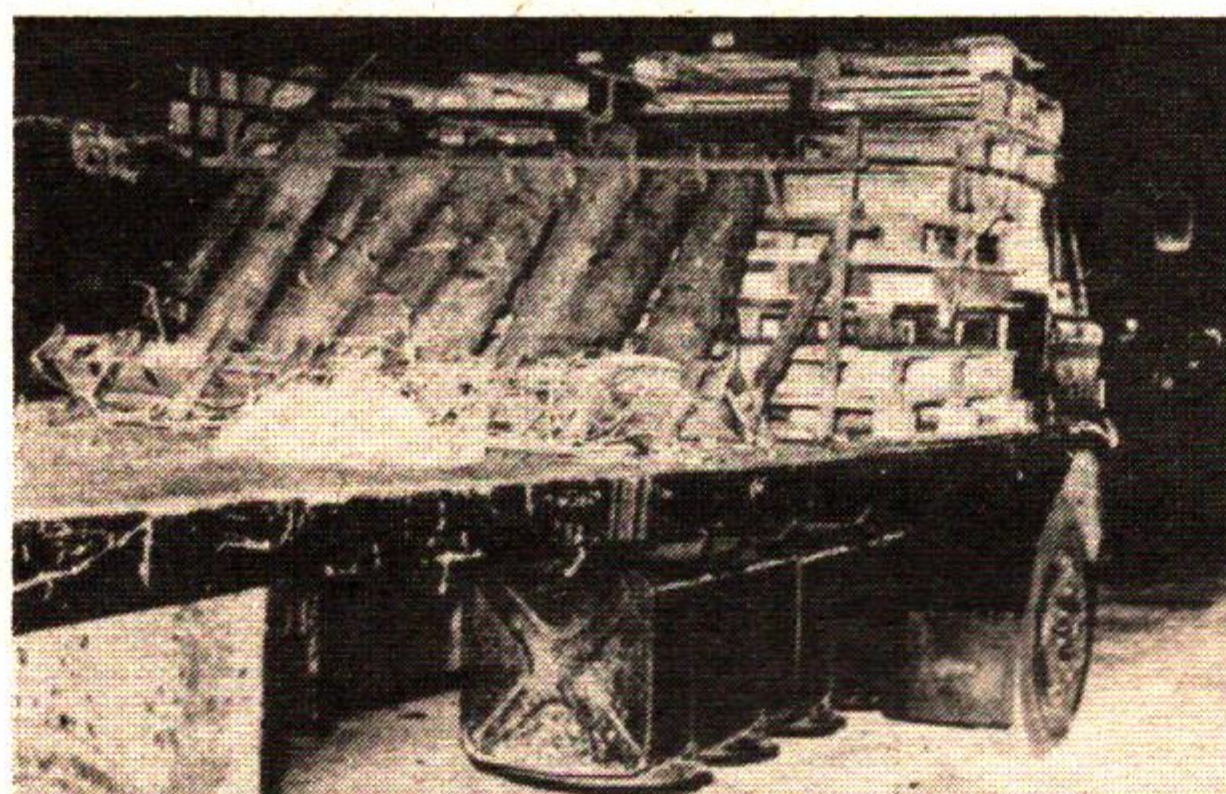
Every section of the nationalist working class has given blood for the cause of Irish freedom. The republican women of Cumann na mBan, while rarely serving on the front line of the war, have lost 10 volunteers. But the most noticeable contribution to the armed struggle is that made by Irish youth. Many of the IRA volunteers shot down by British and Loyalist guns were in their teens or early twenties. The average age of

republican prisoners in the H-Blocks is 25. One of the three IRA men executed in cold blood by the SAS in Strabane this year was just 15 years old. The involvement of hundreds of nationalist youths in the republican movement reflects the popular and energetic support for the war against Britain.

Thousands of nationalists look to the men and women of the republican movement to protect their communities from both British terror and criminal harassment. The RUC report highlights the IRA's punishment of criminals as indicating that 'nothing less than broken limbs and battered bodies satisfies the power lust of the paramilitary godfathers'. Nationalists see things differently. A recent letter to West Belfast's *Andersonstown News*, signed by 'Lenadoon mothers', appeals for 'the republican movement to take action against the Lenadoon hoods' who had burnt down a local community centre. The women of West Belfast have seen too many of their children and homes battered and burnt by the forces of British law and order to turn to the RUC for help.

The nationalist community in Northern Ireland puts its faith in the hands of the heroic young freedom fighters who have defended their people against the British men of violence for almost 16 years. While that faith remains, and the IRA's struggle continues, Britain's boasts about the decline of resistance will ring hollow.

Mick Hume



The IRA mortar attack on Newry police station blew the cover on British lies about declining republican resistance

LABOUR AND RACISM

Black section blues

ANGRY BLACKS demanding the right to organise separate black sections called a protest outside the Labour Party headquarters during this week's meeting of the national executive.

Black activists want their own sections and they want more black parliamentary candidates in winnable seats. They want delegates on the committees that select candidates and representation on the national executive. Supporters of black sections have threatened a mass withdrawal of black votes from Labour if they don't get their way.

The Labour leadership has taken a hard line against black sections, dismissing them as 'divisive'. Neil Kinnock fears that putting blacks up for parliament in marginal seats will cost the party white votes. Kinnock's reactionary line has been supported by the union leaders and the Militant Tendency.

Right-wing Labour MP Andrew Faulds labelled black section activists as 'lunatics' for suggesting that his Warley East constituency was ripe for a black MP. Faulds insisted that a black candidate would 'lose the seat', and that 'with a majority of 3300 we can't monkey about'. Kinnock organised union votes to crush the black sections proposal at last year's party conference. National agent David Hughes has told constituencies that their selection of candidates will be ruled invalid if unofficial black sections are involved.

Black protests that the Labour Party has failed to fight racism either outside or inside its ranks are entirely justified. But black sections are no solution to the problem.

Labour's support for immigration controls and racist police have not been raised in the black sections debate. The arguments are all about the organisational structures of the party, not its policies.

The Labour left has promoted black sections as a gesture towards fighting racism and cleaning up Labour's image. But the left restricts its fight against racism to organisational manoeuvres inside the Labour Party. This bureaucratic approach leaves the issue of black representation open to manipulation by the right. In east London Peter Shore has manipulated representatives of the Bangladeshi community to ward off the left's challenge.

Black sections may provide committees and careers for a handful of black activists. But they provide no solution to the problems of discrimination and repression facing the mass of black people.

A letter from a black section activist to this month's *London Labour Briefing* admits the 'sad reality' that 'the black person in the street cared little' about the Greater London Labour Party's vote against black sections. The majority of blacks do not care how many black MPs the Labour Party can put on parade. They care how many blacks have been deported by Labour governments and how many have been terrorised by police forces funded by Labour councils.

Defending black rights means campaigning against the Labour Party and its accommodation to the racists who have made blacks an isolated section of the British working class.

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

OUR VAL'S FASCIST FATHER

Two days is a long time in royal politics. On Monday 15 April everybody was attacking Princess Michael of Kent for having a father in Hitler's SS. By Wednesday the same pundits were leaping to her defence. At first the establishment didn't mind the press slagging off the most unBritish and unorthodox member of the royal family. But when people started asking if all of 'Britain's favourite family' weren't just a bunch of foreigners with fascist friends, the powers that be declared the matter closed.

Michael is a strange name for a princess. So the royals call her 'Our Val' after the Valkyries, a gang of big blonde furies who marauded their way through Germanic legend. It's the Windsors' way of letting her know that foreign, Catholic divorcees can't really be part of the orb and sceptre set.

Buckingham Palace wasn't too bothered about the initial story on Val's Nazi connections, because the royals don't think much of her background or behaviour either. The six-foot blonde and stylish princess lacks the horse-faced looks of British royalty and is considered a pushy, vulgar upstart. Only days before the SS story broke she demeaned herself by opening a 'Little Chef' greasy spoon motorway cafe. The woman was obviously in need of a right royal spanking, and the Hitler connection was as good a stick as any to beat her with.

Things started to get out of hand when the wider implications of the scandal became apparent. If Val was under suspicion for being German, what about the rest of the royals? One glance at their family tree shows that the people who are supposed to embody the great British nation are all 'bloody foreigners'. Even worse, most of them — with the notable exception of Phil the Greek — are Germans.

Next it became clear that Princess Michael was far from unusual in being a royal with a fascist skeleton in her cupboard. In the appeasement years of the thirties the royal family, like the whole British establishment, had strong affinities with fascism in both Britain and Germany. Like Val's father they were sympathetic to the fascists' anti-communism. The Queen's uncle was a staunch admirer of Hitler, first as King Edward the eighth and later, after he abdicated, as the Duke of Windsor. Last week *The Sunday Times* revealed that an uncle of Prince Charles had been a leading SS officer. This was all too much for the defenders of British democracy, who immediately backtracked and tried to play down the 'Nazi Princess' story.

Every pillar of the British establishment stepped forward to protest that Val was innocent. Apparently, she had always believed that her father was a concentration camp victim who escaped into Austria in true *Sound of Music* style, pushing his family across the Alps in a wheelbarrow. Anyway, he had only been an 'honorary' SS member — a previously unheard of distinction presumably awarded for community service. Everybody, from the editor of *The Times* to left-wing MP Eric Heffer, insisted Val could not be blamed for the sins of her father.

The establishment can't have its cake and eat it. Perhaps the sins of a father should not be visited on his children — but then neither should his property and power. A gang of thieves which claims the hereditary right to rule can't complain when embarrassing questions are asked about their forebears. Those who live by the genes, fall by the genes.

Dissatisfaction with the Tories has led to a revival of the Labour Party in the opinion polls. The media have set about presenting Kinnock as a suitable fall-back prime minister should Thatcher make a major blunder. Back in February *The Economist*, the house journal of British big business, congratulated Kinnock as the British politician who had learned most from Ronald Reagan about putting image before policy. *The Economist* reckoned that Kinnock 'in office would have to do a MacDonald or a Mitterrand, perhaps accepting good government of Britain from the IMF (International Monetary Fund)'. In other words, Kinnock has satisfied the pundits that he is just like social democratic party leaders in Britain in the thirties and France in the eighties. He could be relied upon to do as he was told if called upon to run the country.

The Economist demanded that 'the modern, non-collectivist, market-compatible programme that many Labour politicians mutter about between themselves had better come out of the closet, soon'. In recent weeks a stream of 'market-compatible' policies have come pouring out of Labour's closet.

- Labour's March 'alternative budget' proposed reflation to the modest tune of £5 billion. This was the same amount as Edward Heath and £1 billion more than the SDP. Shadow chancellor Roy Hattersley argued that it was important to be realistic and to 'fight the budget on the government's ground rather than on the Labour Party's'. He meant that the Labour Party should demonstrate that its budget could make a positive contribution to British capitalism, rather than argue its benefits for ordinary people.

- Labour's jobs and industry campaign was launched at the beginning of the month by Kinnock, the three Johns (Prescott, Smith and Cunningham) and singer Billy Bragg. It offers to modernise industry and services, to promote education and training, and to encourage a partnership between unions and management at company level. This scheme combines Thatcher's enthusiasm for new technology, Heath's plans for rebuilding the sewers and David Owen's affection for co-ops. It adds Kinnock's own affinity for Japanese-style company unionism in the workplace.

- Labour's new realism is also the dominant theme in the party's new policies for education and social security, announced last week. There will be no major increase in spending to restore the cuts imposed by the Tories.

Kinnock's distinctive feature as a Labour Party leader is that he is not waiting until he becomes prime minister to declare his commitment to running the system. He reckons that given Labour's catastrophic electoral decline, the party's only hope is to admit openly that it will take whatever harsh measures are necessary to salvage the British economy. He hopes that this approach will win votes from the upwardly mobile to compensate for declining working class support.

According to shadow housing minister Jack Straw, 'Labour must have an ideology robust

Labour and the left Kinnock's loyal critics

The more banana skins Margaret Thatcher steps on, the more the establishment needs to promote Neil Kinnock as an alternative prime minister. The more Kinnock shows his commitment to saving the British economy and crushing the left, the more likely Labour is to be accepted as an alternative party of government.



Under his thumb: moving left to right, Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Militant's Derek Hatton, Ted Knight, David Blunkett (accompanied by Willis of the TUC)



enough to meet the challenge of the video-recorder and This means adopting an alternative way of managing the party. It also means taking a hard line in the Labour Party with the left with Labour's traditional socialism.

Witch-hunters

Kinnock has had the left as a party leader at the beginning of the year. He floated the rumour that he would challenge Kinnock for the sole object of discrediting any leader. 'I'm too old to concede Benn, retiring. Benn's attempts at pro-Nato foreign policy of Denis Healey and trowned on the national round of reselections without a single upstart wingers and a number of the left has been the Militant has done

stakes. Its former Brighton Kemptown number of seats which were hopeful — East Kilbride, Glasgow Provan second and more often Militant, its members local parties in Scotland Mansfield and Newcastle executive is set to end the Coventry Militant conduct of the general constituency. The Militant Coordinating Committee role in the witch-hunt Militant documents to

In Liverpool the Militant Party and not the Labour Party have all supporters who run the Militant allegations of corruption, favouritism, bureaucratic manipulation. Allegations may well be commonplace in charges are being directed part of a campaign by win middle class approval robust enough to smash the face of the left inside

The leadership's confronted the left with either break out and succumb. The left's re-direction of its earlier Thatcher's first victory in 1983 the left sustain of artificial campaigns. These were the years change the constitution electoral college to elect mandatory reselection over who should write

llenge of double glazing, the holiday in Tenerife'. policies which offer an aging British capitalism. tough line against those no are publicly identified ional commitment to

new broom

on the run ever since he the 1983 conference. At ar the Labour leadership t Tony Benn intended to the leadership with the ing the left's parliament- d for that sort of thing' ing wounded from the to challenge Labour's y, now firmly in the grip d the right, have been al executive. The current has proceeded so far et to established right- of setbacks to the left. leadership's purge on the ant Tendency.

badly in the reselection andidate Rod Fitch in was ditched and in a ere its candidates were le, Woolwich, Gateshead — they were pushed into n third place. Worse for have been expelled from th Wales, Blackburn, tle. This week's national rse scathing criticisms of P Dave Nellist over his election campaign in his nck-supporting Labour tee has played a leading t, even leaking internal the gutter press.

liberal Party, the Com- Militant sections of the denounced the Militant he council. To discredit have been circulated of sm in job allocation, ation and racism. The e true, but such practices Labour councils. These cted against Militant as the Labour leadership to val by showing that it is sh the most conspicuous he Labour Party.

urch to the right has a difficult choice. It can d fight or dig in and sponse has followed the ctivity. In the years from in 1979 to her landslide ed itself through a series inside the Labour Party. s of the movements to n of the party, to form an t the leader, to introduce for MPs and disputes the manifesto. The high

point was Benn's (unsuccessful) campaign for the deputy leadership in 1981. The left largely ignored the important issues in the real world outside the Labour Party — unemployment, the riots, the war in Ireland. The left became inward looking and isolated.

The more direct Tory attacks on the labour movement following the 1983 election fiasco put the left further on the defensive. As Kinnock shifted the leadership towards the middle ground, the left turned inwards to defend the threatened institutions of the old labour movement. The result was that as Kinnock pulled the whole Labour machine towards the centre, he dragged the left along. The left's inability to break out of Labour's fatal embrace meant that it moved further and further away from the working class. The left's role in local government shows how its allegiance to the official labour movement increasingly leads it into conflict with the needs of workers.

Socialist productivity schemes

For the past year the left has mobilised around calls to 'save the GLC and the metropolitan counties', or to 'defend the rate-capped councils'. In recent weeks left union officials in the threatened Labour councils have linked up in a national body. Yet all the practical activity proposed by the local government shop stewards is posed in terms of defending the Labour councils and Labour councillors, not in terms of the immediate defence of jobs and conditions. In the Labour councils the left identifies with the employers more than it does with the workers. Over the past five years the left has become heavily dependent on Labour councils for jobs and grants for its projects.

In the early eighties the left-backed Labour councils avoided central government cuts by raising the rates. This allowed them to maintain services by imposing a heavier rate burden on local people. Since the Tories have closed this loophole by introducing rate-capping, Labour councils have come up with another way out — 'creative accounting'. This means making savings through improving efficiency and productivity and manipulating the accounts. The end result of these manoeuvres has been a steady deterioration of wages and conditions for council workers and the erosion of council services. The policy of not filling job vacancies has effectively cut jobs and intensified the burden on the remaining workers.

The policies of Labour councils have led them into a series of conflicts with their workforces. Last year there were strikes in several left-run London boroughs and in Sheffield, Wakefield and St Helens. These often led to left-wing councillors and their camp followers accusing local government unions of frustrating their socialist intentions. Labour councils have presented measures to reduce costs and cut jobs — such as the decentralisation of services — as socialist initiatives. Workers' resistance has been condemned as backward-looking narrow trade unionism.

The new productivity scheme introduced by Sheffield Labour council has been promoted as a progressive initiative in harmonising terms for

manual and staff workers and bringing together councillors and unions in committees at every level. One industrial relations journal commented that the proposed committees 'might in another context be described as quality circles'. In industry such schemes are being introduced by Japanese and American firms in collaboration with right-wing unions such as the electricians. They have been widely condemned by the left as a means of intensifying exploitation. Yet in local government such measures are being promoted by left-wing Labour councils as pioneering socialist initiatives.

The capitulation of the left Labour councils at the first hint of confrontation with the Tories and the courts over rate-capping should come as no surprise. It is consistent with the left's record of running the councils according to the capitalist principles of efficiency and productivity, and their record as employers who provide second-rate services and offer third-rate pay and conditions to their workers. As Ken Livingstone and David Blunkett squabble with John McDonnell and Ted Knight over the best way of manoeuvring out of the mess that they have got themselves into, council workers and people who rely on council services are left to defend themselves against the drastic Tory cuts that are already being felt at local level.

Forlorn hope

The left's opportunism has rendered it defenceless before Kinnock's onslaught. Its retreat is well illustrated by its response to the leadership's jobs and industry campaign. This campaign, which proclaimed to the delight of the media that 'profits are not a dirty word but a positive goal', was 'welcomed' by Militant. *Labour Herald*, the voice (still) of Livingstone and Knight, considered that the campaign deserved 'the wholehearted support of every party member'.

Militant particularly 'welcomed' the campaign's call for government spending on railways, roads, homes and hospitals, but complained that it did not 'explain how these will be paid for'. But the answer is elementary: by the same people who always have to pay for Labour's plans — the working class. The condition for Labour's refutation would be at best even deeper cuts in living standards than we experienced under the last Labour government, and at worst, a war. Militant's only concern about Kinnock's proposals for a new social contract is that 'on the past record big business has been less than willing to cooperate with a socialist government'. Militant wants to know 'why should they start now?' The answer is that with a servile Labour leader like Kinnock and a house-trained left like Militant, big business would be confident that a future Labour government could be relied on to do what it was told.

Labour Herald too has its criticisms. But it is optimistic that Kinnock's 'pro-capitalist, Keynesian package' can be transformed into a socialist programme. 'Let us hope', its editors conclude their survey of Kinnock's policies, 'that in the course of debating them, Labour's economic pundits can be persuaded to make

some fundamental changes'. This is the hope that has sustained generation after generation of the Labour left, but never has it seemed so forlorn. The more reactionary the Labour leadership becomes, the more the Labour left is reduced to the role of its feeble apologist. It will give support — with fraternal criticisms of course — to every anti-working class policy produced by Labour's upwardly mobile leadership.

The left's slavish loyalty to the Labour Party machine is evident in the current campaigns to preserve the political levy. One striking illustration of the extent of this deference to the Labour Party on the British left is the fact that the Socialist Workers' Party, which is formally independent of Labour, is also campaigning to defend the political levy. *Socialist Worker* repeats the bureaucrats' fraudulent claims that if the political levy to Labour is lost then unions will lose the right to contribute to organisations like the National Abortion Campaign or the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

A glance at section 17 of the Trade Union Act 1984 confirms that it refers only to union support for political parties. Recognising the fact that few workers would knowingly waste their hard-earned cash on an organisation as useless as the Labour Party, the bureaucrats have tried to confuse the issue by pretending that what is at stake is the general right of unions to spend money on political campaigns. It is not. The aim of the act is to prevent unions from financing the Labour Party unless they have a mandate from their members to do so.

But the SWP's support for Labour's levy goes further than its endorsement of the bureaucrats' cynical schemes to con union members into paying out for the Labour Party. *Socialist Worker* is worried that Labour will lose 'a substantial part of its income' if this attack on 'the Tories' major political opposition in parliament' is successful. What use was the 'Tories' major political opposition in parliament' to the miners in their 12-month battle for jobs? What has Her Majesty's loyal opposition ever done to help the four million people on the dole? What has the parliamentary Labour Party done to defend the rights of women, black people, the Irish and all the other victims of the Tory government? When people take matters into their own hands and fight back the Labour Party is the first to condemn them. Yet the whole of the left from the entrists to the anti-parliamentarians of the SWP is united in the campaign to keep this deadbeat show on the road.

Under Kinnock the Labour Party has adjusted to the new climate of the eighties by becoming another middle class party. With Hattersley and Healey at the policy controls and Kinnock fronting the media presentation, Labour has become little different from the SDP/Liberal Alliance or the Tory wets. The left's heroes have either gone over to the Kinnock camp (Livingstone) or are left out on a limb (Scargill, Benn). The degeneration of the Labour Party creates better prospects for building a genuine working class party than have existed in Britain for decades.

Mike Freeman



Photographs by Chris Black (reflex)

INTERNATIONAL

South Africa

Botha at the crossroads

The Afrikaner burnt to death by blacks in Uitenhage last Friday was the first white victim of the battle raging between the black masses and the South African state. The killing shocked white South Africa more than nine months of riots and repression in black townships and squatters' camps. It brought home the vulnerable position of five million European settlers trying to keep 23 million blacks under the heel of apartheid.

South African premier PW Botha has rushed through reforms in an attempt to contain black anger and placate Western critics. Last week he lifted the ban on inter-racial sex and mixed marriage — a major departure from South African values. Botha hopes to take the pressure off at home and abroad by removing the most offensive symbols of white supremacy. But such gestures can only increase the tensions threatening to tear the apartheid system apart.

The sex laws were never central to the way apartheid works. Their repeal barely touches on the issues at stake in the current struggles: the pass laws, forced resettlement and the systematic denial of political rights to blacks. The reform will be welcomed by thousands of mixed couples who have suffered persecution, imprisonment and exile. But it will not satisfy black workers' demands for full social and political equality.

'Separate development'

Botha has very limited scope for reforming apartheid. South African capitalism developed on the basis of the system of 'separate development' for blacks. Too much tampering with apartheid would undermine the foundations of the white regime and its big business backers.

After the Second World War the South African ruling class institutionalised white domination through a system of laws and regulations. The white establishment needed a system which would make black labour available for exploitation while excluding the black masses from political life. 'Separate development' achieved these aims through creating black homelands. Blacks were only allowed out of their assigned areas to go to work for the whites. The infamous pass laws were introduced to police blacks' movements in white areas.

The white regime brought in an extensive system of repression to back up 'separate development'. It banned black trade unions and political parties. It introduced 'Bantu education' to restrict black intellectual development. And it enforced segregation in the most mundane aspects of life, through petty rules regulating things like the use of public toilets, transport, and park benches, and access to beaches, sport and entertainment.

Apartheid soon dictated everything about South African society, from the structure of the capitalist economy to who you could go to bed with. The ban on inter-racial sex under the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Amendment Act (1950) was primarily of ideological importance. It helped to cohere the Afrikaner community around the principle of white supremacy. By linking the issue of segregation to sex, racism was turned into a question of national morality.

The barbarity of apartheid has allowed South African capitalism to develop into a major power. But apartheid also involves major risks for the South African establishment. Institutionalised oppression has made for permanent political instability. A vast security apparatus is needed to administer repression on a day-to-day basis. The smallest industrial dispute threatens to become a major political conflict. From a capitalist point of view the apartheid system is far from ideal. It is volatile, inefficient and expensive.

The threat of black revolt built into apartheid explains the growing pressure for

**CITY OF PORT ELIZABETH
NOTICE
FOR THE USE OF WHITE PERSONS
ONLY.**

BY ORDER.

**STAD PORT ELIZABETH
KENNISGEWING**

**ALLEENLIK VIR
VAN BLANKES.**

IDOLOPHU YASA

ISAZI

**UKUSETYENZISA
MHLOPE BODWA.**

PW Botha



reform from Western investors and the local business community. In January South Africa's top five business federations, whose affiliates employ 80 per cent of the country's workers, called for the immediate concession of full citizenship rights to all blacks, an end to evictions and an end to state interference in trade union affairs.

The international business community is protesting against the growing social and economic cost of apartheid. Foreign investors complain that, due to the rigidities apartheid imposes on the labour market, black South African workers' wages are higher than those paid in countries like Singapore or Taiwan. The impact of the

recession in South Africa has highlighted the need for new methods to raise profits and cut out waste. Unemployment now stands at 20 per cent, state expenditure and foreign borrowing have shot up and foreign investment is declining. Political and business leaders who know something must be done to stop the rot are flocking around the anti-apartheid banner.

Botha came to power in 1978 determined to introduce major changes. His 'total strategy' aimed to free the labour market from unnecessary bureaucratic strictures, stabilise labour relations, co-opt a layer of middle class blacks and 'coloureds', and remove provocative symbols of white supremacy. Botha has made a number of changes involving trade union rights and petty apartheid. But he has failed to legislate black aspirations for democracy out of existence. Today black resistance is more widespread and determined than at any time since the Soweto riots of 1976.

The token reforms of the past few years have served to deepen black indignation and to fuel the struggle for real change. Blacks have responded to Botha's attempts to co-opt black middle class officials by organising attacks on puppet councillors and local government offices. The elections to the new 'coloured' chamber of parliament were widely boycotted. Black collaborators have been given no quarter by the masses.

The current upheaval has exposed the contradictions of the reform strategy. Real reforms are impossible because South African capitalism depends on the oppression of blacks. All the establishment

can offer are gestures which have virtually no effect on the lives of black people. Far from stabilising society, the reform strategy has made blacks more keenly aware that apartheid cannot be reformed — it must be destroyed. Botha's total strategy now looks more like a total mess for the white establishment.

To make matters worse for the regime, the reforms and the black struggles have brought the prospect of a white backlash. The gun-toting whites of Uitenhage demanding revenge last week were a grim warning to Botha that white patience is wearing thin.

Reforms which are seen to challenge the foundations of the Afrikaner tradition have done little to endear Botha to the white working class. The repeal of the sex laws has become a target of white outrage against a government seen to be 'soft on blacks'. Such reforms challenge the basic beliefs of a community raised in the conviction that inter-racial sex is sin. The South African establishment and its Western backers may not be sentimental about traditional apartheid values when their power is at stake. But white workers, already shaken by the effects of recession, don't take kindly to a government which seems to be reneging on the principles of the Afrikaner way of life.

With Western bankers and investors breathing down his neck, black resistance on the rise and Afrikaners watching his every move, Botha has got himself into a very tight corner. The crisis of the South African ruling class is only just beginning.

Sabena Norton

BRAZIL

The carnival is over

AFTER TANCREDO NEVES — chaos? The problems of finding a suitable successor for the president who died this week expose the fragility of democracy in Brazil.

The untimely departure of Neves is a major blow to the Brazilian establishment. Elected in January by an electoral college set up by military dictator Joao Figueiredo, Neves' brief was to oversee the delicate process of returning Brazil to civilian rule after 21 years of military dictatorship. His half a century of experience in moderate democratic politics made Neves the ideal man for the job. But he did not get much of a chance to warm to his task. Hours before his inauguration he collapsed and was rushed off to hospital. With Neves gone Brazil's experiment in democracy faces an uncertain future.

The demand for a return to civilian rule had come from Western bankers and politicians, in response to Brazil's profound political and economic crisis. After five years of recession Brazil has totted up over \$100 billion worth of debts to Western banks, making it the world's biggest debtor nation. Last year almost half the country's export earnings went on servicing its enormous debt. Brazilian society has been devastated by this transfer of wealth to Western coffers. Unemployment effects one third of the workforce, and half the country's workers and peasants live on or below the poverty line.

The Brazilian establishment has become increasingly worried about the mass unrest provoked by the crisis. Last year millions of workers took to the streets demanding better wages, social reform and an end to military dictatorship. Even the powerful Catholic church was forced to adopt radical postures under popular pressure. Liberation theology is flourishing in the shanty-towns of Sao Paulo.

The military regime found itself isolated

as left-wing parties and independent trade unions mushroomed. For the first time since the coup of 1964, Brazil's rulers were forced to respond to mass pressure. The military repeatedly reneged on payments due to the banks and put off implementing the drastic economic measures demanded by the international bankers.

The return to democracy was initiated by the military regime itself, after some prompting from Western and Brazilian politicians and bankers. By restoring parliamentary democracy, Brazil's rulers hoped to create parties and politicians which could contain the masses and win a measure of popular approval for government austerity measures. The military announced plans for bringing back civilian government. Establishment spokesmen took to promoting a new climate of national conciliation and new political leaders. But democratisation was always going to be dangerous for the Brazilian ruling class. If it held popular elections the left-wing parties would be returned with a massive majority, a development which would only serve to intensify political instability. Faced with this dilemma Figueiredo opted for a 'staggered' return to democracy.

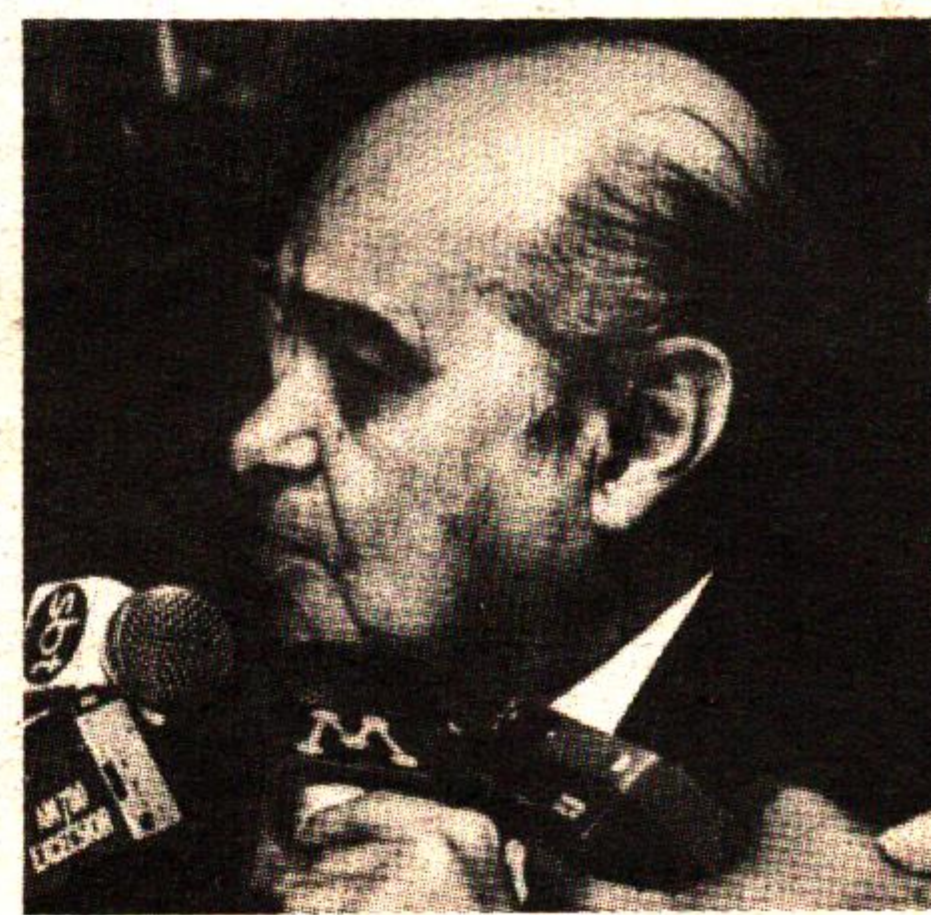
Popular elections were postponed and Neves was elected by a carefully chosen electoral college. Neves had steered a careful course between the military and its civilian opponents throughout his long career in Brazilian politics. The masses held him in high regard as an untainted democrat. Equally importantly, the military regarded him as completely reliable. This consensus in support of Neves' candidature made him the ideal man for the difficult job the establishment needed done. He was selected to build a popular alliance supporting the Brazilian state, in preparation for future elections. Neves had already made some progress in this direction before he took to

his sick bed, winning the support of the Communist Party for his economic policies.

Neves' death on Sunday leaves Brazil's rulers high and dry. Since January hundreds of thousands of metal and public sector workers have gone on strike for better pay and shorter hours. Before his untimely departure Neves was trying hard to stitch up a deal with their union leaders. But now the Brazilian establishment is stuck without a presentable mediator. The democratisation scheme has gone awry. The bosses and bankers will have to look for another way to get their harsh economic measures through while keeping control of the angry workers and peasants.

With no obvious candidate to take over the shaky reins of government, Brazil's ruling class has only two options. It can bring forward popular elections and risk the arrival of a radical government. Or it can re-establish military dictatorship, and re-create the crisis conditions of last year with even less room to manoeuvre. Either way Neves will no longer be around to reconcile the working class to the dictatorship of the Western financiers.

Charles Longford



REVIEWS

PONTING

THE RIGHT TO KNOW THE INSIDE STORY OF THE BELGRANO AFFAIR

CLIVE PONTING

A sign of the times

Clive Ponting, *The right to know*, Sphere Books 1985, £2.50

Clive Ponting provides a detailed account of the *Belgrano* affair. He goes through the movements of the *HMS Conqueror* before, during and after its attack on the Argentinian cruiser on 1 May 1982. He follows on through the subsequent government cover-up and his own role — and that of Labour MP Tam Dalyell — in bringing the whole business out in the open. Yet much of this story is already familiar and he adds little new.

Ponting himself is much more interesting than the *Belgrano* story. Ponting was a successful civil servant who balked at Thatcher's determination to politicise the state's administrative machinery. He had no objection to pursuing dutifully the interests of the British state. Indeed he was personally congratulated by the prime minister for his diligence and awarded the OBE for cutting

waste in the armed forces. He did not object to the war with Argentina or even to the sinking of the *Belgrano*. But what he could not stomach was the government lying to parliament about it.

Ponting was an honest man fallen among thieves, a born-again Buddhist working for unscrupulous Tory politicians. Ponting believes in the ethos of the civil service. In his book he proposes a reformed Official Secrets Act to make government more fair and open. But Thatcher has no more use for open government than she has for Clive Ponting. Turning the civil service into a political arm of the Tory government is a key aspect of Thatcher's reorganisation of the British establishment for conditions of class war. As a man of conscience Ponting could not adjust himself to misleading the public as part of his daily routine.

Ponting's integrity may appear naive in such a senior civil servant. You would think that it was obvious from the record of history that it was a major function of senior civil servants and politicians to lie through their teeth most of the time. But the strength of the British establishment is that so many of its functionaries really believe in their own ideology of honesty and service. It was Thatcher's drive to replace that traditional code with naked cynicism that drove Ponting to leak his story to Dalyell.

Ponting, loyal, liberal (he was a founder member of the SDP) but dubious about the resolute approach, is a symbol of our times. He personifies the loss of nerve among many traditional establishment figures about the aggressive line now being pursued by the Tory government. It is a sobering thought that a bunch of harmless wallies like Clive Ponting, Lord Stockton and the Bishop of Durham have caused Thatcher more aggravation than the combined forces of the Labour Party and the SDP/Liberal Alliance.

Andy Clarkson

HIP-HOP

Lost Poets

The Last Poets, Shaw Theatre

Following the re-release of their records by Celluloid and their recent London appearances, the 'legendary' Last Poets have been celebrated as the godfathers of rap and the founders of the whole culture of hip-hop. Seeing them last week revealed their virtuosity in delivering the slick patter of street-wise black America. Their range of pace and rhythm shows up many imitators of the ilk of Gary Bird as a decidedly second-rate experience. The Last Poets are fast, flash and effortlessly polished.

Yet The Last Poets once had a different reputation. They were a band of militant black Muslims fresh out of the New York ghettos at the turn of the seventies. Their first two albums *Oh my people* (1969) and *This is madness* (1972) made them famous as the angriest and most violent expression of the black power revolt. They called themselves The Last Poets, because after them came the revolution. The Last Poets have survived, but the hopes of that revolution were crushed by the ferocious repression of the US state

machine and the callous indifference of white America.

There is little trace in their current work of the explosive anger of 'White man's got a god complex' or of the anguished screams of 'This is madness'. Yet there is a link. The early Poets focused their revolt on the high-tech America of the almighty buck. For the Poets, and the generation of black radicals who followed the murder of Malcolm X and the annihilation of the Black Panthers, racism was a distortion of the American dream, not a pillar of US capitalism. Liberation lay through opening people's minds, not through taking on the system. The climate of reaction in Reagan's America has closed many minds and sent the Poets retreating into mysticism and ecology. The anti-nuke postures of the Poets' recent concerts go down well with the sort of white liberals they once so despised. The Poets' controversial repudiation of the pill simply carries a stage further many liberals' backward-looking hostility to technology and their general accommodation to reaction. Today their concerts end up with appeals for funds for Ethiopia and the revolution they once proclaimed like prophets crying in the wilderness is now long forgotten. The rap is still good, but the soul is gone.

Mick Kennedy



Shot to pieces: no more Black Panthers, no more soul

FEMINISM ON FILM

Not so thrilling

Marleen Gorris director, *Broken mirrors*, Netherlands 1984, subtitles, Screen on the Green

In 1982 Marleen Gorris made her name with *A question of silence*, a radical feminist classic in which working class women trample to death a man in a ritualistic act of liberation. Gorris has lost none of her talent for ritual and suspense. But in *Broken mirrors* the boot is on the other foot.

The women in this film are prostitutes in the Happy House, a downtown Amsterdam brothel. They bear their brute customers with a mixture of contempt and resignation. Meanwhile a sadistic male killer chains up his latest victim to watch her die of starvation, capturing the various stages of her ordeal on polaroid film. The two strands of the plot merge as another male stabs and almost disembowels one of the women at the Happy House. The faceless killer turns up too and gets chased away by the two main characters, Diane and Doria, who have finally decided they've had enough.

The gruesome tale is superbly presented. But its portrayal of women as the impotent victims of man's relish of female suffering borders on the masochistic. This time there is no revenge, no carnival of the oppressed, just almost contented submission. The only gestures of defiance occur when the faceless killer's victim decides to stop talking to him and when Diane and Doria finally leave the scene of their degradation. The humour and aggro which made Gorris' first work so refreshing have been blotted out in an orgy of self-destruction. The radical feminist obsession with the symbols of women's oppression has wound up in a blind and pretty revolting alley.

Sabena Norton

PALESTINE

Zionists and wolves

N Aruri ed, *Occupation: Israel over Palestine*, Zed Books 1984

Heiny Srour director, *Leila and the wolves*, 1985, Gate Notting Hill

Israel over Palestine examines the barbarous military and legal apparatus which Israel has used to contain Palestinian resistance in the occupied West Bank since it annexed the territory during the Six Day War of 1967.

Israeli land confiscation and economic restrictions have reduced working and middle class Palestinians to a reserve army of migrant labour, drafted in to supply the Israeli economy and subject to apartheid-style pass laws. This has made the West Bank more volatile than ever. The book details the strategy of colonisation and legal repression which Israel has developed to keep the lid on the West Bank. The dispersal and defeat of the Palestinian people remains the objective of Israeli strategy. Expansion and repression are vital for a state based on the liquidation of the Palestinian nation.

Israel over Palestine is flawed by its failure to recognise that the interests of the Israeli state and those of the Palestinian masses cannot be reconciled. In the concluding chapter Muhammad Halaj argues that 'Israel must understand that its long-range interests, as well as the national rights of the Palestinians, require not substitutes for Palestinian freedom, but alternatives to Israeli occupation'. In reality Israel knows that its interests will always depend on denying Palestinians their freedom.

Heiny Srour's ambitious film captures one aspect of the resistance of the Palestinian masses. A collage of documentary footage and fictional scenes, *Leila and the wolves* describes women's role in 65 years of anti-British and anti-Israeli fighting. Its message is disconcerting. After decades of struggle women still remain in the background. We see glimpses of their potential in the heroic women fighters, guns and dynamite concealed in veils and baskets. But while the men lead and fight, women are still left to cope with the consequences of war on the home front.

A chorus of women veiled in black sitting on the sea-shore appears throughout the film as a silent symbol of women's oppression. In the end they throw off their veils — a hopeful, but very restrained gesture, which underlines Heiny Srour's cautious optimism about the prospects for Palestinian women. Despite its clumsy use of symbolism, *Leila and the wolves* is worth seeing for that optimism.

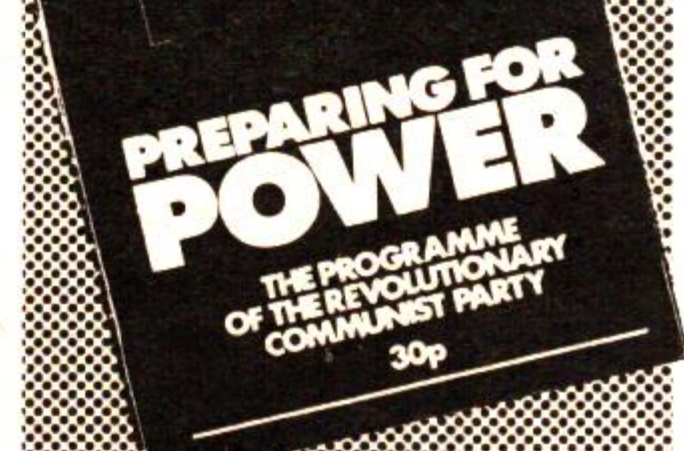
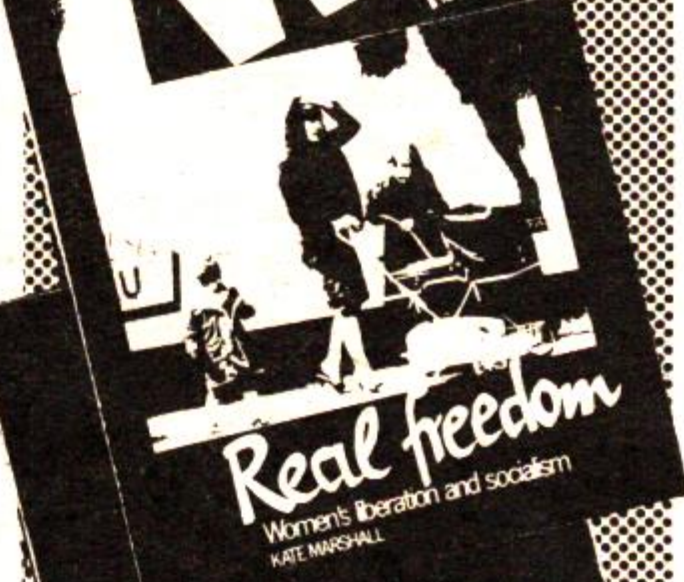
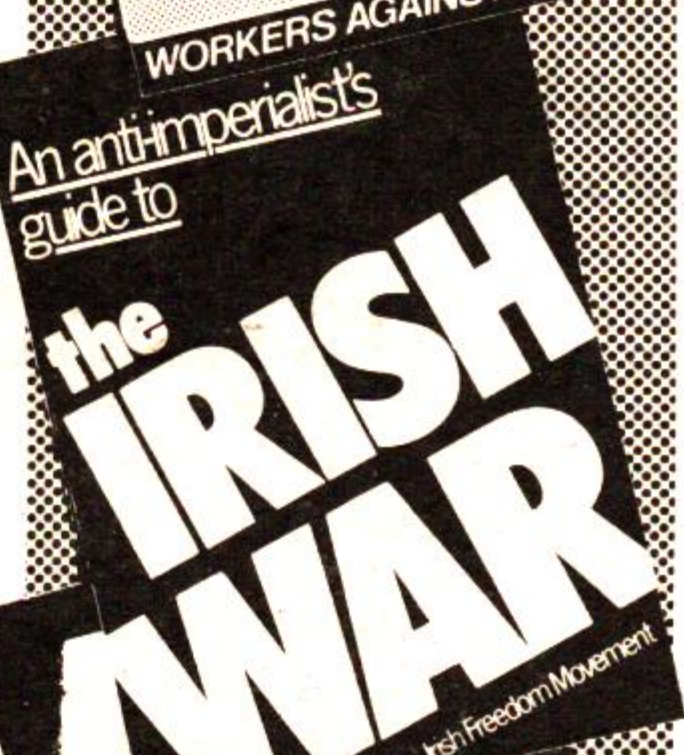
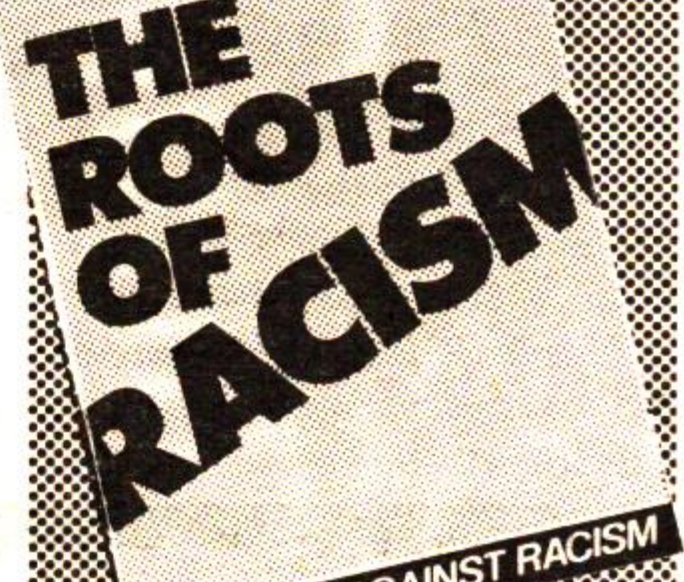
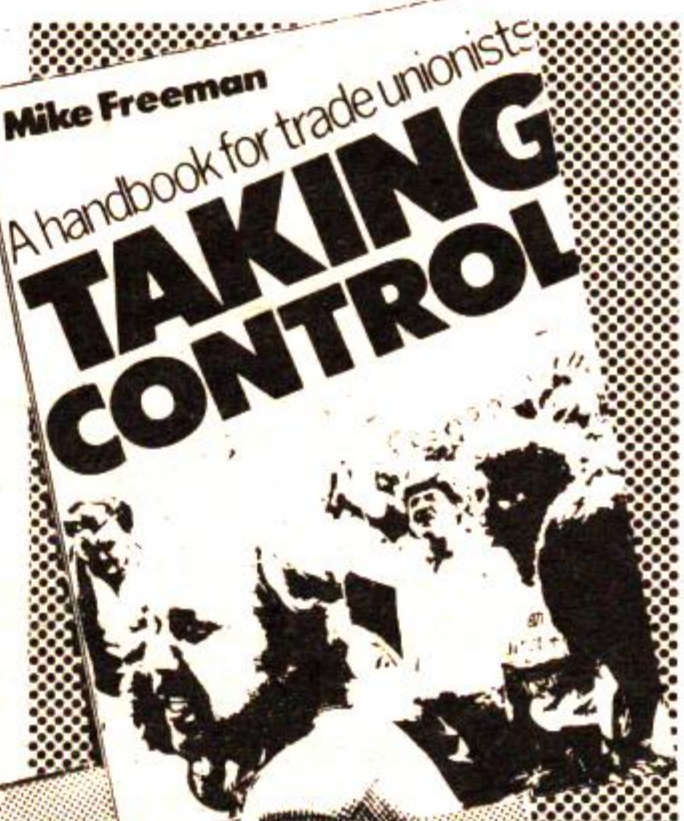
Simon Jay

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Out now — the pamphlet that tells it like it was in the miners' strike. *Our day will come* looks at different aspects of the miners' battle for jobs, from the problem of Nottinghamshire to Arthur Scargill's strike strategy. It tackles the failures of leadership that undermined effective action and points a new way forward for miners and other workers to take on the bosses and win.

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LETTERS

No civil service merger

At their May conferences the Civil and Public Servants Association and the Society of Civil and Public Servants will be voting on whether to accept merger terms. If accepted the plan will then go to a ballot. My advice to *tns* readers in the civil service is to oppose this amalgamation.

Militants usually support mergers because they overcome sectional rivalries and strengthen the unions. But this one is different. The CPSA mainly represents clerical and typing grades while the SCPS represents executive and managerial grades, short of the top civil servants. The merger means including workers with people who represent the employers in the same union. This would create a state of affairs such as exists in Nalco where workers' independent initiative is constantly thwarted by the presence of their bosses in the union.

It's true that there has been some joint action between the two unions in pay and anti-cuts campaigns. But it's also true that when CPSA members have come out on



Chris Black (reflex)

CPSA chief Allstair Graham

their own, SCPS members have disciplined them. The current 'financial management initiative' and the 'review of personnel

management' are proposing to delegate the power to hire and fire down to SCPS members at line management level.

The bureaucrats from far right to broad left in both unions are all in favour of the merger because it will make their positions more secure. Left wingers in the CPSA who once campaigned for a more democratic union have accepted proposals to appoint rather than elect full-time officials. These measures will merely reinforce the grip of the officials and make them less accountable to the rank and file.

There is a strong feeling against the merger among CPSA members. Many people recognise the dangers of having your supervisor in your union, perhaps as the office representative or branch secretary. Many CPSA activists are willing to cooperate with SCPS members to oppose cuts and win decent pay and conditions. But they recognise that supervisors and managers cannot be considered to be reliable allies. Our aim should be to turn the CPSA into a fighting union, not link it up with the bosses.

Paul Foster
London

Post office con job

You mentioned the postal dispute at the Mount Pleasant sorting office in last week's article on ballots which was very useful. But what's going on?

Tension has been mounting in sorting offices everywhere with our union officials locked in negotiations with management at both national and local level. In March talks about the introduction of the new Improved Working Methods (IWM) and flexible staffing — the introduction of part-timers — broke down. Postmen and women at Mount Pleasant thought that the talking had stopped and the fight was on. They walked out. Action of this kind is the only weapon that workers have to defend their jobs and living standards. What went wrong at Mount Pleasant was that the UCW leadership undermined workers' will to fight. I was on leave when the action started, but eager to find out what secondary or solidarity action was planned I phoned the UCW HQ in London. The union official on the other end of the phone told me 'the posties want to spread the action, but we are

doing our best to contain it'. In the fine tradition of British trade unionism the leadership did just this and settled the matter over a boardroom table.

UCW leader Alan Tuffin got what he wanted: one month to persuade the membership to accept the IWM at the national delegate conference in May. Needless to say, management got what it wanted: Alan Tuffin on his knees. Back in the boardroom in London the bosses are planning their battle strategy. Step one is softening up the workforce through a quality of service campaign. This means a series of talks and videos to persuade postal workers that the business efficiency of the post office must come first. So precious is this campaign that it is organised during worktime to make sure that postal workers attend. We must learn the most important lesson of the miners' struggle: we cannot fight for our jobs and living standards if we accept the logic of the bosses' arguments. We must fight for what we need — jobs and a living wage — and not be conned into accepting what they say they can afford.

Woman postie
Manchester

Anti-racist desperadoes

The GLC is not the only Labour council to adopt desperado tactics to tackle the racists. Leeds Labour council has joined the club of left-wing councils who have a policy of evicting racist tenants found guilty of racial harassment. They've got real problems though as one incident this week proved.

Makhan Singh, a single Asian living on Hunslet council estate, was arrested after complaining to the police and the council about threats from his white neighbours and smashed windows. Instead of confronting the racists who attack black people like Makhan the council is leaving it up to the courts. The courts have never done anything for black people except find them guilty. This time was no different. On 15 April Makhan Singh, not his racist neighbours, was found guilty of criminal damage. So what is the council going to do now — evict Makhan?

When questioned, the city council housing aid officer Trevor Lincoln said that it was not the council's job to say what the police should do. The council couldn't criticise the police or argue with the court's verdict because this would have called into question its whole approach of relying on the police and the courts to dispense justice to blacks. We need to confront the racists with our own organisations and not rely on the courts, the police or the council.

Simon Lewis
Leeds

Victimised

I've been an EETPU shop steward at Manchester Royal Infirmary for 17 years. Last Wednesday I got the boot and on Thursday all 83 EETPU members in the hospital came out on strike demanding my reinstatement.

As part of my job as a health and safety rep I was inspecting the oil used in the air conditioning system that services the operating theatre. The oil was sub-standard, which fits in with the general pattern of bad health and safety standards in the hospital. I complained to various levels of management and got nowhere fast. In their opinion it wasn't important. Out of frustration I ended up swearing at one of the managers. I told him he was being stupid and putting people's lives in danger. I was suspended immediately on full pay. They told me 'we don't want you around because you'll hamper our investigations'. Into what?

My members have been great, but I can't say the same for the local Labour councillor Ken Collis who also happens to be a senior manager at the hospital. He hasn't said a word. The lads say they will stay out until I get my job back. My suspension is part of a more general attack on union organisation at the hospital. No doubt management are out to undermine us before they really go for the cuts that kill.

Bill Turner
EETPU
Manchester Royal Infirmary



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Please come in on

Then next on

Costa del Dole

I have just been sent a letter from the department of health and social security that shows up just how callous the Tories are and what lies in store for those they have thrown out of work. I am 25 years old and an unemployed textile worker. My circumstances, like those of a lot of other working class youth, forced me to take bed and breakfast accommodation. Bed and breakfast lodgings, I would like to inform your readers, are similar in most cases to Salvation Army hostels (dosshouses). We are hardly living it up on the Torquay riviera as the Tory gutter press would have us believe.

Even this basic accommodation is too much to give us workers on the dole. From the 29 April, next week, Tory overlord for health Norman Fowler, has decreed that we have four weeks (some hope!) to get a job or we become homeless. The Tories often say that they are worried about the mess that their system has created (ie us). In practice they treat us with utter contempt. In fact they should tremble with worry about the unemployed because the more they spit on us the greater becomes our will for revenge, that one day will surely come. Congratulations on your weekly, it will help guide us to that day.

Pat Kehoe
Huddersfield, West Yorkshire



STEPPING OUT

Is there no bottom to the well of talent that is Norman Willis? The TUC general secretary came to his job with a reputation as a teller of 'hilarious' stories and a public bar song and dance artiste. Now Willis, backed by the Grimethorpe colliery band and the GCHQ union choir, has cut a disc — 'a protest song'. Given the TUC's traitorous role in the miners' strike and the struggle over union recognition at GCHQ, perhaps Norman should have stuck to the song which first earned him notoriety as a crooner — 'I'm the man, the very fat man, wot waters the workers' beer'.

The Bishop of Durham is not the only public figure with doubts about whether Christianity is the good thing it was made out to be. The father, the son and the holy ghost have now joined Clive Ponting and Ted Heath on the black list of establishment rebels compiled by John Gummer, paranoid chair of the Tory Party. 'The doctrine of the Trinity is worrying,' declares Gummer in a heretical outburst in *The Spectator*. Why? 'Not because it is difficult to understand', but because 'it doesn't help the prime minister with the coal strike.' The man has clearly taken leave of his senses.

Labour Party member Jack Kane is waiting for a letter. He's been waiting seven months. Jack is the 'umpire' in the conciliation process between the Scottish coal board and the NUM. When his position fell due for renewal last September, Jack wrote off asking why notice of his reappointment (and retainer fee) hadn't arrived. The board sent him a few quid but no reappointment letter. Scottish NUM officials are distraught that Jilted Jack, their treasured 'independent arbiter', has not had his letter. They seem rather less perturbed that 207 of their members have had letters from the board — terse, one-sentence notes which begin 'You are hereby summarily dismissed from your employment with the National Coal Board...'

According to a piece in this month's edition of the Communist Party journal *Marxism Today*, 'to be liberal' is to be 'weak, equivocating, untheorised, unmateriast and, of course, bourgeois'. 'But,' it continues, 'right now we need all the liberals we can get.' Imagine the rousing chorus of the Internationale at the close of the party's coming congress: 'Arise, ye starvelings from your slumber, arise ye weak, equivocating, untheorised, bourgeois liberals...'

The recent fuss about the royal family's politics has missed the interesting consequences of the queen's intervention in the miners' strike. You may recall that her majesty made some disparaging remarks about the miners to Paul Routledge, labour editor at *The Times*, who foolishly reproduced her comments in print and embarrassed the establishment no end. This week Routledge paid the price for his treasonable act, when he was sent into exile to become *The Times*' man in Singapore. The royal attitude to strikes has not been forgotten by Yorkshire miners either. The organisers of a Save the Children Fund fete to be graced by Princess Anne in Dinnington, near Rotherham, report that the mining community has snapped up only 500 of the 4000 tickets at £2.50 a throw — a clear case of the working class having more sense than money.

REPORTS

Fight NHS cuts

This week the TUC launched a week of action against privatisation in the health service 'to put localised action in a national perspective'. The 'action' is restricted to a series of rallies to put the case for keeping out the private contractors and keeping NHS services in-house. But health workers everywhere know from bitter experience that in-house tenders mean job losses, harder work and lower living standards.

Nupesteward George Risling is proud of keeping the laundry services in-house at Wakefield's Stanley Royd hospital. At the end of last year Nupe and Cohse signed a new agreement involving five job losses and cuts in bonuses from 40 to 33 per cent. Now management wants blood — a 25 per cent bonus — and the unions are powerless to resist. The same pattern has been repeated at hospitals across Britain.

Health workers' anti-cuts action is being undermined by union officials who are prepared to make sacrifices to keep the private contractors out.

● **Leeds:** Health workers facing drastic cuts in wages and working conditions have taken

action against *all* tenders. Their union officials have shown less determination. Nupe and Cohse have been sitting on the Eastern health authority tendering sub-committee, discussing how to make in-house bids 'competitive'.

● **Chesterfield:** Last week cleaning staff at Scarsdale hospital came out on strike against management's privatisation plans. The rejected joint union in-house tender had involved cuts in hours from 2500 to 1400 and voluntary redundancies.

● **Newcastle:** Domestic staff are taking 'guerrilla action' against the in-house tender involving wage cuts of between 33 and 77 per cent. The unions had previously been involved in negotiations over the in-house tender, but when management's terms became clear it was rejected outright by the workforce.

Health workers must reject the idea that any in-house tender is better than a private contract, and oppose *all* cuts, coordinating rank and file action among hospitals and areas.

Kerry Dean

Scottish rail action

'One day's strike is not enough,' said Partick railworker John McBrinn after last week's demonstration of solidarity with the 1250 workers whose jobs are threatened as a result of the proposed closure of British Rail's Caley engineering workshops near Glasgow.

Railworkers throughout Scotland came out on a 24-hour strike despite management attempts to use the law to prevent the action from taking place. 'The day of action shows that the rank and file will support the fight for jobs', McBrinn told *tns*, 'but the union leaders are too busy saving their own skins to do what they are paid for.'

Railworkers' leader Jimmy Knapp told the Scottish TUC last week that he wanted to see solidarity from other workers. But he has done little to mobilise action in his own union. In Scotland the lead came from the rank and file, not from the union leaders. 'At first Knapp and the Scottish leaders wouldn't even make the action official', says McBrinn, 'it was only under great pressure from below that they agreed even to have the day of action.'

After the day of action the threat still hangs over BREL Caley. Union officials are trying to mobilise local shopkeepers,

businessmen, politicians and church leaders against the closure. This ineffectual sort of campaign has already paved the way for closure at Shildon and elsewhere. But if we build instead on the militant defiance of the law displayed by thousands of railworkers on 17 April — and link up with workers in the English workshops — we could really put some pressure on the BR bosses.

Cathy Barrett



Struggle for steel jobs

Discussions are continuing this week between unions and management at the Tinsley Park special steels plant in Sheffield which is threatened with closure and the loss of more than 1000 jobs. The trouble is that the union is trying to come up with an alternative plan for management rather than mobilising workers' resistance to the rationalisation plans.

Plant boss John Pennington has assured the union that the facts and figures necessary to prepare an alternative plan will be made available. Sheffield council's employment department has allocated £15 000 to assist the union campaign and their experts are busily trying to work out how to solve all the firm's problems of profitability, productivity and shrinking markets.

The danger of this approach is that it ties workers' livelihoods to the viability of the company. What if the union experts discover that the only way to save the plant is to accept large-scale redundancies and cuts in wages and working conditions? They have already cooperated in cutting the workforce in half over the last three years. By getting together with the bosses to work out a survival plan for the firm the unions are dragging the workers down the slippery slope to redundancy.

There is another alternative. Ninety per cent of the Tinsley Park workers turned out to a mass meeting at Sheffield city hall two weeks ago and voted unanimously to fight the closure. White-collar workers at the plant have agreed to support any action against closure. Workers at Scunthorpe and other plants in the area have given their backing. If the workers make it clear that jobs come first and determine to take whatever action is necessary to defend them, they can make the bosses back down. The first step is to get the union officials' noses out of the bosses' account books.

Stan Meeds



Deadline for news and reports: Monday 9am

COME ALONG!

Debate

Embryo rights and women's rights
Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child and Life
versus

Revolutionary Communist Party
and a communist doctor
Friday 26 April 7.30pm
Holborn Library
Theobald's Road
London WC1
(nearest O Holborn)

Demonstration

Anti-Powell Bill protest

Saturday 27 April 1pm
Lincoln Inn Fields, London WC2
Join the RCP's 'Defend abortion and contraception rights' contingent

Conference

Moral panics and women's rights

AIDS and the family, embryos and abortion, battered babies and the courts, hooligans and the police.
Plus evening social. Creche available
Saturday 1 June 10am-5pm
Polytechnic of Central London
New Cavendish Street, W1
Phone 01-729 0414 for details

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Irish Freedom Movement rallies
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Leeds
Thursday 2 May 7.30pm
Leeds Trades Club
Savile Mount, Leeds 7

London
Friday 10 May 7.30pm
Central Library
Fieldway Crescent N5
(off Holloway Road)

Manchester
Saturday 4 May 5.30pm
Manchester university
students' union
Oxford Road

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Ten years after Vietnam

Where will America strike next?

The notion that every Third World struggle, whether in El Salvador, Angola or the Philippines, is "another Vietnam" to be avoided at all costs, is an 'absurd prejudice' according to a special survey of 'the legacy of Vietnam' published last week in the influential US magazine *Newsweek*.

The tenth anniversary of the fall of Saigon has provoked sober American reflections on its greatest ever military defeat and on the subsequent decline of US power. It has led to renewed assertions of American determination to use its military might to crush any threat to its interests in any part of the globe.

When the Vietcong seized the Vietnamese capital in April 1975 they brought to an end 10 years of large-scale US military interference in South East Asia. In the course of the long and bloody war US forces devastated vast areas of the subcontinent and killed several million people. They used chemical defoliants to destroy crops and saturation bombing and napalm to destroy people. The final defeat of the US forces by the Vietnamese people was a triumph of a popular and resourceful anti-imperialist resistance movement over a vastly more powerful adversary.

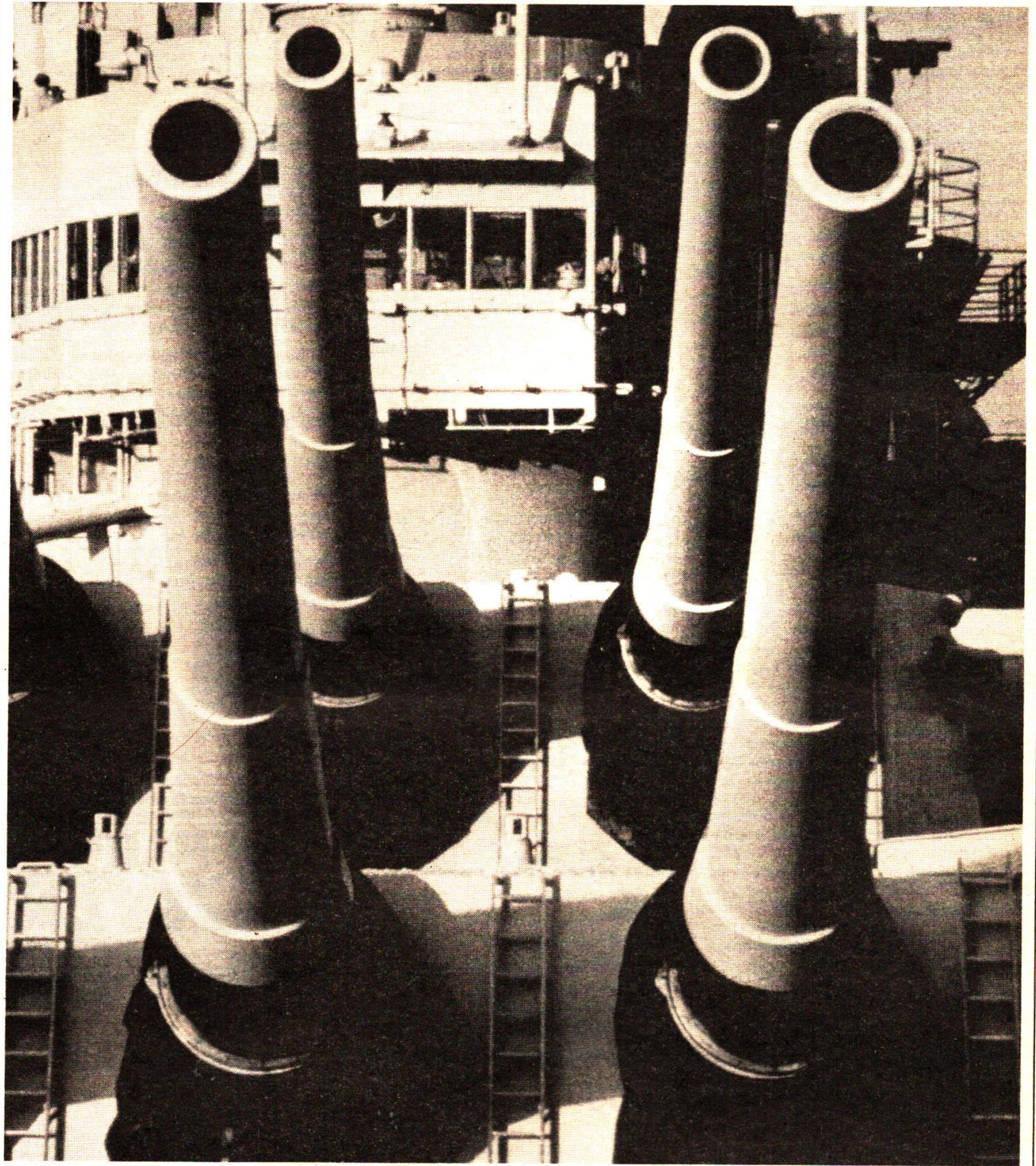
The Vietnam war was a catastrophe for the USA. It lost 57 000 men in a cause which became so unpopular at home that it shook the whole American establishment. The far-reaching crisis caused by the war led to the downfall of two presidents. The USA's precipitate withdrawal from Vietnam undermined American prestige not only in South East Asia but around the world. If the mighty USA could not deal with a peasant-based resistance movement in a small backward country, how could it still claim to be the world's policeman? The Vietnam trauma taught the USA to adopt a more circumspect approach to overseas military entanglements.

Since Vietnam America's rulers have tried to minimise direct military intervention in favour of exercising influence indirectly through local allies. Yet the decline in US economic power has forced Washington to compensate by raising its military profile around the world. The use of the 'rapid deployment force' in the Gulf in 1980, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, and the despatch of the sixth fleet to Lebanon last year were all signs of the USA's new combativeness. The problem confronting the USA is that so many of the world's troublespots are exploding at once, overstressing its diplomatic and military capacities. The question haunting the people of several Third World countries is — will they be next?

● Central America

Reagan has turned local conflicts in El Salvador and Nicaragua into a major focus of US foreign policy. In El Salvador the USA has backed a corrupt and unpopular regime against a popular resistance movement whose guerrilla forces now control substantial areas of the country. In Nicaragua the USA has backed the reactionary contra guerrillas fighting against the popular Sandinista government which overthrew the detested US-backed Somoza regime in 1979. In both countries Reagan has backed a loser in his crusade to smash 'communism' (in reality a negligible force) throughout Central America.

After five years of US-financed and trained terror in Central America, the anti-imperialist forces in El Salvador are thriving and the Sandinista government in Nicaragua survives. This leaves Reagan with only two options. He can call a retreat and face another humiliation. Or he can call in the marines and risk another Vietnam, in a region much closer to home. The more desperate the USA becomes, the more reason the people of Central America have to fear that they may be in line for the 'Apocalypse now' treatment.



The big stick: the guns of USS New Jersey represent US diplomacy in the eighties

● Middle East

America's influence over the Middle East suffered an irreversible setback with the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979. Since then matters have gone from bad to worse. Israel's abortive intervention in Lebanon has cast doubt on the ability of America's only remaining agent in the region to safeguard US interests in this vital strategic area. The growth of militant Islamic movements throughout the Middle East presents a major threat to Western domination. The recession has sparked off social unrest which threatens to uproot the moderate regimes which Washington could once rely on to uphold American interests.

The USA's inglorious intervention in Lebanon ended with the killing of 242 US marines in a Beirut suicide bomb attack during September 1983. This incident confirmed that there was little that the USA could do to shore up a loyal regime in Lebanon short of launching a full-blown war with unpredictable consequences. But what will the USA do if the Iran/Iraq conflict spreads and causes wider disruption in the Gulf? It will have no alternative but to go in — and go in hard.

● South East Asia

In South East Asia, today the world's main growth area, the USA has been edged out by Japan. The current furore over Japanese imports to America shows US products are no match for Japan in the American market, never mind in the Far East. Even developing nations like Singapore and Malaysia have begun to edge the USA out of its former markets in the region. A developing network of economic and political relations between Japan, China and the major markets of the region is a further blow to US influence.

America's main partner in South East Asia, the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, may not last much longer. The 20 000 guerrillas of the left-wing New People's Army are engaged in an increasingly successful war against the government. Large tracts of the southern island Mindanao are in the hands of the insurgents. Yet the USA maintains vital military installations in the Philippines. The collapse of the Marcos regime would blow a hole in US global strategy, a hole that could probably only be filled by American soldiers.

To compensate for its loss of influence around the world the USA is rearming fast. By exploiting America's continuing lead in military technology Reagan hopes to regain the initiative in world affairs. This is the drive behind Star Wars. Reagan's 'strategic defence initiative' helps the USA to keep its rivals in check by introducing a new level of conflict at which the USA has a chance of winning. America's turn to space is a measure of its weakness on earth. It shows that America's survival as a world power has become dependent on its military hardware. Ten years after Vietnam the USA has become a weaker but a potentially more vicious force.

While America's decline creates the danger of more invasions and wars, it also presents great opportunities for the working class movement. It shows that Western domination of the world is crumbling. Rivalry and conflict are undermining the cohesion of the Western powers and limiting their capacity to crush resistance to their rule. Britain, whose decline is far more advanced than that of the USA, is one of the weakest links in the imperialist chain. The chain can be broken if we take on the enemy at home.