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the next step

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Three framed for murder in Blake lock trial



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Winston Silcott has been convicted of murdering PC Blake lock and branded 'The Beast of Broadwater Farm'. Yet no witnesses testified against him. The prosecution produced no photographic or forensic evidence. They could not even prove he was in Tottenham on the night of the violence. He confessed to nothing. He was framed. As his father said, 'They have crucified my son.'

The police case rested on a single statement

Kinnock's Cruise

On the eve of his trip to Washington this week, Neil Kinnock agreed to drop Labour's commitment to send back American Cruise missiles based in Britain. For the Labour left, this must appear as the political equivalent of selling your grandmother. It makes a mockery of Kinnock's past outspoken commitment to unilateral disarmament, and severs the Labour leader's last link with left-wing policies. It ought to have provoked outrage from Labour left wingers, who have long pointed to the Cruise-go-home commitment as the one remaining shred of evidence that Labour is a radical party. Instead, the left has greeted Kinnock's about-turn with the silent dismay of mourners at the funeral of an old friend.

As we predicted he would in last week's *ins*, Kinnock has claimed that this policy change is a response to recent events in superpower diplomacy. The Labour leader says he has been swayed by the possibility of a deal between America and the Soviet Union, which could eliminate all medium-range nuclear weapons from Europe. This, insists Kinnock, means that there is 'no question' of Labour making any hasty disarmament moves which might upset the Reagan-Gorbachev appellation.

Kinnock would have us believe that we can entrust the peace of the world to the conscience and good intentions of Ronald Reagan — at the time when Reagan's involvement in gun-running and his disregard for the paper proprieties of international law are becoming clearer with each new revelation in the Irangate saga. The real reason for Kinnock's switch on Cruise confirms his subservience to the militarists in Washington and Whitehall. He has conceded that, to stand any chance of being accepted as a member of the imperial statesmen's club, he must go along with the wishes of the top generals and governments in Nato.

Kinnock's concession to the right is the logical consequence of his attempt to compete with Thatcher for the title of Britain's most bulldoggish politician. He has tried to convince the establishment that his plans to scrap nuclear weapons and build up Britannia's conventional armed forces are the best way to keep the Union flag flying across the world. But having conceded the need to rearm the British authorities against their foreign rivals, Kinnock was always vulnerable to the charge that his non-nuclear defence policy was wishy-washy and unpatriotic.

Kinnock has come under increased pressure from the establishment to go the whole hog and embrace the Bomb as well as the tank and the submarine. The prospect of Thatcher flying off to Moscow this week, bragging that her hard line on disarmament had brought the 'Russian bear' to its senses,

persuaded the Labour leadership that the time had come to concede the argument. Kinnock's capacity for eating his words when the Tories demand it has now grown so great that he can swallow Cruise missiles.

This week, the Labour leadership sought to distract attention from its backtracking on Cruise by launching yet another defence document, this time proposing a conventional disarmament deal with Eastern Europe. But party spokesmen were quick to point out that this did not alter Labour's expansive plans for building up Britain's army, navy and air force. As George Robertson MP, a member of Labour's frontbench defence team, put it, 'There is a need to strengthen conventional forces. But that does not mean that we have to increase the number of troops on the central front.' So where else would Labour send its new forces? Ireland? The Falklands? Or Greenham Common, to guard the Cruise missiles which would still be nestling in their silos?

The latest panicky developments in Kinnock's defence policy have made a mockery of the left's championing of Labour as the party of the peace movement. Labour now stands stripped bare of any left-wing credentials, and exposed as a full-blooded supporter of Nato in general and of British militarism in particular. The unilateral disarmament policy which the left has turned into the keystone of British socialism has been wiped out with one sweep of Kinnock's censoring pen. Yet the best the leaders of the Labour left could do in response was to whimper that Kinnock must set a time limit on how long he would wait for a superpower deal before sending back the US missiles. When Kinnock rejected even this feeble opposition, the left sank into a sullen silence.

The Labour left is discovering that when you bend over backwards to accommodate Kinnock's attempt to court moderate voters, all you end up with is a pain in the lumber. The consequence of the left keeping its head down during the run-up to the election, in the hope that Labour can sneak in and then turn left, is now becoming devastatingly clear. It leaves the Labour leadership free to move further and faster on to the Tories' ground, and sets back the prospects for resisting the forces of reaction.

Kinnock's switch on Cruise is unlikely to solve his problem of impressing middle class voters, which has sent Labour down in the polls (see centre pages). But it ought to provide the answer to those left-wing people who are questioning their loyalty to Labour. It screams at them to break with Kinnock, and throw in their lot with those fighting to build *The Red Front* as a campaigning bloc of organisations and individuals who will accept no excuses for conceding to the militarists.

Bail debate

The Tories have used the fact that Winston Silcott was on bail at the time they claim he killed PC Blakelock to attack prisoners' rights. The idea that black people picked up by the police enjoy too much freedom is a gross example of Tory hypocrisy.

What 'rights' did police grant the hundreds of youth from Broadwater Farm whom they picked up and terrorised for days on end while denying them access to solicitors, parents, clothes or food? Was it lax bail laws which caused Trevor Monerville

to emerge from the custody of Stoke Newington police with brain damage in January? And perhaps the fear that their victim might be freed on bail explains why two policemen strangled Clinton McCurbin in broad daylight in Wolverhampton last month, while supposedly arresting him for using a stolen credit card?

As the police visit fresh cruelties on black people, we must stand firm against the drive to use the verdict of a showtrial to undermine prisoners' rights still further and to tighten the grip of racism over Thatcher's Britain.

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TRIAL BY TABLOID

Journalists were shocked at the hostility they met at a press conference on Broadwater Farm last week. They shouldn't have been

'You people have had a lot to do with the verdict,' Stafford Scott, a community representative from the Farm, told the press. 'You were all in court, you all know that there was no evidence against them, but you never printed any of that, did you?'

The British media are well-known for their gutter style and limited vocabulary. Until now they have reserved their worst excesses for Irish people on trial for fighting to free their country from British rule. But the abuse the media heaped on the Broadwater Farm defendants was just as savage.

Winston Silcott, sentenced to 30 years for the murder of PC Blakelock, was singled out for special treatment. The day after the verdict was delivered, the *Sun*, the *Daily Star*, the *Daily Mail* and the rest vied to deliver the most damning insult. Silcott was described as the 'machete monster', the 'fiend', the 'Godfather', the 'beast', the 'Tyrant' or simply the 'savage'. The press stressed Silcott's size, as if this was a reliable indicator of his capacity for 'evil'. He was 'a fearsome 6ft 2ins killer', a 'giant black gang leader', the 'hulking mastermind of the Broadwater Farm riot'. But Silcott's size was not half as inflated as the media lies.

The liars evidently wrote their stories in the same bar, because they all agreed that Silcott's nickname was some variation of 'Styx' or 'Sticks'. The *Sun* said he was called 'Styx' — after a river in Greek mythology at the gateway to hell. The idea that Greek legends are favourite reading among young people in Tottenham outshone the *Star's* feeble contention that Silcott was 'nicknamed Sticks because of his very long legs'.

CRUCIFIXION

Somebody should have told the media hyenas that it is rude to call people names. But then the purpose of the press coverage was to make out that black people on Broadwater Farm are not people at all, but 'animals' and 'savages'. By the time the trial ended, the papers did not bother to conceal their prejudice.

The *Sun* motif for its seven-page special on Silcott showed a silhouette of Blakelock, captioned 'Victim of the Savages'. The *Star* said that Silcott 'ruled the lawless Broadwater Farm jungle with a reign of terror'. It printed a series of out-of-focus photographs and claimed they showed 'the Beasts of Broadwater Farm moving in for the kill' — 'led by an animal called Winston Silcott'. In fact the photos showed nothing but the blurred outline of bodies on a balcony. Yet the *Star*, with its superior eyesight, insisted this was 'Silcott and his pack of savages'.

Through their crucifixion of Silcott the press tried to categorise all black youth on Broadwater Farm as common criminals.

Silcott was 'the black gang leader' and Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip were

his two 'henchmen'. The *Sun* said Silcott was the 'Godfather' to five street gangs, who 'ruled by the machete or knife', and his greengrocer's shop 'was a cover for drug rackets'. The *Star* claimed that 'even his friends did not dare to look him in the eye,' others said he had no friends. The *Telegraph* put the finishing touches on a tapestry that told the story of 'black crime' as the Tories wanted to hear it. According to the *Telegraph* correspondent, Silcott 'moved in circles where criminality and contempt for "Babylon" authority are normal,' where 'knives are carried as routine' — a world of 'all-night parties, loud soul music and drugs'.

'YOU BASTARDS'

The pressmen tried every trick to turn the trial into a public flogging. They even invented a threat to the Royal Family, symbol of all things British, to persuade the public that Silcott was guilty. The hacks said that Silcott nearly scared the life out of Princess Diana when she visited Broadwater Farm in 1985, when he 'loomed' out of the crowd, 'wearing dark glasses, a Balaclava hat and loose-fitting camouflage gear'. The *Sun* quoted one detective as saying, 'He looked every inch a terrorist. It was decided to keep him in the background.' The *Sun* got its anti-Irish and anti-black scripts mixed up, but the story served its purpose of setting up Silcott as a threat to the British way of life.

All this and they had the cheek to complain when they got a mouthful from angry residents at a Broadwater Farm press conference last week. The family and friends of those on trial were outraged by three things the press did. They printed a photo of Silcott when he was still on trial; they carried on reporting as fact allegations, dismissed by the judge as 'pure fantasy', that Blakelock's head was to have been put on a pole and paraded round the estate; and they claimed that crossbows, petrol bombs and guns were stashed on the Farm in readiness for another night of violence at the end of the trial.

But the biggest media myth was that the police produced 'evidence' to put the three men away for life.

'It was a remarkable achievement of the police', said the *Mail*, 'to have found the miscreants and to have provided adequate evidence to prove their guilt.' It certainly was remarkable that three men were jailed for life without the police producing a single shred of evidence. But not one paper had the integrity to say it.

As Winston Silcott sat in solitary confinement in his cell in Wormwood Scrubs last Friday at the start of a 30-year stretch inside, the vicious little people who helped to put him there were picking over the pieces of his father's shattered life. William Silcott told the journalists who crucified his son 'I have no more to say to you bastards.'

Joan Phillips

'THEY WERE TREATED LIKE SHIT'

Lynn Rawley spoke to Jude from the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign, about the events surrounding the showtrials which the gutter press didn't report

'When the verdict was announced the brother of one of the defendants was in a total state of shock. He went storming out of court in anger. You can understand it, his brother had been sent down for something he didn't do, the whole trial was a set-up and they'd all been treated like shit throughout. Then about 30 or 40 police set on him with truncheons.

'One witness said they saw the police swinging their truncheons and slamming them down on his head, just beating him to bits. Then they took him downstairs. When we got there they'd bundled him from head to foot in hessian cloth and tied him in rope. You couldn't see his face and he could hardly breathe.'

'We could hear him pleading with the police not to hold him so tight because he was suffocating. There was a police van waiting outside and they carried him out, three on each side like you would a coffin at a funeral. There were about 15 other police standing around trying to stop the press taking photos.'

'Thirty police beat him to bits. Then they bundled him from head to foot in hessian cloth and tied him with rope. He could hardly breathe.'

The outrageous scenes which Jude described got no coverage in the thousands of words printed at the end of the Blakelock trial last week. Neither did the harassment and torment which the defendants' families suffered throughout the showtrial.

The man whom police beat and roped like an animal on Thursday had already been assaulted and called a 'black cunt' by thuggish Old Bailey officials, who prowled the public gallery making racist jibes throughout the trial. He had also been arrested outside the court, for 'stealing' his own car.

The abuse came as no surprise to the Defence Campaign and the defendants' families.

'I had a lot of contact with the Silcott family. They knew this murder trial was another frame-up to try and get Winston. The lawyer said that when he saw Winston in the cell after the verdict Winston just shrugged his shoulders and said "I told you so." He is bitter, the families are bitter. They didn't think for one minute that Winston was going to that court for a fair and just trial. They knew that there was no evidence but they also know what the police and courts are like.'

The black community on Broadwater Farm have all found out 'what the police and courts are like' during the terror campaign which the police have run on the estate since PC Blakelock's death in October 1985. Jude can reel off a catalogue of police raids, arrests and brutal interrogations, sometimes of whole families. 'Most of the arrests were the result of the Farm being constantly occupied by hundreds of police, dawn raids, people being picked up on the streets and people having their doors broken down.'

'Police would arrest a few people, putting pressure on them and getting names from them. That's how they managed to arrest most of the community at one time or another. Some people were tricked, others were intimidated. Some kids were so scared after beatings, threats and being locked up for days without being allowed to see anyone that they made up names just to get out. One youth made up names and only gave street names. Unfortunately one street name he made up turned out to be true, and this other lad was picked up even though there was no evidence.'

Police arrested white youths too, and even put two whites on trial for Blakelock's murder. But they made no secret of the racism that was the real driving force behind their campaign.

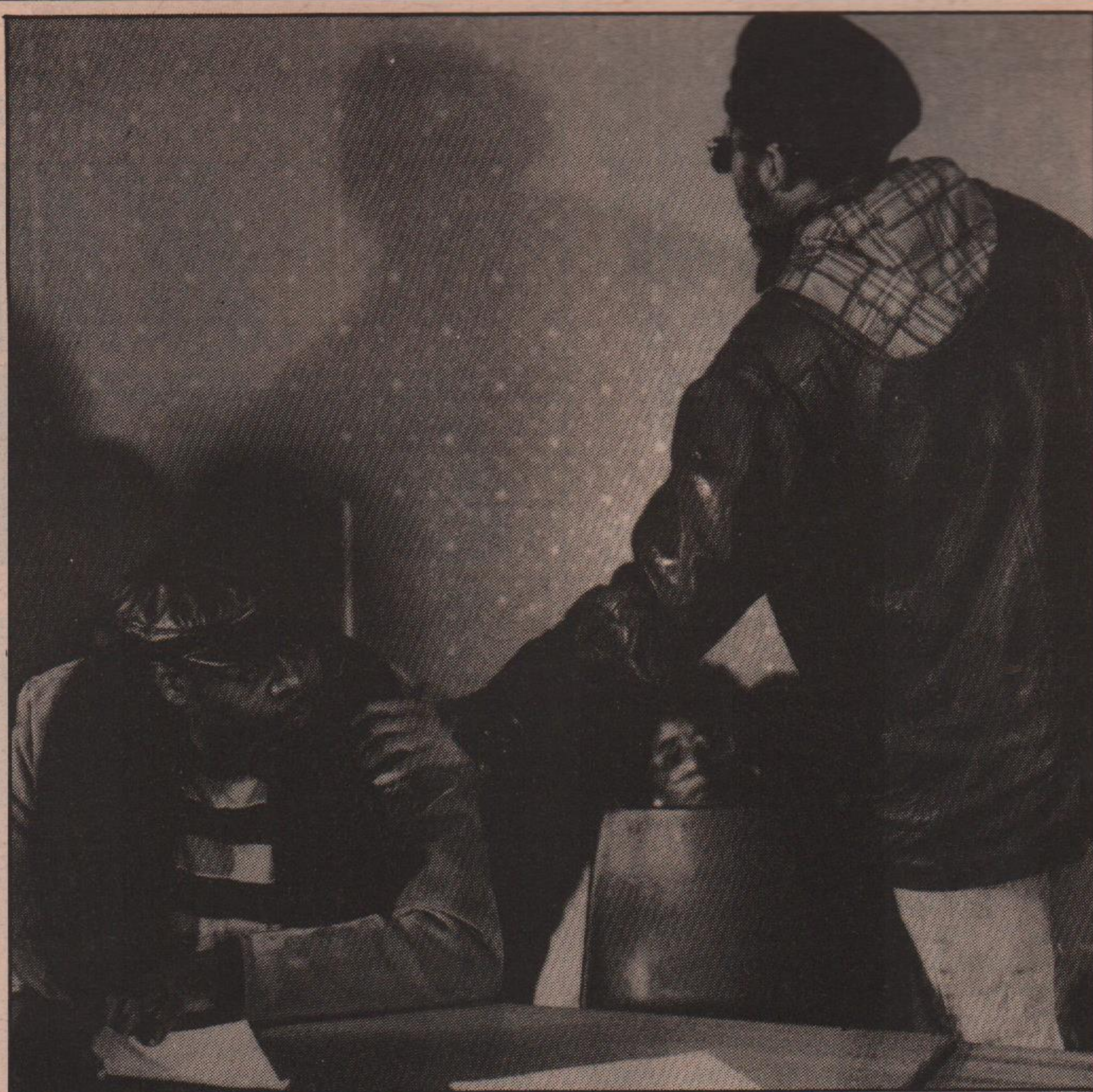
'The police said that as far as they were concerned every black youth on the Farm was a potential cop-killer suspect. With white youth the police would say "Remember your colour, what colour are you? You're white so don't be a nigger-lover because it's the niggers we want. If you give us the names of the niggers we will remember you are white and we'll let you go."'

During the murder trial, police said that witnesses had refused to give evidence in court because they had been threatened. In fact, it was the police who spread panic and fear among people on the Farm. Yet, says Jude, their terror tactics only broke a handful: 'The police tried to get everyone to be a witness for the prosecution and virtually all of them refused.'

'Police told white youth "You're white so don't be a nigger-lover. If you give us the names of the niggers we'll let you go".'

Police went to extraordinary lengths to concoct a case against Winston Silcott in particular. They claimed that one juvenile, who can't read or write, had made a statement that he saw Silcott wielding a machete and covered in blood on the night that the estate erupted. But the youth wouldn't repeat this story in court. So police issued warrants for his arrest and raided his house. 'They eventually dragged him into court with his mother crying on his arm,' says Jude. 'They got his mother thrown out because they said she was stopping him giving evidence. But in the witness box, he retracted his statement. The police went mad and insisted that he become an unwilling witness for them.'

'Come the main murder trial he still didn't turn up. The police kept on going to his house, they raided his family 30 times in the last two months. They took up floorboards, searched the loft and sometimes raided them two or three times a day. They watched the house and called the family niggers and the like. They even had helicopters out looking for him. They found him when they raided his uncle's house. It was two days too late for the trial, but they kept him anyway and accused him of burglary.'



FLOYD JARRETT, WHOSE MUM WAS KILLED BY POLICE, COMFORTS WILLIAM SILCOTT, WHOSE SON WAS CRUCIFIED IN COURT

BERNIE GRANT AND BROADWATER FARM

A BLOODY GOOD HIDING

Bernie Grant, Haringey council leader and Labour prospective parliamentary candidate for Tottenham, shot from obscurity to infamy when he said that the police got 'a bloody good hiding' on Broadwater Farm. We still stand by his statement, but Grant has given up blaming the police. Last week his council even did the force's job for them, searching the Farm after the press claimed that youths were tooling up to attack the police.

Grant's straightforward statement of fact caused a furore in October 1985. He became 'Barmy Bernie' in tabloid gutterspeak, was blasted by Labour leader Neil Kinnock, and racists organised a 24-hour strike by council workers in protest. Under pressure, Grant backed off. He told the Broadwater Farm inquiry that 'it was a bit of a ridiculous thing to say in retrospect.' He opposed a proposal to withhold council funds from the police, after getting a letter from Kinnock condemning the idea.

TUG-OF-WAR

Grant has been torn between his links with the local black community and his loyalty to the Labour Party leadership. Kinnock is winning the tug-of-war. Grant has argued that his only aim in speaking up for black youth was to 'wean the youths away from acts of violence into political action'. This approach seemed to bear fruit in the local council elections in May 1986, when a large turnout brought new gains for Labour.

But while the Labour Party benefited, black youth have been left to stand alone against the ongoing campaign of police terror on the Farm.

In February 1986 Kinnock paid a visit to Tottenham to make it clear that Labour was 'not anti-police but anti-crime'. By now, Grant was echoing the leadership line: 'I have never been anti-police' he declared. Haringey council has let police use empty flats during 'surveillance weeks' on Broad-



BERNIE GRANT: AT PEACE WITH POLICE

water Farm. At the end of the showtrial last week, when the media spread scare stories about renewed unrest on the Farm, Grant issued a joint statement with the police calling for calm, while his council caretakers went in to search the estate like police agents in overalls. Grant excused his change in attitude by claiming that the police were behaving much better since the disturbances. Those who have had to put up with police brutality inside and outside the Old Bailey and on Broadwater Farm disagree (see above).

Grant has taken a bloody good hiding from the press, the Labour Party leadership and now from a reactionary local parents' group which threatens to challenge him at the polls. He has responded by adapting to the pro-police standards laid down by Kinnock. Local black people will be the losers as Grant makes his peace with the police to appease the Labour leaders.

John Voss/The Independent

David Rowke

MORRELL MIMICS BAKER

It was a spontaneous eruption. People are very angry.' That's how Bernie Regan, secretary of the Inner London Teachers' Association, described last week's wildcat strikes against the Labour-controlled Inner London Education Authority. In Camden, Westminster, Hackney and Lambeth, teachers came out in protest against Ilea's plans for compulsory redeployment of 1200 staff. More than 500 school students added their opposition to Labour's scheme for education cuts.

The start of Ilea's programme of cut-backs coincided with the implementation of education chief Kenneth Baker's Teachers Act. After two years of strikes and negotiations over a national pay claim, Tory minister Baker wrote a special law to impose a pay deal and threatened to ban strikes in schools. Now, Ilea leader Frances Morrell has taken a leaf out of Baker's book. She has tried to impose redeployment, and has poached a new personnel director from Ford's who knows all about the Tory school of management. He has threatened to charge striking teachers with 'gross professional misconduct' — a sacking offence. Ilea officials have also said that all strike action is now considered as 'a breach of contract'.

In effect, the Labour authority is trying to impose a Tory-style no-strike deal.



PLAYING HEADMISTRESS: MORRELL

Ilea chiefs have even stolen Baker's speech scripts. Baker has waged a propaganda war against striking teachers, accusing them of wrecking children's education and appealing to parents for support. Now Ilea's chief officer has slammed teachers for endangering 'the health and safety of children in their care'. Faced with a double-edged attack from the Tories and the Ilea leadership, delegates representing teachers, office and catering staff, youth workers and schoolkeepers have set up the London Education Defence Committee (see letters, page 10).

SENSIBLE

The Labour leaders are hoping that Ilea's readiness to attack teachers will offset the authority's 'loony left' image, and show moderate voters that it is committed to management efficiency. Morrell is now being groomed as the leader of Labour's 'sensible left' in London. In the week when Ilea named the first teachers for redeployment, Labour general secretary Larry Whitty announced that Morrell had a key role in the new London Labour Party steering committee. Its job is to redirect debate towards safe issues, and Morrell set the tone by drawing up recommendations on how to avoid talking about lesbians and gays.

Besides taking teachers out of schools, Morrell wants homosexual rights to be taken off the political agenda. With left wingers like her, who needs Kinnock or Baker to put the boot in?

Andrew Calcutt

KINNOCK'S CHEAP LABOUR

Labour's plan to create jobs through training schemes accepts all the Tories' prejudices against the unemployed

Tory boasts of falling unemployment are based on a computer crime that the City of London would be proud of. The government's latest claim, that the total of registered unemployment fell by a 'record' 70 000 last month, simply shows that its schemes to conscript the jobless into cheap labour armies or to rob people of their benefits are beginning to bite.

The Tories have changed the way unemployment figures are computed 19 times, and expanded their sham 'training' schemes. The Community Programme scheme has pulled an additional 45 000 adults off the register and into poorly paid drudgery over the past year. The department of employment's own figures suggest that 370 000 young people would have joined the starvation-waged Youth Training Scheme during the same period.

CONTEMPT

The government's new Restart scheme interrogating and intimidating the unemployed has denied benefit to 11 000 people, and is said to have 'discouraged' another 40 000 from claiming. Meanwhile, mass unemployment and the impact of the cheap-labour schemes in dragging down going wage rates have helped to boost part-time and temporary employment on desperately low wages, as workers' bargaining strength in the labour market declines.

Whatever the Tories might say, the number of workers in Britain without a full-time job which enables them to live a decent life is still on the rise.

The promise to cut total unemployment by one million over two years is the centrepiece of Labour's electoral alternative to the Tories. But Labour plans to create hundreds of thousands of these jobs through 'training schemes'. Its 'New Skills for Britain' campaign, launched last week, shares the Tories' contempt for the unemployed.

Neil Kinnock's plans echo Tory prejudices about 'training' being the key to getting people back to work. In public, this amounts to accepting the argument that the working class is not fit for jobs, rather than blaming the bankrupt profit-system for its inability to employ people. In private, it is an admission that Tory-style schemes are the only jobs which Labour can squeeze out of decrepit British capitalism.

Labour says its training schemes will be 'real' jobs. It plans to replace the YTS with a 'Foundation Programme' giving all school-leavers two years' training. 'Earn to Learn' would encourage 16-year olds to stay in education, and Labour would introduce 'project-based' training instead of the Community Programme for the long-term unemployed.

PHONEY

The names might have changed but the cheapskate character of the schemes remains the same. Labour's training package aims to cut the jobless total by 355 000 for the princely sum of £800m. At just over £2000 per place, Labour's phoney jobs would be about as real as the government's unemployment statistics.

In its determination to look moderate in the run-up to the election, Labour is making more and more concessions to Tory ideas and to establishment criticisms of its spending plans.

Kinnock's 'New Skills' campaign has even dropped Labour employment spokesman



'STAR WASH' - OR IS IT CAR WASH? THE TORIES' SLAVE-LABOUR SHAM

John Prescott's earlier idea for a miserable one per cent levy on employers to help fund the 'training' programme. It also fudges Labour's commitment to pay young people who remain in education, erasing the figure of £27 a week which Labour once claimed it would pay teenagers who stay on at school. Whichever party is running it, a YTS

scheme by any other name still smells as badly of slave-labour and fiddling the unemployment figures. Labour's 'training' schemes offer more of the same to the jobless millions. The only jobs we should accept as 'real' are those which pay a living wage for working in decent conditions.

Tony Kennedy

EALING NALGO STRIKE

UP THE ACTION

At a mass meeting last week, 2500 Nalgo members voted by an overwhelming majority to continue their all-out strike against Ealing Labour council. The strike began four weeks ago, when the council refused Nalgo's demand for inner-London weighting and then suspended clerical workers for carrying out the union's non-cooperation policy. A month later, the strikers are still determined to beat the council. They have refused to accept a phased-deal compromise, but they need to step up the action now to stop their dispute turning into a stalemate.

Nalgo branch officials have wasted valuable time advising the council on how to use creative accounting methods to foot the extra wages-bill. But cosy chats with Labour employers will not win this dispute. The key to victory is the support of rank and file workers from the manual unions. Unfortunately, Ealing Nalgo recently failed to support a pay-claim by the manual unions. Although blue-collar workers are already in dispute over a 35-hour week and £120 minimum wage, Nalgo's sectional record has made it harder to win effective support from them. Yet management will gain the advantage unless rank and file Nalgo members take it upon themselves to go out and convince the manual workforce of the need for immediate action in all council departments.

Nalgo's narrow and divisive attitude to other workers has reduced the momentum of the Ealing strike. Meanwhile, some Labour Party activists are trying to kill it stone dead. During a mass meeting at the start of the strike, one Labour Party speaker remembered that Neil Kinnock is a local ratepayer and argued that 'In election year it would be political suicide to take action against a Labour council which serves us well.' Most Nalgo members believe that Ealing council could best serve them by



STRIKERS SINGING IN THE RAIN LAST WEEK

paying a living wage. They have ignored the 'we can't embarrass Kinnock' brigade — so far.

But as the strike continues, Labour will step up the pressure on Ealing council workers to stop making trouble for Kinnock in the run-up to the election.

Nalgo activists need to stand firm. Far from playing down the action so as not to embarrass Labour, they need to step up the strike against Labour employers who pay bad wages. They must keep an eye on their union officials, who may well accept a compromise phased deal, and refuse to subordinate their fight for a living wage to the needs of Labour's vote-catching machine.

Sheona Young

'Why we're for The Red Front'

THE WAY AHEAD IN THE UNIONS

Alan Harding spoke to two trade unionists about why they are backing *The Red Front*

As the trade union leaders become ever more desperate to get a Labour government in power, rank and file activists have come under pressure not to rock the boat in case they scotch Labour's chances of success. But many left wingers are not prepared to sacrifice our jobs and conditions on the altar of Kinnock's election bandwagon.

Steve Forey is chair of the Aslef shop stewards' committee at the King's Cross terminus in London. Ciaran Conaghan works at the Manpower Services Commission headquarters in Sheffield, and is standing on a *Red Front* platform in the April elections for the department of employment section executive committee of the CPSA. They told *tns* why they are campaigning for *The Red Front*, a platform of working class demands (see pages 6 and 7) that can defend our jobs and our rights against the employers and the government.



ASLEF SHOP STEWARD STEVE FOREY

AH: Do you think the return of a Labour government has anything to offer railworkers?
SF: 'I've talked with a number of people about *The Red Front* as the election gets closer. Railworkers, like many others, recognise the need to get rid of the Tories. But Labour is not really an alternative. *The Red Front* is.

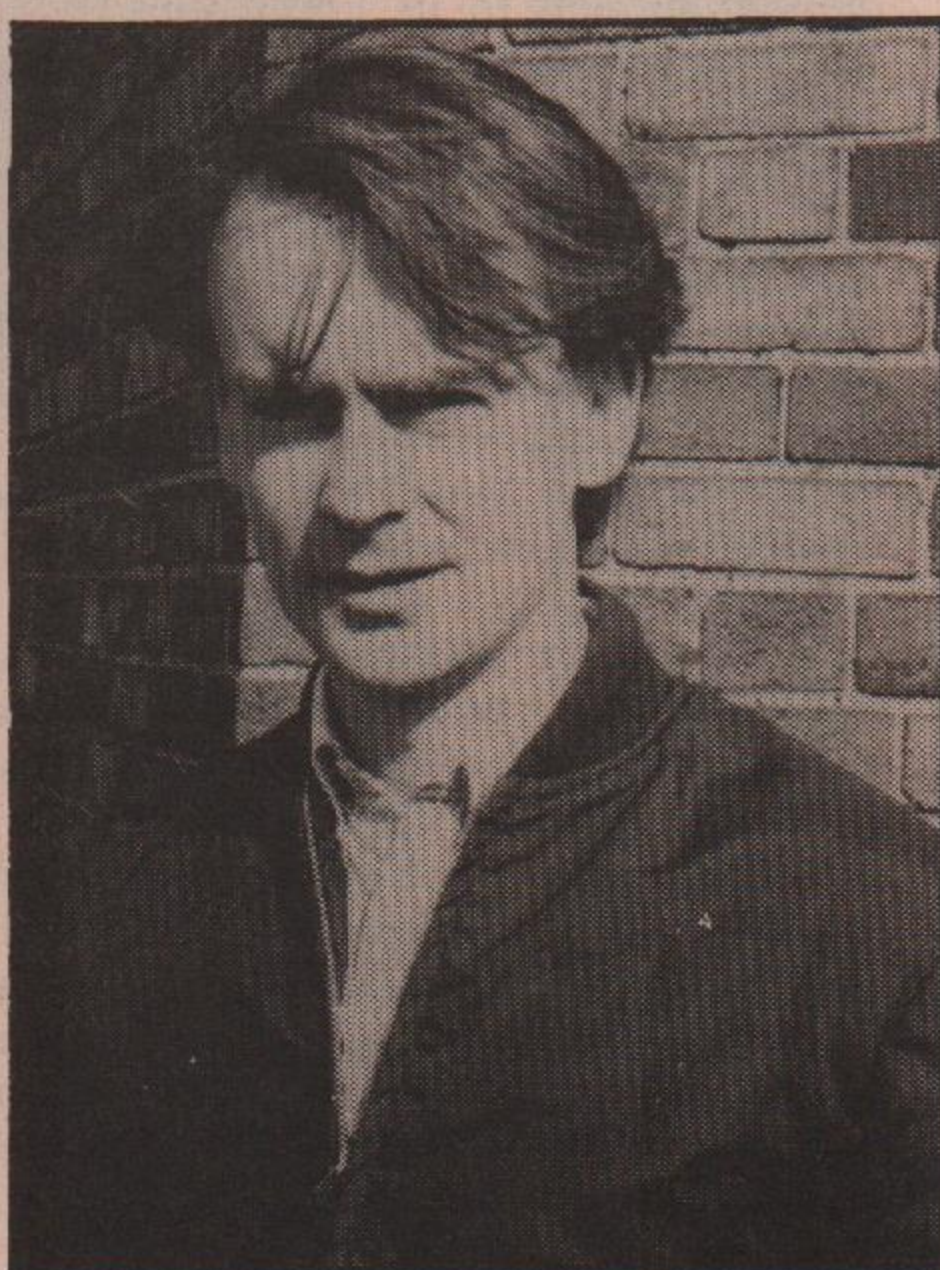
'Railworkers have suffered equally under both Labour and the Tories with cuts in jobs and services. It has been an uninterrupted process since the war. There isn't much confidence in Labour and there is an opening for building a socialist alternative.

'At the moment we're facing more direct attacks. The monopolies and mergers commission will be reporting on the railways soon and we've got hold of the report. They were supposed to report on the reliability of the service, efficiency and cost. What they've come up with is proposals to get rid of the drivers' mileage bonus, to get rid of the local level of trade union organisation closest to the rank and file and they are going to claim that railworkers are over-represented "too dense representation" is their phrase. But at King's Cross there are only four reps for 400 drivers!

'Both Labour and the Tories accept that the railways must run with some sort of profit and not as a public service, so in a recession it costs too much money and, like hospitals and education, we're cut. Labour has always shut unprofitable branch lines that are the only transport link for some communities. This time they might not privatise but they would try and force us to work as if we were privatised.

'In the 1982 drivers' strike we heard nothing from the Labour Party. Except once when we got a call asking us to set up a picket line at King's Cross. We didn't need a picket line at King's Cross, no one was going in, but we were stretched plugging the gaps elsewhere. But the picket was put on because MPs like Dennis Skinner and Tony Benn wanted their photograph taken on an Aslef picket line. That was the last we heard from Labour MPs and the Labour Party.

'It wasn't surprising because this was the time of the Falklands War. The Labour Party was too busy praising the task force and supporting the killing of poor Argentinian farmers in Thatcher's imperialist war. We put Labour in a difficult position. Thatcher called us 'the enemy within' and the gutter press even called Ray Buckton the British General Galtieri. When the *Hermes* came back with the Union Jacks flying the troops had a big banner saying: "Call off the rail strike or we'll call an air-strike". The Labour Party didn't want to know us.'



CPSA ACTIVIST CIARAN CONAGHAN

AH: Ciaran, how do you see the ideas of *The Red Front* working in the civil service?

CC: 'The appalling position that we find ourselves in as civil service workers must be put into context. The government has deliberately set out to attack the living standards of the working class in Britain. They have systematically turned on different groups of workers to weaken resistance. Civil servants, steelworkers, teachers, miners and printers have all been savaged in the Tory offensive. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been cut and wage levels have been

driven down as they have fought to shore up their collapsing system. But everything they have done Labour has done before and is committed to doing again.

'What's even worse, it's got to the point that our department — employment — is now being used alongside the police and the courts as an instrument of coercion and repression. The Tories have introduced Restart to harass the unemployed, the Job Training Scheme to make them work for their benefits, and availability testing in the benefit service to drive them off the register altogether. Our own jobs are now under threat as a network of private Jobclubs opens up for business and as management shapes up to force YTS into our offices.

SHAM CAMPAIGN

'It's not just that Labour has done nothing. It's that following Labour's politics of collaboration opened us up to these attacks in the first place. Years have been wasted in the traditional network of Whitley committees, sipping cups of coffee and munching biscuits with the management, believing they can be outsmarted. The result is our jobs are on the line.

'We now need a leadership that will do what it is told by the members. Every single job must be fought for tooth and nail. We cannot afford to wait for "some form of stability...in terms of work processes and staffing numbers" as the section executive has asked for in their annual report.

'Most of all we can and will build real opposition to ethnic monitoring. The executive's sham campaign on this issue was the most sickening episode of the entire year and sums up their failure to accept the political responsibilities of leadership. Last year the section committee sabotaged the campaign against ethnic monitoring so that management felt strong enough to take out a writ over action taken by members in Leeds and Handsworth.

OUT OF ORDER

'Many activists were angry and many motions have gone forward to annual conference in May challenging the executive, for a real mobilisation for industrial action to wreck the checks; and to fight the courts. Their response is to try and put the lay president Marion Chambers, who is herself a DE section committee member, to rule all of these motions out of order because they are against the law. Ever since the pay campaign two years ago the leadership has gone along with the Tory laws.

'The only way we can fight these squalid manoeuvres is on the basis of *The Red Front*. A fight to repeal all laws that restrict our right to take action to defend ourselves and those under threat from repressive measures such as ethnic monitoring — 100 per cent rejection of restrictions on striking, picketing and solidarity action and no state interference in the way we conduct our affairs.'

If you want to have your say on *The Red Front*, write to *tns*, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.

THE
PROPAGANDA
WAR

JEANETTE

The attempt by Sunderland council to obtain permission to sterilise a 17-year old mentally retarded girl with a mental age of five has provoked widespread controversy. The case of Jeanette, who is in the care of the council, now rests with the house of lords. The consequences of a celebrated American case in the twenties shows that we cannot rely on the state to safeguard the welfare of any individual.

In 1924 a Dr AS Priddy of the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and the Feeble-Minded filed a petition for the sterilisation of Carrie Buck, an 18-year old inmate, said to have a mental age of nine. Carrie was the illegitimate daughter of a prostitute aged 52, with a mental age of eight. Despite Carrie's adoption by a respectable family in Charlottesville, she had proved incorrigible and was committed to the state colony after she produced an illegitimate baby.

The local magistrate gave Priddy permission to proceed with sterilisation, but the girl's guardian appealed, and the case finally went to the Supreme Court. In a widely quoted judgement the distinguished jurist and author Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes approved the request for sterilisation, declaring that 'three generations of imbeciles are enough'.

The outcome of this case gave a boost to the movement for compulsory sterilisation in the USA. Such drastic surgery (including vasectomy) was already approved by statute in 22 states, mainly in the South, for the mentally ill, in 14 for epileptics and in 12 for criminals. In North Carolina, the law allowed 'compulsory sterilisation for the mental, moral and physical improvement of patients and inmates for the public good'.

The demand for sterilisation was promoted by a number of eugenicist organisations. According to the theory of eugenics, by removing the genes of recognised medical and social deviants from the common human stock, the quality of the remainder could be improved. The Human Betterment Foundation, based at Pasadena, for example, enthusiastically promoted sterilisation on eugenic grounds. The result was that in the thirties, more than 25 000 people were sterilised in the USA. In California alone, some 8500 people were compulsorily deprived of the capacity to reproduce.

Fortunately, when the theory of eugenics was popular among Fabians and other radical intellectuals in Britain in the early years of the century, techniques for mass sterilisation were not available. There was some renewed interest in sterilisation in Europe from the late twenties onwards. By the late thirties, the sterilisation vogue became discredited by the supreme vigour with which eugenic theories were pursued in Nazi Germany. However, in the sixties, American welfare administrators were still trying to tie offers of benefits to acceptance of sterilisation.

Despite the outraged pronouncements of the middle class moralists, many parents of mentally handicapped children regard the proposed sterilisation of Jeanette as the only practicable way of avoiding pregnancy. Yet we must take a wider view. Thatcher's Britain is a society which is coming to share more and more of the values and prejudices of the American South. The Tory government and Sunderland council want to sterilise Jeanette to make it easier for them to dump her, and thousands like her, out of children's homes on to the street. We can't trust them with anything, least of all our reproductive organs.

I'm beginning to think I'm a revolutionary and it really frightens me. I'm just a normal guy with three kids, a house and a car, a dog and a cat and tropical fish.' This is how Trevor Sugden from Bradford described his reaction to the experience of unemployment in the *Guardian* last week.

The inability of the capitalist system to provide the basic necessities of life is driving many ordinary people to ask whether there is a better way of running the world and to search out ways of achieving it.

Trevor Sugden has not joined the Revolutionary Communist Party. His determination to do something about unemployment has led him to get involved in the latest campaign to be sponsored by the official labour movement. He has become local coordinator of Hands Across Britain, a project initiated by Jimmy Savile and a host of media celebrities, and supported by all the major parties. Its aim is to form a human chain 375 000-strong from London to Liverpool on 3 May. Several union leaders are backing this campaign in an attempt 'to put unemployment back on the national agenda'.

The contrast between the anger, frustration and determination to fight back expressed by Trevor Sugden, and the futile, fatalistic gesture of thousands of people linking arms along miles of trunk roads on a Sunday could not be more striking. At a time when thousands are beginning to recognise that British capitalism has reached the end of the road and are looking around for an alternative, the leaders of the labour movement can only offer stunts like Hands Across Britain or another of Labour's paper campaigns.

Neil Kinnock launched two campaigns last week — 'New Jobs for Britain' and 'New Skills for Britain'. For the ever media-conscious Labour Party, a campaign begins with a new designer logo and a pack of glossy leaflets, posters and stickers; it is launched at a press conference and promoted in a bland party political broadcast; and that's it — then it's on to the next 'campaign'.

After a series of setbacks at the hands of the Tory government, a loss of confidence has become pervasive in the British labour movement. It is evident at every level, from the executive suites of the TUC and the big unions down to the workplace.

This month's issue of the engineering union journal, for example, features a sober editorial statement on 'the state of our union' by AEU general secretary Gavin Laird. 'We are not on the verge of bankruptcy' is Laird's reassuring message to his members. In a bizarre tribute to the fact that the union has lost a third of its members since the Tories came to power, the front cover of the AEU journal is given over to a full-face, soft focus portrait of Margaret Thatcher. Survival is now a major preoccupation for unions which a decade ago were booming as never before.

Pressures of falling membership have unleashed a spate of inter-union disputes over allegations of poaching members. In some unions squabbling, especially among left-wing officials, has weakened organisation even further. The leadership of the miners' union has split into warring factions over the election of a successor to retiring vice-president Mick McGahey. In the main civil service union, the CPSA, John Macreadie, the Militant supporter who lost out in the red-baiting climate created during the re-run of last year's election for general secretary, is now challenged by two left wingers, as well as the right, in the scramble to become deputy general secretary.

Shaken by past setbacks, left-wing union leaders are afraid of giving a militant lead and confronting the arguments for moderation and compromise.

In the recent dispute in the NUM over the acceptance of a six-day working week at the new Margam pit in South Wales, Arthur Scargill restricted his appeal to the officials on the area executive. Rather than go out to rally rank and file resistance to a management drive to intensify exploitation in the coalfield, Scargill appealed to the area officials to respect the negotiating rights of the national leadership over an ancient agreement on the five-day week. Neil Kinnock wrote to express his delight after the South Wales leaders voted to put the demands of the British coal industry before workers' living standards and working conditions.

Many rank and file union members have watched the defeat of the miners, the Wapping strikers and many more, and have drawn the conclusion that militancy doesn't pay. Lack of trust in the unions has led many workers to

accept that they have no alternative but to collaborate more closely with management and put up with inferior conditions. In depressed regions — Scotland and Wales, the North-east and North-west — and in threatened plants — Ravenscraig steel works, Pilkington glass factory, Leyland trucks — workers have tried to protect jobs and working conditions by working more closely with local management, rather than by organising resistance. Individual survival strategies at the level of the firm or locality have taken the place of collective resistance against the employers.

The defensiveness of the labour movement is not confined to the trade union sphere. It has even worse consequences in the world of politics. The more the Tories and the media step up the pressure on the Labour Party, the more the leadership goes into retreat. The left can be relied upon to follow close behind.

Last week the Liverpool councillors who stuck to the commonly agreed Labour policy of defying Tory cuts in local government for a few weeks after others had capitulated were disqualified from holding public office and heavily surcharged. This measure of savage legal repression was greeted with scarcely concealed pleasure by the Labour leadership. The arbitrary removal from office of democratically elected labour movement representatives and the imposition of heavy fines and costs passed with scarcely a murmur from the left. Only Eric Heffer and a handful of others protested at an outrageous violation of democratic rights by judges following government orders and the shameful complicity of the Labour leadership in this assault. Again, the left has accepted Kinnock's about-turn on Cruise missiles, without any prior discussion or consultation, in humbled silence.

The principle of 'don't rock the boat' in the period leading up to an election has never been applied with greater zeal.

In the panic following the Greenwich by-election defeat, the left is determined to display its commitment to stabilising Kinnock's election machine. The soft-left Labour Coordinating Committee has offered the leader its renunciation of one of the great principles of the heyday of Bennism — the right of the local general committee to select parliamentary candidates. The LCC now upholds the principle of 'one member, one vote' which has long been favoured by the right.

Over the past six months a remarkable transformation has taken place in the outlook of the labour movement. At the end of the 1986 party conference season, Labour was riding high in the opinion polls and Labour supporters were confident of an election victory. After seven years in government, the Tories were languishing in unpopularity as a result of the failure of their economic policies and a series of scandals and resignations. The SDP had fallen out with Liberals over defence and the Liberal assembly had rejected the policy of its leadership on the same issue. Labour appeared confident and united under Kinnock's leadership.

The prevailing attitude was that we should all hold on until Labour got into power, when we could hope that things might begin to improve. There was no great upsurge of enthusiasm for Kinnock, but it was widely accepted that he was the best leader the Labour Party had. Behind all the hopes of a Labour victory lay the solid conviction that there was no other way of defending and advancing the interests of the working class.

The consequences of the 'wait for Kinnock' approach was to foster a mood of passivity in the working class. This sentiment was encouraged by instructions from Walworth Road, the TUC and union headquarters that nothing should be done to compromise Labour's election prospects. The left grudgingly accepted the leadership's view that it was an electoral liability and agreed to keep a low profile.

How things have changed! Today there is a growing realisation that, unless Thatcher hits a catastrophe on the same scale as the Irangate fiasco that has assailed her good friend Ronald Reagan, Labour will not win the election.

Since last October the Alliance has gradually picked up support in the opinion polls, a trend turned to spectacular advantage in the Greenwich by-election. Support for the Tories too has grown, to give them a substantial lead in the opinion polls this week for the first time since the Brighton bombing in 1984.

Labour's support appeared to hover for a time just short of the level required to form a majority government. Then came the party's disastrous performance at Greenwich. The

Why wait



Alliance revival has been encouraged by the increased Liberal majority in the by-election at Truro, Roy Jenkins' success in being elected chancellor of Oxford University and the final collapse of Liverpool council into the hands of the Liberals. The stabilisation of the British economy, as a result of favourable movements in exchange rates, a slight drop in interest rates and the continued expansion of credit, has boosted Tory fortunes. This has allowed chancellor Nigel Lawson to make tax cuts, and Lord Young to massage the unemployed figures downwards. Now Thatcher has the option of going for an early election.

Even before the election campaign begins, Kinnock's strategy is revealed as a loser. His attempts to out-Thatcher Thatcher on issues like national security, over the Peter Wright M15 trial in Australia or Duncan Campbell's revelations about the Zircon project in the *New Statesman*, as well as on defence and law and order, have failed to impress middle class opinion. Instead the Tories have been able to turn the tables on Kinnock and make him look foolish. At the same time, Kinnock's contrived positions have reduced his scope for attacking the Tories.

Meanwhile, despite the fact that Kinnock has reduced the left to its lowest ebb inside the Labour Party in the post-war period, the media can still stir up trouble over the 'loony left'. With a steady stream of revelations about tea room rows and Kinnock's private parliamentary pep talks, the Tories and the media have managed to make the Labour Party itself a central issue of debate. And if the 'loony left' flags, there is always some embittered old right winger, such as James Callaghan or Michael Cocks, ready and willing to stick the knife into Kinnock.

The lacklustre performance of the Kinnock leadership has turned last year's passive anticipation of a Labour victory into this year's fatalistic expectation of defeat.

In Scotland the so-called 'doomsday scenario' — another Tory regime in London after the election governing a region containing scarcely a Tory seat — is now a central focus of debate. In London discussion is well underway of possible realignments between Labour and the Alliance after the election defeat.

Six months ago many labour movement activists were prepared to wait in the belief that their restraint would shortly be rewarded by the return of a Labour government. Now they have nothing but the expectation of an indefinite wait. As waiting for Kinnock is set to become a way of life, more and more people recognise that Labour lacks any strategy at all.

The Greenwich defeat has thrown the official labour movement into a state of barely concealed panic. The response of the leadership is to clamp down on anything that is in the least controversial or likely to cause offence. Even rhetorical commitments to unpopular causes, notably lesbian and gay rights, must be reassessed and the left is obliged to promise that

it will behave. The term 'loony left', coined in the editorial offices of the *Sun* at Wapping, has now become common parlance in the administrative offices of the Labour Party at Walworth Road. The left's main role now is to act as scapegoat for the party's failures.

The retreat of Labour and the left has fostered a mood of confusion and despair in the working class.

It leaves people defenceless and vulnerable to conservative influences and prejudices. In the short term this will not encourage many to look for new solutions. But it will widen the gap between activists and the rest. Some will dig in to reassert old loyalties, or, like Trevor Sugden, they will get drawn into the token initiatives sponsored by the labour bureaucracy to keep its links with workers and the unemployed. A few will be open to bolder political experimentation: these are the target of *The Red Front* initiative launched by the Revolutionary Communist Party.

The Red Front is a way of giving the working class a voice in the political struggle around the general election. It is essential that those who are committed to fighting back against the capitalist system pull together in the coming months to put this point of view across in the clearest terms to the widest possible audience. *The Red Front* aims to unite all anti-capitalist forces, regardless of their differences on secondary matters, around a platform of basic demands. We aim to field candidates who will campaign on this basic platform in the election under the banner of *The Red Front*.

For labour movement activists there are two alternatives to *The Red Front*. It is possible to issue fierce condemnations of Kinnock and other Labour leaders, while continuing to campaign for a Labour vote in the election. This is the strategy favoured by the Socialist Workers' Party among others. But as long as left wingers continue to support Labour at the polls, their criticisms of its leadership and programme have no consequence.

People who vote Labour will be voting for the party that happens to be led by Kinnock, not for the party the left would like Labour to be. Criticisms within the terms of electoral support are like outbursts against restrictive parents from an angry adolescent who can always be relied upon to come home for dinner.

On the other hand, left wingers can choose to suppress their anger and silently accept that there is nothing that can be done in the short term. This appears to be the strategy being pursued by Tony Benn and many other radicals in the Labour Party. This means the left resigning itself to waiting for Kinnock. This is a strategy for those with plenty of time on their hands and infinite patience.

Given the bleakness of these two alternatives, it is evident that *The Red Front* can have a powerful appeal.

One of the arguments often raised against *The Red Front* is that it is focused too much on the electoral sphere. However, it is important to recognise that in today's conditions of mass

It for Labour to lose?



◆ Six months ago many people put their hopes for the future in the return of a Labour government. But, asks **Linda Ryan**, what if Kinnock isn't going to win?

unemployment and weakened union organisation, workers are looking to the political sphere, not the unions, for solutions. The only way to connect with the aspirations of the working class is by making a clear political and organisational challenge in the political arena. If we ignore this sphere we allow Kinnock unchallenged sway in the area which is of most immediate importance to the working class. Those who turn their backs on the general election in Britain in 1987 are abandoning the working class to Labour.

The aspirations expressed by Trevor Sugden confirm that the tactic of *The Red Front* does not merely correspond to the broad conditions created by the capitalist crisis. *The Red Front* also relates to the existing consciousness of important sections of the working class. The more that Labour backtracks, the more we can connect with the outlook of those activists who are now seriously looking for revolutionary political solutions.

The Red Front is a way of making sure that the working class has a voice in future struggles. If you want to change the world, why make do with a party that is content with a feeble attempt to make the best of a decaying system? Why link arms across the country with trade union officials and dignitaries whose arms are locked in a fatal embrace with the employers and the forces of the establishment? Why not link up with the most militant sections of the working class in a movement that aims to push Labour out of the way and really take on the Tories?

A PLATFORM FOR WORKING CLASS UNITY

◆ WORK OR FULL PAY

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

◆ DEFEND UNION RIGHTS

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

◆ EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

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

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

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

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

◆ STOP THE WAR DRIVE

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



out now

◆ Read the RCP programme, which puts the case for *The Red Front*. £1 (plus 40p p&p) from BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX

THE RISE OF WORKING CLASS RESISTANCE

MASS STRIKES IN MEXICO AND BRAZIL

Over the past month workers in Brazil and Mexico have launched major strikes to defend living standards against cuts and hyper-inflation. Last week the Brazilian authorities sent troops and tanks to put down strike action in the oil refineries and the docks. Meanwhile Mexico's state-run union hierarchy is working overtime to pre-empt a similar escalation in the conflict between militant electricity workers and the government.

The outbreak of class conflict in two of Latin America's most stable countries underlines the fragility of the continent's debt-ridden economies — and the growing potential for its dormant workers' movement to awake. But it also shows the need to challenge a left-wing tradition which is long on anti-Western rhetoric, but short on action to defend workers' rights against wage cuts and repression sponsored by Western financiers. **Stefanie Boston** reports from Mexico City and **Ian Haden** examines the crisis in Brazil.

MEXICO: WORKERS AGAINST 'INSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION'

On 3 March 500 000 people crammed into Zocolo Square in Mexico City for the biggest anti-government protest in living memory. They came to support the 36 000 electricity workers on strike for a pay rise to compensate for rampant inflation. The electricians' strike is the first sign of organised resistance to the austerity imposed on Mexico by the International Monetary Fund.

Since 1982, when the government and Western bankers agreed a drastic economic 'readjustment' to prevent the country defaulting on its \$98 billion debt, the real wages of many Mexican workers have been halved. Big cuts in public spending, 100 per cent inflation and rigid pay controls ensure that the masses foot the bill, while 56 per cent of Mexico's export earnings go straight into Western coffers.

Almost half of Mexico's working class is unemployed or ekes out a living doing odd jobs, selling shoelaces or scavenging rubbish dumps. The angry poor and homeless in Mexico City, swelled by a daily influx of 2000 job-seekers from the countryside, have rioted and staged street protests. But employed workers have been kept on a tight leash by the official trade union leaders in the Confederation of Mexican Unions (CTM), which has backed government wage controls and promoted a sectional outlook among workers who have managed to hang on to their jobs.

Since the thirties the CTM has formed the linchpin in the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party apparatus, which has managed Mexican society through a mixture of populist anti-Americanism, patronage and corruption. But rising poverty and economic chaos have undermined the system of union-government collaboration which has guaranteed stability in Mexico for 50 years.

The electricians' strike shows how the government under Miguel de la Madrid is preparing for confrontation with organised workers.

NO-STRIKE LAW

In January Mexican workers were due to get a 23 per cent emergency pay rise to tide them over until the annual wage negotiations. But the government refused to pay up and staged a well-prepared showdown with the electricians who, with the teachers, are the best organised public sector workers.

Two hours before the Sindicato Mexicano

de Electricistas called its members out on strike, an army of scabs and police was already waiting outside the power stations and offices of the company which runs gas and electricity supplies for Mexico City. Invoking an obscure law, unused for 50 years, the government declared the strike illegal. This is a major departure in a country where the right to strike is enshrined in the constitution, and whose rulers have claimed a democratic pedigree other Latin American regimes lack. Meanwhile the state-controlled media blamed the relatively privileged electricians for the economic crisis and for recklessly pushing up prices.

CLIMB-DOWN

For the first time in decades the scene was set for open confrontation between government and unions. But Mexico's house-trained union bosses backed off. Three days after the mass solidarity rally in Zocolo Square electricians' leader Cesar Quezada called on his members to return to work and wait for the outcome of negotiations with the president.

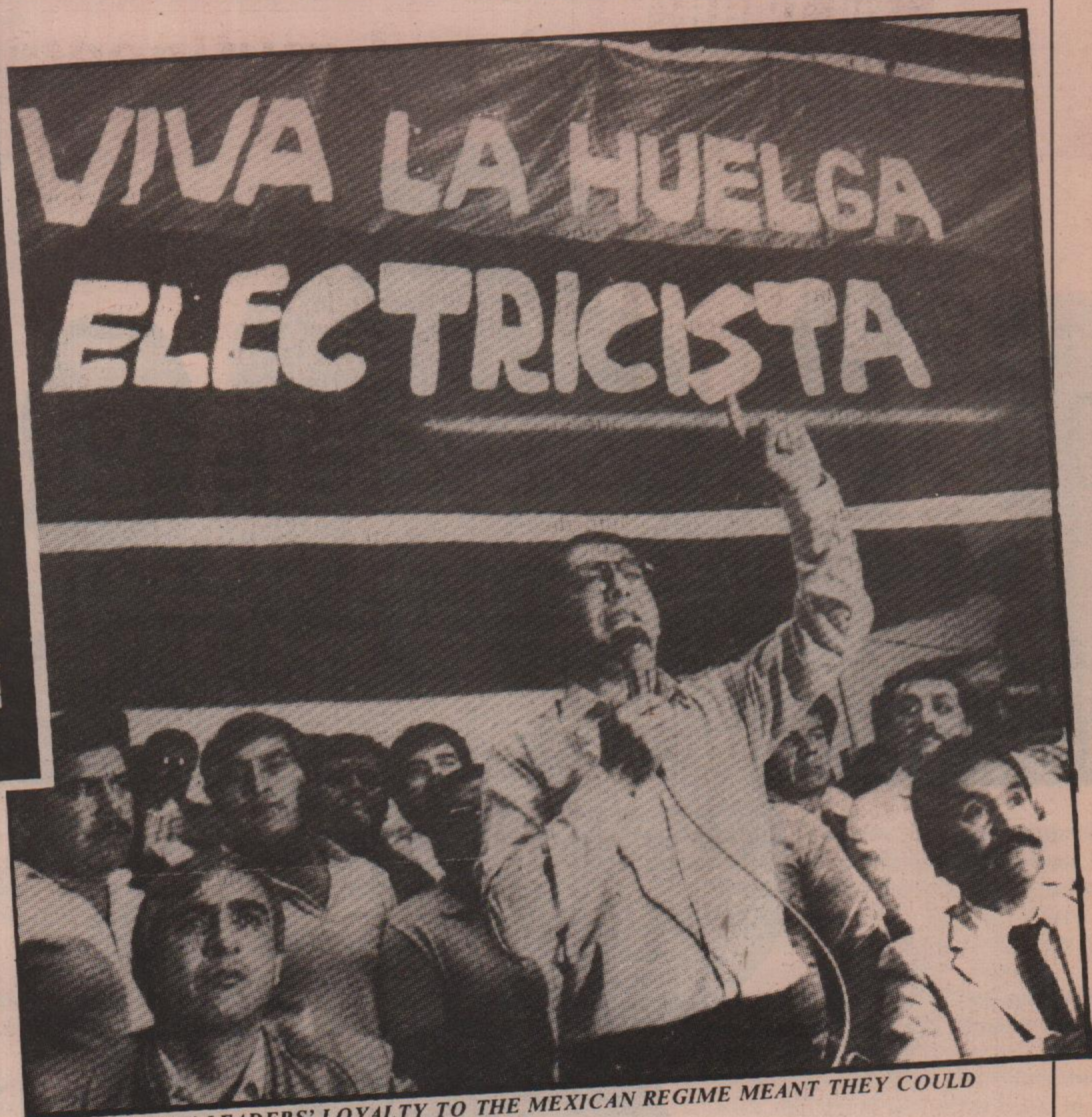
The union is trying to challenge the government's handling of the dispute in the courts. The solidarity banners proclaiming 'Long live the electricians' strike!' still hang from public buildings across the capital. But union leaders have beaten a hasty retreat from the streets to the more familiar environment of the negotiating chamber and the courtroom.

NEW TURN

While this shadow-boxing drags on, the conflict between workers and government is in suspension. But the electricians' strike indicates a new turn in the class struggle. Under the whip hand of the IMF, de la Madrid is adopting the ruthless methods which capitalism needs to control crisis-ridden Mexico.

Mexican union leaders have used anti-Western rhetoric to sustain workers' support, while keeping Mexico 'strike-free' under the IMF dictatorship.

Electricians' leaders have acquired a radical reputation for their role in the campaign for a complete moratorium on Mexico's debt. The strike underlines the need to challenge the posturing of union leaders who sacrifice workers' needs to their own loyalty to the Mexican establishment.



ELECTRICIANS' LEADERS' LOYALTY TO THE MEXICAN REGIME MEANT THEY COULD NOT MATCH THEIR MEMBERS' MILITANCY

BRAZIL: THE TANKS ARE BACK

Twenty-three years after the Brazilian military took power in a bloody coup, and two years after it handed power over to a civilian government, troops and tanks are once again on the offensive against Brazilian workers. The scenes in the state-owned ports and oil refineries taken over by the military last week showed that, when the squeeze is on, the differences between civilian and military rule become hard to spot.

Faced with 400 per cent inflation, Brazil's 40 000 merchant seamen and 51 000 oil refinery workers came out on strike two weeks ago for a wage rise to catch up with the soaring cost of living. After rejecting a meagre government offer of 38 per cent, the oil workers prepared to occupy the refineries, while seamen set about closing the hatches on the merchant fleet. President Jose Sarney responded swiftly, ordering marines in to unload ships and sending troops to seize control of the refineries.

The strike is the first response by the organised labour movement to the economic chaos unleashed by hyper-inflation and the collapse of Brazilian exports. Last month Sarney declared an indefinite halt on payments to service Brazil's \$68 billion long- and medium-term debt to the Western banks. It was a gesture of defiance, designed to contain unrest at home. Western leaders and money-men, who appreciate the difficulties facing the Brazilian regime, responded tactfully.

RIDING HIGH

What worries them far more than the short-term disruption to their bank balances is the long-term future of their multi-billion investment in the continent's wealthiest and most stable economy.

Six months ago Sarney was riding high in the opinion polls and was just as popular in the world's financial and business centres. The Brazilian economy was growing fast and a

record \$13 billion trade surplus meant that debt repayments were no big problem. Sarney's 'Cruzado Plan', to freeze prices and wages, accompanied by a one-off blanket wage rise of eight per cent, seemed to be working. The increased purchasing power was enough to give the ruling Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) more than two thirds of the vote in November's elections.

REPRESSION RULES

For wage-earners the Cruzado Plan offered a short-lived reprieve from grinding poverty — but for the capitalist economy it was a disaster. The vital \$1 billion a month trade surplus was eaten away as imports were sucked in to satisfy growing demand, while industrial profits were squeezed between growing costs and frozen prices. Investment dried up, capital left the country in search of more profitable sites for investment and panic-stricken Western bankers demanded a shift in policy. Five days after the November elections the government introduced 'Cruzado II', a package of swingeing austerity measures, including a 100 per cent rise in prices, the abolition of cost-of-living indexed pay rises and cuts in public spending.

Cruzado II marked the end of Sarney's attempt to use economic policy to win popular support for the new civilian order. Reform has given way to a far-reaching attack on living standards to recharge the batteries of Brazil's profit-making system.

The conflict between workers and troops in the docks and oil industry shows that Brazil's rulers are prepared to go to any lengths to impose their will on the working class.

Seamen who have occupied their ships in Brazilian ports are being starved out by the military. The return of the tanks shows that repression and starvation remain all capitalism can offer the Brazilian masses — whether its rulers wear uniforms or civvies.

READ THIS!

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE AIDS PANIC

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick
Don Milligan

The Truth about the Aids Panic
Dr Michael Fitzpatrick, Don Milligan

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Cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd

Aids victims should be forcibly isolated and left to die to stop the spread of the disease said the right-wing Tory Family Campaign last week. The group also called for tougher laws to punish homosexual offences. Meanwhile Labour MP Michael Meacher claimed that children carrying the Aids virus are being locked away in secure units. And a speaker at the Conservative Medical Society demanded compulsory screening for suspected Aids carriers, legislation to outlaw anal sex and a law to make it a criminal offence to have sex with an Aids carrier.

In the face of mounting hysteria and reaction, Tory Aids chief Norman Fowler appealed for calm and compassion. But his government has done more than any other agency to spread paranoia about the disease, and to ensure that its victims are treated with anything but compassion.

A new pamphlet by East London GP Dr Michael Fitzpatrick and gay rights activist Don Milligan — *The Truth about the Aids Panic* — argues that the British government has launched the biggest public health campaign in history in response to a very rare disease because it wants to use the fear of Aids to promote family values and sexual restraint.

The Tories have taken advantage of a fatal disease to preach the virtues of chastity and fidelity to the British people, the vast majority of whom, contend Fitzpatrick and Milligan, are not at risk from Aids at all. *The Truth about the Aids Panic* takes issue with the widespread prejudice that we are all potential victims of the Aids virus. Using a wealth of medical and statistical material, the authors show conclusively that the risk of Aids spreading outside the recognised high-risk categories among heterosexuals remains minimal.

Now that the Tories have created a state of panic about Aids among heterosexuals, they are shifting their sights to target homosexuals, as Fowler made clear last week. He reassured those calling for more repression against homosexuals that the next stage of his campaign was to target 'those most at risk' and to 'discourage homosexuals from dangerous practices'.

Fitzpatrick and Milligan reject the safe sex propaganda that has received sanction from the government, the gay community and the left. They argue that the problem is not a lack of information or a reluctance to use condoms: the problem is that homosexuals are oppressed. For Fitzpatrick and Milligan, the fact that gay men are the main victims of both the virus and the Aids panic points to the urgency of a campaign in defence of homosexual rights.

REVIEWS

● STRIKES IN THE BRITISH ARMY

Loyal mutineers

Gloden Dallas and Douglas Gill, *The Unknown Army: Mutinies in the British Army in World War I*, Verso, £5.95
Andrew Rothstein, *The Soldiers' Strikes of 1919*, Journeyman Press, £3.95
Richard Kisch, *The Days of the Good Soldiers: Communists in the Armed Forces in World War II*, Journeyman Press, £6.95

The row last autumn over Alan Bleasdale's *Monocled Mutineer* showed that the strikes and

mutinies during and after the First World War had a lasting effect on the confidence of the British establishment. Yet the recent glut of books, plays and films on the period reveals a left-wing nostalgia for this high point of militancy rather than a determination to press the point home in the face of present-day repression.

The Unknown Army is the best of this bunch. Well-researched and properly indexed, it shows how the conscription of hundreds of thousands of industrial workers, many of them trade unionists, laid the basis for the unrest first in Etaples, and again in 1919, when peace

brought broken promises. It was to be a short-lived awakening. The conscripts' trade union tradition was not only the launch pad of their militancy, but also its biggest limitation. Instead of showing mutineers how to make war on their officers, their political leaders lectured them on the 'Labour Party and the church'. Dallas and Gill blame the pro-imperialist official labour movement for blocking the conscripts' militancy.

But there was one significant victory. Inspired by the Russian Revolution, the unrest in the British army forced the war-mongers to drop their plans for a major offensive against the Bolsheviks, or risk real revolt in the ranks. This victory is the centrepiece of Rothstein's book. His brief but informative treatise glosses over the disastrous shortcomings of British Labourism, which ensured that the twenties and the thirties

were just an intermission between two rounds of epic slaughter.

During the intermission, Communist Party members like Rothstein transformed their opposition to the British establishment into concern for its safety. The result was *The Good Soldiers*, communists who fought for Britain in the Second World War and who are the heroes of Kisch's book. They tried to be 'warriors first' and to 'put politics into the background'. Their aim was to increase the number of communists in a people's (pro-British) army built on mock parliaments — debates held in the presence of commanding officers. But the true-blue officers had other ideas. Kisch explains how they dumped the good soldiers as soon as the Cold War became more useful than the alliance with Moscow.

Andrew Calcutt

● ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN DIALOGUE

Don't talk to strangers

Uri Avnery, *My Friend, the Enemy*, Zed, £7.95

'We looked at each other, two people in a London hotel room. I think we liked each other. We were enemies.' Maverick Israeli peace campaigner Uri Avnery was describing his first meeting with senior Palestine Liberation Organisation official, Said Hammami, in 1975. Avnery charts many such attempts to develop a dialogue between the Palestinian resistance and radical Israelis.

Avnery got close to several senior PLO men. Palestinian Issam Sartawi once went to the bathroom while they were sharing a meal. On returning Sartawi laughed, 'If I told any one of my friends that I left a briefcase full of PLO secrets in the care of a Zionist they wouldn't believe me.' Avnery countered 'If I tell any one of my

friends that a PLO terrorist put an attache case under my table and went away, and I remained there, they'd think I was crazy.' They ordered dessert.

Avnery's work paid dividends. In 1977 the Palestinian National Council decided to initiate a dialogue with 'democratic and progressive forces in Israel'. By July 1982, with Zionist troops encircling the Lebanese capital, Avnery crossed into Beirut and became the first Israeli politician to meet PLO leader Yassir Arafat. Since 1985 there has been much contact between radical Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Faced with the massive military power of Israel, bankrolled and backed by the USA, Palestinian freedom can seem a distant dream. And the recent Syrian-backed attack on the camps in Lebanon were a bloody reminder that the Arab

regimes will not help. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Palestinians should explore every avenue to freedom. But Avnery has little to offer them. He emphasises that he represents 'Israeli patriots', and he castigates the PLO for meeting anti-Zionist Israelis.

The effect of talking to people like Avnery has been to point the Palestinian struggle in the wrong direction. Rather than developing their own strength and the support of ordinary Arabs, the Palestinians are encouraged to look to concessions from endless rounds of hopeless talks. The Israeli state that has forced the Palestinians off their land and murdered thousands is looked to as a potentially positive force. The 'dialogue movement' in fact took off at the same time as Israel launched its self-styled 'Iron Fist' policy in the occupied territories in the spring

of 1985. Israel was still smarting from being forced out of most of Lebanon and the PLO infrastructure was scattered across the Arab world. The Israeli authorities encouraged the dialogue to divert the Palestinians from resisting repression.

Now Israel has recovered from its post-Lebanon trauma and has cracked down on radical points of contact between Israelis and Palestinians. Several Israelis who attended a meeting with the PLO in Rumania have been locked up, the editor of the Palestinian daily *Al Shaab* has been deported and the anti-Zionist Alternative Information Centre has been closed down. Palestinians who are tempted by Avnery's dream of a peaceful Israel should note the words of former Israeli war hero Moshe Diane: 'We are a generation of settlers, and without the steel helmet and the cannon we cannot plant a tree and build a house.' Israel's existence depends on denying the Palestinians their right to self-determination — with the silk tongue as well as the Iron Fist.

Daniel Nassim

● THE HUSTLER OLD AND NEW

How can I lose?

***The Colour of Money*, Martin Scorsese (Director)**
***The Hustler*, Robert Rossen (Director)**

Only a director as good as Martin Scorsese could have got away with returning Paul Newman to the pool halls: 25 years after Fast Eddie Felson was banned from the big time we catch up with him, as a hustling whisky salesman. He has made his pile, but it takes only a whiff of the youthful talent of Vince (Tom Cruise) to remind him that 'Money won is twice as sweet as money earned.'

This time it is Newman who is the stakeholder, manager and mentor of an aspiring hustler. This time Cruise plays the recalcitrant, mercurial youth. He is a worthy eighties' successor to the role, strutting and preening round the table to the 'Werewolf of London' on the jukebox, twirling his cue and only pausing to pot the next ball. It is Newman, however, who still commands the screen. By the time the young man has learnt how to hustle, Fast Eddie has been forced to reappraise the whole squalid scene. Newman gives Eddie's transformation considerable depth and conviction, as the old timer returns to the table, and to the inevitable championship match with his pupil.



STILL ON TOP FORM: FAST EDDIE FELSON (PAUL NEWMAN)

Scorsese rattles through the story like Vince through a game of 9-ball, his camera and cutting displaying the same sort of verve as the newcomer himself. It is thoroughly entertaining, but it is not *The Hustler*. The 1961 original is on release again (in wide screen cinemascope at the ICA), and it is a masterpiece. When the older Eddie tells Vince, 'It's not about pool or sex or booze. It's about money. The best is the guy with the most,' he is echoing his own mentor Bert Gordon (George C Scott) in *The Hustler*: 'At the end of the game you count up the money. That's the way you find out who's best. The only way.' No doubt Scorsese understands that the

power of money is central, but Robert Rossen showed best how ugly and degrading that power can be.

The Hustler contains the most convincingly brutal dialogue I've ever heard in a film, as when Eddie tells Charlie, his old partner and would-be father figure, 'Lie down and die by yourself, don't take me with you.' The ethic of competition, of winners and of losers, is so deeply ingrained in the film that it aches from every encounter and rots every human relationship. 'You're a born loser, Eddie,' says Bert at the beginning. 'How can I lose?' retorts Eddie at the end, taking up his cue triumphantly but

bitterly for the final encounter with Minnesota Fats (Jackie Gleason), 'How can I lose!' He knows he has the character to match his talent at last: 'I got it in a hotel room at Louisville' — where his rejected girlfriend, Sarah (Piper Laurie), killed herself.

The black and white world of the *The Hustler* is a deathly place of seedy pool halls, bus station cafes and sordid rented rooms. Eddie sums up his relationships with Charlie, Bert and Sarah in the complaint, 'Everybody wants a piece of me.' That so bleak a landscape should have been created in America at the height of the boom is a tribute to Rossen's grasp of the values which underlay it. Unlike Scorsese, Rossen keeps the plot simple, and follows through on Eddie's education. He begins to win, but only after he has turned Sarah away. He realises too late that he 'traded her in for a pool game', but he rejects Bert's final offer in language the manager will understand: 'The price is too high. If I take it, it will be like she never lived. You're the loser Bert, you're dead inside.'

There's pool too of course. Both films capture superbly the sheer exhilaration of natural players performing impossible feats of skill and flair. This is something even Bert cannot control. Right at the end of *The Hustler*, as Eddie leaves the hall for the last time, he turns back to his arch rival Minnesota Fats: 'Fat man, you shoot a great game of pool,' and gets the only possible reply, 'So do you, Fast Eddie, so do you.'

Pat Ford

Scotland and Ireland

MIKE FREEMAN'S article on Scottish nationalism (6 March) fails to answer a question frequently raised with us by Scottish workers. They argue that, 'Ireland can be described in the same way as you describe Scotland. Neither has been a modern nation, yet the RCP backs self-determination only for the Irish.' But Ireland is quite different from Scotland.

In Ireland nationalists are singled out for special repression because the British capitalist class sees them as a mortal threat to the internal stability of the British nation state. In Ireland people's access to democratic rights depends on their allegiance to the Crown. The struggle for self-determination is the only path open to Irish workers to gain the basic civil rights formally granted long ago to British workers.

To compare the cruel oppression of Ireland with the minor regional discrimination experienced by Scotland is almost an insult to the suffering of the Irish. Workers in Scotland have basically the same relation to the British state as their counterparts south of the border. They are not singled out for discrimination and oppression in the same way as the Irish.

Scottish nationalists harp on about their loss of jobs and the uncaring attitude of London governments. But British governments do not give a toss about the jobs of workers anywhere; all they care about is their profits. A



Scottish parliament is no answer to our problems. In fact it would only serve to bring us more firmly under the control of the local wing of the capitalist class. It would not mean more freedom for Scottish workers, for we've already got all the rights they can afford to give us.

A Scottish parliament might help to unite Scottish people of all classes, which is not what we need. To get the democratic rights the bosses cannot afford to give us, we need to get ourselves as united as they are. We must fight to end the North-South divide in the working class movement.

Faith Walker
Glasgow

A ROGAN (letters, 20 March) supports the Scottish National Party because Scottish independence 'would be a blow to British

imperialism' and would help the fight for Irish freedom. I disagree, after having listened to Bill Morrison, a left-wing SNP leader.

He argued at a public meeting a few weeks ago that 'It would take a braver man than me to take up the question of Scottish Loyalism.' Now it could be that Bill Morrison is just a bit of a coward, but I don't think so. There is no party in Scotland that on the basis of Scottish nationalist politics takes a public stand for Irish freedom and against Scottish Loyalism.

Rogan's letter leads Scottish workers up the wrong road. If he wants to fight for Irish freedom he should join the Irish Freedom Movement instead of supporting a party which simply puts a Scottish kilt on British chauvinism.

Alison Hill
Glasgow

Dole office debates

AVAILABILITY tests are another device used to drive people off the unemployment register, along with the recent ruling that those claimants on part-time community programmes cannot claim unemployment benefit anymore.

The availability test was implemented at my office as a pilot scheme, and the office downstairs was left without the test as a direct control experiment. The results would give the government statistics on exactly how successful this would be in getting people off the register.

At the CPSA union meeting a motion was put forward challenging the availability tests. This motion made three points. The tests are an attack on the working class; the local union leadership undermined and

ignored opposition to the test; and the union was eager to recruit new members to its subs-paying ranks and did not oppose the new staff, 'the claimant advisers', recruited for the specific purpose of availability testing.

I told my rep that I supported the motion because it starts from the defence of the unemployed and it challenges the union's opportunism. But we ended up disagreeing on the way forward. He believes the availability test must be opposed on legal grounds because the sweeping and vague terms on its cover contradict what is inside leaflet NI 12. I argued that this narrow opposition would result in a more specific 'legal' availability form. The only way to defend the unemployed, and those in work who have to implement these rules, is to fight the union's complicity.

Mary
South London

Religion: 'sweet relief'?

I ENJOY reading *tns* and I think you do a good job on limited resources. But I am at a loss to understand how a party which claims to support national liberation in Ireland can take such an offensive attitude to the Catholic Church (see 'Kinnock tails Catholic Church', 13 March).

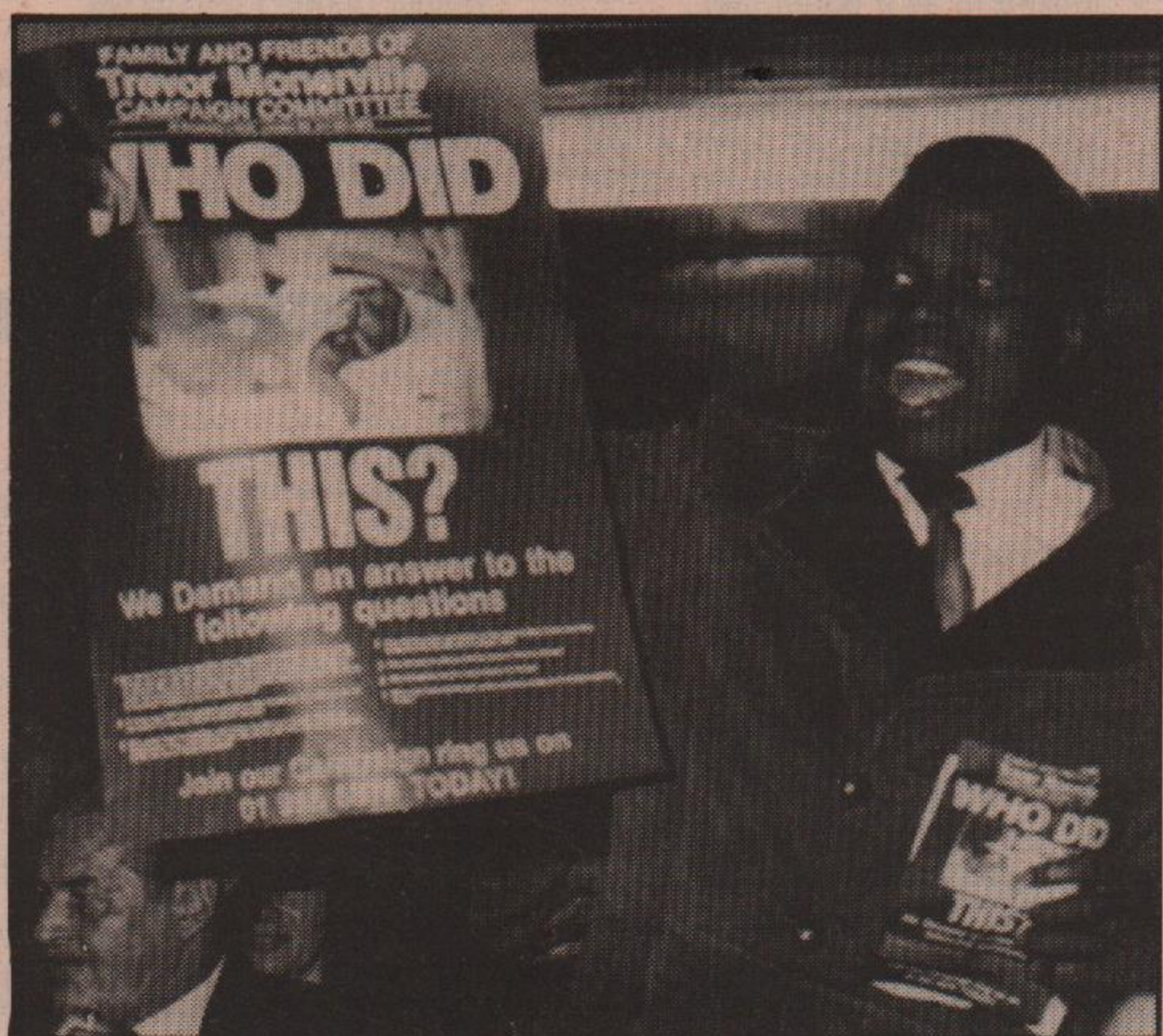
Marxists may well take an attitude of disbelief towards religion. Indeed Marx described it as the 'opium of the people', but what remains unquoted is 'it is sweet relief in a wicked world.' Marxists can ill afford to misunderstand the role of theology, not only as a means of social control but also as a means of liberation, dealing with the utmost needs of the human psyche.

The leadership of the Catholic Church is more concerned with dominating its followers than with making moral statements. But with scientists working on the frontiers of knowledge it is not impossible for cloning, animal surrogates or some other form of degradation to be thought up and inflicted on the population. Consequently the politics of sex, fertility and reproduction are extremely important today.

As practical leaders the Catholic Church has more soldiers in its army than the RCP. I am not suggesting that crash courses in the priesthood are run by your party, merely that some sensitivity is used with anti-religious banner headlines.

Thank you for your support in covering my victimisation at work. I lost my case at an industrial tribunal. Some features on surviving in the workplace would be useful!

Pat Duffy
Vice-chair, Cohse 643
Oxford



Police accountability?

THE RCP says 'Don't talk to the police' (*tns*, 20 March). This is an ultimatic demand. I do not see what harm it does, and it could

even do some good, for left wingers to attend police consultative committees. If Labour councillor Tommy Shepherd had 'mentioned Trevor Monerville's name' at the public meeting with the police, and if Annette Monerville had been invited to speak rather than having to force her way in, then I do believe your objections to such committees would have to be retracted. Any exposure of police racism in whatever forum should be supported. The leaflet Workers Against Racism supporters handed out asked the police 'Who did this to Trevor Monerville?' It seems to me that this is just another way of trying to make the police accountable.

Brenda Hall
Hackney

In defence of education

ON Friday 20 March, delegates representing college staff, school teachers, office and catering staff, youth workers, schoolkeepers and other grades agreed to form the London Education Defence Committee.

All delegates recognised the dangers in Baker's diktat on trade union rights for teachers, and the Tory threat to outlaw strikes in essential services. Discussion centred on a charter of demands for education, including: no redeployment of teaching staff; the Inner London Education Authority Labour group to stop doing the Tories' dirty work (the Labour group intends to set a legal budget which includes £51.2m 'paper' cuts); support for strikes and occupations by Ilea workers and students; and no to privatisation and asset-stripping.

The meeting agreed to give full support to any Ilea Labour group members who wish to fight the cuts, and would take strike action to defend them if charged under Tory law. But should Labour group members attempt to impose Tory attacks, the same strike action will be used to smash them.

All delegates agreed that future defence committee meetings should be open to parents, students and the community, and members of

ilea Working in Education

governing bodies who wish to fight the cuts. The next meeting will take place at 10am sharp on Friday 27 March in the Nupe offices at Pear Place, 150 Waterloo Road, near Waterloo station (Tel: 708 0756). Delegates and supporters are asked to attend with proposals for the charter, and nominations for officers to coordinate the activities of the committee. A proposal to form divisional support groups will also be discussed.

Doug McEwan and Tony Godfrey
Nupe schoolkeepers' shop stewards

Anti-gay plague

I WAS outside a kebab shop with my brother near Brixton police station last Friday when we were verbally abused by two gay-bashers. They smashed my brother over the face and arm with a bottle and I was also attacked. A police car drove past, stopped, had a chat with our attackers, waved goodbye and drove off.

The Aids panic has made gay-bashing acceptable, the message of the gay plague being reinforced on every corner. Even *Capital Gay* has become totally hysterical and defensive. It's only got stuff on condoms and safe sex in it, and homosexuality is never put in a positive light anymore.

It was a breath of fresh air to read *The Truth about the Aids Panic*. It is about time people realised that the Aids scare is a moral, anti-gay panic and has nothing to do with public health or welfare.

Justin
Islington



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.

ARGUMENTS ON AIDS

Our latest publication, *The Truth about the Aids Panic*, has excited a great deal of interest. Even before our distribution network got into gear we received nearly 500 advance orders from bookshops around the country. We've hardly been able to supply our branches fast enough to meet demand. Work in our national office has been severely disrupted by frequent trips to Red Star offices to replenish stocks. (For details of the book, turn to page 9.)

Even the press picked up on the launch of the book. A press conference held by Dr Michael Fitzpatrick and Don Milligan was well-attended and resulted in an appearance on breakfast TV and coverage in a number of national newspapers and medical journals.

Rather than picking up on the political issues raised by the book, the press have concentrated predictably on sensationalising the medical evidence it

uncovers. The pamphlet indicates that Aids is largely a specific threat to homosexual men and intravenous drug users, rather than a danger to every sexually active individual.

There is a danger that these medical statistics, which have already featured in the leading medical journals, will be used to fuel a backlash against homosexuals. But we can only avoid this by directly confronting anti-gay prejudice, not by avoiding the facts.

Until now most groups on the left and in the gay movement have avoided tackling the anti-homosexual thrust of the Aids panic by emphasising that everyone is at risk from the virus. The popular argument has been 'Don't pick on gays, anybody can get it.' This argument has effectively turned a 'moral panic', the purpose of which is to stress the need for traditional family values and to discourage sexual

experimentation, into a purely medical problem. By stressing that *anyone* could die of Aids, the left has tried to promote the idea that *everyone* should be equally concerned to find a cure. In fact the conclusion that many people have drawn is that

the way to avoid Aids is to lock up the people whose lifestyle means they are most at risk and most likely to spread the infection. The left's approach is doomed to failure. Even when the establishment was emphasising that Aids was a problem for

heterosexuals as well as homosexuals, lesbians and gay men still faced the brunt of the attacks. The Aids scare gave fuel and a focus to an anti-homosexual prejudice that already existed.

In Edinburgh, named last year as 'the Aids capital of Europe', the spread of the virus was exclusively linked to the widespread abuse of intravenous drugs, but it was still homosexuals rather than drug abusers who lost their teeth as a result of being physically attacked by bigots.

The way the left has tried to play down the issue of homosexual rights in favour of playing up the medical facts is similar to the way that it side-stepped the issue of racism in the immigration debates of the late seventies.

When the right blamed blacks for flooding into the country, the left retorted that 'in fact' there were more people leaving the country than coming in. What would the left have said if the facts did not fit their argument? In any case the left soon discovered that the racists were not interested in swapping statistics, only in fuelling an anti-black backlash. The only effective way to take them up was to declare support for all black people under attack, whether immigration was rising or falling, and whether the immigrants were 'legal' or 'illegal'. The

left's evasive approach was incapable of defending the rights of the oppressed.

Today the left's arguments are just as useless when it comes to defending lesbian and gay rights in the face of a sustained propaganda offensive. In the current anti-homosexual climate, we cannot afford to adapt to the prevailing preoccupation with Aids by pleading that there is no such thing as a 'gay plague'. Our job is to expose the way press, politicians and priests are taking advantage of a fatal disease to launch an attack on lesbian and gay rights, and to enforce a strict moral code of sexual behaviour on society. For us, the message of the moral panic is to take a stand for the rights of homosexuals.

The Truth about the Aids Panic serves a twofold political aim. First, it presents the facts to demystify the Aids panic and show how the virus is being used by the establishment for political ends. Second, it emphasises the need to fight for equal rights for homosexuals. These are the political arguments that we need to win to challenge popular anti-gay prejudice. Our job must be to confront the prejudices head on, not to seek out ways of side-stepping the issues at stake.

Anne Burton

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE AIDS PANIC

BIRMINGHAM: Wednesday 8 April, 7.30pm, Carrs Lane Church Centre, Carrs Lane
BRADFORD: Saturday 4 April, 2pm, Central Library
BRIGHTON: Tuesday 24 March, 7.30pm, Unemployed Centre, Tibury Place
BRISTOL: Thursday 9 April, 7.30pm, Shepherds Hall, Old Market

COVENTRY: Thursday 9 April, 7.30pm, Biggin Hall, Binley Road, Stoke
EDINBURGH: Thursday 23 April, 7.30pm, Pleasance Theatre, The Pleasance
GLASGOW: Thursday 30 April, 7.30pm, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street
LEEDS: Wednesday 1 April, 7.30pm, Trades Club, Savile Mount
LIVERPOOL: Wednesday 1 April, 7.30pm, Trade Union Centre, Hardman Street
LONDON: Thursday 26 March, 7.30pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, NW1
MANCHESTER: Tuesday 7 April, 7.30pm, Black Lion, Blackfriars Street
NOTTINGHAM: Thursday 26 March, 7.30pm, The Yorker, Mansfield Road
OXFORD: Wednesday 8 April, 8pm, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street
SHEFFIELD: Thursday 2 April, 7.30pm, SCAU, West Street
WAKEFIELD: Thursday 2 April, 4.30pm, Bretton Hall College

DEBATE

THE LEFT AFTER GREENWICH

SPEAKERS

JOHN McDONNELL (LABOUR PARTY)

MARK PERRYMAN (COMMUNIST PARTY)

ANNE BURTON (RCP)

THURSDAY 2 APRIL 7.30PM
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they claim Silcott made when first accused of murder: 'You ain't got enough evidence. Those kids won't give evidence in court. No one else will talk to you. You can't keep me away from them.' Silcott never signed the police notes of his supposed remarks. On the strength of these 26 uncorroborated, unconfirmed, unconvincing words, and these 26 words alone, Winston Silcott was sentenced to 30 years in jail on Thursday.

The Old Bailey judge and jury who convicted Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip of murdering PC Blakelock during the street-fighting on Broadwater Farm in October 1985 were exercising the law of the lynch mob. It was the most criminal charade of a showtrial ever seen outside the no-jury, no-justice courts of Northern Ireland.

The non-existent evidence against Silcott was almost equalled in absurdity by the made-up cases against the other two. Both were denied access to solicitors and endured long interrogations based on threats, abuse, violence and the denial of sleep and food. Both made statements under duress. Yet neither confessed to killing Blakelock. Braithwaite first told police he had hit another policeman. But in court he said there was 'no truth' in the story, which he had told while under the influence of intimidation, hunger and claustrophobia in a cramped cell. There was no other evidence against him. Raghip said he was at the scene of Blakelock's death with a broomhandle (hardly a weapon that could hack a man to death), but took no part. Again, the police had no other evidence. Both got life sentences.

'We thought justice would see them right. Justice turned out to be a load of crap.'
Millard Scott,
Broadwater Farm
Defence Campaign

The hours that the prosecution spent making its case produced nothing but hot air. It was air thick with the stench of British racism. Through 44 days of the trial, the media bayed for blood at the courtroom doors, while the prosecution whipped up hysteria inside with chilling stories about Blakelock's body being reduced to 'a rag, doll' by anonymous rioters 'pecking like vultures' who supposedly wanted to 'parade his head on a pole'. They created a climate of intense racism in which any black man would do for the 'Face of Evil' headlines in the rabid press. They found two such black scapegoats in Silcott and Braithwaite. They threw in a white one, Raghip, for good measure.

The media have sought to use Silcott's past police record to criminalise the black community of Broadwater Farm. He has been paraded across the pages of the press like a caged animal, described as a violent criminal, as a psychopath who pushed drugs, as a North London Fagin who sent out young boys to rob for him, as a notorious knife-man who would cut anybody who accidentally split his beer. The media message is that the youths who rose up against the police that October night were a gang of thugs and thieves led by 'a criminal mastermind'. This is the biggest lie of the lot.

'They have crucified my son.'
William Silcott

Petty thieves do not declare war on the forces of law and order. Even the mythical Mafia could not send hundreds of angry youths on to the streets to do battle with riot cops. The crucifixion of Winston Silcott is designed to distract attention from the real cause of the conflict: the vicious and coordinated campaign of state racism against the black community on the Farm, which came to a head with the killing of black mother Cynthia Jarrett during a police raid on her home, and provoked a spontaneous backlash from black youth who had had enough. If the events on Broadwater Farm were 'masterminded' anywhere, it was not in the back room of Silcott's greengrocer's shop, but in the control rooms of Wood Green police station.

Broadwater Farm is a run-down, inner-city estate with a big black population. Unemployment, bad housing and poverty are part of the grim pattern of everyday life, as they are in thousands of other tower block slums across the country. But on Broadwater Farm, there is an even bigger health hazard: a racist police army of occupation.

Black people suffer systematic discrimination that has driven them to the margins of mainstream British society. There, the authorities view them purely as a policing problem. They are treated not as citizens to be represented by parliaments and given 'equality before the law', but as criminals to be ruled by police batons and legal repression. Black youth in places like Broadwater Farm are at the sharp end of this racist regime. They grow up through one long round of police raids, arrests and stop-and-search harassment. The vanload of police who regularly wait at the end of a local high street, to pull in and beat up any passing young blacks, are just one more great British institution for the black youth of Broadwater Farm.

When police raided Cynthia Jarrett's home on



Saturday 5 October 1985, without a warrant and with a key they had taken from her son, Floyd, it was an everyday act of persecution. But when they shoved the black woman aside, as they had done a hundred times before, she collapsed and died.

Police chiefs started the violence which followed the killing of Cynthia Jarrett. They laid on a double-shift of 400 riot police and invaded the estate to pre-empt any protests about her death. In court, police confirmed that they had been sent in well before seven o'clock on Sunday 6 October — the time at which the authorities claim black youth began rioting. The police used a strategic plan which they had kept in the safe at Wood Green station for more than a year. They were ready and tooled up to deal with the backlash against their brutality which they knew had to come one day.

'There is a psychological hang-up in this country about the use of force by the police. I have fewer hang-ups than most.'
London police chief
Kenneth Newman

In the weeks that followed the eruption on the Farm, while the press began its 18-month campaign of horror stories about PC Blakelock's death, police swarmed over the estate seeking revenge. Between 10-14 October, Metropolitan police records show that Broadwater Farm was besieged by 9165 officers — getting on for half of all police in London. Police raided one home in every four in the estate, often with armed units confronting people on their doorsteps. They arrested 362 people — a tenth of the entire population of the estate, and a huge proportion of all black youth on the Farm.

They held young blacks for days without their parents or solicitors, blackmailing and beating them into talking about others. If a youth was freed or acquitted in court, his 'evidence' would still be used to persecute his friends. Police put three juveniles on trial for murder using these methods, but even the judge had to dismiss their 'confessions' as 'fantasy'. One of them was named by the sole prosecution witness to appear during the Blakelock trial. He admitted in court that police had bribed and bullied him into lying. Such is the justice that the British system has handed out on Broadwater Farm. Yet the police and press have the nerve to claim that Silcott 'forced' black youth to fight their police oppressors.

'I knew Winston Silcott like my brother. Convicting him of killing Blakelock, it's like they killed my mother all over again.'
Floyd Jarrett

Broadwater Farm points the way ahead for the policing of black areas in Thatcher's Britain. Police chief Kenneth Newman gave his men the go-ahead to use plastic bullets during the disturbances. They did not, but Newman is now confident that they would have public support to do so. 'Broadwater Farm has justified, in the minds of the majority, the necessity of the proper equipment to do the job.' The propaganda campaign around Broadwater Farm, depicting black youth as beasts and thieves, and police thugs as heroes and victims, has helped to convince every established British politician that more repression is needed. As the trial ended last week, armoured cars were deployed around the estate without a murmur from the opposition parties.

We will have no truck with the verdict of a showtrial. The guilty parties in the Broadwater Farm case are sitting in the palaces of government, the police fortresses and the sewage-farm press offices around Britain. Their racism is responsible for every act of violence in the conflicts between police and the black community in our inner cities. They have twisted the cold-blooded killing of a black woman into an accident and promoted the police who did it. They have branded the resistance of the oppressed as murder and criminal mayhem. They have turned British justice into racist sadism. They must be opposed. Crucifixion belongs in the Dark Ages. So does the system that put the black community of Broadwater Farm on the cross in the Old Bailey last week.