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the next step

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Gorbachev, Reagan and arms cuts pages 2 and 8

How to win at Caterpillar page 2

March against police murders page 4

The sweat in McDonald's burgers page 5

10

As Kinnock cracks down on every left-wing policy...

IT'S
▼

LOONY

**FOR SOCIALISTS
TO SUPPORT
LABOUR**

See pages 3, 6 and 7

Disarming arguments

Unlike his predecessors in the Kremlin, who often displayed the diplomatic sense of a goose, Soviet chief Mikhail Gorbachev has a good sense of timing. Thus he made his offer to scrap medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe in the middle of Ronald Reagan's Irangate nightmare. At a time when the White House was disoriented and widely discredited, Reagan was always likely to look kindly on the prospect of a deal that could allow him to re-emerge as an international statesman.

It is now possible that some sort of paper agreement will be struck between the 'superpowers'. But the motives behind such a pact would have little to do with disarmament. Gorbachev's main aim is to ease the pressure of the arms race on the creaking Soviet economy (see page 8). Reagan relishes the chance to play peace-maker after the damage done by Irangate, because it would give him the opportunity to confirm America's status as the leader of the Western world.

The rulers of Western Europe reacted coolly to Gorbachev's approach to Reagan. They no longer accept Washington's right to speak for the whole capitalist world. America's decline from its position of post-war supremacy, and the lengthening list of conflicts among the Western powers over such matters as trade, technology and the third world, have divided the Nato alliance. France, Germany and even Britain are now unhappy about leaving the management of international affairs in American hands. They want a slice of the superpower action.

The more intense competition among the Western states ensures that there can be no real moves towards world disarmament. Each capitalist power is rearming to put some military weight behind its economic efforts in the battle for global supremacy. Today the West needs increased firepower to keep a grip on the governments and peoples of the third world. Tomorrow it may need it to sort out Nato's internal disputes in a third world war.

Despite all the talk of 'dramatic breakthroughs' on disarmament, the true dynamic is in the opposite direction, towards bigger arms stockpiles and the age of Star Wars. Even if Gorbachev and Reagan agreed to scrap all the medium-range missiles in Europe, it would cut the total number of nuclear warheads in the world by less than two per cent. The Western powers' lack of

interest in genuine disarmament is indicated by the way they up the stakes each time the Soviet Union makes a concession. First America insisted that any deal on medium-range missiles must not impinge on its Star Wars programme. Now that Gorbachev has accepted that diktat, Thatcher has warned that the Soviets must also be ready to cut their short-range missiles and conventional forces.

The British Labour Party has welcomed Gorbachev's move as a vindication of its own non-nuclear defence policy. In fact recent events serve to expose the emptiness of Labour's alternative to Tory militarism. While the media get excited about the possibility of a paper deal on nukes between Washington and Moscow, the Western powers and their agents get on with waging wars around the world — using the conventional weaponry which Labour upholds as a force for peace.

Concentrating on the balance of nuclear power is no way to stop the war drive. In the last 40 years, nobody has died in a nuclear war. Over the same period, millions have perished in bloody conventional conflicts. British governments, Labour and Tory alike, have stained their hands in bloodbaths on every continent of the Earth. The last week alone brought fresh revelations of British government involvement in running guns to Reagan's murderous Contra gang in Nicaragua, and in sending ex-SAS mercenaries to teach the Sri Lankan security forces how to pursue their pogrom against the minority Tamil community. This is the only meaning that a 'non-nuclear defence' policy can have for a rapacious capitalist power like Britain in the strife-torn world of the eighties.

'If you want peace, fight against war' is a slogan the Revolutionary Communist Party has promoted for the past few years. We have sought to encourage people to widen their opposition to nuclear weapons into an active campaign against every example of British and Western militarism. The fact that there is now talk of a deal on medium-range missiles, at the same time as the West and its agents visit fresh cruelties upon people from Libya to Lebanon, hammers home our point about the inadequacy of a narrow anti-nuclear campaign. The only way to prevent war is to take a stand against the system that feasts on the fake diplomacy of summit meetings, and on the real bloodshed of 'non-nuclear' slaughterhouses.

Free Enterprise

Exactly what happened when the cross-Channel ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* sank on Friday is still unclear. But it is clear that the British government under Margaret Thatcher, who was helicoptered to the scene of the tragedy to cry for the TV cameras, had a hand in scuttling the ship that claimed so many lives. When the issue of safety standards on such ferries was discussed at a recent meeting of Common Market transport ministers, the Tories were among those who made sure that no new safety rules were imposed which would interfere with the money-making activities of ferry firms. As the Belgian transport minister put it, 'The weight of commercial pressure is so great that it would

be like fighting a war to try and pass legislation.'

Everything about the disaster, from the dangerous but cheap roll-on/roll-off design of the ship to its apparently hasty departure from port with open bow doors, smacks of the skinflint, time-is-money attitude of the cut-throat market place. The profit system and the politicians who protect it will risk the lives of countless ordinary people for the sake of saving a few bob. They do it every day in the workplaces, the hospitals and on public transport. It takes a disaster like the sinking off Zeebrugge to highlight the threat to our health which is posed by the drive for profits. The sea can indeed be cruel. But it is not nearly as evil as capitalism.



PLEADING FOR MERCY AT PARLIAMENT WON'T SAVE OUR JOBS

CATERPILLAR OCCUPATION

Time to change gear

In the ninth week of their occupation, Caterpillar workers need some effective solidarity action to save their jobs

Sandy Watson, ex-Amalgamated Engineering Union convenor at Caterpillar Tractors, ended his address to Saturday's RCP trade union dayschool in Glasgow with a challenge to the bosses: 'We shall not be moved.' It summed up the determination that has taken the occupation, against closure and the loss of 1200 jobs, into its ninth week. But on the same day, Cat bosses upped the stakes by threatening to close early and withdraw all redundancy pay. Staying put will not be enough to save jobs at the Uddingston plant.

A week earlier, several thousand activists marched through Uddingston in support of the Cat workers. At a Scottish TUC rally in the factory car park they heard the platitudes that have passed for a fighting strategy in recent struggles in Scotland, culminating in the Gartcosh steelworks closure last year.

The idea, repeated from the platform, is that Scottish workers fighting for jobs share a common interest with every other section of Scottish society. They are supposed to be united with the church, the business community and the Scottish authorities, against a set of rapacious outsiders. These could be the British establishment, the Thatcher government, the multinationals, or just the English, depending on your point of view.

NO STRINGS!

It was therefore no surprise to find a Scottish Tory MP, Michael Hirst, on the rally platform. Of course he was shouted down by the angry marchers, but what nerve and stupidity the STUC displayed in inviting him. Giving credibility to the idea that Tories could help workers can only undermine the struggle. It reduces workers to passive bystanders, hoping that the Tories will save the day.

Having abandoned our class interests, the STUC dreams that the Tories will abandon theirs.

By the end of the Gartcosh campaign left wingers from both the Labour Party and the Scottish National Party were reduced to pitifully lobbying the Queen to save the steel plant. We are not yet as far down this road at Caterpillar, but the signposts are ominous. Last, Thursday a delegation of 250, headed by STUC chief Campbell Christie and mostly made up of union full-timers, lobbied parliament to the strains of a piper rendering 'Bonnie Highland Lassie'. It might set you up for a day with a roomful of MPs, but it won't shake the determined Caterpillar bosses.

Our supporters have argued from day one that only effective solidarity action from other workers will work. Militants at Caterpillar are all for blacking action, but they see no contradiction between pursuing this while negotiating with the Tories to find a new buyer, and seeking a Labour

commitment to nationalise the plant, all at the same time. If nothing else the day in parliament made it clear that this is impossible.

In the unlikely event of the Tories finding a buyer willing to risk money challenging Caterpillar and Komatsu's virtual monopoly over the market, or the even more unlikely scenario of Labour nationalising the plant, the result would be the same. Both would demand more flexibility, more redundancies, and more sacrifices from the workers to justify the intervention — all in the name of defending Scottish industry. Neither the Tories nor Labour were embarrassed about telling the unions this last week.

TAKE CHARGE!

We can expect this from parties that put the bosses before the working class. But angry Caterpillar stewards demanding support also approached solidarity action as something for the government to initiate. They asked the Tories why they hadn't made Britain a no-go area for Caterpillar products. It's a bit like asking Rupert Murdoch why he doesn't boycott the *Sun*.

We can't make the bosses and the authorities change their minds about closure by lobbying them, or offering to balance the books for them.

We have to make it too expensive to close Uddingston down, by keeping all action in the control of the workers themselves and making the occupation bite.

To win we are going to have to be as tough as the bosses. Sandy Watson gave a good example to the RCP's dayschool. The occupation got a phone message that their line would be cut off in half an hour, and it was. Their response wasn't to appeal to the Tories but to cross the road, ring a British Telecom manager, and warn that if the line wasn't back on in half an hour he would find six tractors in his back yard. The line is now on.

This is the only language that the employers understand. We will also have to throw the security guards acting as spies out of the factory and go out to organise proper blacking. This will not please the business community, the churches, and other Scottish dignitaries — tough! The strike's destiny lies not with them, but with the working class sympathisers who already donate £15 000 a week on the streets of Scottish towns. They must be won to giving more active support to the struggle.

For the organisers of the demonstration and the parliamentary lobby, the turn-out was a stage army in a public relations exercise. For us, the people on the streets of Uddingston and those who took part in the discussion at our dayschool are a glimpse of the potential for *The Red Front*, as a campaigning bloc of activists which can organise an effective fight for jobs.

Alan Harding

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LABOUR BLAMES LESBIANS AND GAYS FOR GREENWICH

KINNOCK TAILS CATHOLIC CHURCH

As the Labour leadership panics about 'loony left' scares, and cracks down on every left-wing policy, it is going along with the growing hostility to lesbian and gay rights

The "loony Labour left" is taking its toll; the gays and lesbians issue is costing us dear amongst the pensioners.' This leaked letter from Patricia Hewitt, Neil Kinnock's assistant, to Frank Dobson MP, the organiser of Labour's disastrous Greenwich by-election campaign, hit the front page of the *Sun* last Friday. It blamed Labour's defeat on the left's concern with contentious issues like lesbian and gay rights, and started a row which has accelerated the rightward drift of Labour policy. Kinnock confirmed that the 'loony left' would have no influence 'on the policy, direction and leadership of the Labour Party'.

Labour left wingers expressed shock that Kinnock's team should write such a letter and then leak it to the *Sun*. They should not have been surprised. The Labour leader has made no secret of his hostility to campaigns for lesbian and gay rights, or about his willingness to use reactionary rags to court support from the 'moral majority'. On the same day that the *Sun* published Hewitt's letter, a Catholic tabloid, the *Universe*, published an interview in which Kinnock portrayed the Labour Party as a pious institution which the Pope could safely support.

PULPIT POLITICS

The *Universe* carried a front-page headline declaring 'Stop the killings, say MPs'. The article boasted of growing parliamentary support for further restrictions on women's right to abortion. In his interview inside, Kinnock tried to key into this mood of moral fervour. When asked about his attitude to teaching children about homosexuality, Kinnock displayed his familiar brand of waffle. But his essential message was clear enough:

'I think that nobody, nobody, certainly in moral and spiritual terms, but even in wider curricular terms, has the right by any act in this country to teach children that which their parents morally and spiritually disagree with.'

In other words, we have no right to challenge the widespread public prejudice against lesbians and gays.

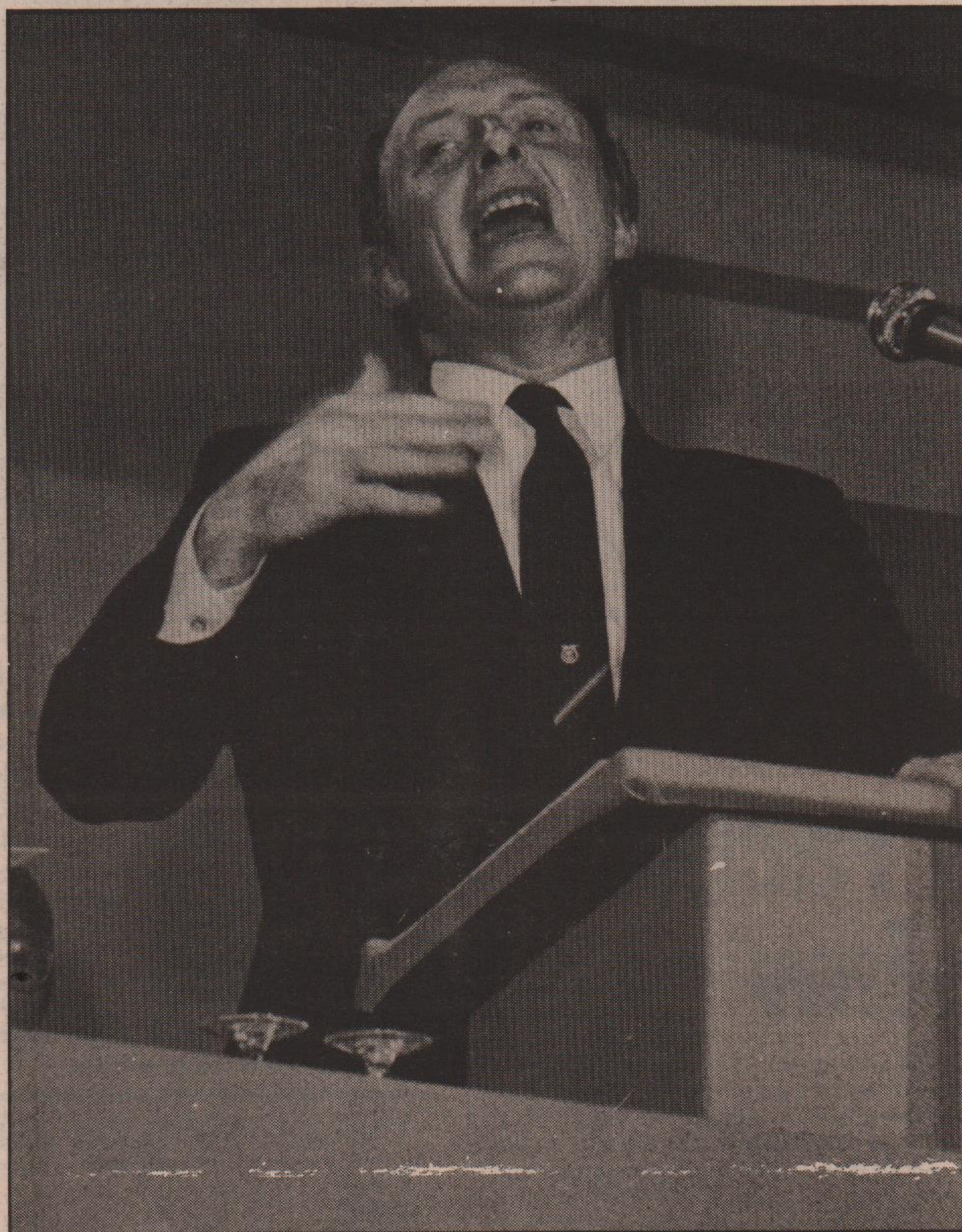
As far as the Labour leader is concerned, the bitter hostility towards homosexuals expressed by the *Universe* and all manner of bigots is a sacrosanct part of British family life. This is the attitude of a politician who will pander to any twisted sentiment if it will win him a few more votes. It is a sign of the yawning gap between Kinnock's electoral ambitions and the aspirations of ordinary socialists in and outside the Labour Party.

FIRES OF HELL

Kinnock went further still in the *Universe* interview. He attacked left-wing Labour education authorities for trying to 'impose' positive images of homosexuality on school students. But he did not object to the moral rearers imposing their backward views on British youth. Indeed, he tried to present this process of religious indoctrination as progressive:

'The most intelligent approach is for young people — not very young children, obviously — to be able to discuss the place of homosexuality in society and that's a function that's been undertaken by good teachers, priests and parents through the ages.'

The view of lesbians and gays put out by most 'teachers, priests and parents through



'Nobody...has the right to teach children that which their parents morally and spiritually disagree with'
Neil Kinnock, the *Universe* 6 March

the ages' is not one to which anybody concerned about democratic rights would give a shred of credibility. From the pulpits, the blackboards of sex education classes and parental lectures, countless young people have learnt that 'the place of homosexuality in society' lies somewhere between the closet and the fires of Hell. Yet under Kinnock, Labour now upholds the intolerance of

Catholic priests as an 'intelligent' attitude which socialists should accept.

Kinnock's interview in the *Universe* marks a new low in his desperate attempt to appear as a responsible statesman and stop Labour's slump in the polls. He is trying to ingratiate himself with the media and the moralists by proving that he can be trusted to accommodate all of the cherished hang-

ups and pet hates which the establishment has instilled in 'public opinion'. Today, when the leader of the official labour movement is in the columns of a Roman Catholic newspaper, he does as the elders of the Roman Catholic Church do.

Kinnock's public display of hostility to the struggle for homosexual rights comes at a time when lesbians and gays are under attack from all sides.

Hardly a day goes past without the gutter press printing another dirty story alleging that well-known homosexuals have been corrupting innocent youth. The panic about Aids, given a new lease of life by the week-long television bonanza, has taken a heavy toll by whipping up fears about homosexuals posing 'a threat to us all'. 'Queer-bashing' is back in fashion in a big way outside the gay pubs and clubs or in the parks and public toilets of British cities. Police harassment of homosexuals has been stepped up. The recent raid on South London's Vauxhall Tavern by police wearing rubber gloves is only one gross example of legal persecution of lesbians and gays. Meanwhile the Aids panic is being used as a pretext for employers to sack homosexuals, for doctors to refuse to treat them, and for the authorities in general to gun for lesbians and gays.

WITCH-HUNT

Kinnock's abandonment of the cause of homosexual rights is a disgraceful concession to this climate of reaction. If we allow him to, he will drag the labour movement down into the mud and the muck which the Tories and the media have spread across British politics in recent years. Yet many leading Labour left wingers have accepted that winning votes for their party must take priority over fighting for equal rights. On the lesbian and gay issue, as on many others, the 'loony left' has conceded the argument to Kinnock (see pages 6 and 7).

While Kinnock sweet-talks the moralists, the Revolutionary Communist Party has been campaigning against the anti-homosexual witch-hunt. The focus of our work has been on exposing the Aids scare. In public debates and forums around Britain, we have attempted to cut through all the myths and lies surrounding the disease, and to expose the Aids hysteria as a political attack on lesbians and gays. This week brings the publication of a new pamphlet, *The Truth about the Aids Panic*, which uses a mass of scientific evidence to show how the authorities have exaggerated the threat of Aids to heterosexuals and whipped up increased fear and hostility towards homosexuals (see below).

STEP FORWARD

The demand for full equality for lesbians and gays has a central place in the platform of *The Red Front*, which we are out to build into a bloc of left wingers campaigning around basic socialist demands. Upholding lesbian and gay rights is not only essential for the defence of these oppressed groups. It is also a precondition for protecting the interests of the entire working class.

How can a labour movement influenced by the ideas of the Catholic hierarchy ever hope to challenge the reactionary forces which run society at our expense?

The current debate about lesbians, gays and the Labour Party is a graphic illustration of where Kinnock is heading. Today it is truly loony for any socialist to argue that supporting Labour holds out any hope. Breaking with Kinnock and backing *The Red Front* won't change the world overnight. But it has to be a step forward from adapting to the *Universe*.

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TAMILS, TORIES AND DONKEYS

Britain's racist lynch-law

The new immigration rules which the Tories imposed last week followed a calculated campaign to use the row over Tamil refugees as the excuse for tightening controls on all immigration.

Tory home secretary Douglas Hurd pushed through new legislation to impose a £1000 fine on airlines and shipping companies for every passenger they carry without a proper passport. Immigrants travelling to Britain, as well as refugees fleeing from torture and persecution, will lose out as transport companies refuse to carry them.

The latest law follows fast on the heels of an orchestrated campaign of abuse by politicians and press about the arrival of 64 Tamil refugees a few weeks ago. Hurd may have decided to grant a review of their cases, to avoid the possibility of losing a court case.

But the Tories made sure that the Tamils' plight was used to intensify the general racist climate.

Tory MP Terry Dicks complained that the new restrictions were too soft, demanding to know why Hurd didn't 'send them back to where they came from'. He branded the Tamils as 'liars, cheats and queue-jumpers'. The *Sun* claimed that Britain was being suckered by black chancers: 'If Mr Hurd does allow the phoney to settle here, it will be seen as a sign to the world that Britain is once again prepared to play open house to nomads of every nationality, creed and custom who fancy their chances.' If this assault drives them back to Sri Lanka, the Tamils don't 'fancy their chances' of surviving the attentions of the British-backed regime which has tortured and slaughtered thousands of their people, with the help of British mercenaries.

The barrage of racist bigotry from the authorities and media has inflamed fears about a foreign 'invasion'. The black community is suffering the consequences:

racist attacks have risen as the refugee row rages. Once again, the politicians who impose racist immigration controls have given the green light to the freelance thugs who want to wipe black people off the map of Britain.

'Inflame' is no exaggeration. In Bradford five Asians escaped through a bedroom window after racists poured petrol through the letter box and torched their home. The police ruled out a racist motive. In Middlesbrough Abdul Chaudhry and his family suffered a petrol bomb thrown at their shop. The police put it down to 'hooliganism'. In Derby a rampaging mob attacked a Caribbean club and wreaked violence in a black area of the town. Press and police blamed 'hooligans' attending a local football match.

The hate campaign against all things foreign, sponsored by the government and promoted in the media, is whipping up a feeling of fierce racism.

The press is now going right over the top in glorifying the British way of life and pouring scorn on anything that is not stamped with the Union Jack mark of approval. In the week when the British authorities were treating Tamil refugees like cattle, the *Sun*, *Star* and *Mirror* competed to see who could pour most abuse on the Spanish for mistreating Blackie the donkey. The *Sun*, predictably, took the prize, foaming at the mouth about the 'sadistic butchers of Spain' and pompously asserting that 'In Britain we do not raise cruelty into a national sport.'

The 'British sense of fair play' which these people uphold is based on the law of the lynch-mob. If you want to see some 'sadism' or 'butchery', you need look no further than the latest parliamentary debate about sending refugees back to their deaths at the hands of British-backed regimes, or any one of a long list of petrol-bomb attacks on sleeping Asian families.

'Who killed Clinton McCurbin? Police killed Clinton McCurbin!' In the week when the two Wolverhampton police officers who strangled the 24-year old black man went back on the beat, around 2000 anti-racists and angry black youth marched through the city to protest against police violence against the black community.

Six hundred Workers Against Racism supporters joined Saturday's demonstration, called by the Black Community Action Group. The march had to contend with filthy weather and close police attention. But even taking this into account, it was a disappointing turn-out — especially from the left. As the state steps up its racist terror campaign to the point of throttling black people in public, and the new draconian public order laws loom on the horizon, we cannot afford to waste such opportunities to stand up for the rights of the besieged black community.

MIDDLESBROUGH POLICE ASK BLACK PEOPLE...

'Are you a mugger or a pimp?'

Abdul Chaudhry and his family have called the Middlesbrough police 200 times in the last six months to deal with racist attacks. Last week they discovered one reason why they have got no satisfaction, when their local community copper was caught handing out a racist questionnaire.

The form, headed 'Questionnaire for Employment (minorities division)' was passed to staff at the Victoria Housing Group in Cleveland, Middlesbrough by PC Hudson who is a regular caller at the office. Questions for black people include:

- Are you visible after sunset?
- Hobbies: mugging, prostitution, pimping (tick as applicable)
- Please tick your diet: curry, pet food, potatoes
- Asians only: when and where did you illegally enter Britain?
- Asians only: are you toilet-trained?
- Name of father if known (West Indians should list all possibilities on a separate sheet)
- Father's occupation: peat cutter, bus conductor, lavatory cleaner, underground guard

The Middlesbrough questionnaire confirms the contemptible and racist character of the

police force. But the local black community didn't need any confirmation that the police are an agency for enforcing racial oppression.

Abdul Chaudhry is a technician in the National Union of Railwaymen. He has got used to racist attacks which are now as regular as clockwork, and he is even more familiar with the lack of police assistance: 'We moved into the Westlane area to avoid trouble in town, but you just can't escape racism in Middlesbrough.' In January Chaudhry caught one of the racists after they shattered the plate glass on his front door window: 'He was just sitting there dead cocky like, I held him for 15 minutes but the police didn't show up so I had to let him go.'

Over the last six months racists have shot at Chaudhry with air rifles, slashed his tyres, attacked visitors to his house and fire-bombed his family: 'I couldn't believe it could get worse. I was wrong. Someone threw a petrol bomb at our old shop next door, we could have bloody burnt to death.' The police have turned a blind eye and now claim that there is 'nothing racist in hooligan attacks'. This statement appeared in the local *Evening Gazette* on a Monday afternoon. By Monday evening the racist gang had struck again. *Kirk Williams*

Cheap meat

WORKING FOR THATCHER'S HAMBURGER ECONOMY

McDonald's worker *Sharon King* exposes the sweated labour behind Thatcher's boast that the service sector can save British capitalism

It's 150 000 kids busting their tails that makes us tick' explained Fred Turner, ex-chairman of McDonald's hamburger empire, confirming that 'a smiling service' isn't all he requires from his staff. McDonald's treats us like so much cheap meat, the raw material for huge profits in the fast-food business.

Most of us are teenagers. About a third of McDonald's workers — 'crew' in fast-food speak — are 16 or 17. Three quarters are under 21. As one duty-manager put it: 'Older people just can't keep up the pace.' But young people don't last long either. Staff turnover can reach 300 per cent a year. Apart from those who drop out within a month (up to seven in every 10 starters), most people stay in the job for about four months.

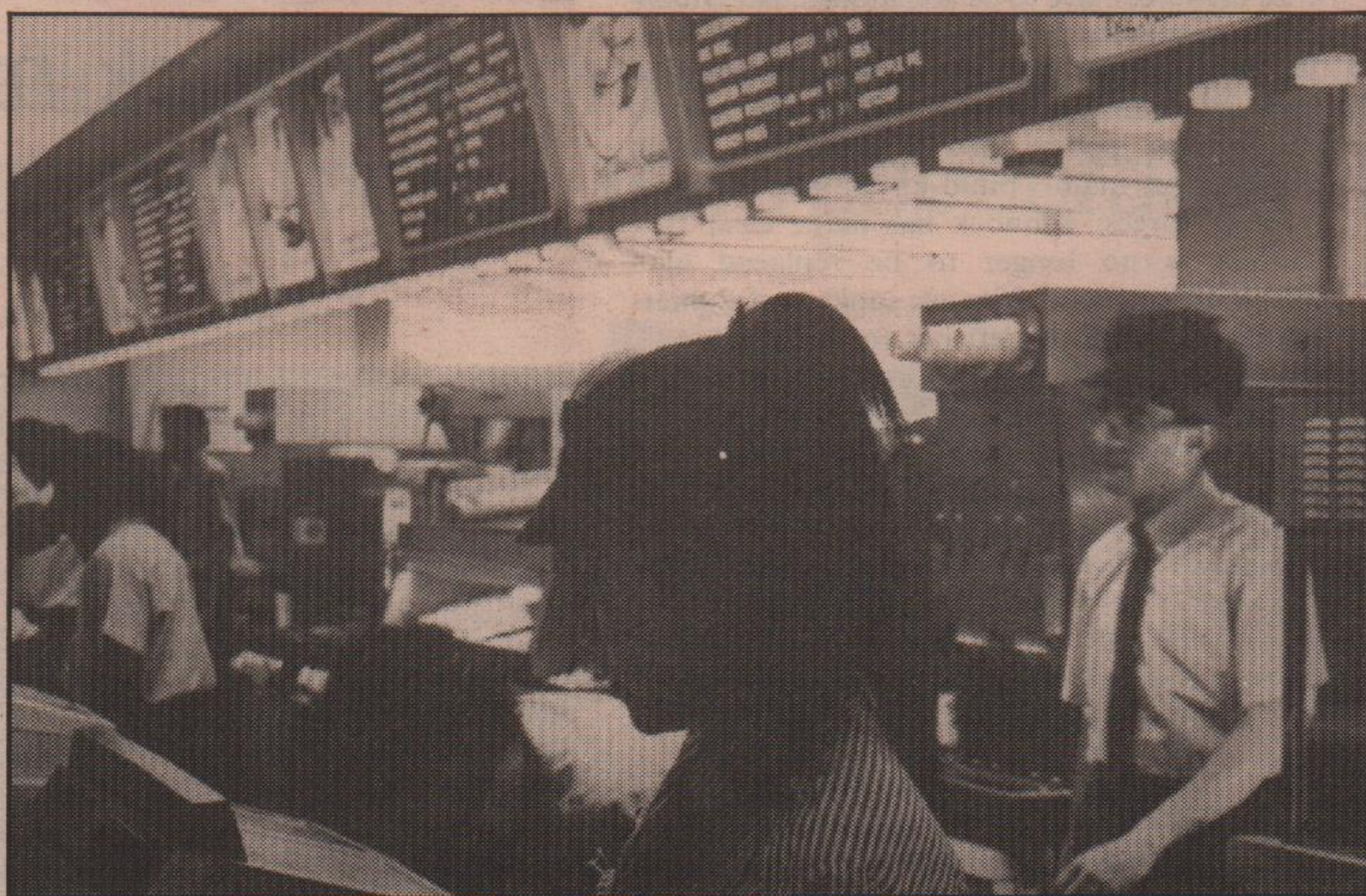
HAMBURGEROLOGY

'These jobs are hire-and-fire' says one 17-year old fast-food worker. 'They take you on for about 10 weeks, until they have worn you down, and then they sack you.' If the pace slackens, they cut down on workers, not workloads. In December, I began work at McDonald's along with eight other new recruits. I am the only one left after the post-Christmas purge. 'They wanted to sack me when the Christmas rush was over' explained my ex-workmate Ian. 'So they decided my hair was too long, and sacked me on the spot.'

All the leaders of the fast-food pack — McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken — use young workers like disposable napkins.

We pay the price for the new store which McDonald's opens in Britain every week. But you've got to keep smiling. If not, you lose points on your personal attributes test, and that could put your job into the 'thank you' bin.

Infringement of shopfloor health and safety regulations is routine. Sweatshop conditions are laid down as rules in the McDonald's crew handbook. Accident procedure is like something out of the Victorian age. 'If you burn yourself it's nothing to do with them' says Helen. But



AT McDONALD'S THEY'VE GOT A HARD TIME FOR YOUTH

fast-food employers are not old-fashioned about the hours we keep. 'We're only supposed to work until 10pm because we're 17' said Nicola from Pizza Hut. 'But we've always had to work until 1am.' Staying up late is fine, as long as you're sweating for the company.

Most McDonald's crew members are paid £1.50 an hour. Many are part-timers who take home about £37 a week. We do not get paid for the time it takes to wash our uniforms. We're supposed to clock off every time we go to the toilet. Breaktime is also unpaid. We are allowed one 45-minute break per shift, at the discretion of managers. They often delay or refuse them. Crew members may be told to work a full shift without a break. Even when you think you've got to the end of a gruelling shift, you could be in for an unpleasant surprise. Kirsten explained: 'Last Saturday I was supposed to work from 9am while 2pm. But I ended up working until quarter to six, because they wouldn't let me go. I didn't get a break, and you get the sack if you leave without permission.'

How does the company get young workers to accept pocket-money wages for hard labour?

Crew meetings, parents' evening and McDonald's orientation sessions, even including a degree in hamburgerology at Hamburger University in Chicago, are all used to keep us loyal and enthusiastic. But the most important thing is the team-grading system which sets young workers against each other, and lets management off the hook.

SLAVE-OWNERS

When you start at McDonald's, you are assigned to a team. Within each team, there are 'green badges' who've worked there less than three weeks, and 'yellow badges' competing for gold merit stars. If you win five gold stars, your money goes up to £1.99 an hour, and you get to wear a white shirt. After the white shirt comes a white badge, which marks you out as an overseer. The next grade up is store manager — he's the only one without a name tag.

Each crew level, with their different colour badges and number of gold stars, is accountable to the level above. Workers in each grade know they will lose their jobs unless they chase lower-grade crew to meet production targets. This keeps us at each other's throats, and stops us uniting against management.

On my first day at McDonald's, a five-star badge holder told me to 'Hurry up! Don't you know this a £250 takings hour?' It may well have been a £250 hour for McDonald's, but for most of the crew the takings remained at £1.50. Even the five-stars were getting a miserly rate, but the company's personnel-handling system made them act like the employer's slave-drivers.

BURGER-BOOM

The quick turnover of staff also helps fast-food companies to keep militancy out of their stores. Workers who don't adapt, or keep their heads down, last about as long as it takes to serve a quarter-pounder. 'We know of no union members among our workforce' say McDonald's gleefully. 'When I make a return visit I see a whole new set of faces' explained one trade union rep.

Margaret Thatcher hopes McDonald's can emulate its success in the USA, where it claims to employ more people than the steel and automobile industries.

Thatcher doesn't care what the firm does to us. When the Tories recommend the service sector as the solution for youth unemployment in Britain, they hope the glare from the garish burger-bars and the growing heaps of profits will blind people to the truth about our pocket-money wages and rotten working conditions.

FATHER JAILED FOR CHILDREN'S DEATH

Whose neglect?

Last week a judge gave 26-year old Michael Tracey a 15-month jail sentence for 'cruelty and neglect' after Tracey's three children died in a fire at his home. The tragic case illustrates the hypocrisy of the authorities, who champion family life while forcing people to risk their children's lives to survive.

Tracey was separated from his wife and struggling to bring up two sons and a daughter in Kennington, South London. His neighbours and social workers agreed he was a loving father. He took a part-time job at a local pub to improve his family's lot. Last June, he could not find a baby-sitter to cover his lunch-time shift. So he shut the children in a bedroom and went to work. When he returned they were dead, killed by fumes from a fire they started with matches and disposable nappies.

Tracey's story shows up the childcare trap which catches many parents, usually women, in modern Britain. They must take whatever

work they can to feed and clothe their children. But the authorities refuse to provide them with childcare facilities. If they cannot afford nurseries, they are left to rely on friends and relatives. If they can't find a free child-minder one day, and dare to stop, as Tracey did, for a haircut or a drink on the way home from work, they risk losing their children, being branded a monster, and getting locked up.

We live under a system that expects people to spend much of their time working for an employer, to spend the rest of it looking after their children without assistance, and to live their own lives in the moments between. If they crack under the strain, an old man in a wig can lecture them about family responsibilities and jail them. The real neglect in the Tracey case is that displayed by the authorities for the welfare of ordinary people. The only way to prevent many more such tragedies is to demand free nurseries for all who need them.

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

IRELAND'S DIFFERENT

When ex-M15 officer Peter Wright writes his harmless memoirs about intelligence operations that are an open secret, the Tories try to ban them. When two former British Army officers reveal details of M15 involvement in death squads and dirty tricks in Northern Ireland, nobody gives a damn.

Major Fred Holroyd, who served in a military intelligence unit in Armagh, claims he was forced out of the Army in 1976 after objecting to an M15 'assassination policy' against IRA suspects. His superiors accused him of insubordination and emotional instability and confined him to an Army mental hospital.

Another British Army officer, Colin Wallace, who ran a covert unit disseminating black propaganda against Irish republicans, claims he was forced out of the Army after he objected to a 1974 M15 campaign to smear politicians, including Tory leader Edward Heath and Labour leader Harold Wilson. Wallace says M15 framed him for manslaughter. He got a 10-year jail sentence.

In statements to the press the two men have revealed that:

- The SAS used members of outlawed Loyalist paramilitary groups to carry out kidnappings and assassinations of IRA men.
- British intelligence gave Loyalists explosives used to make car bombs which killed 26 people in Dublin in 1974.
- M15 and former SAS men formed freelance killer gangs and started a 'dirty war' which Manchester police chief John Stalker stumbled over last year while investigating six 1982 killings.
- SAS officer Captain Robert Nairac, assassinated by the IRA in 1977 and posthumously awarded the George Cross, told Holroyd he helped to murder an IRA leader in 1975 in the Irish Republic.
- In 1974 M15's disinformation department sought to discredit politicians who were considered too soft on Ireland — smears linked Heath with homosexual child abuse.

Despite a vocal campaign by the two former Army officers, the case has failed to excite a controversy. It has only attracted any attention because of its tenuous links with the Peter Wright affair, due to re-open this month in an Australian court.

The British government has tried to prevent the publication of Wright's memoirs which cover his work for M15 in the seventies, and which the government claims are a threat to 'national security'. Wright was also involved in a dirty tricks campaign against the Wilson government and in M15's murder mission in Ireland. He makes no mention of Northern Ireland in his manuscript, yet the government wants to ban it. But the Tories felt no need to censor the allegations of death squads and dirty tricks by Holroyd and Wallace. Roger Freeman for the armed forces didn't even bother to deny the charges: 'The government does not consider the public interest requires legal action to be taken to restrain the publication of such allegations.' The establishment is confident that whatever dirty tricks it gets up to in Ireland, no party is going to make a fuss.

All parties accept the British occupation and the denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination as legitimate. What goes on in the Irish war zone is placed above debate and beyond the realm of party politics. Every British statesman understands that the war in Ireland is a threat to the British state before which unity is essential. They will turn a blind eye to any barbarism used against the Irish.

Tory MP Teddy Taylor described Holroyd as a 'boy scout, a decent and patriotic chap and truthful'. The same could be said of the Labour leaders who are calling for an inquiry into the dirty tricks against the Wilson government, but asking no questions about the undercover killers who butchered Irish republicans.

The term 'loony left' was coined by the *Sun*, which has made the activities of the Labour left, particularly in radical inner-city councils, the target of abuse. Since Labour's by-election defeat at Greenwich, right-wing Labour MPs have seized on the loony label to step up the attack on the left. Last week a letter from Neil Kinnock's office to the Greenwich campaign organiser, blaming loony left policies for alienating traditional Labour voters, was leaked, probably deliberately, to the press. Kinnock called a meeting to lecture the London loony left, and cancelled it in case they used the occasion to promote their policies.

But what are the policies that everybody now agrees are so loony?

Labour's Greenwich candidate was denounced by the press and by prominent members of her party for calling for Britain to pull out of Nato, for approving the withdrawal of troops from Ireland and for supporting lesbian and gay rights. Not only are these policies in the interest of the working class, they have long commanded substantial support in the labour movement.

The NATO alliance is the main axis of Western militarism. Its vast reserves of nuclear and conventional weaponry are the greatest threat to the long-term survival of civilisation on our planet, and an immediate menace to the peoples of the third world. The British occupation of Ireland is the prime cause of the violence, sectarian strife and suffering that has dragged on through 17 years of war. At a time when the Aids panic is encouraging an unprecedented wave of hostility towards homosexuals and a return to Victorian values, standing up for the rights of lesbians and gays is vital to strengthen the unity of the working class.

While the Labour leadership has never defended the rights of the oppressed, in the past the left was prepared to take a stand. A Labour government helped to found Nato after the Second World War, but the left has always opposed it as a force for barbarism. The Labour leadership has consistently supported British

imperialism in Ireland, but a radical minority has always stood out against it. While the Labour leadership has retained its anti-homosexual prejudices, the last two party conferences have voted to support demands for lesbian and gay rights.

But policies approved at Labour conferences by substantial minorities, or even, in the case of lesbian and gay rights, by a two-thirds majority, are now labelled loony by the *Sun*. And if the media speak, who is Neil Kinnock to disagree? He dutifully sets about suppressing the policies that offend the gutter press.

Kinnock faces little difficulty in bringing the left to heel. It is already well house-trained.

The left has accepted that many policies it once favoured have to be abandoned indefinitely in the desperate drive to get Kinnock elected. The left has offered no resistance to the way the Labour leadership has redefined the party's anti-nuclear policy into a manifesto which proposes a major build-up in conventional military forces. Kinnock has made clear that Trident is no longer to be replaced with hospitals, but with frigates, tanks and fighter-bombers — and the left has remained silent.

The left has given up on gestures of concern about Ireland. When Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams MP addressed a rally in London last week, not one Labour MP dared to join him on the platform — a few sent embarrassed apologies. When Kinnock's team claimed that the issue of lesbian and gay rights cost Labour pensioners' votes in Greenwich, only Lambeth council leader Linda Bellos dared to disagree.

The Labour councillor who declared his support for the RCP candidate in Greenwich was ordered to quit the party within hours. The Labour leader on the South Staffordshire council, who agreed with his Tory colleague that gays should be gassed as the final solution to Aids, is still in office three months later.

In their quest for respectability, left-wing Labour councils are not only backtracking on their political commitments. Their commitment to running council machines within the

LOONY

Kinnock may blame the 'loony' have long abandoned radical

financial and legal limits imposed by the Tories and endorsed by Kinnock is leading to cuts in jobs and services and a rash of disputes.

All councils face a yawning gap between the funds they have available and local requirements. Many have pursued complex 'creative accountancy' to close the gap. Brent council in London has used its town hall and other buildings as collateral for vast loans it hopes will be repaid by a Labour government. Another London borough, Newham, has transferred funds allocated for capital projects to pay current expenditure on jobs and services. Some Labour councillors in the borough have donated back to the council the personal savings they have made from rate cuts. They are encouraging council workers to follow their example.

However, many Labour councils have been trying to balance the books by creative accounting for several years and have reached the end of that road. They maintain a public posture of defiance against Tory cuts and a

commitment to jobs and services. But behind the scenes they have been drawing up programmes of cuts and measures to raise efficiency. The result is deteriorating services, job losses — and conflicts with council workers.

Sheffield closes the gap

Early this year, Clive Betts, Sheffield council's financial supremo, issued a toughly worded statement to all employees detailing the council's financial predicament and how the ruling Labour group intended to resolve it.

'It is likely to be inevitable that there will be cuts in some services to protect essential ones, such as those for the elderly and the infirm. It is also likely to mean that we will have to reduce the overall numbers employed by the council.'

He announced a freeze on all but essential vacancies and appealed to council employees 'to look at ways to work more efficiently'.

Meanwhile a special team was drawing up a document, 'Closing the gap: the 5%-10% exercise', detailing plans for cuts. Suggestions

LABOUR BANS 'CONTENTIOUS' BOOKS

'This', says an Inner London Education Authority worker, 'is management by tabloid.' She was talking about the system of censorship and controls which Ilea has introduced over the past year. The authority's Labour left leaders have panicked about gutter press scare stories over their 'equal opportunity' education policies, and stamped on any book or course that might attract a hint of bad publicity.

Ilea policy supports 'an education service which provides equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination on grounds of race, sex, class, sexuality or disability'. This policy has been abused, ignored and broken by the Ilea leaders who wrote it.

Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin

This unremarkable little book about a girl who lives with her gay father and his lover was published, unnoticed, back in 1983. It was unearthed by the Tories and tabloid press during last May's Ilea elections, as an example of the 'vile' publications which the Labour authority was using in schools. Ilea leader Frances Morrell immediately announced that it was being withdrawn.

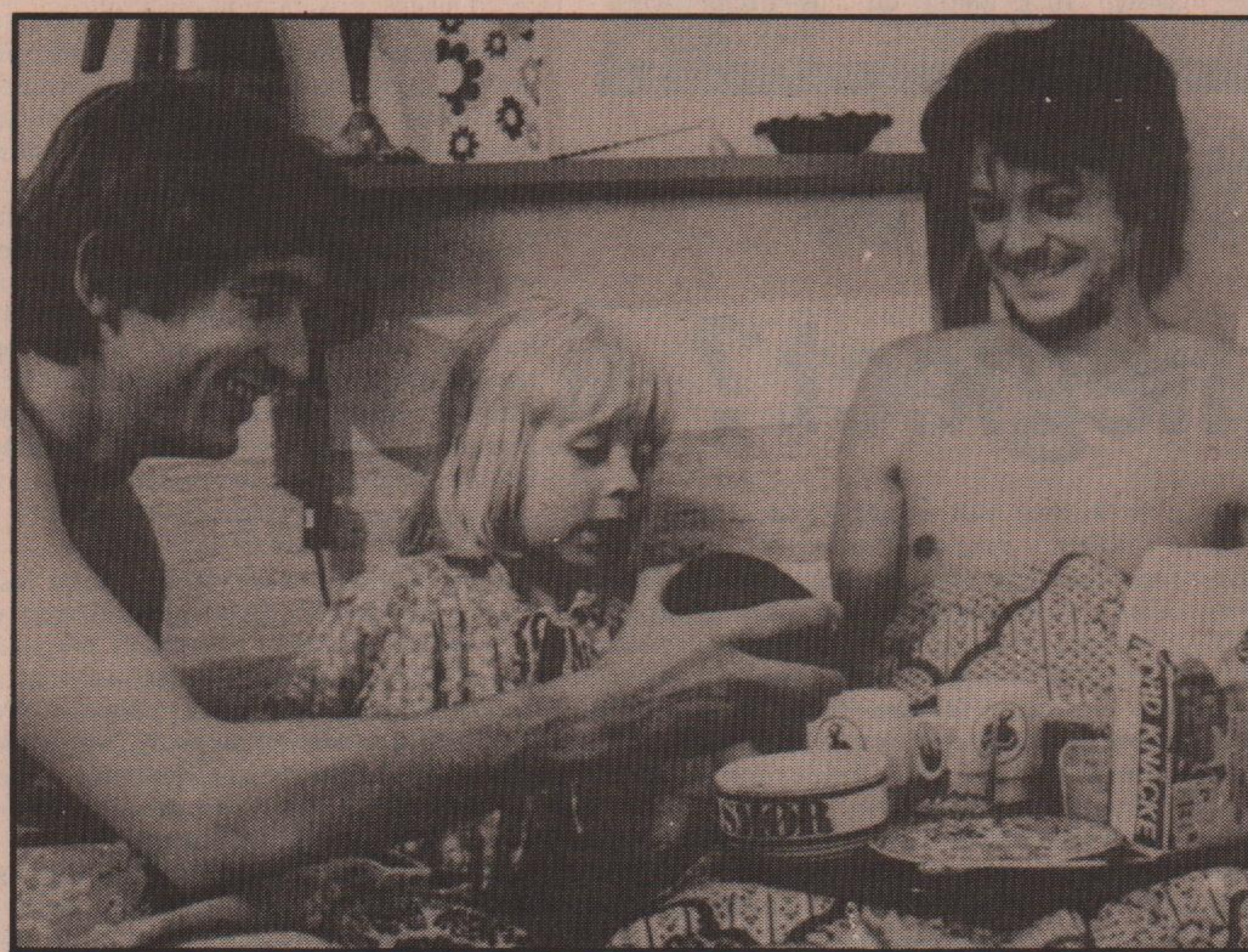
Top Ilea staff pulled the book off library shelves, invested hundreds of pounds in a new computer programme to track down every copy in schools, and told headteachers that *Jenny Lives* should not be displayed openly, but should only be used in 'special cases'. In media interviews, Morrell made clear that these 'special cases' would be children who had lesbian or gay parents — who were unlikely to write to the *Sun* complaining.

Positive Images

The Ilea Relationships and Sexuality Resources Group spent two years compiling this resources guide for teaching about homosexuality. By last June, 2500 copies were ready for distribution to schools. But Ilea decided to delay the launch until September, for fear that the Tories would use it to back up their anti-sex education amendment to the Education Bill.

By September, however, Tory education chief Kenneth Baker was in full cry against *Jenny Lives*, which happened to be listed in *Positive Images*. Ilea panicked, pulped the resources guide, and produced a shoddy, censored edition. *Jenny Lives* had been removed, as had the introduction which warned against the possible backlash from heterosexual

How THE Sun runs London schools



CENSORED! A 'CONTROVERSIAL' SCENE FROM JENNY LIVES WITH ERIC AND MARTIN

males. When the Relationships and Sexuality Resources Group challenged the Ilea education director about this act of political cowardice, he denied that their group had ever existed, let alone compiled the guide.

The Anti-sexist Resources Guide

Even before the *Jenny Lives* row unnerved Ilea, this popular list was a victim of the Labour

authority's determination to placate 'public opinion'. Its publication in 1985 was delayed because the flyer promoting it mentioned the Belfast Women's Centre, which Ilea feared the press might expose as some sort of 'IRA front'. The flyer was scrapped, replaced by 'non-controversial' text, and *The Anti-sexist Resources Guide* became an Ilea best-seller.

Last October, Ilea announced that the *Guide* was 'unavailable', then said it was 'not available' and finally declared that it had been 'withdrawn'. Ilea called in all copies on loan, emptied its warehouse stock, and pulped around 1400 books. The reason given was that the *Guide* was 'out of date'. The real reason was that it listed *Jenny Lives*, which was out of step with the current moral clampdown promoted by the authorities and the media.

Auschwitz

This Ilea teaching pack dealt with the Nazi holocaust and racism. Safe ground for the Labour left, you might think. But not these days; the Conservatives complained about its content, and Ilea obediently withdrew the pack.

The Child Is Not Dead

The authority's book about the struggle in South Africa was originally scheduled to be launched on Soweto Day last year, but Ilea switched it to a less prominent publication date. The Labour bureaucrats are now even scared of being spotlighted as opponents of apartheid.

Contraception

This Ilea teaching pack has been withdrawn before publication. Helping to avoid unwanted teenage pregnancies now comes a poor second to the aim of keeping the Labour Party out of the papers.

Ilea's Labour leaders are also trying to control teaching methods. After the *Jenny Lives* scandal blew up, Ilea established a panel to look at 'contentious materials'. Last October this board of censors produced a document, *The Teaching of Controversial Issues in Schools*. It does not once mention Ilea's equal opportunities policy. Instead, it hammers home the need for 'balance' in lessons, displays and the selection of outside speakers. 'Are racist speakers to be invited to compensate for the presence of those with left-wing views?' asked one angry group of Ilea employees in a reply to the document. Their Labour Party bosses have yet to come up with an answer.

The catalogue of Ilea censorship shows how Labour officials are now prepared to toe the line laid down by the forces of reaction.

In their determination not to rock the boat for Kinnock, they are ignoring their paper commitment to equal opportunities and giving in to the prejudices of gutter press editorial writers. The *Sun* has effectively become the educator of inner-London youth.

NO LONGER

'left' for Labour's failures, but inner-city Labour councils
 radical policies in favour of toeing the respectable line
 dictated by the Labour leader

for the family and community services department included stopping bus passes to the handicapped and mentally ill, charging for meals on wheels, home helps and transport to day centres, and cutting subsidies for holidays for the mentally handicapped. Similar cuts are proposed in all departments.

'Closing the gap' was presented to council workers two weeks ago at the same time as another document — 'Working it out'. This outlines the council's plans for creating jobs in the favourable climate the council leaders anticipate will follow a Labour election victory. It declares that the council will be 'going capitalist in a big way', a statement taken more as a threat than a promise by most council workers. After another year of Labour austerity in the town hall, they can have little hope of improvement by putting Labour in Whitehall.



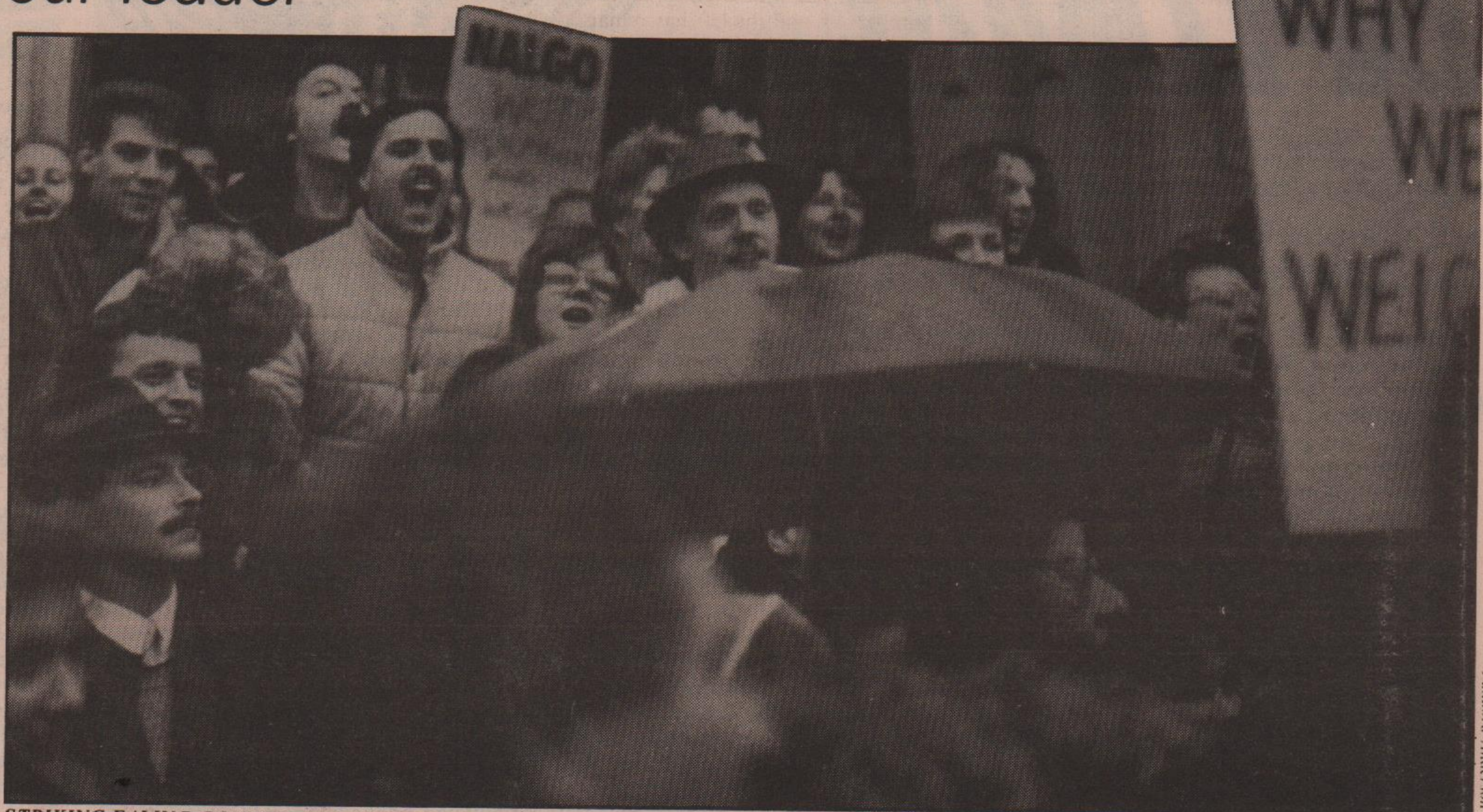
David Blunkett

'GOING CAPITALIST': DAVID BLUNKETT

Under the leadership of prospective MP David Blunkett, Sheffield's left-wing council has worked closely with union officials to impose cuts and efficiency measures. At a recent special general meeting of Nalco, the main union for white-collar council workers, the officials narrowly won approval for their response to the council's budget crisis. The debate reached its lowpoint when a prominent left-wing shop steward seconded an amendment by a member of the SDP calling for voluntary redundancies as a way of bailing out the council. He argued that this would save money and forestall strike action, which would be counter-productive.

The Nalco policy now involves participating in the council's efficiency drive, accepting a freeze on vacancies and, in the end, short-time working. The outcome is a victory for Blunkett and a big setback for council jobs and services.

Supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party in Sheffield council have been exposing the manoeuvres of leading councillors and union officials. They have also been campaigning in support of nursery nurses who have been in dispute with the council for months over a campaign for decent wages. Our supporters have revealed a list of more than 20 councillors who voted against the nursery nurses' claim in secret committees — after signing petitions in support of their campaign outside the town hall. When confronted with his duplicity, Roger Barton, district Labour Party secretary and



Pamela Anderson

STRIKING EALING COUNCIL WORKERS HAVE CLOSED DOWN THE TOWN HALL IN PROTEST AT LABOUR'S LOW-PAY REGIME

chair of the trades council, was furious — at being found out. 'There are a lot of low-paid workers and you can't treat one group of workers differently to others' was his excuse.

Last week Blunkett told nursery nurses how the council intended to deal with low pay. He explained that the council had offered Nalco a lump sum to cover outstanding pay claims, and suggested that union officials decide who should receive priority. Given the inadequacy of the lump sum, this amounted to asking the union to portion out the cuts. The council would regard the union's agreement to this deal as ruling out any more wage negotiation. The scheme is a way of achieving wage cuts and a no-strike deal.

Sheffield was once the heart of the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire. It now leads the way in promoting the cuts that are the real hallmark of the 'loony' left today. It's the same sordid story in all radical councils, as creative accountancy becomes socialist austerity.

● Morrell hits Ilea staff

For months the Inner London Education Authority has declared its determination to defy the government. Now it has voted to set a legal budget and to close the gap by making cuts. The Labour authority aims to freeze one vacancy in three, to compulsorily redeploy surplus teachers and to bring in financial experts to tighten up administrative structures.

Last week Ilea leader Frances Morrell had a hard time explaining Labour's cuts to a big lobby of mainly women manual workers. They were angry about schoolkeepers' jobs going out to tender, about threats to cleaners' jobs and increased workloads for cleaning staff. Morrell's promises that a Labour government would come to the rescue were greeted with sceptical jeering. A supporter of *The Red Front* who condemned Ilea for acting like any other employer was warmly applauded.

● Liverpool against the workers

Five weeks ago more than 100 workers in the housing benefit office came out on strike demanding safety screens after a staff member was assaulted. When the council refused, they occupied the computer room of the treasury

department, the council's nerve centre. Liverpool's left-wing council leaders, many themselves under threat of disqualification by the courts, immediately went to the courts for an injunction to stop the occupation. Union members are now banned from the building for the duration of the dispute.

The council leaders, who have long campaigned against privatisation, then subcontracted housing benefit work to Vernons, the football pools firm, a notoriously anti-union and racist employer. Things have now reached the absurd position where strikers are fighting the Labour council with the support of the Liberals and Tories, who have promised protective screens if they take over the council.

● Newham canes the teachers

Until recently Newham was the only council in the country to consist entirely of Labour members (now there is one SDP member). After years of creative accounting, the council is getting down to the serious business of making cuts. The Labour leaders have raised rents, cut out all daily supply teachers and announced plans to close nurseries and two secondary schools. They argue that it is better for them as socialists to make cuts than to allow Tory auditors to get control. This will undoubtedly be a great comfort to the people of Newham as their homes and schools deteriorate still further.

Teachers in Newham are already in dispute with the council over staff shortages and lack of cover for absent colleagues. Thousands of children are being sent home from school every week. The radical council leaders would much rather attack the teachers and the schools than take on the Tory government.

● The Red Front

The Revolutionary Communist Party is putting forward *The Red Front* as a way of pulling together those who want to fight back against the Tories and can't afford to wait for Kinnock

to become prime minister. We stand by policies which everybody from Norman Tebbit to Frances Morrell now appears to consider loony.

The Labour left may have decided that now is not the time to campaign against Nato and British militarism, for troops out of Northern Ireland, or in support of lesbian and gay rights. We take a different view. These positions are such a threat to the British establishment that all its apologists have to dismiss any support for them as conclusive evidence of mental disturbance. This makes it even more important to campaign around them. These policies had a central place in *The Red Front* programme before the consensus on their lunacy was established in Greenwich. They will stay in a central position through the election campaign.

The Red Front also has an important role to play in the defence of council jobs and services. Many groups of workers are taking action against council employers, but they tend to be isolated and fragmented. They also often remain, despite their militancy, under Labour's influence. For example at the stormy Ilea lobby last week many workers heckling Frances Morrell wore 'Nupe for Labour' badges. They scorned Kinnock's promises, but applauded Morrell's appeal for support for the return of a Labour government.

The Red Front aims to redirect workers' anger against Labour's betrayals into a consistent rejection of Labourism. If the militancy demonstrated by nursery nurses in Sheffield, housing benefit workers in Liverpool and the women cleaners of London can be politicised through fighting around the demands of *The Red Front*, the working class will be assured of a future whoever wins the election.

Mike Freeman

(Additional information provided by Andrew Calcutt, John Cable, Kerry Dean and Bob Hughes)

BACK THE RED FRONT — TURN TO PAGE 11

BEHIND THE NEW 'OPENNESS' AND ARMS CUT OFFERS

GORBACHEV THE DESPERATE DIPLOMAT

Soviet dissidents leave prison camps, Margaret Thatcher plans to visit Moscow, capitalists are encouraged to cooperate with the Kremlin. What is going on inside Gorbachev's Soviet Union? **Frank Furedi** explains

Since Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, the Soviet Union has been winning the propaganda war against the USA. Gorbachev has had Reagan's America on the defensive for the past two years. His diplomacy has punched big holes in the credibility of the old Cold War caricatures of 'Soviet expansionism'. He has also freed enough dissidents to bring into question the Gulag image of the Soviet Union pedalled in Washington.

Gorbachev's idea for a phase-out of medium-range Euromissiles has caught Washington on the hop. It is the most far-reaching proposal for slowing down the arms race to come out of the superpowers' negotiations. This proposal stands in sharp contrast to Reagan's determination to scrap the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and to speed up work on his Star Wars initiative. All of this has helped Gorbachev to win some diplomatic battles and to sway European public opinion in his favour.

There is little doubt that the Soviet Union genuinely wants to end the arms race and is seriously interested in disarmament. A recent publication from the authoritative American Brookings Institute, *Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy*, spells out the Kremlin's concern to avoid nuclear war. Most experts agree that the arms race represents a permanent drain on the vital resources of the Soviet Union, placing a severe strain on its weak economy. But while there is general agreement that the Soviet Union has a real interest in disarmament, there is a debate in the West over the significance of Gorbachev's reforms.

So what is the true meaning of the policy of *glasnost* (openness) and where is Gorbachev taking the Soviet Union?

UNDYNAMIC

The stagnation of the Soviet economy is the big worry facing Gorbachev and his colleagues. As we have argued before in *Ins*, the Soviet economy lacks any dynamic for development. It has no manifest tendency towards innovation, technological change or improvements in the productivity of labour. (For a full analysis of this problem, see Frank Furedi, *The Soviet Union Demystified*, Junius.) The old bureaucratic solutions of mobilising large quantities of labour and resources to compensate for the absence of an effective economic regulator can no longer sustain industrial development in the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev is distinguished from his predecessors by his intellectual recognition that the Soviet economy cannot continue in the old way. Since April 1985, Gorbachev has emphasised the urgency of economic reforms. The March 1986 congress of the Soviet Communist Party adopted new guidelines for the radical reform of the

economy. These reforms aim to give new incentives to enterprises and break through the bureaucratic inertia which dogs the economy. A law passed last November legalises private enterprise in the service sector.

DEMOCRATISATION

Gorbachev has recognised that the real problems of the Soviet economy are more than technical. It lacks a system of industrial incentives which could encourage people to work and to innovate. It also lacks any sense of involving or giving responsibility to the Soviet working class. This is why Gorbachev has sought to encourage debate on social and political issues. He wants to open up a discussion which can at least create the impression that Soviet workers have some say in the running of the economy.

It is not surprising that most of Gorbachev's innovation is in the social and political spheres.

The Soviet economy is not susceptible to reforms, only to experiments. But even the most sophisticated experiment in one plant or one industry is doomed so long as it operates in an unreformed environment. Whereas there is little scope for economic reforms, there is considerable room for rationalising some of the workings of Soviet politics. Gorbachev hopes that social and political reforms can compensate for the lack of real progress in the economy.

Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* is designed to make Soviet institutions more responsive to society. Since last summer, he has emphasised the need for democratisation and openness. This does not mean the democratisation of society in the sense of making the Soviet state accountable to the working class. It implies only the eradication of the more irrational conventions of the Soviet bureaucracy, which serve little

purpose other than irritating the Soviet people. Gorbachev hopes that his reforms can create a momentum which will give the appearance of real change, and consolidate popular support for his regime.

Glasnost has meant opening up the media to the discussion of subjects that were previously taboo. It has led to issues like drug abuse and police brutality being reported, and to a wider exchange of views in the media. In the field of culture the regime has loosened many of the old restrictions and relaxed censorship. Things which were once whispered about in private are now being debated in public.

Of course the old Soviet bureaucracy remains in control, but its rule is now exercised in a more tolerant fashion.

In the short run at least *glasnost* has stimulated public support. Gorbachev has capitalised on this support by publicising the idea that he is a beleaguered reforming leader, continually obstructed by conservative bureaucrats. The Soviet media have carefully cultivated this image. It is now commonplace for Soviet journalists to suggest that Gorbachev would like to go further but is slowed down by resistance from the middle layers of the Soviet bureaucracy.

DIPLOMACY

No doubt there are many individuals within the Soviet bureaucracy who oppose Gorbachev's reforms. Many bureaucrats are used to the routine of the past and dread any institutional innovation. But such opposition is nothing new. Every Stalinist leader has been forced to confront the conservatism of his bureaucracy and Gorbachev is no exception. But Gorbachev is well-served by the publicity which implies that the middle-level bureaucracy is obstructing the policy of *glasnost*. He can

blame all of his failures on the resistance of unknown bureaucrats, thus deflecting criticism from his own policies. This is a well-established manoeuvre. Every Soviet ruler since Stalin has sought to shift the blame on to lower-level bureaucrats. The only difference is that Gorbachev does it much better.

Glasnost is merely a policy designed to rid society of old conventions which the Soviet bureaucracy does not need to maintain its power. It is also a relatively painless alternative to solving the Soviet Union's basic economic problems.

Gorbachev's most successful initiatives have been in the area of foreign affairs.

He has deprived the West of its familiar propaganda weapons. Dissidents have been let out of Soviet prison camps to placate Western opinion. The peace forum organised in Moscow earlier this year helped to neutralise anti-Soviet slanders. In arms negotiations and in diplomatic dealings, Gorbachev has established a reputation as a likeable and well-intentioned statesman.

Gorbachev is very sensitive to Western public opinion. He is prepared to do anything, short of threatening the power of the Soviet bureaucracy, to win friends in the West. His approach is based on the recognition that the survival of the Soviet Union depends on it overcoming its isolation from the West. Gorbachev requires closer relations with the capitalist powers if he is to minimise the effects of economic stagnation.

Firstly, the Soviet Union must curb its spending on armaments. Gorbachev therefore has an urgent need to relax East-West tensions for the sake of saving precious resources at home. Secondly, the Soviet Union needs Western technology and know-how to develop its ailing economy.

Gorbachev has more confidence in the efficiency of Western technology than in internal economic reforms.

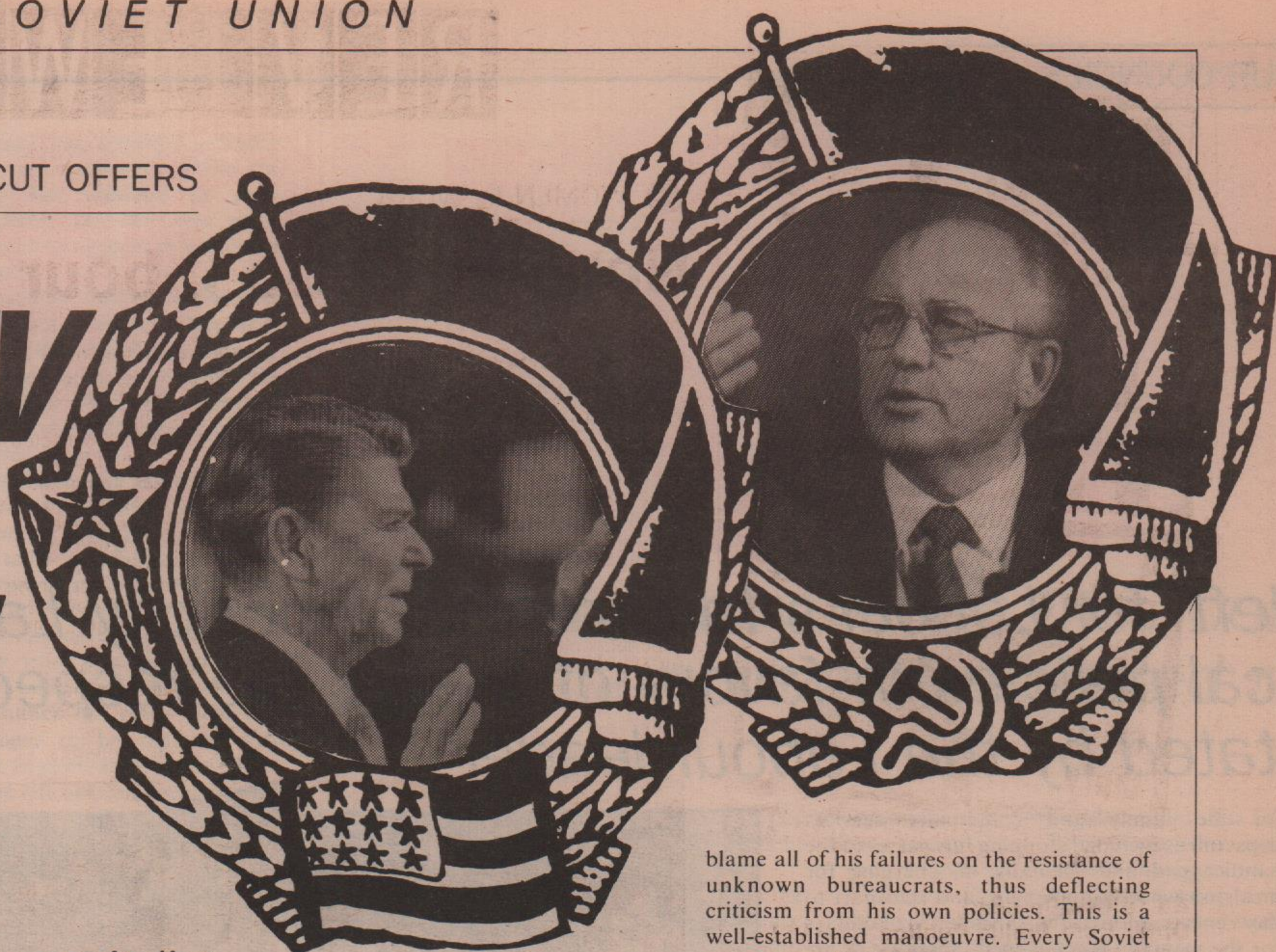
DEAD END

Soviet diplomats have been doing the rounds of Western capitals in search of economic cooperation. They are particularly interested in establishing joint companies with capitalist enterprises. More than 200 West German firms have been approached in recent months with this objective in mind.

If the diplomatic offensive succeeds and the Soviet Union gains access to Western technology, Gorbachev will have won a breathing space for the Soviet bureaucracy. This would help to maintain stability at home, and to meet the rising expectations of the Soviet working class. The stakes are high.

As long as the risks to the power of the Soviet bureaucracy are minimal, Gorbachev will make many of the changes that Western imperialism asks of him. That is the real meaning of the policy of *glasnost*.

Gorbachev's foreign policy may well reap tangible benefits for the Soviet bureaucracy. If it does, it will help to preserve the status quo. But it is a policy of cosmetic change rather than of real reform. There is nothing that Gorbachev can do to transform an inherently irreformable system.



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Frank Furedi

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It is becoming clearer by the day that Neil Kinnock and his colleagues are prepared to put the boot into ordinary people if it will help to put the Labour Party back into power. The Labour leaders have taken their lead from the Tories on every issue from employment to education and picketing to policing. The Revolutionary Communist Party's new, updated programme — *The Red Front: A Platform for Working Class Unity* — puts the case for breaking with the Labour Party and the corrupt system over which it seeks to govern at our expense.

Our programme sets out our alternative to the capitalist system, but it also points to the need for an alliance of left-wing forces around a basic platform of demands which can defend the working class against the onslaught to come, whichever party is put in charge of managing the crisis. It argues for an electoral bloc of organisations and individuals — *The Red Front* — to champion the interests of ordinary people in the election. If we are to give the working class a voice on all the vital issues of the day we need to fight for the demands of *The Red Front* summarised below.

Work or full pay

To survive in capitalist society everybody needs either a job at a living wage, or the same level of income in the form of benefits. We cannot afford to go poor just because employers cannot make enough profit out of our labour, or because the state cannot afford to maintain our living standards.

Defend union rights

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

Equal rights for all

We are in favour of the widest extension of civil liberties and for equal rights for all. We oppose discrimination against women and campaign for free, all-day nurseries and free abortion and contraception on demand. We oppose discrimination against black people and all restrictions on immigration. We reject the Aids panic as a propaganda device designed to proscribe homosexual activity and bolster conventional morality.

Stop the war drive

We oppose all forms of militarism, both conventional and nuclear, and all alliances among imperialist powers. We condemn Western military interference in the third world and support countries such as Argentina or Libya against imperialist aggression. We support all anti-imperialist struggles and put priority on supporting the fight for freedom in Northern Ireland.

WOMEN IN WORK

Non-domestic labour

Feminist Review (editor),
Waged Work: A Reader,
Virago, £5.95

Last week the court of appeal rejected the 'equal pay for work of equal value' claim of Julie Hayward, a woman cook who was getting £30 a week less than painters and joiners in Cammell Laird's Birkenhead shipyard. Hayward's success at a lower tribunal is cited in the introduction to this book as an example of how EEC directives (which enabled her to bring her claim) were 'working effectively' to help women. Her defeat is

typical of the lot of working women today. The reference to her case is typical of the weakness of this book.

Feminist Review has collected 13 articles it published between 1974 and 1985, analysing the position of women as waged, as opposed to domestic, workers. The selection is designed to illustrate the deteriorating position of women in a declining world economy. This it does most convincingly. What it fails to do is suggest an effective strategy for fighting back.

The articles tell a familiar story. Women are still employed in the worst-paid jobs, as cleaners, hospital auxiliaries,

school dinner ladies and the like. On average they earn 30 per cent less than men. The majority of women work part-time or as temporary workers, often without sick or maternity leave, and with no union protection. Among machinists, production-line and factory workers, twice as many women as men have lost their jobs. Sheila Allen and Carol Wolkowitz describe the growth of home working, while Angela Coyle analyses the devastating effect of privatisation in the NHS on a predominantly female workforce.

USELESS

Mandy Snell examines the impact of the 1975 Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts on women's pay and employment over 10 years. She concludes, as any woman who has tried to use the Acts against her employer already knows, that they are useless. Yet Snell is resigned to

using useless legislation as a base from which to campaign.

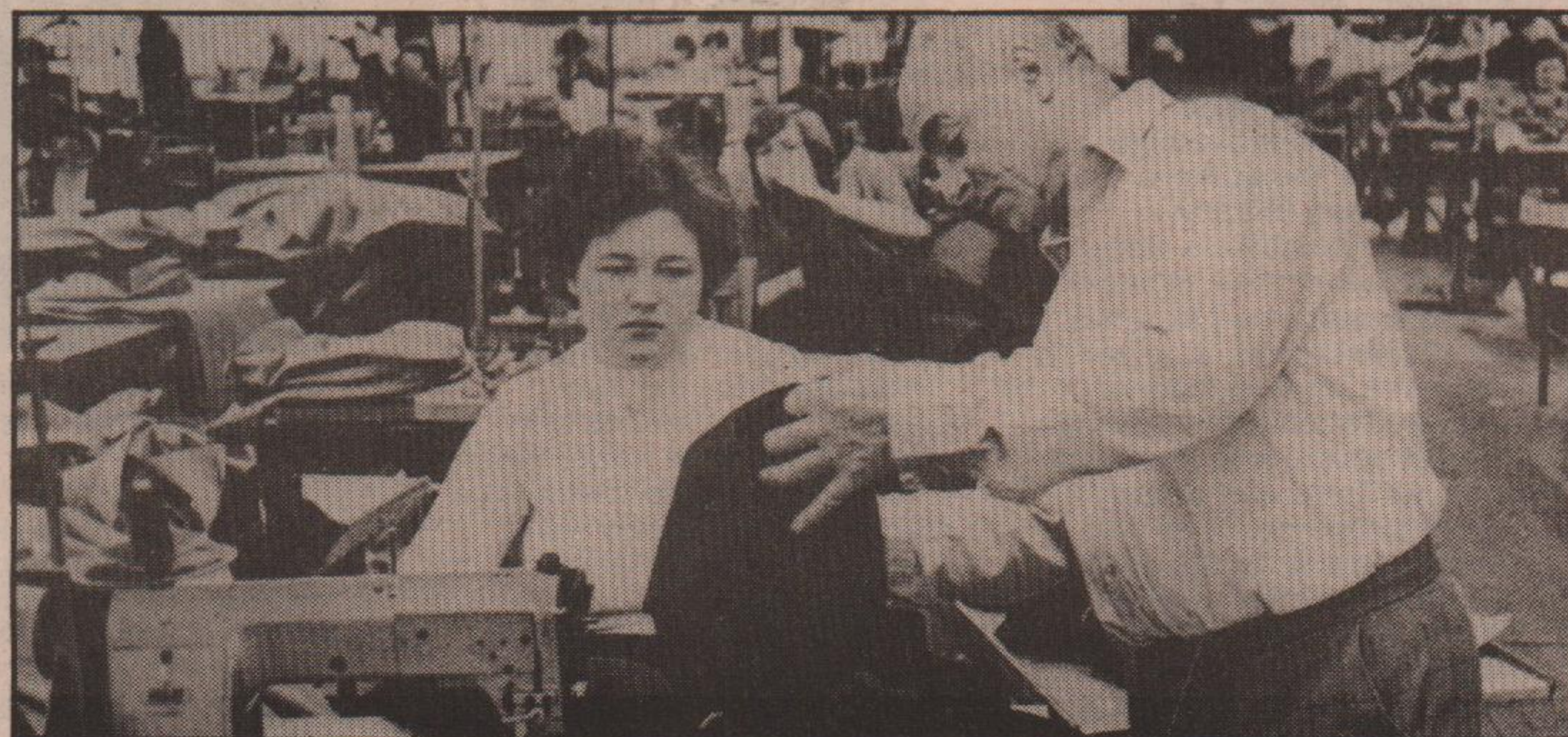
Cynthia Cockburn, Nicola Charles and Angela Coyle all show the unions to be second only to the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts in failing to improve women's position as waged workers. They reveal that union support for temporary and part-time working is more common than support for women on strike for better wages.

BEGGING

Nevertheless Coyle sees no alternative to the unions' dead-end approach. Looking at the NHS, for example, she describes as 'inevitable' the wage cuts and worse working conditions which women cleaners suffered under an in-house contract backed by their union. She even commends the 'committed' Nupe official who did the deal, for keeping out the private contractors. The women at the sharp end of this union-backed attack may not share her sympathetic view. Even those writers who condemn the unions get little further than demanding more women officials.

This book captures the way in which feminists concerned about working women have lowered their horizons as the political climate has turned against them. They have accepted that begging for favours from hostile courts, or finding a niche within the same structures of the official labour movement which have done so much to hold women back, is the best that we can expect. Anybody unfamiliar with the terrible position of women in work should read this book. It will make you want to do something about it, but for that you will have to look elsewhere.

Lynn Rawley



LABOUR'S IRISH POLICY IN ACTION

'Extremely worrying'

Mervyn Rees, Northern Ireland: A Personal Perspective, Methuen, £19.95

Labour's Irish activists will find this book embarrassing. Rees' account of his time as secretary of state for Northern Ireland is irrefutable evidence of the real meaning of Labour's policy on Ireland. Rees had been opposition spokesman on the North for three years before Labour's re-election in February 1974. His term of office took in the Ulster Workers' Council strike in May 1974, which brought down the power-sharing executive, the IRA ceasefire of 1975 and then the collapse of his own Constitutional Convention initiative. Needless to say he kept the troops in and the pressure on the nationalists. Rees is a keen supporter of the left's 'Loyalist veto' theory,

which rests on the idea that Britain would accede to Irish unity but for the resistance of the Loyalists. This happily complements the belief that Britain plays a peace-keeping role in the North. Rees points to his experience of the UWC strike as proof that it 'is the Loyalists and not the British who are the veto on unification'.

By pointing the finger at the Loyalists, Rees diverts attention from the crucial role which the British state played in wrecking his policy, and vindicates his own pathetic role in the strike. The Army, the civil service and the BBC all opposed the implementation of power-sharing because it made too many concessions to the nationalists. Labour, however, believed in it even more than the Tories. But given the establishment's opposition, all Rees' attempts to break the strike were futile.

While British soldiers co-operated with the Loyalist Ulster Defence Association, their chief, Sir Frank King, was persuading Rees to give up. Rees now allows himself a few carping criticisms of the BBC, but refuses to blow the whistle on the Army and the civil servants. He agreed with them that the brutal methods used to repress the IRA were 'not appropriate' for the Loyalist insurgents.

The demand made by Labour's Irish activists that the Labour Party engage in dialogue with the republican movement has recently been sanctioned by Kinnock. He is following in Rees' footsteps during the 1975 truce with the IRA. Rees admits that he only talked to the republican movement so as to disarm the IRA: 'My short-term aim was the same as it had been from the start of the ceasefire: to create the conditions in which the Provisional IRA's military organisation might be weakened. The longer the ceasefire lasted, the more difficult it would be for them to start a campaign again from scratch.'

Northern Ireland: A Personal Perspective is choc-a-bloc with

commission reports, political initiatives, behind-the-scenes negotiations, wheeling and dealing and debates in 'the house'. The reality of British rule in Ireland, the smashing of republican resistance, barely gets a direct mention. Former military intelligence officers Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd have revealed that, during Rees' term of office, officially sanctioned death squads roamed Ireland looking for nationalists to murder. When this broke last week Rees said feebly that it was all 'extremely worrying to me personally'.

The loyal British Labour Party can bring no respite to the Irish people. Rees knows that, to prove its patriotism, Labour must be even more subservient to the British establishment than the Tories. Looking at the way the Tories introduced direct rule after the massacre of Bloody Sunday in 1972, Rees observes: 'I do not believe that a Labour government could have acted as Edward Heath has just done without provoking a political crisis at Westminster.' And we couldn't have that, could we?

Andy Clarkson

SCHOENBERG AND MAXWELL-DAVIES

Breaking glass

London Sinfonietta, Contemporary Music Network Tour, Oliver Knussen (Conductor)

Oliver Knussen makes David Byrne look like a well-adjusted yuppie, and the music he conducts is more psycho than Talking Heads could ever be. If it's angst you're after, you'll want to catch the London Sinfonietta on their contemporary music tour, which ends in Liverpool and Birmingham on 13, 14 March. The spring programme includes music by Arnold Schoenberg,

whose 12-tone scale caused so much controversy in the twenties. Also represented is Peter Maxwell Davies, who cut his musical teeth at the Manchester music school in the late fifties.

From the opening, rhythmic hars of Schoenberg's *First Symphony* to the delicate diminuendo which closes Peter Maxwell Davies' *Revelation and Fall*, this music bears witness to the self-doubt induced by upheaval in twentieth-century Europe. Written in 1906, Schoenberg's score features furious unison-riffing, 50 years

before it became the trademark of bebop jazz. It portrays the nervous yet relentless momentum of a society moving towards a bloody re-adjustment — the First World War. But the *First Symphony* is relaxed and unobtrusive compared with the searing discords of *Revelation and Fall*. When Maxwell Davies wrote this piece in 1966 he used the sound of breaking glass — 10 years before David Bowie in *Low*. Its best moments combine guttural orchestration with a lush, overripe mezzo-soprano part. When it works, the effect is shattering. Bowie's Berlin phase is warm and friendly by comparison.

This is powerful stuff, but not consistently so. The historical process which unnerved the bourgeoisie and its client composers has gradually pushed their culture into brittle formality

and self-parody. Whereas Schoenberg gives us a convincing representation of the first failures of European self-confidence, panic ridden Maxwell Davies often fails the credibility test. His worst moments are as precious as concert-going etiquette.

Unwritten rules prescribe when the audience should clap, and how long for. They obeyed these rules as if their lives depended on them. Their social circle leans heavily on the desperate formality of the not-quite-dead tradition of 'serious' Western music. It provides a sheltered retreat from the ugliness of a strife-torn world. How ironic that this type of audience now claims a monopoly over Schoenberg, the man who set out to convey the momentous sweep of events which they are seeking to avoid.

Andrew Calcutt

Silent sell-out

THE full story of how the Silentnight strike was sold out by the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades union leaders and the Labour Party is only now coming to light.

The Silentnight strike started in June 1985 when the employers sacked most of their skilled production workers at the Barnoldswick and Sutton factories. On 19 December 1986, nicely timed for Christmas, the furniture union withdrew its support, and on 9 February, the strike committee called off the 616-day dispute.

On 1 March activists who had been involved in the dispute to the bitter end discovered the full extent of the labour leaders' perfidy. They received the minutes of the November 1986 meeting of the FTAT executive which made the decision to end official backing for the dispute. Until they got the minutes the strikers did not realise the decision had been made so early. The first they heard of the sell-out was when a correspondent from the *Financial Times* rang the strike HQ to tell them that the union leaders were about to end the dispute at their monthly meeting on 19 December.

On Wednesday 17 December the strikers went to London to lobby their national office and were told that the decision had been

made and was irreversible. An executive sub-committee told the workers that FTAT had 'provisionally discussed this with the TUC and the Labour Party'. Hence the irreversible decision. Before the strikers could get back to their HQ the union beat them to it and took away their printing equipment. Two days later the union leaders officially ended the dispute and declared any further action unofficial. But the decision had been taken a month before and was rubber-stamped by the Labour Party and the TUC.

That isn't all. While the union leaders were supposed to be considering an appeal from the strikers in January, their letter announcing the end of the dispute was being circulated via the Labour Party HQ in Walworth Road to wards that had supported the strikers and adopted families. Almost overnight support for the strikers disappeared. In early February the strikers were forced to end their struggle.

The experience has left a lot of bitterness and anger against the union leaders and the Labour Party among the 88 people who lost their jobs. As Terry, one of the strikers told me, 'They wanted to tidy things up, this being an election year — this is what a lot of the lads are saying'. The Silentnight story is a bitter reminder of the price we are expected to pay for the return of a Labour government.

Charles Longford
Manchester

Defend Libyan students!

MANY people say that, for all its problems, Scotland doesn't suffer from racism. Left wingers and Scottish nationalists claim that people here are more progressive than English workers. I think this is just an excuse not to tackle the real problems of racism in Scotland. Let me give you one example.

The air training service in Perth is a school for military and civilian flyers. Most of the students are from Arab countries — mainly Kuwait. A few are from Libya. For these Arab students, a three-year flying course has turned from a period of intensive study to a virtual jail sentence.

Unlike the other students, Arab trainees cannot leave the school during the week. They are threatened with expulsion and deportation if they miss a single lesson. Libyan students are even excluded from the 'live' hangar, where planes are kept ready to be flown. When Margaret Thatcher visited the school recently, they were not allowed in the same building!

When Arab students approached the principal with a petition signed by nearly every trainee, they had it torn up in their faces. Police and immigration officials constantly harass the students. They receive



RCP SUPPORTERS PROTEST AGAINST THE EXPULSION OF LIBYAN STUDENTS AFTER THE BRITISH-US AIRSTRIKE IN APRIL 1986

stiff fines for non-existent flat tyres on their cars. They are often taken to the police station, made to wait for hours, and then told to go home. They also face continuous racist abuse from local thugs.

Union bosses at Rosyth shipyard are adding to the chauvinist climate, by

organising a campaign against privatisation on the grounds that the company concerned has Libyan connections. We need to make it clear that the British state is our enemy, and that Libyan students are our allies.

Nat Evans
Edinburgh

Spies & unions

IN his letter in *tns* 6 (13 February), Phil Kimby asked why we describe the army and the police as 'reactionary', while defending the rights of 'spies' at Cheltenham GCHQ. I think we make a point of defending workers at GCHQ because of the wider implications of the denial of trade union rights.

If the Tories successfully use the issue of national security to smash trade unions at GCHQ, we can be sure they will try to do the same to workers elsewhere.

But could the 'spies' ever be won to the side of the working class? This depends upon our ability to put working class politics on the map. At present, with the official labour movement leadership on the defensive over national security, and the Tories out to save their

system, it would be pointless to speculate about the potential for certain groups of state employees — particularly the army and the police, who play a thoroughly reactionary role. In this context, defending trade union rights at GCHQ is not an attempt to sow illusions in the state, but a positive assertion of our right to organise against attacks on our living standards and our democratic rights.

Nancy Morton
Hackney

Educate the middle class?

THANK you for an excellent newspaper which I bought from one of your members on a recent visit to Glasgow. I enjoyed it very much, although I was rather concerned by your review of *When the Wind Blows* (27

February). You suggest that Raymond Briggs' characters are an insult to the working class. I agree that is so, but we must remember that there are many middle class people living in suburbia who happily accept the Bomb and the government defence programme. The film will hopefully educate them, and make them oppose such crazy policies.

Alister Blades
Borders Green Party
Berwick on Tweed



Student mafia

ON Wednesday 4 March my college was one of the very few in Britain which wasn't affiliated to the National Union of Students. It was run by a general manager Mike Thiru — salary £10 000 from a union budget of £28 000 — with the help of puppets who go by the collective title of the union executive committee. On Thursday 5 March we had our own little revolution.

In February the executive unconstitutionally adjourned a union meeting before a vote could be taken on affiliation to NUS — it is common knowledge that they are worried about NUS seeing the account books. Last week union members constitutionally reconvened the meeting. The entire executive didn't turn up and surprise, surprise, the moment the meeting began the fire alarm went off. No fire of course.

Incensed at the arrogance of the executive, an outdoor meeting of more than 400 union members decided to affiliate to NUS and sack both the union manager and the executive. About 100 students immediately occupied our union offices to stop Thiru and his woodentops removing any union documents and to show that the union was under new management.

As I write we are on the third night of our occupation and we intend to stay until we have elected a representative, accountable leadership to organise against the cuts.

Sean
Newcastle college of art and technology

Labour careerists

THE left-wing careerist politician is the curse of the working class in this country.

The *Guardian* this week showed Ilea leader Frances Morrell 'firing a symbolic shot' from a dummy tank in a campaign against Shell involvement in South Africa. Then there was your report ('Propaganda War', 27 February) on Morrell pushing the police video on sex attacks into inner-London schools.

The level of deception by these politicians is too much for most working people. They do not have the time or the information to work it all out. They are then left to the propaganda of the media. As a working class bloke, I look forward to your paper (when I can find your sellers).

Greg Langton
West London



If you would like to respond to any of these points, raise questions or comment on what you have read in the next step you can write to *tns*, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX. Or phone the letters page over the weekend on (01) 729 3771.

WORKERS AGAINST RACISM: THE WAY AHEAD

Last Saturday's demonstration in Wolverhampton in protest at the police murder of Clinton McCurbin was called at a week's notice, but Workers Against Racism immediately got to work to mobilise wide support.

We called emergency general meetings in colleges to demand student union coaches for the march. We spoke at trade union and trades council meetings to secure support from trade union delegates with their banners. Here we often had a head start because we recently raised motions protesting at the threatened deportation of Manchester Ucat member George Roucou. We organised speakers to address scores of meetings at youth clubs, black and anti-imperialist groups, women's groups and at other left-wing political

meetings.

We were generally well-received. But several people asked why so many WAR speakers are white. Aren't we just another white group trying to take over the campaigns of black people and use them for our own ends? The same questions came up when our contingent on the demonstration was made up mainly of white people.

The black community is understandably suspicious of 'outsiders' who in the past have tried to make political capital out of their oppression. For instance the Labour Party has a tradition of making promises to black groups and sympathising with their campaigns to help pull out the black vote at election time. In office Labour has delivered nothing to the black community except more immigration controls

and tougher policing. A variety of left-wing groups have occasionally taken up the issue of racism when something sensational has happened, and dropped it when another more 'pressing' issue has hit the headlines.

We are not apologetic about being a mainly white group organising anti-racist work, because we have got nothing in common with Labour and the left when it comes to fighting racism. We did not set up WAR to boost the credibility of the RCP in the eyes of black people. We did so with the specific aim of challenging racism in the working class as a whole.

We believe that it is vital to take our anti-racist arguments to white working class people. That's where racist and pro-British ideas are most destructive: the employers have long relied

on racist sentiments to divide and disorganise the workforce, the easier to defeat it. By making anti-racism into a relevant issue for the more political people, we can challenge backward ideas among their workmates and strengthen our movement by using our power against the racists.

The George Roucou Defence Campaign in Manchester shows the importance of mobilising white workers to fight against racism. It also shows how this can be done. By mobilising through trade unions, student unions and community groups, the campaign managed to bring out 1500 people, many of them council workers, for a demonstration in working hours. This was a considerable achievement, and the result of a political

struggle.

Politicians and employers are always blaming black people for unemployment, bad housing and poor social services. They make out that immigrants and British-born blacks are 'jumping the queue' and taking away 'our' resources. Trade union leaders often echo these ideas — and the left has always evaded taking them up. It is hardly surprising then that many white workers have accepted the argument that black people are a problem.

WAR supporters involved in the George Roucou campaign found that this was the first argument they had to contend with at union meetings. Often meetings erupted into furious rows. The racist lobby would demand to know what 'right' black people had to jobs when there were white people on

the dole. Our speakers put them straight. The success of the campaign was that many of these meetings ended with workers upholding George's right to stay and agreeing to join the demonstration.

Other workers have also taken a stand against racism. In London, teachers are refusing to cooperate with police in their schools. Rank and file workers in the dole offices have refused to implement racist checks on claimants despite getting no support from their union leaders in the CPSSA.

We can expect black people to take up the fight against racism without any advice or encouragement from us. Our job is to make sure that they do not stand alone by showing that it is possible to win white workers to the anti-racist struggle.

Anne Burton

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE AIDS PANIC

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick
Don Milligan

PUBLIC MEETINGS

BRADFORD: Saturday 4 April,
2pm, Central Library

LEEDS: Wednesday 1 April, 7.30pm,
Trades Club, Savile Mount

SHEFFIELD: Thursday 2 April,
7.30pm, SCAU, West Street

WAKEFIELD: Thursday 2 April,
4.30pm, Bretton Hall College

BACK THE RED FRONT!

Join our campaign for *The Red Front*, a bloc of left-wing organisations and individuals who refuse to bow to the dictates of the system or the demands of the Labour leadership, and are willing to fight for our class now. Get the arguments for *The Red Front* in the new RCP programme, out now.



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I would like ... copies of the RCP programme *The Red Front*
(£1 plus 40p p&p).

Send to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX

DIARY

LONDON: Tuesday 17 March,
7.30pm. Living Marxism forum:
Imperialism and the war drive.
University of London Union,
Malet Street, WC1 (Goodge St
tube)

MANCHESTER: Friday 13
March, 12 noon. Protest
against the deportation of
George Roucou. Immigration
Appeals Office, Aldine House,
New Bailey Street

NEWCASTLE: Thursday 12
March, 7.30pm. Abortion
debate with speakers from the
RCP, Spuc, Newcastle
University Pro-Life Group.
Committee Room A, Newcastle
University Students' Union

Wednesday 18 March, 7.30pm.
Forum on Aids. Bridge Hotel,
Castle Square

NEWHAM: Thursday 12 March,
7.30pm. Campaign Against
Racist Attacks activists
meeting. Shalom Centre, High
Street North, near East Ham
tube

SOUTH KIRKBY: Saturday 14
March, 10.30am. Third annual
commemoration march for
David Jones (striking miner
killed on picket line). Assemble
The Green, South Kirkby, West
Yorks

YORK: Tuesday 17 March,
9.30am. Protest at trial of
black youths arrested for
fighting back against racist
attackers. York magistrates
court. Coach leaves from
Bradford MA 'A' at 8am

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tms

OK STRIKE ENDS—

Mark Wilson reports from the Holiday Inn, Johannesburg, on the end of the OK Bazaars strike last

It's a hot summer day in Johannesburg but it's cool in the air-conditioned of the plush hotel. I've waited since 6am as heated final negotiations rage on. Around four in the afternoon there's a sudden roar of voices from the nearby conference room. It's all over, and the 10-week strike is settled.

Youthful black shop stewards of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union are elated as we crowd into the room. As union president Makhulu Ledwaba and the OK Bazaars management man sign the agreement, the trade unionists' dancing and singing shakes the floor of the Holiday Inn's Uranium Suite. I can't help but reflect on the contrast between these militant activists and the tired old leadership of the British trade unions. As I leave, celebratory cries of 'Amandla!' (Power) echo down the hotel corridors, causing some concern to a group of blue-rinsed white matrons sipping gin in the foyer.

The strike has been the longest and most bitter in the history of the South African retail trade and the settlement comes as a relief to the 11 000-strong workforce.

CCAWUSA leaders readily admit that what they've achieved is a compromise but given the conditions under which they have had to fight, they're happy enough.

OK bosses have agreed to:

- a wage increase of R100 across the board. For some workers this amounts to a raise of as much as a third. The strikers had demanded R160.
- abolition of the anniversary system of wage increases, which divided workers fighting for decent pay by promising each one an increment in the month they started work.
- a minimum monthly wage of R400. Workers had demanded R450 but consider the increase an important gain in a climate where wages are falling. They have not achieved an increase of this size in the last five years.
- no victimisations. No union member can be given a warning or face disciplinary action in the next 90 days without a union official being present. A disciplinary hearing must be held within two days. Given OK's record of arbitrary dismissal this is considered a limited but useful gain.
- keep open the jobs of all militants who have been detained under state of emergency laws.
- reinstate most of the 551 militants dismissed during the strike. In 199 disputed cases a mutually agreed panel will arbitrate.

Union leaders have few illusions that the settlement marks the end of the fight for decent working conditions at OK's nationwide chain of stores. CCAWUSA president Makhulu Ledwaba points out that OK is still blatantly racist, paying black workers less than whites. But for him the outcome of the 10-week strike — the longest outside the

mines — is positive, particularly because there have been none of the mass dismissals that have become a common feature of strikes in South Africa.

CCAWUSA leaders speak proudly of solidarity they received from other unions.

Comrades in the Food and Allied Workers Union faced legal action and management coercion, but refused to supply OK stores, and helped to swing the balance. Trade unionists at 54 mines and factories owned by Anglo-American, the major OK

shareholder, also took action which helped speed a settlement.

Given the conditions under which strikers were forced to fight, the OK settlement looks like a positive achievement for the movement. Despite living in ghettos swarming with armed police and surrounded by razor-wire entanglements, despite mass arrests and beatings on the picket line and the starvation and hardship that 10 weeks without pay entails, the strikers kept up the fight. Strike meetings happened on time every day at Cosatu House and every move made by the union leaders was based on democratic delegate votes. Now militants feel that the union is stronger than ever before.

The black resistance in South Africa has suffered some serious setbacks of late. Under the apartheid regime's state of emergency, they have endured nine months of blanket censorship, mass arrests, martial law in the townships, torture of detainees and massacres at the hands of state-sponsored vigilantes.

But the resilience of the OK strikers shows that black workers are far from beaten.

The collective power of the black working class can still force the apartheid authorities to think again. This remains the key to resolving the crisis in South Africa. As one OK shop steward pointed out at the end of last week's negotiations: 'There will be no freedom and justice without socialism and there is no alternative to working class control of this country!'



STRIKE LEADERS CELEBRATE WRESTLING CONCESSIONS FROM OK BOSSES LAST WEEK

STRUGGLE GOES ON



SIGNING THE SETTLEMENT: THE OK STRIKERS SHOWED THEIR STRENGTH

MARK WILSON/the next step

Mark Wilson/the next step