

tms
the next step

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An educating debate

The weekend's speeches by Margaret Thatcher and education secretary Kenneth Baker revealed the Tory campaign against 'loony left' Labour councils as a shallow, hypocritical device specially designed for the general election campaign.

The Tory leaders had the audacity to choose the Young Conservatives conference as the platform from which to complain about how Labour education authorities were corrupting Britain's youth. The young Tories gave them rousing receptions, before going off into an educated chorus of 'string 'em up, string 'em up, string 'em up' during the law and order debate. No doubt they spent their free hours in their usual academic pursuits of singing rugby songs and smashing furniture.

The theme of the Thatcher/Baker offensive was that Labour education authorities were sneaking radical ideas into the school curriculum. Thatcher accused them of substituting 'social engineering' for education. Her man from the education department attacked Labour for conducting school courses on 'left-wing political matters'. The prime minister made a particular point of stressing that parents 'don't want their children brainwashed by Labour's peace studies'. Baker added 'the politics of the third world' and 'homosexuality' to the list of lessons with which Labour was supposedly misleading young people.

MORALS AND THE LASH

The Tory claim that British schools normally provide a neutral education free from political bias is absurd. Education under capitalism has always been a forum for 'social engineering'. Schools have helped to instil generations of youth with respect for the authorities, deference to the law, and pride in being British. The education system exists to teach our young people the do's and don'ts of life in a system of class domination.

The Tories attack 'peace studies' and lessons about 'the politics of the third world' because British education has always been about glorifying war and popularising the politics of the British Empire. Maps covered in red-coloured British colonies still vie for space in history textbooks with glowing passages about Clive of India, Cecil Rhodes, General Kitchener and countless other imperial conquerors who slaughtered their way across Africa and Asia. Today's schools may have given up the practice of the old grammar schools, which were mourned by Baker on Sunday, of press-ganging pupils into army cadet corps. But the education system still prides itself on its patriotism, which turns out young Union Jack-waving football thugs in Heysel Stadium today, and could produce uniformed versions for the battlefield tomorrow.

Complaints about Labour authorities promoting 'homosexual propaganda' are equally two-faced. The present strait-laced religious instruction and sex education classes are only the most obvious ways in which schools bombard girls and boys with establishment morality. The ability to teach young people respect for parental authority and the virtues of marriage and monogamy is a powerful weapon in the authorities' armoury. It gives them a head start in using the institution of the family to stabilise their

system, in perpetuating reactionary ideas about women's subordinate role as wives and mothers, and in stirring up bigotry against homosexuals at an early age.

The Tory alternative to Labour's 'loony' education exposes their blatant class bias. When Thatcher talks of the need for 'real training', she means more military-style YTS schemes that can keep young people off the streets, off the unemployment register, and on the breadline. On Sunday Baker said he wanted to introduce a new 'business awareness' course in secondary schools, to give young people 'some understanding of how a market works, of how wealth is created both in the public and private sector'. The Tories plan to educate teenagers in the harsh reality of living under capitalism, and then pay them a pittance for experiencing it first hand.

If the Labour Party had any instinct for the needs of ordinary people, it would laugh in the Tories' pompous faces when they start spouting about educational values. Yet Kinnock can't do it. He has gone so far in accepting Tory values that he is incapable of puncturing even the most over-inflated bag of Thatcherite hot air.

Labour's local government conference, which ran at the same time as the Young Conservatives shindig, indicated the party's willingness to concede the government's point about loony leftism in local authorities. While Kinnock emphasised the responsible character of good Labour councils, Labour's education spokesman Giles Radice declared his commitment to a national school curriculum — a codeword for Tory plans to give central government more direct control over what is taught. Left-wing education authorities are also backtracking, and watering down their commitment to promoting 'positive images' of lesbians and gays in sex education classes.

CHEATING KINNOCK

It now seems that, no matter how big a target the Tory hypocrites give the opposition to aim at, Kinnock still manages to shoot himself in the foot. His pathetic acceptance of every Tory insult is doing little for his prospects in the general election. It is doing less still for the prospects of ordinary people. If the opposition parties have become infected with the diseased thoughts of malicious Tory minds, what point is there in looking to Labour for relief from the strict discipline of Thatcher's Britain?

This week brings the publication of a pamphlet that everybody who wants to discover an alternative should read. *The Red Front: A Platform for Working Class Unity* sets out the full case for denying Kinnock's party our support, and pledging it instead to a bloc of left wingers committed to the cause of the working class. The details are on page 4 of this week's *tns*.

The loony left education debate, like every other issue now doing the rounds in British politics, has one inescapable lesson for the working class. If we want to stand up to the Tory offensive on our rights, our jobs and our ideas, we need to get organised under our own banners now. It is no good waiting for Kinnock. He is busy cribbing his answers from the blotted copy-book of the Tory propagandists.



David Rourke

WAPPING: WHY WE LOST

Judgement day

Wapping was lost because the Tories, the judges and Rupert Murdoch made up the rules of the dispute, and the print union leaders obeyed them to the letter

When the Wapping dispute started with the sacking of 5500 News International workers in January 1986, print union officials instructed the strikers to keep it low-key. 'They told us, "we can win this by looking good on TV"', remembers one militant. A year later the leaders of Sogat and the NGA were watching TV recordings (lent to them by the employer's lawyers) of police attacking strikers outside Rupert Murdoch's plant. The officials were debating whether to victimise identifiable pickets, as a sop to the media and the courts. They decided instead to use the threat of renewed legal action as an excuse for giving up.

Wapping has been a tragic mismatch between a ruthless employer and gutless union officials.

From writs to riot police, Murdoch brought every arm of the British establishment's legal machine into action on his side. He recruited a scab army to run his plant and another to distribute his papers, driving over pickets and passers-by when necessary. None of this made his victory inevitable. The strikers could have drawn on big resources too, by campaigning for solidarity from others in the industry. But their leaders had other ideas.

What did Brenda Dean of Sogat and Tony Dubbins of the NGA do in response to Murdoch's win-at-any-cost tactics? They agreed to sign away the right to strike if they were allowed into Wapping. They distributed a picture of a little girl with a teddy, asking people to help her daddy. They prescribed a harmless dose of marching up and down outside Wapping, to be taken three times a week. They spent days scheming behind closed doors at the TUC. They tried three times to fob the strikers off with Murdoch's skinflint compensation deals. They did nothing worth doing.

SOFT-FOCUS SELL-OUT

In the aftermath of the miners' defeat the print union leaders opted to reject militancy, keep their dispute respectable and court public opinion. In contrast to Arthur Scargill's fiery rhetoric, they promoted the soft-focus image of Dean as a negotiator. But public opinion as reflected in the media is dictated by the establishment. By trying to keep on the right side of it, the union chiefs conceded that they would fight on the employers' terms. Above all, that meant keeping the law, however anti-union the legislation may be.

Each time Murdoch ran to the courts for further assistance, the print union leaders backed off.

Their two major concessions to the courts, last May and last week, coincided with the highpoints of the Tory propaganda campaign against 'picket line violence'. On both occasions, police ran riot through print

workers' demonstrations, the government and media blamed the workers, and the union chiefs caved in under the pressure.

Murdoch's first injunction aimed to stop Sogat instructing its members in distribution to black News International titles. The union's assets were sequestered. Last May Dean went to court and said she was sorry, she wouldn't do it again, and could she have her money back. She told strikers it didn't matter, because Sogat members outside London were ignoring the blacking order anyway. Yet Dean and her officials had never campaigned to make the solidarity action bite. They simply issued a written order to their members from on high, then withdrew it when they got a countermanding order from the courts. Pieces of paper flew in and out of the Sogat offices, but the idea of getting out and organising to win the arguments for action with their distribution members never entered the officials' heads.

BITTER LESSONS

Murdoch's other big legal move came last summer, when he got a judge to agree that pickets should be limited to six (a regulation which is included in the government's advisory code of practice, but *not* in the anti-union laws proper), and that peaceful demonstrations could only take place opposite the plant at the discretion of the police.

Yet Dean and Dubbins were one step ahead of Murdoch here: they had *already* laid down such rules for their members, turning so-called mass pickets into token demos while the scab convoys roared out of Wapping. The court order put the legal seal on the unions' useless set-up, leaving police free to harass marchers while union stewards made sure the workers were not organised to defend themselves. The way was clear for the police assault at the anniversary demo on 24 January, the threat of more fines, and the union leaders' final capitulation.

Our movement must learn some bitter lessons from the Wapping tragedy.

The most important is that you can't win a war if you tell most of your troops not to fight, and obey orders issued from the enemy camp. The law is not a God-given tablet of stone. It is a weapon in the hands of our exploiters. It cannot be beaten with paper motions and token pickets. But it can be made inoperable by the mobilised power of the labour movement.

That power will remain untapped so long as we are led by people who think that 'looking good on television' is the way to beat a hard man like Murdoch, and that issuing instructions from a London office is the way to build solidarity action. The bosses' courts have had their say; now it must be our turn to pass judgement on Dean, Dubbins and the rest.

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SECRET TALKS LEAD TO STALEMATE

A BARGAIN FOR BT

As we go to press, British Telecom strikers are under pressure to accept worse conditions as a 'satisfactory conclusion' to a strike that should have been won outright within a week

On Wednesday 110 000 telephone engineers are due to vote on a new pay and productivity package. British Telecom boss Michael Betts and National Communications Union chief John Golding are confident that most strikers will accept the deal. It looks as if any militant branches which refuse the offer will be isolated.

Spokesmen from both sides of the negotiating table are claiming that the deal is more or less what they wanted. But the 12.5 per cent two-year pay rise is not much more than the engineers' claim for just one year. Neither have the NCU negotiators broken all of the strings which most angered the strikers. Management may have shelved plans to extend the working day, but their offer is still tied to flexible working practices which will pave the way for thousands of job losses between now and 1992.

WHEELING AND DEALING

BT bosses have good cause to gloat. They provoked the strike with mass suspensions and lock-outs. Now they boast that the money they have saved on wages during the dispute would cover the cost of the pay rise for months to come.

The outcome of the union/management talks reflects the fact that the employers have held the initiative in the dispute.

The deal results from secret talks between BT and the NCU's engineering group executive. Behind-the-scenes negotiations have allowed officials to wheel and deal with management, while members were kept in the dark about their manoeuvres.

Last week, strikers heard on the radio that NCU officials had reached a settlement with BT. When 1500 of them turned up at NCU headquarters to ask what was going on, the engineering executive tried to give them the brush off. 'One official was getting into his car' said Jim, a North London striker. 'He told me he hadn't got time to answer my questions. I spent three weeks on the picket lines, and he couldn't spare me 10 minutes. And when I spoke to John Golding, he pretended he didn't know what the negotiating committee was doing!' John, from City branch, saw through the officials' secrecy. 'If they had negotiated a good deal, you can bet they'd be telling everyone about it.'

RESIGNATION

Secret talks were bound to lead to a compromise at the strikers' expense. Negotiations are not just a battle of wits behind closed doors. They depend on the balance of forces in the real world outside; and while management's scab workforce kept the phone system going, BT could dictate the outcome of the talks.

Management has relied on the union's reluctance to organise a campaign of disruption that could close down the phone system.

While Golding and his crew got down to business with BT, strikers have stood on token picket lines outside working exchanges. They were instructed not to stop scabs going into work, and told to wait for the telephone system to break down of its own accord. Officials did all they could to dissuade activists from taking action to pull the plug on BT's network.

The officials' passive approach to industrial action encouraged the strikers' worst fears. With no big breakthrough in sight and no strike pay in their pockets, the prospect of a drawn-out dispute has undermined their resolve. More of them have come to see a repackaged version of management's con-



DESPITE THEIR SHOW OF BALLOT-BOX DEMOCRACY, NCU OFFICIALS HAVE KEPT MEMBERS IN THE DARK

ditions as the best they could get. The NCU has converted the original groundswell of anger that shocked BT into a growing mood of resignation.

The federal structure of the NCU has done a lot of damage. When officials from the

clerical section ordered 30 000 people back to work after a three-day strike, on the grounds that their pay claim was not connected to the engineers' struggle, they dealt a blow to all BT workers. Days later, 25 000 telephonists from the Union of

Communication Workers were considering action against BT's imposition of harsh working practices. The union divisions among Telecom workers have brought about the criminal prospect of engineers returning to work through one door while telephonists walk out through another.

An opportunity for a united response to management's all-rounded attacks has been wasted.

WAPPING FACTOR

British Telecom engineers began their strike with a better chance of winning than many other workers who have recently gone down to defeat. They are a big, united workforce with the power to hit the employers' economy where it hurts. By taking control of the phone system out of management's hands they could have forced BT to withdraw its threats and concede a decent pay rise in the first few days of the strike. As the dispute has dragged on a minority have started to consider the need to up the action in this fashion. But at the start of this week, the signs are that the dispute will end before they have got organised to do much about it.

NCU officials have echoed media warnings about the dangers of 'picket line violence' and the Wapping Factor, encouraging their members to have nothing to do with 'extreme' ideas or left-wing 'outsiders'. This false moderation has helped management to push BT workers into a corner. It's time we accepted that there is nothing extreme about taking effective action which is forced upon us by an employer's bully boy tactics. The alternative, of letting union chiefs sort out a dispute by secret talks with cocky managers, won't win us the sort of settlements we need.

Andrew Calcutt

CATERPILLAR OCCUPATION

Kicking the habit of defeat

Four weeks ago Caterpillar Tractor company, crippled by the collapse of the construction industry, announced the closure of its Uddingston plant in Lanarkshire, Scotland, with the loss of more than a thousand jobs. The workforce replied by occupying the factory. They are still there, and still in with a chance of winning. The question is *how?*

The decisive action in occupying the plant was a shot in the arm for Scottish workers worn down by a succession of defeats in the fight for jobs.

The 300 stewards from all over Scotland who piled in to pledge solidarity at the AEU headquarters in Glasgow last Thursday showed that they will not let this one go without a fight. Sammy Gilmore from Govan shipyard said that defeat had become a habit with the official labour movement — a habit that has to be broken.

FATAL FORMULA

The leaders of the labour movement who spoke at Thursday's meeting have not kicked it. Donald Dewar, Labour's Scottish spokesman, Campbell Christie, Scottish TUC chief, and NUM leader Mick McGahey reeled off a familiar and fatalistic formula that has led every recent strike in Scotland to

defeat. They called on all Scottish people, all political parties, the churches and the TUC to support a lobby of parliament — in March! This approach might make Labour look good in the election, but it will not win workers their jobs. It presumes that church leaders, councillors of all persuasions, and two-bit capitalists have a common interest in defending workers' livelihoods. It failed at Gartcosh steelworks and it will fail at Caterpillar — if we let it.

A WAY TO WIN

Caterpillar workers have set off in the right direction and seem determined to stay in the driving seat. When union full-timers were sent to talk over the closure with the Scottish Engineering Employers' Federation 50 workers turned up to tell them there was nothing to discuss except the withdrawal of the closure. If this was not on the agenda the meeting need not last five minutes, not even time for a cup of tea, as they put it. When the meeting was still going strong an hour later a delegation of stewards went in to put a stop to it and stormed out after two minutes.

Nothing came of the meeting, but the willingness of union officials to trade with the bosses shows how important it is that workers keep control of the dispute.

There is a way to win and works convenor John Brannon spelt it out last week. Keep control of the factory and the millions of pounds worth of equipment inside; stop the transfer of work to the Caterpillar plant in Leicester; win blacking action on the road, rails and docks. A stewards' delegation is off to Leicester to put the case for solidarity and another is off to Brussels to meet reps from Caterpillar plants at Gossiesle in Belgium and Grenoble in France to do the same. This should be the start of a rolling solidarity campaign. It won't find favour with bishops and businessmen and it won't help Kinnock's showing in the opinion polls — but it could save 1000-plus jobs.

Alan Harding

OPEN FORUM

Which way forward for Scottish workers?
A day of discussion and debate for
trade unionists
Saturday 28 February
10.30am
Woodside Halls
Near St George Cross underground
GLASGOW
For details ring (01) 729 3771

LABOUR'S MACHINE POLITICS IN MANSFIELD

WHAT ABOUT THE MINERS?

While the Labour Party manoeuvres for support from the two mining unions in Notts, the mining communities are left to face management's offensive alone

The selection of left winger Alan Meale as Labour parliamentary candidate for Mansfield upset the local Labour mafia and supporters of the scab Union of Democratic Mineworkers. Meale, a former secretary for the Campaign Group of MPs, who co-wrote the Amnesty for Victimised Miners Bill with Tony Benn, wasn't their idea of a good MP for the UDM's Nottinghamshire heartland.

The row over Meale's hard-left reputation has added to the tension in the Mansfield Labour Party. First it was rumoured that the UDM itself would stand a candidate against him, to focus the union's protests at the national Labour Party's refusal to recognise it. Now a collection of UDM officials, deselected right-wing Labour councillors and careerists have clubbed together to form the Moderate Labour Party. They have threatened to split the slim majority held by retiring Mansfield MP Don Concannon, and upped the pressure on the Labour leadership to let the UDM into the official labour movement fold. 'Meale won't come out and say he supports the 20 000 UDM members' complained MLP chair and UDM branch president Brian Marshall.

The MLP may be a tinpot organisation, but the row over Meale and the UDM can only add to Labour's problems in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Labour has three marginal seats in the area — Mansfield, Ashfield and Bassetlaw. Sherwood, a new constituency that houses a lot of miners, is already held by a Tory. Kinnock cannot afford to lose any more Notts mining seats.

FIXES AND FUDGES

Labour leaders have tried to calm things down by giving implicit recognition to the UDM. They made no attempt to amend the clauses in the Tories' Coal Bill which granted equal legal rights to the scab outfit and the National Union of Mineworkers. But Kinnock has so far baulked at the prospect of giving public recognition to the UDM. Although he has no love for the militants in the NUM, he fears that openly backing an organisation set up to help smash the miners' strike might endanger his hold over other union leaders. The Labour

Party's answer to this dilemma is to revert to its time-honoured tradition of fudging the issue.

A fortnight ago, Labour's national executive sent energy spokesman Stan Orme to the Notts coalfield to sort things out. Orme is well used to the atmosphere of smoke-filled rooms. He was the fixer who toured the coalfields trying to cobble together a sell-out deal during the miners' strike. This time his brief was to set the scene for a deal between Labour, the NUM and the UDM. His visit didn't quite work out. Nottinghamshire NUM president Henry Richardson gave guarded support, because Orme didn't talk openly to UDM officials. But the scab leaders thought Orme was small

fry, and demanded a visit from Kinnock or his deputy Roy Hattersley. The UDM knows it has got Labour under pressure, and wants to make the most of its advantage.

Meanwhile in Mansfield, Alan Meale is already back-peddalling away from his hard-left stance in an effort to help the party fudgers. Although NUM activists remember him canvassing their support with promises to take on the UDM, since selection Meale refuses 'to use the term scab for anything'. He now recognises the scab UDM as 'a section of the community'. His seven-point statement in the local paper, written in reply to accusations of 'loony leftism', shows Meale acting as a mouthpiece for mainstream Labourism: 'As a parliamentary

candidate, my job is to advocate party policy.' Meale's message is that Mansfield has already got a moderate Labour Party, and he is its candidate. He wants all miners to forget their differences and vote Labour.

While Meale, Orme, Marshall and Richardson wheel and deal in their council suites and union offices, the plight of rank and file miners hardly gets a mention.

NUM and UDM officials are at each others' throats over who gets more attention from the Labour Party. But the NUM's attitude to management is now very close to UDM-style collaboration. Both organisations have whipped their members into breaking productivity records, while management implements its savage redundancy programme.

Even the Notts coalfield has lost 8000 jobs since 1984. 'Clipstone is now down to three faces from six,' says John, an NUM member at the UDM-organised pit. 'It's unbelievably understaffed, one man doing three jobs on a shift. There's a strong feeling against it, but no union to organise against it.'

MINERS ARE THE LOSERS

British Coal is now trying to push through the so-called Doncaster agreement, which will mean worse working conditions, more work going to outside contractors, and a divisive bonus scheme. As the deal's title suggests, it was first accepted in the militant NUM area of Yorkshire. On top of all this, 462 sacked and jailed miners still wait for reinstatement, nearly two years after the strike. Since they last went on shift, the number of mineworkers in Britain has been cut by a third to 98 000.

There is a glaring gap between the concerns of the bureaucrats jockeying for position with the Labour Party, and the problems facing rank and file miners.

Meale's call for miners to unite in the fight for a Labour government is no answer to British Coal's attacks. The last Labour government started the swingeing cutbacks in the coalfields and, with Tony Benn as energy minister, brought in the area-based incentive schemes that laid the basis for the NUM/UDM split. Kinnock's party has already turned its back on all the victimised miners who did not win their case at the bosses' industrial tribunals. Its 'planned future for coal' is just another scheme to make miners pay the price for streamlining the coal industry.

Miners in Mansfield and across the country cannot afford to sit back and watch while manoeuvring labour movement officials ignore their interests. They need to step out of the Labour Party/Moderate Labour Party/UDM/NUM marsh and get organised to defend themselves. They could start by throwing their weight behind *The Red Front* (see box).

Andrew Calcutt

THE RED FRONT

A platform for working class unity

Revolutionary Communist Party

THE RED FRONT

We are campaigning for support for *The Red Front*, an electoral bloc that aims to unite all left-wing groups and individuals around a platform of basic working class demands. Send off for your copy of the election programme today, and get the arguments for rejecting the Labour Party in favour of *The Red Front*.

Available for £1 (plus 40p p&p) from Junius Publications, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX. Five or more copies post free.

GREENWICH BY-ELECTION

FIGHTING FOR A CHANGE

Deidre Wood is contesting the 26 February Greenwich by-election for the Labour Party and Neil Kinnock. Kate Marshall is standing for the Revolutionary Communist Party and the working class.

When the Greenwich campaign took off this week, the Tories and the Alliance had little to offer local people. So they launched a scurrilous smear campaign to discredit Labour's left-wing candidate Deidre Wood. Conservative candidate John Antcliffe said she was 'out of step with the party leadership'. David Owen declared that Wood was 'unfit to be an MP'. The press pitched in to denounce 'Dreadful Deidre' as a loony tune.

Wood refutes the hard-left label, swears allegiance to Neil Kinnock, and insists she supports official Labour Party policy.

Wood has appeared arm-in-arm with Kinnock outside parliament, and done her best to toe the line. But trying to keep her

radical credentials intact while supporting the right-wing leadership has already caused some tongue-twisters. The black sections issue got Wood into a bit of bother: 'Yes, I support black sections in the Labour Party. But I also support Labour Party policy, which is at this time that you do not have black sections.' Defence was another dilemma: 'I am not defensive about defence,' said Wood. 'I believe we have a good Labour Party policy and I support that policy.' Pressed about her past opposition to Nato, Wood was confused but contrite: 'My personal views are at this point mixed. I am quite happy that we stay in Nato.'

If Wood is elected we can expect to pay a high price for her loyalty to Kinnock's Labour Party. Loyalty to Labour means supporting a party which has said that it cannot solve the problem of unemployment, which stands at 14 per cent in Greenwich. It means endorsing Kinnock's view that strikers who fight for their jobs — in the pits



RCP CANDIDATE KATE MARSHALL

or in the print — are 'undesirable elements' who are fair game for Thatcher's paramilitary police. It means accepting Kinnock's pledge that a future Labour government would not give extra cash to London boroughs like Greenwich which have a debt crisis. Estates

like the Ferrier or Cherry Orchard, which are crying out for massive renovation, can go on waiting as far as Kinnock is concerned.

The RCP does not accept that Labour's pale imitation of Tory policies offers anything worth having.

We are standing on a platform that demands the basic things we need for a decent life. We stand for a job for every worker or the equivalent in benefits, decent housing for all, the repeal of all laws that restrict the rights of workers to take action in defence of working class interests and an end to all forms of discrimination against women, black people, lesbians and gays. We uphold the right of the Irish people to freedom from British domination.

Our candidate Kate Marshall has a long record of standing up for the rights of ordinary people, from organising solidarity with striking workers to leading campaigns for free all-day nurseries. Her message to local people is: 'Don't waste your vote on 26 February. Use it to show both Labour and the Tories that you are not prepared to take it lying down. Vote RCP and join our movement to fight for a change.'

ELECTION ALERT: Anybody who can help out with our Greenwich election campaign should contact John Gibson on (01) 729 3771.



RIDING HIGH: FIANNA FAIL'S CHARLES HAUGHEY TOPS THE OPINION POLLS AS THE BEST OF A BAD BUNCH

ELECTION IN THE SOUTH

'Chimpanzees in suits'

If you think the choice between Thatcher and Kinnock is unappetising, look at what's on offer in Ireland's election on Tuesday. *Fiona Foster and Mick Spencer report from Dublin*

Welcome to Dublin — the home of Guinness. The financial chaos and corruption now associated with the Guinnessy make it a fitting neon sign to introduce foreigners to Ireland's capital. The ruin of the nation, bled dry by home-grown chancers and foreign financiers, is the big issue in the general election.

The election follows the collapse of the Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition government. After five years of helping to impose cuts and increase unemployment, Labour decided that its best chance of electoral survival lay in opposing the latest budget cuts. Despite such vote-catching ploys (which won't catch many votes), Ireland's foreign debt ensures that the cuts must come. As the British *Economist* noted last week, the election is about 'who is going to do the cutting, by how much and where. It is a wonder anybody wants to win. The victor will face a dreadful mess.'

Yet they do want to win, and to convince the world (especially that part of it with some spare capital) that the South is a tidier place than it's given credit for.

We joined a party of foreign journalists on a coach tour of Dublin's swankier districts. Our guide was outgoing premier Garret FitzGerald, eager to impress his audience with a look at the nice side of the city.

DEBTORS' REPUBLIC

But the passengers weren't fooled. They would keep asking questions about the grim statistics that define the Republic as a Continental corner of the third world: a per capita foreign debt that is three times as high as Mexico's, 20 per cent unemployment, and the fact that poverty is forcing 30 000 people out of Ireland every year. All FitzGerald could promise was that, if re-elected, he would keep a firm hand on the cutting knife. A crowd piled out of a betting shop to register their support for his opponent: 'Haughey's our man. Haughey's the one who'll get the country back on its feet.'

The man himself, one Charles J Haughey, leader of the opposition Fianna Fail, was at that moment launching his tourism policy at Dublin's poshest hotel. When the occasion calls for it, Haughey is the loudest advocate of Irish unity in the establishment. But when everybody is concerned about the economy, and the national question is pushed into the background, he can turn a blind eye to Britain's occupation of the North. 'Ireland', he announced, 'provides peace, tranquility and a hassle-free situation. Cross-Border tourism promotions have a special attraction and special Border areas will be supported.' He won giggles from journalists who had not forgotten there was a war on.

Many Irish voters have had enough of the antics of middle class politicians who pretend their impoverished and divided country is just another advanced European democracy.

Young Dubliners are more fed up than most — which is unfortunate for sellers of *In Dublin*. The city's 'what's on' magazine is sold on the streets at 30p a copy commission. Sales plummeted this week thanks to a cover featuring FitzGerald as 'Garret Fitzheadroom' with a shiny clown's nose. Slouched against a pillar outside Dublin's famous Bewley's tea shop, Martin bemoaned a day's earnings of £6.30. 'It doesn't matter that the front cover is a piss-take or that the article tells you not to bother voting, the cover is still about the prime minister and the election and that's an immediate turn-off for young people. Everyone's sales have dropped.'

DON'T TRUST THEM

Older people retain a fierce interest in politics, if not in politicians. A well-dressed man with a big pole had drawn a crowd on O'Connell Street. His pole had a message for all voters: 'The majority of politicians are chimpanzees in suits who earn £300 a week while I struggle on £36.' He went down well with a widow living on £42 a week in a country where the cost of living is almost twice the British level ('Youse should all tear up your votes!'), and a young man who had earned £38 a week on a government scheme where a slave-labourer is called a general engineering operative ('We need proper jobs, none of this Industrial Development Authority crap!'). 'I've been standing here every day,' said the man with the pole, 'and I can honestly say 95 per cent of people admire what I'm doing.' We asked if he had put up all the anonymous handwritten posters saying, 'Don't trust any of them, Don't vote.' He hadn't but he liked the idea.

FRANK STAGG MEMORIAL PROTEST

Sunday 15 February
Wakefield Prison

On 12 February 1976, Irish prisoner of war Frank Stagg died on hunger-strike in Wakefield jail. Sunday's protest will mark the eleventh anniversary of his death and show support for the Irish political prisoners still behind British prison bars.

The brutal treatment of Stagg by the last Labour government should remind us of the need to unite against Britain's war in Ireland, whichever party is prosecuting it. Called by the Irish Republican Prisoner of War Campaign. Supported by the Irish Freedom Movement. Transport available from Birmingham, Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield. Phone (01) 729 3771 for details.

Elsewhere, a noisy crowd of young people from Ballymun were on their way to the Fine Gael HQ to protest at the government's refusal to fund a community scheme. Nineteen-year old Sean had dressed up as a Fine Gael candidate and carried a placard which ridiculed the party's election slogan, 'Let's build the nation...and leave Ballymun in deprivation.' 'You don't see any of the main parties canvassing in Ballymun. Unemployment is 63 per cent, three quarters of the people are under 25. The politicians haven't got anything to say to us and anyway hardly anybody votes, so it's not worth them risking their hides in our district.' Outside the HQ a Fine Gael candidate looked bemused when a protester asked for a sample of what he could do for Ballymun — and handed him a urine sample bottle.

We left Dublin the day thousands of English arrived for the rugby international. Ireland won the match, but the bombs planted by Loyalist sectarians the next day were a reminder that the Irish people have yet to win the war against the British Crown and its supporters. Yet the war is not an issue. All the big parties now support the Anglo-Irish agreement, with its acceptance of partition and permanent British rule in the North.

GUTTER POLITICS

As the rugby fans poured past, a small group laid a wreath at the statue of Jim Larkin, leader of the 1913 Dublin lock-out, a general strike crushed with British assistance. A plaque read 'And tyranny trampled them in Dublin's gutter, until Jim Larkin.'

As long as Irish workers are represented by the FitzGerald and Haugheys they will keep being trampled 'in Dublin's gutter'.

Haughey looks likely to sneak a win. But the cynicism of ordinary people can only deepen as the misery gets worse. Respect for the authorities is at an all-time low. Around 150 street traders recently packed a court's public gallery to answer charges of illegal trading. They jeered at red-faced policemen as the judge threw out the case. One, Dick, stopped only to sign on before selling his music tapes again on O'Connell Bridge. 'I emigrated for a while, lived in Hackney, but it wasn't so easy to do a mixer (work and claim dole) there. Here the dole office staff sign you on then ask have you got the latest U2 tape. The government know there's a lot of mixing goin' on but sure it's like everything else, they've no control over it.'

The mess that is capitalism in modern Ireland makes it easy to see why some people think the man with the pole has a point.

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

ALF

Last week the courts jailed 10 members of the Animal Liberation Front for a total of more than 37 years on charges of conspiracy and criminal damage. Ronnie Lee, set up as a 'fanatic' and a 'dangerous criminal', got 10 years. Others were jailed for between nine months and four years. The charges of conspiracy and the heavy sentences show that the authorities are out to make an example of anybody who steps outside the law.

The ALF has won notoriety through its campaign to burn, wreck and destroy department stores, fur traders, fishing tackle shops, butchers and research laboratories implicated in the abuse of animals. It has poisoned (dead) turkeys with mercury and put bleach in shampoo bottles to hit its enemies' profits. In 1984 it pushed Mars to the brink of withdrawing 10 million bars from shops by warning that some had been injected with rat poison.

Front supporters claim that the conspiracy convictions will not break their organisation. Its 1000 members are organised in military-style cells which operate autonomously. Recruitment is by invitation only, making infiltration difficult. The Front displayed bravado in the face of high-level intimidation last week, 'liberating' 52 hens and four piglets from a Cheshire research lab and planting 11 firebombs in a Buckinghamshire abattoir, picked off for its links with the pet food trade.

ALF activists have clearly got a lot of commitment, initiative and bottle. But the cause they are fighting for is not worth a 10-year stretch in prison.

ALF organiser Roger Yates, now in hiding after jumping bail to avoid a four-year spell inside, argues that the convictions will not deter ALF activists: 'Direct action pays. Most liberation movements have to go outside the prevailing laws.' But the ALF is not like 'most liberation movements'. Activists like Ronnie Lee, jailed for 10 years last week, have spent years fighting for the rights of animals. Activists like Patrick Magee, jailed for life last year, have spent the last 15 years fighting for the right of the Irish people to freedom from British rule. 'Most liberation movements' are fighting to free their people from poverty and oppression, a more worthy cause than the liberation of a few dozen hens and piglets.

The ALF endows animals with 'rights' which do not exist. Rights are not like cells, common to all living things. They are a unique feature of human society. People only win their rights by organising together in a conscious struggle to determine the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Any right worth having — the right to belong to a trade union, the right not to be exploited for more than eight hours a day, the right to demonstrate — has been won as a result of workers fighting together to win a recognised concession from the capitalist class. When the establishment is on top, as it seems to be today, our rights come under attack. When we are going forward, our rights expand accordingly. As a feature of the struggle between classes, rights only have any meaning for individuals in human society, not for dogs in kennels or chickens in coops.

Everybody who is concerned about the current clampdown on civil rights must condemn the outrage of last week's conspiracy convictions. The case underlines the urgency of fighting for rights that are worth defending. But the ALF's campaign can only give the authorities an excuse to strengthen their repressive powers against the real threat to their system of exploitation and oppression — the working class.

Why should you be concerned about Aids? This is one of the opening questions in the special leaflet 'Aids: Don't Die of Ignorance' the government had delivered to 23 million households in January. Here is the government's answer:

'Any man or woman can get the Aids virus depending on their behaviour. It is not just a homosexual disease.

'There is no cure. And it kills.

'By the time you read this, probably 300 people will have died in this country. It is believed that a further 30 000 carry the virus. This number is rising and will continue to rise unless we all take precautions.'

But is all this really true? The Aids virus has been isolated from a range of body fluids including saliva, tears, breast milk and vaginal secretions. But there is good evidence that only blood and semen act as effective transmitters of the infection. It also appears that the virus can pass from an infected pregnant woman to her unborn baby.

The Aids virus cannot be passed on by coughing and sneezing, hugging and kissing, sharing washing and cooking utensils or toilet facilities.

Numerous parents, siblings and others have been exposed to the various body fluids of children who have contracted Aids. Not one case has resulted in the transmission of the virus. Many accidental exposures of laboratory staff — even many needle stick injuries — have not resulted in infection. There has been one recorded case of a nurse who accidentally injected herself with a small quantity of blood becoming infected with the Aids virus.

There has been some controversy over a case in which a woman was presumed to have become infected via her husband's saliva and another in which a child was allegedly infected via a bite on the forearm. But as the government's chief medical adviser, Sir Donald Acheson, concludes, 'There is no sound evidence that the virus has been transmitted by kissing' (*Guardian*, 30 January 1987). The Aids virus has been designated as a relatively low risk to medical and laboratory staff engaged in caring for Aids patients and examining their body fluids. Routine precautions only are required.

HOW AIDS TRAVELS

There is no doubt that the Aids virus can be transmitted through blood. There have been many cases of Aids in haemophiliacs (who require periodic transfusions of blood products), and in other recipients of blood. Many drug addicts who share needles and syringes have contracted the Aids virus by this route.

There is also strong evidence that the Aids virus can be transmitted in semen. A high proportion of Aids cases in the West are male homosexuals. It appears that anal intercourse is associated with a high risk of transmitting the virus. It seems that the virus in semen can enter the circulation of the receptive partner through microscopic breaches in the lining of the rectum.

What about other forms of sexual activity? A recent study of more than 300 gay men in London concludes that the receptive partner in anal intercourse is the only one at risk (*Genitourinary Medicine*, 1986; 62:386-91). Dr Brian Evans, head of genitourinary medicine at the West London hospital, found no evidence of transmission of the Aids virus by oral-anal or oral-genital contact or by swallowing semen. They found no increased risk of acquiring Aids for the insertive partner in anal intercourse. The results of a larger US survey — 'The San Francisco Men's Health Study' — confirm these findings. The report concludes that 'the data confirms that receptive anal genital contact is the major mode of transmission' of the Aids virus (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, 257, 3).

In other words, it is infected semen deposited into the rectum that transmits the Aids virus among gay men. It is likely that repeated exposure is necessary to transmit the virus: the strongest predictor of infection in the British study was homosexual activity for more than five years. The American study noted a clear association between the number of male sexual partners and likelihood of infection with the Aids virus.

The question of the heterosexual transmission of the Aids virus is contentious.

There is some evidence that infected men can pass the virus to their female sexual partners by vaginal intercourse. Antibodies to the Aids virus have been observed in the partners of

infected haemophiliacs and Aids patients. There have also been a few cases in which women became infected following artificial insemination with semen from asymptomatic carriers of the Aids virus.

While it is possible for the Aids virus to be passed from men to women in vaginal intercourse, in the West relatively few women appear to have been infected in this way. In Britain by the end of 1986 only 10 women were thought to have acquired Aids from men by the vaginal route and only three of these actually caught the infection in Britain. Given the prevalence of bisexuality in the gay scene, this suggests that the virus is spread less easily by vaginal intercourse than it is by anal intercourse.

Can the Aids virus be passed from women to their male sexual partners? The virus has been demonstrated in both cervical and vaginal secretions. But it is uncertain whether it can be effectively transmitted by this route. One American survey which purports to demonstrate the infection of servicemen by contact with prostitutes has been criticised on methodological grounds. By the end of 1986 there were 10 cases of men in Britain who had apparently acquired Aids through heterosexual contact — only one of these picked up the infection in Britain.

The main evidence for the spread of the Aids virus from women to men comes from epidemiological surveys in Africa which show similar levels of infection among men and women, and postulate a central role for prostitutes in transmitting the infection. But this case is far from proven. As a result of the high incidence of malnutrition and chronic parasitic infection in Africa, a degree of suppression of the immune system of the kind that occurs in Aids is commonplace. This creates a quite different immunological, epidemiological and clinical picture in Africa. For example, the tumour Kaposi's sarcoma is a characteristic feature in Aids. It was only seen in the West among elderly Jews in Eastern and Central Europe before the arrival of Aids. Yet it has long been common among much younger people in Central Africa.

Countries where funding for basic medical care is woefully inadequate do not have the resources for painstaking epidemiological research of the kind required to investigate Aids. A number of small and unreliable surveys in Africa have provided the basis for a mountain of dubious generalisation in the West.

HIGH-RISK CATEGORIES

A number of different factors may be involved in creating a more even distribution of Aids between the sexes in Africa, if indeed this is the case. There may be a higher level of homosexual and bisexual activity than has been recognised and the practice of heterosexual anal intercourse may play a part. The widespread re-use of non-sterile needles for immunisations, injections of antibiotics and other medications may also be an important factor in spreading the infection.

Whatever the case, it is impossible to generalise from Africa about the ways in which Aids may be spread in the West.

Dr Brian Evans believes that Aids will remain a homosexual problem in Britain. 'Outside of Africa we have a handful of cases that might be by heterosexual transmission, yet here we are saying it's a heterosexual disease.' The San Francisco survey of 1000 men found that nearly

half the homosexual and bisexual men tested were positive for the Aids virus, whereas all the heterosexuals were negative. There is no good medical evidence to support the view that Aids is likely to spread rapidly by the heterosexual route.

'Any man or woman' can get the Aids virus, but only if they engage in very specific forms of behaviour in very exclusive company. Men are at risk of picking up the Aids virus if they are the receptive partner in anal intercourse with an infected man. Women may be at risk if they have vaginal (or anal) intercourse with an infected man. And men or women are at risk if they share needles or syringes with infected individuals. Haemophiliacs and recipients of

blood transfusions are no longer at risk as stocks of blood have been treated to kill the virus.

The low infectiousness and remarkable fragility of the Aids virus — it can be killed by washing up liquid, moderate heat or dryness — mean that it is largely confined to clearly defined risk categories. These are:

- gay men in a community in which the Aids virus has become established; this means most city gay scenes in the West;
- intravenous drug users in a similar community;
- haemophiliacs or others who became infected through contaminated blood products.

NEW PAMPHLET EXPOSES

THE TRUTH

AIDS

Our opposition to the government's publicity campaign on Aids, and insistence that the issue is lesbian and gay rights, has provoked heated debate on the left and in the lesbian and gay movement.

In an extract from a forthcoming pamphlet, Dr Michael Fitzpatrick and Don Milligan look at the facts about the Aids scare

DOES MYTHS AND LIES

ABOUT THE

AIDS

PANIC

before screening checks and heat treatment were introduced;

- babies of carriers of the Aids virus who acquire the infection in the womb or at birth: as neither gay men nor haemophiliacs (a disease linked to X chromosome which therefore only affects men) bear children, in practice this means the babies of female drug addicts.

Between the arrival of the Aids virus in Britain in 1982 and the end of 1986, 610 people had developed Aids. Aids is concentrated in the London area — 77 per cent of all cases have been reported to the four health authorities covering the capital and its surrounds. Only handfuls of cases have been reported to other

regional health authorities. The majority of people in Britain who do not fit into the four high-risk categories or live in the South-east have little chance of catching the Aids virus, no matter what sort of sexual antics they get up to.

'Aids is not just a homosexual disease' says the government. But 88 per cent of the 610 people in Britain who contracted Aids up to the end of 1986 were male homosexuals. This proportion rises to 97 per cent if the other risk categories are added. In the USA, 96 per cent of the 30 000 Aids sufferers are in these four risk categories.

It is striking that as the epidemic has spread in the USA, it has shown no tendency to spread outside the main risk categories.

There have been contradictory responses to the fact that the majority of Aids sufferers are gay men. Right-wing politicians and moralists have seized on this fact to whip up public prejudice against homosexuals and to call for harsher repressive measures. More mainstream politicians have chosen to blow up the minimal risks of the infection spreading to the heterosexual community. Many radicals, especially in the gay movement, have gone along with this approach because it appears to take the heat off the gay community. In fact this response tries to avoid confronting the intensified attack on lesbians and gay men which is the immediate consequence of the Aids scare.

When we point out that Aids predominantly affects gay men, this is not to attribute any blame to them or in any way to endorse attacks on lesbian and gay rights. It is simply to recognise a fact: conceding that sickle cell anaemia largely affects black people is not racist, and admitting that Aids largely affects gay men is not anti-gay. When we acknowledge that anal intercourse is probably the major route by which the Aids virus is spread, this is not to disparage this form of sexual activity, which many people find pleasurable.

Clarifying the facts about Aids is the essential first step to tackling the real issues raised by the current scare — the denial of equal rights to homosexuals in our society and the attempt to take advantage of Aids to promote a climate of sexual restraint.

Aids is indeed an incurable and fatal illness. By February 1987, the total of deaths from Aids in Britain had passed 350. This is a tragic loss of life, particularly as most of the deaths were of young people. But compared with other causes of death and disease, 350 deaths in four years is a marginal public health problem. In 1985 heart disease killed 190 000 people in Britain, cancer 134 000, and respiratory diseases 86 500. Car accidents kill around 5000 people, many of them children and young people, every year. Every year around 600 people die as a result of accidents at work — twice the number killed in four years by Aids. Another 800 people die each year as a result of occupational diseases.

SCAREMONGERS

There have been many alarmist projections of the likely extension of the Aids epidemic in the future. Health minister Norman Fowler is fond of quoting a figure of 4000 anticipated deaths over the next three years. According to one widely used computer model the incidence of new cases of Aids in 1988 could be anywhere between 462 and 7307. It is significant that while this approach allows anybody to choose a figure at random, the politicians and the media always choose the higher and more alarming figures.

Statistical projections based on limited data are notoriously unreliable. A pamphlet produced by the Office of Health Economics in December calculated that, according to this computer model, the annual incidence of Aids would reach a magnitude equivalent to the entire population of the country by 2001 (Nicholas Webb, *The Aids Virus: Forecasting Its Impact*, OHE).

The experience of the USA suggests that the exponential growth curve of 1982 and 1983 is already flattening out.

This sigmoid pattern is characteristic of biological phenomena. In the early stages the number of new cases of Aids doubled every five

months, but this interval had lengthened to 10 months in 1984-85 and to 11 months in 1985-86.

Fears about the rapid spread of Aids have been intensified by the widespread practice of publicising *cumulative totals* of those with the syndrome, rather than simply noting *new cases*. This obviously gives a much more rapidly rising curve and contributes to the general alarm. Studies of the spread of infectious diseases generally rely on figures of new cases because these provide a more accurate assessment of the course of the disease. The declining rate of spread of Aids in the USA is immediately apparent from the figures on new cases, but is obscured in the graph of cumulative totals.

The number of people infected with the Aids virus is increasing, but the government will not stop this rise by exhorting us to 'take precautions'. Some precautions are obviously sensible for those in the high-risk categories — more gay men in particular had been generally taking such precautions long before the government launched its campaign. For everybody else, the vast majority of the recipients of the government's leaflet, precautions are quite unnecessary.

'Why are you being sent this leaflet?' Given the remoteness of the Aids threat to most of the population, the first question on the government's Aids warning seems particularly apt. Here is the government's answer, written in the stilted tabloid journalism style considered appropriate for addressing the masses:

'This leaflet is being sent to every household in the country. It is about Aids. And everyone now needs to know the facts. It explains what the disease is. How it is spread. How serious a threat it is. And how it can be avoided.'

The government's campaign against Aids is one of the biggest health education campaigns in British history. By a striking coincidence on the same day in November 1986 that the government launched its Aids campaign, it quietly announced the abolition of the health education council. After a series of disputes arising from campaigns launched by the council that antagonised the cigarette companies and breweries — an important source of government revenue and Tory Party funds — the government scrapped it.

ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL DEVICE

The government has refused to make more than token gestures against the preventable epidemics of coronary artery disease, lung cancer and alcoholism. Early detection improves survival prospects in many forms of cancer, notably in cancer of the cervix, which kills 2000 women every year, and in breast cancer which kills around 10 000 women every year. Yet successive governments have refused to provide the resources for properly organised screening facilities. The carnage on building sites, in coal mines, in factories and on North Sea oil rigs could be drastically reduced by ensuring that safety rules are followed in every workplace. But at a time of a rising rate of industrial accidents, the already pitifully inadequate health and safety inspectorate is being cut back still further.

If the government were really concerned about public health there is no shortage of problems to be tackled and campaigns required to alert the public to dangers to life and limb. Yet the government has chosen a rare disease, which is spreading fairly slowly within clearly defined high-risk categories and seems unlikely to spread more widely, to launch the most extensive public health education campaign in history.

It has been clear from the beginning of the Aids epidemic that the establishment is more interested in using Aids as a focus for publicity than it is in providing resources for treatment and research. The advertising campaign is designed to raise fears and anxieties. Above all it is designed to frighten people into a return to conventional morality, and to deter all departures from the sexual straight and narrow, such as homosexuality and promiscuity.

To the extent that Aids is spreading among gay men the only way to stop it is to remove the criminalisation of homosexuality that forces much gay sexual activity underground, into circumstances that make safe sex impossible.

The response of the working class movement to the Aids panic should be to take up the fight to defend the rights of lesbians and gay men. We must repudiate all attempts to stir up prejudice against homosexuals and to take advantage of Aids to promote a return to Victorian values.

BRITAIN, AMERICA USE GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY

TERRY WAITE AND THE GULF WAR

The Western powers protest about the disappearance of Terry Waite and 25 hostages in Lebanon while sending their fleets to hold the masses of the Middle East to ransom. **John Johnson** reports

The seizure of Terry Waite in Lebanon and US journalist Gerald Seib in Iran is a good excuse for another round of Arab-bashing in the West. America and its allies have taken advantage of the hostage crisis to launch new war moves in the eastern Mediterranean. Bristling with the most advanced weapons and with a full complement of 38 000 marines, 30 US warships have taken up position off the coast of Lebanon. Another 11 have steamed towards the Gulf to join the joint US-British naval task force which is already poised to strike against any challenge to Western power in the region.

It is inconceivable that the Western powers would stage such a show of force out of concern for the plight of Seib — who has since been released unharmed — or that of British trouble-shooter Terry Waite. The West has been stung into action by the threat of fresh upheaval in the Middle East, arising from Iran's recent successes in the Gulf War.

Iran's thrust to within six miles of Basra, Iraq's second city, marks a breakthrough in the war which has killed one million in six years.

More than 20 000 Iranian soldiers died in the offensive which broke the Iraqi line at Fish Lake last month. Iranian artillery can now lob two missiles into the city every minute. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are streaming from Basra along the banks of the Euphrates.

POWER GAMES

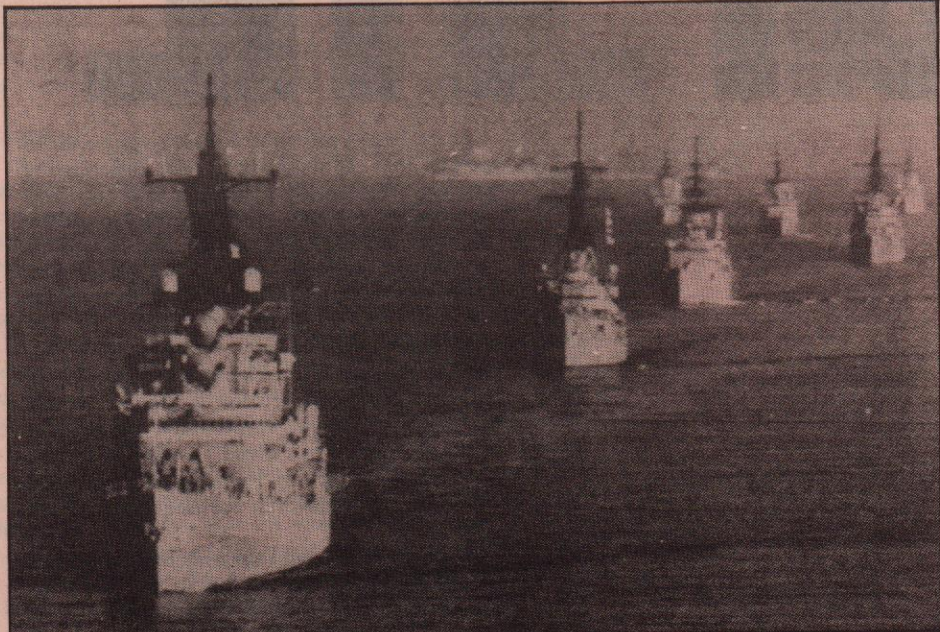
The Iranian offensive may yet be halted by the superior firepower of the Iraqi air force. But the assault on Basra is the first clear sign of a shift in the balance of the war. Iran now has the initiative and looks likely to regain its past position as the dominant nation in the Gulf.

Iran's success is worrying Western leaders. It presents the prospect of an end to the bloody stalemate which has helped the West keep its grip over the Gulf for the past six years.

The slaughter in the Gulf is a sickening illustration of what Western domination means for the people of the Middle East. Six years ago the USA encouraged Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein to attack Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran. Since then the USA, France, Britain and West Germany have made billions by selling arms to keep the war going.

The roots of the conflict lie in the uprising in Iran, which overthrew America's stooge, the Shah, and ushered in the Islamic regime in 1979.

The US authorities were shaken by the loss of the Shah, and keen to divert the Iranian masses from spreading the fight against the Western order across the region. By fomenting the war with Iraq, they pushed



DEATH THREATS: US WARSHIPS MOVE INTO LINE OFF THE LEBANESE COAST

the Iranian people into a senseless struggle against a neighbouring Arab state. Hussein obliged the Americans because he hoped that a bid to replace Iran as the leading power in the Gulf would help sustain his feeble and detested government in Iraq.

Iran's new clerical rulers also welcomed the war as an opportunity to tighten their grip. Hundreds of thousands of Islamic 'guards' — the *Pasdarans* — and the teenage *Baseej* have been sent to certain death in Iran's savage 'human wave' battles. The war helped drown the revolutionary fervour of the Iranian working class in an orgy of bloodshed and religious fanaticism, and served as a pretext for militarising Iranian society.

The military stalemate has helped preserve a stability of sorts in the Gulf. Iran's success now threatens to upset this balance and expose the fragile regimes of the Middle East to a new round of conflicts.

Iran's offensive has been a blow to the authority of the Hussein regime, and has done further damage to the morale and discipline of Iraq's reluctant troops. The prospect of defeat could easily turn war-weariness into revolt, among a people whose patience has been sorely tried by economic hardship and by the casualty toll in a war which was never popular.

The collapse of Iraq could destabilise established regimes throughout the region.

Kurdish secessionists, encouraged by Iran's advances, have already seized a third of the Kurdish territories in northern Iraq, blocking the main northern road and pipeline links. This threatens to drag Turkey — the land link between the Middle East and Europe — into the widening Gulf conflict.

Its military rulers fear that the Kurdish revolt in Iraq will give heart to the 8.5 million Kurds who live in eastern Turkey under martial law. Last August Turkey launched air raids on Kurdish villages in Northern Iraq, claiming they harboured Turkish 'terrorists'. If Hussein's Iraq goes under, Kurdish nationalism could become a resurgent force across the Middle East.

The rulers who have most to fear from the impact of the Iranian advance — in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait — have backed Iraq's war effort to the tune of \$15 billion a year. They have used the menace of Khomeini's fundamentalism to justify their close involvement in Western efforts to turn the region into an armed camp.

THE REAL GANGSTERS IN LEBANON

Terry Waite's abduction has provoked an outburst of chauvinist hysteria against Lebanon. Media commentary which depicts the country as a 'cesspool' inhabited by deranged gangsters and murderers calls to mind the denunciations of Gaddafi's Libya which preceded the US-British bombing raids last April. The orchestrated outrage against the Muslim militias who have abducted a handful of Westerners provides a convenient distraction from the slaughter of Palestinian and Arab people by Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

The shift of public attention towards events in the Gulf ensures that Western-inspired atrocities against Palestinians in Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pass almost unnoticed.

Over the past year Israeli forces have killed dozens of Palestinians in the occupied territories. The Israelis have imprisoned or expelled hundreds of Palestinians and bulldozed homes of Palestine Liberation Organisation supporters. While the West has been whining about a handful of European and American hostages in Lebanon, more than 700 Palestinians and Shiites have been slaughtered in the past three months of the Lebanese 'camps war', thousands more face death from starvation and disease.

The British media professes horror over Lebanese 'sectarianism'. But the real sectarians in the Middle East are the USA,

The collapse of oil revenues and harsh austerity measures have already prompted unrest in the Gulf states. The regimes have responded with fierce repression. Kuwait's Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, a loyal supporter of British interests in the Gulf, has abolished parliament and silenced the press, on the pretext that the opposition is conniving in Iranian-inspired Islamic subversion.

The fragility of the capitalist order in the Gulf has become a nightmare for world leaders.

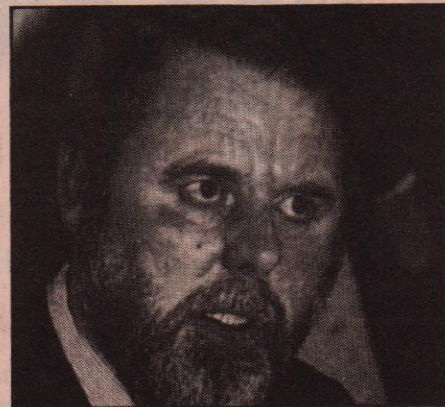
The West has responded by toning down its hostility to Iran. Western leaders appreciate that Iraq will soon be a spent force and that Iran, the richest and most populous state of the region, is destined to resume its former role as a leading power. Reagan's arms-for-hostages diplomacy and France's more pro-Iranian posture reflect the desire of the Western powers to come to a new understanding with Iran.

WAR MOVES

Terry Waite is no innocent bystander in all this. His trips to liaise with Iranian-backed guerrillas have been funded by shady American sources and assisted by the CIA and Colonel Oliver North. In response, the Iranian leadership has shown that it is ready to play a 'responsible' role in a new Western-backed regional alignment. It has launched a flurry of diplomatic initiatives to win sympathy in the West and among its Turkish and Arab neighbours.

Iran's re-emergence is a mixed blessing for the West. In the short term it is bound to provoke greater instability. Inside Iran the moves towards conciliation with the West have intensified divisions in the leadership. Iran cannot easily abandon the fiercely anti-Western posture which has helped hold the Islamic republic together. Waite's disappearance suggests one minor symptom of this wider problem: the Iranian clergy has lost control over the militant Lebanese Shiite militias. Meanwhile, moderate Arab rulers will find it hard to come to terms with the emergence of the Iranian mullahs as a major force in the Gulf.

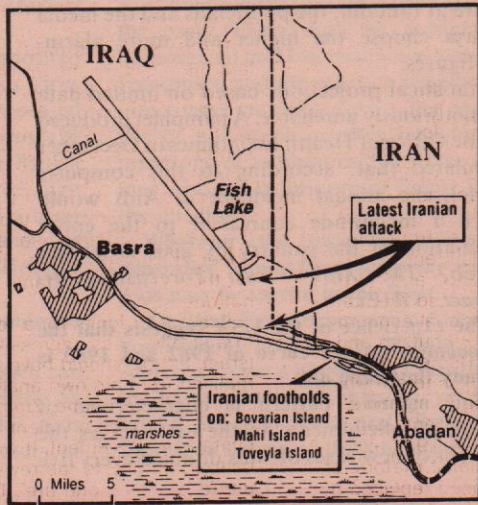
These problems explain the apparent contradictions in Western strategy towards Iran. Reagan, Thatcher, Chirac and Kohl have tried to coax Iran into a new understanding. At the same time, they have launched a massive military operation to show their readiness to crush any threat to Western economic and strategic interests. The war moves in the Gulf and the Mediterranean confirm that only the threat of military intervention can maintain the West's hold over the Middle East.



MISSING: TERRY WAITE

Britain and France. They created a sectarian Christian state in Lebanon to oppress the country's Arab masses. They depend on Israel, the most 'sectarian' state of all, to terrorise the Palestinian people in their own homeland. The West forces the people of the Middle East to live in a 'cesspool' of murder and oppression.

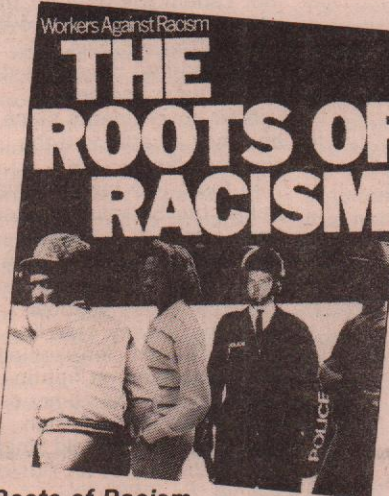
The gunboats off the Lebanese coast and the propaganda war against Lebanon in Britain suggest that our rulers are preparing for a new round of terror against the Arab and Palestinian people. We should challenge the anti-Arab propaganda and show our solidarity with the Middle Eastern masses.



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THE STYLE COUNCIL

Sinking ship

The Style Council, *The Cost of Loving*, Polydor Records

With his new album *The Cost of Loving* Paul Weller's long flirtation with all things black and seventies has reached the end of the road. Even that symbol par excellence of his stubborn idiosyncrasy, the loafer, no longer sets him apart from the crowd, now that even wrinkled old lefties shop at Next and Warehouse. The Style Council's image has gone up the high street market, and their music too has taken a dramatic turn for the worse. This record is the worst thing Weller has done since the dog days of the Jam, before the memorable *All Mod Cons*.

SOUL BOYS

Since Weller has subsequently chosen to fight his battles on the field of black American dance music it is not unfair to judge him in comparison with other white artists who have done the same. In the mid-seventies the explosion of disco music even led rock giants like the Rolling Stones to relate to current developments in black America. Mick Jagger's attempts to 'get funky' on *Black and Blue* may have been less than inspirational, but others took to

the scratch guitar and the falsetto routine with more aplomb. The key to their success lay in their ability to adapt the musical form to enhance their own talents. The authentic sound of the enthusiastic Average White Band and Kokomo helped them break into the black scene itself. The Bee Gees and Daryl Hall hit gold by virtue of vocal ability and superior

compositions, two longstanding features of commercial soul. The sheer audacity of David Bowie's arch portrait of the promised land, *Young Americans*, started the plastic soul tradition.

The Style Council have been the guardians of the soul boy mantle since the demise of Spandau Ballet. Their early singles promised a lot, and even when the words were melancholic — *Speak Like a Child*, *A Solid Bond In Your Heart* — there was an unmistakable joie de vivre threatening to burst through. It really did seem as if Weller had achieved his dream — a group that looked good, made records you could dance to and were meaningful and

uplifting. On top of that the band operated on flexible and democratic lines. Even the patchy *Cafe Bleu* album was offset by the singles, a brilliant Isley Brothers pastiche, *My Ever Changing Moods* and the sublime *You're the Best Thing*.

Since then it has been downhill. We've had the desperate eclecticism of *Our Favourite Shop*, where everything from the insipid calypso to the ghost of Sgt Pepper was thrown in to distract from the absence of anything interesting or original. *The Cost of Loving* is no better and it does not even have the variety. The music rarely strays from a uniform mid-tempo plod, which has the effect of emphasising some very dour lyrics.

END OF THE ROAD

Paul Weller has never been famous for his wit. His better lyrics relied upon a brutal honesty and directness, and his best songs dealt with personal relationships and the contradictions they throw up. On *The Cost of Loving* he writes heavy-handed didactic pieces about the Tories and the Bomb which make Billy Bragg look spry and mischievous by comparison. Perhaps it is because he is trapped in a cult he helped to create, soporific jazz-fusion, with an image as bland as a Continental lager, that he feels the need to pen odes to the joys of getting yourself on the electoral register. Play the old singles, and think how good they could have been.

Toby Banks



NOT MUCH SOUL LEFT IN WELLER'S LOAFERS (OR HIS MUSIC)

BBC'S BANNED DOCUMENTARY

I Spy

Secret Society: Zircon

It sounds like a New Order album, but it is a half-hour bootleg documentary now showing only in those parts the Special Branch can't reach. For the past 20 years America has been launching signal intelligence (sigint for short) satellites. These sensitive bugs can listen in on practically anything broadcast on the airwaves. Since the early seventies GCHQ has been pining for one of its very own and next year the ministry of defence intends to oblige by launching Zircon over the Indian Ocean — longitude 53 degrees east to be precise. This is the big secret for which the film was supposedly banned.

Zircon (its official working title was Zipper) is one of six programmes which BBC2

commissioned Duncan Campbell to do under the general title *Secret Society*. His investigation has little to do with spies in the sky. It is about the way the defence ministry has deceived parliament. In a series of interviews with politicians and civil servants Campbell shows that some time after 1983 half a billion pounds were laundered to pay for the Zircon project. The ministry raised and spent the money without bothering parliament. Only a year earlier, in 1982, it had been agreed that any expenditure over £50m by the defence boys in Whitehall had first to be endorsed by their politician counterparts on the public accounts committee.

The Tory decision to suppress the film has nothing to do with secrets about spy satellites (British Aerospace published

these years ago). It may have more to do with the government's embarrassment about its flagrant disregard for the normal parliamentary pretences. It seems more likely however that the government is relishing the current furore, and may deliberately have chosen to take the offensive in order to keep those buzz-words 'national security' buzzing and Kinnock hopping, and of course to intimidate the media.

But for Campbell and the *New Statesman* the 'major point of importance' is 'the misleading of parliament'. The politicians are presented as the innocent victims of faceless bureaucrats. Clive Ponting is wheeled on to the programme to warn about mandarins who are out of control. No doubt the other five programmes (on emergency powers, cabinet committees, the Association of Chief Police Officers, data and radar) take up the theme. Campbell concedes the importance of 'national security', and concedes too the idea that the state, through parliament, can protect our best

interests. All we need is Tony Benn to refer sensitive matters to the committee of privileges, or a Bill of Rights or Freedom of Information Act to be ushered in by enlightened Labour politicians.

Parliament does not control the state. In any case, when the police, the army, the courts, the civil service and so on attack our civil liberties they do so with the backing of politicians like Thatcher and Kinnock, who invoke notions like 'national security' and 'law and order' to justify it. If we want to stop the government despatching satellites and the secret police muzzling journalists we must start by rejecting the idea of the state as a neutral force in our society — and that includes rejecting its apologists in the Labour Party. The last time they were in government they used the Official Secrets Act against Campbell in the infamous ABC trial. If they get in again they have promised not to restore full trade union rights at GCHQ.

Faith Walker

NEW ZIONISM

Blood and fire

Avram Schweitzer, *Israel: The Changing National Agenda*, Croom Helm, £19.95

Schweitzer has written an excellent journalistic account of the Israeli state since its foundation in 1948. He sees 1977, when the right-wing Likud bloc first took power, as of almost equal significance. Until then Israel was governed by the Labour Party and its predecessors. This shock change brought an upsurge of interest in the new Zionism, or revisionism, of the Likud.

Schweitzer, senior editor of Israel's most prestigious daily,

Ha'aretz, describes the apparent shift to the right in Israeli politics. In the first decade of Israel's existence Mapai, the forerunner of today's Labour Party, achieved its basic objectives. Helped by the mass immigration of Jews from the Arab world (60 per cent came from the Middle East and North Africa), it consolidated the state and formed a national economy. The party of the Kibbutzim and of the Histadrut (Israel's unique bureaucratic conglomerate which combines leading firms and a trade union department) had realised its aim. By 1977 however the socialist rhetoric of the Mapai had been replaced by

a new Zionism stressing military strength and conquest. The Likud now pushed to the top of the national agenda the ambition to maintain permanent control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The book argues that Mapai laid the basis for the growth of new Zionism. Mapai intervened to create a private economic sector that generally gave support to Likud. The Six-Day War of 1967, in which Israel took control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (so tripling the number of Palestinians under its control), paved the way for the growth of militant nationalism.

Schweitzer longs for a return to a smaller, less aggressive Israel, but he should have realised from his own analysis that it is a vain hope. Zionism has always been a violent and militaristic movement. It was built, according to the revisionist motto, 'in blood and fire'. The

Labour Zionists created the Israeli state by using terror to expel hundreds of thousands of Arabs from Palestine. Labour Zionism stresses the danger of Israel incorporating too many Palestinians and argues for their exclusion from Israeli society. The Kibbutzim and the Histadrut deny Palestinians proper membership, playing an important role in giving Israelis privileged access to jobs and land. In contrast the new Zionists are generally happy to include Palestinians as long as they are subordinate to Israelis.

Neither Labour or Likud offer any future for the Palestinians. The debate between the two wings of the Zionist movement is about how Israel can maintain stability in the region on behalf of the Western powers. As long as the Palestinians are denied their freedom there will be no peace in the Middle East.

Daniel Nassim

Bloody Sunday 'shambles'

I WENT on the Bloody Sunday demonstration in Sheffield to show solidarity with the Irish people's struggle and went home feeling disgusted with the way the march and rally were organised. I have never been on a march which was such a shambles. The organisers, the Troops Out Movement and the Labour Committee on Ireland, did not arrange proper stewarding or take measures to protect the marchers from attack. They lost control of the demonstration and spoilt its



potential for making an impact on passers-by. At the rally they tried to stop other anti-imperialist groups — Irish Freedom Movement, Workers' Press/WRP, Workers' Power, etc — who did much more than them to build the march, from having a

platform. The whole shambles showed me that the old Troops Out Movement is finished. It's just a letterhead on paper and a handful of sectarian splitters. **Danny McGonigle**
Tottenham

For The Red Front

AFTER eight years of Tory attacks on the working class the key task in the coming election will be to get Thatcher and Co out. The effect the revolutionary left can have in this task will be minimal due to its size and influence. If the Tories do lose, they will either be replaced by a majority Labour government, or the SDP-Liberal Alliance will hold the balance of power. No organisation claiming to be Marxist, or revolutionary socialist, can pretend that these alternatives will stop or even ease the attacks on the working class.

Kinnock has already decided to keep the Tories' anti-union legislation, although they will be changing its name. Labour in opposition have been solidly anti-working class, condemning pickets at Wapping and trying to eclipse the Tories on law and order. They may have a glossy new image, but as far as many workers are concerned, and as opinion polls reveal, this fails to conceal the lack of a political alternative to the Tories. Labour will certainly not be offering the electorate a socialist alternative. This presents the left with an obligation to provide that socialist alternative, however difficult. It is wrong to stick to the dogmatic belief that we should 'support Labour like a rope supports the hanging man', or campaign for their election so that those workers with illusions that Labour will fight for the working class can be proved wrong. That analysis may have stood up in Lenin's day, but we have had seven Labour governments since, and they all attacked the working class.

About the bishop's Bill

BISHOP MONTEFIORE of Birmingham was last in the news for his criticisms of the government's Aids campaign. He thought all the stuff with the exploding mountains and drills was too phallic, and that the leaflet put too much emphasis on condoms and not enough on monogamy. Now he is pushing for restrictions on abortion rights. The bishop's Infant Life Preservation Bill has just passed its second reading in the house of lords. It proposes a reduction in the number of weeks allowed for abortion from 28 to 24. If passed it would override the 1967 Abortion Act and make

it even harder for women to get an abortion.

One Labour peer opposed the Bill on the grounds that since it's already practically impossible for women to get late abortions it would be best to leave it to the discretion of doctors and the DHSS. The last thing women need is a party that argues that since it's already so hard for us to get our rights there's no need to make it even harder! I hope that the RCP will keep an eye on this Bill, and mobilise the sort of opposition that you did for the Powell Bill. We can't let reactionaries back up their propaganda campaigns against promiscuity with attacks on our rights.

Liz Groves
Birmingham



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

SWP backs bans

LAST week I went to a National Communications Union mass meeting in Bristol, held to declare strike action. Five minutes into the meeting a Socialist Workers' Party member in the NCU asked the chair to exclude me because I was in the National Graphical Association, not the NCU.

There has been an effective ban on 'outsiders' at every NCU activity in Bristol, excluding all other trade unionists — and, incidentally, the SWP. This sectional attitude has already done untold damage to my own union at Wapping. For a year NGA and Sogat bureaucrats — who did exactly the same dirty tricks against each other's union pre-Wapping — have egged us on to scapegoat all the electricians for Eric Hammond's scabbing behaviour, rather than argue for unity with them at grassroots level.

The left has enthusiastically backed this divisive tactic. SWP members have fought long and hard to expel all EETPU members from the TUC. How the hell are we ever going to win strikes like this? With friends like the SWP, NCU and NGA bureaucrats hardly need the bosses' assistance to keep us divided.

Jan
Bristol NGA

In tns 4 (30 January) Alan Bell of the Socialist Workers' Party states 'It is far easier to stand on a podium, beat your breast and denounce everyone else's political impurity.' In fact, standing candidates on clear socialist policies, based on fighting for working class demands, is far more difficult than peddling the tired old slogan 'vote Labour with no illusions — join the SWP'. The Revolutionary Democratic Group welcomes *The Red Front* initiative. To present a socialist alternative it is vital to stress maximum unity of the forces fighting for the working class. Standing *Red Front* candidates in the general election can give the minority of class conscious workers a positive direction in which to channel their energies, rather than getting Kinnock into No 10.

It also clearly poses the need to build a new, revolutionary party. While being prepared to take part in *The Red Front*, we suggest a meeting of all groups involved to agree a joint platform and discuss our attitude to constituencies where no *Red Front* candidates are standing. We would appeal to all other groups on the left, including the SWP, to take part.

Steve Forey
King's Cross Aslef/RDG

Sikh sentenced to death

ANTI-RACISTS in Bradford are backing Rajwinder Singh's battle to stay in Britain. The government's latest victim is epileptic and has been mentally handicapped since birth, but that has not stopped the home office hunting him down for deportation. Family and friends of Rajwinder are keeping him in a temple to

thwart the Tories. If he returns to the trouble-torn Punjab his chances of survival are slim indeed. His father, Gurdev, has issued a challenge to the government: 'I'd rather they shot Rajwinder here at his home than send him back to certain death in India. At least then he'd die with his family.' This week the defence campaign is lobbying the council to make Rajwinder a freeman of the city. We are calling on all tns readers to get involved.

Louise
Bradford Workers Against Racism

Spy unions?

I WAS left very confused by your 'Propaganda War' about GCHQ (30 January). On the one hand you talk about the trade union rights of the workers there. Yet I can remember you often dismissing GCHQ as a 'spy centre'. What then is your position on people employed by the security forces? Do you agree with Militant, for example, in calling for the Police Federation to affiliate to the TUC? Are soldiers to be treated as 'workers in uniform' as well? What is the difference between GCHQ 'spies', who you say should have the right to be in a union, and the police and army?

Phil Kimby
Cambridge

The jailing of Phil Penn

ONE of our comrades in the Workers' Revolutionary Party/Workers' Press, Phil Penn, has been jailed for 12 months — eight months of it suspended — for assault. He is a highly respected member of our central committee, a party member for 18 years, active in the trade union movement and recently in campaigns such as that on the Guildford Four. Our concern in this case is that members of another organisation claiming to be part of the labour movement were, apart from the arresting officers, the only police witnesses. This would be like miners giving evidence against miners in the recent strike. As you may know, in October 1985, the

WRP expelled its former leader Gerry Healy for sexual abuse, violence and slanders against members of the organisation; charges which he never contested. A small group of party functionaries — including Corin and Vanessa Redgrave, Sheila Torrance and Richard Price — supported Healy and were expelled by the majority. This group then formed a bogus party calling itself the 'WRP' and publishing a newspaper, the *News Line*. Phil Penn was arrested and charged after a demonstration called by the print unions at Wapping on 3 May 1986. The events, as reported in court, were as follows:

• In the *News Line* of 1 May 1986 the 'Workers' Notebook' column carried a crude and provocative attack on Phil, insulting his intellect and presenting him as

ignorant and illiterate, speaking in grunts.

• On 3 May Wapping march, as the conflict between demonstrators and police became increasingly fierce, Phil went to fetch his camera. Once away from the main body of demonstrators, he came across members of the Healy/Torrance Group. They verbally abused him, taunting him with quotes from the above-mentioned article. He refused to be provoked.

• Four of them, Richard Price, Eric Rogers, Paul Williams and another man, then attacked him physically — in Price's case with banner poles — and knocked him to the ground. In defending himself, Phil damaged the eye of one of his assailants. Only Phil was arrested.

No organisation calling itself

socialist would collaborate with the police against members of the labour movement. This is a point of principle. But members of the Healy/Torrance Group eagerly acted as police witnesses. Three of the four men who attacked Phil did not appear in court but two women members of the Healy/Torrance Group gave evidence which Phil vigorously contested. Had he been found guilty on the charge of wounding with intent he would undoubtedly have been given a much longer custodial sentence.

This is not the first time the Healy/Torrance Group have acted in this way. Six of them appeared as police witnesses in Sheffield crown court in January this year after an incident between themselves and members of the International Communist Party. On this occasion, the

court did not believe them and the defendant was found not guilty. We should point out that members of the Healy/Torrance Group again attacked and beat up Phil Penn on 8 June 1986 in Leicester. They used sticks and knives. The police wished to prosecute the attackers, but, as a matter of principle, Phil refused to act as a witness and the case could not go forward.

We are asking all labour movement organisations to condemn the anti-working class actions of the Healy/Torrance Group, which were responsible for the jailing of Phil Penn. Messages of support and inquiries should be sent to: WRP/Workers' Press, PO Box 735, London SW9 7QS.

Yours fraternally,
Dave Temple,
Chair of WRP/Workers' Press

BT ■ countering the Wapping Factor

Whatever happens in the telephone dispute this week, reports from our supporters indicate that the Wapping Factor has already made a big impact on British Telecom strikers. Many BT engineers have seen how the media succeeded in discrediting 'picket line violence' at Wapping and have drawn the conclusion that they must keep up a responsible and moderate image.

EXTREMISTS

BT workers have been reluctant to escalate their action or to make any serious attempt to win the solidarity of other groups of workers. This has created a climate in which 'outsiders' are viewed with suspicion. Union officials have had an easy time in warning off left-wing activists, arguing that the dispute will be lost if it is associated with extremists.

The influence exercised by the Wapping Factor has

presented our supporters with big problems in winning the arguments. Some supporters have written in, asking whether it makes sense under these circumstances to argue for the policies outlined in *tns* to win the strike. They have suggested that if we argue that strikers should pull the plugs on BT, we run the risk of being dismissed as extremists.

It is clear that as long as the present atmosphere prevails in Britain, any form of militancy could run against the grain. There is little point in pretending it is going to be easy to win the argument. But whether we like it or not, the arguments have to be won. It is not a question of being militant for its own sake, but of winning the strike.

HOW TO WIN

Our supporters must pose the question 'How are we going to win the strike?' Going out on strike does

not in itself guarantee victory. As long as BT can continue to function, the employers have the upper hand. They can live with the dispute because they recognise that time is on their side. In contrast, time is definitely not on the side of the strikers.

NO OPTION

The longer the strikers are out, the more difficult it will be to deal with the problems of economic hardship and insecurity. Unless the strike moves forward it will become less coherent. Every day that passes without a big breakthrough can only strengthen the conservative mood, and the activists will have difficulty in keeping everyone together. This is why we have advocated tactics that can put BT out of action. It is simply not possible to win the dispute any other way.

To modify our arguments would be to accept defeat.

It would be irresponsible of us to give in to the threat of short-term unpopularity, and water down our proposals. We are certain that if the strike continues beyond another week our tactics will begin to correspond more and more to the views of the activists on strike. Once the danger represented by the current stalemate becomes evident, more strikers will be prepared to consider new solutions. If we don't present our arguments now, an alternative for winning will not be available at the stage when strikers are prepared to look for new answers.

RELEVANT

In a few areas our tactics are already under discussion by strikers. As the relevance of our arguments is confirmed by experience it is possible that they will gain a greater hearing. Of course it is possible that the dispute

could come to an end by the time this issue of *tns* is published. The pressures for a settlement are very strong. If the dispute ends now, most workers out on strike will not see the relevance of our tactics. However, it is important to take a long-term view of the situation.

CHALLENGE

The influence of the Wapping Factor is not restricted to the BT strikers. Other workers may well draw similar conclusions. Such a trend can persist as long as our class lacks a realistic fighting alternative. We are obliged to put the case for such an alternative at every opportunity.

We are not asking our supporters to become super-revolutionaries revelling in splendid isolation. We all have a responsibility to stay in touch with the prevailing mood. There is no principle that says we should

counterpose our policies to what people are thinking. At the same time our supporters are obliged to challenge the mood and help construct a focus for those who are already prepared to fight. This is the immediate objective of the RCP — not just in industrial disputes but in every sphere of political life.

EXPERIENCE

To help construct this focus we have to learn from the experience of our supporters. We ask our readers to write to us outlining their views and experiences in the BT affair and other disputes. Your opinions will help the party develop its policies and tactics further so that they can become more effective in fighting the Wapping Factor.

Frank Richards

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Tuesday 24 February THE PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP

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Diary

BRADFORD: Thursday 19 February, 7.30pm. Childcare campaign public meeting: Free nurseries on demand! Bradford University, Room F17.

LEEDS: Thursday 12 February, 7.30pm. Public meeting: Fighting Labour's cuts. Panel of speakers from Nalco. Trades Club, Savile Mount

NEWHAM: Thursday 12 February, 7.30pm. Public meeting: Racists on the attack — stop them! St John's Church Institute, 27 Romford Road, Stratford

PONTEFRAC: Thursday 12 February, 7.30pm. Open debate on Aids. Speakers from the Labour council, SPUC and the RCP

WOLVERHAMPTON: Monday 23 February, 11am. Court protest: Defend the Womborne 12! Seisdon magistrates court, near Wolverhampton. Transport from Birmingham, Coventry, Bristol, Leicester, Oxford, Nottingham, Brighton, London. Ring Don Milligan on 01-729 3771 for details

BRADFORD DEBATE ON IRELAND

JOHN O'MAHONEY — *Socialist Organiser* editor
 MICK HUME — *the next step* editor
 Wednesday 25 February 7.30pm
 Bradford University

THE EALING VICARAGE CASE

RAPE ROW MEANS MORE REPRESSION

The Ealing vicarage rape case has led to calls for heavier policing and harsher sentences. But more law and order won't help women threatened by rape, writes **Lynn Rawley**

A national outcry followed the conviction of two men for rape and one for aggravated burglary at an Ealing vicarage. The rape was a brutal experience for the woman, involving anal intercourse and penetration with the handle of a knife. The vicar and another man were beaten unconscious with a cricket bat. The judge sentenced the two rapists to three and five years imprisonment, saying 'The trauma suffered by the victim was not so great.' He jailed the third man, not involved in the rape, for 14 years for aggravated burglary.

Press, police and politicians all condemned Mr Justice Leonard for punishing theft more heavily than violent rape. They stressed their concern to prevent rape and to punish rapists properly. But we should be suspicious of people whose past record shows a singular lack of concern about women's welfare, and who profess a sudden concern to do something about it. We should also question the motives behind the campaign for more law and order measures at a time when the authorities are proposing more repressive powers against everybody from pickets to the BBC.

Crimes against women are part and parcel of a society that degrades women as domestic skivvies, cheap labour and sex objects.

HYPOCRITES

The same politicians who preach concern about rape are responsible for enforcing women's oppression at work and at home. Under a system which treats women as second class citizens it is scarcely surprising that men feel free to abuse them sexually.

Contrary to the media myth, rape is not generally the act of a psychopathic sex maniac. It is a normal feature of a way of life in which women are seen as worthless. More women are raped at home than in any other place and most rapists are known to the victim. They are husbands and boyfriends, friends and relatives, neighbours and workmates. The fact that the law does not recognise rape within marriage — where most rapes take place — shows how capitalist society regards women as chattels. Thousands of women have found the

police anything but protective when it comes to rape. According to a recent inquiry into rape and sexual assault conducted by Women Against Rape about 90 per cent of women who are raped refuse to report it to the police for fear of interrogation, abuse and humiliation. Many women have found their experience in the police station as degrading as the rape itself. A recent report by the Scottish office admitted that rape victims face 'brutal questioning on behaviour and dress, moral character and sexual experience'.

PREJUDICE

Once cases get to the courts rapists often get off lightly, with the excuse that they were 'led on' or 'provoked'. The Ealing sentences were par for the course. The average sentence for rape is three and a half years, of which only 20 months are usually served. Once they get in the papers rape cases are used to boost sales. The press pilloried the judge who passed the paltry sentence in the Ealing case, but went to great lengths to give the gruesome details of the rape to titillate their readers.

Why should women put their faith in press, politicians and police who preach prejudice against women 51 weeks of the year and in the

other one make a fuss about sex crimes because it suits their own sordid purpose?

The aim of the present rape furore is to turn people's revulsion at rape into a crusade to strengthen the authority of the police and the courts. Rape is an emotive and effective issue around which to rally public support for more law and order because everybody feels sympathy for the victims and anger against the assailants. But, as the Women Against Rape survey notes, 'Long sentences are often advocated for reasons which have nothing to do with women's safety.' The establishment manipulates public outrage about rape to create a climate favourable to more repressive laws. The beneficiaries of extra police and legal powers are not women, but the system that brutalises them.

EXPLOITATION

Putting more police on the streets and sanctioning stronger sentences will not stop women being raped. In fact more repressive powers and more regimentation of life can only make matters worse for women. Whatever new legal weapons the police and the men in wigs are given, they will use them to defend the power of those who rule over us. The capitalist system dictates that a privileged minority owns almost everything,

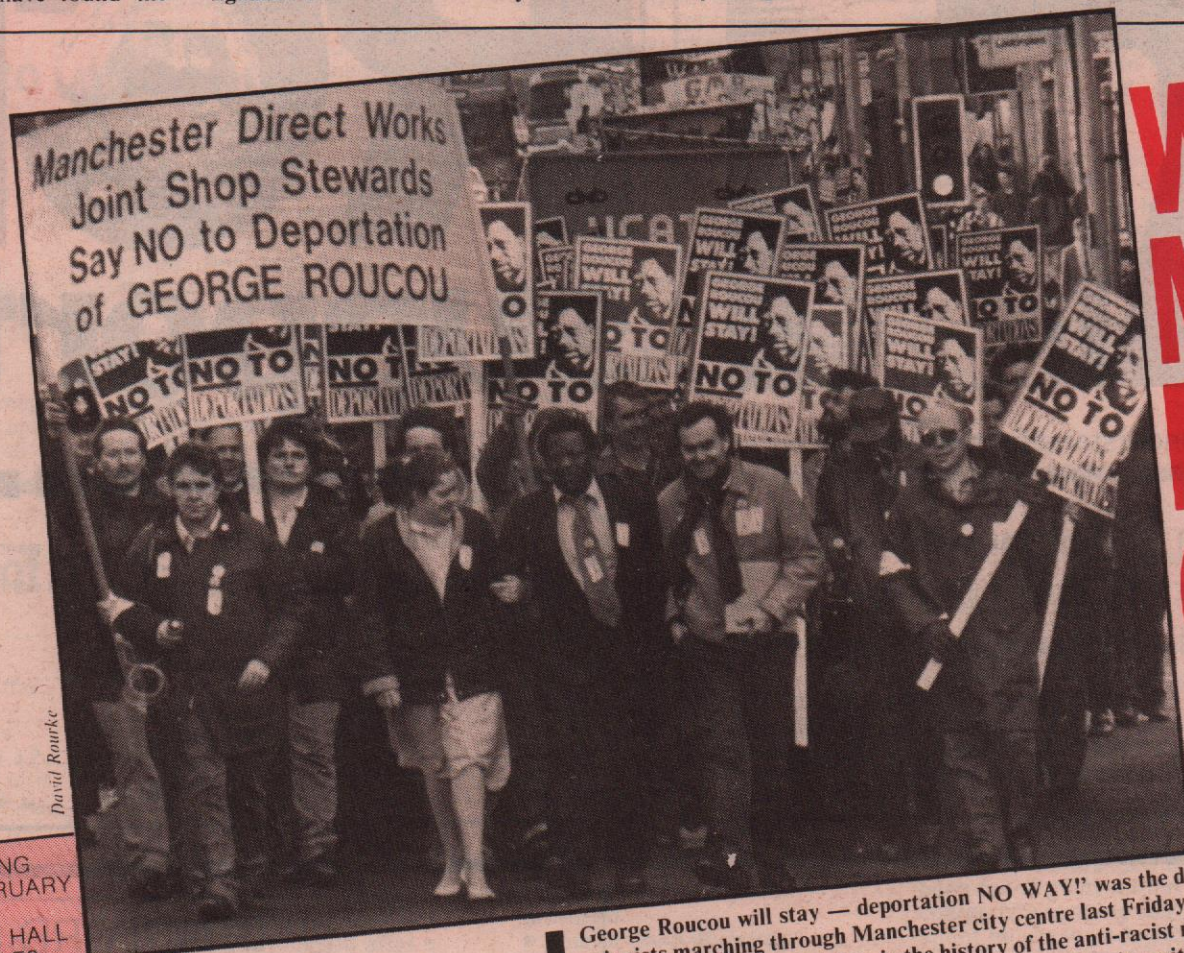
while we own next to nothing and are available to be exploited and abused. The system's legal guardians will always put protecting private property first and protecting women nowhere.

REPRESSION

The calls for more law and order after the Ealing case have already encouraged a legal clampdown. In the same week that politicians demanded longer sentences, an appeal court judge turned an £80 fine into a six-month jail spell for Gary Turner, charged with 'assault' when a policeman banged his own head on a table in a row about rent arrears at Turner's council house. It now looks like a controversial clause in the Criminal Justice Bill, which would give appeal court judges the power to recommend increased sentences all round, will sail through parliament. We will be the losers in the new legal assault.

As much as we would like to get even with rapists we cannot afford to let our anger be directed into a campaign for more legal repression.

The only way to take revenge for rape is to fight for women's rights against a system that degrades us all. We will not succeed by putting more powers in the hands of our oppressors.



WORKERS MARCH FOR GEORGE ROUCOU

PUBLIC MEETING
TUESDAY 17 FEBRUARY
7.30pm
HACKNEY TOWN HALL
MARE STREET E8

Trevor Monerville, a black youth from Hackney was found beaten and brain-damaged after five days in police and prison custody. His family have launched a campaign to find out what happened.

CALLED BY THE FAMILY AND
FRIENDS OF TREVOR
MONERVILLE.
PHONE (01) 985 6878
FOR DETAILS

George Roucou will stay — deportation NO WAY! was the defiant message shouted by trade unionists marching through Manchester city centre last Friday in a show of strength against the home office. For the first time in the history of the anti-racist movement in Britain more than a thousand workers stopped work to march in solidarity with a black man threatened with deportation — George Roucou, a Ucat shop steward employed by Manchester city council direct works.

The demonstration, backed by 45 union bodies, marked a major step forward in the struggle to keep Roucou united with his common law wife Kim and their three children. Roucou applauded the packed rally in Albert Square: 'I cannot fight the home office on my own. But this magnificent support is what I need to win this struggle. United we can win.' In Manchester last week a show of strength by rank and file workers stopped the traffic. If we build on this beginning we can surely stop the home office.