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They talk about
tax cuts, but they want wage cuts
**GET READY
FOR A
Tory
rip
off**



Rip-off

The Tory government is presiding over a wild, extravagant pre-election party that puts anything Cynthia Payne ever organised to shame. Thatcher's Britain is now the venue for an orgy of get-rich schemes, sponsored by the government and greedily snatched up by the financiers.

The British Airways share flotation is the latest example of the Tories selling off state assets at bargain prices, mostly to the big City institutions. The talk of tax cuts in chancellor Nigel Lawson's March budget is cause for cracking open another bottle in the City's Square Mile. But Thatcher's money-spinning bash has an air of panic about it. It gives you the distinct impression that Britain's businessmen are trying to rip off whatever they can before their system goes under. The scramble for succulent shares and juicy government hand-outs looks a bit like the big street-brawl that breaks out at the end of an old film, when the fleeing robber drops the suitcase full of swag, and the booty starts blowing away in the wind.

Behind all the false optimism, British capitalism is now limping along on borrowed time and other people's money. The City itself is starting to feel the pressure of stiff foreign competition, just 100 days after the Big Bang exposed it to overseas markets. Despite Tory claims of improved competitiveness, floods of imports are still running up a big trade deficit for British manufacturing industry. The gap is only being papered over by profits from Britain's overseas loans and investments. These foreign holdings have increased tenfold since 1979, because British investors prefer the easy life of the jet-setting money-lender to the unrewarding grind of trying to screw their next million out of deadleg British industries.

WARNING

The current money-go-round and credit boom can give the capitalist system a quick boost. But it does not even address the employers' fundamental problem of low profitability. To resolve that, they will have to devote their energies to ripping off the working class. The key to restoring their profit rates lies in restructuring the economy to leave less workers producing more surplus-value. The Tory government's latest ideas for driving down our wages show that Thatcher's party is very definitely by invitation only. We see none of the fun, but we are expected to pick up the bill with higher real unemployment and a lower standard of living.

Tory paymaster general Kenneth Clarke attacked the idea of national wage agreements and the going rate for the job. He announced that the government is seeking 'a system where pay increases are based primarily on performance, merit, company profitability and demand and supply in the local labour market'. This is a recipe for driving home more divisions among workers in different regions, and even among those within the same firm. Clarke aims to make us compete with each other, and to identify more closely with our exploiters, by accepting that the state of their accounts and order books will dictate the level of our living standards. His speech is only a warning of what is to come.

This week, the Labour Party has launched a campaign against the government's tax and financial policies. Labour spokesmen pointed out that Lawson's proposed tax cuts

are a cheap vote-catching gimmick. They want to brand the Conservatives as an 'uncaring' party which would rather blow £3 billion in short-term tax concessions than use it to invest in real jobs. Winning the next election is undoubtedly uppermost in Tory cabinet members' scheming minds, as they deliberate over the budget details. But Labour's alternative ideas about what to do with the money would make just as little difference to the majority of people as will Lawson's two-pence-in-the-pound tax cut.

The much-debated £3 billion cannot create real jobs in Britain today. Labour's paltry public spending plans would give no more than a thin lick of paint to the crumbling walls of British capitalism. But Kinnock's party is far too conservative and wary of offending the financiers to try anything more daring. The most radical of its recent ideas are proposals to suspend work on the Channel Tunnel while the accountants have a look at the costings, and a transport policy designed to get more people travelling by rail than by road. These are hardly the sort of schemes that are going to rebuild Britain's industrial empire.

The only jobs Labour could create by throwing a few pounds at the economy would be repackaged YTS schemes. As the Tories have found, these are great for the consciences of politicians who can announce to the nation that official unemployment is falling. They are hell for the people who have to endure them.

CLASS POWER

The Tories' latest claim, that the economic policies of the two big parties are now further apart than they have ever been, is the biggest piece of pre-election hype of all. The small tax cuts versus a little public spending debate is an empty one which we have no interest in joining. It indicates that the parties are squabbling over the same ground, about the best way to keep the system going. The idea that anybody should challenge the system instead has been ruled out of the debate.

The Revolutionary Communist Party believes that there are no economic solutions to the capitalist crisis, whether by cutting taxes, raising borrowing, selling shares or whatever. It will be resolved, one way or another, in the course of the class struggle. The issue is not economic policy, but class power: can the capitalist class get its way at our expense, or can we defend ourselves at the expense of their system? It is a question which they won't even need to pose while the potential power of the working class is squandered on supporting Kinnock's pro-capitalist policies.

The case for organising our own forces independently of Labour grows stronger as the election gets closer. Every discussion — about taxation, trade unionism (see pages 6 and 7) or the Greenwich by-election — provides fresh evidence of the hopeless future we face if we throw in our lot with Kinnock.

For the past few weeks, the Revolutionary Communist Party has been campaigning for *The Red Front*, a bloc of left-wing groups and individuals united behind a set of basic demands. The case for *The Red Front* is outlined fully in our new programme (see page 9). Our conclusion is that the choice now facing the working class movement lies between backing *The Red Front*, or accepting the rip-off.



THE SIEGE OF BOURJ AL-BARAJNEH

Thatcher sheds crocodile tears

The government's show of concern over the suffering of Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps can't hide the Western powers' bloody motives in the Middle East

In West Beirut 30 000 Palestinian people are starving to death in the besieged refugee camp of Bourj al-Barajneh. After weeks of media outrage about the fate of a handful of Western hostages, attention has finally turned to the real horrors of Beirut.

Reports have revealed how a mother of four incinerated herself and her children to escape starvation. Muslim inhabitants of the camp have issued a gruesome appeal to their clerics, asking for permission to eat human flesh. The media have lifted the veil of silence which hung over the genocide of Lebanon's Palestinian refugees.

SUSPECT SOURCES

Since TV images of the hell at Bourj al-Barajneh flashed across the screens last week, Western leaders like Thatcher have promised aid for the besieged camps. The attempts to rescue their inhabitants have received detailed and sympathetic coverage in the Western media. This apparent concern for the welfare of Palestinian people comes from highly suspect sources. The Western powers robbed the Palestinians of their homeland and established the state of Israel. Ever since, they have helped to keep the Palestinian nation dispersed and desperate in camps across the Middle East.

For six months the West has stood by while the Amal militia, led by pro-Western Shiite leader Nabih Berri, have butchered more than 700 Palestinians in the savage 'camps war' in West Beirut.

At the same time Israel stepped up its campaign of terror against the Palestinians and Shiites in southern Lebanon. Equipped with the most modern US hardware, Israel's surrogate South Lebanese Army has established an 'exclusion zone' for Palestinians which extends up to the port of Sidon, 80 kilometres inside Lebanese territory. Last week, while food convoys destined for Bourj al-Barajneh were forced back under Amal gunfire, Israeli bombers raided the Palestinian camps in Beirut and at Mieh-Mieh near Sidon.

The siege of Bourj al-Barajneh is only the latest episode in the bloody record of anti-Palestinian atrocities in Lebanon. Since the mid-seventies the 300 000-strong community of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has been the chief victim of the savage war for control over the country.

Until 1982 Lebanon was the main stronghold of the struggle for Palestinian liberation outside the Israeli-occupied territories. Five years ago Israel, backed by the US sixth fleet and by a multi-national intervention force, invaded Lebanon to crush the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Hundreds of Palestinians were slaughtered by pro-Western Christian militias in the massacre at Sabra and Chatila in West Beirut, and Yassir Arafat's PLO fighters

were forced to leave the country. The Palestinian community was left defenceless in the embattled camps.

Since then the Palestinians have been the target of continuous savagery meted out by Israel, its local proxies, and by the Shiite militias. The Shiites, the largest and traditionally most oppressed group in Lebanon, drove the Israeli forces and the US marines out of Lebanon in 1984. But they have since been persuaded to turn their arms against the Palestinians by middle class leaders like Nabih Berri. Egged on by Israel, Syria and the Western powers, Berri has skilfully manipulated lingering anti-Palestinian resentment in the Shiite community, to lead Shiite militants into a fratricidal war against the victims of Israeli oppression in Lebanon.

The West pulls the strings in the camps war. The USA, Britain and France understand that the fight for Palestinian freedom represents the biggest threat to the established order in the Middle East. Anybody — government or gangster — who helps to suppress that threat is welcomed by the West. Nabih Berri has been feted in Western capitals. The communal bloodbath in Lebanon creates the conditions in which the Western powers can try to resume control over the country, which they lost when the Christian-dominated state that they set up started to collapse.

WESTERN WARLORDS

The middle class leaders of the Shiite, Druze and Sunni communities are fighting over their respective stakes in a new carve-up of Lebanon. These robber barons ultimately rely on the Western warlords to sponsor their claims to power. Reagan, Thatcher & Co are just waiting until the bloodletting has ground down the Lebanese masses enough for the West to move in and play referee. The weekend's talks between Thatcher, Geoffrey Howe and Lebanese president Amin Gemayel show how keen Britain is to stick its oar into Middle Eastern affairs.

With this aim in mind, Western politicians shed their crocodile tears over the horror of Bourj al-Barajneh.

It makes sense for them to blame the Shiites, and to pose as benevolent bystanders in a conflict which they have done everything to foment. This approach serves to soften up public opinion for moves to impose Western 'order' on the country — which can bring only further degradation and suffering for its people.

We should treat Thatcher's offer to 'help' the Palestinian people with the derision it deserves, and side with the Palestinian and Arab masses in the struggle against all those who back the wretched order which the West has imposed on their nations.

John Johnson



THE TORY/LABOUR/SDP ALLIANCE

The Greenwich by-election bandwagon is now rolling into its final week. Labour still looks set to win, but will it make any difference?

'Deirdre Wood understands' is the slogan the Labour Party is using to promote its candidate in next week's Greenwich by-election. What Deirdre Wood understands is that if you want to be a Labour MP these days, you have to toe the party leadership's increasingly right-wing line. The result is a by-election in which some of the policies put forward by the Tory candidate (a City whizz-kid and a member of the hang 'em and flog 'em brigade), sound remarkably like those supported by the Labour hopeful (a supposedly hardline socialist and a member of the 'loony left' Inner London Education Authority).

Take law and order. Tory candidate John Antcliffe has called for more policing and declared that he will vote to bring back hanging if elected. Alliance candidate Rosie Barnes responded by demanding more Bobbies on the beat. Labour's shadow home secretary Gerald Kaufman nipped in to agree with her and to philosophise about how 'the quality of life' depends on the number of police prowling the streets. Deirdre Wood nodded her agreement with the Tory/SDP/Labour alliance.

Which one would you vote for if you are worried about the threat that the police now pose to the black community, to striking workers, to lesbians and gays, to journalists, and to anybody else who steps out of line?

On every issue, Labour now looks like a close relative of the Conservative Party. With each by-election campaign that comes along, the Labour Party becomes more concerned about maintaining a respectable image and pandering to the prejudices of the media. The nearer we get to a general election, the tighter Neil Kinnock controls what his candidates do and say to make sure that they don't tread on the toes of moderate voters.

The Labour left has given up struggling to

escape Kinnock's grip. In the recent Knowsley North by-election on Merseyside, the local party selected a left-wing candidate and Kinnock had to bulldoze in his own house-trained candidate to replace him. In Greenwich, the local party also selected a left-wing candidate. But Kinnock no longer needs a bulldozer to tame the left. He simply told Wood that she mustn't be left-wing any more, and she has obeyed his instructions. 'Mr Kinnock is happy where I am, and I am happy where I am' she says.

MAINSTREAM MARSH

When Wood's campaign minder, Frank Dobson MP, told red-baiting reporters that 'the concept of people being on the left or the right of the Labour Party is a bit archaic,' he meant that ideas about standing up for the working class are now history, and Kinnock's copy-cat version of Tory/SDP policies is the order of the day.

The non-debate in the Greenwich campaign is typical of the marsh that is mainstream British politics today. It is hard to tell where one party ends and the next one begins. It is harder still to see what any of them have to offer ordinary people.

Kate Marshall is contesting the Greenwich by-election for the Revolutionary Communist Party. She does not mimic Tory campaigns on law and order, and neither does she take instructions from Neil Kinnock. Her platform is based only on our assessment of what people need for a decent life and a bit of real democracy:

- a job and a living wage for every worker;
- decent housing for all;
- an end to anti-union laws and all state interference in labour movement affairs;
- opposition to all forms of discrimination against women, black people, homosexuals; support for Irish freedom from British domination.

Not as red she is painted

The tabloid press would have us believe that Labour candidate Deirdre Wood is a 'raving red'. Our advice is ignore the *Sun*, and listen to what she says about herself.

- She thinks the police are 'nice' and 'democratic': 'The police are part of democracy and they want to be part of the community. My thanks to Eltham police, who were terribly helpful when I phoned up to report my stolen handbag. There was a nice, sympathetic policewoman on the telephone.'
- She is a boss who disciplines militant

workers (Wood is chair of the Inner London Education Authority staff committee): 'In certain circumstances a group — not all — teachers can go on a demonstration. They lose their money. If they do it without permission we have a disciplinary procedure.'

- She believes Thatcherites can find a home in the Labour Party: 'I've always told Tory voters "Change to the Labour Party because we're good for everybody."'
- But people can't find a home under a cost-conscious Labour council: 'If you sit in council surgeries all over this borough, you will find desperate, almost suicidal people. We have to say to them "We cannot help you."'



GREENWICH MINDS THINK ALIKE: LABOUR'S DEIRDRE WOOD AND TORY JOHN ANTCLIFFE SEE EYE TO EYE IN THE ELECTION

The Labour Party is quick to dismiss our demands as unrealistic. But getting organised to fight for them is a lot more realistic than entrusting our futures to a party whose socialism stops where the election campaign starts. We are not in the business of making unrealistic promises about winning elections or delivering the

goods. But we can promise Greenwich voters that if we don't make a stand now, the Deirdre Woods of the world will be free to make sure 'Mr Kinnock is happy' at ordinary people's expense.

Come out canvassing for RCP candidate Kate Marshall, and start fighting for a change. Phone John Gibson on (01) 729 3771.

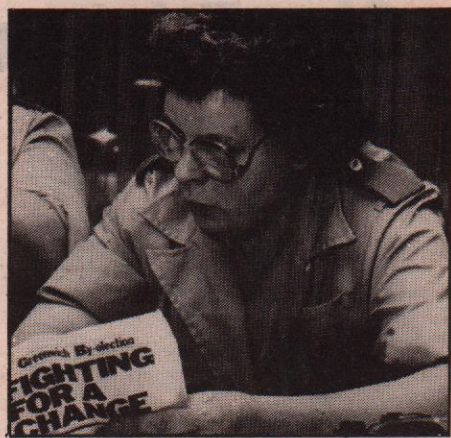
Sick of the cuts

'I think I'm going to be sick.' Tory health minister Edwina Currie's visit to Greenwich district hospital provoked this response from one of the nurses last week. The domestic staff were equally upset by Currie's smarmy bedside manner. They are facing 55 redundancies, pay cuts and higher workloads — thanks to an agreement their union has worked out with management.

The women domestic workers who spoke to RCP supporters protesting at Currie's visit had no love for the Tories. They were equally sick of the way their union had gone along with the government's hospital cuts: 'When they gave us our notice they had the cheek to put "thank you for your service" on the bottom. We're angry that our shop steward sat in on all the talks and never told us what was going on.'

The women were just as tired of being short-changed by the Labour council. 'Labour's done nothing for this borough for years and years and I've been here since 1956. We couldn't get a council house then and as far as I can see nothing much has changed. My daughter's house has got water running down the inside of her walls and the kids are always ill because of it. They live with me now because the council won't give them a decent house.'

Places like Greenwich are supposed to be in the 'soft South'. But there's nothing soft about an unemployment rate of 14 per cent, or living on grim estates like Ferrier and Cherry Orchard. The leaders of the labour movement in the unions and the Labour



HEALTH WORKERS WANT A CHANGE

Party have allowed Greenwich people to suffer for the sake of balancing the account books. Some people have become resigned to their fate. Others still want to fight, but can't see a way forward. 'What can we do?' is a comment you hear a lot.

For a start, we can bring together all of the angry local people who have had enough of union officials who tell them they must give up their jobs and Labour politicians who tell them they can't have a home. We can organise a campaign that refuses to restrict its aims to what the capitalist accountants will allow. We can turn our backs on those who do the Tories' dirty work in the hospitals and housing estates. Voting RCP next Thursday will be warning to the authorities, from whatever party they come, that we've had all we can take.

EXPRESS POLL SHOWS SUPPORT FOR WITHDRAWAL, BUT...

Public opinion won't bring peace

Last week's **Daily Express** poll, which suggested that 61 per cent of British people support withdrawal from Ireland, is not such a problem for the British authorities as it might appear

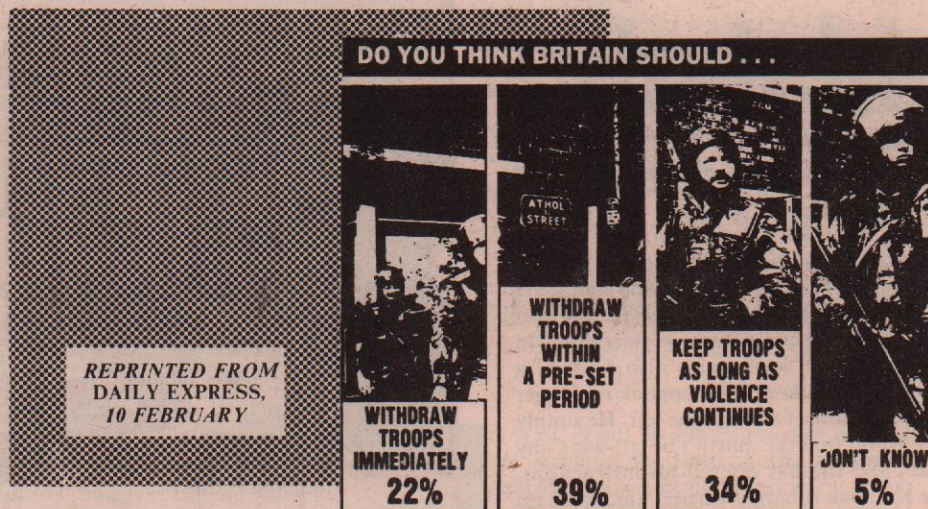
Ian Paisley is both the most recognisable and the most repugnant man in Northern Ireland, few British people have ever been to the 'province', and fewer still think the Irish War is a more important issue than the Common Market. These were some of the results of the *Daily Express*-Mori poll on British attitudes to events in Ireland, published last Tuesday. The ones which got the headline treatment, however, concerned the central question of whether the British Army should be in there at all.

Most people thought it shouldn't be, or it shouldn't stay much longer: 22 per cent supported an immediate withdrawal of troops, and 39 per cent supported withdrawal 'within a pre-set period', while 34 per cent believed that the Army should remain in Northern Ireland 'as long as the violence continues'. One third for staying, almost two thirds for getting out. The *Express* claimed its poll would be a source of 'shock' and 'dismay' to British politicians.

In fact, a closer look at the findings reveals how successful the authorities have been in influencing British opinion with their interpretation of Irish affairs.

The best example of the success of the official propaganda campaign came when people were asked about the cause of 'the troubles'. All of 45 per cent thought that the roots of the conflict lay in religion. No other explanation got into double figures. Only six per cent believed that the presence of the British Army provoked the violence, and just two per cent blamed partition and the Border dividing Ireland.

The idea that the Irish War is some sort of hangover from a historical religious feud has always been popular with politicians and the press in Britain. It allows the British authorities to throw up their hands in mock



MORI INTERVIEWED 1103 ADULTS IN 74 CONSTITUENCIES THROUGHOUT BRITAIN

exasperation at the 'irrational' and 'tribal' Irish, and to pose as referees trying to keep the peace. It serves to distract from the fact that Britain is to blame for the conflict.

British governments divided Ireland and denied the Irish people their right to self-determination. British governments built and sustain the sectarian state of Ulster, with its artificial majority of privileged Protestant Loyalists and its oppressed minority of Catholic nationalists. British security forces uphold the status quo with their fierce war against those fighting for Irish unity and independence. Meanwhile British propagandists seek, with apparent success, to bury the truth beneath endless shovelfuls of dirt about Irish 'religious fanatics'.

The low priority which most British people place on the Irish issue is further

proof of how the authorities have won some important victories in the propaganda war. All of the major British parties have made an unwritten agreement that they will not use the Irish War as a 'political football'. They recognise that the republican struggle to free Ireland from British domination is too big a threat to the British authorities to be manipulated for petty party advantage. The wall of silence which Labour, Tory and Alliance leaders have built around Ireland means that, according to the *Express* poll, more than 90 per cent of people here spend less time worrying about a war being fought within the 'United Kingdom' than about the European Economic Community!

The anti-Irish prejudices which official spokesmen have instilled in British public opinion dictate the reasons why people told the Mori pollsters that they favoured withdrawal.

The small percentage which identified the Army or the Border as a problem suggests that sympathy with the cause of Irish liberation is not the major factor. Rather, many people accepted that the British authorities have done their best but thought that the 'Irish problem' was insoluble, and so Britain should wash its hands of the whole affair.

More than half of the respondents complained about the cost of keeping Northern Ireland to the British exchequer. When asked who was a 'force for evil' in

Ireland, 70 per cent mentioned Loyalist leader Ian Paisley and 54 per cent fingered Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, compared to only 24 per cent who picked out Margaret Thatcher. The poll reflects a widespread feeling that all sides within Northern Ireland are up to no good, and that the blasted place is more trouble than it's worth to Britain.

CRIPPLING BLOW

These arguments may add up to an impressive percentage in a public opinion poll. But they will not sway the British establishment from its determination to keep control of Northern Ireland. The British ruling class does not remain in Ireland out of any belief in its ability to solve the problems of the Irish people. Nor is it there to prevent bloodshed.

The Army stays because the authorities know that withdrawal would strike a crippling blow to the institutions of the British state.

Pulling out of Ireland would mean dismantling an integral part of the apparatus with which our rulers govern the whole 'United Kingdom'. Such a dramatic reversal would severely weaken the state — the establishment's most precious instrument for protecting its power and prestige. It would do untold damage to the confidence and authority of the entire capitalist class. That is why the British authorities never have and never will seriously consider a voluntary withdrawal from Northern Ireland. It is also why a succession of public opinion polls showing a popular majority for pulling out have made not a jot of difference to government policy. For the authorities, grumbles about 'a waste of money' are besides the point; they simply cannot afford to concede the Irish their freedom.

TAKING SIDES

The Tory government can be reasonably satisfied with the poll results. They indicate that feeling against the Irish is strong enough to give the government a free hand in its dirty war against the liberation movement. In the context of the current protests against the Anglo-Irish agreement, the display of public distrust towards the Loyalists provides the Tories with an extra lever to force Paisley & Co back into line behind their British paymasters.

The prejudices that lie behind the *Express* poll results mean that it is not the bonus for supporters of Irish freedom which some on the left would have us believe. The British authorities cannot be dislodged from Ireland by war-weariness, boredom or the bitterness of the taxpayer. They will only be forced out when they are defeated in political struggle by superior forces.

Our job is to get out and campaign for active support for the struggle against British domination.

Even the *Express* poll reveals a small base of existing support for these ideas. The fact that one respondent in four had a vague idea that a united Ireland might be the best eventual arrangement indicates a wider potential audience which we can reach. But we can only carry the day against our determined rulers by convincing people of Britain's responsibility for the bloodshed and the need to take sides with the Irish. We cannot win if we sit back and expect opinion polls which describe a colonial war as an inter-church conflict to defeat the British state and bring peace to Ireland.

Sinn Fein councillor held



Sinn Fein councillor Tommy Maguire from Fermanagh was arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act last week, when he arrived in Liverpool for a cultural visit to Wales. Irish Freedom Movement supporters staged a protest outside the Bridewell police station, calling for an end to Britain's use of the PTA as an anti-Irish charter. On Sunday police used the PTA to pick up six more people on a ferry from Ireland and to start yet another 'IRA bomb plot' scare. All were released without charge on Monday.

Plaid Cymru MP and party leader Dafydd Elis Thomas gave his full support to the police action in arresting Tommy Maguire. A couple of years back, the Welsh nationalist MP was a supporter of Irish unity who gave public support to several Irish Freedom Movement initiatives. He even moved the writ in the house of commons for the 1981 Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election, which made IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands an MP. His craven retreat to supporting the victimisation of a republican councillor from Sands' constituency shows how a mood of reaction is getting a grip on all the opposition parties in the run-up to the election. It brings home the urgency of mobilising our forces to make sure that support for Irish freedom and opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Act are not forgotten in election fever.

Debate

Ireland: a socialist solution?

John O'Mahoney — editor of *Socialist*
Organiser

Mick Hume — editor of the next step
Wednesday 25 February 7.30pm
Room 3.7 Chesham Building
BRADFORD UNIVERSITY

NEW CAMPAIGN TO STOP RACIST ATTACKS IN EAST LONDON

Don't trust the system

Black victims exposed the truth about British racism at a meeting in East London last week, where Workers Against Racism launched a campaign to defend them

'W'e got lost going to a party and we were directed to the right house by some white blokes. Afterwards about 20 of them attacked us. I was stabbed in the eye.' Trevor Ferguson is a young man who got a broken bottle in the face for being black. He joined other victims of racist violence and discrimination on the platform at last week's Workers Against Racism meeting in Newham, East London.

'I used to think racist attacks happened to other people,' said Naeem Lone. 'I've changed my mind since the night white youths threw beer glasses at my father, my uncle and me outside my uncle's shop. I knew our luck was out. We were attacked by 10 racists. I saw my father's face cut with a knife. He had stitches to his head and body. We were lucky to come out alive.'

'Almost as soon as we moved in, the racists started putting shit through the letter box.' Nasreen Saddique was imprisoned in her own home by racists. She has become well-known for the diary she kept of her family's ordeal. 'Our house became a centre of attraction for them. We were prisoners. We were so afraid we practically lived under the table.'

OFFICIAL APPROVAL

Marion Gaima spoke about the government's threat to deport her. 'The first I heard about it was when two coppers woke me up. They said they'd been looking for me and that I was to be deported. Since then they've put me in prison twice. This evening we've been listening to accounts of physical attacks. I feel that I'm being attacked as well, by the government.'

All four speakers had different experiences of racism. Yet there was a them common to all the assaults and abuse they have suffered. In each case, the British authorities gave the racists free rein.

The home office, the police and even left-wing councils all played a part in contributing to the problems facing the black community.

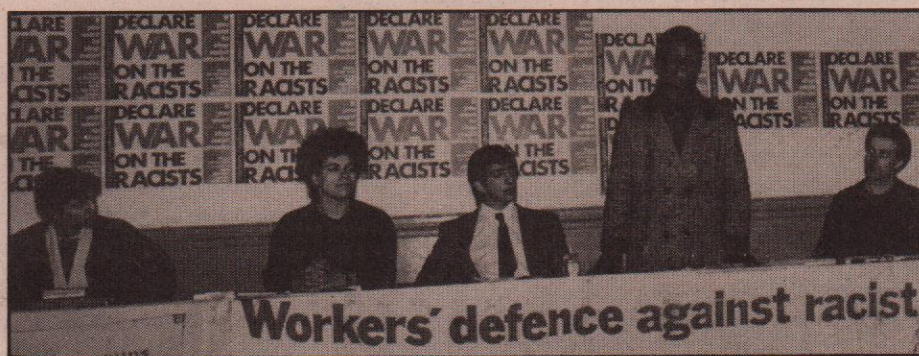
After he had been blinded, police told Trevor to push off. 'At first they just weren't interested. The second time we phoned them they called me a liar. They said the attack was nothing to do with racism and that the other boys were only jealous because I was going to a party and they weren't.'

Naeem soon learnt who the police were rooting for. 'They took our statements, but said they were too busy for even one officer to protect us. Then we saw a whole vanload of them where the racists live.' But the police weren't there to arrest the racists. 'They were there to protect them against a "black backlash".'

WAR WORKS

Defending the black community is not part of the policeman's lot. But harassing anti-racists goes with the job. 'Sometimes we rang the police six or seven times a night' said Nasreen. 'But the only time they came was when Workers Against Racism supporters were sitting with us in our house. They came in and searched it without our permission. Then they took the WAR people outside and threatened to arrest them if they came to our house again. But WAR are the only people who have ever been any good.'

Anyone who's been in Britain for 10 years is supposed to have the right to stay. Marion has been here 13 years, but the police tell her 'it's discretionary.' Marion knows that this isn't just one policeman being awkward. Every law officer — the hard cases and the community cops, the white racists and the



BLACK VICTIMS OF RACIST ATTACKS PUT THE CASE FOR DIRECT ACTION

token blacks — has to enforce immigration laws written to intimidate black people. 'However long you live here, they can turn round and say "it's just discretionary."'

Marion is disappointed that Newham Labour council hasn't helped her. 'When I went to the council advice centre, nearly everyone was there because of racism. But they have done nothing.' Newham council is all for anti-racist publicity campaigns, but incapable of effective action. Worse still, the Labour authority's apartheid housing policy has created black ghettos and increased racist pressure.

WAR organiser Keith Tompson argued that we should recognise how the police are always loyal to the government and its racist laws.

We must show the same uncompromising loyalty to the black community. Tompson explained how anti-racists' allegiance to left-wing councils is a dead end. 'No matter how radical they want to be, local authorities operate within a framework laid down by racist national government. They would like to keep us working within their framework,

but that's like trying to fight racism with your hands tied behind your back.'

'We have to break people's loyalty to official channels. That's why WAR is setting up a new campaign against racist attacks in Newham. Our first job is to get a questionnaire around the borough, to identify who will take direct action against the racists. Then we can set up an instant response service. We can offer an alternative to the 'anti-racist' publicity campaign run by the Metropolitan police. They tell black people to buy a dog and stay at home. We will organise meetings in community centres, trade unions and Labour parties, to have out the arguments about why we need to defend black people. We can win these arguments because ordinary people have everything to gain from taking sides against the authorities, and showing some loyalty to the victims of racist violence.'

For further information about the Newham campaign, ring (01) 729 3771.

Lynn Rawley

BROADWATER FARM SHOWTRIALS

Bullies and blackmailers

The trial of six youths accused of murdering PC Keith Blakelock at Broadwater Farm is revealing a catalogue of police bullying, bribery, blackmail and bare-faced lies.

The six, four of them black, are charged with killing Blakelock on the North London estate in October 1985, during the disturbances which followed the death of black mother Cynthia Jarrett in a police raid on her home. Last month's press reports of the trial were all about depicting Blakelock as an innocent victim and praising the heroism of his fellow riot cops. The idea was to cover up the fact that the trouble started when police harassed a black woman to her grave, and then sent in 10 tooled-up district support units to occupy the estate. This month has brought new evidence of the police conspiracy against those who rebelled against their racist regime on the Farm.

First the court heard how one of the accused, a 15-year old black youth reported to have a mental age of eight, was interrogated for eight hours while locked away from solicitors and his parents. While he pleaded for his mother, police bombarded him with accusations and abuse. It was hardly surprising that a terrified

teenager should 'confess' to knifing Blakelock.

The next nail in the coffin of 'police impartiality' came when 18-year old Jason Cobham appeared as a police witness. Cobham had earlier been fined £200 for throwing stones on the estate, while those he accused of doing the same got sentences of up to seven years. But when the Broadwater Farm supergrass turned up to give evidence against the six accused last week, he admitted that he had lied, and that police had found him a house, got him two jobs and paid most of his bills. Yet the judge still had the nerve to condemn the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign leaflet which had described the courtroom charade as 'a showtrial'.

While the murder trial grabs the headlines, other Broadwater Farm cases are still going through the courts. Four youths have been jailed, and five cases thrown out. One of the acquitted, James Roberts, was 'read his rights' by a police officer in a way that summed up the legal system. 'You're lucky you gave yourself up,' said the policeman, 'or we'd have come round and done your mum the way we did with the Jarrett's.'

THE PROPAGANDA WAR

NATIONAL TRIBUNE

The first issue of *Tribune* in January 1937 depicted the British working class as a lion, with a flat cap on its head and a Union Jack around its neck. Throughout *Tribune's* 50 years in print, one theme has remained constant — the paper's commitment to the British nation.

Tribune was launched on the wave of anti-fascist unity that swept the left wing of the labour movement in the late thirties. However, under the influence of Labour politicians, popular hostility towards fascism was rapidly transformed into support for the war effort of British imperialism. *Tribune* echoed the left's criticisms of the British ruling class, accusing it of being too slow to rearm for war and not aggressive enough in pursuing the military conflict against Germany. At the close of the war, *Tribune* patriotically supported the imperialist policies of the post-war Labour government in Greece, Malaya and the Middle East.

National chauvinism featured prominently in *Tribune* in the fifties. The paper ran a successful campaign against proposals to let Germany build up its armed forces — on the grounds of the alleged militarist tendencies inherent in the German temperament. In its support for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, *Tribune* emphasised Britain's responsibility to 'give a moral lead' to the world. As *Tribune* editor Michael Foot put it, 'suddenly in CND national pride and disgruntlement, scarcely less than intelligent alarm about the bomb, found expression'.

Tribune opposed the Tory government's invasion of the Suez Canal in 1956 — on the grounds that military methods were not the best way to secure British interests. In a response that provided a model for the left in future overseas military adventures, *Tribune* condemned both the government and its victim — Nasser's Egypt — and recommended the use of diplomatic and economic leverage instead of force. 'It must not be all take, Colonel Nasser' declared Aneurin Bevan, the leader of the left, in a *Tribune* headline addressed to the president of a country that had endured decades of British exploitation and terror.

In 1982 a new editor, Chris Mullin, cited *Tribune's* position over Suez in criticism of the Labour leaders' support for the Tory task force in the South Atlantic. Labour leader Michael Foot, who had been editor of *Tribune* in 1956, now angrily repudiated Mullin's criticism as 'infantile leftism'. While Foot urged the task force on, *Tribune* called for its return; but it still found space for the traditional chauvinist abuse against Argentina, and the equally traditional calls for sanctions and United Nations mediation to secure British interests.

Perhaps the most significant feature in *Tribune's* 50th anniversary issue is a little column tucked away at the back of the bizarrely redesigned paper. The column is entitled 'Give the Anglo-Irish Agreement a chance', and its author is Seamus Mallon, MP for the pro-British Social Democratic and Labour Party. For the best part of 20 years, *Tribune* has ignored British barbarism in Ireland while occasionally condemning those who fight back against it. Now it provides space for the party that has been promoted by the British government to stop the rise of Sinn Féin and undermine support for the freedom struggle.

After 50 years, it's time the lion took off its flat cap and tied its Union Jack around the neck of the Labour leadership, good and tight.

This was a Tebbit strike' boasted National Communications Union chief John Golding last Thursday. Golding proudly declared that his union owed the 'success' of its strike against British Telecom to the intervention of Norman Tebbit's 1984 Trade Union Act, with its compulsory secret ballots. A powerful union leader was praising the government's legal shackles on the labour movement in the week when the same laws helped to finish the Wapping print workers. The sorry spectacle captured the mood of moderation among union officials today.

The Wapping and Telecom strikes revealed how labour movement leaders now see industrial militancy as an embarrassing nuisance. They are desperate to maintain a respectable image and keep 'public opinion' sweet, even if it means that their members suffer. The important factor influencing the union leaders is the fear that fierce struggles might frighten middle class voters away from Labour in the next election.

The dismal results of the two recent strikes show the high price we are expected to pay to protect our leaders' virtuous reputations, and to help Neil Kinnock appeal to the yuppie electorate.

Thousands of sacked print workers stood outside Wapping for a year, struggling with the elements, the scabs and the police. Meanwhile, Brenda Dean of Sogat and Tony Dubbins of the NGA spent most of their time indoors. They held long hours of secret talks with the TUC and Rupert Murdoch's managers, scratching around for some sort of deal to end the dispute — even if it meant signing away their members' right to strike. Dean went to court to swear obedience to anti-union laws. They both appeared at press conferences to condemn 'picket line violence' whenever the media men gave them their cue. In the end, the pair of print union leaders simply gave up and went home rather than face another court order. They kept their credentials as law-abiding citizens intact. But they lost 5500 workers their jobs

SHORT AND SOUR

The Telecom dispute was shorter but equally sour. If Golding's NCU had organised a campaign to disrupt the telephone system, the strike could have been won outright within days. Instead the union officials told their members to behave themselves — 'I don't want

WHY SHOULD WE KINNOCK'S PRICE

a thug union' warned Golding — and begged BT management to do a cheap deal.

The NCU leadership made moderation a principle. As a result many engineers became resigned to a compromise, and returned to work last week under an agreement which included most of the rotten working arrangements which had started the strike in the first place. When they went back, they discovered that the employers did not share their union officials' faith in gentlemen's agreements. Hardline BT bosses ripped up the deal, tried to impose longer working hours, and took away union facility time. Golding, displaying his naive belief in the law to the last, threatened to take BT to the capitalist courts.

Our union leaders are trying to restrain the working class and to divert trade unionism into harmless public relations exercises. They are willing to sacrifice struggles on the altar of Labour's election campaign.

The gap between union bureaucrats who want a Labour government at any cost, and ordinary people who need to fight for survival today, has never been greater.

Much of the pressure to keep our heads down and wait for a Kinnock government results from the breakdown in the old labour movement machine. The trade union bureaucracy has crumbled under the impact of mass

unemployment, employers' aggression and Tory legislation. Getting a less hostile Labour prime minister into office is the union chiefs' only way out of the mess.

One striking example of their problem is the loss of union membership and the resulting financial crisis. Figures just released by the department of employment reveal that total union membership in 1985 stood at 10.7 million — a drop of 278 000 on the previous year, and all of 19 per cent lower than the 13.2 million membership peak in 1979. The loss of one in five members has sent union bank balances into the red. The TUC is conducting a comprehensive cost-cutting review, while one of Britain's biggest unions — the Amalgamated Engineering Union — urges its officials to take voluntary redundancy.

FIGURE OF FUN

Along with its members and its money, the official labour movement has lost much of its power and prestige. The general secretary of the TUC used to be an influential figure, visiting Downing Street and appearing on television to warn the government of the day against taking liberties with the labour movement. By contrast the present incumbent, Norman Willis, is a figure of fun. He is rarely seen, even more rarely listened to, and better known for his saloon bar crooning than his accomplishments in the field of industrial struggle. Willis is counting on a Kinnock government to put him back in the big picture.

The union leaders are not interested in making their stricken organisations effective fighting forces.

Indeed, in his review of TUC affairs, Willis blames the cash crisis on the fact that the Congress still makes too many promises of solidarity with those in struggle; 'any union's campaign tends to become every union's campaign' he grumbles. This is rich coming from an institution that has proved incapable of providing the most basic assistance to miners, print workers and countless others. It confirms that the union barons' only concern is to save their own hides. They will corrupt the principles of trade unionism as much as is necessary to give Labour a leg up the polls.

PANTOMIME POLITICS

The closer it gets to a general election the more determined the union officials become to stamp on any action that might alienate potential Labour voters. For the past two years, our leaders have told us we can't win by being militant. Today this message of moderation has taken a new twist. First it was 'We can't do much except wait for a Labour government.' Now it's 'We mustn't do anything in case we screw up the election.'

Union officials no longer make a move without weighing up its possible impact on the opinion polls. Golding's secret talks were not just with BT management. He also had a confidential chat with Kinnock, to discuss what the dispute would mean for Labour's electoral prospects. The upshot of their talk was that Golding signed the dodgy deal to end the strike last week.

To keep on the right side of 'public opinion', union officials like Brenda Dean have sought to reduce the class struggle to the level of a pantomime. At Wapping, Dean tried to convince the public that her union was a pathetic, penniless Widow Twankey figure — and just as harmless. She set up print baron Rupert Murdoch as the evil Sir Jasper, a malicious and miserly character who was trying to turn the union out of its cottage. Her hope was that, if she could make the unions look tame and lovable enough, the audience would hiss and shout 'He's behind you' so loudly every

The Wapping and British Telecom strikes show what we are expected to pay to protect our leaders' virtuous reputations, and to help Neil Kinnock appeal to the yuppie electorate. It argues that it's far too high a price to pay for an alternative government.

time Murdoch appeared, that the villain would slink away muttering 'Curses'.

Unfortunately for Dean, multi-millionaire capitalists like Murdoch don't stick to other people's scripts. The fact that their opponents look feeble merely encourages them to stick the boot in. The only way to beat a Murdoch is not by appealing for the audience to boo him off, but by campaigning for them to come on stage and help to throw him out. That, however, is against the rules laid down by the Tory theatre managers — rules which Kinnock has instructed the union bosses to obey.

Kinnock's adoption of Tory standards of behaviour has influenced every labour movement leader.

A right winger like Golding, himself a former Labour MP and national executive member, exemplifies this trend.

IN HOCK TO LABOUR

During the Telecom dispute, Golding discovered that management was tapping his phone. But he refused to denounce it as an attack on union rights that should be resisted. Instead, Golding took the same patriotic tack with which Kinnock had tried to out-Tory the Tories over the Zircon spy satellite ban. The NCU leader said he didn't mind being bugged, but he objected to the sloppy standards of the scabs who were doing the dirty work normally carried out by his members. 'Mrs Thatcher,' Golding announced, 'as head of our security services, should have her attention drawn to the drop in the standards of phone-tapping because of the strike.' The Tory backroom-boys now considering proposals to ban strikes in essential services must have been wetting themselves at the prospect of using his words to endorse their case.

The idea that we should keep quiet and wait for Kinnock is doubly dangerous for trade unionists. It means that management is given a free hand in hammering our jobs, conditions and unions today. But, worse still, it means that our future is mortgaged to a party which is willing to let the working class go to the wall for the sake of winning votes in the suburbs.

NO JAM TOMORROW

Kinnock has left us in no doubt as to where he stands on industrial struggles. Over Wapping he condemned pickets battling with riot police for damaging the interests of the 'legitimate' labour movement — ie, harming the Labour Party's standing in the opinion polls. Meanwhile, Labour's industry spokesman John Smith appealed to Lord Young — the minister of mass unemployment and the YTS scheme — to intervene and settle the Wapping dispute. Young would have been about as much help to striking print workers as were the mounted police. But Smith would have preferred to have him stitch the strike up quietly, than to face headlines about 'picket line violence' in the gutter press.

If we behave ourselves and the Tories make enough blunders, the Labour Party thinks it can win the next election. But what then?

It might mean a bit more breathing space for the union bosses. But for the working class, it would only mean a revamped version of the cuts and coercion which we face now.

THE EETPU FACTOR

The union leaders' campaign against the scabbing antics, single-union agreements and no-strike deals of the electricians' union has now been exposed as so much hot air. They are all adopting EETPU-style policies in their scramble to survive. They are also devoting their energies to electing Neil Kinnock — the political equivalent of electricians' chief Eric Hammond.

Throughout the Wapping dispute, print union leaders and others supposedly on the left of the labour movement called on the TUC to discipline the EETPU for its role in recruiting scabs for Murdoch's operation. Hammond's role at Wapping was undoubtedly a disgrace. But Brenda Dean of Sogat and Tony Dubbins of the NGA only targeted the EETPU to distract attention from their own wheeling and dealing. They offered Murdoch an EETPU-style no-strike deal. Elsewhere in the industry, they have signed several similar agreements. Their argument with Hammond was only that he had beaten them to Murdoch's table and grabbed all the crumbs.

The 'business unionism' which the EETPU pioneered now holds sway across the official labour movement. Union leaders desperate for members have taken on Hammond's approach. They are promising employers anything in return for recognition, and trying to sell their unions to workers not as combat organisations, but as benefit societies that can give them legal advice, social facilities and cheap holidays.

Sogat chose the last lap of the Wapping marathon as the time to launch its glossy new recruitment pack. It is a bright yellow advertising agency production that depicts the union as a sort of social club-cum-citizens' advice bureau, with soft-focus images of Dean as your friendly general secretary. The fact that

the leaflets come in sealed plastic pouches sums up the sanitised image of trade unionism today. It might look cheerful, but it brought precious little joy to print workers battling with the law and the police outside the Wapping plant.

The Transport and General Workers' Union has long claimed to be the bastion of the left in the TUC. Now it can also claim to be the union whose members drove scab TNT trucks through Wapping picket lines for 12 months. For the last few years, the TGWU has tried to keep its radical credentials intact by doing its dirty deals under the table. Now it has had to come clean. Last month the union admitted for the first time that it had signed a single union sweetheart deal with a Norwegian fertiliser company in Humberside — with the agreement of the EETPU.

The union leaders now following where Hammond leads have also accepted Kinnock's move to extend the EETPU approach into the political sphere. The EETPU's basic message is that the labour movement can't fight the employers' new mood with old-style militancy. Instead, unions must adapt to today's climate and compete with the bosses on their own terms, becoming rival personnel management departments. Kinnock has pursued the same theme of collaboration in politics. He has taken on board Tory ideas about defence, law and order and morality. He has told the labour movement that it must be judged by the establishment's standards. He has raised a scab banner and demanded that we march behind it. Yet this is the politician the labour movement leaders claim can deliver us from the modern Murdochs.

Before you get committed to Labour's campaign, ask yourself: would you vote to put Eric Hammond in Downing Street?

E PAY CE?

Telecom strikes show
endure in order to get
editor **Mick Hume**
much, and offers
native

Kinnock's interview in the latest *New Statesman* is a rambling testimony to the incoherence of Labour's alternative to Thatcherism. But he saves his rare moments of clarity to explain that he would do nothing for the working class once in office. He declares that a big pay-out to restore Tory cuts in council spending would be 'simply irrational': 'I refuse to give it, and if some people are wounded by that, well that's tough but it's truthful.' We are supposed to be grateful for having an honest hatchetman hacking his way through council jobs and services.

Kinnock also tells the *New Statesman* that he is in favour of picketing 'as a civil right, up to the point where it becomes a source of disorder where it obviously can't be allowed'. In other words, we can picket so long as we don't achieve anything. But the moment we start being effective by blocking roads or stopping scabs — a source of disorder — Labour will slap on the court orders and send in the riot cops.

TIME TO CHOOSE

Time and again, Kinnock has warned us of what to expect from a Labour government. Yet the left remains committed to his electoral cause. The left's dependence on the old institutions of the official labour movement has laid it open to being influenced by the moderate mood and narrow aims of the union hierarchy. Leading left wingers now accept that it is worth paying any price to get Labour into power. This was vividly illustrated at the Labour Party local government conference a fortnight ago.

The Leeds conference centred on speeches from Kinnock, his deputy Roy Hattersley and environment spokesman John Cunningham. The Walworth Road triumvirate stuck to one theme: there would be no easy money for local government from a Labour administration. Their audience included representatives from all of the councils which, two years ago, were in the vanguard of the fight against the Tory rate-rapping laws. Yet now these same radicals gave their tight-fisted leaders a rousing reception.

The speeches from delegates were couched in the language of their Conservative persecutors, all about the need for 'more efficient spending', 'good housekeeping', etc. They mean what they say. More left-wing Labour councils have proved willing to swallow their pride, toe the Kinnock line, and put Labour's commitment to capitalist accountancy into practice. In recent weeks, Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool councils have all taken on their workforces and provoked disputes over jobs and working conditions.

Their actions show that they have chosen to side with Kinnock's election campaign, against the immediate concerns of ordinary people. Now we have to make our choice.

Many left wingers would agree with our criticisms of the 'heads-down-here-comes-Kinnock' approach of the official labour movement. But the string of defeats inflicted on the working class has convinced them that staying in Labour is the closest we can get to a victory. They can see no other escape route from the Tory/employer vice now squeezing the life out of our people.

Yet there is plenty of evidence to show that an important minority of workers are willing to take



DIRECT ACTION AGAINST DEPORTATIONS: WORKERS MARCH FOR GEORGE ROUCOU AND SHOW THE WAY TO BUILD OUR FORCES

a stand, if only we could provide them with a focus to fight around.

An example of such a focus has recently been provided by the George Roucou Defence Campaign in Manchester.

George Roucou is a shop steward in the direct works department of Manchester city council. He is threatened with deportation to the Indian Ocean islands of the Seychelles. Last year, his supporters launched a campaign to defend his right to stay. A deportation campaign is nothing new. But most of them rely on a collection of politicians, vicars and other dignitaries to plead for clemency. Some now advise those threatened with deportation to spin out their case and wait for mercy from a Labour government. The George Roucou Defence Campaign has done it differently.

THE WAY AHEAD

Roucou's supporters set out to convince working class people in Manchester that defending a black worker against deportation could be an important step forward in our struggle against the authorities. They went to dozens of union and workplace meetings to put forward the case for anti-racism. Their straightforward approach of conducting a political struggle within the working class has borne some remarkable fruit. Two weeks ago around 1500 people, many of them council workers, marched through Manchester on a Friday afternoon on a demonstration against Roucou's deportation. It was the first time ever that a sizeable number of British workers had stopped work for such an event.

At a time when many have despaired of ever getting trade unionists to take a militant stand on a political issue, the George Roucou Defence Campaign has given us a glimpse of what could be achieved.

FIGHTING FOCUS

There were no tricks or manoeuvres involved in the Roucou campaign's success. His supporters conducted a clear political argument for trade unionists to take action, on the grounds that defending a black worker was too important a task to be left to anybody else. They provided a focus for those who are looking for a way to fight back against the injustices and insults delivered by the system. Their campaign provides some important clues as to how we can organise a wider defence of the working class.

Initiatives like the George Roucou Defence Campaign suggest that there is an alternative to the dead end of making sacrifices in the cause of

Kinnock. We can organise our own forces to begin building some defences around our class. We cannot reverse all the setbacks of the recent past overnight. But we can establish a backbone in the workers' movement, upon which we can build muscle in the many struggles to come. Anything we achieve must be a positive alternative to the schemes of spineless union and Labour Party bureaucrats.

THE RED FRONT

The Revolutionary Communist Party has set about establishing such an alternative. We are campaigning for *The Red Front*, a bloc of left-wing individuals and organisations united around a set of basic demands (see page 9). We hope that *The Red Front* can become a focus for fighting today, and a platform on which to stand candidates in the general election tomorrow. The RCP's full programme for the election campaign is set out in a new pamphlet

(see page 9). The need for *The Red Front* arises directly from our understanding of the current crossroads in the class struggle in Britain. We do not expect every left winger to agree with all our ideas at once. But we are asking you seriously to consider the dangers of waiting for Kinnock, and the overriding need to start fighting for our class.

'If Kinnock's got any sense,' said one press baron after Wapping, 'he'll make Brenda Dean a cabinet minister if he gets power. She's the acceptable face of trade unionism.' Union officials like Dean who sell out year-long struggles, bow and scrape in the capitalist courts and condemn militant pickets are 'acceptable' to the British establishment, and to Kinnock's Labour Party. They are not acceptable to us. Neither is the high price which they expect us to pay for putting their man in Downing Street.

Which way forward for the working class?

EDINBURGH

Debate between RON BROWN (Labour MP for Leith), BILL MORRISON (Scottish National Party prospective parliamentary candidate for Leith), MIKE FREEMAN (Revolutionary Communist Party)
Friday 27 February 7pm
Chamber Street House
Chamber Street
Edinburgh University.
Tickets £1/50p

PONTEFRAC

Discussion with speakers from NCU, NUM, sacked print worker and eye-witness from French rail strike
Thursday 26 February 7.30pm
Red Lion Pub

KIRKBY

Debate between the Labour Party, Socialist Workers' Party, Revolutionary Communist Party
Wednesday 18 February 7pm
Kirkby Unemployed Centre

THATCHER SUCCEEDS WHERE KOHL, CHIRAC STUMBLE

EUROPE AWAKES — BRITAIN SLEEPS ON

Student revolt and militant strikes show that politics are getting interesting in Europe. So why is Britain quiet? asks **Sabena Norton**

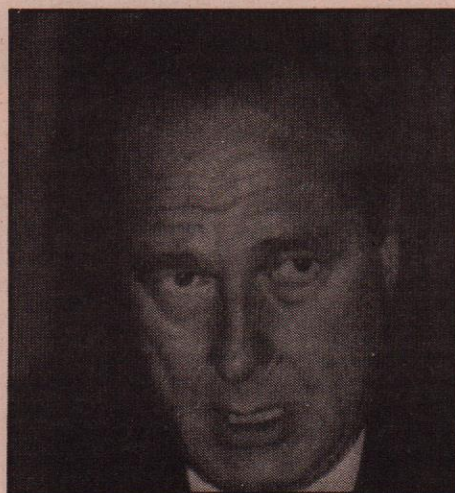
All the pundits agree that Western Europe is in for a hard time this year. European exports are getting dearer as the US dollar tumbles down the exchange markets. A consumer spending spree has cushioned industry against the impact of falling profitability and shrinking markets over the past 18 months. But the credit card economy is now reaching its limits.

While Europe's rulers thrash about for new policies to keep their system afloat, they have to cope with a new climate of unrest and uncertainty. Over the past two months student protests and public sector strikes have shaken governments in France, Spain and Greece. Even in stable West Germany, fresh divisions have begun to disrupt the patterns of political life. The recent elections were marked by bitter infighting among the right-wing coalition parties and by a major triumph for the radical Green Party.

Britain has so far been least affected by the political instability rocking the European powers. The Tories have had their share of scandals, from Westlands to Zircon. But, blessed with a pathetic opposition, Thatcher has managed to turn most such embarrassments to her advantage.

Although its economy is disintegrating much faster, the British ruling class seems more stable than its more prosperous German and French rivals.

French capitalism is in big trouble. West Germany is beating it to European and overseas markets. Last year only huge arms sales saved France from a trade deficit, as imports of consumer goods — mostly West German — quadrupled. Unemployment has been rising since mid-1986. The recent revaluation of the deutschmark, forced on a reluctant West German government by the franc's collapse, underlined the weakness of the French economy.



WORRIED: PREMIER JACQUES CHIRAC

West Germany is easily the most prosperous state in Europe. Yet it too is heading for recession. Until 1985 it benefited from an export boom, fuelled by the artificially inflated dollar exchange rate. Even when exports slumped last year, the shortfall was made up by consumption at home. This year, however, the decline in the dollar and the franc is making German exports even less competitive, while the domestic spending boom fizzles out.

The capitalist malaise has provoked tensions in the French and the German governments. They need harsh measures to tackle the crisis of profitability. But both French premier Jacques Chirac and German chancellor Helmut Kohl seem to lack the political clout to press home the policies the ruling class requires.

The problem is worst in France. The first



ALL SMILES: THATCHER HAS HER TROUBLES, BUT LABOUR ISN'T ONE OF THEM

wave of militant protest in more than a decade has disoriented the establishment and sapped the morale of the Chirac administration. Since December the government has abandoned important bills on education and nationality to contain public protest. Its plan to limit public sector pay rises to three per cent looks doomed.

CHIRAC STALLS

Since the rail, electricity and metro workers' strikes ended last month, teachers have taken to the streets in protest against a new school bill, and civil service pay talks broke down without agreement. Chirac now lacks the will to impose Thatcher-style union-busting techniques. He is desperate to pre-empt further unrest and to win back some sympathy before next year's presidential poll. He has promised a 'new social dialogue' with the unions and announced increases in unemployment benefit and more union consultation in the public sector. This embarrassing turnabout reflects the government's loss of direction.

The West German working class remains quiescent. But the need to find a cure for economic decline has caused ructions within the establishment. The liberal Free Democratic Party is the minor partner in Kohl's right-wing coalition. Emboldened by its better-than-expected election results, the FDP is demanding big tax cuts to boost profits and demand. Kohl's Christian Democrats are reluctant to comply because cutting taxes must mean slashing public spending. Unemployment benefit, health care and agricultural subsidies are obvious candidates for cuts. But such cuts are unpopular within the Christian Democrat alliance, with its strong rural base and 'caring' appeal. Kohl's reduced majority in the new Bundestag also impairs decisive action.

FACTION-RIDDEN

The German authorities suffer from a similar handicap as their French rivals. Unlike Britain, both lack a stable ruling class party. This deprives the capitalist class of an important instrument for dominating politics.

The British Conservative Party is closely linked to industry, the state bureaucracy, the armed forces and the media. Since the decline of the Liberals early this century, it has faced no real rival. The Tory Party is thus much more than an electoral machine.

It is an agency for centralising the affairs of the ruling class, with a coherent outlook and uncontested hegemony over bourgeois politics.

Thatcher's success in imposing a ruthless capitalist strategy owes much to the monolithic role of British Conservatism. The dilemmas confronting Britain's rulers are far greater than those of its more prosperous rivals. But tensions within the British establishment rarely reach the surface. When they do — as over the Westlands dispute about Britain's relationship with America — they take place within the confines of one party and can be quickly buried.

France's bourgeois parties are a notoriously faction-ridden mess. The centre-right UDF, Chirac's RPR and the far-right Front National are little more than electoral blocs among rival right-wing cliques. Every political problem tends to blow up into a big row and an excuse for electoral posturing. Since taking office last March, Chirac has spent most of his time manoeuvring to avoid the upstaging antics of his right-wing rivals.

The fragmented state of French bourgeois politics limits the scope for decisive action. With the presidential elections looming, Chirac has already sacrificed whatever strategic goals he may have had to short-term electoral considerations.

PEOPLE'S PARTIES

Both big West German parties — the CDU/CSU on the right and the Social Democrats on the left — are 'people's parties'. The right-wing CDU/CSU alliance was formed after the war as a populist Christian alternative to fascism and to the discredited nationalists. It still has a broad base of support, including a 'Christian-Social workers' section linked to the unions. The CDU/CSU gets most of its votes from the Catholic working class and the rural petit bourgeoisie.

The paternalistic relationship between the party and its clients — reflected in Kohl's avuncular beer-swilling style — undermines the Christian Democrats' capacity for taking firm action. Franz Josef Strauss, the Bavarian CSU leader, is a hardliner on issues like law and order and defence. Yet he opposes cuts in agricultural subsidies, which may generally benefit German capitalism, but upset his Bavarian middle class constituency.

In a situation where, as one German commentator puts it, 'all people's parties are becoming schizophrenic,' it is left to the little FDP — which has less of a constituency to worry about — and the president of the German Bundesbank to provide the clearest policy proposals in Kohl's coalition government.

The political problems facing French and German rulers are a product of the past.

Until the end of the Second World War, the fragility of the capitalist order in both countries precluded the emergence of a strong bourgeois leadership. West German and French politicians still find it tricky to cope with the problems of the recession. By contrast, the British capitalist class can draw on the experience and confidence built up over long years of unchallenged political hegemony.

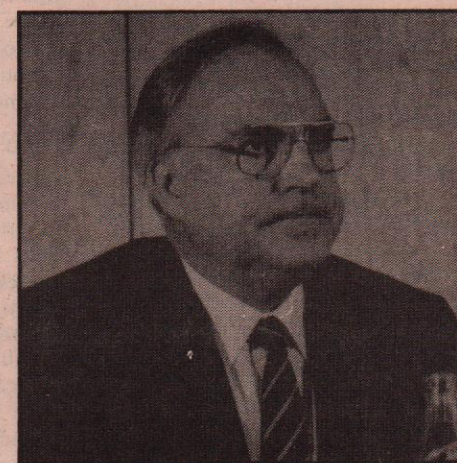
The lack of coherence among Continental ruling class parties is matched by the traditional European left. In France and West Germany the old reformist parties are already finding it hard to match the British Labour Party's success in keeping control of the working class.

NEW LEFT NEEDED

Britain is the poor relation of northern Europe, and the Tories have launched a more ruthless offensive than have their Continental counterparts. Yet there are few signs of organised resistance over here. The Conservative and Labour parties have each played their part in maintaining stability. The Tories have monopolised debate and forced Labour on to the defensive. In turn, Kinnock has used the Labour Party's influence over the labour movement to discourage militancy and pull radicals behind his shift to the right. Labour's unchallenged hold over the British left helps to insulate the ruling class.

The French and German reformist parties have also adapted to right-wing pressure. But in doing so they risk losing control of their left-wing constituency. In France the student revolt and the rail strike erupted independently of the old left-wing parties and the union machines. They showed how aloof these institutions have become from the concerns of ordinary people. The French Socialist and Communist parties lack the hold over the left and the working class loyalty which Labour enjoys. Thus they cannot exert the same control over anti-government protest.

Francois Mitterrand's Socialists now look forward to forging a bloc with sections of the ruling class parties in the presidential elections. But this course is risky, because it threatens to alienate more workers from the official left.



TIGHT-LIPPED: CHANCELLOR KOHL

The West German Social Democrats, who lost 600 000 votes to the Greens in the recent elections, face even bigger problems. The Greens have replaced the SPD as a natural focus for left-wing aspirations. This has highlighted the underlying fragility of the West German political order.

The problems of the traditional European left show the potential for creating new working class parties.

This potential exists in Britain too, but tends to be obscured by the left's continuing loyalty to Labour. As the Continent's old political institutions start to crack, there is scope for more spontaneous unrest. But the task of constructing parties that can turn these limited protests into a challenge to the system itself has yet to be taken in hand. Across Europe, conflicts are becoming more bitter and intense. Yet the working class still lacks a political voice of its own. Although conditions vary from country to country, this is the common problem we all have to confront.

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Revolutionary Communist Party

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The Revolutionary Communist Party's new, updated programme — *The Red Front: A Platform for Working Class Unity* — sets out our challenge to the capitalist system and the forces that are dedicated to its survival. It also spells out why the working class cannot afford to stick with the Labour Party. Under Neil Kinnock Labour has made clear that it sets more store by saving the system and securing a place in power than it does by defending the working class.

Our programme points to the need for an alliance of all left-wing groups and individuals in an electoral bloc — *The Red Front* — to give the working class a voice in the election. If we are to defend our jobs, our livelihoods and our rights we need to rally our forces around a basic platform of demands which we summarise below.

Work or full pay

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

Defend union rights

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

Equal rights for all

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

Stop the war drive

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

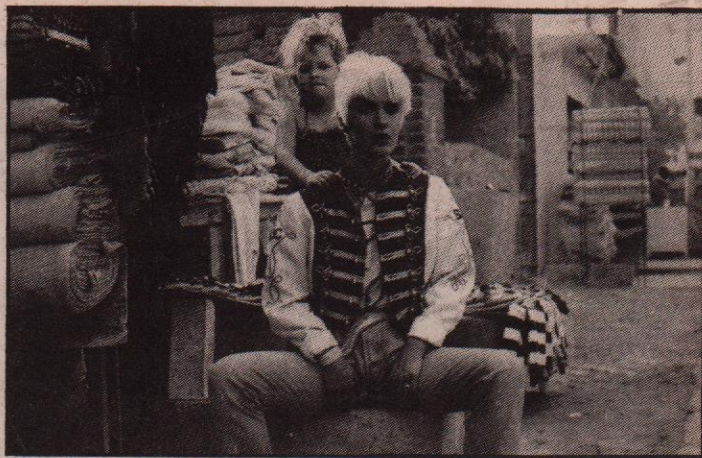
THE PERILS OF PAULA YATES

Is that it?

Paula Yates, *Sex with Paula Yates*, Sphere Books, £3.95

'Can I get pregnant with my pants on? The answer to this and many other pertinent teenage questions inside' reads Paula Yates' cover blurb. Inside we find a serious sex education primer lurking beneath a scurrilous style and the sort of language that teenagers themselves apply to such matters — thus we have headings such as 'Willies', 'Shagging', 'Wanking', and 'Clap'.

It is packed with useful information, answering very pertinent questions — 'What is a French kiss?', 'How can I check a man's penis for herpes?' etc, all coated with Yates' homespun vulgarity and genuine wit. It will probably be more effective than the usual clinical diagrams and fastidious prose in dispelling the ignorance and prejudice which prolong adolescent misery. Yates attends not just to the definitions ('testicles, a.k.a. balls, bollocks, nuts, goolies') but to all aspects of the process, from the



PAULA POSING IN EGYPT WITH FIFI TRIXIEBELL

pick-up to the tendency of boys to 'roll over and go to sleep immediately afterwards' (she refers to this several times, so wake up Bob). She even advises girls not to wear their knickers outside their tights, and boys to avoid food-stained nylon tracksuits and T-shirts sporting 'I'm with Stupid' slogans.

Paula Yates will no doubt succeed in coaxing many pubescent from the introversion of their bedrooms. But that isn't

why this book has been published, nor why the *Sun* serialised it. The real thrust of the book concerns the nature of the society that youth are being invited to join. It reinforces that society's obsession with sex, taking at face value the feverish teenage assumption, cultivated by their elders (where else do they get it from?), that the whole world revolves around sex. The book's opening question, 'Who on earth is ever going to fuck

me if I go on looking like this?' expresses well its general perspective.

Don't get me wrong, she's not saying that personal fulfilment in society is just a matter of sex — there's romantic love and the family as well. Yates may be basically sensible about abortion and contraception and our 'rude bits', but all the old humbug is here too. She comes clean in the introduction: 'Without wishing to sound too much like Barbara Cartland, being madly in love makes everything different,' and later she tells us 'Love is the best aphrodisiac of all.' There is a special chapter entitled 'Parents', devoted to 'creating a good ambience' in the home. Under 'More horrible problems' she berates girls who go out with married men, warning them they'll be alone at Xmas and Easter.

ANTI-CLIMAX

Beneath all the naughty natter Yates' conventional morality makes itself felt. There are four pages of role advice on how girls should play 'hard-to-get', compared to two pages in the entire book on homosexuality, and those are sandwiched between 'Crushes' and 'Oral sex' in a chapter headed 'Angst'. *Sex with Paula* is neither as naughty nor as innocent as it would like to appear.

Frances Walsh

DAVID CRONENBERG'S LATEST HORROR

Fly in the plasma pool

The Fly, David Cronenberg (Director)

It's been a lean year so far at the movies, but this one was worth waiting for. So too was the moment when Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) transports his body across the lab on the 'beam me up Scottie' principle beloved of science fiction (and of the 1958 original version of this film). Cronenberg's patient introduction is typical of the story-telling skill he displays throughout. By the time things get sticky we are the suitably complacent friends of our hero and his girl, Veronica (Geena Davis).

MUTATION

The problem is that a fly got into the ointment (or telepod) with Brundle and that in the transportation their genes were spliced and fusion occurred at 'the molecular-genetic level', creating Brundlefly. An even bigger problem is that the insect (Brundle discovers the species is 'very brutal, no compassion, no compromise') takes over, and he slowly mutates into a 185lb housefly before our very eyes. He starts to twitch a little, clamber athletically around the room and

perform tirelessly in bed. The fun really starts when various organs and limbs drop off and the mucus gushes from his mouth as he eats like a fly.

CREEPY

It would be a mistake to take any of *The Fly's* many layers too literally. *The Beauty and the Beast* theme is here of course, as Veronica remains faithful to the tragic monster to the end. The audience delivered their verdict on that with a communal groan as she gives him a hug just after his right ear has dropped off his decomposing head. We have too the overweening scientist theme, the Faustian tampering with the natural order in a vain bid to transcend it. Brundle's sin though is not meddling, but his ignorance of the needs of his own body, and indeed of other people. He is a virgin, and he says to Veronica 'I don't have a life, nothing for you to interfere with.' His foolishness here leads him to make the fatal trip.

At the heart of the film is the terrible transformation of the human body into something which in its scale and nature we find hard to contemplate. There

is little gratuitous grossness (apart from some abruptly terminated arm-wrestling), and we are reminded occasionally how close it all is to everyday experience. There is a lovely variation on squeezing spots in front of the bathroom mirror, when the fly's milky fluid spurts from the holes left by his missing fingernails. Some of the little touches, like the fly hairs which sprout from an old cut on Brundle's back, are creepy to the point of disturbing. If you said they got under your skin I'm sure Cronenberg would be pleased.

NOT NATURAL

He disrupts that casual attitude we have to our bodies, and challenges our acceptance of our most natural and profound revulsions, especially those for decay and disease. He exorcises our proper fear of such processes by confronting us with the gore, guts and protozoic slime of which we — and other beings — are made. He puts the horror in perspective too by the insistent wit and irony of its presentation. At the same time he forces us to consider that nothing is natural or given, and that your version of what is

horrible depends upon your point of view.

This is the dramatic lesson of Brundle's own changing attitude towards his transformation. He is never phased by what he becomes and his sense of humour is with him at the end, as he contemplates 'the ideal family' in the fusion of himself, Veronica and their unborn child. At the beginning he is manic with insect energy, denouncing society's timid, repressive attitudes, 'its sick grey fear of the flesh', and apocalyptically announcing new possibilities: 'Drink deep of the plasma pool or taste not.' Depression follows as he begins to call it a 'disease', resigning himself to death from 'a bizarre form of cancer'.

RELEASE

When he realises it is a 'disease with a purpose', he concludes optimistically that 'it's not such a bad disease' after all. On the threshold of the final transformation he asserts, tragically for his past, but defiantly for his future, 'I am an insect who dreamed he was a man, and loved it. Now the dream is over and the insect is awake.' At this stage the human body is just a chrysalis for the magnificently blossoming fly, and we feel release as well as awe and fear when it finally issues forth.

Pat Ford

SOGAT AND THE NGA

Past their prime

Linda Melvern, *The End of the Street*, Methuen £9.95

'The horse has bolted' was how Rupert Murdoch put it. *Sun* editor Kelvin MacKenzie was, as you might expect, more graphic: 'They haven't got us by the balls any more.' Either way, Murdoch and MacKenzie had made it to Fortress Wapping, and Linda Melvern documents all the manoeuvres which took them there, away from 'the Street', the power base of the print unions.

Some of her account reads like an episode of the *The Power Game*. We begin with a fly-on-the-wall account of the tense stares across the boardroom table between polo-chewing

Murdoch and elegantly coiffured Brenda Dean, secretary of Sogat. The sub-plot is more like John Le Carré — it concerns the secret team of computer experts whose electronic page make-up turned the craft skills of NGA members into an historical curiosity. But Melvern's main character is the clapped-out machinery that passes for the print unions themselves. The union leaders were too busy squabbling to notice how vulnerable their previously successful bargaining procedures were to Murdoch's well-planned offensive. *The End of the Street* is a labour movement version of *Sunset Boulevard* starring Sogat and NGA officials as manoeuvring madonnas long past their prime.

'There was always chapel and inter-union rivalry. No one cared about the overall situation', said engineers' assistant Tony Cappi. Perhaps the worst aspect of the Wapping tragedy is that the print workers could have won, but for the archaic sectional traditions of Fleet Street unions. Melvern's last chapter focuses on a report by Cappi and AEU member Terry Ellis, which revealed Murdoch's plans nearly a year before he carried them out. In that time the unions could have organised effective solidarity to ensure that technological change took place on their terms. But Melvern explains that the union hierarchies ignored this report, largely because Ellis and Cappi were not recognised 'faces' in the machine. Also, Cappi belonged to the most junior section of Sogat, while Ellis was a skilled engineer. Print union officials were so steeped in sectionalism they questioned why members of different unions

were working together on a joint report.

CRIMINAL

While Fortress Wapping loomed larger every day, inter-union rivalries reached criminal proportions, and the concept of effective solidarity shrank to a speck on the horizon of defeat. Since the move all the national publishing groups have attacked rank and file workers — Associated Newspapers, United Newspapers, *Financial Times*, *Observer*, and the *Mirror Group*. In the past few weeks, proprietor Conrad Black has started a rolling programme of redundancies designed to dispense with half the *Daily Telegraph* workforce. Anyone who even sticks up a notice in opposition to this programme is liable to instant dismissal. *The End of the Street* is a depressing book. Read it, and you'll never trust a trade union official again.

Andrew Calcutt

Teachers' strike lessons

IN response to education secretary Kenneth Baker's attack on union rights, the executive of the National Union of Teachers plans to sell our negotiating rights and turn its back on a pay claim which affects 400 000 teachers.

Union officials have told us to plead for mercy by petitioning Margaret Thatcher and writing to local MPs. They even provided us with names and addresses of lords they thought might support us! After 6000 members supported a one-day unofficial strike on 13 January, national officials suspended the people who organised it — the 50-strong executive of the Inner London Teachers' Association.

The NUT executive is clearly determined to quash any initiative by the membership. The suspension shows how far the executive is prepared to go in maintaining control over its members. It wants us to wait for a Labour government to solve our problems, even

though Labour has adopted many of Baker's plans.

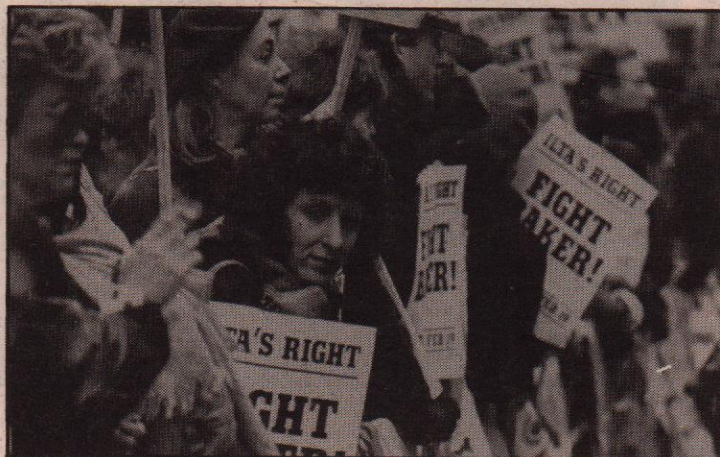
On 7 February, the ILTA council was reinstated by the national executive. But the lobby to support them was poorly attended. There were plenty of motions of support read out over the loudspeaker, but only 150

members present. This is an indication of teachers' demoralisation, after more than two years of ineffective industrial action.

It is time the membership challenged the union leadership and the rules it makes. Members must be prepared to break the rules that penalise them. They must learn the lessons of the last two years and build for their own, united action — firstly in support of the ILTA against the union machine, and then against the Baker Bill and all threats to pay, conditions and educational standards.

Time is running out. The Baker Bill could be law by the beginning of March. As well as the one-day strike planned by ILTA for 19 February, we must prepare for well-organised, long-term action.

Dawn Haringey Teachers' Association, NUT



David Rourke

Loony right rampage

ON Thursday a thousand students packed the main hall at Manchester University for the biggest general meeting in recent history. The left stood by, heads hung low, while the right bussed in 700 students chanting rugby songs, 'smash commie scum' and 'Thatcher we love you'. A single events officer with a fetish for dressing as an elephant and a handful of Tory students had mobilised them to smash the last remnants of political activity in the students' union.

Their campaign for 'beer not politics' and 'money for students, not for miners' managed to tap a lot of dissatisfaction felt by students not involved in the union. Masterminded by the right, unopposed by the executive and fuelled by the token posturing of the left, this coup came within five votes of the two thirds majority needed to change the constitution.

The bureaucratic, book-balancing methods of NUS and the 'It'll all be alright when we get a Labour government' attitude of Labour students are no match for the loony right. It's time we put the 'jam tomorrow' politics of Labour behind us and got organised for a real campaign to defend students' interests in the here and now. That's the only way we will be in any position to take on Thatcher, the Federation of Conservative Students and its elephant-adoring cronies.

Penny Revolutionary Communist Students Manchester

College censorship

WHEN we tried to show *The Longest War*, the Irish Freedom Movement video, in my sixth form college, the resources department objected to the leaflets we used to tell students about the video. But the showing went ahead, and the IFM speaker was fairly well-received by students. However, after phoning the school, the local paper ran a large, factually incorrect article headed 'Row over left-wing film show in school.' The 'angry parent' who instigated the article was later revealed as a workmate of a parent who'd heard about it fourth-hand and indignantly phoned the paper. It has yet to put the record straight.

Obviously, this passion for attacking 'subversives' can be found in any local daily, and while the IFM and RCP can gain a great deal of publicity from this McCarthyism, it has resulted in much more restraint on political activities in the college. The students involved received the backing of the college principal against the gutter press, but our political work inside the college has been forced underground. Can *tns* readers suggest how we sidestep these restrictions?

Graham Leicester

'Let me stay'

ON Tuesday 10 February, my wife phoned to tell me I had a letter from the home office, saying I can no longer stay in this country and that I should leave immediately and go back to Turkey. The reason they gave is that they don't believe my marriage is real. I don't know how they can say that. They don't know anything about me and my wife, and they expect me to just leave her and go.

I need you to support me. I want to stay here and live like other people. I think people must know how racist the home office is. Many people are facing this situation. Two of my best friends have just been

deported, but I was still shocked when they came to have a go at me. We cannot let the home office get away with this. They are trying to round up Turkish people and they are making British people hate us.

Mustafa West Yorkshire

Part-time anti-racism

AFTER stabbing 14-year old Ahmed Iqbal Ullah in the stomach last September, Manchester schoolboy Darren Coulburn shouted 'Do you want it again, Paki?' But his victim was already dying. Last week, Coulburn was

found guilty of murder.

In the immediate aftermath, Manchester police denied the murder was racist. Anti-racist Manchester city council condemned the police cover up. But now the council has joined hands with the police to silence local anti-racists. It stopped a public meeting about the murder from going ahead in Longsight library, which is council property.

Now the council has proposed a public inquiry, which will consult 'all interested parties' — police, racists, the lot. Even when we're being murdered, black people cannot expect to gain the undivided attention of our anti-racist city council.

M Nidal Manchester

NUM: old habits die hard

THE union officials who led Kellingley miners back to work at the end of the 1984-85 miners' strike proclaimed that they were going back 'with heads held high'. Although they had every right to be proud, many miners and their families felt bitter and ashamed because Kellingley superpit had been used as a strike-breaking centre. They renamed it

'Scabbingley'.

Many of the scabs have since taken redundancy, along with many of the old NUM branch committee. There has been an influx of militants from neighbouring pits that have closed, despite attempts by management to recruit 'scabs only'. The NUM proudly boasts that the new branch committee is one of the youngest in the coalfield. But unfortunately for Kellingley miners who refuse to buckle under increasing management pressure, their will to fight is not being matched with union support.

Many of the night shift walked out recently in protest

at the lack of basic safety materials. They refused to start work until management supplied paper dust masks. This type of lightweight mask always seemed to be in short supply. Under-managers were heard to moan about the high cost. They threatened not to re-order.

To halt the walkout, the bosses speedily obtained a box of masks. Meanwhile union officials pleaded with the men to stay on the job. They assured them that everyone had been catered for. This was not true. Management had failed to account for the fact that miners need as many as

three masks per shift to stop the dust clogging their lungs. The walkout went ahead.

Soon afterwards, the men involved each received a letter which told them to stick to agreed procedures and warned them not to ignore union instructions to stay at work. In a pit where management is instituting a system of fines on some workers and victimising others, it appears that the youthful NUM committee men are quickly adapting to the old collaborative ways.

Danny Lees Pontefract

Unite the German left

I QUITE enjoyed your article on West Germany (30 January), probably one of the few articles in your paper with which I can fully agree. I'd like to make some additional points.

The one surprise in the elections was that the so-called liberal Free Democratic Party polled so many votes. It has to be interpreted as a rejection of the ultra-nationalist propaganda of the Christian democratic parties CDU/CSU. Chancellor Kohl equated Gorbachev with the Nazi propaganda minister Goebbels, and accused the

German Democratic Republic of having concentration camps. The West German electorate rejected this anti-Soviet propaganda.

The SPD leadership couldn't and didn't want to topple the right-wing coalition. SPD candidate Rau's statements rejecting any cooperation with the Greens indicated the real objective of the SPD was to kick the Greens out of parliament. They hoped to destroy the Green Party to attract in future elections all oppositionist votes. Only the Green Party really wanted to topple the government, and represented the demands of extra-parliamentary movements such as unilateral disarmament, abolition of nuclear power

stations, defence of the right to strike, defence of immigrants, etc.

But the Green Party is not anti-capitalist. The more it begins to work inside parliaments, the more it is alienated from the social movements. The Greens are about to become an established party and to fully adapt to reformist strategies.

You're right, an anti-capitalist left is strongly needed. It will be difficult to achieve splits in the SPD or in the Greens. In opposition, they will try to attract any oppositionist forces by using radical phraseology. One main task of the socialist groups such as the Communist League, the United Socialist Party, the Democratic Socialists and

others will be to expose the capitalist character of both the Greens and the SPD.

A joint campaign of socialist groups will hopefully lead to unification on a revolutionary programme. I think that the fusion of the Group of International Marxists with the Communist Party of Germany to form the United Socialist Party was a step in the right direction. A strong revolutionary party can only be built on a non-sectarian basis.

Markus Widera Democratic Socialists IDS West Germany



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

THE RED FRONT & LEFT UNITY

Since we first put forward *The Red Front* as a vehicle for intervening in the next election, several readers have asked whether we view it as the first stage in establishing a more durable unity among organisations who see themselves as part of the revolutionary left. One suggested that, having gone this far, it might be worth our while to go a step further and finally try to tackle the disunity that prevails on the left.

ARTIFICIAL

These sentiments for left unity are understandable. But under present conditions they are unrealistic and misguided. The past decade has brought many unity initiatives. They have all failed, because unity cannot simply be declared and realised. Such declarations beg the question: unity around what? Unity among organisations which each

have their own brand of left-wing policies is always artificial and doomed from the start. Today's conditions make this more true than ever. The fact that the left is generally isolated tends to heighten differences, as small organisations feel obliged to preserve their identity. Thus the common experience of isolation tends to breed suspicion and even hostility among groups on the left.

HOTHOUSES

The artificial differences between left-wing parties often seem a bigger barrier to elementary collaboration than their real disagreements. As a result the relationship between left-wing organisations seldom assumes the character of a genuine political debate. Instead it consists of a series of petty manoeuvres which have little to do with political issues. As long as the left

operates in isolation, such backward practices will come to the surface time and again.

There are also real differences which separate the parties of the left. An organisation that tries to ignore these differences becomes diffuse and irrelevant. This is why the unity campaigns of the past all disintegrated. We believe that such a unity campaign can only be an organisational manoeuvre. It usually represents an attempt by one organisation to gain recruits at the expense of another. This can be seen in most joint left-wing forums. They soon turn into hothouses where the overriding preoccupation is to recruit from among your rivals' members.

POSTURING

We have no objection to recruiting from other organisations. But making that the objective of party

activity would be self-defeating. Unity drives and the scramble to recruit from each other simply redistribute the supporters of the existing left. It is an inward-looking activity that does not impinge on the real world. It provides no opportunity to test our politics in real situations, and turns discussion into posturing. Most important of all, it does nothing to change the relationship between revolutionaries and the working class.

OVERDUE

The aim of *The Red Front* is to change the relationship between revolutionaries and the working class. Its goal is to give an organisational shape to the desire to fight back, and thus to increase the audience for revolutionary politics. It is vital that we strengthen the active section of the working class, if the devastating consequences

of Kinnock's policies are to be minimised. The RCP alone is not in a position to construct the focus for a working class alternative. That's why we have proposed the establishment of *The Red Front* — a united campaign which brings together individuals and organisations who recognise the importance of strengthening workers' will to fight. It is not unity for its own sake, but a united fight for an alternative that everyone on the far left ought to recognise as long overdue.

INHIBITIONS

The future of the RCP depends on our ability to test our programme in the working class. This can only be done effectively if workers are prepared to experiment with new alternatives. *The Red Front* is one means through which more people can be convinced of the necessity for fresh options.

It is likely that there will be a lot of initial resistance to the idea of *The Red Front*. The narrow sectarian impulse of old will turn some against *The Red Front*. Others will be inhibited by the idea that it is not possible at the present to fight for an alternative. Our supporters should draw upon the experience of the party and show how RCP campaigns and action have succeeded in making an impact. Many of the campaigns that we are promoting serve as an argument for the plausibility of *The Red Front*.

RESULTS

The RCP on its own, with its limited resources, has achieved important if modest results. The potential of *The Red Front* is even greater. This should be the argument that our supporters develop in the months ahead.

Frank Richards



LIVING MARXISM

A crash course on understanding the world in order to change it

Tuesday 24 February THE PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP
Tuesday 3 March THE PROBLEM OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Meetings start at 7.30pm at the University of London Union, Malet St, WC1 (Goodge St tube). £1.50/£1 per session. Tickets available on the door.

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DIARY

LEEDS: Thursday 26 Thursday, 7.30pm. Open forum on Aids and lesbian and gay rights. Speakers from Gay Switchboard, Leeds East Health Authority, Nalogo Aids Working Group, NUS Gaysoc, RCP, Leeds Trades Club, Savile Mount LS7
DARLINGTON: Saturday 21 February, 11am. Street meeting: Yugendre will stay! Town Hall, Seethams
NEWCASTLE: Wednesday 4 March, 7.30pm. Public meeting: Yugendre will stay! St Mary's Centre, Corporation Road
MIDDLESBROUGH: Thursday 26 February. Yugendre Defence Campaign benefit. Empire Pub, Linthorpe Road



STRIKING BACK!

A day of discussion and debate on the way forward for Scottish workers. Saturday 7 March. Registration 10.30am. Woodside Halls, near St George's Cross underground, GLASGOW.
Tickets £1.50/50p from RCP PH8, 340 West Princes St, Glasgow G4 9HF. Or call (01) 729 3771

DEFEND THE WOMBORNE 12!

On Monday nine gay men and three lesbians go on trial for protesting against a Tory councillor who wants them gassed.

Don Milligan in London and **Richard Wilde** in Nottingham talked to some of the Womborne 12

When they arrested us I spat at them in self-defence because the police officer was breaking my hand and throttling Tracy. Later in the police station I was told that as a "gay" I was a risk, you know, I was a walking pit of Aids. They said they were thinking of charging me with attempted murder for spitting.

Gyll was one of 12 members of the Lesbian and Gay Youth Movement arrested and held for a week over Christmas, for sitting in the garden of South Staffordshire's Tory council leader Bill Brownhill. 'He'd gone on television and said that 90 per cent of gays and lesbians should be gassed as a cure for Aids,' explained Phil. 'We were worried about what happened the last time those kind of ideas became popular. It wasn't just about protesting against somebody with right-wing views — it was about the way Aids is being used to attack lesbians and gays right now in Britain.'

'Brownhill got in the national press and on television,' remembered Tracy. 'That's a platform which is consistently denied to lesbians and gay men. We felt so enraged with his comments that we wanted to take some action.' When the LGYM occupied Brownhill's garden, they were arrested, detained and abused.

From the start, the police and prison authorities made it clear that the case was to be a focus for the anti-homosexual panic around Aids.

'When we saw the doctor on the first morning in prison, the only questions he asked were were we homosexual and what did we do in bed and "Have you had Aids yet?"' said Phil. 'He asked about blood tests. I said I had one recently for tetanus which was negative and he wrote down "No Aids yet". Now I don't believe that doctor is so badly informed. It's just a way that doctors in the pay of the prison service harass gay prisoners.'

POOL OF PREJUDICE

Screws at Birmingham's Winson 'Green' prison made noises like escaping gas at the prisoners, and encouraged other inmates to have a go at them. Lenny, who is black as well as gay, was singled out for special treatment: 'The screws called me a nigger and a pervert. They tried to keep me in for another week, because they said they couldn't verify my address, even though me and my mum had both given it to the police. They left it until two minutes before going to court to say they could verify it. This only happened to me.' The law kept up the harassment until the moment the 12 were released on remand: 'It was ridiculous,' said



STRIKING BACK AGAINST THE BIGOTS: ANDY, LENNY AND HIS MUM

Andy. 'We were handcuffed like we were violent criminals and there was a massive police escort that came with us between the prison and the court.'

Faced with public order charges and all the forces of reaction that the Brownhills and other bigots can muster, the LGYM has set up a Womborne 12 Defence Campaign to support the defendants. 'When I was inside I was pretty scared because it's lonely, I didn't know that anybody even knew about us,' said Lenny. 'But when we came out of court there were people with banners and now it's just brilliant, everybody seems to be giving support.' They have all been surprised and pleased about the amount of support they've had from the left, but disappointed that many lesbian and gay groups — especially what Phil calls 'the big, established groups funded by government money' — have been unwilling to get involved in a campaign that confronts the law.

Members of LGYM are determined that this case is just the start of the fightback against the Aids scare.

'I don't see the campaign as just a defence campaign,' said Andy. 'I don't want it to

focus on paying our fines or just sympathy. There's more to it than that.' Tracy knows that loud mouths like Brownhill are just the scum on top of a very deep pool of anti-homosexual prejudice. 'Brownhill isn't isolated. He's just very public about it. I think you'd find that there is a terrifying number of people who think like he does.' One LGYM member added: 'We've got to mobilise and show we're not going to take any of the shit — we are not going to be threatened with gassing or shooting. It will demonstrate to people that if they say something like that publicly, then they're going to get coach-loads turning up in their front gardens.'

Gyll sees it as important to keep working within the lesbian and gay communities, 'to respond to this idea of the backlash. For years we've been told that there is a moral backlash against lesbian and gay people. It's about time that we say no, that's a nonsense — there is a lesbian and gay backlash against their moralism, we won't stand for it.' But she is pessimistic about the prospects of the labour movement organising active support. 'I don't think that the labour movement

could organise an ostrich feather hunt in the Queen Mother's hatbox.'

That reaction is understandable from people who have put up with persecution since the day they 'came out', and have never seen much support from the chauvinist leaders of the labour movement. It is our responsibility to change this state of affairs.

We have to get out and mobilise working class people against every attack on the democratic rights of lesbians and gays. If we allow the Aids panic and the resulting repression to go unchallenged, the bigots will dominate discussion within the labour movement and the cause of liberation for us all will suffer a serious setback.

Join the court protest to defend the Womborne 12 on Monday. Let's show the Tories and their allies and agents that we will not allow them to drive lesbians and gays off the streets and into the closet, never mind into the gas chambers.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Defend lesbian and gay rights — support the Womborne 12! Speakers from Womborne 12 Defence Campaign and RCP. All meetings are on Thursday 19 February at 7.30pm.
COVENTRY: West Indian Centre, Spon Street
MANSFIELD: The Bridge Inn, Bridge Street
OXFORD: East Oxford Community Centre, Cowley Road

COURT PROTEST

Monday 23 February 11am
Seisdon magistrates court, near Wolverhampton
Transport from London, Nottingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester, Oxford, Brighton and Sheffield.
Phone (01) 729 3771