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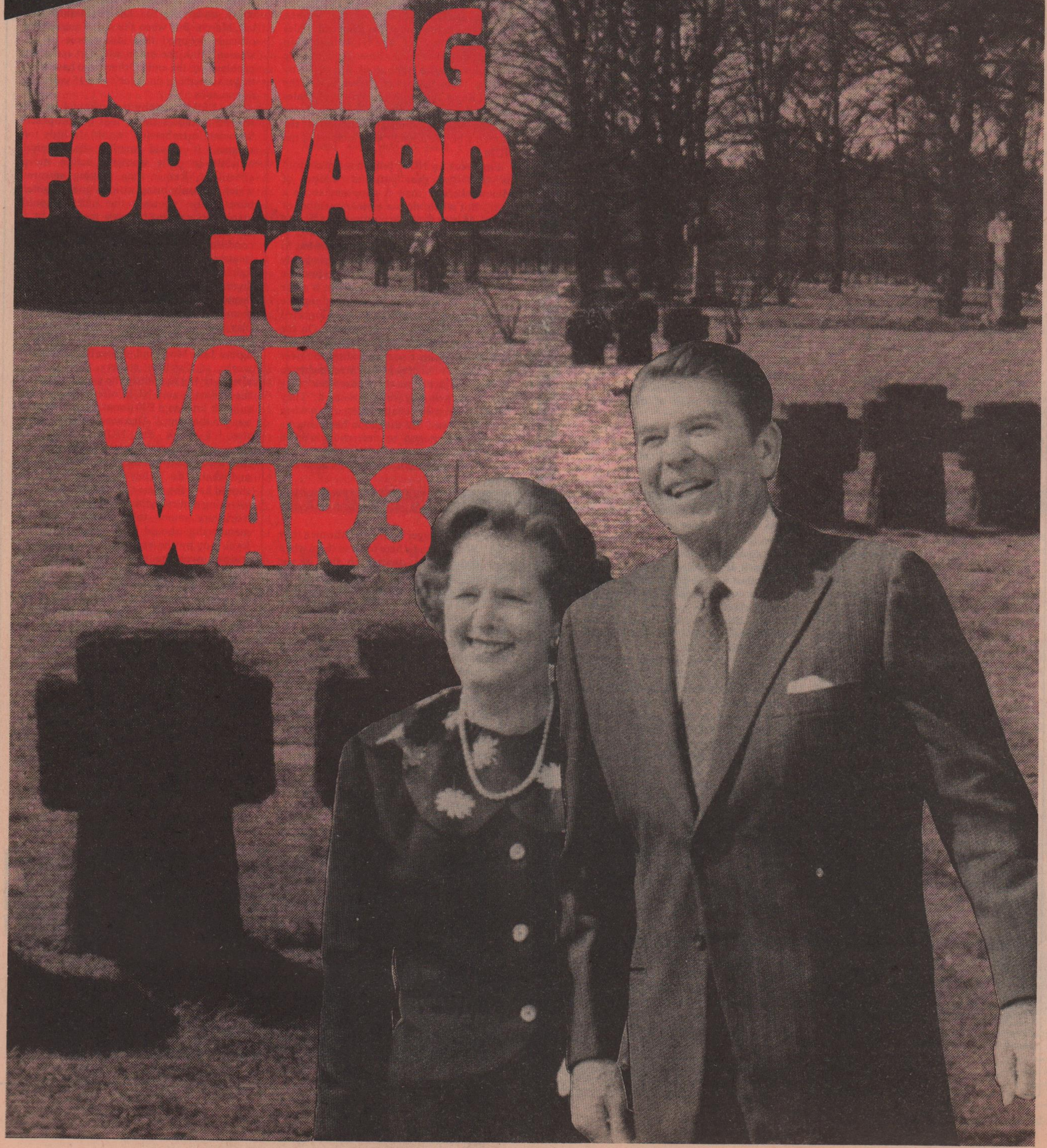
LOOKING FORWARD TO WORLD WAR 3



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The lesser evil

'We defeated fascism 40 years ago, now let's unite to defeat the Thatcher government' runs a current left-wing slogan. The Second World War was a defeat for Germany, but it was a greater defeat for the working class throughout the Western world. The fact that much of the British left celebrates one of the darkest moments in the history of the working class as its finest hour is an indication of the confusion that still surrounds the war years (see pages 6 and 7).

The First World War led directly to the Russian Revolution and the formation of communist parties in every European country. Millions of workers joined the movement to overthrow capitalism and build a communist society. In the early twenties the revolutionary upsurge was contained in the West and the fragile Soviet state was isolated. For the best part of the next three decades the class struggle raged in every Western country. It passed through mass strikes and insurrections, street battles between workers' militias and fascist gangs, civil war, world war and cold war. By the late forties a new world order was established on the ruins of the international working class movement.

The key to the capitalists' victory was their success in corrupting the spirit of international solidarity among working class people. Proletarian internationalism was the founding principle of the Communist International. In every country the central object of the workers' movement was to overthrow its own ruling class. Yet the communist movement recognised that overthrowing the world-wide capitalist system and building a higher form of society demanded the concerted action of the international working class. Workers' internationalism was a mortal threat to the nationalist ideology which gave every capitalist class a hold over the loyalty of its labour movement.

Popular front politics

The overwhelming influence of patriotic anti-fascism in the Second World War marked the triumph of the establishment in the battle of ideas. Anti-fascism meant the abandonment of the goal that had guided every action of the early communist movement. The working class movement now put off the struggle to get rid of capitalism to the future. Instead it directed its fire against a particularly vicious form of capitalist rule, in favour of a more democratic form of exploitation. The labour movement in every country accepted the national goals of its own ruling class as worthy objectives for the working class. Patriotic anti-fascism led millions of workers who had fought long and hard against the bosses into fighting a war on their behalf.

The result was not only that workers were slaughtered in millions on the battlefields and driven like slaves in the munitions factories. As the workers in each country followed their national rulers into war, the international working class movement disintegrated and the anti-capitalist momentum of each labour movement was destroyed. In the post-war years the labour movements in every Western country gave up their historic aim of building a socialist society and for all practical purposes accepted that capitalist society would continue indefinitely. They have since limited their activities to modest parliamentary politics and moderate trade unionism.

The British left today glorifies the Second World War and recommends the anti-Nazi popular front approach. During the war the left chose the lesser evil of Western democracy to German fascism, and followed Churchill into the bloodbath. Today it reduces its horizons to replacing Thatcher with a slightly less reactionary establishment politician. The clearest exponent of this point of view is professor Eric Hobsbawm, a leading member of the old Communist Party with considerable influence in Labour Party circles.

Different ways of dying

'Nobody', Hobsbawm assures us, 'disagrees about the comparative remoteness of a socialist Britain.' The Hobsbawm strategy is to try to make the best of life in a capitalist Britain by opting for any alternative to Thatcherism. Hobsbawm would prefer a coalition government including the Labour Party, the Liberals and the SDP and even Tory wets. His followers prefer Lord Stockton to Thatcher, Peter Walker to Norman Tebbit, even the Bishop of Durham in preference to the Archbishop of Canterbury. But what would be the benefit of these choices to the working class? All these parties and politicians are committed to preserving British capitalism at the expense of the working class. Workers have no interest in choosing between more or less extreme versions of a life of capitalist misery or between different ways of dying on a capitalist battlefield.

Many left wingers who reject Hobsbawm's conclusions share his pessimism and his popular front approach. The left constantly opts for the lesser evil of the choices offered within the existing system. Take the responses of the far left factions to conflicts between left and right in the official labour movement. They choose Tony Benn against Neil Kinnock, Arthur Scargill against Roy Lynk, John McDonnell against Ken Livingstone, Ron Todd against George Wright. But do these choices provide any way forward for the working class? The common feature of 'left-wing' dissidents from Francis Pym to Denis Skinner is their lack of a coherent alternative to the right.

Forty years ago the left chose to fight to defend British democracy against fascism. Today the left chooses left against right in conflicts within the labour movement, in conflicts among the major political parties and even in internal disputes in the Conservative Party. The lesson of the Second World War is that choosing the lesser evil leads the working class to disaster. Now that the leaders of the Western world are preparing their alliances and their weapon systems for a new world war our future depends on not making the same mistake again. The only way forward for the working class is to mobilise our forces to get rid of this system before it gets rid of us. Why choose the lesser capitalist evil when we can choose to build a new world?

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Russell Osborne (reflex)

Left to right: NUM members Corine, Val, Brenda, Margaret, Margaret, Cheryl

Women and the miners

Part of the union?

'When it suits the union we're union members, but when it doesn't we're just canteen staff,' says one of the women workers from the canteen at Prince of Wales colliery in Pontefract. The NUM leadership is proposing to reward women from outside the industry who supported the strike by making them 'associate members' of the union. But a chat with the Prince of Wales women during their afternoon break shows that the union has done little enough for the women who are already *full* members of the NUM.

Last week an NUM branch secretary told us that 'in the National Union of Mineworkers, a man is supposed to be a man'. But where does a woman member of the NUM who works in a pit canteen fit into the union's view of the world?

She's a member of the union so she has to pay full dues, like the men. But she probably doesn't go to many branch meetings because the most prejudiced miners make it clear that she's not welcome. If she's anything like the women at Prince of Wales she supported the strike through 12 long months. On the afternoon we spoke to the women the pit was threatened with another dispute over proposals for harsh new shift arrangements. 'If there's a picket out there next week', they said, 'there's no way we're crossing it.' They have proved their loyalty to the union when it needed them. Yet the union has proved a lot less determined to defend its women members. On every issue they come out worse off than their union brothers who work the pits.

- The women are paid £10-£15 a week less than the basic rate of the lowest grade pit-top worker.
- They work longer hours than the men they feed: 'We have to be here to serve them when they come in at quarter to five in the morning and here with meals when they come out'. That means working eight and a half hours to the men's seven and a quarter.
- The women get just three rest days to the men's eight.
- They don't get any coal allowance.
- If their pit closes they don't have the choice of transferring elsewhere or taking voluntary redundancy which is promised the men. Women workers at pits earmarked for closure, like Ackton Hall and Glass Houghton near Pontefract, face the sack.

The Prince of Wales women have tried to put pressure on the union to fight to improve things: 'We've been to see Johnny Walsh (area agent) and all the rest of them about it. We've only got to see Tom and Jerry now and we'll have seen everybody.' But the NUM has never launched an effective campaign to make the coal board concede the women's demands. The best the union could do was threaten to take the board to court, under the Sex Discrimination Act, last March. But when the strike started the officials dropped that idea. Some of the women think the union will sort out their problems 'in the end'. Others who have tried to get something done for up to 15 years are not so sure.

The NUM's shabby treatment of its full women members shows that the proposed 'associate membership' would do little for women. It would simply allow union officials to stifle women's action more effectively. Rather than making gestures which can only bring women under tighter bureaucratic control, the union should involve its existing women members in a national campaign on jobs, pay and working conditions — and their demands for equal treatment should be a primary aim of the fight. Miners' wives, whose livelihoods depend on the industry as much as any faceworker's, should be made full NUM members and given every opportunity to play their part in taking on the coal board.

'Associate membership isn't enough,' agrees June Moreland, whose husband Alan works at Frickley colliery, 'the union's always trying to control the women. During the strike the area NUM offered to give our support kitchen a £20 donation, but wanted a say in the menu!' Alan sees things the same way: 'I think the NUM leaders are suggesting associate membership now so they'll be able to tell the women where to go and what to do. If they are in the NUM they should have the same rights as the men as far as voting and everything else goes.' Another Yorkshire miner told us that women's membership should be decided 'at branch level, not by the executive. The more real control over the union goes out to the membership, the better it will be.'

There will undoubtedly be opposition from some miners and union officials to the idea of women playing a bigger part in the union. But militants must build on the respect won by miners' wives during the strike to get the argument across. 'A lot of the lads think more of these women in the support groups than they do of the officials at the pit,' says one miner. Alan Moreland knows the strike showed the importance of women fighting alongside the men: 'At the back end of the strike I couldn't go picketing because of my bail conditions, so my wife and her mates went instead and did a good job. It would be an idea if the NUM organised nurseries in the next strike so they can all go.' It would be an even better idea if the NUM acted *now* to turn all its fine words about its women supporters into action.

Jenny Morgan (reflex)

'They want to tell women what to do': Alan and June Moreland

ACTION

South Kirkby on strike

Miners need national action

'If you see a bloke stomping about with a riding crop, that's our pit manager,' said a picket outside South Kirkby colliery last Friday. Around 2000 miners from the Yorkshire pit and neighbouring Ferrymoor-Riddings walked out in protest over the victimisation of two miners in two days last week. Now the miners' willingness to rebel against management's new dictatorial regime needs a national focus to strike back against the coal board. *Mick Hume* reports from Yorkshire.

The South Kirkby strike broke out after manager John Lumb forced through the fourth victimisation at the pit since the end of the 12-month dispute. The walkout signalled that miners' patience was exhausted. When Joey Henry had been victimised within a fortnight of the return to work in March, the South Kirkby men voted to pursue his reinstatement through the long-established appeal procedure. Almost two months and another sacking later, Henry's appeal was going nowhere. After Lumb sent John Connolly and John Page to join Henry in the dole queue last week the South Kirkby miners voted for a different sort of appeal. They walked out and appealed to the union for support.

The South Kirkby management, like coal board agents throughout the mining areas, has ditched all of the traditional procedures for maintaining stable industrial relations. 'Procedure' now means provocation and victimisation of militants. Miners are being sacked at the coal board's equivalent of the supergrass trials in the no-jury courts of Northern Ireland.

Last Monday John Connolly was called into manager Lumb's office. Lumb asked Connolly if he had received the letter sent to all South Kirkby miners, demanding harmonious working relations in the pit. He had. Lumb asked if he had seen the notices posted all around the pit, warning miners what would happen to them if they caused trouble underground. Connolly could hardly have missed them. Lumb then produced a sheet of paper which, he claimed, was a statement from a miner who had broken the strike, accusing Connolly of calling him a scab in the lift taking miners to the coal face. Connolly protested his innocence and 20 of his workmates offered to testify that the incident had never happened. But Lumb wasn't interested. The uncorroborated word of his informer was 'sufficient evidence' of 'verbal abuse' to satisfy the coal board and send Connolly down the road. 'From now on, a scab's word is law around here,' said one striker.

A scab's word may be law but the South Kirkby miners weren't prepared to obey it. The Monday night shift walked out in Connolly's support. On Tuesday Lumb responded by dragging John Page in front of the same kangaroo court and sacking him, again for 'verbal abuse' of scabs. The 1400 South Kirkby miners had had enough. 'That was it for me,' said one, 'it was time to get your coat on and go.' They voted to strike and brought the 500 men from the Ferrymoor-Riddings pit out with them.

The South Kirkby miners' vote to resist the coal board's provocative strategy shows the pitmen's resilience. Despite the defeat in March, a year of hardship, police repression and media abuse during the strike, the fighting spirit of militants has not been crushed. This spirit means it is still possible to organise a coordinated campaign to keep the bosses at bay. Yet the miners' officials are proving unwilling to lead action.

The NUM officials at South Kirkby told the strikers to hold fire on seeking wider support until the union's Barnsley panel had discussed the strike. Instead of organising the strikers to lobby last Wednesday's panel meeting and demand effective action, the branch officials sent a single representative to put South Kirkby's case. The panel decided that branches in the Barnsley area should vote individually on their attitude to the dispute.

Bob Radcliffe (reflex)

Armed with *miners' next step* bulletins, South Kirkby takes on coal board

Many miners saw the panel's decision as a radical appeal to the rank and file. In fact the Barnsley officials were passing the buck back to their members, in a move which could only lead to divisions and strife among branches. The branch-by-branch approach is an even worse version of the area-by-area strategy that left the NUM divided throughout the 12-month dispute. The lack of a clear lead from the top made an uneven response from the branches inevitable. While branches like Royston and Houghton Main voted to back South Kirkby, most decided that nothing could be done.

South Kirkby NUM officials toured local branch meetings to ask for support. But when the strikers passed a resolution to the Yorkshire area council at Barnsley calling for centrally-organised support, their branch officials insisted they 'daren't send it to Barnsley', because it would bring South Kirkby into conflict with the area council — something the branch officials want to avoid above all else. They are determined to avoid an argument with the area leadership, to 'protect the fabric of the union'. But what use is the union's fabric if it can't organise to defend its members when they are victimised by management?

Instead of hiding the resolution calling for action, the branch officials should have sent it off straight away with a few hundred strikers to back up South Kirkby's message to Barnsley. And the campaign shouldn't stop at the Yorkshire area's boundaries. Miners need a national lead to conduct an effective battle against coal board provocations. Branch and area officials must be forced to focus their energies on getting a positive lead from Arthur Scargill and the national executive — not on dissipating the energies of rank and file miners who want to fight.

Many miners' 'low spirits', which local officials everywhere point to as a reason for inactivity, are largely due to the NUM's failure to lead resistance to the coal board's harsh new methods of management. Throughout the coalfields, miners are facing the sort of disciplinary clampdown and worsening conditions which provoked the strike at South Kirkby. Several have lost their lives to the new efficiency drive.

One militant told *tns* about the killing consequences of the board's cuts at Brodsworth colliery a fortnight ago: 'This young banksman had to cover two pit shafts instead of the usual one. He got locked out of the second shed, tried to get in through a tiny window, slipped — and hanged himself.' Another miner recently drowned at South Kirkby itself.

On top of victimisations and cuts in safety cover, the coal board has tried to impose harsh new shift times and differential bonus schemes which will widen the divisions among miners. NUM members, whose anger at the suffering being meted out by the board has sparked off resistance, have found themselves isolated. Frickley miners recently voted to reject a new bonus arrangement, which would have put faceworkers in a different pay league from other NUM members, because as one militant put it 'you don't just grab what's offered by people who've spent the last 12 months taking everything you've got'. But the union's failure to make any hard recommendation as to how its members should vote meant Frickley was the only Doncaster area pit to throw out the proposal. Its chances of resisting the board's divisive scheme alone are slim.

The lack of any national focus for miners to organise around means that pits like South Kirkby, even with the support of neighbouring branches, cannot deal effectively with management's hardline tactics. National NUM officials have a responsibility to lead whatever action is needed to cohere the fight against the board's provocations and victimisations.

CIVIL SERVANTS

Eyes right in Brighton

THE RIGHT WING is set to regain control of the Civil and Public Services Association at the union's national conference in Brighton this week. But the elections won't change much. On the key issues facing civil servants the left has given no lead.

The left first took control in 1982 under the leadership of *Militant* supporter Kevin Roddy. After presiding over stagnating pay and selling out important strikes in Oxford and Birmingham, the left was ousted by moderate Alistair Graham and the right in 1983. Last year the left regained control of the executive and split into two cliques — Militant and the Broad Left 84 group. Rank and file civil servants have come to expect nothing from their left-wing leadership except faction fights.

● Pay cop-out

The left promised to make pay its top priority this year — then led an unconditional surrender to the government's four per cent offer. On 15 March the national executive voted 14 to four to defy the law and take strike action without holding a ballot. Within a week the government had applied to the courts for an injunction, the executive had voted 11 to 10 to obey the law, cancelled the one-day strike planned for 1 April and called for a ballot. Having called a ballot the executive failed to campaign to win it. When the ballot was lost the union leaders announced that there would be no further industrial action.

● Rank and file civil servants cannot afford to leave the fight for decent living standards in the hands of the broad left leaders. We must get together to work out the wages we need and start organising now to make sure we get them.

● Patriots' corner

The left never made any attempt to challenge the patriotic posturing of the civil service unions over the ban on trade union rights at GCHQ last March. Union leaders argued that civil servants are loyal to national security and offered a 'no-disruption' clause which was worse than any no-strike deal. To save face the left threatened a 24-hour general strike if any worker is sacked. Yet when civil servants struck in protest at the ban last March the union leaders didn't want to know. The left's capitulation to the 'more patriotic than thou' approach merely legitimises the government's new witch-hunt against 'subversives'.

● The only way to guarantee trade union rights is to fight for them. The patriotic grovelling of the bureaucrats has undermined effective action against attacks on workers' rights. Activists should organise nationally against all bans and proscriptions.

● Hands down for democracy

CPSA delegates are voting this week on whether to amalgamate with the Society of Civil and Public Servants. The merger is supported by moderates like Graham and most of the Broad Left 84 group. Militant supports the merger in principle, but objects that it will mean that all full-time officials except the general secretary are appointed and not elected. Yet for the past three years it has been more concerned to secure a cosy niche in the union machine than to fight for more accountability and rank and file control.

● Civil servants should reject the merger. We have no interest in allying ourselves with management, nor should we endorse a move which will make our union even more undemocratic. Workers who want to build a fighting union should come to the RCP fringe meeting and join our protest in solidarity with the unemployed (see page 11).

This week Margaret Thatcher said she wanted to create a 'classless society' where everybody owned companies. We are out to create a classless society where companies don't own anybody. Rush donations to our fighting fund at BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques payable to RCP Association.

EVENTS

Kerb crawling Bill

Policing women's lives

This week Tory MP Janet Fookes' Bill to outlaw kerb crawling is being debated in parliament. Predictably, right-wing Tories have given the increased police powers in her Sexual Offences Bill a warm welcome. More surprisingly, many feminists have lent support to Fookes' repressive proposals.

The Sexual Offences Bill creates three new offences: kerb crawling, persistently soliciting women for prostitution and soliciting a woman for sexual purposes in a manner likely to cause her fear. The Bill also raises the maximum penalty for attempted rape to life imprisonment, the same as for actual rape, and raises the maximum penalty for indecent assault on women and girls to 10 years.

The Bill has the support of organisations such as Women Against Rape and Women Against Violence Against Women which have been campaigning on these issues for several years. Fookes has further endeared herself to feminists by stressing her determination to protect women from men. She has played up the argument favoured by many feminists that male harassment keeps women at home. 'It is intolerable in a civilised society', she says, 'that there should be no-go areas for respectable women because of the activities of kerb crawlers, prostitutes, pimps and ponces.' Feminists might balk at the word 'respectable' or at the suggestion that prostitutes are a threat to women's rights, but they have heartily applauded the rest. Fookes has struck a chord with those feminists who blame women's oppression on men in general.

Other women's groups like the English Collective of Prostitutes, which have long called for action to be taken against kerb crawlers, say the new legislation is unnecessary. They argue that the police should put existing law into effect.

By accepting the right of the police to control the streets, both supporters and opponents of the Bill have played into the hands of the law and order lobby backing Fookes. The real purpose of Fookes' Bill is to bolster the Tory campaign for a law and order crackdown. By couching her argument in terms of defending women, Fookes hopes to create a climate which will legitimise more police interference in people's lives.

Fookes' Bill will not prevent women, particularly prostitutes, from being harassed or looked upon as objects by men. As long as women are tied to the family and denied full economic independence, they will be considered inferior and forced to sell themselves to men. The most that this law will achieve is to drive prostitution underground. The main achievement of the Bill is its success in using feminist phrases to win feminist support for state repression.

There is a precedent for Fookes' strategy. In the last two decades of the last century right-wing moralists enlisted feminist support for a series of repressive measures by stressing the 'double standard' which allowed men, particularly rich men, to prey on women and young girls. These measures merely legitimised police harassment of prostitutes in the years leading up to the First World War. It is not too late to challenge Fookes and the rest of the new moralists. But if we are to fight those who support the moral standards and state institutions that maintain women's oppression, we can have no truck with the ideas of the moral majority or the law and order brigade.

John Johnson

Increased police powers won't stop women being degraded or bought and sold by the system

JASMINE BECKFORD CASE

Death in the family

'THE PUBLIC inquiry is really a showtrial,' said one social worker last week as the hearing into the death of Jasmine Beckford got underway amid a storm of publicity. The furore whipped up around the case has targeted incompetent social workers as the problem and not the system that brutalises working class lives.

Four year old Jasmine Beckford died deformed and weighing only 23lbs last July after 10 months of cruelty and neglect. Her stepfather Maurice Beckford was jailed for 10 years last month and her mother Beverly Lorrington received an 18-month sentence for wilful neglect. But according to the establishment press and the courts, the real criminal in the case is Brent social worker Gunn Ann-Marie Wahlstrom.

The killing of Jasmine Beckford provoked a hysterical media reaction and a public panic. 'It was amazing,' said a Wandsworth social worker, 'we had people phoning the office saying "the children next door to us are being battered. The family is black so it must be true". It went on for days.' 'How could it happen?' screamed Fleet Street. The establishment's main concern is to ensure that the blame does not attach to itself. The witch-hunt against social workers is a cover-up for the real cause of family violence and social breakdown — mass unemployment, poverty and cuts in welfare and social services.

Most social workers weren't surprised when the Beckford case blew: 'My first response was god, it could be me,' said one. Every year 6000 names appear on a child-abuse register. The Jasmine Beckford case is significant only in that it has exposed the strains that the recession has placed on the family and the institutions which are meant to keep it together.

Cuts in social services and welfare provision have removed many of the props that once helped to support families. Closure of children's homes, day care nurseries, psychiatric wards and day centres for the mentally and physically handicapped have pushed more burdens on to families. The strain has pushed many families and many women over the edge. Many are forced to get by on meagre state benefits, forced to live in squalid, damp, cramped flats in high rise blocks, and forced out of the labour market through the lack of nursery places. Parents take their frustrations out on each other and on the children. The result is Jasmine Beckford.

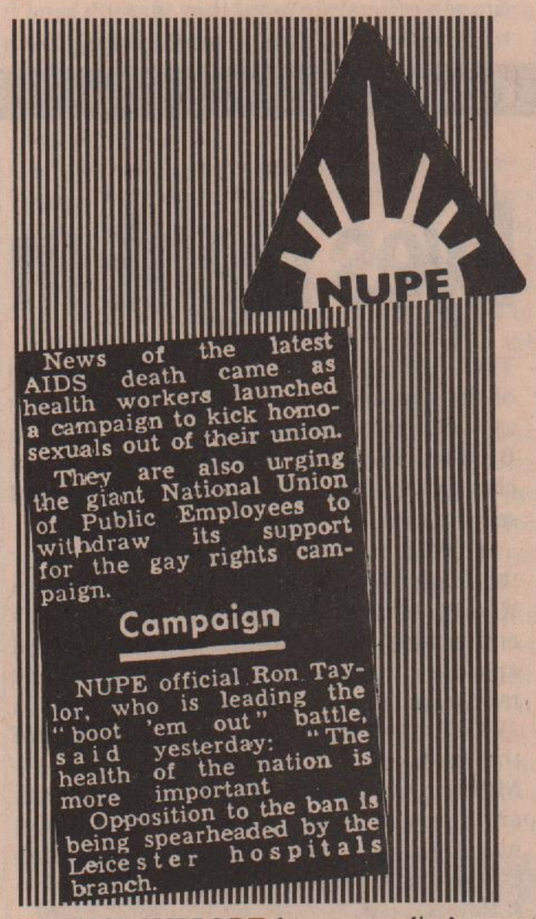
The panic that has greeted the Jasmine Beckford case reflects establishment fears about the fragility of family life and the potential for social breakdown resulting from the recession. The fact that parents can kill their own children goes against everything the family stands for in our society. It strikes horror in many people because they realise how easy it is to go over the edge. It strikes fear in the establishment because if it happens too often people might begin to question a system that drives families to murder their children.

The upshot of the inquiry will be to tighten state control over the lives of working class families by giving social workers more power to intervene. The establishment hopes that the hysteria created around Jasmine's death can be used to justify measures which will help to hold the family institution together and keep control of the most downtrodden sections of the working class. To protect the family the establishment had to find a scapegoat for Jasmine Beckford's death. The media portrayed her black stepfather as an inhuman monster and crucified the social worker who 'didn't do her job properly'. But the people who are really responsible for Jasmine Beckford's death and all the other casualties of the system are still getting away with murder.

Julie Peterson

NUPE CONFERENCE

No bans on gay rights



'IF YOU SUPPORT homosexuality', says Nupe official Ron Taylor, 'you are supporting Aids.' Active workers need to act fast to defend gay rights and challenge anti-gay bigots like Taylor.

Last week Taylor was acclaimed by *The Sun* for his campaign to get gays kicked out of Nupe. Next week he will be urging the union's national conference in Scarborough to drop its token support for gay rights. Taylor is outspoken in his attacks on gays, but he is only a more vocal exponent of prejudices which have deep roots in the British labour movement.

Many trade union officials are capitulating before the establishment drive to stigmatise and isolate gay workers. Charles Maslin, branch secretary of the Greenwich branch of the white collar union Actss, believes that 'homosexuality is perverted'. He has instructed his members to have nothing to do with gays. Similar prejudices have been expressed in the firemen's union, in health unions and in the local government union Nalgo. The failure of the labour movement to stick up for the rights of gay workers has encouraged victimisations and sackings. Robert Hopps, a gay clerical worker, has been suspended from his job at the Medical Research Council for having a blood test because he was worried that he might have Aids.

The unions have helped to isolate gays by fuelling the Aids panic and joining the chorus of establishment voices denouncing gays as deviants deserving of all they get. Ron Taylor's Nupe branch in Boston, Lincolnshire passed a motion before Christmas demanding that the union rescind its commitment to gay rights. 'I think it's a sensible motion', Taylor told us, 'obviously you're not going to shoot anybody — you can shoot animals with rabies — but you can't let it go on and on.'

Taylor is counting on getting a lot of support for his views at the Nupe conference, despite amendments to his motion calling for more education and a campaign to counter the hysterical anti-gay response to Aids. But gay workers in Nupe don't want more education. They want their union to say loud and clear that it will not allow the establishment to divide gays from the rest of the working class, and that it will not tolerate bigots like Ron Taylor in its ranks. Nupe members who want to take a stand against the bigots should come to the *tns* fringe meeting at the conference to organise resistance.

Helen Simons

THE HOLOCAUST

Anti-Jewish conspiracy

AS RONALD REAGAN has found out to his cost over his visit to Bitburg, memories of the Nazi holocaust still provoke strong passions. Now that the holocaust has become the subject of television entertainment, and a visit to a concentration camp has become obligatory for leading Western politicians, we should not let them forget that 40 years ago there was a conspiracy of silence over the extermination of the Jews.

In the thirties anti-semitism became a virulent force throughout central and eastern Europe. In Germany the Nazi party found that anti-semitism was a useful device for channelling popular discontent with the failures of the capitalist system into attacks on a harmless target — the Jews. Leading politicians and businessmen were grateful that outbursts of mass violence were directed against Jewish people rather than against their crisis-ridden system.

For the Nazis, the Jews were a natural target. They stirred up hatred against Jewish traders and money-lenders at a time of profound economic and social crisis. For their lower middle class supporters the Nazis offered to eliminate competition from Jewish businessmen. For their big business backers the attack on the Jews offered a welcome diversion from the anti-capitalist traditions of the German working class. The liquidation of the Jewish population was not the product of a society gone mad. It was part of a calculated final solution to the deep-seated problems of German capitalism.

The Nazis were confident that their attacks on the Jews would have a popular resonance throughout western Europe and the USA. Hitler's right-hand man Goebbels was certain that capitalist leaders the world over would not lose any sleep over the fate of a few million Jews. He was right. In 1938 US president Roosevelt convened a conference at Evian in France which was supposed to be concerned with the fate of Jewish refugees. More than 30 governments were represented. Yet, with the exception of the tiny Dominican Republic, they all agreed that they had no room for the Jews.

The USA imposed strict immigration controls. While millions of Jews were being shipped into the concentration camps, Washington restricted its quota of Jewish immigrants to a few thousand. Boats carrying Jewish fugitives were turned back as they reached the Statue of Liberty. The staunchly anti-Nazi Roosevelt even echoed the anti-semitic prejudices promoted by the Nazis. At the 1943 Casablanca conference he told the French of his plan to 'eliminate the specific and understandable complaints which the Germans bore towards the Jews in Germany, namely that while they represented a small part of the population, over 50 per cent of the lawyers, doctors, school teachers, college professors, etc in Germany were Jews'. Roosevelt insisted that 'the number of Jews engaged in the practice of the professions should be definitely limited'.

Roosevelt was not alone in his sympathy with the 'understandable complaints' of the Nazis. At a meeting between British and American politicians in 1943 the question of saving the Jewish community of Bulgaria was on the agenda. Anthony Eden, a leading cabinet member and future prime minister, declared that 'we should move very cautiously about offering to take all the Jews out of a country like Bulgaria'. He put the British view that if the government helped in Bulgaria, 'then the Jews of the world will be wanting us to make similar offers in Poland and Germany'.

The following year the question of saving the Hungarian Jewish community was raised. 'Save a million Jews?' exclaimed Lord Moyne, 'what shall we do with them? Where shall we put them?' Goebbels can certainly be excused for believing that the extermination of millions of Jews would not raise too many eyebrows in establishment circles among the Allies.

After the event the Allies justified their indifference to the extermination of the Jews on the grounds that 'we didn't know what was going on'. This evasion of a share of responsibility for the holocaust does not stand close examination. From October

1941 onwards there was a regular stream of reports about the death camps. A group of senior officials in the US state department led by Breckenridge Long organised the suppression of this information. Roosevelt waited until late 1944 when millions had already died to publicise the liquidation of European Jewry.

The Churchill government colluded in the conspiracy of silence. Despite repeated requests from 1941 onwards, the British government refused to order the bombing of railway lines leading to Auschwitz. Britain's despicable role was further exposed after the war ended and news of the genocide became public knowledge. In 1945 some 100 000 survivors of the concentration camps were left to rot in Germany and Austria. The main concern of the Attlee Labour government was to keep these refugees out of Britain. Given the indifference of the West to the plight of Jewish refugees it is not surprising that Jews were still dying in anti-semitic pogroms in Poland as late as 1946.

One of the ironies of history is the way in which the Zionist establishment became a beneficiary of the holocaust. Throughout the war some Zionist leaders participated in the conspiracy of silence about the death camps. They looked upon the holocaust as a vindication of their idea that the survival of the Jewish people depended on the establishment of an independent Jewish state. They saw the historic tragedy of Hitler's Germany as their most powerful argument for setting up the state of Israel. History has shown that the existence of Israel has provided no security against anti-semitism. The memory of the victims of the holocaust has been used to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people.

Today even the most hardened anti-semite feels obliged to denounce the excesses of Hitler's policy. But as long as capitalism continues the conditions for another holocaust will continually be re-created. Back in 1938, when nobody wanted to know, one man spoke with tremendous insight about the impending tragedy: 'It is possible to imagine without difficulty what awaits the Jews at the mere outbreak of the future war. But even without war the next development of world reaction signifies with certainty the physical extermination of the Jews.'

Leon Trotsky identified not only the danger but also the only way of averting it. 'Only audacious mobilisation of the workers against reaction', he continued, 'can provoke a change in the relations of forces, stop the world wave of fascism, and open a new chapter in the history of mankind.' Only those who set about the task of overthrowing capitalism can ensure that the holocaust never happens again.

Frank Richards

NORTHERN IRELAND ELECTIONS

War voting

RATE-CAPPING AND the cuts will not be issues in next week's local council elections in Northern Ireland. Voters will be taking a stand on the issue that overshadows all others — the British occupation and the armed struggle to bring it to an end.

Nor is there any controversy about the balance of forces between the two main camps — the Loyalists who uphold the British connection and the nationalists who want a united Ireland. The creation of the Six Counties state in 1920 ensured a permanent Loyalist majority, and a system of manipulated electoral boundaries has guaranteed Loyalist control over most local councils ever since. Only two of the 26 district councils are at present under nationalist control. The main interest in the elections lies in the battle within each camp over how the war should be fought.

'Put Sinn Fein out of business,' says James Molyneux of the Official Unionists, claiming that Sinn Fein is just a front for the IRA Army Council. 'Smash Sinn Fein, annihilate the terrorists,' says Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionists. It is difficult for outsiders to see much difference between the two major parties contesting for the Loyalist vote. Both parties are critical of the British government for being too soft on republicans and for engaging in talks with Dublin politicians about Northern Ireland. The middle class and respectable Official Unionists dislike the vulgar populist style of Paisley's party. But the differences are of emphasis — both parties share the bigotry and prejudice that sustains Britain's allies in Northern Ireland.

'Victory is out,' John Hume told the recent conference of his Social Democratic and Labour Party. The SDLP condemns the IRA's armed resistance to the British forces in the hope that the British authorities will bring 'peace, stability, agreement, consensus and partnership'. Hume is the British establishment's favourite representative of the nationalist community. The government has pumped money into projects in his Derry constituency to bolster up his support. He is also popular with Dublin politicians who fear the consequences of Sinn Fein's electoral success spilling over the Border.

The SDLP's problem is that its popularity at home is much more precarious than its leader's status abroad. Intensifying British terror over the past four years has driven more and more nationalists towards Sinn Fein, forcing the SDLP to take greater account of anti-British sentiment. Party leaders have criticised the murderous excesses of the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Army's use of plastic bullets and the routine strip searches of republican prisoners in Armagh jail. The SDLP now calls for measures to stop discrimination against Catholics and for the right to fly the Irish flag and use the Irish language in public places. But on the key issue of the war, the SDLP remains a party of treachery and surrender.

Sinn Fein, with only three councillors at present, is the central focus of the 1985 council elections. The Loyalist parties vie to display their commitment to destroying it and the SDLP's energies are devoted to limiting the damage Sinn Fein is expected to cause to its traditional support. Sinn Fein is the centre of attention because of its close association with the organisation that is at the centre of the Irish War — the IRA. The voters in the nationalist ghettos of Northern Ireland who vote for Sinn Fein on 15 May will be voting their support for the IRA's armed struggle against British rule. This is why Sinn Fein's electoral success sends shudders up the spines of Britain's supporters in Belfast and Dublin. It exposes the central myth of the Irish War — that the IRA are a bunch of crazed psychopaths without any popular support.

Watch the polls on 15 May and see the extent of popular support for resistance to British rule in Northern Ireland. Watch out too for the sickened expression and pathetic excuses of British minister Douglas Hurd, the man Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams rightly calls the leading representative of the political wing of the British Army in Ireland.

Carol Taggart

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

HOCUS POCUS

When Ian Paisley stated that Prince Charles' visit to the Vatican 'threatened to undermine the constitutional position of the throne' nobody took him very seriously. It was treated as one of big Ian's familiar outbursts of bigotry against any dealings with the 'scarlet whore of Babylon', that 'son of perdition'. But Paisley had a point.

The 1701 Act of Settlement forbids those who may inherit the crown to 'be reconciled to or hold communion with the See or Church of Rome'. This law was introduced following the expulsion of Catholic King James II by Paisley's hero William of Orange, to ensure that none of James' descendants inherited the throne. The English monarch is also the governor general of the established church and official defender of the Reformed Protestant Religion. Paisley the Free Presbyterian is right — the founding principle of the British monarchy is anti-Catholicism.

The two central issues of conflict between Rome and Canterbury are the status of the Pope and the Mass. For Catholics the Pope is the supreme representative of Christ on Earth and the Mass is a representation of the blood sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. For Protestants the Pope is at best an impostor and at worst Paisley's anti-Christ. They have never accepted that bread and wine undergo 'transubstantiation' into the flesh and blood of Christ on the pronunciation of a few words in Latin. The term 'hocus pocus' came into use as a Protestant skit on the Catholic ritual.

Despite these apparently weighty theological differences, the churches of England and Rome have been drawing together in recent years. Falling gates all around and a common commitment to preserving religious mystification in an increasingly godless world have led to a new spirit of ecumenism. Special joint doctrinal commissions have set about fudging all the old controversies. When most Anglicans go along with implausible stories like the virgin birth and the resurrection it seems churlish to begrudge the Pope his infallibility and his magical powers. When both Anglican and Catholic theologians question these basic articles of faith there seems little point in maintaining the ancient schism.

So Charles, known since his approval of his cousin's marriage to well-known Catholic Princess Michael to be soft on papists, went off to meet the Pope *and* to go to Mass in Rome. This was too much for the Anglican old guard led by the current governor general of the Church of England, Charles' mother, the Queen. Backed, according to the *Daily Star*, by 'the highly talented' Prince Philip, the Queen put her foot down on Chas and Di getting involved in any papist hocus pocus. The Queen's precipitate action may have saved the integrity of the succession, but it has provoked another schism in the British establishment — a split between Kensington Palace and Buckingham Palace.

On the side of the Sloane Rangers stand Charles, the notoriously high church Queen Mother and her oily Catholic friend Norman St John Stevas. This camp has the support of mystic and author Laurens van der Post, oil billionaire Armand Hammer and Welsh philosopher Neil Kinnock. Meanwhile up the Mall the Queen is rallying the Anglican establishment, the Grantham bible scholar Margaret Thatcher with the dubious support of Ulster's answer to the bible belt, Ian Paisley.

The moral of this story is that Anglican princes who sup with the Pope need a very long spoon.

The myths of the Second World War

The Second World War resolved two decades of economic depression and political upheaval and reorganised the world order – at a cost of more than 50 million lives. Yet 40 years later the real history of the war remains shrouded in myth.

The Allies' 'anti-fascism'

The notion that Britain went to war in 1939 to defend democracy against fascism has become widely accepted. The concept of the anti-fascist war has had a profound effect on people's attitudes to the prevailing system of society and the state. The First World War generated widespread anti-war sentiment, pushing many thousands of workers into the fight to destroy capitalism. The Second World War did not provoke a similar response. Most workers supported the war believing it was being fought in defence of democracy. The 'anti-fascist' war united the nation more than ever before.

Winston Churchill, a Tory reactionary, became the most popular politician in modern British history. The Union Jack, previously regarded as an emblem of reaction, became a popular national symbol, proudly paraded at left-wing meetings and demonstrations. Patriotism became acceptable even among the most left-wing workers, because it was identified with the destruction of the vicious Hitler regime. Left-wing parties became the most enthusiastic supporters of the war effort — none more so than the Communist Party of Great Britain, then still an influential organisation among militant workers. Anti-fascism blotted out all political differences and mobilised the working class for war on an unprecedented scale. Anti-fascism was crucial for Britain's war effort. But why did Britain really go to war?

'We lived on bluff from 1920 to 1939', said top British diplomat Alexander Cadogan in 1941, 'but it was eventually called.' After their victory in the First World War Britain and France had carved up the Turkish Ottoman empire and Germany's former colonies under the terms of the Versailles peace treaty. Yet this settlement could not guarantee lasting stability among the big powers. The Versailles deal gave France and Britain much greater power than they merited given their declining economic strength. For the next 20 years Britain and France 'lived on bluff'. Meanwhile the more dynamic economies of the USA, Japan and Germany, extended their influence in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and South America.

The world recession turned smouldering grievances into fierce conflicts over markets, sources of raw materials and foodstuffs. Britain stepped up trade with the countries within its old empire to compensate for its decline in other areas. German businessmen set their sights on eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, while Japan moved into China and South East Asia. The USA, whose industrial growth and economic reserves far exceeded those of the other powers, extended its trade and investment throughout the world.

The new pattern of world relations provides the key to the military conflict which eventually ensued. There were three main power blocs. There were the clapped-out veterans Britain and France. There were the impetuous upstarts Germany, Japan and Italy. And there was the giant USA whose economic muscle, geographical size and aloofness from old world squabbles put it into a class of its own.

Each country had its own problems which dictated its pre-war policies. Britain and France desired nothing more than to maintain a status quo which reflected their past glories rather than their current decline. Their main objective was to hang on to the colonial empires which gave them a big stake in the exploitation of the Third World. Given their economic weakness

Myth 1: Britain and the Allies went to war to fight fascism

at home and their far-flung overseas interests, they could only achieve their objectives by winning allies. The old ruling classes preferred the methods of collaboration with the labour movement to the repressive approach of the newer capitalist powers. Unlike the aggressive newcomers, Britain and France relied heavily on diplomacy and manoeuvre to preserve their interests. Hence the old imperial robbers and warlords could rest on a 'peace-loving' face to

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Tommy Atkins, British soldier, picks up another trophy for John Bull, British capitalist: millions of European workers died to defend the 'democracy' favoured by British exploiters against the fascism to which the German establishment had resorted

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War with the objective of strengthening its position by manipulating its allies to weaken the long-standing competitors it now labelled its 'political enemies'. British politicians steadfastly pursued this pragmatic strategy.

Throughout the thirties Britain did its best to avoid being dragged into war too early by pursuing a conciliatory approach towards Germany, Japan and Italy. This tactic of 'appeasement' has traditionally been interpreted as a symptom of a lack of resolve on the part of the British establishment. The Labour Party, always keen to display its patriotism, made great play out of denouncing the treacherous appeasers. Prime minister Neville Chamberlain, who maintained cordial relations with Hitler until the eve of the war, bore the brunt of the left's patriotic indignation.

In reality Chamberlain and his team pursued the only rational course available — keeping Britain's options open. They were far more aware of the fragility of the British position than their left critics, and their policy was to conduct a holding operation. Hence Britain turned a blind eye to Japan's annexation of northern China in 1932, to Italy's seizure of Ethiopia in 1935 and to Germany's invasions of the Rhineland (1935), Austria (1936) and Czechoslovakia (1938). Even when Japan invaded the British enclave of Tsientsin in China in March 1939 and subjected the British populace to public strip-searches and other humiliations, there was no interference from London.

Britain's strategy of staying out of trouble and where possible exploiting tensions among its rivals was the only one consistent with the

Myth 3: The liberation of Europe was also a liberation for the working class

capacities of a feeble and overstretched imperialist power. The wisdom of this course of action was fully confirmed by Britain's military performance once action became inevitable.

Neither love of democracy nor hatred of fascism played any part in British policy. Britain's relations with its rivals were based on pragmatic and carefully calculated strategic considerations.

Fighting Hitler – and fighting one another

Hitler's invasion of Poland on 3 September 1939 — a calculated provocation of Britain and France — finally sparked off the inevitable conflagration. During the first nine months the war centred on Europe and bore all the hallmarks of a traditional European great power conflict. But this phase — often rightly called the 'phoney war' because very little serious fighting took place — was only the prelude to a new type of war. The global conflict which ensued was of unprecedented ferocity and complexity. It extended over three major theatres: Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and the Far East. And it involved far more than the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The objective of defeating Germany and Japan united Britain and the USA in the war effort. After Hitler's invasion of Russia in June 1941 the Soviet Union joined the anti-Hitler coalition and waged the decisive campaign against Germany which tied down six million German soldiers in the Russian steppes until their eventual defeat at Stalingrad in November 1942. But for Britain and the USA defeating Hitler was only one of many objectives. While Stalin did a good job of containing the German advance in Russia, the Western allies had the leisure to pursue broader long-term goals. The 'anti-fascist' war was considerably prolonged as the Allies took the opportunity to settle scores with one another.

A concerted effort by the Allies could have defeated Hitler within a year of Stalingrad. Personal records of top Nazis confirm that by the end of 1941 Hitler was well aware that he could not defeat Russia and that Germany's fight to become the dominant world power was lost. Yet it was not until late 1943 that the USA and Britain embarked on a leisurely offensive against Germany in the European theatre.

While millions were dying on the battlefields and in the concentration camps, the Allies began a series of delicate negotiations concerning the shape of the world after the war. Following America's entry into the war after Japan's attack on the US base at Pearl Harbour in December 1941, US president Franklin D Roosevelt published the Atlantic Charter, a document which laid down America's war aims. The Charter demanded — in liberal anti-colonial terms — that the French and British empires be dismantled and the Third World be opened up to free trade. With the Charter the American ruling class gave notice that it intended to run the show after the war. Discreetly but firmly, the USA made clear to its allies that the price of US support in the war was world power after the war was over.

Conflicts among the 'anti-fascist' allies absorbed much of the energies of Western leaders between 1941 and 1944. The Middle East became the focus of rivalry among Britain, France and the USA. America muscled into Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia to break British and French control. As Roosevelt put it in 1944, America 'must adopt a policy of positive action in Iran, with a view to facilitating not only the war operations of the USA in that country, but also a sound post-war development'. Meanwhile British troops moved against French forces in Lebanon and Syria.

In South East Asia US troops were under orders not to interfere with the expulsion of French forces by the Japanese. 'The case of Indochina is perfectly clear,' said Roosevelt in 1944. 'France has milked it for 100 years,' he declared, and now it was America's turn. Using its control over the funds which financed the Allies' war effort the USA sought to take maximum advantage of the enfeebled condition of its rivals. The USA cynically prolonged the war to weaken its European allies and thus put the USA in a stronger position at the close of the war. At the Casablanca conference in January 1943 Roosevelt declared that nothing less than Germany's unconditional surrender would satisfy the USA. This demand had the effect of uniting the German nation behind Hitler as it had never been before. It ensured that the war dragged on to the considerable benefit of the USA.

The Allies were united against Hitler only to the extent that they had a common interest in frustrating the ambitions of German capitalism to become the dominant world power. Once this had been achieved in the early stages of the war, the rest of the conflict was devoted to resolving the final shape of the post-war order under American domination.

Whose victory in Europe?

The ruling class has good cause to celebrate VE Day because it marked the beginning of the restoration of stable capitalist domination over Europe. The final push against Germany was only undertaken well after the division of the spoils of the slaughter had been settled at the conference tables at Tehran (1943) and Moscow and Yalta (1944) by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. The main concern which finally led to the Allies' invasion of Europe in 1944 was the desire to halt the rapid westward advance of the Soviet army. The British and Americans were particularly concerned to restore control in France and Italy and other areas vacated by the German retreat, when popular anti-fascist movements were beginning to take over the functions of government.

Despite its economic devastation and enormous loss of life, the Soviet Union emerged well out of the conflict with Hitler. Its armies had pushed the Germans back as far as the Elbe and most of the resistance and anti-imperialist movements throughout the world gave their allegiance to Moscow. The survival of the Soviet Union was a major disappointment to Churchill and Roosevelt who had hoped that Germany and Russia would finish each other off. Instead the Allies had to race across Europe to restore control before the Soviet armies and communist-influenced resistance movements became a new threat to the planned post-war order.

Stalin however proved to be a reasonable customer. In exchange for a share in the loot — Eastern Europe — the Soviet leader endorsed the imperialist carve up and turned a blind eye to US and British atrocities against people who had looked to the Soviet Union as a force for liberation. With Stalin's consent British forces moved into Greece in December 1944 and slaughtered the anti-imperialist movement. Soviet assistance proved invaluable to the Western powers in restoring capitalist control in Europe and beyond.

Victory in Europe in May 1945 ushered in a period of fierce repression against the working class. In Italy, France and Germany the Allies moved in, banning trade unions and workers' parties. Striking workers and left-wing militants were mercilessly hounded by the occupation forces. Stalin's loyal communist parties generally lent a helping hand, exhorting workers to leave the class struggle for later and to buckle under to rebuild the capitalist economy. The liberation of Europe brought no freedom for the working class.

In the Third World the defeat of fascism and the establishment of the new world order was a prelude to terror on a scale which dwarfed even the horrors of the Second World War. The nuclear bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki which ended the war in the Pacific in August 1945 set the tone for imperialist wars in the Middle East, Korea and South East Asia in the post-war era. For millions of people throughout the world the end of the war in 1945 meant the beginning of a more vicious phase of imperialist rule.

The 'forty years of peace' which began in 1945 was above all peace for the capitalist class to resume the business of exploitation free from the pressures of instability at home and rivalry abroad. The legacy of the Second World War was that of a defeated working class and an invigorated international capitalist order. The myths of the Second World War still obscure what really happened in those terrible years. Exploding these myths is the best guarantee that we never again let them bail out their rotten system through the slaughter and degradation of millions. The urgency of this task of demystification cannot be overstated at a time when the leaders of the Western world are using the anniversary of the Second World War to prepare for a third.

Sabena Norton

Nicaragua

'Only a military solution'

Last Wednesday president Reagan announced a total economic blockade against the radical Sandinista government in Nicaragua. On Thursday 3000 US marines, backed by paramilitaries and combat aircraft, launched major 'invasion exercises' on the northern coastline of neighbouring Honduras. Reagan may have lost the congress vote on aid to the anti-Sandinista contra rebels, but he is still out to crush Nicaraguan resistance to US domination.

Reagan's blockade announcement at the Bonn economic summit was received in frosty silence by America's allies. The rulers of Europe and Japan fear that stepping up the offensive against the Sandinistas will only increase tension in Central America. The more aggressive stance of the Reagan administration has also provoked dissent within the American establishment. Reagan's defeat in the vote on his $14m aid package for the contras indicated the growing anxiety over the scale of America's engagement in Nicaragua. Memories of the traumatic defeat in Vietnam reinforce American fears of another long, bloody and unpredictable conflict.

But while Reagan's critics grumble about his high-risk strategy, they have no quarrel with his starting point — that the USA can brook no independent radical government in Central America. Within days of the congress vote Reagan's Democratic Party opponents ruefully admitted that they would like to 'reconsider' their views on aid to the contras. Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega's trip to Moscow to request further Soviet aid in late April was, they felt, a 'rebuke to congress' which called for a stern reply. Liberal misgivings vanish when it comes down to the fundamental issue of America's right to dominate the impoverished nations on its southern flank.

The US blockade against Nicaragua and the manoeuvres in neighbouring Honduras represent a new stage in the campaign of terror unleashed to dislodge the popular Sandinista government. They are meant to drive home the message that the prevarications of fainthearted congress politicians will not deter the US administration from using whatever methods it sees fit to protect its interests in the region. The purpose of the Honduran manoeuvres, according to the official White House communique, is to provide US forces with 'realistic combat training'. What they are training for is the big question hanging over Central America.

'Our credibility would collapse'

For five years the world's biggest power has tried to pound Nicaragua into the dust. The tiny country, with a population of three million and an air force consisting of 12 antiquated Soviet aircraft, has paid dearly for resisting its powerful neighbour. Its ports have been mined and its farms and crops burnt by America's mercenaries. Last year almost a quarter of Nicaragua's produce was lost through war damage. Why is the USA so determined to crush this weak impoverished nation?

America initially adopted a neutral attitude to the Sandinista movement which overthrew Nicaraguan dictator Somoza in 1979. The USA sent some aid and launched negotiations in an attempt to stitch up an advantageous deal with the country's new rulers. But American attitudes soon changed when it became clear that Nicaragua wished to pursue a programme of social and economic reform and its own foreign policy, free from US interference. Soon after his inauguration president Reagan launched his crusade against 'communism' in Nicaragua and by 1981 the contras — led by former members of Somoza's National Guard — were armed with US funds and advisers.

Under Reagan Central America became the focus for the redirection of American foreign policy after the humiliating setbacks in Vietnam and the Middle East during the seventies. The presumed threat of communist subversion south of the US border was chosen as an issue around which American power and combat readiness could be reasserted. At home Reagan used the campaign against Nicaragua to re-educate the nation in the values of anti-communism and militarism. The launch of an aggressive campaign against subversion in Central America was Reagan's answer to the problems posed by the decline of American capitalism and its influence in the world.

Reagan's strategy means taking risks. He has staked the reputation of American power on its capacity to destroy the Sandinistas and the anti-imperialist movements in El Salvador and Guatemala. Reagan summed up his approach in a famous speech in April 1983: 'The national security of all the Americas is at stake in Central America. If we cannot defend ourselves there, we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere. Our credibility would collapse, our alliances would crumble and the safety of our homeland would be put in jeopardy.'

Guns against imperialism: Nicaraguan forces have repelled US-backed contras

The problem for the American establishment is that its attempts to subdue the people of Central America have deepened hostility and resistance to US domination.

Big war

In Nicaragua US military pressure forced the Sandinistas to mobilise all national resources for the defence of the country in the war against the contras. The war has imposed drastic economic sacrifices on Nicaragua's workers and peasants. But during the past six months the Sandinista forces have scored major successes against the US-backed insurgents. The contras have been driven out of most of their former strongholds. Even American politicians admit that the contras are all but defeated.

This turn of events has been a major blow to US prestige and presents Reagan with difficult choices. What started off as a 'splendid little war' which the president felt confident of winning, now looks set to become a big one. To rebuild the contras a major injection of funds, equipment and advisers is required which will cost much more than the paltry $14m so hotly debated in congress. Any such increased involvement will raise the stakes further for the USA.

American intransigence in Nicaragua is also beginning to wear down its friends in Central America. The Contadora initiative, an attempt by Mexico and other Central American countries to mediate in a conflict which threatens to destabilise their own regimes, has come to nothing. By forcing the Sandinistas to call elections last November, the Contadora countries hoped to weaken the radical government, paving the way for negotiations with the contras and a sell-out to the USA. But the Sandinistas won the elections hands down and the contras are no longer a credible force. The determination of the Nicaraguan people to end US domination leaves little scope for mediation.

Recent events in Honduras are even more alarming for the USA. This country is the main bastion of US influence in Central America, containing major US military facilities and the contras' bases and training camps. Honduran president Suazo Cordoba faces growing resistance to the American presence and to his own corrupt dictatorship. Opposition to Cordoba is spreading in the armed forces and among middle class layers. Rumours of an impending coup are rife. The US despatched its 3000 marines to Honduras last week to counter this dangerous trend.

Reagan's critics at home and abroad are terrified by the spread of instability throughout Central America. They recognise that the escalation of the American offensive in the region threatens to create even greater unrest. But they have no alternative to the recent declaration made by George Shultz, that 'if other policy alternatives fail there can only be a military solution'.

The Nicaraguan people have shown great courage and determination in the fight against the world's biggest power. Their recent military successes show what even a small and ill-equipped nation can achieve against the armed might of the West. But they cannot hold out on their own for ever. They depend on our solidarity.

Keith Tompson

FIGHTING APARTHEID IN BRITAIN

Solidarity with South African miners!

'BLACK BLOOD ON British hands — smash apartheid now!' was the cry that rang out on the Revolutionary Communist Party's picket in solidarity with 16 000 sacked black South African miners last week.

The lively and vocal protest outside the central London headquarters of the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa didn't go down too well with the city bosses. Our slogan demanding reinstatement for every sacked miner brought the entire staff running to barricade the doors and call for police reinforcements.

A week earlier two of South Africa's biggest gold and uranium mining companies — Anglovaal and the Anglo-American Corporation — sacked more than 16 000 miners. Some have since been reinstated but many have been transported back to the homelands and many militants have been victimised. This was the employers' response to a demand for a wage rise.

The vicious response of the South African mineowners shows the limitations of the celebrated reforms in the apartheid regime. Anglo-American boss Harry Oppenheimer has an international reputation as a critic of apartheid. He is a leading voice among businessmen and politicians in South Africa and abroad calling for the removal of some

Chris Black (reflex)

of the restrictions of apartheid and for 'peaceful change in South Africa'.

The employers' desire for change does not extend to paying decent wages to black workers. Their interest in reforms goes as far as measures to try to defuse the revolt against the apartheid system and allay the anxieties of foreign investors. When workers take action the bosses respond with the familiar weapons of the South African state — mass sackings and police terror.

The names of South Africa's mining companies reflect the stake held by Britain in the apartheid system. Our picket was called to expose British complicity in apartheid and to demonstrate that workers here can best show solidarity with the South African masses by taking a stand against the British bosses and the British state at home. We should expose the hypocrisy of British politicians who criticise apartheid but uphold a system which depends on the profits squeezed out of the black workers of South Africa.

REVIEWS

GAYS ON FILM

The fears of San Francisco

Robert Epstein (director), *The times of Harvey Milk,* Everyman, Hampstead

Harvey Milk was gay. In 1977 at his fourth attempt he was elected to the Board of Supervisors at San Francisco City Hall. It was a milestone in the fight for gay rights. Within a year he had pushed through a Bill making it illegal to sack workers on the grounds of their homosexuality. He played a leading role in the defeat of the 'Briggs initiative' which sought to remove gay teachers from Californian schools.

Within a year too he was dead, assassinated by right-wing loser Dan White, one of the other 12 supervisors. On the day Harvey Milk died 45 000 people marched in a spontaneous candle-lit demonstration. This moving documentary is an account of Harvey Milk's life and death, and his charm, dynamism and talent shine throughout.

Harvey Milk was the owner of a small camera store who became a community politician. He appealed not just to gays, but to all of San Francisco's ethnic minorities and underdogs, including, in his own words, 'perhaps the rank and file trade unionists, not the union leaders though'. He was an unconventional conventional politician and his constituency was not unlike the one Ken Livingstone's GLC has tried to mobilise in Britain. But while Milk may have shared some of the limitations of the community approach he certainly would not have fitted into the machine politics of the Labour Party. With a duplicator at the back of his rundown store and his lesbian motorcyclist agent and the rest of his chaotic team, he was the genuine article. However broad his base, it was undoubtedly the growing number and confidence of the San Francisco gays that put him in office.

The film relies too much on the talking heads of Milk's friends and a glutinous 'portrait of a legend' voiceover is just unnecessary. While these devices help to get over the tremendous sense of waste and loss provoked by his death, more of the context in which he worked would have been welcome. The film's real strength lies in the emphasis it gives to Milk's murderer and his fate. Former cop and fireman Dan White was elected on a law and order ticket, but he was systematically outmanoeuvred by Milk and the new liberal mayor George Moscone. After 10 months he resigned in a sulk. When he was refused reappointment he climbed through a window at City Hall, emptied his gun into Moscone, reloaded, crossed the building and did the same to Milk.

A selected jury decided that the murder was not premeditated, that White had diminished responsibility (induced in part by eating too much junk food) and he ended up serving five and a half years. He is now alive and well on parole in Los Angeles. On the announcement of this verdict San Francisco gays rioted and burned what they could lay their hands on. No doubt in the spirit of Milk's own views, several of his former supporters dissociate themselves in the film from this response. But they do not indicate any superior strategy for tackling the enormous institutionalised prejudice facing gay people in the America of Anita Bryant and the rampant moral majority.

The times of Harvey Milk is well worth going to see, and it is worth pondering too how his politics might have evolved had not the barbarian cut him down.

Pat Ford

THEATRE

Romantic revolutionary?

Archie Hind, *Shoulder to shoulder,* directed by Robert Robson, touring

Cumbernauld Theatre Company's new play brings to life the revolutionary oratory of John Maclean against the background of the unofficial strike movement on the Clyde during the First World War. It portrays Maclean's career as an anti-war agitator, an organiser of the unemployed, and a communist.

Maclean denounces the war as 'this murder business' from soapboxes, on street corners and from the dock. The three versatile actors who make up the cast swap caps for bowlers, and police helmets for judges' wigs, giving the impression of a cast of thousands. Their energetic performance lends conviction to Maclean's own judgement that he lived in 'the rapids of revolution'.

Shoulder to shoulder dwells too much on Maclean the man. Maclean was a remarkable individual. Lenin thought so and appointed him first Bolshevik consul for Scotland. But by dwelling on Maclean's personal life and the friction between him and his wife, the play trivialises the struggle and reduces the movement of which Maclean was a part to a mere backdrop for an off-beat love story — a sort of red Mills and Boon.

Martin Stone

POLITICAL TRIALS

Judges and juries

Peter Hain, *Political trials in Britain,* Penguin 1984, pbk £3.50

Peter Hain has been on the receiving end of British justice. In 1972, he was arraigned on conspiracy charges for organising the 'Stop the Boks' campaign against the touring South African rugby team. In 1975, he was framed on a charge of bank robbery. His book contains a useful review of the growth of the police force and all aspects of the judicial system.

The best part of *Political trials* is the chapter on the jury system. Hain shows that the apparently democratic institution of the jury is subordinated to the reactionary on the bench. When Clive Ponting put his acquittal down to '12 ordinary people', many celebrated the vitality of the jury system. Hain indicates that such perverse verdicts 'are also a vital source of legitimacy for the legal system'. Even the most bigoted judges support the jury system because it makes it appear that the rule of law is imposed through the judgement of ordinary citizens.

The book's weakness lies in Hain's contention that, through the abuse of their discretionary privilege, the courts act to enforce their own interests without reference to parliament. Hain separates the repressive arm from the rest of the state. He presents parliament as the guardian of democracy while judges strive to resist change. This ignores the fact that every law passed by parliament is designed to shore up a reactionary system of which the judiciary is only a part. By counterposing the elected MPs of parliament to the unelected judges, Hain forgets that elections merely allow the establishment to swap one set of exploiters for another.

Andy Clarkson

SEX

Love in chains

Deidre Sanders, *The woman book of love and sex,* Sphere books, London 1985, pbk £1.95

Woman magazine's survey of 15 000 women's experience of sex and marriage is the raw material for this fascinating study. It discusses the frustration, fears and estrangement which women experience in sexual relations. Problems in this intimate sphere of life tend to be seen as a matter of individual failure, and often give rise to feelings of guilt and inadequacy. *The woman book of love and sex* shows that the problems are universal and rooted in women's position in society.

Hundreds of women explain their feelings about sex and marriage. May, 44, writes:

'Imagine the scene. Husband reads paper all evening. 10.30pm. Table to lay for breakfast, have hot drink. Bed. He reads technical magazine or library book. 11.00pm. Lights out. What kind of a sexy mood would *you* get? I've had a vision of myself as a hole in the mattress.'

Thousands of women admit to being too tired for sex and bored with their husbands. Four out of five wives find it hard to get sexually aroused. Two in five fake orgasm. 'What do you think about when you make love?' Alex Higgins, Tom Jones, James Bond and the Aston Villa football team, say some. Others (30 per cent) admit to their thoughts straying to the children and other day-to-day worries.

The book also discusses women's experience of contraception, motherhood, lesbianism, incest and rape. It proves conclusively that capitalism wrecks our sexuality. Shift work, long hours, women's isolation in the home, lack of privacy and free time limit the scope for personal and sexual expression. The book's weakness is that, having shown sexual problems to have social roots, it only offers individual solutions: assertiveness training, marriage guidance and sex therapy.

Kate Marshall

BLACK ECONOMY

Moonlighting

Philip Mattera, *Off the books: the rise of the underground economy,* Pluto Press 1985, pbk £3.95

Mattera is our courier on a tour around the black markets of the world taking the scenic route. First stop Britain, then on to the USA where the underground economy is reckoned to be worth 10 per cent of gross national product. Next stop Italy where the black market is most developed and accounts for about 30 per cent of the economy.

The majority of 'underground' workers are teenagers, women and black workers. Usually they work in sweatshops or on piece rates at home, with no trade union rights. The employers' need to intensify exploitation in the recession has boosted the black economy. Yet Mattera finds something progressive and liberating in the rise of the black economy. He does not dwell on the nastiness of sweatshops in East London, the super-exploitation of Latin American workers in the USA, or the misery of the sprawling shanty towns in the Third World.

Mattera admires the middle class drop-outs who choose to work in the black economy. He sees it as the birth of a new decentralised economic system, based on autonomous work units and allowing greater independence and choice for the workforce. Sounds familiar? It is. Labour left-led councils have been promoting the same ideas for the past four years. *Off the books* at least has the merit of recognising that the process of workers exploiting themselves in Labour-sponsored coops is simply an extension of the global sweatshop economy.

Tony Powell

junius publications

Out now!

More than 30 people have died in an outbreak of Legionnaire's disease in Stafford. Yet nobody blames this disease on the elderly ex-servicemen of the American Legion and their habit of dressing up in military uniforms.

How different from the media hysteria about Aids, herpes or cervical cancer! These diseases are blamed on gay men and promiscuous women and lead to calls for a return to decent family values.

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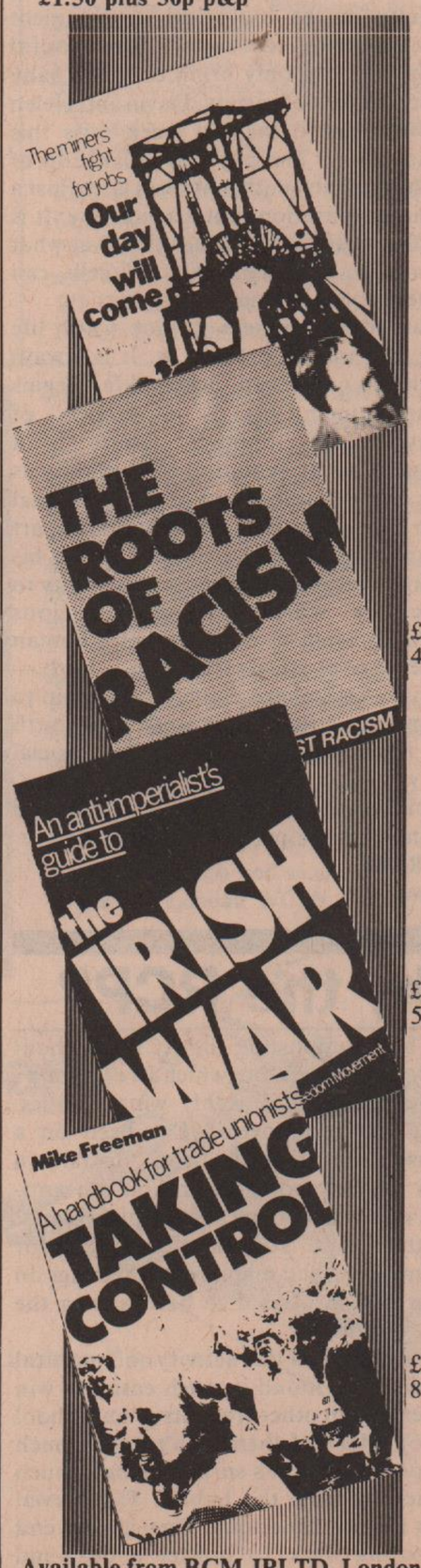

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LETTERS

What is life?

I have been following the debate about when life begins in *tns* and other publications. I think that it is a very useful debate and raises many issues which are important for us to tackle.

I do think that we need to clarify what distinguishes the communist approach to the question of life. For the moralists this can be a biological or a metaphysical question. Thus they make no distinction between an embryo and a human being. Our approach must be a social one and we do make an important distinction between embryo life and human life. There is a continuity in the biological development from embryo to man. But social development can only begin once the baby has become part of society. Dawn and Helen who wrote in to *tns* last week miss this essential point. The physical separation of the baby from its mother at birth is not just a biological separation, but a social one. It is only *after* this physical separation that what was once a mere collection of cells can become a social animal.

What really matters is not *when* life begins, but *what* it actually is. It is always difficult to ascertain when life begins because human life is a process of continuous development. There is a continuum in the evolution of humanity as well as in the development of the individual human being. However, what sets man apart from any other animal, plant or foetus is his capacity for social intercourse, his ability to change the world through conscious activity. So when we come to define human life, the act of physical separation — birth — is crucial. An embryo cannot even begin to develop as a social being until *after* birth when it becomes an independent social entity.

I look forward to more debate on this and other important topics in future issues of *tns*.

Janet Ryder
Stockport

Why the RCP?

I've been supporting the RCP for about four months, during which I've learned a lot about left (and right) wing politics. During this brief period I've been on a demonstration against Leon Brittan, a Bloody Sunday commemoration, an anti-Powell march and many miners' picket lines. I've attended a Yorkshire dayschool for trade unionists and many other meetings on popular topics. And I've been selling the paper every week.

As a result of all this activity and political discussion I've found it much easier to win arguments with other students at our school (I'm 16). Most of them don't know much about politics, but it's surprising how much they pick up from the Labour Party, even though it's not conscious. They always end up shouting back to bolster a dead-end argument. Another good thing that's come out of all this is that I've met a lot of new people, made some new friends and lost all my old, boring Tory friends.

The RCP is different from other left-wing groups because it takes revolution seriously. It's only through education in revolutionary politics that you can develop the arguments to really convince people. I would urge all youth who don't like what society's got on offer and who want to do something about it to become supporters of the RCP. Then we'll be one step nearer to a working class revolution in Britain.

Andrew Robinson
Huddersfield

Chris Black (reflex)

Snoopers routed

Just over a week ago we discovered two time and motion snoopers in Alder Hey hospital in Liverpool. Within minutes 100 angry workers, mainly women, had barricaded them in an office. But this was just the start. All it took was a few phone calls and every hospital in Liverpool was taking action.

All 17 Liverpool hospitals had previously agreed that they would take united action against any attempt by management to introduce privatisation, get rid of jobs or worsen conditions. Workers at every single Liverpool hospital occupied the canteens and refused to budge until management got rid of the time and motion team at Alder Hey. It didn't take the bosses long to realise that they were beaten. Within the hour the snoopers slunk off with their tails between their legs.

Resolute and united action works! One Nupe steward at the women's hospital told me that he was not in the business of selling jobs and there was no way that he would negotiate with management over privatisation. But clearly management will try again. They might do it differently in a different hospital, but try again they will. And when the crunch comes Liverpool workers will need more than just an efficient telephone network.

Already two wards at the women's hospital have been closed with the loss of nearly 40 jobs and other workers redeployed. The health authority has used the old chestnut that the closures are only temporary. That's the story that comes up every time the matter is raised. There was a campaign to stop the closure which failed. Of course there will always be setbacks and defeats along the way, but we can minimise these if we make sure that as many people as possible are involved in the struggle.

Plans are already underway to meet further attacks from management. But only the stewards know anything about them. There is an argument for keeping things secret and taking management by surprise, but it's not half as strong as a workforce which is directly involved in all the decision-making. Unless this is done there will come a time when the phone just doesn't work because the membership has not been convinced of the arguments.

Alan Harding
Liverpool

Anti-gay landlord

A few weeks ago we got a new landlord at my local pub, The Queen's in Hackney. The next thing he was refusing to serve lesbians. A couple of Sundays ago two gay women who had used the pub for years were told they couldn't have a drink. When they asked what was wrong the landlord told them that he didn't have to give them a reason and they should know why. So last Wednesday the local women got together and decided to do something. About 16 of them went out for a drink to the Queen's.

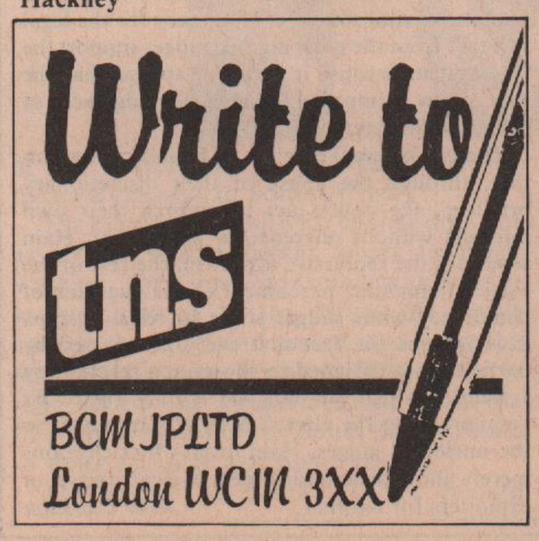
One woman got served at the bar and another went up to help her carry the drinks. This woman was wearing a 'dynamite dyke' badge. Carol, one of the women involved, told me that the landlord went absolutely wild. He ordered all the women out of the pub, hurling insults after them, and called the police. The police took the precaution of bringing dogs with them. The women left while they still had a chance.

Last Sunday the women went back to the pub and mounted a picket. We handed out leaflets and urged the locals not to drink there. The landlord's first response was to

tell us to 'piss off'. After a few minutes he was back on the phone to the police. This time the police said there was nothing they could do because we weren't breaking the law.

The landlord says that he banned lesbians from the pub because they were virtually copulating all over the tables and putting graffiti all over the toilets. But he hasn't said anything about the 'Steve and Tracys' or 'Sharon and Pauls' and other heterosexual scribblers. On Saturday 11 May we want an even bigger picket at the pub because we're not prepared to let bigoted landlords turn gays into social lepers. Local people should support the picket of the Queen's, Victoria Park Road, at 7pm.

Kerry Andrews
Hackney



STEPPING OUT

While travelling by train from Glasgow to Edinburgh to watch Celtic play football, senior RAF aircraftman Timothy Williams had one dram too many and forgot who he was supposed to be. He jumped on to a table, made derogatory remarks about the Queen, and shouted 'Up the IRA'. Fining Williams £100 for his 'particularly unpleasant words' in Edinburgh last week, sheriff Nigel Thomson noted that 'what you were shouting was not in accordance with the oath of allegiance sworn to Her Majesty on joining the services'. Quite so. As a drunken football hooligan who supports the IRA and serves in the Crown forces, Williams is the front-runner for the 'ultimate enemy within' award. Other nominations are canvassed.

Sticking with the British armed forces, this week's Sunday newspaper magazines carried a double page advert from the Royal Marines touting for gallant young officers. The ad features photos depicting all of the force's engagements since the end of the Second World War — a veritable roll-call of Britain's modern imperialist plunderings, from the Middle East to Malaya to East Africa and the South Atlantic. It boasts that 1968 was the one year in which the Marines 'took a holiday' from stamping on oppressed peoples around the world. The entries for 1969, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1983 all list Britain's war against the IRA as the Marines' major commitment (is this why the advert is for 'Short Career' officers?). Altogether a fitting counter to the waffle about 'forty years of peace' being spouted at various VE Day binges this week.

●

The growing anti-gay hysteria is not confined to the pages of the gutter press. Communist Party member Charlie Poulsen thinks gays should be renamed 'miserables' and doesn't want his party mixing with 'them'. 'I cannot imagine', blusters Poulsen in the party paper *Focus*, 'why they should consider their private sexual habits have anything to do with the class struggle and the battle for socialism, except to sidetrack it into collusion with the many members of the ruling class and the establishment who share their "gayness" (or should it be "gaiety") with them.' So it's the old homosexual/capitalist conspiracy we're up against is it Charlie? What about the Jews? And, for that matter, the communists?

On bank holiday Monday Tony Benn called for the next Labour government to grant a 'complete amnesty' to imprisoned miners. Benn claimed there was 'a precedent' for such action in the amnesty granted to Ian Smith, who ran Zimbabwe when it was the white supremacist state of Rhodesia. There is a different precedent for Labour governments' attitude to imprisoned strikers which forgetful old Tony didn't mention. The last Labour administration, of which Benn was a leading member, refused to do anything to speed the release of the jailed Shrewsbury pickets. One of them, Des Warren, still suffers from the effects of the liquid cosh treatment he was given inside. The other, Ricky Tomlinson, is reduced to playing a full-time trade union official in the TV soap opera *Brookside*. Those jailed miners who don't share Ian Smith's qualities of being a racist millionaire farmer shouldn't hold their breath waiting for Labour to deliver on Benn's promise.

●

There is no truth in the rumour that Dennis Thatcher's little accident at the weekend, when he smashed his head on a steel girder while staggering out of a football club dinner and dance, was an attempt to bolster his wife's hysterical campaign about soccer-inspired violence.

REPORTS

Journalist seized in Belfast

Some people just don't like having their photograph taken. *tns* photographer Joe Boatman found this out the hard way when she was detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in Belfast's Castlereagh interrogation centre last Sunday.

Joe is a member of the National Union of Journalists and a photographic art student at the Polytechnic of Central London. She was in Belfast photographing last weekend's march in commemoration of the 10 republicans who died on hunger-strike in 1981 fighting for political status for Irish prisoners of war.

The British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary were out in force on the demonstration and out to provoke trouble. Joe was arrested because she was pointing her camera at the wrong people. The men behind the British death squads don't take kindly to having their photographs in the papers. And an NUJ card and a camera are no protection against police and Army harassment in war-torn Belfast. Joe was surrounded by three RUC and British Army landrovers, dragged off the street and taken to the infamous Belfast torture centre at Castlereagh.

'In one breath they told me that they knew I was working for terrorists,' said Joe after her release on Monday, 'in the next breath they told me I was nothing and nobody was going to lose any sleep if anything happened to me.' Joe was told that she was being detained for taking photographs. 'I thought that was what photographers were meant to do,' said NUJ deputy general secretary Jake Ecclestone after protesting at Joe's arrest and demanding her immediate release. But pointing a camera at a British soldier in Belfast is almost the same as pointing a gun at him. Joe's film was destroyed and the RUC threatened to smash her equipment.

'This is British justice', an RUC officer told Joe at the start of his two-hour interrogation, 'you wouldn't get the same in a communist country.' Joe was not allowed to make a phone call or get in touch with a solicitor. Her watch was taken from her so she couldn't tell the time. She was interrogated twice more in the morning, finger-printed and photographed, before being dumped in the city centre.

The PTA is the law that backs up every British Army bullet. It is part of the British arsenal of repression that aims to drive resistance to Britain's war in Ireland off the streets of Belfast or Birmingham, Derry or Liverpool. Anybody who takes a stand against the war — or even a picture of the combatants — is a target for police and Army terror. When the RUC dumped Joe they told her to get out and never come back. 'But we'll be back', says Joe, 'and they'll be the ones who have to get out.'

Joan Phillips

Russell Osborne (reflex)

Huddersfield gas workers have turned trucks away from their picket — now they need to turn their union away from bureaucratic procedure

Gas strike hots up

'It used to be us and them. Now it's us, them and the union,' said a picket outside the Huddersfield depot of North East Gas on Friday. Last week 3000 gas workers across the region got fed up waiting for the general and municipal workers' union to act. They took strike action in protest over management's attempt to cut the time allowed for each job by a third.

When jobs timed on the new scale were handed out to workers from Featherstone and Pontefract on Monday 29 April they refused to do them. When management threatened disciplinary action the gas men walked out. By Wednesday they had brought out every Negas depot except Halifax.

Management told the union officials about the new working times at a meeting of the Regional Joint Incentives Committee a month before. But the officials hadn't seen fit to pass on the information. 'The first I heard about it was when the stewards from Featherstone turned up asking us to support the strike!' said Huddersfield shop steward Dave Berry.

Once the action was underway the union proved equally slow off the mark. Area official Les Atkinson said the strike couldn't be made official because the workers hadn't followed procedure. He advised them to work the new times for a few weeks 'under protest'. 'Work under protest? We never work under anything else,' said one picket. On Wednesday 1 May the workers occupied the union offices in Leeds, demanding official support. Under pressure, the officials agreed to hold a ballot. Around 80 per cent of the men voted for the strike. Negas workers have shown their willingness to stand up to management's threats.

But the disillusionment with the union which led the Halifax depot to carry on working is widespread. Stuart, a steward from the distribution side, told us that Halifax had been one of the more militant sections, 'but they're fed up, like everybody else, about the executive not pulling their finger out — the rank and file never know what's happening on a regional level'.

Strikers who have had enough of the officials' feet-dragging are talking about quitting the union. Some are considering tearing up their union cards, while militants like Mick Ryan feel they might be 'better off with our own gas workers' union to involve the rank and file'. The divisions opened up by the officials' failure to lead must be fought. The first problem that needs confronting is the union's obsession with procedure. Most Negas militants accept that the dispute is primarily about getting management to return to established negotiating procedures. But the table talk of negotiators like Les Atkinson did nothing to prevent management introducing the time-cutting scheme. Nor has it stopped the steady replacement of Negas jobs by non-unionised contract labour. Militant rank and file action against all cuts and redundancies is the way to build a fighting union that will deserve workers' loyalty.

Fiona Ryan

01-729 3771

Deadline for news and reports: Monday 9am

COME ALONG!

Moral panics and women's rights
A day of discussion and debate on the new morality and what it means for women
Sessions on:
- the holy trinity: the family, the individual and the state
- the politics of medicine
- Tory family policy
- the limitations of liberalism
- communism and the family

Creche available and evening social
Saturday 1 June 10am — 5pm
Polytechnic of Central London
New Cavendish Street, W1

Victoria Gillick and seven of her 10 off-spring

Enoch out of Manchester!
DEMONSTRATION against the man behind the Bill to restrict embryo research and women's rights
Friday 10 May 6pm
Manchester Business School
Oxford Road

Gillick out of Coventry!
MOTORCADE demonstration against the woman who has already restricted contraceptives to under-16s and wants to stop sex education and curb abortion rights
Saturday 18 May 10.30am
From Pool Meadow cafe

Women's rights — yes, embryo rights — no
DEBATE: revolutionary communists Vs Life plus Women for Life
Thursday 23 May 7.30pm
McLellan Gallery, 270 Sauehiehall Street, Glasgow

Remember Bobby Sands!
MEETING to commemorate the 10 hunger-strikers who died fighting for political status for Irish freedom fighters in 1981 and to discuss how to make sure it doesn't happen again
Friday 10 May 7.30pm
Central Library
Fieldway Crescent, London N5
(off Holloway Road)

Stop the dole cuts! Full housing benefits for all!
LOBBY the CPSA conference to demand solidarity from dole office workers for young people threatened with homelessness by the new bed and breakfast regulations and all the schemes to regiment the young unemployed
Monday 13 May 11.30am
The Brighton Centre, seafront

Our jobs and conditions before their economies and state security!
FRINGE MEETING for delegates attending the CPSA conference
Wednesday 15 May 7.30pm
Prince Albert Pub, Trafalgar Street, near Brighton BR station

Become a supporter of the Revolutionary Communist Party!
SUPPORTERS of the party meet every week to discuss the paper and the events of the week and to plan action in the local area.

At present we meet in Birmingham, Bradford, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, East Kilbride, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hackney, Huddersfield, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, North London, Nottingham, Pontefract, Sheffield, South London, Sunderland, Wakefield.

For details of times and places of meetings see sellers of *tns* in your area.

Find out more about the Revolutionary Communist Party!
For further information about the RCP or any of the events advertised here
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RCP

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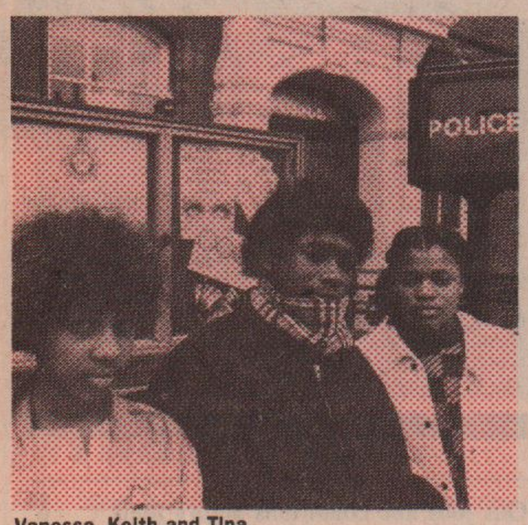

Chris Black (reflex)

Vanessa, Keith and Tina

Andrew Ward (Report)

'Black people don't get much of a chance in anything,' says Tina Hughes, 'we have to fight for our rights because if we don't we won't get them.' If you are young and black in Newham you don't have many rights. You have no right to walk the streets without being attacked by racist thugs. You have no right to carry a ghettoblaster without being arrested for carrying stolen property. You have no right to a job or decent housing. This Saturday black people in Newham will be out on the streets doing something about it. Three black teenagers told us what it is like growing up in Newham and why the march is so important to them.

'I was sitting on this wall near the police station and all of a sudden the police came over and lined up against it. One of them told me to get off and when I asked him why he said "because you make the wall look messy". Three of them grabbed me and we got into a fight.' A fortnight ago Vanessa Irwin was the first person to be attacked by the police on the demonstration in support of the Newham 7, Asian youths on trial for hitting back at the racists. Vanessa escaped arrest, but her friend Keith Palmer was not so lucky. He was beaten up and carried upside down into the police station, dumped on the floor and charged with threatening behaviour:

'I was sitting on the barrier when a policeman grabbed me by the neck. I pushed him away but another six came and grabbed me by the neck, arms, hair and legs. They took me to the police station and gave me lots of kicks and punches on the way.'

Police harassment is a way of life in Newham. Blacks are constantly stopped and searched and made to account for their every movement. Vanessa told us about a typical incident at her school. A policeman came into the playground and took her friend Paul away. 'He put him in the van and took him back to his own house and made him prove that the key fitted in the door.' The police go out of their way to harass young blacks and make their lives a misery.

Racism is part and parcel of school life. 'It's not just the pupils,' says Tina, 'it's the teachers as well.' White girls get away with wearing make-up and any clothes they want. But 'when one black girl wears anything other than school clothes they send her home, there's a letter to her parents and she's told not to come back to school'. Teachers often turn a blind eye to racist attacks in the classroom. Vanessa remembers one occasion when a white girl pulled an Asian girl down the corridor by her hair and spat on her while the teachers just stood and watched. 'Quite a few black boys get beaten up because they go out with white girls', says Tina, 'and the white girls get called "wog meat". One girl had glass put in her stomach.' Most young blacks are cynical about school and about their teachers. 'They don't do anything. They just wait until it's all over and then ask you if you're alright.'

Life doesn't get any better out of the classroom. The most young blacks have to look forward to when they leave school is a second-rate place on a Youth Training Scheme. Vanessa, Tina and Keith are adamant that they won't do it: 'It's slavery and we want proper jobs'. Unemployment for black youth is double the rate for whites. Young black people don't get the opportunity to strike out on their own. 'If you're black you can forget about getting a flat,' says Tina. 'When people say that black people are getting all the housing what they mean is that black people are getting all the worst housing.' Last month Yolanda O'Shaughnessy, a young black mother, became the second person to jump to her death from the Dennison Point tower block in Newham. The Labour council admitted that conditions were bad but said it had nowhere else to put people. Newham has nearly 10 000 people on its housing waiting list and a long queue of homeless families. Blacks are at the bottom of the list and the back of the queue.

British society doesn't offer young blacks much of a future. As far as Vanessa, Tina and Keith are concerned the only thing to do is change it. 'We won't get a chance to do anything unless we fight for it.' Saturday's demonstration is an opportunity to stand up for black rights. Be there!

Demonstrate

Saturday 11 May 1pm
Plashet Park, Newham

- **No more racist murders**
- **Police off our streets**
- **Defend the Newham 7**