

tms

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party • 16 January 1987 • 30p

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**Marching
under
rank
and file
banners**



David Koumte

FRENCH RAILWORKERS HAVE SHOWN THE WAY

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the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly • 16 January 1987 • No 2

Cold comfort from Kinnock

'Nobody with a conscience votes Conservative anyway,' Norman Tebbit is reported to have told the cabinet. The Tory Party chairman denies it but, as an anonymous cabinet colleague remarked, 'the story doesn't strike me as implausible in the least.' Tebbit's comments confirm that Thatcher's Britain is a bitter and nasty place, run by bigots whose arrogant contempt for those they rule over knows no bounds.

It is a place where Tory policies have turned Jack Frost into a mass murderer. Last winter 50 000 elderly people died because they could not afford to keep warm on their pitiful pensions. The latest attack of freezing weather has made parts of the country colder than ever before. In response the Tories have changed the social security rules, to make it harder than ever for pensioners to get special cold weather allowances.

Thatcher's Britain is a place where young lives, too, are expendable if they interfere with the requirements of the system. On his nineteenth birthday last Saturday, Mike Delaney was knocked down and killed by a hit-and-run driver in East London. The police were on hand, but they let the vehicle drive on. It was a TNT juggernaut speeding away from striking print workers outside Fortress Wapping, loaded with copies of Murdoch's *Sun* and *Times*. Like the pony express, the scab press must get through.

Thatcher's Britain is a place where deception is official government policy. From the City of London to the Manpower Services Commission, the brightest sparks which the establishment can produce (dim though they be), are devoting all their energies to fiddling the figures. A confidential document just issued by the MSC instructs job centres to forget about helping people find real work, and concentrate on conning the unemployed millions into joining slave-labour schemes or attending phoney courses on how to write a letter.

LABOUR'S FAILINGS

Most sinister of all, Thatcher's Britain is a place where police batons and prison bars have become the authorities' answer to all opposition. Jailed miner Terry French has just started his third year in prison for fighting for his job. When Scottish prisoners protested against brutality last week, the Tebbit-loving *Sun* had a blunt solution: 'End the riot now by sending in the SAS with guns blazing — and if prisoners die, then so be it.' 'Send in the SAS' is just about the only 'solution' the Tories have left to keep their system under control. It is no wonder that Edward Windsor doesn't feel up to the big job which the armed agents of the ruling class have on their hands in the years ahead.

Yet despite all the hatred which Thatcher has stirred up over her eight years in office, the latest opinion polls reveal that most people living in key marginal constituencies would still vote Conservative tomorrow. This has little to do with their lack of consciences, and a lot to do with the failings of the official opposition. Kinnock's Labour Party cannot take advantage of people's anger against the Tories because most of its policies look like ragged Tory cast-offs. On every important issue, Kinnock has bowed to pressure from the establishment and followed Thatcher's trail towards the right flank of British politics (see pages 6 and 7).

Labour's failure to break through the 35-38 per cent barrier in the polls is starting to cause panic among Kinnock's loyal supporters. 'How unfair life can be' writes top Kinnockite analyst Peter Kellner in the latest *New Statesman*. He lists all the moves, from expelling Militant to accepting secret ballots in trade unions, which Kinnock has made at the behest of the media, and whines that people still won't believe that Labour would make a 'credible government'. Kellner is careful to dismiss as 'absurd' any notion that Kinnock's ideas are too right-wing. The only other conclusion that can be drawn is that Labour's programme is still not moderate or 'respectable' enough. The party's march to the right seems set to accelerate as the general election draws nearer.

Every speech and statement the Labour leadership makes confirms Kinnock's willingness to take his lead from the Tories. He even explains his minor differences with the government in terms which any Tory could understand. Last weekend, Kinnock sought to justify Labour's proposals for small tax increases on the grounds that the money was needed 'for the defence of our country, for the security of our people, for a decent anti-crime and disorder regime'. From Fortress Falklands to Fortress Wapping, Kinnock has volunteered to take Thatcher's place on the ramparts of British capitalism.

WARMING UP

While the working class suffers under the Tories, and Kinnock struggles to catch up with Thatcher, the Labour left's silence in every political debate is deafening. The only alternative the left can see to five more years of misery under Thatcher is the election of a Labour government, whatever its policies. Thus left wingers have opted to keep their heads down or, in the words of one of their journals, 'bite our tongues'. No indignity is too great for the left to suffer in the cause of a Labour victory. It even accuses those who refuse to campaign for Kinnock's pro-capitalist programme of 'aiding the Tories'.

The Revolutionary Communist Party's aim is not to aid the Tories, but to destroy every evil that their system visits upon its victims. That cannot be done by supporting a party which is committed to taking up wherever Thatcher leaves off. The left can point out that Labour's paper policies on employment or defence differ from the Tories'. But such differences don't matter, given that both parties share a commitment to saving British capitalism at our expense. There may be more than one way to skin a cat, but the method used is of no interest to the cat. Kinnock's scalpel would cut just as deeply into the working class as Thatcher's.

Those looking to end the winter of Thatcher's rule can take cold comfort from the official opposition in the run-up to the general election. We are going to have to take it upon ourselves to warm up the political climate in the months ahead. The RCP has launched a platform for working class unity, as a focus for bringing together all who want to turn the heat on Thatcher, and are not prepared to accept that Kinnock's threadbare coat provides any protection worth having. The basic demands of the platform are outlined on the centre pages of this week's *tns*. We ask any group or individual who supports them to back our campaign, and come in from the cold.

FRENCH RAILWORKERS



ARMS LINKED AGAINST THE BOSSES: RANK AND FILE RAILWORKERS MARCH THROUGH PARIS

A GLIMPSE OF OUR POWER

However it ends, the French railworkers' strike should be a source of inspiration to all those fighting to defend wages and working conditions

As we go to press, the outcome of the French railworkers' strike and the solidarity action by public sector workers remains uncertain. Last week the government and media launched a coordinated disinformation campaign, claiming that the rail strike was collapsing. Their claims were answered by fresh strikes in the electricity, metro and gas services, which caused long power cuts and stopped six out of 10 trains on the Paris underground. Meanwhile, the French employers' federation got more urgent in its pleas for the government to do something to get supplies moving to industry.

The French authorities were forced to admit that they could not lie their way out of trouble. Instead, they came up with new pay deals for the electricity and gas workers, and a number of minor concessions on working conditions for train drivers, in an effort to divide the strikers. Whatever impact this manoeuvre makes, the strikers' resolution has clearly forced prime minister Chirac to stop playing the tough guy.

Chirac started last week saying there would be 'no negotiations', and ended it with sweet-talk. He declared that there should be 'no winners and no losers' in the dispute. The right-wing parties and press may claim that public opinion has turned against the strikers. But the workers' success in putting real pressure on the government should serve to increase the confidence of the entire working class in its ability to defend living standards. Chirac was hit on two fronts, by the railworkers' determination and the threat of a pay strike throughout the public sector. He was forced to forget all his early bluster about breaking the movement, and tried to buy it off instead.

GRASSROOTS CONTROL

The rail strike has come at a time when many workers have lost confidence in industrial action after a series of setbacks. It shows that a determined and well-organised strike movement gets results. The struggle's initial success has sent shock waves through the French establishment.

The reason for this is simple: the strike has been organised by rank and file workers, free of the restraining influence of the union bureaucracy.

Much left-wing commentary on the strike has been more towards eulogy than analysis, and has missed the main point. Some writers, impressed by the dynamism of the movement, have jumped to the delighted conclusion that we are witnessing the rebirth

of industrial militancy in Europe. Others, who apparently have never heard of a strike committee before, have dug out their copies of Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*, and discovered some quasi-revolutionary significance in the committees and mass meetings in France's rail depots. This is nonsense.

The emergence of a national strike movement outside the control of official union machines is an important departure from the established pattern of industrial struggle. But it has more to do with the parlous state of the French trade unions than with the supposedly revolutionary consciousness of French workers. The railworkers only decided to organise industrial action themselves because the rail unions refused to do so.

POLITICAL STRUGGLE

The workers launched the movement on their own and were forced to set up the machinery needed to run an effective strike. Their use of mass meetings and elected strike committees was a practical necessity, not a political principle. The conservatism of the union leaders, who refused to respond to rank and file calls for action, forced the railworkers to take control of their own struggle. Rail militants had to go out and win the arguments in favour of strike action with other workers. Before the start of the strike they launched a campaign, travelling from depot to depot to mobilise support. They continued this campaign to keep up the unity and momentum of the action.

While union officials rely on the power and authority of the union machine for their influence, the rail activists have had to rely on their ability to convince others politically.

The rail strike has had bite and dynamism because it was the product of political struggle within the working class. It has been built and run by the workers themselves, giving them a real stake in its progress. The democratic organisation of the campaign created scope for drawing more strikers into an active role in the struggle. This served to strengthen the movement, involving thousands in new political experiences. The strike has become, as all strikes should, a 'school in the class struggle'.

The railworkers have shown what can be achieved when we take control of our own struggles. Workers in Britain should keep a close eye on events across the Channel. Win, lose or draw, the French strikers have given us a glimpse of the way in which working class power can explode into national politics.

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tns: How did the strike start?

DL: The movement started from below. Small groups of workers started meeting, including members from different unions and non-union workers. The situation has got worse over the past five years and we decided it was time to do something. We'd had 14 24-hour strikes organised by the unions during the past year and achieved nothing. We decided this was getting us nowhere. We started circulating petitions about wages and conditions and about the 'grille', the new pay system they want to introduce, which would abolish automatic increments and promotion and force us to submit to individual performance assessment by management.

The small groups which began to organise, mainly on the Paris-North and South-West networks, decided that the only solution was a strike which would be controlled by the rank and file and carry on until all our demands are met. On 4 and 5 December there were two strikes on the South-West network, but they didn't get enough support. Then on 18 December the Paris-North drivers came out and after four days the strike was solid.

tns: How has the strike been organised?

DL: We are not on unlimited strike. Every day the mass assemblies discuss whether to continue the action. Our concern has been to make sure the strike remains under the control of the rank and file. All decisions are taken at the mass meetings. Then we have strike committees. They are elected and recallable at any time. Their job is to direct the strike, to draw up agendas for the mass meeting, draft leaflets, bulletins and so on.

tns: What are your demands?

DL: We demand a wage rise of F700 per month across the board to make up for what we lost during the 18-month pay freeze. Then there are the working conditions which are catastrophic. Our demands are for improvements in health and safety, more drivers, a maximum six hours night-work for rolling staff at eight hours pay, more breaks and better accommodation for drivers and so on. Then there is the 'grille' which was withdrawn by management in response to the strike. We want to have it in writing that our existing pay and promotion structure will stay.

We have also discussed, though there is no decision yet, that we want to have observers present when the negotiations eventually

take place. Another possibility would be to have them televised, like they did in Poland in the struggle for Solidarity. We want to make sure that the workers who have waged this struggle can see what is happening and respond accordingly.

tns: What have the unions done since the strike began?

DL: Today most of the unions, about 80-90 per cent, say they support the strike. But this

of course is only because of the pressure and they are manoeuvring all the time to try to regain control and get us back to work. This is one reason why the Coordination is so important. We have to be able to find out about what is going on and discuss it in the mass meetings.

For example in late December management made some offer, some minor concessions — nothing of substance — and already some of the unions called for us to go back to work. Some depots, where they had

some influence, actually did. Through the Coordination we caught wind of this and were able to pass on the information and have the whole matter discussed in the mass assemblies. The same goes for the government's disinformation campaign. Every day they have come out with figures, '40 per cent of trains running' and so on. Through the Coordination we could centralise the daily votes in the mass meetings and go back and tell people that 95 per cent were out on strike.



STANDING FIRM IN PARIS: RESOLUTE ACTION BY RANK AND FILE RAILWORKERS STOPPED CHIRAC IN HIS TRACKS

Notes from the front line

• Tuesday, 6 January

Crowds of railworkers assemble at the Montparnasse station for the demonstration organised by the Communist Party-backed union, the CGT, to coincide with the first day of solidarity action by public sector workers. A woman thrusts her pay-slip under my nose. 'That's what I get, F4000 a month, and pay F2000 rent. My husband works for the electricity board, he gets F6000. That makes F8000 for us and our two sons — one's unemployed and the other's doing military service. That's it — let's show them what we think of it!' It's about £150 a week for a family of four — except that you can knock off another £50 for the effects of inflation. It was hardly surprising this railworker's husband was probably just pulling the plug at the electricity board.

A little way on were a bunch of drivers. 'So you're from England,' said one. 'Tell us, why did the miners get defeated? We want to win. We've been out for 21 days, which is bloody long enough. We won't go back now without getting what we want — so where did they go wrong?' We discussed how many of the miners' problems were due to the strike being run by their union officials. 'Well, we usually leave it to them, too,' said another driver. 'But we can't do it now, because they won't move their arses.'

'The students, you see, that made an impact,' said a solitary-looking bloke, who turned out to be one of the few postal workers taking solidarity action. 'Everybody thought, well the government can be budged after all. I mean, nobody believed that the students, of all people, would make Chirac back down. But the little buggers did. Almost put us to shame really. That made a real impression. Then Chirac goes on telly and says that when there's tens of thousands of students on the street, you've got to make concessions — otherwise who knows what would happen. Well, you know, people didn't need telling twice. So here we are.'

At the rail depot at Ivry on the southern edge of Paris, we headed straight through

the first door and asked the first bloke in sight 'Is this the Coordination, please?' 'No!!!' came the answer. Ah, wrong door. This was the CGT depot office, a pretty spacious affair. When it was built they could not have foreseen that, in the biggest rail strike in French history, 12 solitary CGT shop stewards would sit there twiddling their thumbs and refusing to take part. Meanwhile, next door, about 40 strikers squeeze in and about 50 squeeze out of a hall the size of your living room, as one rank and file committee meeting ends and the next begins. Among them are CGT members who are part of the action. Now we could start to grasp the complexities of the French trade union movement.

• Wednesday, 7 January

Outside the Gare du Nord, railworkers were assembling for the first joint march organised by the two national committees. 'Being on the streets is important,' said one of the crowd from Creil just north of Paris. 'We have to argue a lot about this, because many believe the most important thing is always to stay at the depot, keeping up the pickets.' It reminded me of the arguments we had during the miners' strike, about whether 'picketing your own pit' or going out to win solidarity action was more important. 'Of course picketing is important,' he went on, 'but we also have to go out and be seen, to show our strength. That's why we're here, but we still have to convince a lot of others.'

Apart from a few right at the back, we could see no official union banners as the march moved off. They were all plain, painted with the names of the various depots where people had come from. As we turned into the street the chanting started:

'Open your eyes and close the telly!'
'We want, we will get total satisfaction!'
'Winning the strike, that's not possible?'
Of course it's possible!

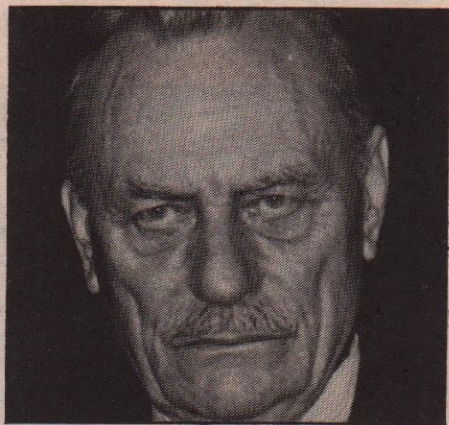
What about British railworkers? Turn to page 5

1956 CABINET MINUTES

How Tories Planned Racist Backlash

The press didn't miss a sentence from the shock Suez revelations in the 1956 cabinet minutes. But they didn't print a paragraph about top secret talks on immigration. **Joan Phillips** reports

Three times in 1956 members of the cabinet committee on colonial immigrants sat down to discuss what to do about the 'coloured invasion'. They concluded that 'steps to impose (immigration) controls would not be justified at present', because immigrant labour was still vital for the economy, and the government had yet to create a public consensus in favour of controls.



POWELL PREPARED RACIST POGROM

The shortage of cheap labour in Britain after the war dictated an open door immigration policy.

The government dispatched the likes of Enoch Powell to the West Indies to run recruitment campaigns. They shipped in black immigrants to fill second-rate jobs which white workers would not take. The cabinet committee noted that unrestricted



GOING HOME: BLACKS LEAVE BRITAIN AFTER NOTTING HILL BACKLASH

immigration made economic sense: 'From the economic point of view the nation had benefited up to the present from the arrival of coloured workers; for example coloured nurses had done much to relieve the shortage in that profession.'

In 1956 politicians saw that cutting immigration would run against the needs of the capitalist economy. But they understood that it was only a matter of time before they would be compelled to act: 'Clearly we could not absorb all the coloured immigrants who wished to come here; and eventually this

immigration would give rise to problems which would be disproportionate to the difficulties and objections to be faced in enacting legislation to control it. There seemed little doubt that some form of control would become necessary in the long run.'

The committee wanted to work out a comprehensive system of controls to be implemented when the economy no longer needed imported labour.

Public opinion was the cabinet committee's second consideration. Ministers

noted that 'there had been little public concern here over the question of coloured workers recently.' Tory leaders were reluctant to start a big immigration debate while employers still needed foreign labour. Nevertheless, they recognised that any future legislation would have to be racist and that it was their job to win public backing for controls:

'Although the absence of any public demand for legislation was not in itself a sound argument for refraining from action if the government felt that action was called for, it was nevertheless true that in a controversial matter of this kind the government would need to be able to count on a satisfactory volume of public support for any step which they decided to take.'

This is straight from the horse's mouth. It was the politicians who set out to persuade public opinion that immigration was an issue, not popular prejudice which pushed the government to act — as most accounts would have it.

Racist rantings from Tory backwoodsmen were par for the course. But the Labour Party and the TUC too played a part in popularising anti-immigrant prejudice. The cabinet committee noted that the motion condemning racial discrimination passed at the 1955 TUC congress was 'not entirely consistent with the views on this subject which the TUC had expressed on other occasions'. But the committee was confident that it could count on the TUC to toe the anti-immigration line once 'more serious unemployment developed'. Their confidence was justified. While trade union leaders presented immigration as a threat to British workers' jobs, Labour politicians blamed blacks for the housing shortage.

By presenting immigration as a problem the labour leaders made sure that racism became a major force in British society.

The cabinet debates of 1956 prepared the way for the system of racial discrimination that emerged with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act. The 1957 slump provided the economic impetus for closing the door on Commonwealth immigration. The 1958 Notting Hill race riots provided the excuse for the establishment to turn immigration into a political controversy.

The 1956 cabinet discussions reveal how the British establishment consciously planned to turn immigrants into public enemy number one when the time was right.

'ETHNIC MONITORING' ON THE DOLE

Strike back against the race checks

The Tories are making another bid to introduce 'ethnic monitoring' into dole offices. Workers Against Racism supporters campaigning against the race checks look at the problems and the potential for taking action against the Tory schemes

The Tories have targeted dole offices in Leeds, Nottingham and Handsworth to test out the 'ethnic monitoring' scheme for two weeks before going national. The department of employment claims that the information collected on black people will be confidential and not linked to individuals.

The start of the race checks coincided with the release of the 1985 Labour Force Survey which shows that blacks are twice as likely to be unemployed as whites, and the jobless rate for those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin is three times that of whites. The government has used these statistics to back its claims that 'ethnic monitoring' is necessary to alleviate racial discrimination in employment.

In fact race checks aim to reinforce the second class status of blacks.

The scheme has two aims — to use dole workers as part-time immigration police and to extend internal controls on black people. By recording the 'ethnic origin' of every claimant the race checks will provide the information to discriminate systematically

against black people.

For five years the Tories have tried and failed to get race checks into the doles. Recently they tried to get the checks into job centres as a backdoor route to the dole offices. Resistance by rank and file workers in the CPSA and by Workers Against Racism stopped this. How are things shaping up now?

The official policy of the CPSA department of employment section is 'to oppose all forms of ethnic monitoring'. But the union leaders have always opposed such a policy and cannot be trusted to fight the checks. In talks with management in December union officials argued that the checks were 'impracticable', that they would overburden staff and expose them to attacks by claimants — in fact anything but the argument that the checks are racist.

Last week WAR supporters campaigning for a 'yes' vote in ballots for strike action against the checks in Nottingham, Leeds and Birmingham ran into problems with CPSA officials. Before the vote WAR supporters leafleted and lobbied workers, putting the

arguments for action against the scheme. When the votes were lost in Nottingham and Handsworth and indecisive in Leeds, officials blamed WAR for politicising the issue and losing the vote.

One Nottingham official blamed 'lack of support from the section executive' and 'WAR leafleting' for the bad ballot result. He argued that we should have played down the politics so as not to upset more moderate members. An official in Leeds said that we 'put people off' and 'harassed' his members going into work.

The real problem was the reluctance of CPSA officials to have out the anti-racist arguments with all their members.

In Nottingham workers unfortunately found out about the ballot from WAR rather than from their union reps who hoped to win the vote by playing up the arguments about extra work and attacks by claimants, and playing down the arguments about the checks being racist. One worker from Nottingham said the union's approach could never work: 'To me the whole point of objecting to ethnic monitoring is that it is

racist and as far as I'm concerned that was totally ignored. If racism was brought up as an issue it might have changed people's views.' In Leeds too officials backed off from putting racism at the centre of the debate.

TELL IT STRAIGHT

Avoiding the anti-racist arguments is a kick in the teeth for black claimants who stand to lose their rights, and an insult to rank and file workers who have fought off the checks for five years. Rather than unite workers and claimants around a clear anti-racist platform, officials have appealed to workers' sectional concerns about overwork and assaults to win support. This creates an 'us' (counter staff) against 'them' (claimants) outlook and undermines the potential that exists for building a united campaign to wreck the checks. The issue is whether dole workers are prepared to play the role of immigration spies or whether they will fight to defend the rights of black people. We are convinced that if we put the argument straight we can win this battle.

There is still scope to scotch the scheme in all three target areas. In Leeds dole workers and WAR supporters have organised pickets to turn an indecisive vote into a majority for action. In Handsworth management have threatened disciplinary action against staff who refuse to implement the checks. We need to build support for the workers' stand. In Nottingham we have to carry on the campaign to convince the workers of our case.

The battle against the race checks will not be pursued by the union leadership, nor won by their narrow and mistaken arguments.

We must make sure that control of the arguments and the action is put in the hands of rank and file workers who have every interest in wrecking the checks. Leaflets, briefing documents, speakers and help are available from WAR. Contact us on (01) 729 0414. *Richard Wilde*

BRITISH RAILWORKERS

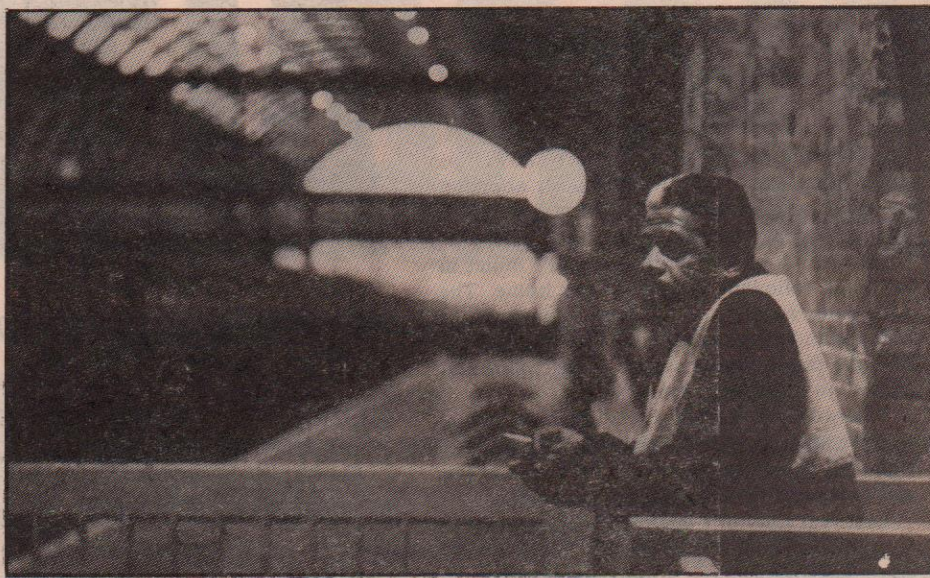
Don't trust Knapp's talks

Rail union leaders called off Wednesday's one-day strike on the London underground at the first sign that management was willing to talk. But we can still build for effective action against job cuts

When 7500 members of the National Union of Railwaymen voted for strike action on London Underground, they wanted to block management's schemes for slimming down the workforce. But union officials had other ideas.

NUR general secretary Jimmy Knapp only wanted a 'yes' vote in the strike ballot to persuade management to talk to him. He called a one-day strike at eight days notice, giving the employers plenty of time to invite him round for a chat. The tube bosses asked the NUR leaders over on Monday, and management 'reaffirmed their commitment to abide by negotiating procedures'. In other words, the employers weren't ditching their cuts, but were willing to talk to the union leaders about who should be made redundant and how. That was enough for Knapp and Co, who 'suspended' the strike, leaving many of their members confused and dispirited.

The NUR executive was delighted with the talks. 'It is an amazing achievement,' said the union statement calling off the action, 'to move from a position where the union was brushed aside to a situation where a firm commitment has been made to adhere to the spirit of the machinery'. Underground workers have a lot less to cheer about. The 'spirit of the machinery' which the executive holds so dear has been responsible for the loss of half a million jobs on the rails over 40



RAIL MILITANTS MUST OVERCOME THEIR ISOLATION AND UNITE ACROSS UNION LINES

years of management/union negotiations. The fact that Knapp has got his feet back under the negotiating table may have made his day, but it promises little protection for the NUR rank and file.

Many NUR militants will be rightly angered by their leaders' strike-call charade. But they should not grieve too much over the loss of the 24-hour strike. It was never going to disrupt as many trains as the bad weather.

Knapp had made sure of that by refusing to approach the train drivers' union, Aslef, for support. A one-day strike couldn't be anything more than a gesture of protest. If NUR members are to put real pressure on their employers and put an end to the plans for restructuring and redundancies, they need to forget Knapp's phoney approach to action, and get together to organise a campaign that will make management do a lot more than reschedule a few trains.

Such a campaign must involve winning solidarity from other union members working in the London transport network. Despite the traditional sectionalism of rail union structures, there are signs that such an appeal would attract support.

Despite the officials' best efforts to ignore them, some Aslef militants were keen to take solidarity action with NUR members. 'We will refuse to drive trains down any parallel lines' promised Aslef steward Steve Forey. 'After consultation with the guards, drivers at British Rail King's Cross may take further action'.

BREAK OUT

These BR drivers recognised that taking a stand alongside London Underground's NUR members was the best form of protection against their own employers' plans to introduce redundancies and job flexibility. Their solidarity action is proof of the potential for rank and file opposition to all job-cutting schemes.

Yet this potential is held in check by traditional union procedures. Last week, Aslef activists at London King's Cross were preparing to defend 65 drivers' assistants' jobs. Meanwhile, Southern Region drivers were making similar plans. But because direct communication between different sections is not part of Aslef procedure, neither group knew exactly what the other was planning. We won't stand a chance against management's across-the-board offensive, unless activists break out of the narrow channels of traditional union organisation.

The old structures cannot protect rank and file workers. Their purpose is to protect union officials and their stake in management's negotiating procedures. Some railworkers have already learnt this lesson. London Underground workers at Cockfosters depot have disregarded traditional union procedures and voted for a depot-wide meeting, open to members of all London Underground unions, to decide how to organise their own defence.

If other activists follow this approach, railworkers in Britain could begin to match the impact made by their French counterparts, whose strength has depended on their rank and file organisation and their refusal to abide by the officials' rulebook. We must learn from their initiative.

Andrew Calcutt

UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE 'SOFT' SOUTH

Pickets close doles

Greenwich dole office was closed on Monday. It was one of 25 London offices hit by strike action against 'availability for work' tests — the government's scheme to massage unemployment figures by denying 'lazy' claimants their benefit. In the forthcoming by-election in Greenwich, the plight of the unemployed will be an important issue for Revolutionary Communist Party candidate **Kate Marshall.**

Picketing out the dole offices meant braving the coldest London weather on record. But members of the Civil and Public Services Association were determined to tell benefit claimants about their opposition to the 'availability' trap. 'We don't want to act as benefit police for the department of employment' said CPSPA steward Ray Cartwright.

If you listened to the debate about the latest government report on unemployment, you could have been convinced that there is no unemployment south of Watford. The traditional industrial areas in the north have certainly been hardest hit. But some southern factories and firms have also cut back. Alongside the consequences of cost-cutting Tory policies, this has given people further south problems of their own. Area's like Greenwich in inner London have been devastated, as the dole office pickets who face the victims across the counter could testify.

'This area has been seriously affected. Molins tobacco plant closed last year. There have been lay-offs at Peak Freans biscuit factory and redundancies at SR direct-mail. Even the Dreadnought seamen's hospital has closed — there's nothing left'.

In some parts of Greenwich, unemploy-

ment has risen nearly 100 per cent in less than five years. The official jobless total in Greenwich is close to 15 per cent — 3.5 per cent higher than the national average. Far from getting off lightly, Greenwich is one of many London areas where people are bearing the brunt of the employers' job cuts.

Labour leaders were quick to latch on to news of the North vs South divide, because it allows them to draw attention away from the important division in society — between the working class and the capitalists. This is a potentially explosive conflict which Labour leaders would rather not talk about, especially when they are trying to court middle class voters in the run-up to a crucial by-election.

By contrast, RCP candidate Kate Marshall is determined to highlight the issues which affect working class people. Outside Greenwich dole on Monday, she said: 'The availability tests are an attack on all claimants. Unemployed women are especially vulnerable. We're fully behind action against the availability trap. Our campaign will demand that every unemployed person is given benefit equal to a living wage, not conned out of the pittance they're allowed now with a lot of trick questions.'

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

INSIDE THE CITY

Last week Labour's deputy leader Roy Hattersley declared war on crime in the City of London. After months of peddling Labour's economic policies at exclusive City banquets in the hope that British financiers might set aside a few billion to pay for Labour's plans, Hattersley's renewed hatred for the City amounts to sour grapes at being told where to get off by City cynics.

In a fit of pique Hattersley reverted to Labour's traditional critique of the financial markets, saying that the City's interests were 'largely independent of those of the rest of the economy', of which it was 'the least reputable sector'. Labour's anti-City campaign has been spurred on by a series of scandals in London's square mile. The biggest concerns brewing giant Guinness, and its takeover of drinks firm Distillers last May, now being investigated by the department of trade.

City sources have accused Guinness of illegally buying its own shares to try to bid up their price and improve the terms of the takeover offer. The company has been linked with Ivan Boesky, the disgraced US financier recently fined \$100m for illicit insider dealing. Guinness boss Ernest Saunders and his Morgan Grenfell bank adviser, Roger Seelig, have resigned in disgrace.

A few years ago Guinness would have been commended for skilful financial management. Now it is the latest in a string of City scandals resulting from the boom in big takeover battles and the liberalisation of share trading rules. The recent burst of activity by Whitehall's watchdogs is not about 'cleaning up' the City. It reflects the dog-eat-dog environment of competition and recrimination brought about by the decay at the centre of the British capitalist system.

Since the Guinness scandal broke the Labour Party has effected the guise of honest broker in the City. At its policy planning conference in Bishop Stortford last week Hattersley blamed City financiers for refusing to bail out a bankrupt British economy. Labour's message is — industrial capital is good and money capital is bad.

Labour blames City slickers and financial speculators for exploiting decent working folk, and extols the virtues of brass and muck British manufacturers who are working hard to make Britain great again. But the real exploiters are the bosses whom Labour wants to put on a pedestal. They make their 'honest' profits by grinding their workers into the ground and throwing 'surplus' labour on to the scrap heap. The City vultures just hover around to pick up the scraps.

The anti-City campaign unites both right-wing Labourites and left-wing radicals in support of British capitalist industry and against British capitalist finance. A recent editorial in the *Morning Star* sounded its opposition to a takeover bid for St Helens-based Pilkingtons glass manufacturers: 'Pilkingtons is a British company committed to manufacturing. BTR is a financial conglomerate committed to city manoeuvring...and destroying jobs.'

Pilkingtons the British manufacturer has ditched two thirds of its workforce in the past decade. Yet the British left prefers ruthless exploitation by British bosses to shady speculation by City hustlers.

Ordinary people are right to be suspicious of squalid dealings in the City. But they should be just as wary of the idea that our jobs and living standards depend on backing British industrialists. It's time we purged our own movement of insider dealers — those dealing inside the capitalist system.

The Labour leadership emerged from its two-day meeting in Bishop Stortford last week to announce that the party was on full alert for the general election. But how does Labour's election platform measure up to the requirements of the majority of people in Britain in 1987?

ECONOMY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

The centrepiece of Labour's election campaign is its promise to create one million jobs in its first two years in office. But at a time when the real total of those out of work is running close to five million, this amounts to a pledge to maintain mass unemployment for the indefinite future.

For 40 years after the Second World War the Labour Party was committed to full employment. This goal was only formally abandoned at last year's party conference. Since the last election Labour has more and more come to terms with the requirements of British capitalism in crisis — and that means accepting unemployment as a fact of life. This is why Labour leaders have been unable to use the Tories' appalling record on jobs to their own electoral advantage.

When Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley say that jobs are the key issue for Labour, this is just their way of saying that Labour is fully committed to the revival of British capitalism. Yet they are well aware that trying to make British industry profitable will not create jobs. As Kinnock told Channel 4 last week, 'we do not envisage that there would be a big increase in jobs in manufacturing industry over the first two years of a Labour government.'

The 'party of production' is also the party of mass unemployment.

At a time of capitalist recession, profitable production requires the existence of a reserve army of labour to keep up the pressure on people in jobs to accept worse conditions and lower wages. Kinnock and Hattersley accept the laws of capitalism — a future Labour government could be expected to impose them ruthlessly on the working class.

It is significant that the most specific promise on jobs to emerge from Bishop Stortford was that Labour would create 300 000 'jobs' on training schemes. More slave-labour and bogus training from the party that last time around doubled unemployment and pioneered make-work schemes to keep young people off the streets!

For all his jibes against the City, Hattersley's refusal to recommend any significant increase in taxation reveals the timidity of the Labour leadership before the British establishment. The working class, not the City, will have to pay the price for a future Labour government's determination to revive the fortunes of British capitalism.

TRADE UNION RIGHTS

The only mention of the unions to emerge from Bishop Stortford was the hint that the minimum wage policy agreed by the Labour Party and the TUC would have to take an even lower priority than expected on the agenda of an incoming Kinnock government. This is because the party leaders have calculated that even if the threshold was set at the proposed starvation level of £80 a week, it would still cost the government more than Labour considers it could afford for a luxury like alleviating the poverty of the lowest paid workers.

The original purpose of the minimum wage pact was not to improve the plight of the low paid, but to prove that the unions would be prepared to allow a future Labour government to regulate wages. One of the key factors which commends Labour to the British establishment is its capacity to persuade union leaders to sacrifice their members' living standards to the cause of national capitalist revival. Never before have the Labour leaders been so candid about their commitment to capitalist austerity before getting into government.

When Kinnock gets into power there will not even be crumbs for the working class — every penny will be devoted to the cause of boosting capitalist profits.

The shadow cabinet team devoted considerable time at Bishop Stortford to considering measures which a future Labour government could introduce at 'low cost, or no cost'. These include support for voluntary groups and measures to encourage nature conservation. Kinnock's pre-election message to the labour movement is clear: if it costs money — forget it!

Labour's policy on union legislation is to repeal most of the Tory anti-union laws. But it also proposes to replace them with an even more legalistic framework to regulate trade union affairs. Labour plans to replace the rights of workers to organise collectively to defend their wages and working conditions with the right of the isolated individual worker to plead for mercy before a judicial representative of the capitalist class. Thousands of miners and hundreds of print workers can testify to the quality of justice that can be expected by militant trade unionists before the bosses' courts.

REACTION AND REPRESSION

Thatcher's Britain is a mean and vicious place. The Tories' public order legislation gives the police a free hand to curb any expression of dissent. The government is moving ahead with plans to remove legal protections from part-time women workers and Enoch Powell is threatening to revive his attack on abortion rights. Cherry Groce, a middle-aged black woman from Brixton, appears in court paralysed for life with a policeman's bullet in her back following a raid on her home. The Aids panic rages on as a threat to the rights of lesbians and gays and as part of a wider drive to turn the family into a source of discipline and control in a disintegrating society.

Where does the Labour Party stand in response to these attacks on civil liberties and democratic rights? It stands on the side of the forces of law and order and the preachers of prejudice.

Last year Labour's law and order spokesman Gerald Kaufman went to the Police Federation conference to display Labour's support for the forces of state repression. Leading Labour politicians reject gutter press allegations that the party is 'anti-police' and condemn resistance against police terror by pickets or demonstrators. Labour's political broadcasts depict the police as friendly bobbies protecting children and the elderly, and call for more officers on the beat.

In his attempt to cultivate a respectable image, Kinnock has proclaimed that when it comes to questions of the family, he is 'a reactionary'. These reactionary prejudices may appeal to middle class voters, but they also help to condemn working class women to the drudgery of work in the home and the menial jobs that can be picked up on the fringes of the labour market.

Labour promises to set up a Ministry of Women if it comes to power. Yet the party has avoided any specific policy commitments on women's rights. It has not allocated additional resources to ensure that the few measures it has promised, such as nurseries for three and four-year olds and improved cervical screening, are in fact carried out. We can be sure that even these modest demands will be placed well down in Labour's list of priorities. On crucial issues of women's rights at work, facilities for contraception and abortion, Kinnock has no policies at all.

When it comes to racism, Labour leaders will sometimes criticise the excesses of Tory

WHY WE ALTERNATE

After eight years of misery, bigotry and repression, strife and scandal for them, the Tories are still in opinion polls. If the Labour Party can't or won't fight the Tories, argues **Mike Freeman**, then it must make way for those who can and will

treatment of immigrants, and left wingers will sometimes venture complaints about police brutality. But when the forces of the establishment put the pressure on they can rely on the Labour Party to give way to the pressures of British racism.

When right-wing politicians or the press accuse Labour of being soft on immigration or of favouring an open door policy, Labour leaders insist on their commitment to firm immigration controls. When black youth fight back against police repression, Labour politicians can be relied upon to join in the racist backlash.

The existence of anti-racist activists and pressure groups inside the Labour Party merely gives credibility to a party that has consistently upheld racist policies, both in government and in opposition.

This year's Labour Party conference approved a resolution championing the rights of lesbians and gay men. The fact that the party managers carefully staged the brief debate to coincide with *Play School* to avoid television exposure shows that Labour's commitment on this issue is likely to remain in the closet. Labour's endorsement of the 'safe sex' campaign entirely contradicts its conference pledge to defend lesbian and gay rights. Combating the Aids panic is the front line in the struggle for the equal treatment of homosexuals and for the unity of the working class against

the establishment's divisive moralism and phoney public health propaganda.

WAR AND PEACE

In an attempt to deflect the Tory attack on Labour's defence policy, the Bishop Stortford conference avoided any reference to the matter. But the line of Labour resistance is already clear: its policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament has become a policy for stepping up conventional forces to a level which would render British imperialism an even greater menace to the world than it is already.

Labour's recent policy statement on defence confirms not only that money saved by cancelling Trident would be used to strengthen conventional defences (not on hospitals as the left used to demand), but that overall military spending would increase. Labour insists that Nato must have 'land, naval and air forces that could inflict defeat' on the Warsaw Pact.

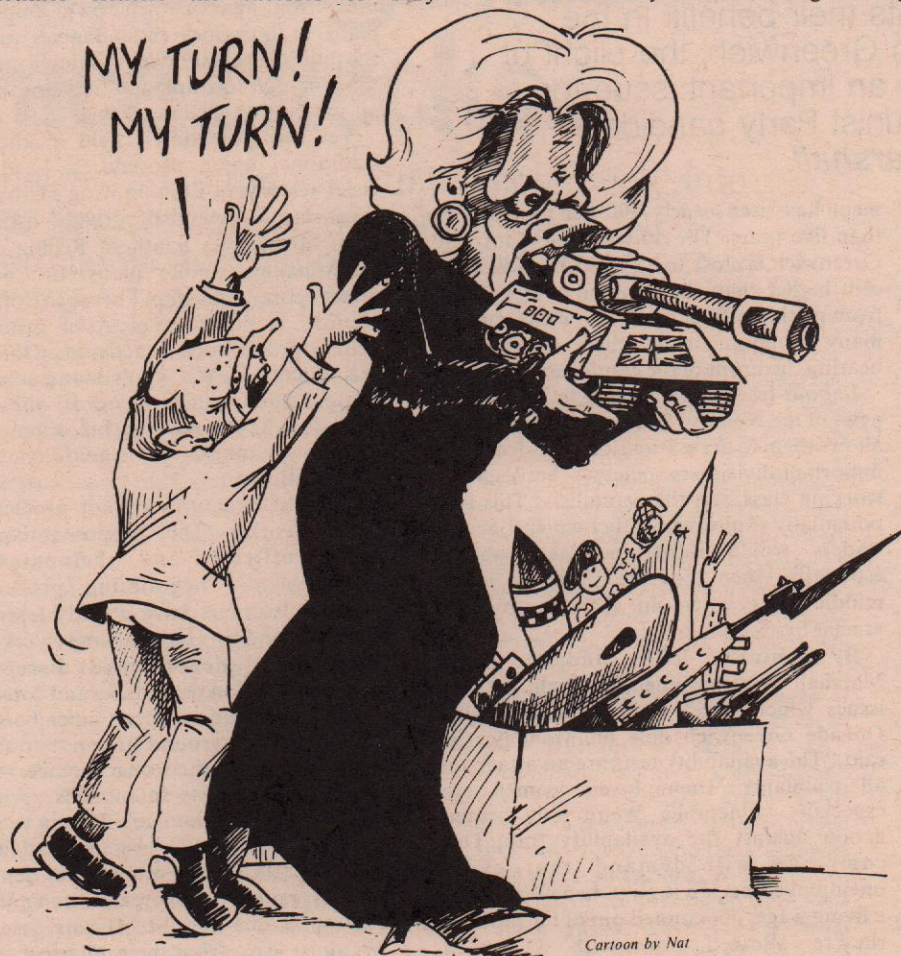
Labour is committed not only to stepping up British forces in Europe, but also to strengthening its capacity to strike outside the Nato area. After years of criticising the Tories' 'Fortress Falklands' policy, Labour now insists on Britain's 'general responsibility' for undertaking aggression overseas, 'most notably in relation to the Falkland Islands'.

Labour's December political broadcast was a celebration of British militarism on such a scale that it alarmed many party supporters. The party that has in recent years identified itself with the cause of peace is increasingly revealing its traditional role as a party of war. The Labour leadership supported the Tory attack on Argentina and objected to its involvement in last year's air-strike against Libya only because it exposed Britain's subservience to the USA.

If Kinnock ever gets to power, who will be the first target?

As the 1987 general election approaches, neither the Tories nor the Labour Party want to make the war in Ireland into an election issue. Both parties have consistently approved British domination and every act of barbarism against the Irish people. John Stalker, the Manchester police chief who came within an ace of exposing the truth about Britain's death squads in Ireland, has been forced into early retirement. A dozen Irish people languish in British jails for bombings it is obvious to everybody they could not carry out.

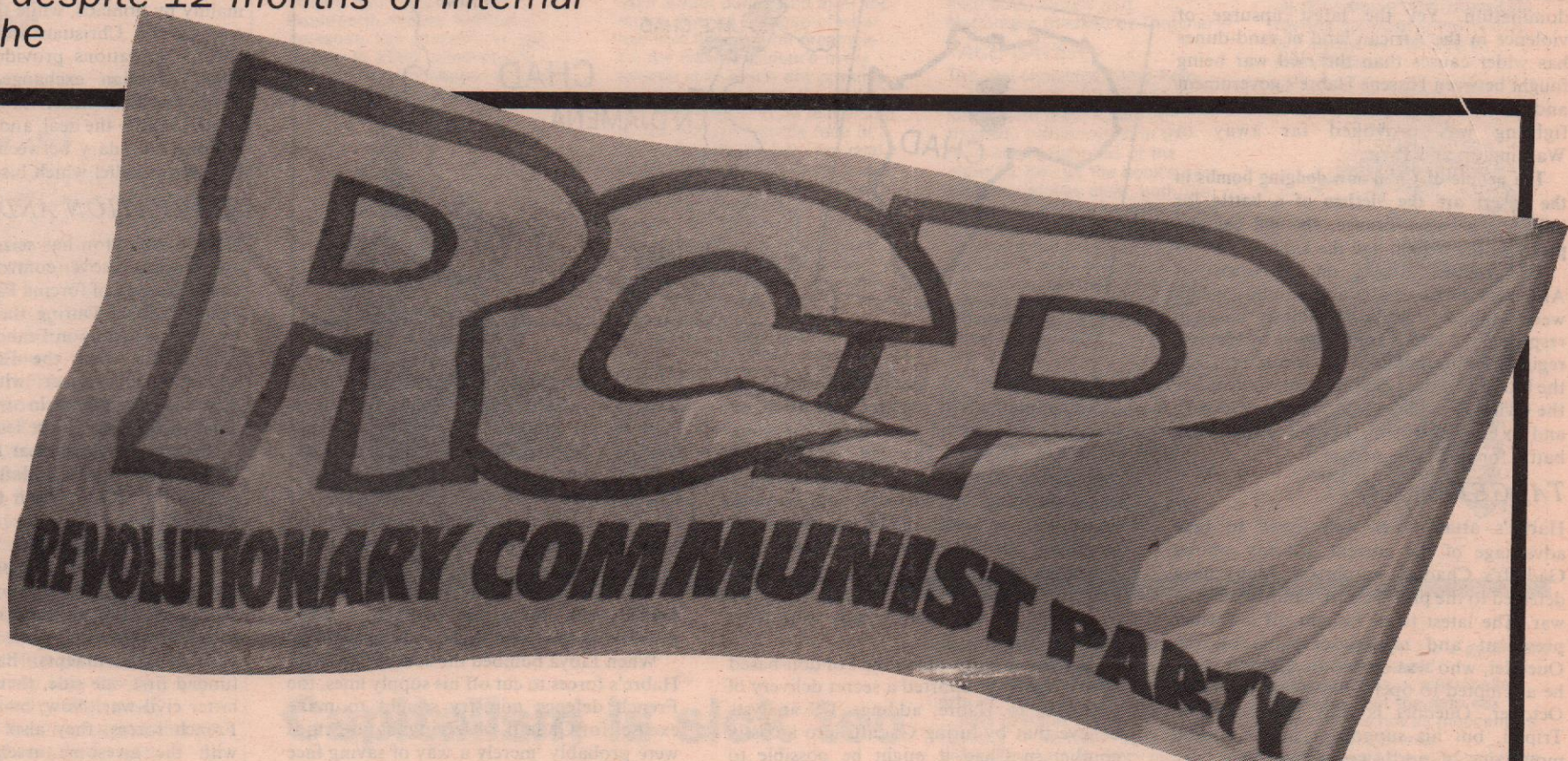
But Labour will not try to embarrass the Tories over these issues in the run-up to the election. Under Roy Mason, the last Labour government pursued similar policies in Northern Ireland. The same government introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the legislation that criminalised every Irish person in Britain as a way of curbing resistance to the British occupation of Ireland. Under a future Labour government the Irish people could confidently expect British terror to continue as usual.



ON '87

NEED AN ATIVE TO LABOUR

ion for us, and despite 12 months of internal
riding high in the



A PLATFORM FOR WORKING CLASS UNITY

The Revolutionary Communist Party is putting the following basic demands as a platform for the general election. We are inviting individuals and organisations who agree on the urgency of giving the working class a voice in the election campaign to join us in putting forward a slate of candidates. Our full election programme will be available in pamphlet form shortly.

WORK OR FULL PAY

To survive in capitalist society everybody needs either a job at a living wage or the same level of income in the form of benefits. We cannot afford to lose our livelihoods because employers cannot make enough profit out of our labour, or because the state says that it cannot afford to maintain our living standards. What constitutes a living wage? This can only be decided by the working class itself, including wage-earners and those who rely on benefits. We reject state attempts to regulate wages through any form of incomes policy.

DEFEND UNION RIGHTS

We stand for the repeal of all legislation that restricts the rights of workers to organise and take action in defence of working class interests. We are opposed to all restrictions on striking, picketing and solidarity action. We reject all

state interference in the affairs of the labour movement, in strike ballots or union elections or in any other way.

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

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

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

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

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



STOP THE WAR DRIVE

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

GREAT POWER GAMES IN THE SAHARA

As if the poorest nation on Earth didn't have enough to worry about, Chad's 20-year old civil war is now being made worse by a struggle between France and America for control over Africa. **Andy Clarkson** reports

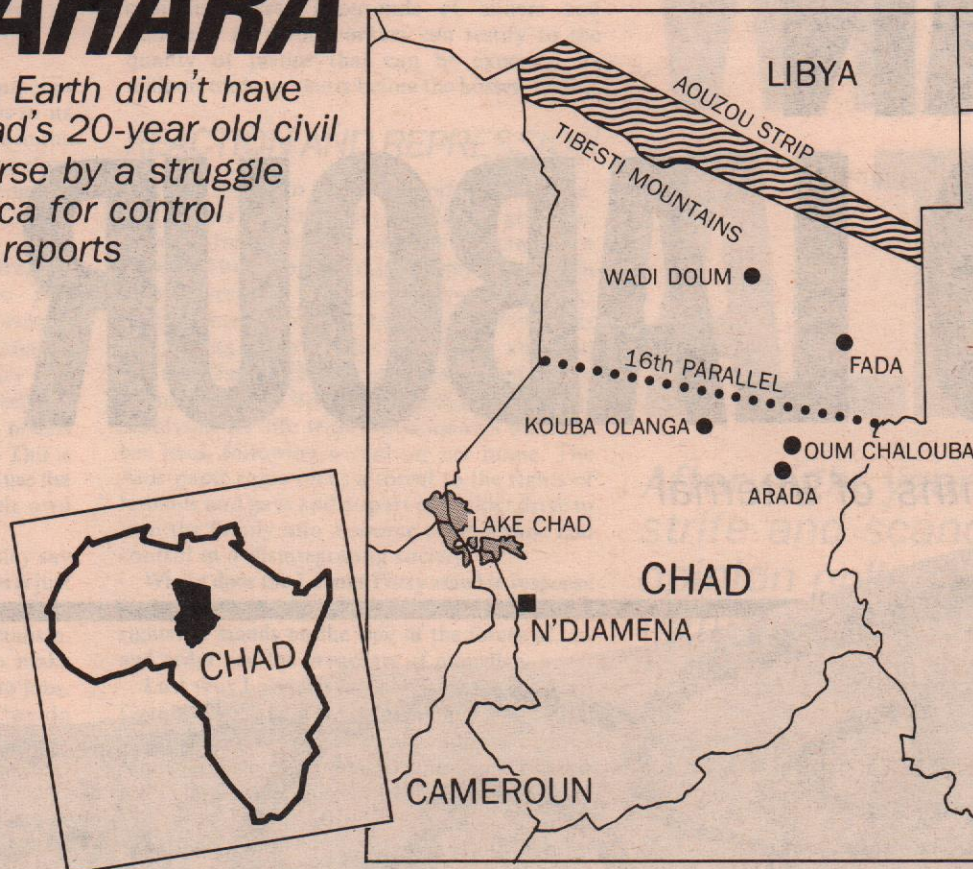
In the last two weeks Libyan Migs have launched bombing raids inside Chad, and French Mirages have replied by blasting the main Libyan airfield at Wadi Doum in northern Chad. This has sent the Western press into a familiar rant about Colonel Gaddafi's plans for world domination. Yet the latest upsurge of violence in the African land of sand-dunes has wider causes than the civil war being fought between Hissene Habre's government and Libyan-backed rebels. The fresh fighting was provoked far away in Washington and Paris.

The people of Chad now dodging bombs in the desert are the victims of a battle for influence between France, the old colonial power in the region, and the USA.

The Libyan attacks on the towns of Arada, Oum Chalouba and Kouba Olanga were retaliatory raids on military bases in response to a New Year offensive by Habre's regime. Habre has sent his forces north at the bidding of the USA. Reagan wants to use the civil war in Chad to destabilise Gaddafi, and to elbow aside his French rivals in the battle for power in Africa.

TARGET GADDAFI

Habre's attack was well timed to take advantage of the current disarray among Gaddafi's Chadian supporters. Many have defected to the pro-Western camp in the civil war. The latest to be bought off is former president and rebel-in-chief Goukouni Oueddei, who was ousted by Gaddafi when he attempted to open talks with Habre last October. Oueddei is now imprisoned in Tripoli, but his supporters in the Tibesti mountains of north-west Chad have been fighting alongside Habre's troops against the Libyans. Gaddafi has responded to the loss of his Chadian stronghold at Fada by ordering a full mobilisation of Libyan reservists.



The weakness of Gaddafi's position in Chad makes the civil war an ideal setting for Reagan to follow up last April's bombing raids on Tripoli. The US president is prepared to interfere in any blasted corner of the globe if it presents him with another opportunity to set up the bogey of 'Libyan terrorism' as an excuse for maintaining American influence in the third world. Thus Reagan has long been encouraging Habre to attack the Chadian rebels and their Libyan allies.

As early as last summer the London-based *Africa Analysis* reported a secret delivery of US arms to Habre, adding: 'US analysts believe that by luring Gaddafi into a costly conflict in Chad it might be possible to create conditions for a coup in Tripoli.' Last year the USA provided Habre with \$10m worth of arms, with another \$15m promised for the new year. The report concluded: 'When the US supplies are ready for use after

the long road trip from Douala [the nearest seaport in neighbouring Cameroun], there may be an offensive by the now highly confident Habre.' But it also noted that the Libyans would not be the only forces in Chad opposed to such an offensive. If Habre's attack went ahead, 'there could be subtle obstruction by French ground and air forces, numbering around 1500 [in Chad].'

The expected obstruction tactics of the French were borne out in their low-key response to the latest desert confrontation.

When Libya bombed the southern base of Habre's forces to cut off his supply lines, the French defence ministry sought to make excuses for Gaddafi, observing that the raids were probably 'merely a way of saving face for Libya'. The French authorities only launched their half-hearted retaliatory raids to ensure that their other former colonies in the region did not turn to Reagan for assistance. Their caution indicates that the

French are more concerned about America's designs on their power-base in Africa than about Gaddafi's supposedly 'expansionist' ambitions.

SECRET DEAL

France is not keen to kick Gaddafi because of its important economic links with Libya. In the first five months of 1986 Libya shipped almost one million tonnes of crude oil to France. Last month the Paris-based Dati corporation won the \$20m contract to refit two European airbuses for Libyan airlines, in defiance of American trade sanctions on Libya. French firms are even involved in arming Gaddafi. In October the French arms giant Thomson-CSF was accused of modernising Libya's Crotale missile system, which was damaged in April's US/British raid on Tripoli.

France's Libyan connections have encouraged it to try to avoid conflict with Gaddafi over Chad. In a secret agreement concluded in 1978, French president Giscard d'Estaing agreed with Gaddafi to share out Chad into informal 'spheres of influence'. Libya was to supervise the Muslim north of the country, peopled mainly by nomads, while the French would control the Christian south, where their cotton plantations provide 85 per cent of Chad's foreign exchange. In November 1984, President Mitterrand met Gaddafi in Crete to ratify the deal, and establish a more definite boundary between their sectors at the 16th parallel which bisects Chad.

STARVATION AND WAR

Now Washington has seized upon Habre's ambition to recover control of the whole of Chad as a way of forcing Paris back into line against Libya. During the post-war years, the USA relied upon France to police north Africa. But when the French refused to abandon their pact with Gaddafi, the Americans stepped in with an offer of assistance which Habre leapt at.

Reagan is making clear that if the French will not toe the anti-Gaddafi line, America is prepared to tread on their toes and deal with the problem itself.

Since they gained their 'independence' in 1960, the desperate people of Chad have suffered an endless round of war and starvation. French paratroopers have re-invaded the country time and again, while French governments have armed and funded first one side, then the other in the bitter civil war. Now, on top of occupying French forces, they also have to contend with the awesome arsenal of the most powerful nation on Earth. As the Great Powers jostle for the right to control and exploit Africa and the Middle East, the people of Chad and Libya are paying the price in blood.

RACISM IN THE USA

The Howard Beach affair

A vicious racist attack in the New York borough of Queens has provoked a wave of black anger that is sending a shudder through the US establishment. **James Malone** reports from America

After midnight on 20 December three black men stopped into New Park Pizza in the white, mostly Italian, working class neighbourhood of Howard Beach to use the phone after their car broke down. Finding the phone out of order, they decided to sit down and have a slice. Once outside they were set upon by a mob of white teenagers wielding baseball bats and tree branches and screaming 'niggers!' One 17-year old attacker, Jon Lester, yelled 'There's niggers in the pizza parlour — let's go kill them!'

Reports have emphasised that Lester is South African-born, but you don't have to be from the apartheid state to be a racist thug in the USA.

The attack left the men bloody and dazed. One, 23-year old Michael Griffith, escaped and stumbled toward the highway. The other two were chased into a dead-end and attacked again. Griffith, crawling on the

side of the highway, was then killed by a car driven by Dominick Blum. The car crushed Griffith's skull and threw him 20 feet in the air. Blum's windshield was smashed, but he drove on, as he said he thought he had 'hit a dog or something'. He returned later with his father, a policeman. The victims who survived are sure that Blum is a member of the white gang. They smell a police cover-up, and have refused to testify until he is charged with murder. Because they won't go into court, a judge has reduced the murder and manslaughter charges against three attackers to 'reckless endangerment'.

Black people in New York are furious. The media have played up apparently retaliatory attacks on whites. The New York press says there is now a 'Race War', and something must be done. Liberals were shocked to see unrepentant Howard Beach residents on television saying that 'the only time blacks come into Howard Beach is to

rob us,' and 'whenever they kill one of us we don't see any of you people.' When the moderate National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and other black and left groups led 2000 in a protest march through Howard Beach, white locals came out in force to shout 'Go home' and try to stop the demo. As the marchers halted for speeches, Laura Blackburn, New York representative of the NAACP, suggested that they all sing the Star Spangled Banner because 'after all, we are all Americans.' The first few bars of the national anthem were booed by the marchers, and Blackburn had to give up.

Democratic mayor Ed Koch of New York was quick to come out against the Howard Beach attack, calling it a 'lynching' like those in the Deep South. Koch is desperate to show that he is doing something about racist violence. He visited a Howard Beach church, has suggested racial awareness

courses in schools, and staked black plainclothes cops on the streets of Howard Beach.

Koch's hypocrisy is blatant. This is the man who saluted 'subway vigilante' Bernard Goetz — who gunned down four black youths on an underground train — as a hero. Time and again Koch has defended his racist police force, after it killed a black grandmother for being \$60 behind on her rent (Eleanor Bumpurs), a black teenager for painting graffiti (Michael Stewart), and a black college student (Edmund Perry). Koch has also turned a blind eye to the notorious 'stun gun' torture techniques used on black suspects in police stations. But the mayor has been under fire over reports of corruption recently, and is desperate to calm black anger by showing that he wants reconciliation.

Black people throughout the USA recognise that the Howard Beach incident is not an isolated one.

Even the government's phoney statistics on racist attacks show a threefold increase since 1984. The establishment is worried that racial tensions are about to explode. The *Washington Post* ranked the Howard Beach attack up there with Irangate, Ivan Boesky and the Challenger explosion as one of the most important events of 1986.

The US authorities have always recognised racial divisions as their trump card for keeping society under their control. Now they fear that their racist campaign could blow up in their faces and plunge society into turmoil. In Reagan's America, people are just not supposed to start jeering the Star Spangled Banner.

REVIEWS

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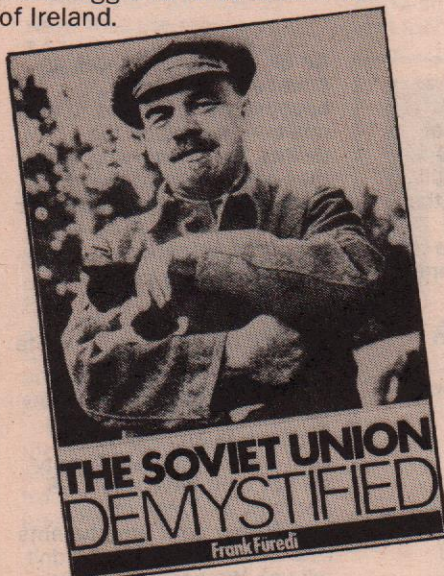
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Fighting the frame-ups

The Irish War
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handbook
£2.95 (plus 85p p&p)

Last week an all-party delegation of MPs and peers met home secretary Douglas Hurd to press for a review of the cases of Irish people jailed in the wake of the 1974 Birmingham and Guildford IRA bombings. Labour home affairs spokesman Clive Soley said that 'the reputation of British justice' was at stake.

But as the Irish Freedom Movement handbook points out, 'British justice' put the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four behind bars in the first place. They were convicted on the basis of confessions beaten out of them and discredited forensic evidence. All this did not matter, because in British courts, to be Irish is guilt enough. *The Irish War* explains how the British judicial system has criminalised the Irish people, and argues that the only way to stop the frame-ups of ordinary Irish men and women and the imprisonment of Irish freedom fighters is to join the struggle to force Britain out of Ireland.



Things fall apart

The Soviet Union Demystified
Frank Furedi
Hardback £12.50 (plus £1.20 p&p)
Paperback £5.95 (plus 85p p&p)

The British media's latest anti-Soviet jibe is to blame the Russians for the bad weather — apparently it was sent from Siberia. Meanwhile Gorbachev's celebrated 'open society' is closing off the riot-torn republic of Kazakhstan to foreign pressmen. *The Soviet Union Demystified* gets behind the media's Soviet-bashing banalities and explains the forces that are fragmenting Soviet society.

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● RAKING OVER THE COALS

Scargill v MacGregor?

Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike 1984-5: Loss Without Limit*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, £14.95

On BBC last week former coal boss Ian MacGregor gave his gloating account of the miners' strike, refusing to discount even Tory minister Peter Walker as one of 'the enemies within'. Arthur Scargill hates these post-mortems, and not just when they come from the victors. Last time I heard him speak I was in Brodsworth miners' welfare in Yorkshire. Full of scorn, he told us how in 1986 'intellectuals' such as Eric Hobsbawm and Raphael Samuel sat after

dinner in Hampstead discussing what went wrong, why the strike was lost, who was to blame; and how 60 years earlier a different group of 'intellectuals', Sydney Webb and GDH Cole, did the same for the 1926 General Strike.

EVASION

Scargill is right to dismiss these pompous academics who spread doom and gloom about the working class, and the Fleet Street hacks whose papers pilloried both the miners and their leader during and after the strike. But the purpose of what has now become the preamble for the NUM president's every speech is to evade any probing questions about why the strike lost and why the NUM leadership is now impotent in the face of mounting attacks from the coal board (sorry, British Coal). It is a clever device because it is not difficult to persuade a hall full of miners that Hobsbawm and Samuel are a pair of pilchards.

Adeney and Lloyd were the industrial reporters for the BBC and the *Financial Times* respectively. Lloyd, at least during his *FT* days (he now edits the *New Statesman*), displayed an often incisive grasp of trends in the labour movement. They had access to the exclusive circles of both Hobart and Congress House. Their book has plenty of good inside information and gossip but overall is an expensive disappointment, falling well short of their aim of

'understanding' the strike rather than just describing it.

Loss Without Limit makes the same mistake as every other bourgeois account of the strike. Scargill and MacGregor are set up as irreconcilable opponents who could not compromise out of principle. After an accurate presentation of the traditions of consensus and collaboration that grew up between the coal board and the NUM in the period after nationalisation, Adeney and Lloyd argue that this tradition met its ideological challenge from both Scargill and MacGregor (backed by Thatcher).

FACE-SAVER

The real challenge came from a government which could no longer afford the luxury of tripartite collaboration in the recession conditions of the eighties. But, as the book's own evidence makes clear, both the board and the union were buried so much in the past they could not make the break on which the survival of both depended. The rot went so far that the board's industrial relations staff were mostly former NUM officials. Coal board bosses would go to areas where a pit was coming up for closure and spend time with the area union leaders. Norman Siddall would sit up half the night drinking whisky with Mick McGahey to 'ease the thing through'. In this way leaders like Peter Heathfield 'quietly acquiesced in closures in their areas'.

Scargill's mobilisation of his army, which Adeney and Lloyd argue was part of an effort 'if not to overthrow the state, then to destabilise it', was in reality an attempt to force the board to return to the cosy collaboration of the past. Scargill's famous obduracy (indeed he truly showed the 'intestinal fortitude' which MacGregor accused many on his own side of lacking) in the end became just a face-saver against an equally resolute but more powerful opponent.

In *Loss Without Limit* Lloyd in particular allows his right-wing Labour prejudices to get in the way of a clear view of the problems that beset the miners' strike. As long as we have to put up with pessimistic post-mortems from the Eric Hobsbawm brigade and off-the-mark analyses from journalists playing politicians, the miners will always be the losers.

Joan Phillips



● AIDS

Capitalism is sick too

John Green and David Miller, *Aids: The Story of a Disease*, Grafton Books, £5.95

Green and Miller are leading Aids counsellors. They provide here a clear account of the lethal, sexually transmitted human immuno-deficiency virus (now designated HIV) which causes the disease, and an unpatronising guide through the maze of immunology and virology, explaining words like antibody and Kaposi's sarcoma. The authors also face up to the anti-homosexual prejudices surrounding discussion of Aids in Britain, and pay particular

attention to dispelling the myths which surround homosexual relationships.

Their dispassionate treatment of homosexuality and their medical clarity, however, are no match for the anti-gay hysteria. The real story of Aids goes beyond the disease itself. Green and Miller fail to confront why the establishment has used the Aids issue to persecute homosexuals. Like many gay activists they underestimate the ideological battle being waged to re-establish social control through the family and conservative moral values. Aids comes at a good moment for crisis-ridden capitalism. It is the

ideal argument against extra-marital sex and homosexuality, and for heterosexual monogamy and motherhood.

Aids hysteria (and it is hysteria — we have many similar killers amongst us, from heart disease to motorbikes) is a qualitatively new manifestation of anti-gay prejudice. Provocation of fears that lesbians and gays will mortally infect as well as morally offend has led large sections of society to endorse attacks on gay rights and on gay people. One reason for the establishment's success in isolating the gay community is that its opponents have responded to the debate on the moralists' terms.

For example, Green and Miller conclude that a safe sex campaign among high risk groups is the best answer to Aids. Using condoms is sensible to minimise the risk of all sexually transmitted diseases — just as basic hygiene and correct

food preparation are a good idea if you want to avoid gastroenteritis or salmonella poisoning. But the safe sex campaign is not as innocent as it appears. It merely complements the moral crusade against promiscuity, extra-marital sex and homosexuality. It obscures the fact that the only sure way to eliminate the risk of Aids is to find a cure and a preventative vaccine, quickly. It reinforces the idea that Aids is a question of individual responsibility, rather than a medical problem that requires the mobilisation of massive social and scientific resources. It fails to confront the fact that Aids is a political issue. As a result, the government gets away with a cheap campaign bolstering the backwardness and bigotry which are a bigger threat to gays and the working class than the disease itself.

Jenny Graham

● NOSTALGIA MOVIE

Browsing in time

Peggy Sue Got Married, Francis Coppola (Director)

Peggy Sue faints at her 25th high school reunion and is transported back to 1960 to inhabit the body of the teenage girl she then was, but keeping the mind of an adult with two grown-up children who is in the midst of a divorce. She had just been moaning to an old friend 'If I knew then what I know now I'd do a lot of things differently.' The big mistake she would like to have avoided was her marriage, but even when she does know then what she knows now, she ends up falling for him again. Well she would, wouldn't she? So this film would have us believe.

The story itself plays second fiddle to what must be the most nostalgic return yet to an idealised late fifties America. The detail is magnificent. Through Peggy Sue's tear-filled eyes we soak up the happy families, the gleaming cars, the confidence and the style of a period for which the Western world now yearns as a lost paradise. Just how strong is our yearning may be judged by the stylish fifties-style adverts for Georges Marciano jeans and Southern Comfort which precede the film.

It is hard to believe that the man who made the *Godfather* films, *Apocalypse Now*, *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* could serve up such soft-centred

nonsense as this. He made it clear though that he was aiming for a commercial feature and is no doubt aware that the market is ripe for reassurance. Coppola co-produced *American Graffiti*, the George Lucas film which in 1973 launched this nostalgia boom. We could have known too from his 1982 film *One From the Heart* that he has a strong belief in couples sticking it out in the face of messy, inadequate relationships. The woman in that film also decides to give the man another chance, although she doesn't go as far as Peggy Sue in offering him some good home cooking to go with it.

Kathleen Turner is excellent as both mother and teenager and manages to bring off some touching scenes as she gets a second chance to show her true appreciation of her family, her grandparents and the school swot; a second chance too to make it with the local Jack Kerouac. But this adult version of *Back to the Future* lacks that film's ingenuity and

lightheartedness. Weighed down by the baggage of its fatalistic moral, it tries too hard to recover the golden age and to convince Peggy Sue that it's a wonderful life.

When Peggy Sue confides in her grandmother that she has come from the future the old lady, as complacent as the film itself, tells the child that she is simply 'browsing in time' and should choose the things she's proud of. Coppola squanders the opportunities offered by the device of characters travelling back in time. The idea of intervening in your own history with the benefit of foresight is a fertile one (as James Cameron showed in *The Terminator*), but it is not developed here, beyond the plea 'Change your destiny!' which is clearly to be disregarded. He could have compared the eighties with the fifties, but we get only an exercise in nostalgia which tells us little of the history of that time and nothing of our own.

Pat Ford



FROM 'CONSERVATIVE VALUES' TO 'MENTAL AIDS': FRENCH STUDENTS FORCED **FIGARO** TO EAT ITS WORDS

French letter

LAST September the right-wing *Figaro* magazine proclaimed with satisfaction that the 'new wave of French youth had shifted to the right' and now embodied the conservative values of 'family, fatherland and work'. At the time such an assessment seemed plausible. After six months in office, Jacques Chirac's right-wing government had met no effective resistance to a

stream of 'neo-liberal' economic measures (privatisation, job losses, tax bonanzas for the rich). Backed up by repressive and racist legislation, France seemed to be sinking into a period of blackest reaction, symbolised by the expulsion of 101 Malian immigrants, who were handcuffed together and herded aboard a charter plane, bound for Africa. And yet...

By the end of December *Figaro* was describing the 'new wave' as a 'herd of

zombies, infected with mental Aids. It has lost all its natural immunities; every decomposing virus affects it.' The student revolt has hit French society. The enormous demonstrations of students, backed by tens of thousands of organised workers, the intervening riots, Chirac's ignominious climbdown — these events have significantly changed the political atmosphere in France.

Louis Dufoix
Paris

Readers' survey results

IN OCTOBER we published a survey for our readers to complete, and 256 replied. Most were supporters of the RCP. Three quarters of the people replying had sold the next step, reflecting the loyalty and activism of our supporters, 86 per cent had read the next step before, 37 per cent claimed to have read 'every word', another 37 per cent more than half the paper. Four people had read less than one page, but still sent in the survey — maybe to explain why they found it so indigestible. Only 12 people said they had bought the paper because of our hard sell.

TOO FEW

The big problem with the survey was the small data base it produced and the predominance of active supporters among those replying. We would have liked to hear from more new readers too, to help us assess the paper's wider impact. This drawback reflects the problem which Mick Hume identified in last week's issue — our need to make the next step connect better with people's concerns, and to open a

dialogue with our readers. It indicates that we have yet to establish any real relationship with many of the people who buy the paper. The survey results should remind us that we have to use *tns* as a political tool, not just sell it like an ordinary newspaper.

Nevertheless the survey was a reflection of what people already close to the RCP think of the next step. The centre page feature was our readers' favourite page. The editorial was also popular, with 17 per cent preferring it to all other articles. The reviews won in the unpopularity stakes with 11 per cent of respondents giving it a major thumbs down. But *Stepping Out* was close behind with 10 per cent saying they 'hated it most'.

ISSUES

We asked what you would like to see extended, particularly when we go to 16 pages. The international page and the letters page were both judged to be too short by 16 per cent, the party page by 12 per cent and the news coverage by nine per cent.

We asked what people thought were the three most important political issues of 1986. Anybody who watched *Newsnight* and all the other boring reviews of the year would have seen how the established media thought that the Chernobyl disaster and the Challenger crash were the biggest events (closely followed by the Royal Wedding). Our readers took a wider view. Well over half named racism, nationalism or chauvinism as the number one issue. Next came Ireland with 34 per cent and the third most important issue was moral panics and women and gay rights.

EXPOSURE

Most respondents (two thirds) were in a political group, campaign or union, although this included NUS (27 people) and the Tory Party (three people). Of those specifying a trade union, most were Nalgo members. What sort of meetings do our readers attend? Around 60 per cent had been to a non-RCP meeting, organised by groups like the Anti-Apartheid Movement, LPYS/Militant, CND, NUS, SWP/SWSS or a

Aids & Nazis

I FULLY support the imprisoned lesbian and gay comrades for their militant stand against Tories, police and jailers over the Aids scare (letters, 9 January). But I'd like to make one fraternal criticism of the letter. Councillor Brownhill is not a Nazi. He is a Tory, and a fairly unexceptional one at that, with the weight of the whole British establishment behind his anti-homosexual campaign.

I think we on the left have too often made the mistake of branding right wingers as 'Nazis'. It's easy, and it usually gets a positive response from the many people who instinctively hate fascism. But dismissing

opponents as Nazis can also be an excuse for not taking up their political ideas which often, like Brownhill's anti-lesbian and gay bigotry, have a wider hearing. Instead, I think we should concentrate on exposing how Brownhill's rantings are only the logical end of the government's so-called public health campaign on Aids, and pin the blame where it belongs — on every defender of the system, rather than just their lunatic fringe. Surely winning the arguments about homosexual rights rather than about fascism is the way to make sure that people like the jailed lesbians and gays are not isolated?

Julie Hawkins
London

To the point

Why no Ward?

While looking for the full number of an Irish prisoner of war in *The Irish War* (Junius) I noticed that no mention was made of Judith Ward. Having looked through the list of innocent political hostages including the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, etc, I thought there may have just been a printing error and that she had been listed among the recognised PoWs. However there was no mention of her there either. Is there a reason for this, or is it just an accidental omission? She does appear to be the least publicised of the innocent Irish hostages in English jails.

Vaughan
HM Prison Hull

Why no WAR?

Having noticed that Workers Against Racism claims to be at the forefront of anti-racism in this country I can't help wondering why it doesn't get involved in the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign. Over the last year the whole community has been under siege from racist and oppressive policing. I don't know what reservations you have about working with the defence campaign — a dislike of the broad left? — but it seems time to drop these, pull your fingers out and prove that you are committed to aiding the anti-racist struggle in Tottenham.

Jack Hughes
Tottenham

meeting on Hungary organised by a number of different left groups. It was good to see that our regular readers can be exposed to other political ideas and still come back to the RCP for the answers; 80 per cent of respondents had been to a recent RCP meeting or event.

WORRYING

We asked how you voted in the 1983 general election. Although one woman refused to disclose how she voted (on the grounds that her politics were a matter between her and the ballot box), 68 were too young to vote, and 23 were either foreign nationals or abroad at the time, we found more people abstained on principle (28 per cent) than voted Labour (17 per cent). Only one person voted for the RCP — probably because so few of them had the opportunity to do so.

Our readers' other newspaper of the year was the *Guardian*, which half take daily. Only five admitted to reading *The Times*, but the *Independent* and the *Financial Times* each have seven per cent of our readership. However, a staggering quarter of our readers said they didn't read any daily paper. A similar proportion don't read any weeklies apart from the next step. This means that even many of our closest supporters don't know what is going on. Relying on *tns*

for all your news as well as politics is dangerous, because we're not yet in a position to replace the dailies. It is a worrying sign that one in four of the readers who responded don't take the time to study a serious newspaper.

MORE DEBATE

Our survey says that our average reader is male, white and under 30. Only one quarter of respondents are female, eight per cent are black or Asian, and 12 per cent are non-British. Twenty-six per cent have a job, 18 per cent are unemployed, and 40 per cent are students (the other 16 per cent didn't tell us). We know from our selling experience that our real readership is far more mixed than the survey suggests — though it still doesn't cover as wide a range of experiences as we would like.

We ran the survey to try to assess who reads our paper. While we did not get enough of a response to be able to generalise from the results, we remain very keen to discover you. We can improve *tns* if you tell us why it doesn't meet your needs and what you think we could do better. The letters page exists to reflect what our readers think. We've issued a challenge with our politics. We want our readers to respond.

Kate Marshall



Dave Rourke

Making Bloody Sunday an issue

Trying to convince people to join our contingent on the Bloody Sunday demonstration in two weeks' time raises the problem of making Ireland an important issue for British people, at a time when the war is largely out of the headlines over here.

Some of our supporters have found it difficult to clinch the arguments with people who are not unsympathetic to the cause of Irish freedom, but say that Bloody Sunday was a long time ago and things have changed in Ireland since then. So how can we win over people in Britain who want to know what relevance Bloody Sunday has for them?

For a start we have to show that the massacre of 14 Irish civilians by British paratroopers might have happened 15 years ago, but a lot of Irish blood has flowed on the streets of Derry and Belfast since then. We only have to look at the cover-up of the shoot-to-kill atrocities behind the John Stalker controversy to show that British rule in Ireland is just as brutal and just as bloody for Irish nationalists today as it was in the first five years of the Irish War.

In 1972 people all over the world watched their TV screens in horror as British troops gunned down anti-internment demonstrators.

In 1984 TV cameras showed the armed assassins of the Royal Ulster Constabulary shoot the life out of John Downes at point blank range at the end of another anti-internment demonstration. Today, while the British forces try to cultivate a civilised image by not murdering people in front of the media, the Loyalist paramilitaries (many of them armed and staffed by security force members) wage a sectarian assassination campaign against Irish nationalists. The British war machine kills on.

But cold, hard facts are not enough. They can prove to somebody that the war between the British state and Irish nationalists

continues, but by themselves they won't convince many to take sides with the Irish people. Through the logic of our arguments, we have to convince our audience that their interests lie in lining up with Irish freedom fighters against the warlords of the British establishment.

Winning the arguments on Ireland is part of a broader political struggle to change the way working class people see the world and their role in changing it. In a sense, the most important point we have to get across is not about Ireland at all, but about British politics. We have to establish that there are two sides on every issue in Britain — that of the ruling

class and that of the working class. Ordinary people here have no more interest in agreeing with the establishment on Ireland than they would have in siding with Thatcher on wages or NHS cuts.

Seen in this light, taking sides with Irish freedom fighters against the authorities ceases to be a matter of simply sympathising with the Irish and becomes a vital part of building an opposition movement *within Britain*. It strikes at the heart of one of the biggest political problems facing the labour movement today — British nationalism.

The popular nationalist view that British bosses and workers are all on the

same side has had terrible consequences for us. It has meant thousands of carworkers, steelworkers, etc, losing their jobs to keep 'our' industries afloat, and millions of people losing their lives to win wars against 'our' enemies. If we can show working class people that accepting the establishment's arguments about 'our' right to rule in Ireland means allowing our class opponents to monopolise political debate, we will be well on the way to making Ireland an issue over here.

We can also start a debate by bringing the lessons of the Irish War to bear on the problems and concerns of activists in Britain. For example, people here who are concerned

about the assault on civil liberties enshrined in the Public Order Act, which became law on 1 January, could learn a lot from the Irish people's disregard for police powers. Irish nationalists have broken every ban on the right to demonstrate because they recognise the law as a weapon in the enemy's armoury, and don't allow the paramilitary police to push them around.

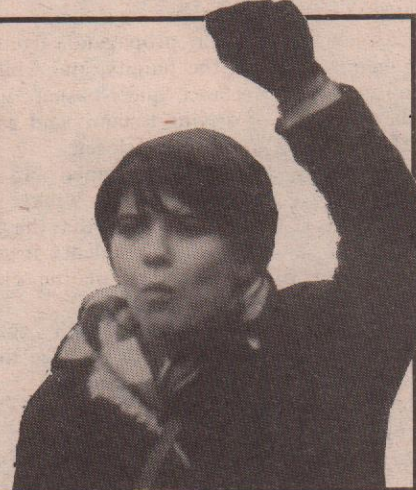
People here who still put their faith in the efficacy of radical police committees and campaign to bring the police under 'democratic control' could save themselves from serious physical damage in the future if they follow the Irish people's example. Long experience of riot batons, plastic bullets and CS gas has taught Irish nationalists to have no truck with the forces of law and order. After the experience of paramilitary police operations in the miners' strike and at Wapping it is easier to convince trade union militants that British law and order means British bosses' violence on both sides of the Irish Sea.

In the next two weeks, connecting Ireland to the immediate concerns of British people will be a vital part of building our contingent on the Bloody Sunday march in Sheffield.

MARCH

AGAINST BRITISH MURDER IN IRELAND
SATURDAY 31 JANUARY
SHEFFIELD

For transport details ring (01) 729 0414



Diary

EDINBURGH: Tuesday 27 January, 7.30pm. Public meeting, Fighting for a woman's right to work. With sacked Arbride worker Anna Druggen and a speaker from the unemployed workers' centre. Trades council, 12 Picardy Place (opposite Playhouse)
GREENWICH: Anybody who wants to canvass for the RCP candidate in Greenwich, get in touch with Rob Knight on (01) 729 0414
LONDON: Thursday 29 January,

7.30pm. All-London supporters' group, Why we say *Troops out now!* Holborn Library, Theobalds Road (Holborn tube)
LONDON: Tuesday 3 February, 7.30pm. New Living Marxism series starts. This week, Freedom and liberation in Marx. University of London Union, Malet Street, WC1 (Goodge Street tube)
MANCHESTER: Friday 6 February, 12 noon. Demonstration, Defend George Roucou, No more deportations! Assemble All Saints,

Oxford Road
NEWHAM: Thursday 12 February, 7.30pm. Public meeting, Racists on the attack — stop them! St John's church institute, 27 Romford Road, Stratford
SHEPHERD'S BUSH: Monday 26 January, 7.30pm. Public debate, Ireland — is peace possible? Clive Soley, Labour MP and John Fitzpatrick, RCP. Shepherd's Bush village hall, Bulwer Street, W12 (corner of Wood Lane and Shepherd's Bush Green)



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● AIDS ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

TORIES BROADCAST BIGOTRY

Despite its pretence of moral neutrality, the government's advertising campaign on Aids is another stage in the attack on lesbian and gay rights

What have icebergs and exploding mountains got to do with anal intercourse? The question probably occurred to many disappointed right-wing moralists catching their first glimpse of the government's Aids adverts for TV, radio and cinema last week.

They wanted the Tory marketing men to broadcast a broadside against promiscuity and homosexuality. Instead, all they got were some rather bizarre images of nature at its most violent (the sort of thing Hollywood used in its primmier days to represent a sex scene), against a background of doom-laden chimes and chants ('eerie electronic SFX' according to the press-released script). The voice-over was just a guarded reference to 'a deadly disease' that is 'a threat to us all', and advice to read a leaflet now falling through our letterboxes. No 'repent ye sinners', nothing. So what is the government's game?

In fact, the fire and brimstone brigade have nothing to worry about. The Tory 'safe sex' propaganda fits their twisted requirements like a sheath.

Despite its neutral tone, the advertising campaign will endorse all the public prejudices about Aids and step up the pressure on lesbians and gays.

In launching the campaign, Tory health chief Norman Fowler avoided any explicit moral attacks on those considered to run a 'high risk' of contracting Aids, especially gay men. Instead Fowler posed the whole thing as a public health campaign to protect everybody. He proposed the use of condoms as a strictly technical solution to a strictly medical problem.

While various vicars, gutter press editors and Tory councillors have made outspoken attacks on gays over Aids, calling for homosexuals to be shunned, interned or even gassed, top Tories and government officials have kept their distance. This reflects the division of labour which the establishment has set up.

Having started the panic about 'the gay plague' in the first place, the authorities are content to let the backwoodsmen and bigots do the dirty work for them, stirring up a

public mood of fear and hostility towards homosexuals. Meanwhile, ministers stand to one side talking about public health and trying to look sober and responsible. They have no need to get blood on their hands when there are so many others pumping out anti-gay propaganda from the press offices and the pulpits, and while the police and freelance 'queer-bashers' get on with the job of driving lesbians and gays off the streets and into the closet.

Fowler summed up this two-track approach at last week's press conference: 'My own view is that the government's aim of teaching prudence is complementary to the teachings of the church and other religious leaders.'

The Tory 'health' campaign is 'complementary' to the idea that homosexuality has been sent from hell.

The government's 'safe sex' propaganda has caught the imagination of people across the political spectrum. Yet it can only help to keep public bigotry on the boil. It spreads more speculative scare stories about how Aids is sweeping the nation, and ignores the fact that just 610 people in Britain have contracted the disease, of whom 293 have died. Its dire warning that Aids is 'a threat to us all' does nothing to counteract the widespread belief that the 'threat' comes first and foremost from gay men — all gay men.

The campaign's emphasis on avoiding casual sex and promoting monogamy as 'the only safeguard' against Aids adds fuel to fires on which the new moralists want to roast those who stray from the sexually straight and narrow — especially gay men. This is where the 'scientific' and the 'ethical' wings of the British establishment meet in a joint offensive. Despite its studied neutrality, the government is gearing up for a renewed onslaught on lesbian and gay rights — which, it will no doubt claim, has been 'forced' on it by 'public opinion'.

In their hypocritical campaign about Aids, the Tories are taking the role of master criminals who sponsor and organise the crime from afar. But when the deed is done,

when the 'queer-bashers' put the boot in or employers victimise homosexuals, the government is elsewhere with an alibi — 'don't blame us, we're only telling people to look after their health.'

The Aids campaign is not about health at all.

It is part of a political drive to re-establish the hold of traditional morality over society. The Tories recognise how useful ideas about the virtues of marriage and monogamy can be in strengthening the grip of reaction, and moulding the way people see the world to fit in with establishment views. While the phoney campaign to get everybody using condoms will make little headway, the political effort to mobilise public opinion against sexual 'deviants' is already a success. This is confirmed by the fact that lesbians — who, with nuns, are least at risk from contracting Aids through sex — have suffered increased discrimination in the backlash prompted by the official Aids scare.

If we recognise the Aids campaign as a political strategy targeting lesbians and gays, we must respond in kind. That means refusing to join the public chorus calling for sexual conformity, and highlighting the attack on homosexual rights that lies behind the hypocrisy about 'public health'.

A government that is prepared to let thousands of homeless people and pensioners freeze to death for the sake of knocking a few quid off the social security bill could not care less about the health of ordinary people. Its only concern is to ensure the survival of its system, by spreading right-wing ideas about how people should live their lives. Our concern should be to stand up for the rights of lesbians and gays under attack, and campaign to turn the tide against the moralists. As the 'Don't die of ignorance' leaflets hit the doormats of Britain, let's make sure that people don't suffer from ignorance about the malicious motives of those posing as the champions of 'the public good'.

AIDS
DON'T DIE
OF
IGNORANCE

LESBIANS & GAYS FIGHT BACK

Last week we published a letter from Winson Green prison, written by a group of 12 lesbians and gays from the Midlands. They were arrested and held for a week for the crime of protesting outside the home of a Tory councillor who had called for gays to be gassed. Now they are organising a London meeting to launch a defence campaign. It's on Thursday 29 January at 7.30pm, in the Red Rose club, 129 Seven Sisters Road.