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the next step
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VICTORY

British companies have a big stake in apartheid. The blood of the hundreds of blacks who have been killed by the apartheid state is on the hands of British capitalists and their backers in successive British governments.

to the South African people

Demonstrate against apartheid's British backers ***Sunday 16 June • 12 noon • Jubilee Gardens • London***

tns

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly ● 14 June 1985 ● No 9

State power

'In reality', wrote Engels in 1891, 'the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy.' Engels emphasised that the complex bureaucracy of the state apparatus in the advanced capitalist democracies disguised the same 'bodies of armed men' who propped up the ruling classes of the absolutist dictatorships of nineteenth century Europe. In Thatcher's Britain 90 years later the coercive character of the capitalist state is becoming increasingly apparent.

The only things the British establishment can afford to spend money on in 1985 are nuclear missiles for the armed forces and new riot gear for the police. The government's latest policy reviews sum up the direction of government strategy. The Tory review of public order threatens draconian police powers to restrict rights to assemble, picket or demonstrate. Norman Fowler's review of the social security system promises cuts in welfare benefits across the board. The state is the agency that sustains the interests of the crisis-ridden British capitalist class. It is preparing to compensate for its economic weakness through political force abroad and at home.

Labour's state socialism

While the Tories are ruthlessly shaping the state apparatus into a machine to defend their class, the Labour Party retains its naive faith that the state can play a progressive role in society. This faith is often most strongly expressed on the left. Tony Benn and Eric Heffer recently submitted a comprehensive 'plan for a Labour victory' to Labour's national executive which is sharply critical of the direction of the party under Neil Kinnock's leadership. Benn and Heffer single out Kinnock's retreat from the party's 'clear socialist commitments on public ownership, economic planning and exchange controls' as the key betrayals. All three are measures which the same state that recently smashed the miners and is currently making thousands of young people homeless is supposed to introduce on behalf of the labour movement under a future Labour government.

The effect of the left's illusions in the progressive potential of the state is to disarm those who take them seriously in the face of the current state offensive. Yet the pious hopes of Benn and Heffer for the state of the future have been widely endorsed by what is still sometimes called the hard left. 'A real step forward' and 'a bold strategy for socialism' were the comments of two left-wing papers as they faithfully reprinted the Benn/Heffer manifesto last week. The Labour Party sees the state as an instrument for socialism and the left sees the Labour Party as an instrument for the working class.

Benn and Heffer sum up the outlook that dominates the British left:

'The Labour Party is the principal political instrument for working people in Britain, having been established by the trade unions for that purpose, and having consciously adopted socialism as its objective.'

They outline an eight-point programme for a Labour victory. Closer inspection reveals that, as point five is missing, it is in fact a seven-point programme. Of these seven points five are concerned with organisational matters — relations between the national executive and the parliamentary party, stopping the purge against Militant, integrating women and blacks, etc. One point urges the party to 'campaign around real struggles' and another insists on the need for 'socialist policies'. On this point the left leaders hint that these may need to be even 'stronger' than the party's 1983 manifesto, but put off further discussion to a future paper.

The Benn/Heffer document indicates that the left's narrow objective is to return a Labour government. But this is not the same thing as socialism. Indeed, it is clear from the left's own critique of the Kinnock strategy that socialism would not be the objective of any government of which he was prime minister. Kinnock and his shadow cabinet colleagues have told the press straight that they would not use government office as an instrument for releasing imprisoned miners, repealing repressive laws or expropriating British businessmen. Kinnock has made it clear to everybody that he can be relied upon to use the power of the state just like James Callaghan, Harold Wilson and Clement Attlee — against the working class.

'The Labour Party is the principal political instrument for working people,' say Benn and Heffer. What smug arrogance! Many working people who have looked to the Labour Party to do something on their behalf over the past five years are no longer working. Miners who looked to Labour found the party leaders looking shiftily the other way, at the media and the opinion polls. The trade unions may have established the Labour Party to defend their interests, but their defensive and dishonest campaigns to preserve the political levy expose the inability of the union leaders to win the support of their members for the politics of the Labour Party (see page 4).

Workers' power

The Labour Party and the trade union leaders have become so dependent on the patronage of the state machine over the past 60 years that they are no longer capable of leading serious resistance when that state machine goes on the attack. The left can only keep proclaiming its child-like faith that the state can be used to defend workers' interests and its conviction that the Labour Party is the party of the working class.

In our view neither the state nor the Labour Party can be useful instruments for the working class. The state is the collective organisation of the capitalist class. The Labour Party is the tool of the leaders of the unions and the parliamentary party, not the working class. The capitalist state represents the major obstacle to the defence and advance of working class interests. The Labour Party acts to contain the working class within the framework of the system on behalf of a section of the labour movement which has won an influential position within the British establishment in industry and in politics.

The only way to defend working class interests is through independent action and organisation against the state. The working class will get nothing out of the capitalist state without fighting for it. Preparing for Power, the RCP's week-long summer school in July, is devoted to working out ways of mobilising against the system. If you've had enough of preparing for more defeats at the hands of another Labour government, start preparing for power (details page 7).

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Pauline Walton (reflex)

Fighting Fowler

'I think it's diabolical, it's sick. What's going to happen to us kids? Thatcher doesn't know what she's doing.' Eighteen-year old Anita has just received a letter from the DHSS ordering her to get out of her room in a bed and breakfast hotel in Birmingham. Last week she joined the Revolutionary Communist Party's local protest against Fowler's cuts outside Bush Street housing office.

When Anita ran away from home a room in a bed and breakfast was all she could afford. The DHSS pays £80 a week for the hotel, leaving Anita with £9.25 to live on. The £80 covers breakfast and tea but not dinner. Breakfast is a tiny bowl of cornflakes or a sausage or a scrambled egg. Tea is an endless round of liver and potatoes, chips and beefburgers, liver and potatoes, chips and beefburgers.

'I don't have much of a private life,' says Anita, 'everybody always wants to know what you're doing.' The post-box is locked with a padlock. The landlord takes the giros and hands back £9.25. Anita has no idea why she gets so little money and nobody has ever bothered to enlighten her.

Anita doesn't know what she will do when she is finally thrown on to the streets. 'It took me all my time to get this place in the hotel, where do I go now? They are expecting us to go home, but half of our parents don't want us. I know I can't go back.' She thinks that people should protest about it. That's why she has been out on the streets with the RCP, protesting against a system that throws young people on the streets and the scrapheap.

Mary Harper

Chris Black (reflex)

No life of your own

'Your level of acceptance just drops. You come down to London thinking you'll get a job and a flat within six weeks. It took me a week to get disillusioned. I remember going to my first hostel and thinking "God, I'll never be able to stay here". A year later I walked into here and thought "God, this is great, a real home from home". You get used to so many things — the dirt and the noise and the violence and the police — you come to accept so many things. Maybe that's what they want.'

Gail, 20, is waiting for a letter from the dole. 'I suppose one week I'll get my giro and be told "that's it, no more".' She shares a double room with her boyfriend Pat in the three-house Haverstock Lodge bed and breakfast in Belsize Park, north London. They pay £62 a week for the room and 'breakfast'. That leaves them with about £28 each to see them through the week. 'Here breakfast is a cup of tea and two slices of toast,' says Pat, 'that doesn't set you up for the day, you've got to buy meals on top of that.' Cooking is almost impossible, with three houses sharing one cooker.

Gail, who left home and college in the north east to look for a job in London, thinks the new board and lodging regulations are a sick joke. 'I feel that at 20-years old I should be starting a life of my own. You can't live with your parents forever. If you're legally an adult when you're 18 why are they trying to force you to go back to your family?' Gail won't go back, but Pat is going home to Ireland next week. 'My sister's just after getting married and said she'd put me up for a bit while I try for a job. It means you're constantly living on the goodwill of other people. You can't fend for yourself.' Pat jokes that he'll have to join the foreign legion.

Gail has worked here and there in nightclubs and restaurants. She thinks that if people could get a decent-paying job they would take it, but she can't see the point of doing slave labour for a pittance. The new laws will make it even harder to get a job. 'You get ripped off at every stage of the way. There's no chance of a job. You come to a place like this and they know they've got guaranteed cheques every week from the DHSS, they don't have to put themselves out. Everybody coins it in except the people who really need it.'

Pat told us about the last hostel they lived in at Agamenmon Road in West Hampstead. 'It was five people to a room, £125 a week rent, prison beds, no electricity, no heating.' Last month the landlord got a £100 fine for overcrowding, but he didn't feel it. Gail had her giro stolen one week and Pat slept with a big stick by the side of his bed: 'I used it once or twice, you have to, you'd be better off in prison than that place'.

'I suppose there's no alternative but to keep moving round the country,' says Gail, but she hates the thought of it. 'People aren't brought up to move round the country. You're brought up to expect to make a home somewhere. They say "look it's your country, but sorry you can't stay in any one spot of it".' Gail talks about pitching a tent on Hampstead Heath and laughs saying she'd probably get charged ground rent.

Homeless youth

Down and out in Thatcher's Britain

Tory cuts in housing benefit and new bed and breakfast rules will force thousands of young people to live in tents, in subways and in the gutter. On these two pages ***Joan Phillips*** *looks at the grim reality of streetlife for Britain's wasted youth.*

Chris Black (reflex)

Thatcher's dole queue treats everybody like animals

It is eight o'clock on a cold, rainy night in Newcastle. Eighteen-year old Brian Evans is huddled in a makeshift tent that has been his home for the past two weeks. He has no money, no food and nowhere to go.

Brian Evans is one of the first victims of the Tories' new board and lodgings rules which are set to throw 50 000 young people out of squalid hostels and hotels and on to the streets. Britain's youth are the biggest losers under a system that must sentence millions to the scrapheap to survive.

When Tory minister Norman Fowler announced the government's new package of social security cuts in parliament last Thursday, Brian Evans had just been evicted from his shabby room in Wallsend Guest House. He spent his first night in a cold, dingy police cell, his second in excrement and vomit in Newcastle's Cyrenian night shelter. The Cyrenians kicked him out when they discovered that he did not have £45 rent. Brian has been surviving ever since in a tent outside St Thomas' church with about 20 more of Newcastle's outcast youth.

The reforms promised by the Tories had been heralded as the most comprehensive review of the welfare state since the 1942 Beveridge report, which established the framework of the modern social security system in the boom years that followed the Second World War. The four volume Fowler review promises to dismantle it bit by bit in an era of recession and mass unemployment.

Critics argued that the Fowler proposals were 'a mouse' and not the comprehensive package that had been promised. Supporters of the Tory government in the business world argued that Fowler had not gone far enough and called for more blood. But for tens of thousands of young people like Brian Evans, the Fowler cuts are a mighty 'mouse' and bloody enough. They mean a rootless future on the homeless circuit.

Cuts in housing benefit and the new board and lodgings regulations are the cutting edge of the Tories' drive to make the working class pay the price for their rotten system.

• Housing benefits

Fowler's proposals contain no figures, but everybody knows that housing benefits will be the biggest cash cut for the government's £40 billion social security budget. More than seven million people, one in three families, depend on housing benefit. The Tories' latest cuts, estimated at £7.5m, promise to put an end to this lifeline.

The Fowler proposals will deprive around two million people of housing benefit, around four million pensioners will suffer losses of at least £1.40 a week and well over half a million households will lose more than £3 a week. Everybody, including those on supplementary benefit, will now be forced to pay a percentage of their rates. The elderly face more indignities of cold and hunger thanks to Fowler. But young people face the cruellest cuts of all.

• Bed and breakfast

At the end of April the government introduced new board and lodging limits for people aged 25 and under. The new rules mean that young people will be forced to move from town to town every two to eight weeks to qualify for bed and breakfast money. Time has already run out for those living outside the eight-week zones of London, Birmingham and Manchester, in towns and cities governed by a two-to four-week limit.

By the end of June most homeless young claimants in London will have to move out for a minimum of six months. They will have to move on again every two to eight weeks without returning to any place visited within the previous six months. An estimated 50 000 young people will be turned into refugees over the next few months. The Tories are creating a vast pool of rootless and impoverished youth reminiscent of the vagrants created by the nineteenth century Poor Laws.

The Tories have also slashed the amount they will pay out to claimants in bed and breakfast accommodation. Social security offices will pay out between £45 (outside London) and £70 (London), including £21 subsistence allowance, for ordinary board and lodging. This means finding a hotel at £7 a night in London, or £3.30 a night in Penzance. Many young people who have not been uprooted will no longer be able to pay for their existing accommodation. Others will have to put up with even worse overcrowding and squalor as landlords cut costs and cram more people to a room.

The Tories' attack on young claimants aims to slash the social security budget, and to drive young people back to the home. The Tories have to rob the poor to guarantee the future of the capitalist system. Social security is a very expensive drain on the employers' profits and the public purse. The Tories point to a 184 per cent rise in the numbers claiming board and lodging from 55 000 in 1980 to 139 000 in 1984, which has pushed the cost to the DHSS up from £52m to £380m. They forget to mention that public spending on housing has fallen by 70 per cent over the same period, creating a new form of bed and breakfast tenure for those the system cannot house.

The object of Fowler's reform of the welfare state is to get rid of what *The Times* called 'the nanny state' which has 'insulated' the unemployed from 'the real world' for too long. The 'real world' which old and young alike are told to face up to is one of ravaging cuts and grim despair.

The Tories intend to make life so miserable for young people that they will pack their bags and go home. This will reduce the burden of young people on the state and transfer the load to hard-up parents, brothers and sisters. It is a major part of the establishment's drive to reassert the centrality of family life in crisis-torn Britain. In the list of exemptions to the new regulations, having no family, like suffering from mental illness, is deemed a good enough excuse for staying put.

When Margaret Thatcher says that young people would be better off at home she means that the British establishment would sleep safer at night if it knew that thousands of rebellious youth were being kept on a tight leash at home instead of wandering freely through the streets looking for trouble. The Tories emphasise family values to counter the lawlessness and disrespect for traditional institutions which have become features of the recession. Tory hypocrites exalt the ideal of family life as they devastate millions of households with savage cuts and lay waste to thousands of young lives.

Thatcher may dream about making the family the saviour of the nation. But the family cannot redeem the establishment from the riotous consequences of its savage attacks on unemployed youth. The degradation of mass unemployment and homelessness condemns millions to a fractured existence on the margins of society and dissipates the scope for organised resistance. But it can only increase the instability and youthful rebellion which the establishment is so afraid of. The future is full of sleepless nights for Thatcher and her crowd.

Rights for youth

THERE IS A lot that we can demand and do to defend the rights of young people and the homeless:

- *Say no to Tory laws:* many workers in the civil service unions which organise in the dole offices told us they were sickened at the meanness of the new scheme. They must organise to make the new bed and breakfast regulations inoperable. Strikes by dole workers do not have to deprive claimants of their giros, if the workers themselves are in control of the dispute.
- *Decent homes for all:* cuts in public sector housing by successive Tory and Labour governments have thrown tens of thousands into hostels, made 800 000 families homeless and put more than a million on council waiting lists. Five million people live in homes unfit for human habitation. We must fight every cut and get rid of Labour councils which refuse to challenge capitalist cutbacks.
- *Stand up for unemployed youth:* young people facing exile on the streets have joined local campaigns like HASSLL — homeless against social security lodging laws — to organise resistance to the new laws. But young people also need the support of organised workers to defend their rights. Every worker has an interest in uniting with the unemployed against the system.

Seven-year scrimp

Carole Richardson lives with her two daughters, Michelle (6) and Natalie (4), on a delapidated estate in Kennington, south London. She is only 24 but she has had seven years' experience of being ground down by the system. She is tired of trying to make ends meet on less than £50 a week from the social and she doesn't like to think about what will happen when the latest cuts hit home.

But Carole thinks that she is 'luckier than some' because she at least has a roof over her head, even if it covers only one bedroom for her and her two girls. And she knows from years of personal hell what it is like doing the rounds of bed and breakfasts.

Carole's mum kicked her out when she was 17 and she went straight into a bed and breakfast. Michelle was born in the Stapleton 'hotel' in Balham High Street. From Balham Carole moved upmarket to another bed and breakfast in Pimlico, 'the biggest dump I've ever seen'. The windows were broken, the milk was green, the water was cold and cooking was unheard of. She escaped by squatting a council house, but it wasn't long before Lambeth council sent the bailiffs round to evict her.

Carole finally made it to her present one-bedroom flat, but she's been trying to get transferred to a two-room place so that she and the children can have a bit of space to breathe. She has heard nothing from the district housing officer since she last spoke to him in March 1983. She wishes the Labour council would move at the same pace when it comes to helping you as it does when it wants to throw you on the streets.

RCP

The Revolutionary Communist Party has launched a special money-raising appeal. Setting up a new national centre, launching the weekly *tns* and producing more books and pamphlets have exhausted our funds. Lack of hard cash is holding us back from producing propaganda and expanding our national network.

The RCP needs you. We cannot turn to the GLC for a grant or to rich backers for a handout. We have to rely on people who support our work and read our paper to give us what they can afford. Give the RCP a boost and send your contribution to Special Appeal, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Please make cheques/POs payable to RCP Association.

Labour and the unions

The non-political levy

The Labour Party seems to be rolling to a series of victories in trade union ballots over political funds. But the non-political campaigns being run by the trade union leaders are playing into the hands of the Tories.

First the printworkers, then the steelworkers, and now the furniture and timber workers have voted by substantial majorities in favour of retaining their political funds. After early opinion polls suggested the prospect of a series of disasters for Labour, union leaders have become increasingly confident that they can win most of the ballots.

The most striking feature of the political fund ballots so far is how quiet they have been. There have been no strident 'vote no' campaigns in the tabloid press. Indeed, the ballots have received less attention than many recent union leadership elections and certainly less than most strike ballots in the past few months. Tory trade unionists have been instructed to stay out of the whole debate around the political funds. Why this conspiracy of silence?

No politics please

The answer lies in the wider aims of the Conservative government and its approach to dealing with the labour movement. At the moment of her general election victory in 1983 Margaret Thatcher said that she hoped that the Labour Party would rally and return to its former status as a respectable opposition party. The Tories do not want to destroy the Labour Party or to break the lifeline between the party and the unions. Their aim over the last two years has been to put the unions on the defensive, make them less political and weaken their links with the Labour Party. Thatcher wants the official labour movement to survive, but in a state in which it clearly recognises who is boss.

The 1984 Trade Union Act enforces secret ballots for union elections, on strike decisions and on political funds. The Tories' aim is to weaken the unions by imposing a legal framework over their internal procedures. They favour ballots as a means of giving the employers and their media more influence over the affairs of the labour movement. The aim of imposing ballots on the political levy to the Labour Party is not to bankrupt Labour, but to create a greater distance between the unions and the party, and to depoliticise the unions even further.

While the Labour Party has so far won the ballots, a look at the trade union campaigns shows that the Tories have succeeded in their wider objectives.

The trade unions' first step in the campaign to win the political fund ballots was to tell the Labour Party, especially the Labour left, to stay out of it. The politicians have dutifully obeyed — there have been no big Tony Benn and Denis Skinner rallies, and even Healey and Hattersley have kept their heads down. The trade unions have been so keen to keep a low profile that they were reluctant at first even to let the TUC get involved. They have set up a trade union coordinating committee, with discreet TUC backing, to run a calculatedly low-key campaign.

The main theme put forward by the committee is that the ballots have 'absolutely nothing' to do with the Labour Party. All the unions want is to uphold the 'right to campaign' and to 'have a voice in parliament'. This 'non-ideological' approach runs through all the union propaganda for a 'yes' vote in the political fund ballots. This strategy is based on deception and a cringing retreat from any political challenge to a political attack on the labour movement.

We have consistently pointed out in *tns* that section 17 of the Trade Union Act applies exclusively to the expenditure of money in support of a *political party* — in practice the Labour Party. Trade union hacks try to get around this objection by citing subsection (f) of section 17 which includes campaigns whose main purpose is to persuade people *not* to vote for a political party. They argue that, for example, a campaign against the Tory government's privatisation policies could be interpreted as a call *not* to vote Conservative in an election. But even a TUC lawyer should have no difficulty in persuading the most right-wing Tory judge of the distinction between a specific campaign against the government and a general recommendation not to vote Tory. Yet this dubious proposition forms the main basis of the trade union case for a vote to maintain a political fund.

The trade union campaigns miss the whole point of the Tory legislation which is to weaken the links between the unions and the Labour Party. In their response to the Tory attack on the labour movement the union leaders have taken a step backwards from the small advance which their predecessors made more than 80 years ago when they founded the Labour Party.

The formation of the Labour Party indicated a recognition that the working class could not systematically advance its position through the trade unions alone but had to organise in a political party. Today even left-wing union leaders can no longer stand up and defend 'the workers' party'. Their main defence of the political fund is to pretend that it will be used for all-purpose campaigning (when in reality almost all the cash goes directly to the Labour Party). Their second line of defence is to pretend that the unions' only concern is to sponsor MPs in parliament (MPs who just happen to be elected on the Labour Party ticket).

The early trade union leaders formed the Labour Party to advance the cause of the labour movement in parliament. Today's union leaders are ashamed of the past record and the current irrelevance of the Labour Party and conscious of its low standing among ordinary workers. They are reduced to justifying political funds as kittys for financing campaigns and politicians in the abstract. The trade union campaigns amount to an attempt to secure financial support for the Labour Party on false pretences.

The trade union campaigns on the political levy redefine the politics of the unions. The old division of labour between the unions and the Labour Party was bad enough. It allowed the Labour Party to dictate the political outlook of the labour movement on defence, foreign policy, women, race, Ireland. While pursuing a parochial defence of the trade union officials in parliament, the Labour Party has always provided the working class movement with an approach on wider political issues that has differed little from the parties of the ruling class. At the same time the existence of the Labour Party as the parliamentary voice of the working class movement has helped union officials to keep dangerous politics out of the unions.

In their response to the 1984 Trade Union Act the union leaders have given up the labour movement's commitment to Labour as 'the workers' party'. Instead they declare a general respect for parliamentary democracy. They have reduced trade union politics to campaigns to safeguard the interests of some particular section of workers and to uphold the sponsorship of MPs of no particular party who ask humble questions of ministers of state in the palace of Westminster. The way is clear for the Labour Party under Kinnock to widen its appeal to the middle classes (while still feeding off workers' dues). And the unions are well on the way to accepting, on behalf of the working class, a drastically restricted role in the political life of society.

It is no wonder that the Tories have kept so quiet about the ballots. It is not surprising that there have been no media exposures of the fraudulent character of the trade union campaigns to save the political funds. The people who are being defrauded and deprived of any political voice are ordinary trade unionists. If on the strength of campaigns like these the Labour Party wins all the political fund ballots, the Tories will have won a much more significant victory in depoliticising the working class movement.

Mike Freeman

POLITICAL LEVY ROW IN NUPE

Kicked out for opposing Labour!

'I TOLD THE officials the issue wasn't whether or not the union had a political voice, but *what kind* of a political voice we were getting from Labour.' Last week Don Milligan, a Nupe shop steward and Revolutionary Communist Party supporter, was ordered out of his union meeting at the GLC because he opposed the payment of the political levy to the Labour Party.

Nupe district officer Mark Sanders and divisional officer Chris Humphreys had turned up at the branch meeting to put the union officials' case for affiliating to Labour. Humphreys stressed the importance of Nupe's political voice, the importance of its relationship with the Labour Party, and the importance of not allowing 'a handful of judges to tell us what to do'. In reply, Don Milligan stressed the importance of breaking with Labour.

'I said that Humphreys might complain about unions being pushed around by "a handful of judges",' Don told *tns*, 'but Kinnock's condemnation of miners who took on the police and councils who said they would take on the rate-capping laws showed that the Labour Party always comes out in favour of *obeying* the judges.

'I pointed out that Nupe's support for Labour had stopped the union defending its members against attacks by the last Labour government and the present Labour GLC. So Nupe members should vote against the levy to Labour, and set up our own political fund to campaign on the issues that matter to us.'

District officer Sanders then made the bizarre (and illiterate) observation that 'RCP and SDP are very similar initials'. He accused Milligan and the RCP of being 'social fascists' and insisted that 'Brother Milligan has spent three years weakening the union in its battles with the employer'. This was greeted with scorn by members of the branch who know Don's outstanding record of campaigning in defence of workers sacked, suspended and disciplined by the Labour GLC. When Milligan protested, he was ordered out of the meeting by branch chair Sue Hill.

Russell Osborne (reflex)

Don Milligan: 'They're saying – "If you don't support the Labour Party – you're out of the union".'

The Nupe officials' message to Don Milligan and any other militant is clear: if you want to be accepted as a union member you have to support the Labour Party. Milligan's message to Nupe members is equally forthright: 'If you want to be a fighting trade unionist, you've got to oppose the Labour Party that has made life a misery for thousands of underpaid, overworked GLC workers — and challenge the union bureaucrats who want to hand over our dues to Labour'.

VOTE RCP IN VAUXHALL

Fighting for a change

Labour GLC councillors have decided to precipitate a by-election in Vauxhall on 11 July to allow Londoners a protest vote against the threatened abolition of the GLC. The Revolutionary Communist Party is contesting the by-election to give local people a real alternative to the Tories. Jean Smith told *Helen Swift* why she's standing.

Time to stop 'working for London' and start fighting for the future

How did you get involved in politics in the first place?

'It was partly my family background in Leicester. My father was a shop steward in the engineering union, his father was branch chairman of the woodmachinists' union, my uncle was active in the bakers' union. We were a union family and I've always indentified with the working class.

'I've always believed you've got to stick up for yourself. When I was 14 I got into a dispute with our local newsagent because he expected me to deliver extra papers with no extra money. I ended up walking out.

'When I was 18 I went on a demonstration against the National Front and I saw a fascist right next to a policeman hit a bloke over the head with a hammer. The police did nothing. I was shocked and it made me angry and want to get more involved in doing something to change the way things like this were happening all the time.

'I went away to college and got involved in going to meetings and demonstrations. This was in the seventies. We were involved in sit-ins and demos about abortion and about what was happening in Ireland. It was around this time that I joined the Labour Party.'

Why did you leave the Labour Party?

'At first it seemed quite good. I was in the LPYS and I soon got on the management committee, Militant even tried to recruit me. Looking back on it it was a good training in speaking at meetings and organising things but it was pretty irrelevant to what was going on in the real world. When I left college I started work in a textile factory and got more involved in union work.

'I was making nightdresses in a factory with 200-300 other women and there was no union. The wages weren't too bad by local standards but they were bad enough and there was a lot of aggravation over petty disciplinary issues. So we started a union — first we tried the T&G but they didn't want to know so we joined the tailor and garment workers instead. It took a three-day strike to get the union properly established but we did it.

'I more or less drifted out of being active in the Labour Party in the four or five years I was in the factory. But I still more or less supported it. It wasn't until I moved to London and started working in the post office that I began to question Labour politics a bit more.'

How did you come to join the RCP?

'I was elected as my branch rep to the trades council and I went along to see what was going on. It was the Falklands War that really made me think. At the first trades council meeting I went to there was a resolution from the south east district of my union criticising Margaret Thatcher for being *too slow* in sorting out the Argentinians. I was disgusted. And the only person who spoke up against this at the meeting was a supporter of the RCP.

'So I talked to him after the meeting, bought *the next step* and went through it carefully. At the time I was more thinking along the lines that workers shouldn't support either side in the war, and it took some time to come around to the view that we should support Argentina against Britain. I was also very much attracted by the anti-racist work being done by Workers Against Racism at the time.

'The hardest thing actually was breaking with the Labour Party. I knew its leadership was totally committed to the system and it was hopelessly bureaucratic, but I still thought that when it came to it you should vote Labour. It was a matter of basic class loyalty. The 1983 election changed that.

'The night before the election I read the RCP's pamphlet *Who needs the Labour Party?* and I decided that was it. It really made clear that what I had been doing — what generations of working class people have done — supporting Labour in the hope that someday it will be different, was a waste of time. That was the first time that I didn't vote Labour in an election, and I joined the RCP soon after.'

What made you decide to stand in Vauxhall?

'Well the RCP has had an active branch in the area for three or four years now. It's right next to Bermondsey where the party stood in the by-election in 1983 and the general election the same year. We've done a lot of work in the area, selling *tns* around council estates, campaigning on various issues from the shortage of nursery facilities to deportations. We organised a lot of activity during the miners' strike, street meetings, collections that sort of thing.

'When the by-election came along it seemed a natural thing for us to stand. The election itself is obviously a GLC stunt, but like any election it concentrates people's minds on politics and it gives us a wider audience for getting our point of view across.

'We're opposed to the abolition of the GLC, just like we're against any restrictions on our rights. But this does not mean to say that we support the Labour GLC or its campaigns — far from it. In fact some of our strongest supporters in this area are people who work for the GLC at County Hall. They're really fed up with all the big talk and the radical image of the GLC when it behaves like any other employer, and worse than a lot.

'We also want to challenge the GLC approach on things like women and race. A lot of people think that Ken Livingstone's done a lot to improve the position of women and blacks in London. They may have put a lot of posters up and given a few token jobs out, but that's not the same thing as fighting sexism or racism. We want to put forward a different approach, a practical way of people taking the initiative into their own hands and fighting for a better deal for women and blacks.'

Many people have become cynical about all politicians – what's different about you?

'I know what you mean. The first response of a friend of mine when I told him I was running for the council was "Can you get me a council flat?" People do think that politicians are just in it for what they can get out of it for themselves. I'm different because I'm not making any promises about council flats or anything else. What I'm saying to people is that if you want anything you've got to fight for it. What we're offering in Vauxhall and in general is a way of fighting to get what we need out of this system.'

VOTE MUHAMMAD IDRISH IN SPARKBROOK

Stand against racist laws

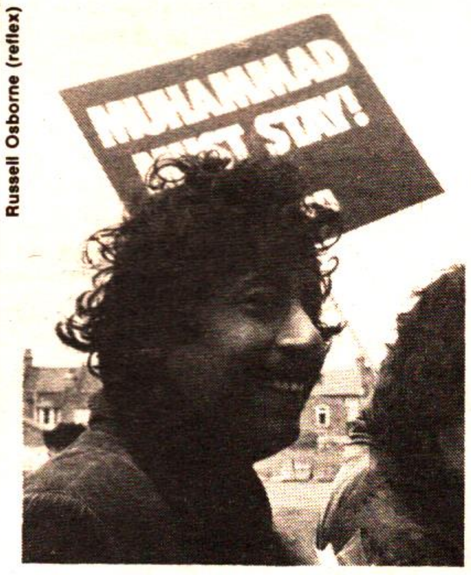
ON 11 JULY Muhammad Idrish will be asking the people of Sparkbrook in Birmingham to take a stand against immigration controls by voting him on to the council. Birmingham Revolutionary Communist Party is campaigning for a big turn-out for Muhammad in the election.

Last month Muhammad lost the final appeal in his three-year fight against deportation. He decided to stand in the Sparkbrook by-election when the seat fell vacant after the death of the Labour councillor. He reckons it is his best chance of mobilising mass support to force the immigration authorities to back down.

Muhammad has had to fight the Labour Party all the way to stand in Sparkbrook. The Tories are not contesting the seat because they know they don't stand a chance in a solidly working class area with a large black and Irish population. But the Labour Party has put up a rival candidate to Muhammad. Labour's man is an Asian protege of right-wing Sparkbrook MP Roy Hattersley.

The Labour council wasted three months refusing to call the by-election because it wanted to give local people time to forget the 43 per cent rate rise it has pushed through. Local Labour leaders were also worried that Muhammad would stand and rob them of a precious seat in local government. They were more concerned about keeping the local Labour machine intact than about Muhammad's impending deportation.

Muhammad announced that he would stand and that he expected Labour Party support. The Labour Party denounced the move as 'divisive'. The Labour left also spoke out against Muhammad's decision to stand. The day he sent off his election papers two prominent left wingers, Barry Lovejoy and Bob Smith, resigned from Muhammad's defence campaign.



Russell Osborne (reflex)

For the first time ordinary people in Sparkbrook will hear the arguments against all immigration controls and the arguments for standing up for the rights of black people. Labour Party members who really want to fight racism should get out and campaign for the real anti-racist candidate.

Pat Hughes

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

THE CLONES CYCLONE

'The hand of Irish reconciliation rests inside a boxing glove.' Or so the press would have us believe since Barry McGuigan won the world featherweight title on Saturday. The rapturous reception given to the 'Clones cyclone' on both sides of the Irish Border is supposed to prove that sport can unite Catholic and Protestant Ireland. The British media had a field day acclaiming this 'fighter for peace' who had struck a 'blow against sectarianism'.

Now just because Barry McGuigan was born an Irishman is no reason to expect him to go around denouncing British terror in Ireland and supporting the liberation struggle. He is supposed to be a boxer, not a political activist. And he is a very good boxer at that, who delighted millions last weekend. Boxing may not be to everybody's taste but it is just one small, brutal part of a brutal world. Those of us who aren't pacifists don't lose any sleep over the fine art of self-defence.

From a boxing point of view, you can understand McGuigan swapping passports to become British champion: Irish boxing is not a great launching pad to success. And even the spectacle of his father (a one-time Eurovision contestant) singing 'Danny Boy' before the fight was objectionable as tuneless stage Irishry rather than because of the song's far-from-republican content. But if McGuigan wants to be seen as a sportsman rather than a statesman, he should belt up altogether on the issue of the Irish War. There is no reason why Irish people who enjoy watching McGuigan work should have to put up with listening to his inanely pro-British comments about Northern Ireland.

McGuigan's waffle about 'bringing joy' to 'the suffering people of our province' is an open invitation to British propagandists, and one they have accepted with open arms. He has been photographed shaking hands with current British boss in Belfast Douglas Hurd, congratulated by Hurd's predecessor James Prior for 'doing more than me to unite Catholics and Protestants', and feted by Fleet Street as an Irishman who fights under the United Nations flag of peace and opposes Irish violence.

It ill befits a man who punches other men's heads for vast sums of money to allow himself to be used as an advert for the virtues of non-violent action. And it even iller befits an Irishman to allow himself to be championed by the very British warmongers who are responsible for bringing violence and death to the streets of Northern Ireland. As a boxer McGuigan can excite thousands of Irish people. As a symbol of 'Irish unity in action' he can only enhance Britain's portrayal of the Irish War as an irrational squabble between feuding communities which can be overcome by a little human emotion.

All of the hullabaloo about 'McGuigan mania in Ulster' has diverted British people's attention from the real political punch-up going on in Northern Ireland. On Monday 3 June the elected representatives of the two communities which McGuigan is supposed to have united met on Magherafelt district council. Unionist members attacked Sinn Fein councillors with fists and chairs, and republican John Davey emerged with more blood pouring from his head than either of the two boxers who fought such a good fight on Saturday. So keep splitting other people's lips if you want, Barry. But keep your own buttoned.

BLACK LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA
THE LESSONS OF ZIMBABWE

The struggle against apartheid in South Africa must avoid the mistakes that held back the fight for black liberation in neighbouring Zimbabwe

'Imperialist strategy is dictated by the need to maintain capitalist social relations in Zimbabwe. This demands the transfer of power to a class of Africans prepared to accommodate the needs of foreign capital in a more subtle way than their European predecessors....The hatred of the African masses for their oppressors must be eliminated by the installation of a pro-capitalist African regime.'

This was the comment of *the next step* in September 1979 on the talks at Lancaster House in London which brought the seven-year liberation war in Zimbabwe to an end and led to the installation of Robert Mugabe's regime three months later. At the time the British left condemned our opposition to British intervention and dismissed our warning that the Lancaster House settlement spelt disaster for the people of Zimbabwe. The left and the wider solidarity movement enthusiastically welcomed the settlement as a victory for the liberation struggle and hailed Mugabe as a revolutionary.

Six years later it is left to the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times* to sing Mugabe's praises. Apart from a few incorrigible hacks, few now deny that the Mugabe regime has cruelly betrayed the aspirations of the workers and peasants of Zimbabwe.

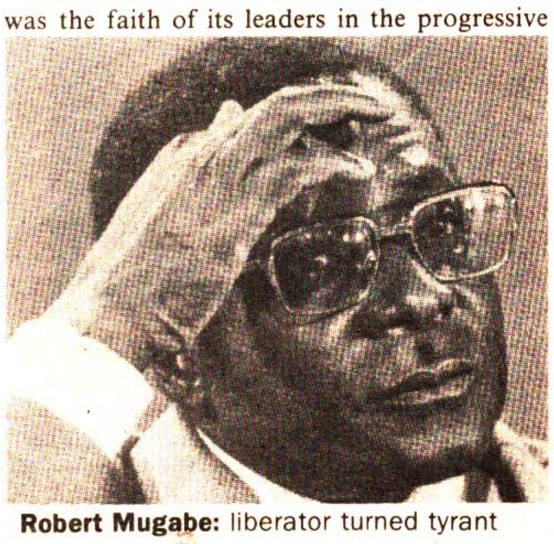
The gathering revolt against the apartheid system in South Africa gives added importance to the lessons of Zimbabwe. The past nine months of strikes and protests and riots have shaken the regime to its foundations. The crisis has forced the Botha government and its Western backers to embark on a desperate search for 'more subtle ways' of managing South African society. Popular revolt has rendered Botha's old strategy of gradual reform obsolete. The survival of South African capitalism now depends on creating some form of government that can overcome the current regime's isolation from the black masses and contain their rebellion by involving their leaders in its processes.

The main barrier to the ruling class project is the hostility of the black masses to the apartheid system. But the Western powers have a wealth of experience in grinding down resistance through a subtle blend of diplomacy, manipulation and repression. The conference held by Western and South African businessmen and politicians at London's Hilton Hotel last week was one of a series of events organised to work out a coherent strategy for South Africa. The whole weight of Western power and expertise is being thrown into the struggle for capitalist survival in South Africa.

The main threat to the fight for black freedom at present comes not so much from the ruling class, but from the political weakness of the black movement. The tragic outcome of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe provides vital lessons for the struggle ahead.

It took the Western powers almost 20 years — from the constitutional conference in 1960 to the Lancaster House settlement in 1979 — to crush the movement for black liberation in Zimbabwe. In this period the politicians and businessmen of London and Washington effected a transition from white settler rule to a new capitalist order under black majority government. They were greatly helped in this process by the political weakness of the middle class leadership of the movement for national independence.

The Achilles' heel of the liberation movement was the faith of its leaders in the progressive intentions of the Western powers. Joshua Nkomo, who emerged as the main nationalist leader in the sixties, regarded Britain as an ally in the fight to oust Ian Smith's white regime. In the early stages of the struggle Nkomo repeatedly called for British military intervention to overthrow the white settlers. Robert Mugabe who came to prominence as a radical opponent of Nkomo in the mid-seventies shared his faith in the Western powers. The aim of the black middle class was to mobilise the masses to force Britain to implement the process of decolonisation which had already taken place in other parts of the continent. Its strategy was based on the idea that Britain had a progressive role to play in Africa.



Robert Mugabe: liberator turned tyrant

This dominant approach had disastrous consequences. The pace of the struggle in Zimbabwe became increasingly dominated by the manoeuvres of the nationalist leaders in the diplomatic arena. The armed struggle, which mass pressure had forced the leadership to embark upon in the early seventies, was diverted into an instrument of the power struggle between the two wings of the liberation movement. The working class and the peasantry were reduced to a stage army to back up the manoeuvres at the conference table. By the late seventies the struggle for power neared its conclusion. Militant sections of the movement which opposed moves towards a settlement on imperialist terms were liquidated.

The fatal drift towards compromise with the West was the logical outcome of the leadership's political conservatism. While disagreeing on minor matters all sections of the leadership shared a narrow conception of the objectives of the struggle. Their aim was to win a stake in the system, not to get rid of it. Although both Mugabe's Zanu and Nkomo's Zapu adopted a platform of social reform to sustain the support of the masses, neither movement proposed any serious challenge to capitalist domination. Even Mugabe, the most left-wing nationalist leader, declared his support for private property and for the preservation of white land ownership. Mugabe's Zanu reconciled the tension between the limited political objectives of the leadership and the desire for fundamental social change among its supporters through its two-stage programme: black majority rule first, socialism later.

Both Nkomo and Mugabe envisaged the establishment of Western-style democratic capitalism based on black majority rule. This approach was consistent with the widely-held view that poverty, inequality and repression in the old Rhodesia were the result of the white settler regime and could be overcome by a democratic black state. But even in the most advanced capitalist countries democratic rights are limited by what the system of exploitation can afford. In the poor countries of the Third World capitalism can only survive through the ruthless repression of workers and peasants. In Zimbabwe the leadership's incoherent strategy was never exposed to a serious political challenge. The scope of the struggle became restricted to winning a change in the complexion of the country's rulers.

The conservatism of the leadership demoralised the masses and gradually undermined the anti-imperialist resistance. The degradation of the struggle for emancipation into a narrow fight for political power inevitably intensified regional and ethnic tensions. Meanwhile, Britain and the USA gradually tightened their noose around the liberation movement. The front line states of Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Angola were drawn into the drive to force Mugabe into a settlement. The transition to black rule took place under British military control, which ensured that no challenge to capitalist interests emerged. The liberation armies were disarmed, and the new regime clamped down on trade unionists and peasant farmers who occupied deserted white estates. Opponents of the regime were imprisoned and in many cases simply massacred.

The tragic outcome of the struggle in Zimbabwe was not inevitable. It was the faith in Britain and America and the narrow outlook of the black middle class which allowed the West to weather the crisis. The Zimbabwean people were cheated of the freedom for which they had fought so long when it was within their grasp.

The experience of Zimbabwe will stand the Western powers in good stead now they are bracing themselves for a showdown in South Africa. As the West's counter-insurgency strategy has taken shape in recent months, the dangers facing the resistance movement have become clearer.

Britain retained the leading role in sealing the fate of its former colony of Rhodesia. Now the USA is calling the shots in South Africa. This week the US senate is likely to approve the package of economic sanctions against the apartheid regime which has already been passed by the house of representatives. Sanctions are part of the US establishment's attempts to put across a radical anti-apartheid image which is intended to win sympathy among the black masses.

America's aim is to assume the role of mediator in the struggle in South Africa. Invitations to black leaders to come on prestige conference and speaking tours in the USA and

Britain serve the same purpose. In South Africa the Botha government has launched a drive to demoralise black resistance by playing on sectional, ethnic and political divisions among blacks. During the past few months it has gone to great lengths to stir up communal tensions in order to sow confusion and justify military occupation of black townships and settlements.

In early May violent clashes between urban township dwellers and migrant workers took place in Tsakane on the Eastern Rand. Clashes among mineworkers from different ethnic groups have reportedly occurred in a number of mines. Violent conflicts have also erupted among supporters of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's conservative Zulu-based Inkatha movement, the moderate United Democratic Front, and the radical nationalist Azapo. Ethnic and sectarian tensions are a powerful weapon which the regime is determined to exploit. The South African government now seeks to stir up the divisions created by its homelands policy of segregation.

Botha's first objective appears to be to break Buthelezi's Inkatha movement away from the opposition camp. Until now Buthelezi has refused to accept 'independence' for his Kwa Zulu homeland. He has maintained a formal commitment to the minimum programme of the anti-apartheid movement — one man one vote and the abolition of all apartheid laws. But Botha's offer last week to include blacks in the running of a new multi-racial provincial government of Natal, which includes Kwa Zulu, is designed to promote a separate deal with Buthelezi. Among the leaders of the country's 10 homelands Botha has a large reserve of conservative black politicians whom he will seek to mobilise against the black resistance.

Botha is well aware that the stooge homeland leaders command little support in the black working class. This is the importance of his regime's attempts to open a dialogue with the radical leadership of the nationalist ANC and the liberal UDF. Botha's offer in January to release imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela if he rejected violence was emphatically turned down. But contact between the government and exiled ANC leader Oliver Tambo has been maintained through a number of intermediaries. This in itself is a propaganda coup for the Botha regime. Meanwhile, American politicians have developed close contact with UDF leader Allan Boesak. The movement's patron, Nobel-prize winner Bishop Desmond Tutu, has become the key link between the US leadership and the black movement.

Bishop Desmond Tutu: agent of Western diplomacy

The South African government and its Western backers have a long way to go in their drive to subdue the liberation struggle. At this stage no leader who wants to retain the support of the black working class can risk being seen to give ground to Botha. But Western attempts to sow confusion present a grave danger to the fight against the apartheid system. As in Zimbabwe the problem remains that the political leadership needed to thwart the ruling class manoeuvres is lacking. The fact that the UDF's next major campaign focuses on protests against the New Zealand rugby tour is a measure of the gulf between the determined stance of the black workers and youth and the timidity of the present leadership.

The people of South Africa should study closely the lessons of Zimbabwe. The stakes in South Africa are higher for both the white ruling class and its Western backers and the cost of failure for the liberation movement would be much dearer. If the people of South Africa are not to share an even worse fate than those in Zimbabwe, they need to move fast to replace their vacillating leaders with a leadership that is prepared to go all the way with the workers and peasants to get rid of the whole system of capitalist power in South Africa.

Sabena Norton

ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT NEW DIRECTION NEEDED

Bishop Trevor Huddleston: for 25 years anti-apartheid campaigners have tried to make the British establishment fight the system it sponsors in South Africa

Scenes of murderous police attacks on black demonstrations and mass funerals in South Africa over the past six months have provoked world-wide revulsion against the apartheid regime and sympathy with the black resistance. In the USA more than 5000 anti-apartheid protesters have been arrested so far this year. Five US states and 28 cities have agreed to withdraw funds invested in South Africa. In Britain anti-apartheid action has been less conspicuous. But here too the reports of events in South Africa have inspired a revival of campaigns for economic and political sanctions. But can sanctions help to advance the fight for black liberation?

The objective of the official anti-apartheid movement is to persuade Western governments, big business and other official institutions to put economic and political pressure on the Botha government. The key demand is the call for disinvestment. The favourable response to this demand from sections of the US establishment is widely regarded as a major achievement in the struggle against apartheid. The British anti-apartheid movement, which has campaigned for boycotts and sanctions for the past 25 years, hopes to emulate the American success in Britain. But is disinvestment really going to change South Africa?

The call for disinvestment presumes that Western investors have the right to dispose of the wealth of South Africa. But that wealth properly belongs to those who created it — the South African people. Our aim should be to get the wealth of South Africa into the hands of the black masses, not to return it to their Western exploiters.

From a practical point of view the disinvestment strategy simply does not make sense. The anti-apartheid movement argues that disinvestment will 'isolate' the apartheid regime, spark off economic chaos and thus force the government to abandon repression and introduce equal rights for blacks. Even if Western capitalists withdrew their capital, which is highly unlikely, it is even more unlikely that any good would result. Opponents of disinvestment can convincingly argue that isolation and economic chaos would force the government to adopt even more repressive measures to contain social unrest.

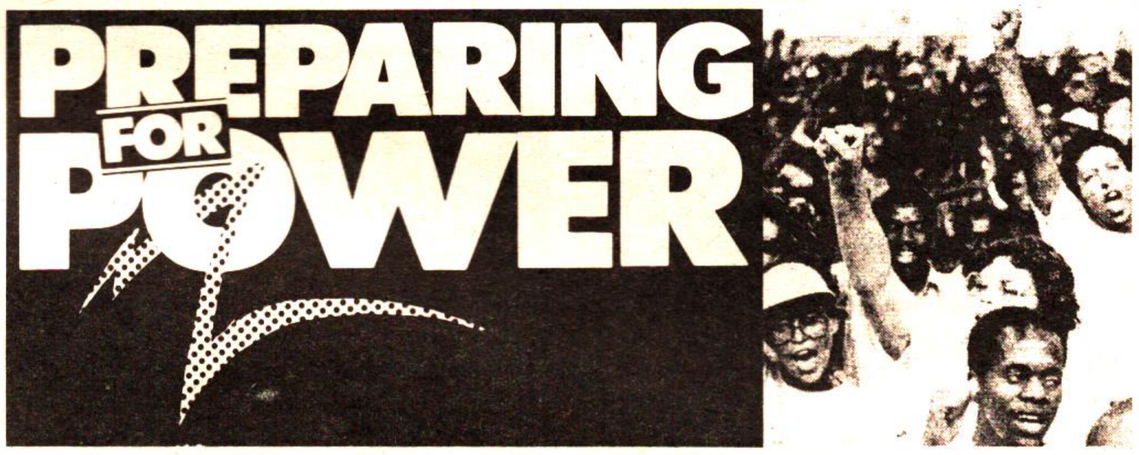
The real problem with the disinvestment campaign is not weak logic but political shortsightedness. The campaign depends on recruiting Western politicians and businessmen to the struggle against a regime they helped to establish and have built up for decades. Asking Britain or America to take action against apartheid in South Africa is like asking the CBI or the Institute of Directors to fight British capitalism. Yet in long years of campaigning for government boycotts and sanctions the British anti-apartheid movement has acquired an unshakeable faith in the progressive potential of Western capitalism. In fact the real significance of the current disinvestment debate appears to have entirely escaped the British campaigners.

The call for disinvestment is supported by a substantial section of establishment opinion. The South African Foundation, a major business think-tank, played a key role in popularising the disinvestment slogan in the USA and Europe. In Britain the advocates of disinvestment include politicians such as SDP leader David Owen. As foreign secretary in the last Labour government, Owen made an early attempt to settle the Zimbabwe problem by installing a reactionary pro-British regime under Bishop Abel Muzorewa.

In the US congress disinvestment has been supported by right-wing Republicans who agree with the American magazine *Newsweek* that 'US strategic interests would be better served by siding with the blacks than by going down with the white ship'. The crisis in South Africa has provoked a degree of panic among Western leaders. They are putting diplomatic pressure on the Botha regime, not out of a desire for black liberation, but to force the government to take measures to restore control. The threat of sanctions has been used to strengthen Botha's hand against the right-wing opponents of reform.

The debate within the ruling class about Western strategy in South Africa is a debate about counter-insurgency techniques. For the West the issue is capitalist stability in an area of key economic and strategic importance. Because of the complexity of the problem the debate covers a wide range of options from economic and diplomatic measures to military terror. But whatever tactics the West pursues the aim is the same — to contain or crush black resistance to capitalist rule in South Africa.

Our aim is to make sure we don't repeat the failure of the British solidarity movement over Zimbabwe in South Africa. Our appeal for solidarity is directed at the only force for progress in British society — the working class. The struggle against the apartheid regime is terrifying the British establishment. The survival of its system depends on maintaining black oppression in South Africa just as much as it depends on degrading workers at home. Supporting black liberation is another way of working to rid ourselves of the system that oppresses us all. Workers' solidarity is the force that can really change things - in South Africa and in Britain. Join the Revolutionary Communist Party contingent this Sunday, 16 June, on the march against apartheid.



SOUTH AFRICA

*Come to **Preparing for Power**, London 19-26 July, summer school of the Revolutionary Communist Party.*

This year's conference includes a series of special sessions on South Africa. Speakers will include experts and activists in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa and Britain.

Sessions include:

- ***Black resistance: from Sharpeville to Uitenhage***
- ***White crisis: the economic and political pressures on the Botha regime***
- ***Imperial Pretoria: destabilisation in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe***
- ***Anti-apartheid: disinvestment or anti-imperialism?***

***Preparing for Power** includes a series of discussions on the theme 'the West and the South'. This will focus on the relationship between imperialism and the backward capitalist countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East.*

Sessions will include:

- ***Famine and debt***
- ***Military juntas from left to right***
- ***The working class in the newly industrialising countries***
- ***Soviet 'imperialism'?***
- ***Anti-imperialist movements – results and prospects***

There will be additional workshops on Cuba, Nicaragua and other Third World issues, and a major course on racism in Britain.

***Preparing for Power** also includes sessions on Marxism, Leninism and the class struggle in Britain and Europe, as well as films and entertainment.*

***Preparing for Power** is being held at the University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1, from Friday 19 July to Friday 26 July.*

***Preparing for Power** costs £15 if you're working and £12 if you're not. A creche and accommodation are available.*

Syria under Assad

The West's new hatchet-man

Syria's role in the devastation of the Palestinian camps in Beirut and its cynical manipulation of the complex conflicts in Lebanon contrasts with its traditional image as a radical Arab regime. What has made Syrian president Assad the new power broker in the eastern Mediterranean?

Syria acquired its reputation as a radical maverick among the conservative Arab nations in the fifties. The secular middle class Ba'athist party attempted to modernise the country and it used a series of radical reforms to win working class and peasant support. In 1958 Syria joined with Egypt, then under the anti-Western leader Gamel Abdul Nasser, in the United Arab Republic — a move which greatly irritated the Western powers. In the sixties successive Syrian governments introduced sweeping programmes of nationalisation and land reform. The country's rulers shunned the Western alliance, looked to the Soviet Union for economic and military aid and adopted a radical pro-Palestinian stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Saika, a Syrian-sponsored Palestinian army, was formed to back the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

Syria's radical image survived long after it had become a force for reaction in the Middle East. The radical reform policies of the sixties gave way to retrenchment in response to growing opposition from the Syrian middle and upper classes organised in the Muslim Brotherhood. Hafez Assad came to power in a military coup in September 1970. He soon turned against the masses in an attempt to contain the country's deepening social and economic crisis.

The coup followed shortly after Jordanian King Hussein launched the 'Black September' massacres against Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Assad sent 200 tanks to the Jordanian border in a token gesture to help the fleeing Palestinians. But, under heavy US pressure, he refused to provide the air cover that would have made the protection effective. Syria's relationship to the Arab-Israeli conflict came to be dominated by Assad's pragmatic instinct for survival.

Keeping the lid on

At home Assad unleashed a wave of repression against the Syrian Communist Party and the trade unions. He established a powerful military-bureaucratic apparatus to suppress the turbulent social and religious conflicts in the country. As a member of the small Alawite sect, Assad lacked a substantial social base in the mainly Sunni Muslim country. But he succeeded in holding his regime together through his control over the armed forces and by making major concessions to the Muslim establishment. During the economic expansion of the early seventies, the regime managed to maintain a fragile grip over Syria's deeply divided society.

Yet Assad was obliged to take a hard line to counter the influence of the anti-imperialist struggles in neighbouring Lebanon. The problem facing Syria's rulers is that the Syrian population is highly sensitive to the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

Syria's main minorities, the Alawites, Shiites and Druze, all have close connections with their co-religionists in Lebanon which once formed a part of Greater Syria. This is why Assad has been so concerned to establish some form of truce in Lebanon. He wants desperately to keep the lid on the factional struggle that constantly threatens to spill over into Syria.

In 1976 Assad took the decisive step that led to increased Syrian involvement in the tangled web of Lebanese politics. Syria intervened militarily in the Lebanese civil war on the side of the country's Christian Franjieh regime against the joint Muslim-Palestinian opposition. In the process the Syrian forces butchered thousands of Palestinian refugees. Thanks to Syria's backing the Christians remained formally in control. But henceforth the country was divided into rival Christian and Muslim regions — and Syria established its permanent occupation of the Beq'ua valley. President Carter praised Syria for the 'constructive role' it had played in the Lebanese crisis.

The face of Assad, once a symbol of Arab hopes, now the agent of Western plans

To maintain the allegiance of the working class at home Assad still had to tread carefully. His cynical betrayal of the Palestinians in Lebanon has been coupled with rhetorical support for the wider Arab cause. Thus Syria remains formally committed to the defeat of Israel and, along with Libya, adheres to the so-called 'rejectionist front'. This loose grouping brings together Arab regimes which opposed the unilateral peace accord between Egypt and Israel in 1979. Syria and Libya are also the only countries which maintain support for Iran in the Iran-Iraq war.

Assad's Arab nationalist rhetoric is wearing increasingly thin at home as economic and social problems deepen. The president has come under growing pressure from the Muslim opposition. His brother Rifaat Assad articulates the desire of the country's upper classes for closer ties with the West. For two years the Syrian economy has been stagnant and the occupation of Lebanon now consumes a third of government expenditure.

At the Ba'ath Party congress last January Assad gave way to demands for a greater commitment to the private sector and for moves to gain access to Western loans. Rifaat Assad, who was exiled in Paris after a foiled coup, was rehabilitated. In April, the president declared a general amnesty which includes members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Assad's desperate need for both Western finance and domestic stability has turned the Syrian regime into an agent of Western interests in the Middle East. The new links among Syria, the conservative Arab rulers and the West were revealed on the eve of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. This operation was preceded by a joint meeting between US president Reagan, Saudi Arabian minister Prince Feisal and Syrian foreign minister Khaddam.

The minutes of the meeting record Khaddam's anxiety about 'PLO terrorism' and a 'consequent very difficult security situation in the Arab world'. Syria, one of the West's old bogeys in the Middle East, has thus become one of its best hatchet-men. This change reflects the growing insecurity of the Arab ruling elites in today's harsh climate of recession and conflict.

But no matter how much they grovel before the Western powers, their day of reckoning will come.

Inez Landa

ISRAEL IN CRISIS

Paying the price of defeat

Last week the Israeli army was scheduled to complete the final stage of its withdrawal from Lebanon. In the event some units were left behind to back up Israel's proxy Christian militia, the South Lebanese Army, which is falling apart under sustained Shiite attacks. But with the bulk of its forces returned from Lebanon after the worst military and political setback in Israeli history, Israel looks set to give its iron fist a rest while it tries to sort out its domestic difficulties.

The fighting between Israel's Muslim and Palestinian enemies in Lebanon provides the Israeli government with a breathing space to tackle its profound economic and social problems at home. The gravity of the country's economic crisis explains current Israeli moves to restore relations with its Arab neighbours. Israel cannot afford another war. The Peres government has even adopted a cautiously friendly attitude to Egypt's and Jordan's joint initiative for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Defeat in Lebanon and economic recession have had a devastating effect on Israeli morale. The Israeli Defence Force, once the best equipped and most disciplined army in the Middle East, is in bad shape. According to recent reports the IDF suffers from a serious shortage of skilled personnel and modern technology. Parts of the airforce had to be mothballed after defence cuts of $538 million earlier this year. Meanwhile low pay and military humiliation in Lebanon have sapped the army's fighting spirit and discipline.

The settlement programme to suppress Arab resistance in the occupied territories is suffering under the strain of government cuts. By the year 2000 Israel intended to settle up to a million Jewish settlers in the Israeli-occupied West Bank of Jordan. But the programme has slowed down as jobs and funds for settlers become scarce. Settlers in the Golan Heights have reportedly begun to pack their bags and leave.

The recession has plunged the Israeli economy into chaos. This year the annual inflation rate is expected to top 1000 per cent. Last week alone prices for sugar, bread and dairy products rose by a quarter, while the price of petrol shot up by 41 per cent. Hyper-inflation, a current account deficit of $5 billion and a steady tide of bankruptcies have brought Israel to the brink.

In May the government introduced an austerity budget, including major tax increases and cuts of $1.5 billion in state spending. But, as the American government was quick to point out, these measures are far from sufficient. American funds have kept the Israeli economy afloat. During the past six months Israel has received almost $3 billion in US military and economic aid. The USA can be relied on to fend off the collapse of its most important strategic ally in the Middle East, but America is pressing Israel to put its house in order.

The economic crisis has exposed the contradictions facing the Zionist state. Since its formation Israel has been in a virtually uninterrupted state of war with its Arab neighbours. Its survival depends on the maintenance of a vast military apparatus. But the recession has curtailed Israel's ability to play the role of the West's policeman in the Middle East. Sheer economic necessity has forced Israel to adopt a more moderate foreign policy approach.

The turn to austerity has had a profound effect on Israeli politics. Last year Shimon Peres' Labour Party won a narrow victory in the general election and was able to form a government of 'national unity' with the rival right-wing Likud party. Labour's electoral success reflected widespread war-weariness and unease about the deepening crisis. Labour promised peace and economic reform. The withdrawal of the Israeli army from Lebanon has been welcomed and has added to the popularity of the Peres government. But both Peres' attempt to moderate Israeli foreign policy and to enforce austerity at home have polarised the political climate and strained the coalition government.

Last month Jewish settlers on the West Bank were outraged when the Israeli government released 1150 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners of war in exchange for three Israelis held by the Palestinians. Convoys of armed settlers moved through the streets of the West Bank in a show of defiance, and demands were raised for the release of all jailed Zionist terrorists. At the same time the government's resumption of diplomatic relations with Egypt has produced major ructions in the coalition cabinet.

In the aftermath of its humiliation in Lebanon the Zionist state faces an uncertain and divided future. Israel has never been so weak. Today the conditions exist for striking a hammer blow against the Zionist state which has run the Middle East with an iron fist, if the Palestinian and Arab masses can seize the day.

Daniel Nassim

REVIEWS

BRITISH ARMY IN IRELAND

The killing machine

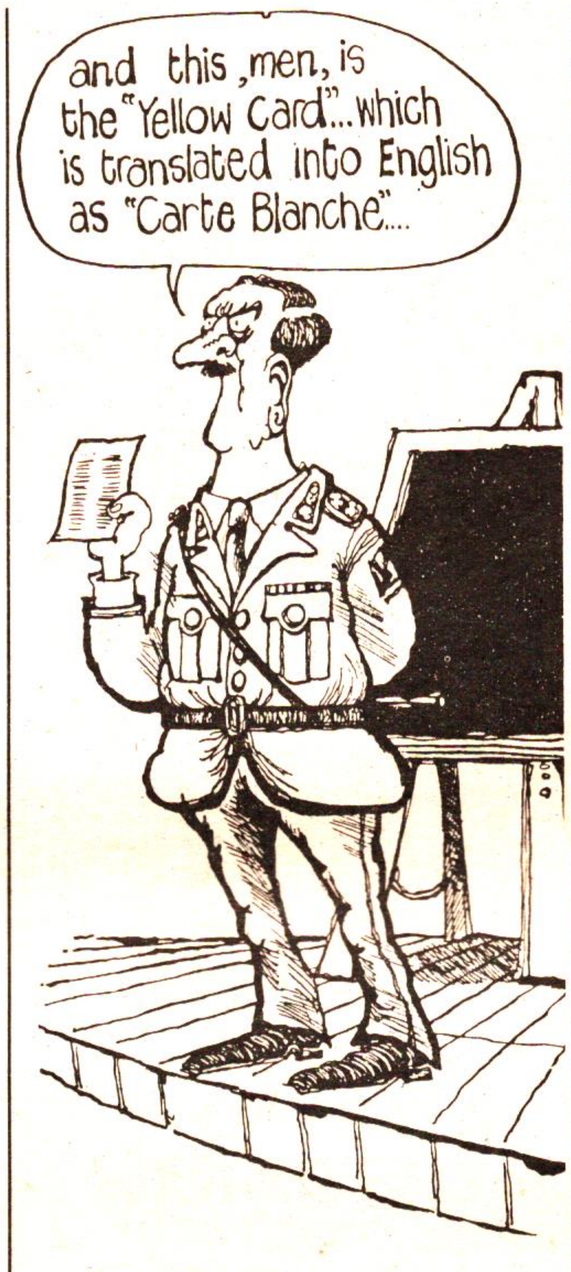
Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the middle: the army in Northern Ireland 1969-1984,* Methuen, hbk £12.95

According to Enoch Powell, the role of the British Army in Northern Ireland is 'to act as what it is: a killing machine, at the moment when authority in the state judges that order can no longer be maintained or restored by any other means'. According to Desmond Hamill, some senior British officers serving in Northern Ireland regard this as a 'precise and accurate' assessment. Others would prefer to be more discreet and disguise the function of the British forces in more diplomatic terms.

As 'ITN's most experienced reporter in Northern Ireland' Hamill is in a good position to provide an account of the Army's view of its role in the Irish War. He has interviewed many senior officers who have served in the security forces over the past 15 years and many who are still operational. Although many of their comments are off the record, and not attributable to any particular officer, they provide some insights into British strategy in the war.

Hamill shows that from the beginning senior officers appreciated that, while killing was necessary, it was not in itself sufficient to sort out the Irish problem. He records the horror of one top soldier at the view of Stormont politicians in August 1969 that 'if we now had the police, the 'B' Specials and the army totally committed, then we could beat the Micks'. The military men understood the need for political management of the situation. Their constant concern was that political initiatives should enhance the military task, not make the soldiers' job more difficult. But they found that the Stormont politicians 'had no broad political ideas — they just wanted to smash the Catholics'.

The military commanders took a pragmatic view of political questions. Far from being in the forefront of demands for more coercive measures 'to crush the terrorists' the senior officers were often a restraining influence, especially in the earlier days. They repeatedly held back from the wilder demands of Loyalist politicians to go in and wipe out the IRA. Lieutenant general Ian Freeland, when he was general officer commanding, responded angrily to Unionist complaints that his men were tolerating a 'no-go' area in the Bogside in Derry. He told them that he could take over the area in three hours — but that it would take about three years to get out again.



The soldiers also firmly resisted any political initiatives which threatened to destabilise the position of the Six Counties within the United Kingdom by making power-sharing concessions to the nationalist community. Hamill details the sequence of events around the Ulster Workers' Council strike which brought down the power-sharing assembly and executive in 1974. Deciding that the politicians had gone too far, the Army colluded with the Loyalists to wreck power-sharing and restore direct rule from Westminster.

Once the war was underway the Army chiefs recognised that withdrawal was not an option for Britain. As one commander told Hamill, 'It would be anarchy if we walked out, and a tremendous victory for an illegal organisation'. In 1975 the British authorities commissioned a special report from John Bourne, a senior civil servant in Northern Ireland. Bourne's committee included senior Army officers including the chief of staff, top RUC officers and a man from MI5. It produced a report entitled *The way ahead* which was never published, but had a decisive influence on British strategy.

Bourne's report began by ruling out a number of policy options that had been long under discussion — 'the Irish dimension', full integration with Britain, a united Ireland and an independent Ulster. *The way ahead* outlined the policy of Ulsterisation — the replacement of the British Army on the streets by the 'Ulster' police.

In combination with terror and mass imprisonment under the Diplock no-jury courts, Ulsterisation produced some results for Britain. Yet the IRA managed to regroup and strike back, sometimes with deadly effect. The deaths of Mountbatten and 18 soldiers at Warrenpoint in one day in August 1979 dictated the need for a tougher military strategy. Carefully maintaining the 'primacy of the police', the Army entered a new phase of covert operations and shoot-to-kill murders of republican suspects.

In 1984 Northern Ireland's top brass again assembled around the table with John Bourne. This time the brief was to consider long-term strategy up to the end of the century. The committee again began by ruling out any question of Irish unity. It noted that in practice this had now been accepted not only in London and Belfast, but also in Dublin, Washington and in the EEC. 'The way ahead' in 1984 lay through closer intelligence cooperation between Dublin and Belfast in covert operations against 'the terrorists'.

Hamill's account reveals the pragmatic operation of Britain's ruthless terrorists in Ireland. On the page facing the one on which Enoch Powell acknowledges the role of the Army in 'controlled and selective killings', Hamill complains of the 'respectability' of killing for the republican cause in the nationalist ghettos of Northern Ireland. For as long as Britain's killing machine occupies Ireland, killing British soldiers will remain a 'respectable' act of resistance against an alien tyranny.

Fiona Foster

IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

The promised land

Gregory Nava (director), *El Norte,* Channel 4, Thursday 13 June, 9.30pm

Thousands of refugees from Central America cross the Mexican border into the United States every week in pursuit of a better life in the 'land of the free'.

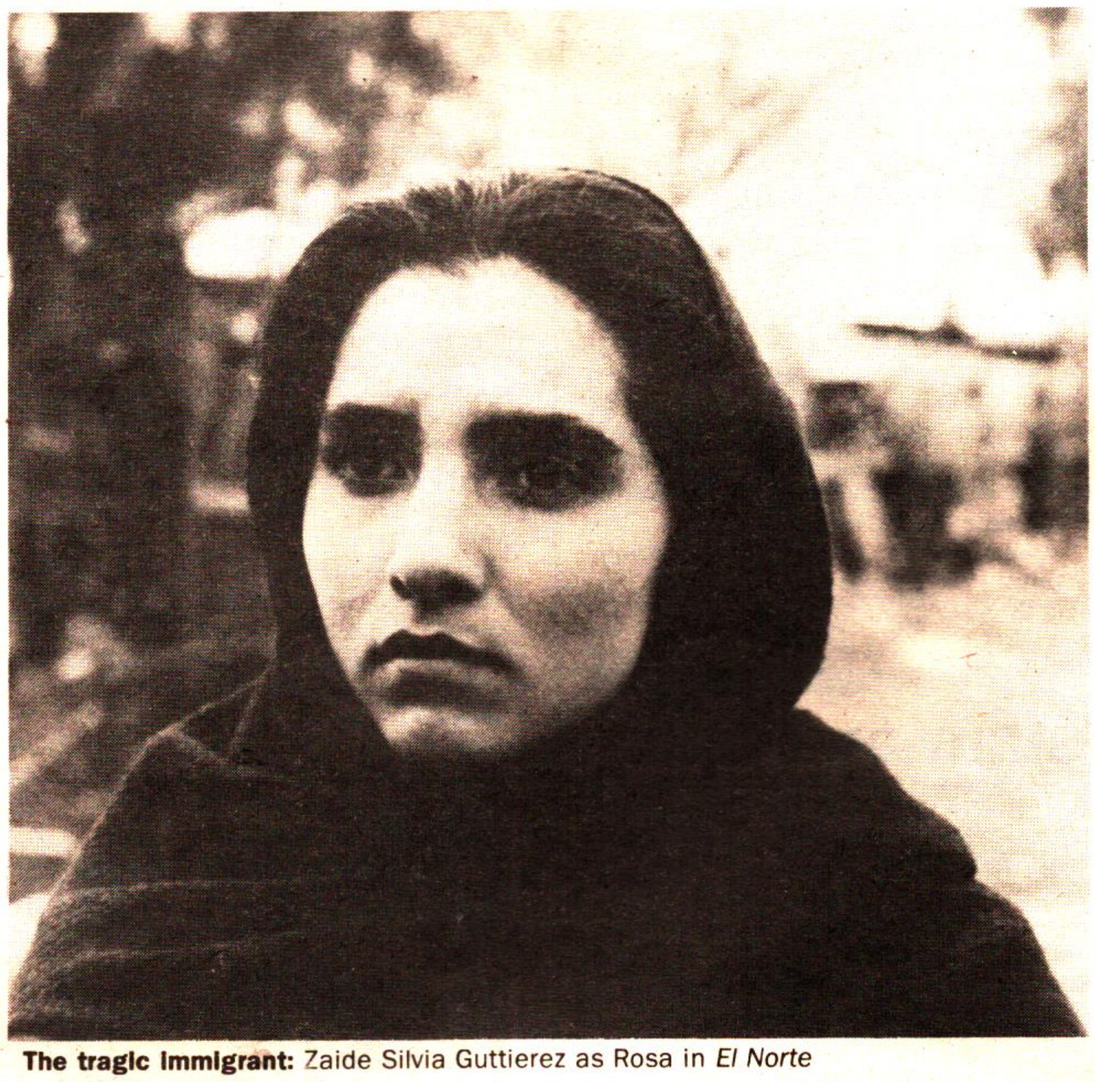
El Norte, Channel Four's 'Film on Four' slot on Thursday, in the story of two Guatemalan Indians Enrique (David Villalpando) and his sister Rosa Xuncax (Zaide Silvia Guttierez). They decide to flee their village when their father is brutally murdered by government soldiers and their mother is interned. Their impressions of what El Norte — the USA — will be like are gleaned from the pages of *Good Housekeeping* magazine.

El Norte's rich visual imagery propels the film through the unfolding tragedy of the two refugees. At the start of the film soldiers hunt the father Arturo Xuncax through ruins on the outskirts of the village. The immense abandoned stones ringing with the sound of running feet echo the hopelessness of Arturo's flight. When Rosa and Enrique emerge from the abandoned sewers of Tijuana in the USA a view of neon-lit Los Angeles greets them like a luminous forest in the distance. The majesty of the view stuns Rosa and her brother. It is both terrifying and seductive.

That *El Norte* achieves this sense of drama without sacrificing intimacy is a tribute to the simple, lyrical style in which the film tells its story. The couple's concerns are always vivid whether we are with the bored couple in the back of the bus on its way across Mexico to Tijuana or sharing Rosa's bafflement when the white woman she has come to clean for tries to explain her hi-tech washing machine.

El Norte is a powerful and moving drama. In the early scenes in Guatemala and Mexico the personal tragedy of Rosa and Enrique is well integrated into the social tragedy of the Guatemalan Indians and of the refugees waiting on the Mexican-US border. However after their arrival in the USA social questions are introduced more formally into the dialogue and the personal tragedy of Rosa and Enrique comes to the fore. To intensify the film's tragic end the initial success of Rosa and Enrique in landing on their feet in the USA is exaggerated. This has the effect of setting them at a distance from the universal experience of Latin American immigrants into the USA. The result is a more tragic conclusion but one which is imbued with fatalism rather than anger against the system that lives off the sufferings of refugees and immigrants.

John Johnson



The tragic immigrant: Zaide Silvia Guttierez as Rosa in *El Norte*

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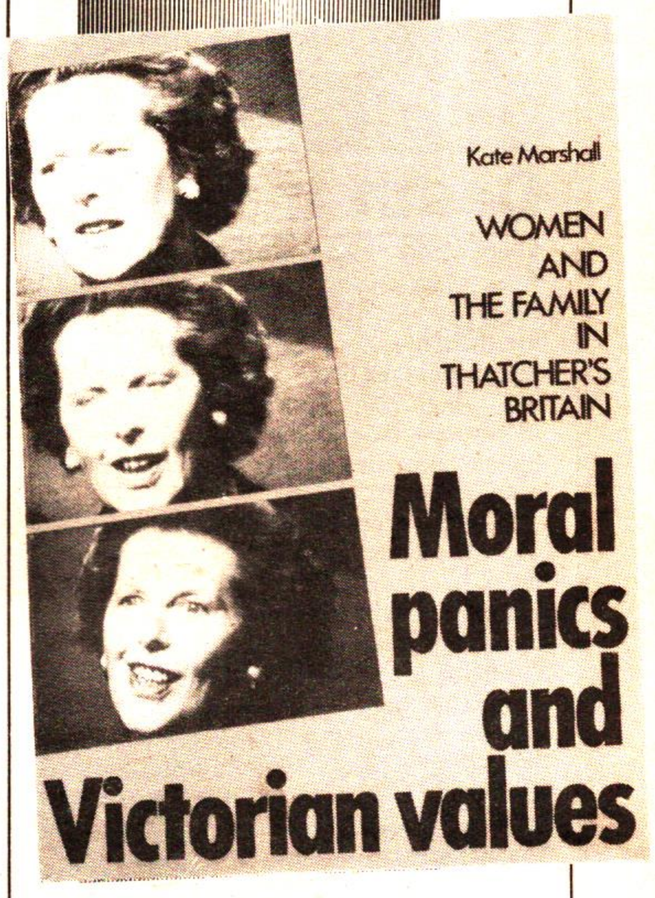

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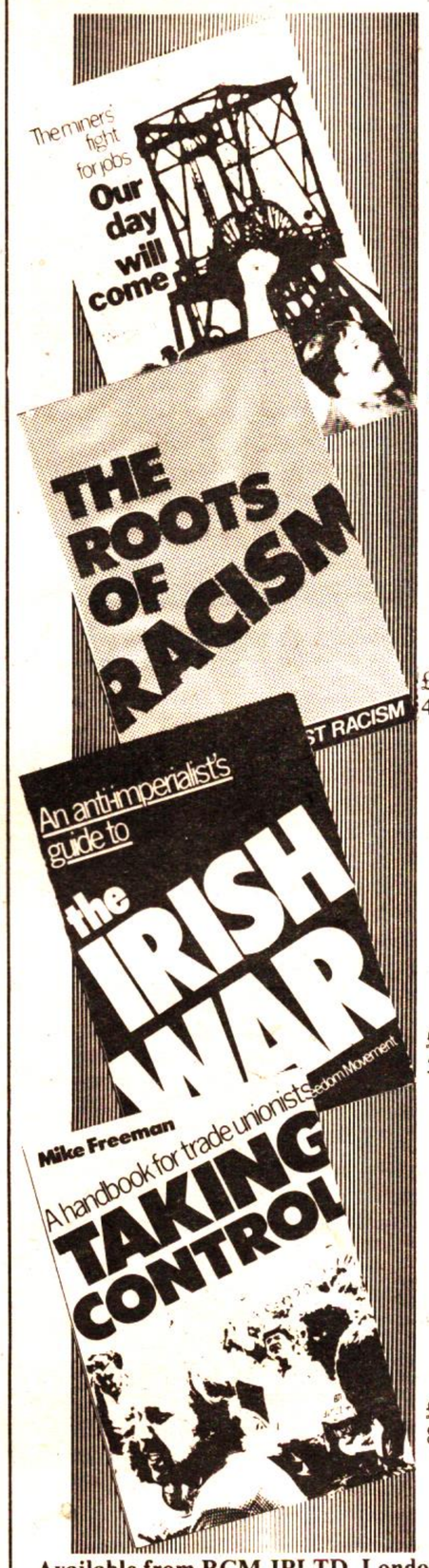

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LETTERS

Joe Boatman (reflex)

Death threats

I would like to thank *tns* for highlighting my son's case during the past few weeks. Both Pearse and his wife are living in constant fear for their lives, not knowing when the next search will take place or what the next arrest will bring. Their house has been searched more times than Pearse can remember and the same applies to the many times he has been arrested.

Last week my 17-year old son Sean was also threatened with his life. On Monday night he made a complaint against Royal Ulster Constabulary thugs who hit him at a council meeting at Derry Guildhall. On Saturday the RUC stopped him on the Buncrana Road. One cop asked him, 'Are you the boy who put in the complaint about the police last week?' When Sean refused to answer an RUC man put a machine gun to his head and another said, 'He'd love to pull that trigger if you don't drop the case'.

Before they let him go they they warned him not to go down the Buncrana Road 'or we'll do it to you there'. As soon as he escaped Sean went to the police station to make another complaint. He was sick in the police station and has been put on tranquillizers. That's British democracy for you.

If the British people only knew what was happening over here to us, maybe they would understand the Irish liberation struggle and why the fight must go on until we get rid of the so-called defenders of democracy here in Ireland.

We all want peace, but not at any price. We need the support of the British working class. Last year I had the pleasure of meeting the delegation from the Irish Freedom Movement which came over from England. These young people were able to get an insight into the situation for themselves and they went back with a better understanding and a promise to work hard for the freedom of Ireland.

Teresa Moore
Derry

Engineers and Labour

In June members of the AUEW will be asked to vote on the retention of the union's political fund to the Labour Party. The AUEW leaders are campaigning hard for a yes vote. President Terry Duffy says, 'We feel it is essential that we return a yes vote...to keep the union affiliated to the party and to keep down the influence of the hard left'. The Canterbury district committee do not think it is enough just to vote against retaining the political fund. We want to use the money for political activity that is useful to the working class. Contrary to what the union leaders have been saying the Trade Union Act does not prohibit unions from political activity. Its purpose is to put a block on trade union funds to the Labour Party.

The Labour Party supports the rule of capitalist law and the leadership demonstrated this clearly in the miners' strike. Workers now know that they cannot win their rights by going to law — ask the strikers who lost their jobs at Hindle Gears.

Labour in office has never hesitated to sacrifice the interests of workers. Why should workers go on handing money to a party that goes on betraying them?

Alex Laurence, AUEW
Canterbury

Miners and Labour

I am writing in reply to Edward Hepworth's letter in *tns* 7. He cites the food collections and jumble sales held by Labour Party members during the miners' strike as evidence that Labour fights for the working class. While not wishing to belittle the importance of collections, it is vital for people like Hepworth to understand that they are no substitute for political activity. What was needed to take the strike forward was an uncompromising anti-capitalist stance. What united Tony Benn, Denis Skinner, the Socialist Workers' Party, Arthur Scargill and Neil Kinnock was loyalty to the *Plan for Coal,* a document which tied miners' jobs to the future of British capitalism.

Hepworth goes on to say that an end to the political levy to the Labour Party will 'not help the working class' and that 'the labour alliance of unions and Labour Party...gives revolutionaries the chance to argue for democratisation and control'. While the political levy goes to Labour, it is out of any rank and file control and simply goes to fund Labour leaders who turn round and scab on the miners, the Irish, black people and women. We should call for a levy directly under rank and file control to be used in any political or industrial struggle workers are involved with. This is the only way 'democratisation and control' can rest with the very workers who pay the levy.

Damon Fairclough
Sheffield

End of a dream

I have been reading your paper for several weeks and noticed the letters from Labour Party supporters who still have illusions in the Labour Party. I'd like to relate my experiences as a bricklayer working for Wakefield Labour council for the last five months.

When I joined the council the manager said, 'When you make money I make money. If you don't make money I'll want to know why'. This has been their attitude ever since and bonus targets have been set ridiculously low, making it impossible to make bonus. Safety standards have been practically non-existent. The scaffolding we have been forced to use looks as if it has come straight from the scrapyard.

During the binmen's strike we were encouraged to use private contractors' skips. The union justified this by saying that the binmen never came out with us in our dispute.

It was always something of a dream for me to work for a Labour council. I expected first class conditions, first class wages — without having to work too hard for them — and at least decent safety standards. We were told we would have all these and more but so far we have had just the opposite. I'm 29-years old, this is my eighteenth employer, a Labour council. I'm used to being treated like an animal at private firms, but this being a council which works for the people obviously has no regard for animals.

Andy Brooke, Ucatt
Wakefield

Islam and Iran

It was good of you to write on Iran once again (*tns* 6) at a time, as you mentioned, when all the media have chosen silence. It was especially pleasing because it is a long time since the left publications reflected upon the labour movement in Iran. However, after reading the article there are a couple of points which I would like you to clarify.

As I understand from your article, the concept of Islamic fundamentalism and its anti-Western position are rather misconceived. If by West we are referring not to an imaginary land, but to a particular social system, then we must clarify that the 'anti-Western' feelings generated by this fundamentalist mentality are not 'anti-colonial' and 'anti-exploitation'.

What the Shiites mean by West is a place where having sex without marriage, drinking, uncovered women, make-up, homosexuality, etc are unopposed. They call it 'corruption' and derive their 'anti-Westernism' from it. Either this is genuine anti-Westernism, in which case it must be opposed by socialists, or else it is not genuine and a sign of the backwardness of Islamic education. I argue that the second position is the correct one.

Has *tns* taken these facts into account? What do you mean by 'anti-Westernism'? Again let me thank you for publishing articles on Iran and wish you good luck in your struggle against capitalism.

An Iranian reader
London

MEN OF MILLWALL

Hundreds of Football enthusiasts are joining the Army daily.

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THE FINAL

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West Africa House, opposite National Theatre, Kingsway.

Football and war

I agreed completely with Mick Hume's article about football hooliganism and the hypocrisy of the ruling class. The connection between 'thugs' and soldiers has always been close. Anyone living within bottle-throwing distance of a barracks will know the hell of a squaddies' night out, and will be accustomed to seeing anything from a wrecked pub to a rape discreetly ignored by the establishment or written off as high spirits.

But the authorities' attitude to the unsanctioned violence of working class youth is ambiguous too. Along with the calls to lick them into shape with national service are direct appeals to the football 'armies' to join the real thing. The poster enclosed (reprinted above) shows how John Bull banged the drum at Millwall's ground generations ago. The government's search for cannon fodder is the same today. At the height of the skinhead revival an army poster showed a brutal pair of combat boots with the caption: 'These boots won't make you taller, but you'll feel bigger wearing them'.

The establishment is worried that foreigners are spitting on the Union Jack because of football thugs, but Britain's barbaric tradition ensured this response long before the days of European football.

T Banks
London

Write to tns

BCM JPLTD
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STEPPING OUT

Council tenants in Shepherds Bush receiving the latest copy of *Labour News* may have been surprised to learn that they live in the 'municipal equivalent of the Somme in 1916'. This, according to local MP Clive Soley, is the result of a 'shabby year's work' by the Tory/Liberal council. Top of Clive's list of concerns is the demise of the 'traditional working class'. Last year, he points out, the crime rate rose by nine per cent, part of which was due to the council cutting the number of toilet attendants, 'whose presence deters crime'. Precisely what kind of 'crime' is not specified, but one thing seems sure. Gone are the days when public lavatories were places you could take the family, secure in the knowledge that every cubicle contained the traditional wooden seat, hard paper — and a police 'attendant' crouched behind a peephole.

The plight of homeless people forced to pay exorbitant rent to sleep in squalid, overcrowded bed and breakfast hovels, and that of Tamil refugees herded into British detention centres, is dealt with elsewhere in ***tns****. Here I would only add a footnote on Hounslow landlady Mrs Liza Massey, who seems to combine the benign qualities of bed and breakfast minister Norman Fowler and immigrant-interning home secretary Leon Brittan. Mrs Massey has been playing host to 16 Tamils who fled to Britain to escape the death camps in Sri Lanka. She charged 16 of them £48.30 each a week to doss down on sofas and share one toilet. Her explanation for this disgraceful carry-on? 'I am a Christian who offered to help persecuted Sri Lankans in an emergency.' With Mrs M coining in a total of £772.80 rent each week, the wages of sin are obviously enjoying a boom.*

●

Speaking of crime and wealth, the authorities are clearly getting very worried about the decline in public respect for the institutions of law and order. An editorial in the latest edition of *The Magistrate* urges the 23 000 part-time beaks not to dress too flash on the bench, for fear that the poor souls being denied their freedom might think class has something to do with who gets it in the neck from British law and order. In particular, lady magistrates are warned not to wear sparklers while on court duty. 'If the offender is unemployed', notes *The Magistrate,* 'It will do nothing to make justice more acceptable to him if he notices that the lady on the bench has a knuckle full of diamonds.'

There is nothing like a bunfight between different sections of the official labour movement to bring out the worst in trade union bureaucrats. The dispute over NUJ member Jim Brown, who was sacked from his job at Nalgo HQ for supposedly passing on confidential union documents to Liverpool city council, rumbles on. Recently the NUJ, Apex and Actts picketed the Nalgo offices in Brown's support. The Nalgo bureaucrats inside immediately got the police round to ensure that there were no more than eight people on the Actts picket line. When the men from Actts offered to refer the dispute to the powers that be at the TUC, Nalgo retorted that the TUC is 'not relevant to trade union members'. A rare insight from the union bureaucracy. It's a shame they don't take the same attitude to the bosses' police.

●

British democracy in Ireland, part 500. Republican Henry Cushinhan has for some time visited IRA prisoners in the Long Kesh concentration camp. He was recently elected as a Sinn Fein councillor for Antrim. On his next visit to the Kesh, he was denied access by the screws. Why? Because he is an elected Sinn Fein member of course, and the Brits don't allow such types near their repressive institutions. Unless, that is, they're being arrested under the PTA.

REPORTS

Tamils must stay!

Last Tuesday, Workers Against Racism supporters demonstrated outside one of Britain's biggest passport offices in Liverpool in protest at the Tories' treatment of Tamil refugees. We got a rousing reception from trade union activists in the passport section who walked out of work to support the picket.

At the same time news broke that the home office had sent 21-year old Kandiah Raveenthiran back to Sri Lanka. The deportation created a political storm in parliament. Immigration minister David Waddington said that the deportation was 'a serious blunder'. In fact it was completely in line with home office policy. Home secretary Leon Brittan had no doubts 'that the decision arrived at was correct and in accordance with the policy I have announced'. The blunder was that somebody had found out about it.

Since the start of Sri Lanka's recent anti-Tamil pogroms 2300 Tamils have fled to Britain. Only 24 have been given permission to stay and more than 100 have been told to get out. Hundreds more are being held in prison conditions at Heathrow and Gatwick airports.

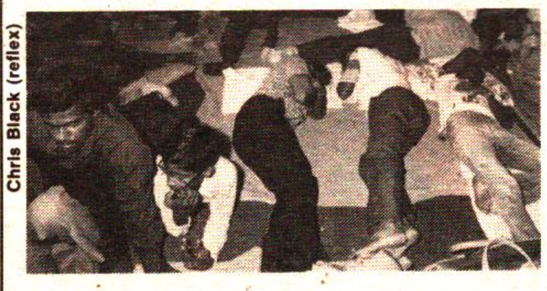
The establishment and its gutter press have conducted a hysterical campaign to whip up popular outrage at the arrival of immigrants from Sri Lanka. The *Sun* said the nation had to make an 'ugly choice' between kicking the Tamils out or 'ceasing to be British and becoming a melting pot of all nations'. The prospect of 2000 Tamils setting up home in Britain was an uglier choice for the *Sun* than the prospect of 2000 dead Tamils in Sri Lanka. It recommended expulsions.

Labour immigration spokesman Gerald Kaufman alleges that Brittan 'does not care about the fact that people may be sent back to imprisonment, torture and death'. But the Labour leaders made it clear that they did not object to the *principle* of immigration control. Their only concern is that proper immigration *procedure* is followed.

Even left-wing Labour MPs like Militant's David Nellist have done nothing more than criticise the Tories' immigration procedure. Nellist objected that Brittan's decision to reduce the time scale for appeals against deportation from several months to 24 hours was going too far. 'I like to satisfy myself', explained Nellist, 'that someone has a good case.'

We held our picket of Liverpool passport office to make the point that every immigrant has 'a good case' and that we support the right of every black person to live in Britain. Tamil refugees can do without the indignity of Labour MPs investigating their backgrounds and making decisions based on racist laws. Our message to the *Sun* is that British workers have no interest in keeping Britain British and every interest in uniting with blacks against British bosses and their barbaric system.

Kenan Malik



Chris Black (reflex)

Jobs shivers in sunrise firms

'All we've got to look forward to is a life on Norman Fowler's family credit,' said a woman worker from the National Semiconductor micro-electronics plant last week. This month 450 women at the factory face the sack.

Management says the recession 'will send shivers through the whole of Scotland's "silicon glen" '. A woman worker at the factory told us that the latest redundancies will push local unemployment past 30 per cent: 'There's 10 000 people chasing 300 jobs. A lot of us are the only wage earners in our families now. The men have all been put out of work already'.

The women at the factory are not unionised. Jimmy Milne, Scottish TUC secretary, said he was 'seriously concerned', but he was not concerned enough to do anything about the job cuts. Norman Godman, Labour MP for Greenock and Port Glasgow, is satisfied with the bosses' explanation that the job losses are 'lay-offs' not 'redundancies'. Maybe Godman can tell the women what the difference is. The provost of Inverclyde called for 'strong and urgent action' from the government.

The women of Greenock don't expect 'strong and urgent action' on their behalf from a Tory administration whose response to unemployment is to cut welfare benefits. They want strong and urgent action from the labour movement. Workers in the sunrise firms need to fight for union recognition and for organisations which will make the silicon glen bosses do more than shiver.

Cathy Barrett

Glasgow furniture bust-up

When workers arrived at the Morris furniture factory in Glasgow on Monday 3 June the boss turned them away and sacked 29 for clocking off after 39 hours the previous Friday. The sackings are the culmination of a long dispute over working hours.

The furniture workers' union FTAT has a nationally agreed 39-hour week, but three years ago workers at the Morris factory agreed to an extra three unpaid hours to 'help the company through a bad patch'. Now they want to return to normal working, but boss Robert Morris isn't prepared to discuss it.

Since the 29 sackings six more workers have been given the boot for refusing to cross their picket line. 'Nothing's getting through to the factory now,' steward Brian McKee told *tns*, 'all the machine shop is out, the polishers and labourers are in, but production has been stopped.'

McKee's strategy is a potential winner. But the other strategy being promoted by FTAT officials is a sure loser. Because Morris' business competitors are annoyed that he has broken the 39-hour agreement, the officials argue that the way to win is to get other employers to lobby Morris on the men's behalf. In reality the bosses are more likely to attack the wages and hours of their own workers.

The FTAT officials have enforced a six-man picket and told the men not to rock the boat. Morris won't be impressed by good behaviour. He might be moved, however, if the whole workforce was out, if his orders were stopped, if other trade unionists blocked supplies to the factory and if pickets were mounted on Harrods and other shops that stock his furniture. As McKee argues, 'we've got to stop him producing furniture — that's the only way'.

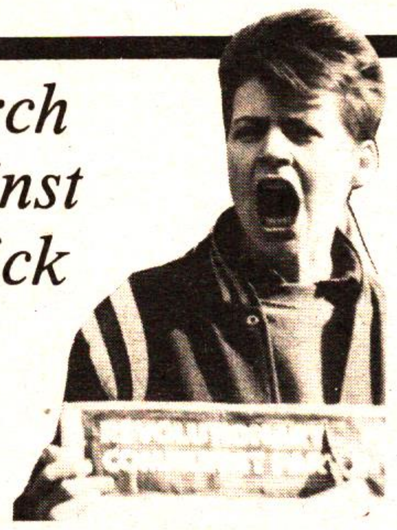
Stevie O'Riordan

01-729 3771

Deadline for news and reports: Monday 9am

COME ALONG!

March against Gillick



On Monday 24 June the department of health is appealing against Victoria Gillick's ban on contraception to under-16s in the house of lords. Last December Gillick won her case to stop doctors giving advice on contraception or abortion to young people without their parents' consent. The Gillick ruling emphasises that parents have a responsibility to look after their children's morals and that the place for sex is within the constraints of marriage.

Last Saturday more than 100 people came to our dayschool in London to discuss why the Tories are so keen on the family. The day was such a success that we decided to do the same in Glasgow next month. Next week the RCP will be marching against Gillick in London. Join us!

● Free contraception, free abortion on demand!
March against the Gillick ruling
Sunday 23 June 11.30am
Lincoln's Inn Fields

● Moral panics and women's rights
Dayschool to discuss the new morality and what it means for women
Saturday 6 July 10am — 5pm
Partick Burgh Hall, **Glasgow**

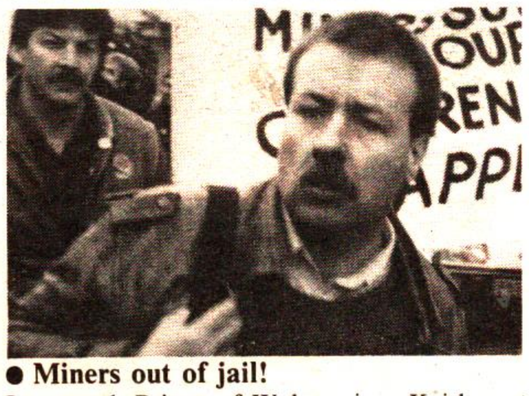
● Stop Victoria Gillick!
Public meeting to discuss Thatcher's family
Wednesday 19 June 7.30pm
Albany Centre, Shaftesbury Avenue
Montpelier, **Bristol**

OTHER EVENTS

● Come out and canvass
People in Vauxhall are getting a chance to vote revolutionary communist in the local GLC election on 11 July. Help us make sure they know they've got a chance to vote for a real change.
Canvassers meet at 10.30am every Saturday at Stockwell tube and we're out every night from now until the election. Get in touch on 01-729 0414.

● Their state, our rights
Meeting to discuss Tory law and order
Monday 17 June 7.30pm
Murray Hall, **East Kilbride**

● British troops out of Ireland!
The Irish Freedom Movement has called a demonstration in London to commemorate the anniversary of Internment. In August 1971 the British Army raided nationalist ghettos in Belfast and Derry and locked up Irish freedom fighters without a trial. The British war machine has been locking them up ever since.
Saturday 10 August
London



● Miners out of jail!
Last week Prince of Wales miner Keith Hammond got sent down for four months for 'behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace' during the miners' strike. He would like *tns* readers to write to him in prison. Send letters to:
Keith Hammond
Prisoner No R96424
HM Prison
Armley, Leeds LS12

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* Cortonwood to shut * Cortonwood to shut *

Stop the pit closures!

On Friday the National Coal Board announced the closure of Cortonwood, the South Yorkshire pit where the 12-month miners' strike began. *Mick Hume* was there.

Outside the post office in the Dearne Valley village of Brampton, home of Cortonwood colliery, a battered cardboard box serves as a collection point for the Bradford football fire disaster appeal. 'They'll need to get a crate out here for a miners' disaster fund if they close the pit,' said one Friday morning shopper. Some men who lost their jobs fighting pit closures for a year already rely on the support of local people to survive. The hand-written posters for a Brampton gala of stalls and sideshows declare that proceeds will go to 'local charities and fund for sacked miners'. Now, for the second time in 15 months, the whole Cortonwood workforce has been shown the pit gate.

Last time the coal board announced that Cortonwood was to shut, in March 1984, management's move was a shock to South Yorkshire miners. The board's decision to close a pit that had been thought secure was a calculated move designed to provoke a battle on the bosses' terms. Cortonwood's miners walked out, along with workers from seven other South Yorkshire pits, and started the area-by-area reaction that led to the strike. Throughout the 12-month dispute the Cortonwood picket line — known as 'The Alamo' — was a symbol of the miners' determination.

There was no repeat walk out when the board publicised its latest plans. Where last year's closure move sparked angry resistance, last week's announcement was met with bitter resignation. 'It's closing this time,' the miners told us. Why?

The responsibility for the pessimistic atmosphere hanging over Cortonwood on Friday does not lie with the men who gave their all in the strike and whose lives and villages still bear the scars of the battle. The blame lies with the NUM officials who failed to unite the union behind the strike last year and who have failed to organise against the coal board in the latest stage of the struggle.

In contrast to last year's bolt from the blue, Friday's announcement that the pit will close by the end of this year should have come as no surprise to anybody. Since the defeat of the strike the coal board has been busy forcing through its programme of pit closures and job losses. The other three areas of the Yorkshire coalfield had already been told they were to lose around 8500 jobs. It was common knowledge that the South Yorkshire cuts were to be publicised on Friday, and a safe bet that the 122-year old Cortonwood was on the hit-list. Yet NUM officials had done little to prepare their members for what was to come or to prepare the national union to resist the closure.

The Cortonwood miners walking down the pit lane to begin the Friday afternoon shift a couple of hours before the closure announcement said the union had given them no lead about what they should do if closure was coming. 'Ask in the butcher's down the road,' one told us, 'they'll know what's going on before we do.' In the union office at the pit the officials were waiting passively for the board to tell them their fate. 'You'll have to ask the colliery manager', they said, 'he's in charge here.'

With 'Dale's butchers and bakers shop' rivalling the union office as the place miners go to find out what's happening at their pit, it is no wonder the rank and file can see no clear direction to fight back. The NUM's acceptance that the colliery managers are 'in charge' has allowed the employers to have their way at Cortonwood.

You can hear the same story of management aggression and union submission at almost every pit along the Dearne Valley. Manvers colliery was another South Yorkshire pit earmarked for big job cuts on Friday. Local rumour has it that the board wants to trim the 1700-strong workforce to 600. Last year Manvers came out on strike three weeks before the national dispute began, when management tried to introduce changes in shift and meal break times. Since the strike ended in March, the employers have simply imposed the changes which they couldn't get through before. 'The union officials have tried to get negotiations going through the established procedure', a Manvers electrician told us, 'but management are just bulldozing procedure flat.'

While NUM officials plead with the board to return to the pre-strike procedures of negotiation and compromise, management are bulldozing on with their new no-nonsense methods of restructuring the Yorkshire coalfield. At the coal board's Allerton Byewater workshops the bosses have even bulldozed the NUM office flat. The union's confidential files are heaped in the canteen, and NUM members have to clock off and back on if they want to talk to the union men. Acting branch secretary Cliff Martin is reduced to working out of his car in the colliery car park. 'The management here are trying to work the place as if the union doesn't exist,' he complained.

At some pits the union doesn't exist. NUM officials have just given up. After the two best branch officials were given compulsory transfers from Askern in the Doncaster area, another official asked to be moved and the rest of the committee bar one declined to stand for re-election. The lack of organised opposition has allowed management to introduce a harsh regime of safety standard cuts and new bonus schemes. Last Wednesday a young Askern miner broke his leg underground. The usual safety procedure would have involved sending five men to carry him out on a stretcher. Instead only two were allowed to help the maimed man with no stretcher. 'They'll be leaving bodies down there next so as not to stop production,' one miner told us.

Given the way the NUM has crumbled before the employers' offensive it is no wonder that many miners feel lost and demoralised. A lot of them, especially the older men, have put in for voluntary redundancy to get out of the industry. There are now only five miners over the age of 50 left at the Yorkshire Main pit. Yet many others are not prepared to lie down and be trampled on. Thousands of Yorkshire miners have proved willing to rebel against the coal board's dictatorial rule since the 12-month strike ended. Local disputes have broken out at every pit in the Doncaster area. At Kellingley colliery in North Yorkshire two weeks ago, miners won a battle with the board even though their officials had thrown in the towel.

At a branch meeting last month Kellingley NUM officials recommended that their members accept management plans to introduce an extra shift. The miners present rejected the union's idea. Management told the men the new scheme was being brought in anyway. When some miners organised among themselves to turn up for work at the old shift times, they were sent home. The rest of the dayshift walked out, the afternoon shift refused to go down, and management withdrew the shift changes.

Local militancy like that displayed at Kellingley might win the miners a temporary respite from the board's battering ram tactics. But it cannot stave off the employers' concerted assault on miners' jobs, living standards and working conditions. The miners need a nationally-led campaign against every pit closure and redundancy and for the reinstatement of every man sacked or jailed because of the strike. Yet the NUM's national officials have more than matched its local leaders in backing down from the challenge and staging a disappearing act.

After the latest round of Yorkshire cuts were announced, area NUM president Jack Taylor could only express his gratitude to the coal board for not hitting the miners harder. National president Arthur Scargill responded to the Cortonwood closure plan by calling for 'renewed industrial action'. This posturing will ring pretty hollow with miners who have seen and heard nothing of Scargill since he led the Cortonwood return to work parade in March. Scargill has done so little in response to the board's attacks that the miner-hating *Sun* has announced a prize for any reader who spots the NUM chief.

The NUM leaders are telling miners to pin their hopes of reinstatement and resisting pit closures on the election of a Labour government. Scottish NUM leaders welcomed Labour leader Neil Kinnock as an ally at last weekend's Scottish miners' gala. The fact that a party which closed more pits than Thatcher last time it was in office is now promoted as the miners' saviour sums up the NUM's abdication of leadership in the fight against cuts and sackings.

The closure of Cortonwood closes the last chapter of the 1984-85 miners' strike. Miners need a fresh start and a new fighting leadership if they are to use their energy and anger to win back the ground that has been lost. This month's branch elections present an early opportunity for calling the old compromisers to account, and building a national campaign which can avert any more disasters.