tns
the next step
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Joe Bageman

WHAT THE BRITISH CROWN SENT TO ONE IRISHMAN'S FUNERAL...

75 Armoured Cars

If Derry in Northern Ireland is now as 'normal' as ***Panorama*** *claimed last week, why were there 75 ARMOURED CARS, 1000 PARAMILITARY POLICE, 100 BRITISH TROOPS and a HELICOPTER GUNSHIP at this republican funeral in the city? And if the IRA is as isolated from support as the British authorities say, why were two of its volunteers able to fire a salute at the funeral and escape through cheering crowds?*

FULL STORY AND EXCLUSIVE PICTURES – pages 2,3

the next step
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Two trips

The difference between Margaret Thatcher's acclaimed trip to Moscow and Neil Kinnock's humiliating visit to Washington says much about modern British politics. Both trips were designed with the forthcoming general election in mind. But there the similarity ends. Thatcher looked vaguely like a mature and assured Oscar-winning actress, coming off the plane in her black fur hat and coat. Kinnock, meanwhile, bore some resemblance to Brinks Matt bullion robbery suspect John Fleming, skulking down the stairs of a jumbo jet wearing handcuffs and the look of a condemned man.

Thatcher took advantage of her visit to Gorbachev's Soviet Union to display the mastery of the political high ground that has served her so well over the last eight years at home. She spoke out on the broad anti-Soviet, pro-Western themes best suited to her hectoring style — human rights, the war in Afghanistan, etc. She also threw in a dash of diplomacy and, amid much talk of closer Anglo-Soviet relations, emerged from the talks to boast that her strong-arm defence policy had proved its worth in making Gorbachev see sense.

Insincerity seeped from every pore, as the prime minister who five years ago this week launched the bloody invasion of the Falklands, spoke of her heartfelt yearning for peace. Yet no British opposition politician could expose her posturing. The apparent success of Thatcher's Moscow stunt shows how her reactionary ideas on such matters as patriotism and defence have influenced the thinking of her opponents. Both Kinnock's Labour Party and the upwardly-mobile Alliance have adopted pseudo-Tory policies on important political issues (see pages 6 and 7).

Thatcher's pace-setting role in British establishment politics means that, despite the deep unpopularity of her government and the recent Alliance upsurge, the Tories remain favourites to win the election. It also means that, whatever the election result, we can expect little respite from the bitter and miserable climate which Thatcherism has created.

Kinnock's trip to Washington confirmed how far he has gone in adapting to pressure from the Tories. By any rational criteria, he was stupid to cross the Atlantic at all. It was clear that Reagan and his aides had not been so disoriented by Irangate that they would miss such an opportunity to do the dirty on one of Thatcher's opponents. Yet Kinnock had to go. He has pinned his career prospects on convincing the British establishment that he can be as imperious a statesman as Thatcher, capable of posing in the White House with Nato's top militarists. The rebuff he received in America — and over here — shows what the official labour movement can expect when it tries to challenge Thatcher as the champion of British capitalism around the world.

The most telling aspect of Kinnock's trip came once he was back in Britain. The Labour leader and his foreign affairs man, Denis Healey, were dismayed at the way the White House distorted their brief exchange of words with Reagan's team. They were particularly hurt that the American spokesman claimed Kinnock had told Reagan of his plans for unilateral nuclear disarmament. The Labour statesmen grovelled before the British media, insisting that, honestly, they had not mentioned any such thing. A disarmament policy which, until recently, was widely viewed as the centrepiece of Labour's radical programme is now seen as something Kinnock should deny any association with. This says a lot about where the Labour leadership is heading. The fact that Kinnock and Healey could do this without exciting a murmur from leading Labour left wingers says even more about the ineffectiveness of the Labour left today.

On the eve of Thatcher's Moscow visit, a *Sun* editorial branded Tony Benn as 'Twisted, evil, treacherous' because of an article he had written for the Soviet press. Benn's piece attacked the British authorities for their infringement of human rights in Northern Ireland, their jailing of trade unionists as political prisoners, and their vetting of appointments to the BBC and the civil service. All well and good. But when was the last time Benn provoked the wrath of the gutter press by making these points to a British audience? Like the rest of the Labour left he led in its finest hour, Benn has buttoned his lip for fear of embarrassing Kinnock in the pre-election campaign. Top Labour radicals are standing by while Kinnock cringes before the right, and Thatcher dictates the terms of British politics.

The two trips have served to underline the current drift of political debate towards the natural terrain of the British ruling class. We have no interest in following that drift. The precondition for taking on Thatcher and her tame opponents is to establish an independent voice for the working class on the issues that count. We must equip our movement to deal with the authorities on the broad political questions where they monopolise opinion, such as the rearmament drive, or Britain's occupation of Ireland. We can do that by campaigning for The Red Front, as a bloc of left wingers who want to stand up for the working class no matter what Kinnock says (see page 11). We cannot do that by tailing a Labour leader who thinks going to Washington to grovel to the Western world's leading warmonger is a statesmanlike thing to do.

Trade war

With each week that passes, the Labour Party publishes yet another turgid instalment of its plans for revitalising the British economy. All of them are shot through with 'Britain first' policies on import controls and investment. The true meaning of this chauvinist outlook became clear last week, when new rumours about an impending trade war with Japan had Labour MPs trying to outdo Tory backwoodsmen in their determination to turn back the 'yellow peril'.

While misnamed Tory reactionary Sir Bernard Brain demanded the government act against the Japanese 'pirates', Labour spokesman John Smith insisted that the Tories should 'do to the Japanese what they do to us'. The tightening all-party alliance against the supposed threat from Asia has begun to parallel the mood of the late thirties. Then, it resulted in a world war to redivide markets and raw material sources among the capitalist powers. The defenders of British trade on all sides of the house of commons will drag us into another, with even more horrific consequences, if we allow them to. We must stamp on Labour Party patriotism when it begins with talk of retaliation against Japan in the financial markets, before it ends in another Hiroshima.

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Joe Bootman

IRA VOLUNTEERS FIRE THE FINAL SALUTE OVER GERARD LOGUE'S COFFIN

CLERGY DECLARE WAR ON IRA

Bishops back Britain

The Bishop of Derry's ban on IRA funerals crowns a century of conflict between the Catholic church and republicans

Dr Edward Daly, Bishop of Derry, banned the bodies of IRA men from his churches after republicans fired a volley of shots over the coffin of IRA volunteer Gerard Logue in the grounds of St Columba's church. Daly said he would no longer allow church ground to be 'desecrated' by 'men of violence'.

Many people in Britain believe that the cause of the conflict in Ireland is an age-old and irrational religious feud between Catholics and Protestants. In a *Daily Express* poll in February 45 per cent of the survey sample located the roots of the conflict in religion. British propaganda aims to reinforce the view that religious bigotry is to blame for the bloodshed.

This helps to hide the true cause of the conflict — British domination.

The people fighting for Irish freedom happen to be Catholic, but their real affiliation is national not religious. Irish nationalists have always defied the anti-republican doctrines of the Catholic church by organising resistance to British rule. The Catholic hierarchy's latest attack on the IRA continues a long tradition. The Catholic hierarchy likes to proclaim its independence from both sides in the Irish War, but it saves all its condemnation of violence for the IRA, and backs every British attempt to undermine the republican movement.

'BLIGHTING CURSE'

In a famous sermon in 1867 the Bishop of Kerry described Fenian fighters for Irish freedom as 'criminals'. He called down 'God's heaviest curse, his withering, blasting, blighting curse', upon Fenians for whose punishment 'eternity is not long enough, nor hell hot enough'. Ever since, the Catholic clergy has issued the same warnings of damnation to those who take up arms against the oppressor. Since British troops invaded again in 1969 clerical condemnation of the IRA has become a religious ritual.

In every phase of the Irish War a handful of priests, under pressure from their parishioners, have sought to defend those fighting oppression. Father Desmond Wilson from Belfast has often criticised the Catholic establishment for its knee-jerk condemnation of 'terrorism': 'I suppose the next thing they'll be asking us to condemn violence before every meal instead of saying grace.'

The hierarchy can thank priests like Wilson for preventing a total cleavage between the church and its people.

The hierarchy has used its power where it is strongest — inside the church itself — to pressurise republicans. In an echo of contemporary controversies, priests refused to administer the sacraments to Fenians or to allow their dead to lie in state lest they stage-managed the event to promote their cause. In 1956 the church made it a mortal sin to be a member of an illegal organisation. In December 1975 the tricolour-draped coffin of IRA volunteer 'Basil' Fox was turned away from St Paul's church on the Falls Road in Belfast. In 1980 *all* the churches on the Falls Road refused to accept the body of IRA volunteer 'Dec' Delaney. Now bishops are set to impose a blanket ban on IRA funerals.

The cardinals and bishops have colluded with the British authorities to undermine the anti-imperialist struggle. In 1969, as armed Loyalists laid siege to the Catholic ghettos of Belfast and Derry, the church launched a takeover of the nationalist Citizens' Defence Committees and told its people to pull down the barricades. In 1976, in collaboration with the British government, the church sponsored and financed the foundation of the Peace Movement, which tried to exploit the feeling of war weariness among nationalists to disarm republican resistance.

DEBT REPAID

The hierarchy was instrumental in undermining the hunger-strike for political status in 1981. While 10 young republicans died for their right to be recognised as political prisoners, the church put pressure on their families to accept that they were common criminals. The prisoners described Father Denis Faul, the Catholic chaplain in the H-Blocks, as a 'conniving treacherous man'. In response to the upsurge of support for the republican movement after the hunger-strikes, the church cooperated with the British authorities, calling on people to become informers and not to vote for Sinn Fein in the 1983 general election.

The Catholic church owes its influence in Ireland to the English Crown.

Centuries of British interference have held back the development of the Irish nation in all spheres, from the economic to the cultural, and given to religion the same status as it assumes in many third world countries dominated by imperialism. The British authorities have nurtured the Catholic church, which has repaid them in kind: it has been a bulwark of British rule and a vociferous critic of Irish republicanism.

Bishop Daly of Derry declared that 'we do not want armed men of any kind in our church grounds on the occasions of funerals'. Yet the bishops have kept quiet about more than two dozen attacks by the RUC and British Army on nationalist funerals in the past three years. Hundreds of paramilitary police and soldiers followed Gerard Logue's coffin into the church grounds to intimidate the mourners, but Daly could only 'disagree' with this, while he was 'disgusted' at the IRA salute. In a telling statement, Daly revealed his real fears. 'When several hundred people, who profess themselves to be Christians, applaud and cheer an act of desecration of this nature, it gives us all even more cause for concern.' For the Catholic church the cause for concern is not the salute itself, but the fact that thousands of nationalists support the people who fired it.

Joan Phillips

Joe Boorman

KEEP YOUR HELMETS ON AND YOUR PLASTIC-BULLET GUNS COCKED: HOW THE RUC PAYS ITS RESPECTS TO REPUBLICAN DEAD

● FUNERAL DISPLAY EXPOSES BBC PROPAGANDA

Northern Ireland is not 'normal'

Last Monday the BBC's *Panorama* set out to show that Derry in Northern Ireland is now a 'normal' British city. That night the IRA killed a Loyalist jailer and two senior Royal Ulster Constabulary men in Derry. The next day the RUC and British Army harassed the funeral of an Irish republican in the city with helicopters, dozens of armoured cars and hundreds of armed men. Two IRA men still succeeded in firing a salute over the coffin, to cheers from the crowds of mourners.

Almost 18 years after British troops invaded Derry, the city and the rest of Northern Ireland remain about as 'normal' as any colony torn by a war between an occupying army and a popular liberation movement.

Panorama's theme was that Derry is enjoying a prosperous and peaceful new dawn, far removed from the bad old days of violence and death. It pointed out that the nationalist Bogside area, where British paratroopers shot dead 14 Irish civilians on Bloody Sunday in 1972, is now the home of the Pilot's Row community centre. The programme makers included what they thought was a jolly local ditty, the Bogside Calypso, to show how light-hearted the community centre-using nationalists have become.

Anybody who has ever heard it played in a Derry bar could have told the BBC boys that the Bogside Calypso is an ironic song about the British Anglian Regiment raiding nationalist homes at all hours of the night and day, and using their 'emergency' powers to kick in doors, rip up floorboards and take Irish people away for a week's worth of interrogation without charge. It is about the everyday brutality which, community centres or no, Irish nationalists still suffer under the British forces occupying the North of their country. The day after *Panorama*, Derry nationalists received another dose of the Empire treatment at the hands of troops and paramilitary police who tried to wreck the funeral of IRA volunteer Gerard Logue, killed in a shooting accident the previous weekend.

The Crown forces gave Gerard Logue the ghoulish treatment they reserve for those fighting for Irish unity and independence. They lurked outside his family home in the Gobnascale district during the wake, shouting 'bring out your dead'. They surrounded the house on the morning of the funeral, starting aggro every time the Logues tried to bring out the coffin. When the cortege finally set off for the cemetery, the RUC sent 1000 armed police and 75 armoured landrovers, accompanied by scores of soldiers, to obstruct and abuse the large crowd of mourners. The British forces laid on the usual helicopter to hover overhead, photographing funeral-goers and trying to drown out the service and the republican oration.

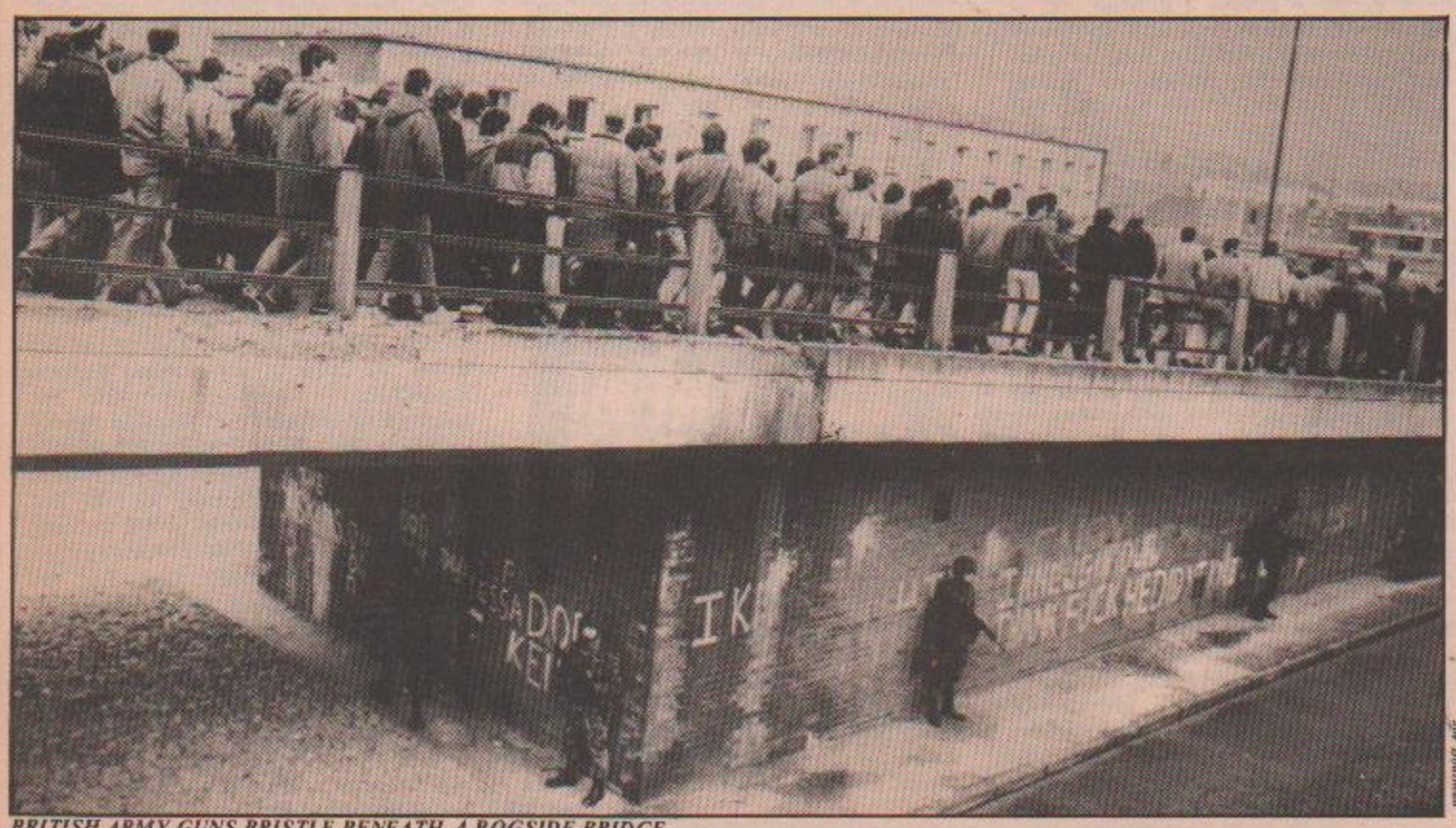
Perhaps *Panorama's* producers could say when they last saw such a South African-style spectacle at an ordinary funeral in an average-sized town in a normal corner of the 'United Kingdom'?

And if Derry nationalists are now so content with their lot, maybe the men from the BBC could explain why mourners at Logue's funeral jostled paramilitary policemen away from a coffin, or why the altar boys threw stones at the security forces, or why hundreds cheered and whistled when two IRA men appeared and fired a salute over the coffin of their fallen comrade?

UNDER THE HEEL

No amount of soft-focus British media coverage can disguise the unchanging reality of life in Derry. It is still the city of Bloody Sunday, where no aspect of Irish life (or even death) is free from the distorting and degrading influence of the British occupation. That reality ensures that, no matter how hard the British government, the BBC and the Catholic Church try to isolate the IRA, nationalists at the business end of Britain's gun-barrel democracy in Ireland will show their support for those fighting for Irish freedom.

Down in the Bogside it is still normal to back the IRA and sing bitter songs about the British Army. The only change that can bring the prospect of real peace to Northern Ireland is its liberation from the unwanted embrace of the 'United Kingdom', and the withdrawal of the British forces who turn Irish graveyards into battlegrounds.



Joe Boorman

BRITISH ARMY GUNS BRISTLE BENEATH A BOGSIDE BRIDGE

KINNOCK ATTACKS BLACK SECTIONS

SHOULD ANTI-RACISTS BACK LABOUR?

Last week Neil Kinnock threatened to crack down on Labour's Black Sections, after their recent conference in Nottingham criticised his race policies. ***Nigel Long*** *spoke to Birmingham councillor* ***Phil Murphy,*** *Black Section candidate for Labour's national executive, about the Black Sections prospects. We also publish an alternative view from Workers Against Racism, arguing that last week's attack provides a compelling case for anti-racists to break with Kinnock and back* ***The Red Front***

'THEY CANNOT IGNORE US'

tns: **What gains do you see from last month's Nottingham Black Sections conference?**

Phil Murphy: Before you even look at policies, the conference was extremely successful in terms of our ability to organise such a large meeting of black people. When the media are concentrating on the disunity and conflict black people are supposed to cause, we showed that we can be effective, efficient and comradely. The fact that it happened at all is important for black people.

Black Sections have adopted very different policies from the Labour leadership. This is significant in three aspects: opposition to all forms of immigration controls; a commitment to enforce equal opportunities policies on all Labour's employment schemes; and the formation of a black caucus of MPs to pressurise the leadership. We showed we are no longer powerless and outside the mainstream of Labour politics, and that Labour leaders will have to take elected black leaders seriously from now on.

tns: **How will you ensure these policies are implemented?**

PM: This is where black MPs will play a crucial role. Workers Against Racism believes that there are severe limitations to the effectiveness of activity in the Labour Party, but what black people will see is their elected representatives in parliament defending their rights against the leadership, and an attack on Black Section MPs will be seen as an attack on the black community. This is what the Labour executive committee want to avoid, and they are attacking us now to stop it happening. They are paranoid about the constituencies where black people have influence on the Labour vote. By threatening Black Sections, they are cutting their nose to spite their face.

tns: **In the recent debate in *The Voice* between Marc Wadsworth of the Black Sections and Kenan Malik of Workers Against Racism, Malik points to the tendency of Black Sections to accommodate to the Labour leadership. How do you react to that?**

PM: I agree with Malik that Black Sections spend too much time trying to gain approval from the Labour Party leadership. But we should always seek constitutional recognition, aware that there may be a certain tendency to compromise. For Malik to say that Black Section members are unaware of this is dishonest. In certain circumstances we temper our criticism of the Labour Party so as not to damage it. But we always back this up with firm statements and actions like the Nottingham conference.

BLACK SECTIONS SUPPORTER PHIL MURPHY

David Rourke

tns: **Isn't it dishonest to sow illusions in the Labour Party?**

PM: The extent to which Labour is socialist and can be made to act in the interests of black people is always a difficult one to answer. From its inception, it has never really been wholly socialist, and at some time or other has abandoned radical policies. A sell-out is always possible. The answer is to make the Labour Party democratically accountable. If this requires a radical restructuring of the party, then so be it. I very much subscribe to Tony Benn's view that the Labour Party needs to be refounded on original principles so that groups such as WAR and Black Sections can participate in it.

tns: **After the Labour leaders' attacks on you and the Black Sections, do you still believe that this is possible?**

PM: The attacks embarked upon by the leadership can only benefit Black Sections. For instance, even though they have been able to remove me from certain positions in Birmingham council, they have also been forced to create posts for black people at the highest levels — assistant chief executives, etc.

The very fact that the leadership is attacking us has led other black people to become active in the Labour Party. The struggle itself has been enough to build up effective defence. Once we come under attack and others come to our defence, it only draws attention to our policies and proves they cannot ignore us.

A RED FRONT AGAINST RACISM

Phil Murphy might insist that the Black Sections are 'no longer powerless and outside the mainstream of Labour politics'. But the motion Labour's national executive committee passed last week was a straight 'shut up or get out' warning to black activists:

'Any decision to undertake separatist action with regard to selective support for candidates or statements or "manifestoes" will result in action being taken under the party constitution against any party member endorsing or acting upon such decisions.'

The message is clear: the Labour leadership will not tolerate the sort of anti-police, pro-immigrant rhetoric displayed at the Black Sections national conference in Nottingham last month. The Black Sections' record of grudgingly accepting Kinnock's diktats suggests he will get his way.

POSTURING

Marc Wadsworth has dismissed Kinnock's latest attack on the Black Sections as 'posturing'. But that seems to us to be a more accurate description of the Nottingham get-together itself. Take the conference's controversial proposal to set up a parliamentary caucus of black MPs after the next election. Murphy asserts that these MPs will defend black people's rights 'against the leadership'. Yet prospective black MPs like Russell Profitt are only allowed to stand as Labour candidates because they conceded Kinnock's point about the illegality of Black Sections, and agreed not to involve Black Sections in the selection process. This display of subservience implies that they will bow to Labour's ban on any black caucus in the house of commons.

On policy, the Nottingham conference produced the radical anti-racist touches Murphy mentions. There was much talk of not giving Kinnock any 'blank cheques', and Lambeth council leader Linda Bellos even said she would endorse 'precious little' of the Labour Party manifesto. Yet all of this is without consequence. The Black Sections remain committed to campaigning for a Labour government. Such a government would operate under the policies Kinnock has laid down — supporting strict immigration controls, continuing the Tories' criminalisation campaign against black youth, etc. However loudly they might condemn Kinnock in their private meetings, those who campaign for him in the outside world must share responsibility for his racist proposals.

BACKTRACKING

Against the background of the Black Sections' commitment to Labour's election campaign, the Nottingham conference was little more than a token gesture. The Labour executive's reaction indicates that such tokenism is no longer acceptable, as Labour seeks to halt its slump in the polls. The 'paranoia' afflicting the Labour leadership is not, as Murphy suggests, a fear of the Black Sections leading a revolt against the party's racist policies. It is a fear of losing the support of moderate (and moderately racist) voters, by being associated with the Black Sections' posturing. Kinnock has decreed that any talk of anti-racism is out of the question in an election year, and the activists who attacked him in Nottingham are backing off.

Murphy's admission that the Black Sections 'temper our criticism of the Labour Party so as not to damage it' is an understatement. Any debate about whether they are 'aware' of the tendency to compromise with Kinnock misses the point: aware or not, they do it, and black people lose out. The reaction of Haringey council leader and prospective MP Bernie Grant to events around Broadwater Farm is one glaring example.

LABOUR LOYALISTS

As the Tories, the courts and the media whipped up hysteria against the black community, Kinnock stepped up the pressure on Grant to distance himself from those fighting police racism on the Farm. Grant responded by toeing the Labour leaders' line. He declared that he had 'never been anti-police', and opposed a proposal to stop council funds going to the police occupying the estate. When the gutter press spread rumours about a riot at the end of the Blakelock showtrial, Grant turned council staff into plain clothes police who searched the Farm for petrol bombs. So much for the Nottingham declaration that Labour should support black people in conflict with the racist state.

Black Sections spokesman Madhav Patil reacted to last week's executive attack by swearing that there was 'no question of caucusing against the Labour Party'. If there is no question of campaigning against Kinnock as he panders to racist prejudices, then surely there is no point in supporting Black Sections. Constrained by their loyalty to the Labour Party, people like Phil Murphy are left encouraging black people to back Labour while that party's opposition to real anti-racism becomes clearer by the day. Murphy can drag up the old chestnut of making Labour democratic, but Kinnock has a fine grasp of the true process through which Labour policy is decided.

As he said in New York last week, 'Labour is now a completely democratic party, governed by one man one vote — and I'm the one with the vote.'

REAL ANTI-RACISM

Kinnock has demanded that Black Sections' activists put the cause of Labour before the cause of anti-racism. Workers Against Racism has different priorities. We refuse to subordinate the campaign against racism in Thatcher's Britain to anybody's electoral ambitions. Workers Against Racism supporters are campaigning for *The Red Front*, as a bloc of left-wing people who will fight on a platform of basic working class demands before, during and after the election. Those demands include opposition to all immigration controls and other discriminatory laws, and opposition to the racist police. If Black Sections supporters want to fight for some of the ideas they floated in Nottingham, they should stop supporting a party which brands anti-racism as a disciplinary offence, and throw in their lot with *The Red Front*.

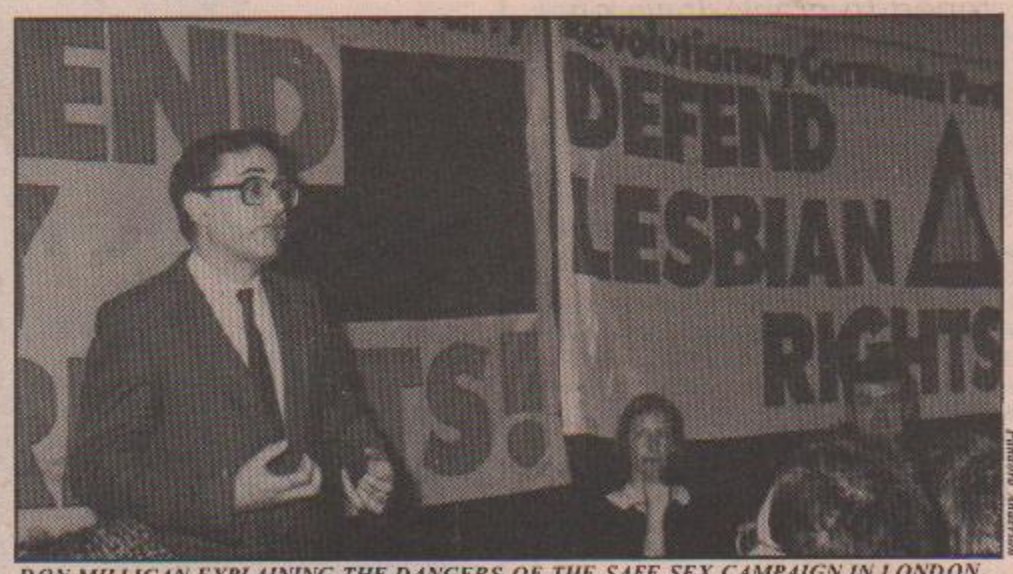
NEW BOOK SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Aids, sex & gay rights

Our new book, *The Truth About the Aids Panic* by *Dr Michael Fitzpatrick* and *Don Milligan,* has provoked an angry response from radical supporters of 'safe sex' at meetings around the country. Here, the authors respond to their critics

Many of our critics agree that the government and the media have manipulated the Aids issue to promote anti-homosexual and pro-family prejudices. But they insist that the safe sex campaign is much wider than the government propaganda and that it contains progressive aspects.

First, they argue that safe sex is the only way to stop Aids spreading. Aids is a fatal disease for which there is neither vaccine nor cure. Aids is already a major cause of death, not only in Africa, but in North America. There may so far be only 731 cases in Britain, and these may be largely restricted to recognised high-risk categories, but we can't afford to be complacent. Aids is therefore 'everyone's problem': according to the safe sex campaigners, we can only guarantee our survival if we all change our sexual behaviour.



DON MILLIGAN EXPLAINING THE DANGERS OF THE SAFE SEX CAMPAIGN IN LONDON LAST WEEK

NO SOLUTION

We agree that Aids is a terrible disease, but we do not accept that the safe sex campaign is the way to fight it. Aids is not 'everyone's problem' in the sense that it is a risk to everyone. There is no risk whatsoever to anyone who is not the sexual partner of somebody who is a carrier of the virus, or who shares needles and syringes for intravenous injection with an Aids carrier.

On the most alarmist estimate of the number of Aids carriers in Britain, this excludes more than 99.9 per cent of the population.

For heterosexual partners of carriers of the Aids virus, the risks of catching it appear to be low. In Africa heterosexual transmission seems common, but there is little evidence of this in the West. So far there have been only five recorded cases in which Aids has been acquired heterosexually in Britain. In the USA, where there are more than 30 000 Aids cases, the proportion acquired heterosexually remains around three per cent.

While Aids is not a threat to everybody,it is certainly a threat to gay men: 88 per cent of cases in Britain have been male homosexuals. But the attempt to promote safe sex among gay men as the solution ignores the fact that, because of the discrimination and repression they experience, the majority of gay men are unable openly to acknowledge their homosexuality. Men who are unable to admit (often even to themselves), that they are homosexual, and who try to preserve a front of heterosexualiy, are not receptive to safe sex propaganda targeted at gays. Men who are forced to conduct their sexual activity in conditions of guilt and shame, in furtive snatched encounters, are not likely to practise safe sex.

The only way to stop Aids spreading among gay men is by removing the stigma of criminality from homosexuality. This means fighting to remove discriminatory laws and challenging instances of harassment in workplaces and on the streets.

BETRAYAL

For the gay movement, the time for spreading information about Aids is now past. In the early years of the epidemic it was important to inform the gay scene of the dangers of Aids — groups like the New York Gay Men's Health Crisis and, in Britain, the Terrence Higgins Trust, have done this. Gay movement publicity and the impact of the disappearance of friends and lovers have transformed the social life of the gay scene. Everybody involved in the 'out' gay scene now knows the score about Aids. The important task now is to take up the campaign for lesbian and gay rights, so that the majority of homosexuals, who remain closeted, can live openly in society and protect themselves against the dangers of Aids.

Unfortunately, instead of taking up the fight for gay rights, the gay movement has retreated into the safe sex campaign. This is not only a capitulation to the moralistic (and anti-gay) propaganda of the Tories and the media.

It is also a betrayal of the submerged majority of homosexuals.

Most gay men remain often brutally oppressed, and do not share even the limited security enjoyed by the middle class spokesmen of the metropolitan gay scene. The safe sex campaign seeks to provide information to protect individual gay men from Aids. But what gay men need is a movement that fights for an end to the oppressive conditions which allow the Aids virus to flourish.

SEX STRAINS

The second point that many gay movement activists and some feminists make is that the safe sex campaign can create opportunities for promoting a more progressive sexuality. Some approve the renewed emphasis on the virtues of more stable and lasting relationships, while others welcome the exploration of other forms of sexual activity than penile penetration. Radical supporters of the safe sex campaign insist that they are in favour of wider sexual experimentation, not a return to Victorian prudery.

The notion that safe sex can be better sex rests on a technical, problem-page, view of questions of sex and relationships in our society. The fact that many people find sexual relationships unfulfilling results from social factors rather than from faulty technique. The lack of equality between men and women and the extra burden of work on women inside and outside the home imposes severe strains on many heterosexual couples.

The key factor in spoiling the fun in the bedroom is the unequal relations which exist outside it, not the deficiencies in men's education about female sexuality.

Social pressures make it even more difficult for people to enjoy relationships with partners of the same sex. Lesbians and gay men cannot openly conduct relationships without risking humiliation and discrimination, and even a beating or court sentence. The scope for exploring the sublime delights of body rubbing and massage, as recommended by radical safe sex promoters, is limited in the public toilets, parks and commons in which many gay men are forced to meet their partners.

For homosexuals, the main obstacle to fulfilment is not a lack of information, but the conditions of oppression in which they live.

It is ironic that left wingers, who would dismiss any Tory attempt to interfere in the trade unions, should take such a positive view of the government's attempt to interfere in our sex lives. There is a dangerous tendency to take the government's Aids campaign at face value.

CYNICAL KILLERS

Last week the government attempted to suppress the last report of the Health Education Council, the campaigning body it abolished on the day it launched the Aids scare. This report puts forward proposals to cut by 20 000 the number of premature deaths among manual workers that are predicted over the next decade. It is difficult to believe that a government that shows such callous indifference to the fate of 20 000 working class people has been moved by the deaths of 377 people from Aids, most of them gay men.

If the Tories were really concerned about Aids they would not waste £20m on a campaign to create public alarm about the non-existent danger of heterosexual spread. A rational response to Aids would be to pump resources into research and care, to stop the spread among drug abusers by issuing free disposable equipment and to act to remove all forms of discrimination against homosexuals.

The government's safe sex campaign is a cynical attempt to take advantage of the fear of Aids to promote a return to Victorian values. This campaign will do nothing to stop the spread of Aids and it can only reinforce the oppressive morality that helps to keep women and homosexuals as second class citizens. Instead of trying to find positive features of safe sex, the left should repudiate the campaign in its entirety. How can people who allow the Tories to dictate the conduct of their sex life fight the government on a wider political front?

● out now!

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THE PROPAGANDA WAR

PRIVATE PRISONS

Proposals to privatise the prisons are likely to be included in the Tory election manifesto as a 'value-for-money' measure aimed at ending prison overcrowding and cutting the rising cost of incarceration. But the Tories' penal privatisation plans are more a propaganda exercise than a practicable proposition.

The prison service is part of the state security apparatus and cannot be contracted out to cowboy companies. The repressive and punitive arm of the state exists to protect the power and privilege of the whole capitalist class. It enforces capitalist law and order on behalf of every employer against the working class. The ruling class cannot rely on individual capitalists managing private armies or prisons to guarantee the future of its system and put down its opponents.

Privatising the prisons would work only on a limited basis, at either end of the prison population as in the USA, for petty thieves or big-time fraudsters. The result would be concentration camp conditions for petty criminals, a sort of *Midnight Express* nightmare where every service has its price and corruption is rife; and a holiday camp regime for the big-time boys who have the money to make their stay inside a comfortable one. In fact prisoners are already segregated according to race and class.

Encouraged by reports of massive cocaine consumption among his colleagues, Sebastian Villiers, a high-flier in the City, plans to open a private, luxury prison. Villiers is convinced there will be plenty of takers for up-market porridge: 'Six months in clink can be pretty much like home for your average Brixton mugger, but it can fairly devastate a so-called Top Person just out of public school, sent down for a drug offence.'

Villiers was merely acknowledging the class divisions of capitalist society which extend into the courts and the prisons. A system which condemns millions to a life of poverty and degradation, and is rife with racist institutions which confine black people to the scrap-heap, can only pay lip service to the idea of 'equality before the law'. Black people, for example, are twice as likely to be imprisoned as whites who commit the same offence. They make up more than 10 per cent of prisoners, but only five per cent of the general public. Black people on average receive longer sentences, even though they generally have fewer convictions.

The Tories have mooted the idea of prison privatisation as a propaganda stunt to promote the spirit of free enterprise, and endorse the idea that private profiteers can sort out the inefficiency of the state sector. It is an attempt to deflect criticism after a spate of prison riots and a barrage of criticism about overcrowding. Britain now has proportionately the biggest prison population in Western Europe, and the Tories' have been forced to withdraw their pledge to end prison overcrowding by 1990. The Tories now blame the inefficiency of the state sector, not the brutality of their system, for the horrors of a prison service which locks people up three to a cell for 23 hours a day. They claim that free enterprise is the solution.

The free enterprise system rests on the repressive power of the state, with its prisons, police forces and armies. In the name of free enterprise, British governments have brutalised people around the world and imprisoned those at home who challenge their authority. Now the Tories would have us believe that the inhuman conditions in Britain's prisons are due to a shortage of the entrepreneurial spirit. The vision of a capitalist concentration camp run on the cheap is a fitting image of Thatcher's Britain.

THE RED FRONT AND

THE ALLIANCE: A S

The success of the Alliance indicates the urgency of building an alternative to the Labour Party

of ***The Red Front***

'The Alliance should stop talking and planning for a hung parliament and go for victory at the general election,' Roy Jenkins of the SDP told the Scottish Liberal Party conference last week. 'Recent opinion polls have shown the Alliance drawing level and even passing Labour as the main challenger to the Tories as the general election draws closer. Liberal leader David Steel echoed Jenkins: 'An outright win and an overall majority for the Alliance is now possible. We can come through the middle and win.'

The Alliance euphoria is understandable. Ever since the stage-managed relaunch of the combined forces of the Social Democratic Party and the Liberals in February, they have gone from strength to strength. In the Greenwich by-election last month SDP candidate Rosie Barnes achieved a massive 28 per cent swing to take the seat from Labour. A week later, Matthew Taylor won the seat in Truro vacated on the death of David Penhaligon with more than 60 per cent of the vote. Roy Jenkins iced the Alliance cake by beating a former prime minister and an eminent Tory peer in the election for a successor to Lord Stockton as chancellor of Oxford University.

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Following a desultory Tory budget and a series of savage personal attacks by Norman Tebbit and Margaret Thatcher, the popularity of the Alliance has advanced steadily. The current success of the centre party of British politics has little to do with the appeal of David Owen and David Steel and their reissued joint programme. It cannot either be put down to popular enthusiasm for their new designer logos, their specially selected theme tune, or the gold ties and other insignia now sported by Alliance leaders on public platforms.

The growing popularity of the Alliance reflects the dissatisfaction of substantial sections of the middle classes with the existing mainstream parties. It reveals the failure of either of the traditional class parties to rally wider forces around a shrinking core of loyal supporters.

The Alliance began the election season which opened with last year's party conferences in a weak position. While both the Tories and Labour projected a united and purposeful image, the Alliance partners fell out over defence policy and the Liberal assembly rejected the policy to which their leadership was already committed. Yet in the six months since last October, the Alliance has taken advantage of the unpopularity of the Tories and the ineptitude of Labour.

The Conservative Party remains ahead in the opinion polls and it is still the bookies' firm favourite to form the next government. In recent months the Tories have been buoyed up by the stabilisation of the British economy, which has allowed moderate cuts in taxes and interest rates. As the election approaches, Thatcher can claim an impressive list of political victories — over Argentina, the Labour Party and the TUC, the miners and the Wapping printers. She can also claim success in a series of influential propaganda campaigns — against international terrorism, on drugs, football hooliganism and other issues of law and order, and most recently, on Aids.

Yet the government's overall record of economic catastrophe and political ruthlessness is one which has alienated many of the Tories' traditional supporters.

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The prolonged recession over which the Tories have presided since 1979 has ruined many middle class people. Bankruptcies have hit record levels and many businesses, small and large, have been forced to the wall. Redundancies and closures have hit middle management as well as the shop floor and many middle-aged technical and administrative staff have been forced to join manual workers on the dole. Graduate unemployment on a significant scale has been a distinctive feature of the Thatcher years. While many have thrived under the Tories, many have not and some are bitter at being excluded from the benefits of Nigel Lawson's budgetary largesse.

The Tories have singled out the traditional professions for attack. Teachers have been reduced from a position of some standing in society to the status of badly paid child-minders. Doctors are still reeling from the shock of drastic Tory proposals to shake up general practice, while hospitals and research units are increasingly forced to rely on fund-raising stunts to finance their activities. The Tories have even set about removing the hallowed restrictive practices of barristers and solicitors. Public spending cuts have threatened the security of a wide range of professionals from university lecturers to technicians in nationalised industries.

The abrasive rhetoric and the aggressive methods of Thatcher and Tebbit have outraged many middle-of-the-road voters. Many are uneasy about the conduct of a government which has sought confrontation and conflict at home and abroad. The callous brutality of the riot police at Orgreave, Stonehenge and Wapping, the blatantly political use of the courts and the police against civil servants like Clive Ponting or Sarah Tisdall or journalists like Duncan Campbell, the savagery of the airstrike on Libya — all these are incidents which have caused widespread alarm. Many middle class people resent the assaults on civil liberties and the campaigns of bigotry that have become a familiar part of life in Thatcher's Britain.

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The Tories' claims of economic success ring true for only a small minority. The collapse of the Tory vote in Greenwich — as in most recent by-elections — confirms the profound unpopularity of the government.

The space for the Alliance has been opened up by the inability of the Labour Party to seize the initiative and exploit the failures of the Tories.

Since the onset of the recession in the mid-seventies the growth of class conflict has provoked growing middle class hostility towards the working class and the labour movement. The attempts of the trade unions to protect workers' living standards have consolidated prejudices against trade unions and all forms of working class militancy. Fears of inner-city revolt and third world insurgency have stimulated wider anti-working class sentiments. In response to the demands of its traditional supporters in the seventies for a more militant stand against the system, the Labour Party shifted to the left. As a result, Labour has steadily lost middle class support over the past decade.

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Labour's defeat in 1979 accelerated the party's leftward shift. The right-wing leadership of James Callaghan and Denis Healey took the blame for electoral failure and the left strengthened its position inside the party machine. One result was the election of Michael Foot as party leader; another was the ascendancy of the left at party conferences in the early eighties.

In fact the left's strength was illusory because it lacked popular support in the wider labour movement. However, the influence of the left was strong enough to provoke the right wing of the parliamentary party to break away under the leadership of the 'gang of four' — David Owen, Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams and Bill Rogers — to form what became the SDP in 1981. The new party consolidated its base of support, mainly among middle class former Labour voters, through its aggressively moderate stand against Labour's 'left-wing extremism'.

Teaming up with the Liberals, once the great party of the rising industrial bourgeoisie, but throughout the post-war period merely the temporary resort of Tory protest voters, the Alliance won 26 per cent of the votes in the landslide Tory victory of 1983, but only 17 seats. Most of the 20-plus right-wing Labour MPs who deserted to the SDP lost their seats. The eccentric collection of Liberal parliamentarians, including the flamboyantly obese Cyril Smith and gourmet cat food advertiser Clement Freud, came to dominate the public image of the Alliance.

By electing Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley to lead Labour after the 1983 debacle, the party hoped to regain some of its lost ground. This 'dream ticket' gradually succeeded in winning back many of the working class voters who had deserted Labour between 1979 and 1983. However, events like the miners' strike and the local council rate-capping campaign enabled hostile politicians and the media to keep alive the myth of left-wing domination. This ensured that Labour made little headway among the middle classes. Yet, while the Alliance continued to do well in by-elections, it still appeared unable to fulfil its promise of breaking the mould of British politics and displacing Labour as the major opposition party.

The disastrous performance of the Labour Party over the past six months of mounting pre-election hysteria has now tilted the balance decisively towards the Alliance. Under Kinnock, Labour has staked everything on crushing the left and presenting a moderate appeal to the middle class electorate. Yet, while stamping on Militant and the rest was easy, Kinnock's attempts to outflank Thatcher on the right have

IGN OF THE TIMES

merely left him looking silly.

On national security, defence and law and order, Kinnock has tried to present Labour as the party of patriotism, war and the police. But middle class voters have already got a party in government with a proven record in these areas. Why should they opt for a party that seems only to have taken up these issues on the grounds of electoral expediency? While Kinnock's efforts to posture as more true blue than the Tories are wholly unconvincing, they deprive him of the opportunity to attack the government from the left on issues on which it is highly vulnerable. Thus Alliance leaders like Roy Jenkins, or even dissident Tories like Michael Heseltine, are generally more effective critics of the government than Labour's front bench spokesmen.

While Kinnock's quest for middle class support has proved futile, he has failed to consolidate Labour's traditional base. Many commentators ascribe Labour's weakness to the decline in the size of the manual working class. In fact the working class, including both blue collar and white collar workers, still constitutes a substantial majority of British society.

Labour's weakness is not sociological but political: it has failed to combat the corrosive individualism that has resulted from a decade of mass unemployment, setbacks to trade union struggles and disillusionment with the methods and policies of the official labour movement.

Recent by-elections have shown that many working class Labour voters are prepared to desert their traditional party and vote for the Alliance. A substantial swing from Labour to the Alliance took place not only in yuppie Greenwich, but also, to an even greater extent, in solidly proletarian Kirkby in the Knowsley North by-election last November. The experience of past Labour governments and nearly eight years of ineffectual Labour opposition have bred a deep cynicism about the party.

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The solution to the decline in Labour's traditional support recommended by the left over the last five years has been to make the party a 'rainbow coalition' of ethnic minority and other interest groups. However, instead of making support for the struggles against oppression of women, black people, the Irish, lesbians and gays, a central campaigning focus for the labour movement, the Labour Party has merely attempted to attach these movements to the official labour movement bandwagon. The labour bureaucrats hope that by making token gestures at party conferences and in the small print of party documents, they can add on votes from each constituency to the party total.

Labour's bureaucratic approach to minorities would work very well if their demands for democratic rights were uncontroversial. The problem for Labour is that they are often a direct threat to the establishment. Thus the demand for free abortion and contraception runs against the growing pressures for restricting women's access to these facilities. The call for an end to immigration controls challenges the whole legal framework which makes racism respectable in Britain. Supporting the movement for Irish freedom means taking sides with a national liberation struggle fighting against the British state in Ireland. Upholding the rights of lesbians and gay men means standing up against the anti-homosexual hysteria generated by the Aids panic.

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Since the last election the Labour Party has been happy to allow its left wing to adopt some of the demands of the women's movement and incorporate black activists into the party. Party fixers have even allowed the left to meet representatives of Sinn Fein and to pass resolutions in support of lesbian and gay rights when nobody was looking at party conference. Yet the media only need to draw attention to these policies and it becomes immediately apparent that there is no consensus of support for them in the wider labour movement. A left which has fooled itself that token gestures and paper resolutions mean real support is no match for the right when it turns to stir up deep-seated prejudices on these issues. As Labour discovered in Greenwich, under a little pressure its bureaucratic rainbow alliance will shatter, unleashing a mass of divisive and destructive conflicts.

The Labour leadership's response to the Greenwich debacle has been to thrash around in a panic. It has stepped up its attack on the left — in Liverpool and in the Black Sections. It has made more policy concessions to the right — notably on American cruise missiles. Kinnock launches one vacuous campaign after another and then goes off to face another round of humiliation in the USA. Meanwhile the press remorselessly rake over every detail of news about the Labour Party and turn it into enemy ammunition. Last week an eagle-eyed *Daily Mail* reporter discovered Kinnock's signature in a long list in an advertisement condemning the Contras' brutal war in Nicaragua and used it to embarrass him in the USA.

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The left has panicked even more than the leadership. Commentators in the *New Statesman* and *Marxism Today* have taken their quest for any alternative to the Tories to the logical conclusion of approving tactical voting for the Alliance and even a coalition government.

Pursuing the fatalistic logic of always choosing the lesser evil, they conclude that a government headed by a troika of Kinnock, Owen and Steel, pursuing policies little different from those of Thatcher, would be better than another Tory government.

The inevitable beneficiary of the collapse in Labour's credibility as the major opposition party is the Alliance. It can appeal to the middle classes with policies that approve higher public spending, especially on welfare, without having to apologise for the trade unions, black sections, CND and lesbian and gay rights. It can also appeal for working class support in many parts of the country as the most credible alternative to the Tories. As an untested political force, the Alliance is not tarnished with a record of past betrayals and current incompetence.

Given the volatility of British politics that results from the chronically unresolved conflict between capital and labour, the Alliance may well come to play a role in the next election that is out of proportion to its real weight in society. Yet the Alliance remains an unstable political formation. The middle classes on which it relies are not a homogenous social force. The Alliance includes traditional professionals like Doctor Owen and yuppies like public relations consultant Rosie Barnes. It contains a dapper Westminster career politician like David Steel and a rather scruffy Leeds community activist like Michael Meadowcroft.

The Liberal Party stretches from radical supporters of CND and Anti-Apartheid who are close in outlook to the Labour left, to racist councillors in East London who have much in common with the National Front. The SDP includes politicians like Jenkins who look back to social democrats like Anthony Crosland and the orthodoxies of post-war Labourism, and others like Owen who seem to share many of the free market values of Thatcherism. The row over defence undoubtedly foreshadows future conflicts within the Alliance if its unstable amalgam is ever really tested in the heat of political battle.

The success of the Alliance is above all a result of the disintegration of the Labour Party. Whereas a few months ago all discussion centred on whether there would be a Labour government after the election, now the debate is whether there will be much left of the Labour Party after a few more bruising rounds with Thatcher and Tebbit.

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The collapse of the Labour Party even before the election campaign begins in earnest confirms the urgency of the Revolutionary Communist Party's *Red Front* project. We have appealed to all left-wing organisations and individuals to join us in challenging the mainstream parties at the polls on a platform of basic working class demands. We consider that it is vital to make this challenge in the electoral sphere as well as in other areas because the general election will form the main focus of political debate in Britain in the coming weeks and months.

The fact that Labour has given up all pretence of representing the working class means that the working class will have no voice in the election unless we provide it.

Instead of discussing 'doomsday scenarios' following another Labour defeat, tactical voting and coalition governments, the left should get down to the serious business of preparing for the capitalist onslaught that will follow the election, whichever party or combination of parties comes out on top. *The Red Front* aims to provide a focus around which to mobilise working class resistance to attacks on living standards and democratic rights before, during and after the election. Don't mourn the death of Labour — organise to make sure that the working class lives to fight another day!

Mike Freeman

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THE ALL-WHITE ELECTIONS

APARTHEID SHADOW-BOXING

As three million whites prepare to vote in next month's elections, South Africa's ruling National Party seems deeply divided. But the conflict between the 'New Nats' and the hardliners won't challenge apartheid.

***Russell Osborne** reports*

The press would have us believe that PW Botha's regime faces a real threat in the May polls. Most reports have concentrated on the challenge posed by former ambassador to London, Denis Worral and the liberal 'New Nats'. Worral left the ruling party to stand against Cape National Party leader Chris Heunis, Botha's heir apparent. He has been joined by liberal and mainly academic Cape Nationalists. Some pundits even talk of the 'flavour of 1948' — the year the National Party took power — and forecast the end of the established political order.

With insurrection continuing in many parts of the country and the state of emergency now in its ninth month, speculation about political instability is to be expected. But the ruling party's problems within the white community have been greatly exaggerated. The most vocal attacks on Botha have come from critics within his own party.

They are arguing about nuances of political strategy, not proposing major policy changes.

The Afrikaner National Party holds 126 of the 178 seats in the all-white parliament. It would take an electoral earthquake to deprive it of a majority. Botha's party now looks less likely to lose seats to the right, as the hardline parties have failed to agree on an electoral pact. Some rural whites and poorer white workers may vote for the right in protest at falling living standards and Botha's paper reforms. But the National Party's recent hardline policy of repression, which has seriously damaged the black opposition United Democratic Front, should mean most traditional voters are happy enough to stick with Botha.

IN-FIGHTING

Those on Botha's left pose a slightly bigger threat. The New Nats, led by Worral and former Nationalist MP Wynand Malan, are backed by an expensive press campaign. The official opposition Progressive Federal Party has tried to overcome fears that it is soft on the African National Congress by making an electoral pact with the conservative New Republic Party. The New Nats and the PFP-NRP have agreed not to challenge each other where they have a chance of beating Botha's party.

Seasoned political observers believe that Worral's much-hyped candidacy is part of a leadership struggle in the National Party rather than an attempt to build a new party.

REPRESSION RULES: THE LIBERAL CHALLENGE HAS CHANGED NOTHING FOR THE BLACK MAJORITY

Many Afrikaner politicians, backed by big business, are dissatisfied at what they see as Botha's inept handling of the economic and political crisis. The New Nats don't deny the need to continue Botha's basic policy of dealing with the black majority through the carrot and stick approach. They differ only on the balance of reform and repression needed to contain black resistance. Worral's big business backers believe Botha has used a bit too much stick to reassure his right-wing supporters.

Brutal repression is a basic requirement of apartheid, but it provides no long-term solution to the system's problems. Liberals like Worral want a more serious effort to co-opt middle class and conservative rural blacks, to provide some semblance of black support for a revamped version of the system. A recent multi-racial conference in Natal province, involving Zulu chief Gatsha Buthelezi, white businessmen and academics, recommended a power-sharing arrangement in Natal. But Botha snubbed it. This did not improve South Africa's poor reputation among foreign investors and annoyed the liberals in the National Party leadership.

But the differences among white leaders won't rock the foundations of apartheid. Worral was a key architect of Botha's modified apartheid set-up. He supports the state of emergency and wants to keep the ban on the ANC. He says he is not opposed to the National party — only to its current leadership.

NO CHANGE

If the New Nats put pressure on Botha it could prompt the National Party to make more energetic efforts to co-opt some puppet blacks. Chief Buthelezi's Inkatha movement, which has intimidated and killed black radicals in Natal, is likely to figure in any such deal. Some of Worral's big financial backers are powerful Natal sugar barons who also bankroll Buthelezi.

The fact that the only split of any significance has opened the left of the National Party indicates the success of Botha's recent strategy. His major concern has been to undermine the radical black resistance movement, and to court disenchanted white voters. Repressive measures under the state of emergency have largely achieved this aim. Co-opting middle class blacks and satisfying foreign opinion will just have to wait until later.

'NEW NAT' DENIS WORRAL

The media hype surrounding the election campaign is irrelevant to South Africa's black majority. The New Nats' campaign has changed nothing. Black people still face systematic police and army brutality in townships fenced with razor-wire. Thousands of activists remain in jail suffering torture and starvation.

Chris Heunis, Botha's minister of constitutional development and planning, has paid little attention to the demands of Worral, his election opponent. Heunis has opted for old-fashioned, up-front racism to pull out the vote. He has ordered the removal of 10 000 residents from a 'black spot' at Oukasie in the Northern Transvaal, to keep conservative whites happy. The 10 000 will be dumped and left to starve in nearby Bophutatswana homeland.

The essentially trivial differences between Nationalists and New Nats confirm that the options open to South African capitalists are limited.

The international banking community accepts this, and has not allowed its disquiet at Botha's latest acts of repression to interfere with the smooth rescheduling of South Africa's debts. Apartheid's sham elections remain a contest between different brands of racism. In pre-election South Africa the real fight is still between the angry black masses and a white minority desperate to hang on to its privileges and power by any means possible. All the rest is just shadow-boxing.

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

'THRASH THEM 'TIL THEY CRACK'

While the media focus on phoney white elections, the apartheid regime terrorises its real opponents in the black resistance movement under the nine-month old state of emergency.

• CENSORSHIP

Draconian censorship makes it hard to gauge the true extent of repression, or to report on resistance. The authorities admit that emergency rules muzzling press coverage of security action simply aim to stop people hearing about the unrest.

The state is also organising a disinformation campaign. Security police put out fake pamphlets to incite violence between black groups. The Bureau for Information alleged that seven highschool students recently murdered at KwaMashu, near Durban, were killed by the organisers of a township school boycott. Locally everyone knows that state-backed Inkatha vigilantes were responsible.

• OFFICIAL REPRESSION

Most townships are under permanent police and army occupation. Many areas have curfews after dark and activity on the streets is discouraged by gun-toting patrols who are free to open fire. The government refuses to name all those in detention under emergency rules. Some reckon that a third of the estimated 30 000 detainees are children. The security forces have cracked down on black funeral protests, invading churches to drive mourners away.

• TORTURE

'You thrash (a prisoner) until he cracks. It is right to beat men and go crazy.' Security policeman Nikodemus Nampala told a Windhoek court what it means to help apartheid's police with their enquiries. He described how one captain ripped a medical drip out of a prisoner's arm before a lengthy bout of questioning, and how a wounded man was flogged with a hosepipe. Asked if there was anyone in authority he could complain to about this, Nampala replied: 'For what purpose, your honour?'

Fakazi Mabaso needed emergency surgery after being kicked in the testicles by his interrogators and forced to eat his own hair. Prison warders have teargassed detainees at least 20 times since July 1985. Three political prisoners were hanged last year.

• ATTACKS ON THE UNIONS

When local whites complained about a black miners' meeting at Grootvlei near Springs, Transvaal, police broke it up with gunfire, killing one and wounding eight. At Mpophomeni township in Natal 200 thugs from Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha murdered three Metal and Allied Workers Union militants involved in the BTR-Sarmcol strike, while police held back local people.

Management has tried to divide and rule militant black miners on a traditional tribal basis. Last year 124 miners died in so-called faction fights fomented by management.

• REMOVALS

Botha promised to end the policy of removing 'surplus' black workers from white areas and dumping them in the homelands. Now the regime has perfected a new system of removal, combining trespass and anti-squatting laws, land privatisation and the consolidation of 'black spots' into homelands. Forced removals are called 'orderly urbanisation, slum clearance, rural development and the clearing of health and fire hazards' in the newspeak of reformed apartheid. In Langa 4000 have been moved to a tent town at Uitenhage, after their leaders were locked up.

• VIGILANTES

Massacres like that of the seven teenage activists hacked and shot to death at KwaMashu have become commonplace. Roaming bands of thugs and vigilantes have attacked and killed black militants while police turn a blind eye or lend a hand. On January's Bloody Sunday in Uitenhage's KwaNobuhle township, 4000 vigilantes led by a police 'Hippo' vehicle killed two youths and burned the houses of 10 activists. Kidnapped activists described being taken to a house 'with blood all over the walls' to be interrogated. Many vigilantes wore the blue uniforms of the government's new 'kitskops' who may receive just three weeks' training before being given shotguns and let loose on the local populace.

Behind the election, the apartheid state is using brute force to keep South Africa's sham democracy intact. For now the racists have the upper hand. But they have learnt before that fierce repression must eventually lead to more determined resistance.

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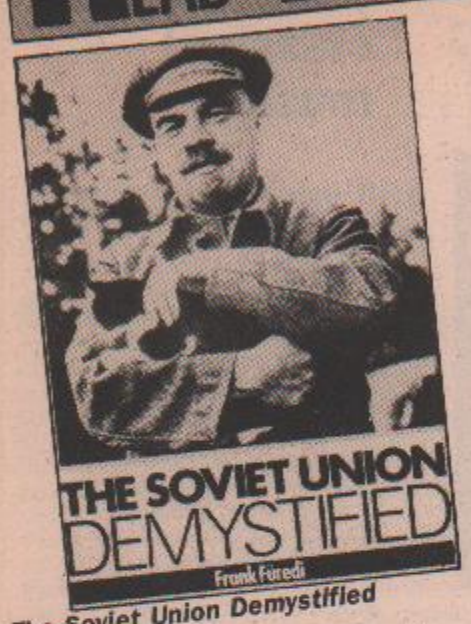

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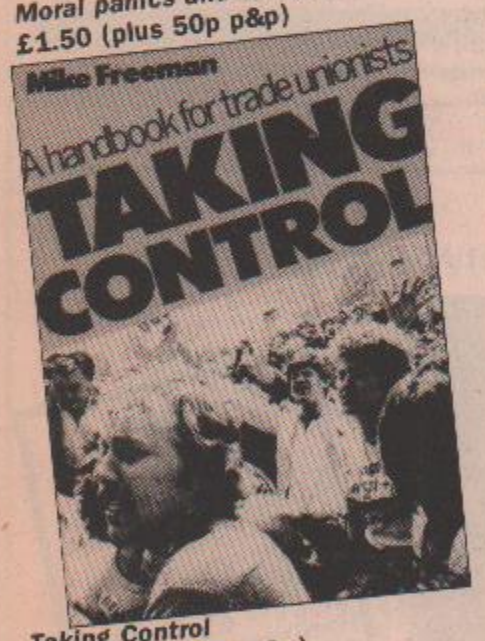

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● THE GLASGOW DETECTIVE

Restless spirit

William McIlvanney, *Laidlaw* and *The Papers of Tony Veitch,* Coronet, £2.25 each

These books were recommended to me by a Glasgow trade unionist who drifted into the city's gangland during a long spell of unemployment. He knew the score, and McIlvanney's writing lives up to the good things he said about it.

Glaswegian Jack Laidlaw is the central character in both books. Laidlaw is a police detective, but don't let that put you off. If this is just another police thug, then the Glasgow nod is a way to say 'yes'. McIlvanney sums up Laidlaw when he has another policeman describe him as a 'pig in the middle. He doesn't know which side he's on'. This isn't surprising, for in Jack Laidlaw's Glasgow the mean streets are all blind alleys. Like Philip Marlowe, another cipher for a grim survey of the state of contemporary society, another hero who won't bend his own values to conform with it, Laidlaw can't quite figure it all out.

Yet McIlvanney is not just a Chandler or Hammett copyist. Whereas the classic American crime-writers used Los Angeles and San Francisco as a backdrop for their tightly-knit stories, McIlvanney puts his urban landscape centre stage. The first line of *Tony Veitch* sets the tone: 'It was Glasgow on a Friday night, the city of the stare.' Even the coldest procedures of city life are made to yield their secret truths: 'Through the double glass doors of the police mortuary come those with a grief to collect. They take away the offal of a death, its privateness, the irrelevant uniqueness of a person, the parts that no one else has a use for. The court will keep only what matters, the way in which the person became an event.' The real hero of these books however is that part of 'Glesca' which refuses to accept that a person's uniqueness is irrelevant. The grit, graft and garish humour with which Glasgow's people respond to the brutalising restrictions of their environment, are obviously a tonic to McIlvanney, and he has made Laidlaw their personification.

The failure of left-wing politics in Scotland is one of McIlvanney's starting points. The legacy of Stalinism in Glasgow leads him, through Laidlaw, to dismiss Marx as 'middle-class, with less balls than a bumble-bee'. As a result, although the author touches on political issues like anti-gay prejudice and the role of the police, he's not equipped to confront them. 'Convinced that the nearest he would get to a destination would be when they pulled his eyelids down', all Laidlaw can do is keep up his restless running. These books are still a great read, if only for the fun of trying to keep up with him.

Andrew Calcutt

● SWP ON AIDS

'Too little too late'

Duncan Blackie and Ian Taylor, *Aids: The Socialist View,* Socialist Workers' Party, 90p

This pamphlet has been written by people who want to fight Victorian values and to stand up for gay rights. Blackie and Taylor view Aids as a political problem and they try to tell the truth. The cover blurb explains: 'This pamphlet aims to cut through the hysteria and misinformation surrounding Aids.' The authors review the literature on the effects of the disease, the discovery of the virus and the course of the epidemic. They look at the situation in Africa, the complacency of the Conservative government here and the problem of Aids in the workplace.

In conclusion, Blackie and Taylor outline their belief in the *ultimate* importance of the socialist revolution. In the meantime, however, they note 'The government does appear to be spending more each month on Aids — yet it is always too little too late, and cuts elsewhere weaken its effectiveness.' They agree with the government's description of the Aids epidemic *today*. This sloppy admission is the key to the pamphlet's failure. Instead of looking at the claims of the government and the medical establishment and setting them beside the hard statistical and epidemiological evidence, Blackie and Taylor promote the hysteria whipped up by everybody from British ministers to the World Health Organisation.

Against all the evidence in the United States and in Britain this pamphlet seeks to deny the importance of the male homosexual transmission of the disease. The authors support the government's assertion that everyone is at risk. They ignore the fact that 88 per cent of those hit by the disease in Britain are homosexual men. They ignore the fact that in five years only five people have contracted the disease in Britain by way of heterosexual transmission. They ignore the fact that Aids in North America and Europe is an extremely rare and an extremely difficult disease to catch, and that it is likely to remain so. After accepting the consensus that Aids constitutes a national health emergency, Blackie and Taylor go on to accept the idea that safe-sex and the widespread use of condoms is the only solution to the 'crisis'.

This pamphlet entirely misses the point. It is not the unpopularity of the condom that is the problem but the fact that the people most at risk — gay men — lead lives that are disfigured by the fear and the shame of the closet. Most gay men are unable to conduct their sexual encounters or relationships in circumstances conducive to the practice of safe sex. *Aids: the Socialist View* fails to distinguish fact from fiction. It fails to demonstrate the connection between the growing pogrom against gays and the real course of the epidemic, and it fails to draw out the way that the oppression of gay men seriously undermines effective action against this rare but fatal disease.

The SWP has tried to take the heat off promiscuity in general and off gays in particular. In practice its cavalier approach to the detail of this subject will simply promote the panic. That approach results from the SWP's unserious attitude to tackling reactionary ideas in the working class. It is complacent in the belief that such ideas will ebb away in the course of industrial struggle and the socialist revolution. In the meantime Blackie and Taylor can only provide us with moral assertions about defending gay rights rather than political conclusions that flow from a scientific analysis of the problem.

Don Milligan

● THIRTIES SPAIN, EIGHTIES NICARAGUA

Then and now

James Pettifer, *Needles of light,* Foco Novo Theatre Company, Riverside Studios
Salman Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smiles: a Nicaraguan Journey,* Picador, £2.95

DORIEN THOMAS, HARRY LANDIS (POINTING) AND HILARY TOWNLEY IN NEEDLES OF LIGHT

In February 1937 the British battalion of the International Brigade was decimated in the Jarama valley holding the Madrid-Valencia road for three weeks against the fascist advance on the Spanish capital. From the East End of London, the Red Clyde, the Little Moscows of the Welsh valleys and the Lancashire weaving towns they had come to help the cream of the European working class fight fascism in Spain. The Spanish civil war still exerts a powerful hold on the imagination of working class fighters — for the waste as well as for the heroism. While workers died at the front, the Republican government and the Communist Party handed the factories and land back to their former owners. Those who destroyed the revolution also lost the war.

In *Needles of Light* James Pettifer recreates the Spanish experience through the adventures at Jarama of three volunteers from the Welsh valleys, and through the use of the *pastorale* the Basque form of the medieval mystery play. On the political front he is sadly let down by his sources. Pettifer is also editor of *Cockburn on Spain* and it is this material which determines his narrative. Claud Cockburn was the *Daily Worker* correspondent Frank Pitcairn. His piece of 11 May 1937 was typical: 'Pitcairn Lifts Barcelona Veil. Trotskyist Rising a Signal.' He argued that Catalonia was flooded with German and Italian agents who were in league with the Trotskyist POUM to sow disorder and bloodshed and bring down the republic, just as the 'Trotskyist swine' had conspired against the Soviet Union. He filed his 'on-the-spot' report from Valencia — 200 miles down the coast.

MARRED

It would be well-nigh impossible not to stir some emotion when the heroism of the volunteer is the subject of a play, and some fine gallows humour and colloquial dialogue contribute to that. The attractive colour, ritual and movement of the *pastorale* also repays in part the brave attempt to appropriate that form. But the absolutes of good and evil embodied in the medieval Moors and Christians can only be transposed to the Spanish civil war by virtue of a simple Stalinist reading of that event. It is this which mars the piece.

For many on the left Nicaragua has been the Spain of the eighties. It has been viewed in the same romantic and rose-tinted way as many have viewed the Spanish civil war. We can be thankful then that Salman Rushdie keeps his senses about him. As a good liberal, he has to wring his conscience about whether he can support an illiberal regime, but on the whole *The Jaguar Smiles* is a well written and perceptive book. It is not a political study but an imaginative account of his impressions of Nicaraguan society. He shows for example how its symbols have been metamorphosed. In the murals and songs of the Nicaraguan people Christ no longer suffers for the redemption of humankind in the future, but is a worker, peasant or guerrilla who fights for the people now. No wonder the Catholic church so promptly developed its liberation theology.

He covers Nicaraguan society, from the calypsos of the Caribbean to the astonishing poets who are both leading supporters of the regime and mass attractions. In the process he begins to uncover some of the internal problems of Nicaragua, such as the refusal to challenge the chauvinism against women that is now embedded in the constitution. He also reveals its strengths, such as the land distribution that gives Nicaraguans such a stake in the future that 32 co-operative members held off 400 Contras for three hours until reinforcements arrived.

There are many telling parallels with Spain in the thirties, not least the heroism of the people, and the celebration of the cause here in Britain, even if now the international volunteers are only asked to pick coffee. Let us hope that the striking lesson of that earlier experience — that you can't defeat reaction by accommodating to it — will not be lost on this occasion.

Alan Harding

LETTERS

The Red Front

Frank Richards' contribution to the 'Party Page' (20 March) makes some interesting points. He says that 'there are many who will stick with Labour through thick and thin'. This seems to be the main problem that we have. Despite getting ready agreement from many Labour supporters on the policies of *The Red Front*, we are finding it very difficult to convince them that now is the time to build a revolutionary alternative.

It would be interesting to read how other supporters are dealing with this deep-seated loyalty that is expressed in terms of history, tradition and the treachery of deserting a sinking ship. My own view is that in the short-term we should ask such people to join us in a fight around one or more aspects of *The Red Front's* policies. This will have the generally positive effect of increasing the numbers of people fighting for basic working class interests, and it will also give the party the opportunity of drawing out the contradiction between fighting for working class interests and voting Labour.

Melanie Benson
Coventry

Engineering the accounts

In the latest Amalgamated Engineering Union journal Gavin Laird, the general secretary, investigates why the union is so weak. For Laird, being an elected union representative is like being an accountant — it's all about balancing the books. He notes that membership has declined from 1.2 million in 1980 to 857 559 in 1986. The union's running costs have increased, HQ staff had a 53 per cent wage increase during 1986 and legal action by a former member has meant that the union is now obliged to pay '75p a week to unemployed members and members on certified sickness'.

Those are his excuses for the failure of the AEU. These are the executive council's proposals for rationalisation: a reduction of full-time officials by 33 per cent by voluntary severance and early retirement. Those that keep their jobs will get cheaper, smaller cars. Branches will be 'merged' if they have less than 100 members, arrears of 26 weeks or more or they regularly get their contribution books in late. As a further incentive to improve the cash flow problem those paying their dues by direct debit will be entitled to a discount.

With a union like this who needs managers? Their solution to get out of decline must have been taken out of the CBI dustbin, because it stinks of modern capitalist exploitation of the workers.

GAVIN LAIRD

Laird blames the crisis on high wage rises, but the staff have gone on strike this week saying they never got their rise. Laird does not mention the real need to strengthen the union by fighting for our jobs, wages and conditions. He attacks the left for criticising him when 'all those with the best interests of the AEU should come to the defence of the union'. But he means defending the officials' machine, not the members' interests. Laird says the AEU is a union with 'substantial financial reserves and a considerable property portfolio' and is 'determined to remain so'. He wants to protect the union machine at the expense of the working class he represents.

AEU steward
Glasgow

The right not to reproduce

I think the emphasis in last week's Propaganda War about Jeanette was wrong. Revolutionaries should not be demanding women's right to bear children and to end state interference in women's right to reproduce. Until we have childcare, abortion and contraceptive facilities freely available the main problem we face is the right *not* to reproduce. The limited rights to abortion which exist are under attack, from the Bishop of Birmingham's attempt to reduce the time limit to an Oxford student's attempt to stop his girlfriend 'killing his baby'.

Until we live in a society where women's oppression no longer exists we have to concentrate on women's right to abortion on demand rather than the more general demand for control over our reproductive organs. In the case of Jeanette we should demand the state takes responsibility for her and those like her who are being dumped back into the community to be looked after, no doubt, by their mothers.

Alison Corrigan
Newcastle

In defence of classical music

It was with some alarm that I read that anyone 'after angst' should flock to the London Sinfonetta's current 'contemporary' music tour (reviews, *tns* 10). I have for some time been aware of the confused and prejudiced views held by many British socialists on Western classical music, imbuing it with special 'bourgeois' qualities while praising the latest offering from the Style Council etc. Now we read that only the psychotic can possibly endure the classical music of the twentieth century, as it 'portrays' capitalist society in deadly decline.

It is ironic that the ruling class is forced to fall back on the works described for its most public concerts. Maxwell-Davies' music-theatre pieces of the sixties are the last British works to cause any degree of sensation. The British bourgeoise has never had any time for contemporary music as such; its unsentimental puritanism earned Britain the title 'the land without music' in the nineteenth century, when the only music it could tolerate was that which glorified the plunder of its colonies or the mystification, through religion, of the masses.

It is unsatisfactory to see classical music as merely a reflection of its surroundings, as a barometer of the preoccupations of the ruling class, although the works which usually get performed are of that nature. Schoenberg's great achievement was not his response to the general crisis, but his exploration of the historical responsibility of the contemporary composer. His flirtation with Marxism ended in the 1890s when he declared he was 'a bourgeois'. However, his thought retained the seeds of a musical language which could both serve the needs of those engaging in the struggle to overthrow capitalist society, and point to a musical imagination freed from 'angst'.

Chris Talbot
Brighton

Aids:1

I would like to take issue with Nik Corrigan's letter about the government's Aids campaign (letters, *tns* 11). He argues that the safe sex campaign should be supported in principle because everyone is vulnerable, no matter how low the statistical probability. And that any other position 'dodges the issue'. Surely all the RCP does when it points out how improbable it is that anyone outside the high-risk categories will contract Aids is put the whole thing in perspective?

Is it not Nik Corrigan who dodges the issue? We live in a society where people are far more likely to die of heart disease, lung cancer etc than Aids. If that is true then why does the government wage a high profile, extravagant and intense media campaign over the danger of Aids? Its real motivation is to reinforce the traditional moral values underpinning the British capitalist state.

Nik Corrigan's primary concern is to save lives. But how many lives will be lost as the Aids campaign, with its exacerbation of anti-gay hysteria, forces many gays back into the closet, thereby further undermining the effectiveness of the public health measures necessary to combat the spread of Aids?

J Hulland
Greenwich

Aids:2

I am a nurse, and have been involved in lots of discussion with healthworkers about how to solve the problem of Aids. While everyone has an opinion on the matter, they all divorce the issue of Aids from the fight for lesbian and gay rights.

Our union (Nupe) campaign stresses that the government is doing 'too little, too late' — ie that the safe sex information campaign is not explicit enough and that resources needed for the care and treatment of suffers are inadequate. Neither of these approaches will stop the spread of Aids, causing a tragic loss of life, especially among young gay men.

'Safe sex' is not an option for the vast majority of gay men — the group most at risk from the Aids virus. Because of widespread discrimination in society many gay men are forced into having sex in a clandestine, furtive manner. The government's campaign has whipped up anti-homosexual prejudice and helped to preserve the oppressive conditions which leave gay men open to infection by HIV. The fight for lesbian and gay rights is inseparable from solving the problem of Aids. Health workers should organise themselves to support it.

Nikki
Nupe steward
London

Lessons for teachers

I work in a South London school. Two weeks ago the Labour-run Inner London Education Authority launched its 'redeployment' scheme only a few days after Baker had imposed the Tory government's pay and conditions package on teachers nationally. Last Tuesday, the divisional inspector was invited to attend a full staff meeting at the school. Although he is a Labour Party activist in Lewisham, he was representing our employer.

He made it crystal clear that Ilea was determined to impose this redeployment scheme (recognised by most teachers as a redundancy scheme) whatever its impact on the staff and pupils. I was shocked by the response of the staff. Their main argument was to present the school as deserving special treatment. There was an implication that bigger schools could afford to lose staff more easily. They pointed to other sections of Ilea — such as administration — that were more wasteful and more trimmable.

I argued that there was no point in discussing how to fight redeployment and redundancies with the employers' representative, since Ilea's priorities are clear. Ilea has demonstrated its commitment to teachers' jobs by hiring a personnel director who made hundreds redundant at Fords. I said we'd have more success if we got together as employees and discussed how to fight the redeployment plan with other Ilea staff. It is obvious that as far as Ilea is concerned there are no special cases and we will get nowhere pretending that we are one.

I'd be interested to know if there are any Ilea staff who would like to get together and discuss how we can overcome the conservative and sectional approach in most schools.

Wendy
South London

Pandora Anderson

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.

THE PARTY PAGE

POLITICAL COMMITTEE REPORT-BACK

The March meeting of the Political Committee of the RCP was devoted to an assessment of the party's work during the first quarter of this year. Much of the discussion concentrated on the political climate and the party's progress in the present conditions.

Reports to the Political Committee indicated that the crisis in the working class has reached new dimensions. The collapse of the Labour Party during the past three months has confirmed the implausibility of the traditional solutions on offer. Kinnock's shift to the right and his attacks on the left have gone unchallenged. It appears that in the short-run the main casualty of Labour's crisis is the left. No matter how ruthlessly Kinnock attacks the left — and no matter how much ground he concedes to the Tories on issues like lesbian and gay rights, defence, or law and order — he can still count on the loyalty of all sections of the Labour Party.

The left has too much at stake in the Labour Party to stand up and fight. In any case, it lacks an alternative to Kinnock. It has been reduced to petulant outbursts against 'Kinnock's betrayals' followed by a series of diplomatic silences. One consequence of the left's subservience to Labour is its inability to organise and maintain an active profile. It even lacks distinct issues to fight around. The dearth of left-wing initiatives, demonstrations and campaigns is striking.

Looking at the implications of this development, the Political Committee noted that in the long-run the collapse of the left is not a bad thing as it opens the way for a rethink of strategy and tactics. On the negative side, however, the left's retreat helps to foster a mood of confusion and passivity in the working class. It has the effect of widening the gulf that separates the minority of activists from the passive majority. This point was elaborated by PC members in the discussion. Many workers will take the collapse of the traditional left as confirmation that Kinnock's realism is right. Under these conditions our task is to challenge the widespread view that it is not possible to fight.

During a discussion of our activities PC members agreed that the party has made some important gains in the past three months. We have maintained a good campaigning dynamic and succeeded in forging a relationship with new groups of workers. Party activities are now mobilising more people than at any time in the RCP's history.

The gains made through strengthening the party's campaigning work have to be put in perspective. PC members pointed out that mobilising support for the party's activities is only a first step to winning the political arguments. In the present climate, even more so than in recent years, improving our ability to win the political arguments must be the priority of party work. The PC felt that we need to put more emphasis on building support for *The Red Front* in the period ahead.

Concentrating the party's work around *The Red Front* can force supporters to tackle the crisis of leadership in the working class.

Between Kinnock and *The Red Front* there are no other alternatives. Those on the left who are disturbed by the direction in which Kinnock is steering the Labour Party can do one of two things. They can follow the Socialist Workers' Party's example and denounce Kinnock but campaign for a Labour government. This approach fails to follow through the logic of the criticism. It has the character of an ineffectual outburst and does not pretend to offer a solution. The other left option is to suffer Kinnock in silent anger. This approach is a recognition of paralysis and an admission of defeat. *The Red Front* constitutes not a criticism, nor a denunciation, but a political and organisational alternative. Criticisms of Labour's betrayals which lack organisational consequences concede everything to Kinnock.

The March meeting of the Political Committee resolved that in the period ahead the emphasis of the party's work should be on politicising supporters to win the arguments for *The Red Front*. We want supporters to take a lead in organising discussions on *The Red Front* among their friends, in the unions and at the workplace. We need a greater emphasis on campaigning around *The Red Front* if we are to win workers to the conviction that despite Labour's collapse it is both *possible* and *necessary* to fight. This is the argument that we have to win.

Frank Richards

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
BRISTOL: Thursday 9 April, 7.30pm, Shepherds Hall, Old Market
COVENTRY: Thursday 9 April, 7.30pm, West Indian Centre, Spon Street
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
MANCHESTER: Tuesday 7 April, 7.30pm, Black Lion, Blackfriars Street
NEWCASTLE: Friday 24 April, St John's Church Hall, Granger Street
OXFORD: Wednesday 8 April, 8pm, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes Street
SHEFFIELD: Thursday 2 April, 7.30pm, SCAU, West Street

DEBATE

THE LEFT AFTER GREENWICH

JOHN McDONNELL (LABOUR PARTY)

MARK PERRYMAN (COMMUNIST PARTY)

ANNE BURTON (RCP)

THURSDAY 2 APRIL 7.30PM HOLBORN LIBRARY THEOBALDS ROAD, EC1

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SCOTTISH WORKERS CONTINUE OCCUPATION

Ceri Tully

UNION BUREAUCRATS AND CHURCH LEADERS HAVE DRAGGED CAT STRIKERS BEHIND THEIR DEAD-END STRATEGY

DEFEND CATERPILLAR STRIKERS

On Monday Caterpillar workers fighting for jobs voted by a majority of six to defy a court order and continue their occupation of the Uddingston plant. ***Ceri Tully*** *reports*

'They're taking the jobs and now they're after my pension. Caterpillar have treated us dirty.' Caterpillar strikers like Big Tam Weir are bitter, but determined. Eleven weeks ago Cat workers occupied the tractor plant at Uddingston near Glasgow, after their American bosses sprung a surprise closure plan. Last week Caterpillar got a court order against the occupation. Lanarkshire sheriffs left 808 letters at the factory gates, warning strikers that they would be individually liable if the occupation continued. Just for good measure, the injunction called for the return of the Pink Panther — the tractor made during the occupation and donated to War on Want. Strikers had already been told they were sacked. Despite this mounting pressure, on Monday they voted by 368-362 to continue their occupation.

Cat strikers have hung on to the advantage of controlling the factory and the expensive equipment inside. But the decreasing majority in favour of staying put indicates the danger of growing resignation among some strikers.

This problem stems from the strike leaders' strategy.

The Cat unions have sought to play down the fight for active solidarity from the thousands of workers supporting the dispute, and to play up their broad-based campaign with Scottish dignitaries against the American employer. By emphasising the importance of forming a sort of Scottish front with local Tories, bishops, top union bureaucrats and businessmen, the officials have reduced the working class to a subsidiary role in the struggle for jobs. This passive approach has given scope for a conservative mood to develop among less militant strikers.

COURTING FAVOURS

When Lord Justice Clyde signed the court order against the strikers, Cat convenor John Brannan expressed disappointment that a Scottish judge had sided with a US multinational, and said that strikers should withdraw from the plant if police arrived to enforce the order. Brannan's reaction to the court order resulted from the Joint Occupation Committee approach of seeking allies in the establishment for a campaign to defend Scottish industry. Union officials have lobbied parliament, paid court to Tory Scottish minister Malcolm Rifkind, and, even as late as last Saturday, told strikers to shut up and listen to Tory MPs who turned up at rallies. They were disappointed when Lord Clyde left his kilt at home and found in favour of the company. But they should have expected nothing else.

Clyde, Rifkind and the rest act not as defenders of the Scottish nation, but as representatives of the British capitalist class.

They may be sensitive about the impact of a factory closure in a hard-hit region. But they accept the ultimate logic of the profit system. The most they were ever prepared to offer Cat workers was the possibility of a slimmed-down, more efficient firm that would save some jobs for those prepared to work harder for less. Once the bosses' law entered the fray, it was inevitable that they would side with the employers against the working class.

The unions have discovered that, to win sympathy from establishment figures, you have to abide by their rules. This excludes the possibility of mobilising militant action against the employers' law from other workers. At Monday's mass meeting, Cat convenor Brannan made no mention of fighting for solidarity action from the strike's supporters. He insisted that Cat workers would not break the law, but would 'twist' it to their advantage. But we cannot 'twist' Tory laws or reactionary judges into defending jobs.

A dead-end strategy of courting favours from the capitalist class can only further undermine the strikers' spirits.

Cat militants want to dig in. 'If the police set foot in the plant, we should line up the tractors and bulldoze them,' was one engineer's expression of the Cat workers' will to fight. His attitude is echoed by militants in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, thousands of whom marched with the Cat strikers on Saturday. Many more have given cash support to keep the struggle going. You can see hundreds wearing badges supporting the strike on the streets of Scottish cities. Now this sympathy must be turned into active support to win back the initiative — and fast.

REACH OUT

Rank and file strikers must take it upon themselves to ensure that all the badge-wearers and strike-fund contributors turn their passive, individual support into active, working class solidarity. They must organise blacking of Caterpillar products, and fight for solidarity action — including physical defence — if police attack the occupation. They can also reach out to unite with other workers fighting for jobs, like the women sacked by Ardbride products in Ardrossan.

It is essential for workers in other Cat plants to join the Uddingston strikers. During the occupation, the corridors of Uddingston have been lined with messages of support. Now is the time to put those messages into practice. The alternative, of pinning our hopes on union and Labour Party bureaucrats, Tories and judges, can only lead to the same end as the last big 'broad-based' Scottish campaign around the Gartcosh steelworks — defeat and closure.

DEFEND KIRKBY UNEMPLOYED CENTRE

BUILD THE CAMPAIGN, NOT THE LABOUR PARTY

'We have no alternative but to fight, to fight hard and to fight now.' Tony Boyle, one of the founders of the Kirkby Unemployed Centre, was addressing a meeting called last week in response to the Labour council's plans to cut the centre's funding by 55 per cent. Nearly 150 people came along and agreed to protest at the next meeting of the council's finance committee.

Coordinator Christine Davidson said that the centre was a democratic and independent organisation which puts the council to shame. Welfare rights officer Paul Cosgrave explained that 75 per cent of Kirkby households have used the centre. Speakers acknowledged that the cuts were a political attack on a centre with a record of campaigning for the unemployed.

Tony Boyle pointed out that a Kinnock government would not solve the problems of the unemployed. Its modest job-creation plans wouldn't touch Kirkby, and anyway would be based on Tory-style cheap labour schemes.

The centre would be needed as much under a Labour government as it is now.

But while everyone at the meeting agreed on the urgency of taking on the Labour council, some speakers argued that the place to fight was inside the Labour Party. They called on people to join the local Labour Party, so that next year they could deselect some of the councillors who voted to cut the centre's budget while protecting their own allowances.

Revolutionary Communist Party supporters argued against this idea. They pointed out that it would mean converting the anti-cuts campaign into a recruitment drive for the very party which had displayed such contempt for the unemployed in Kirkby. At a time when Labour was showing its true colours and supporting the system against the working class, left-wing activists who pursued such a strategy would only be reinforcing illusions in the radical potential of the Labour Party.

The place to fight the cuts effectively, our supporters argued, was not in council chambers or Labour Party committee rooms, but within the organised working class.

They proposed that unemployment centre supporters should ask council workers to take solidarity action against the Labour group, by refusing to process the cuts and keeping the centre in working order whatever their Labour employers decreed.

Meet at Kirkby Unemployed Centre, 5.30pm on Thursday 2 April. March down to finance committee meeting at the Kirkby Suite.