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— see page 5**

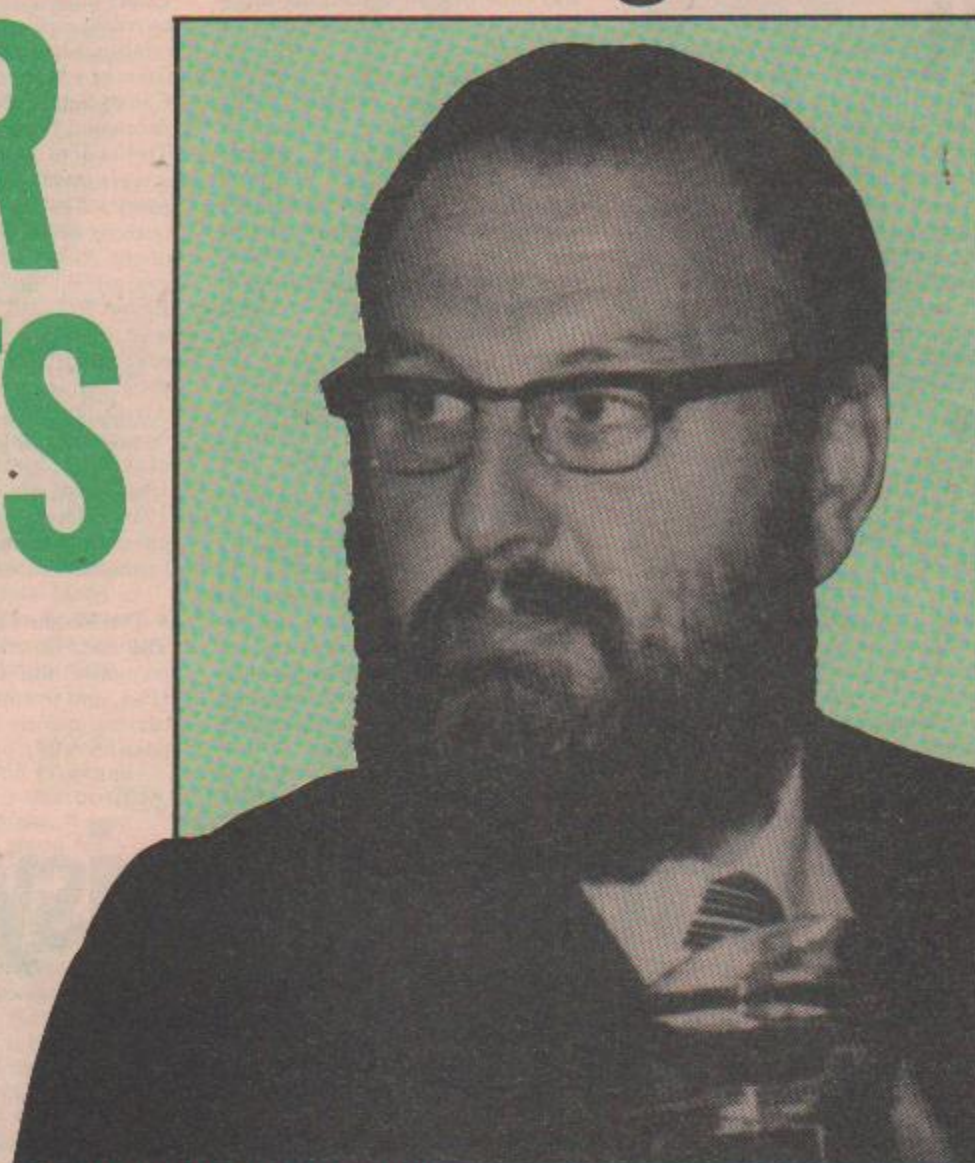
Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly

8 January 1988

40p

Tories impose new ban on homosexual rights

A CHARTER FOR BIGOTS AND FIRE BOMBERS



Pandora Anderson

GOD'S POLICEMAN JAMES ANDERTON

► **CLAUSE 27** of the Tory government's new Local Government Bill proposes to ban 'the promotion of homosexuality' by local authorities. Once it becomes law, this clause will represent the most far-reaching legal attack on the rights of homosexuals for 90 years. It will certainly mean a ban on honest discussion of homosexuality in schools. But it could also mean a ban on councils doing anything which might assist lesbians and gays — from issuing drinking licences to a gay bar to permitting a gay pride march to go ahead (see page 4 for details). And it will put the job of every lesbian and gay

teacher at risk. **Clause 27** is a big step backwards towards the complete re-criminalisation of homosexuality.

■ We don't have to wait until **Clause 27** is on the statute book to see the damage which the Tory witch-hunt is doing to homosexuals. The government's campaign against lesbians and gays has already helped to create a climate in which 'queer-bashing' is considered a legitimate leisure activity.

■ The fire-bombing of the London offices of *Capital Gay* just before Christmas is only one example of the increased violence and victimisation which lesbians and gays now

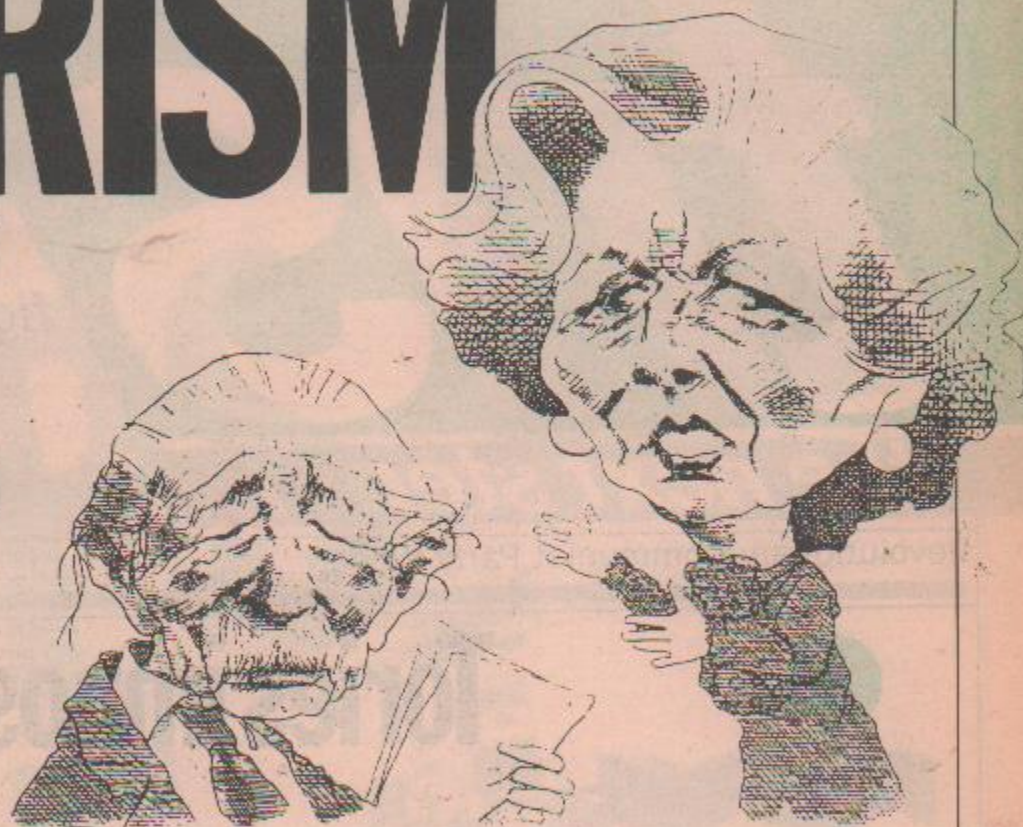
face. And when the amateur thugs aren't waiting to ambush them outside pubs and clubs, the professional bigots of the police force step in to harass homosexual people. Last month Manchester police chief James Anderton declared that the legalisation of any aspect of homosexuality was an 'abomination' that should not be tolerated. His offer to flog criminals until they beg for mercy gives a flavour of the repression homosexuals can expect to face from the forces of law and order in the future. The impact of **Clause 27** will make it that much easier for the Andertons and their henchmen to hammer homosexual

people.

◆ The Tories and their allies have drawn up the battle-lines for an organised campaign of bigotry. The only way to answer them is by arguing for an unequivocal defence of the democratic rights of lesbians and gays. This is vital both to defend homosexuals, and to strengthen wider opposition to the government. We cannot hope to change society for the better if the working class is under the influence of the fire bomb-and-brimstone brigade. A campaign in solidarity with lesbians and gays, against the bigots' charter of **Clause 27**, will be a blow for freedom for us all. ▼

THATCHERISM IN THE MAKING

1957
CABINET
MINUTES



At midnight on Saturday 2 January Margaret Thatcher became the longest-serving British prime minister this century. Her acolytes boasted that she had notched up '3000 days of firm government'. Her critics condemned her style of government as 'destructive and divisive'. Many of Thatcher's opponents cited former Tory prime minister Harold Macmillan, in office from 1957 to 1963, as their ideal prime minister. They contrasted Thatcher's confrontational style with Macmillan's advocacy of 'one nation' politics.

Yet the cabinet papers for 1957, released on New Year's Day under the 30-year rule, show that for all his talk of one nation, Macmillan was on the same side of the class divide as Thatcher. The two Tory leaders had different styles. But the difference in the severity of their policies only reflects the fact that each had to operate according to the changing requirements of British capitalism then and now.

The starting point for both of them was how best to defend the interests of the British establishment.

• State secrets

For 'one nation' liberals of the Macmillan school, Thatcher's ruthless suppression of former M15 officer Peter Wright's *Spycatcher*, and any newspaper which has dared to print extracts from it, is evidence of her imperious approach. But when it came to matters of state security, Macmillan was just as single-minded. In 1957 a fire inside the Windscale military plutonium reactor sent 20 000 curies of radiation into the Cumbrian atmosphere. Nobody knew how serious Windscale was because Macmillan suppressed vital information to safeguard the nation's nuclear industry and Britain's standing in the eyes of the US military. His attempt to pass the disaster off as a minor accident meant that plans to evacuate the area were dropped, causing an unknown number of deaths among those exposed to fall-out.

• Press censorship

Court injunctions against media coverage of 'security matters' relating to *Spycatcher* and to former M16 agent Anthony Cavendish's *Inside Intelligence* prompted *Observer* editor Donald Treford to accuse the Thatcher government of 'muzzling the press'. Yet media blackouts are nothing new. Following the failure of the Anglo-French task force to capture the Suez canal zone from Egypt in 1956, press censorship was the order of the day. In 1957 Macmillan slammed a Panorama programme on apartheid in South Africa in the same way that Norman Tebbit accused the BBC of biased coverage of the joint US/British air raid on Libya in 1986. Then, as now, British governments used the media to further their own interests.

• The Middle East

The Suez fiasco forced Britain to recognise the supremacy of the USA, and to embark on a policy of carving out as much territory as possible while operating under the

American umbrella. The British flotilla now stalking the Gulf, and acting in concert with a larger American naval force presence, is the latest example of this policy. The terminology used by British statesmen to justify their Empire-building adventures has changed little in 30 years. After the British withdrawal from Suez, Macmillan likened Egyptian premier Colonel Nasser to the devil incarnate. He asked American president Dwight Eisenhower to 'denounce Nasser and all his works. (Nasser is) a blackmailer and a crook...a self-elected dictator'. It could have been Thatcher talking about 'mad dog' Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi.

• Economics

In 1957, warnings of an impending economic crisis prompted Tory chancellor of the exchequer Lord Peter Thorneycroft to draw up a 'Thatcherite' economic strategy based on attacking the working class.

Thorneycroft called for a 300 per cent rise in unemployment to push down wages and raise profits. But his class war scenario was premature. Rather than risk provoking resistance, Macmillan opted to cash in some of the reserves of a relatively strong (compared to 1988) British economy. He withdrew his original support for the Thorneycroft package, and the chancellor resigned. But as the economy declined, the British establishment found it had no chips left to cash in. By the late seventies Britain's leaders could no longer afford to

postpone a shake-out of industry and a showdown with the unions. Margaret Thatcher took over where Thorneycroft left off.

Government policy on the NHS also reveals the Thatcher regime adopting ideas which were raised under Macmillan. The cabinet papers show that in 1957 treasury spokesmen were considering the introduction of 'hotel' charges for hospital patients. Similar plans are now being considered by health minister John Moore. Thirty years ago there was more scope for indirect attacks on the living standards of working class people. Instead of 'hotel' charges on patients, ministers agreed to levy a compulsory NHS contribution on every worker. Today the Tories have less room for manoeuvre and are preparing deep cuts in spending on health and social security.

The 1957 cabinet papers confirm that British capitalism has always been the problem for the working class. Thatcher's 'domineering personality' is not the reason for state repression or mass unemployment today, any more than Macmillan's avuncular manner can be said to have created the post-war boom. Thatcher's policies, and Macmillan's, were fashioned according to the changing needs of the profit system in Britain. And although we should always take account of the altering face of their system, we must never lose sight of the fact that capitalism, in all its forms, is what we have to beat.

Andrew Calcutt

British hypocrisy in Palestine

On Monday Tory minister David Mellor went to the Middle East to add Britain's voice to the international chorus of condemnation against Israel's treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Mellor denounced conditions in the refugee camps, where thousands of Palestinians live in squalor and semi-starvation, as 'an affront to civilised values'. He was seen rebuking Israeli soldiers for arresting teenagers accused of throwing stones. He even denounced the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation and sympathised with the demand for Palestinian self-determination. Earlier he argued

that the Israeli regime's decision to deport Palestinian activists was a flagrant violation of international law.

The Tories' hypocrisy is breathtaking. Not only did past British governments help to rob the Palestinians of their right to self-determination by sponsoring the creation of Israel. The present British government, in which Mellor is a junior minister of state at the foreign office, is guilty of practising the same war crimes which Israel visits upon the Palestinians. A British occupying army denies the Irish people their right to self-determination through force of arms. The British warlords at Westminster incarcerate Irish

freedom fighters in concentration camp conditions in hell-holes like the H-Blocks of Long Kesh. British forces shoot dead teenage joy-riders and stone-throwers with impunity. The Prevention of Terrorism Act that empowers the British home office to deport Irish people emulates Israel's deportations of Palestinians.

The Tories might pay lip-service to the idea of Palestinian self-determination, as they manoeuvre for position in the Middle East. But when the fighters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation try to wrest their freedom from the Israeli tyrants, the Tories have no hesitation in condemning the PLO — like the IRA — as 'terrorists'.

IS THERE A SCOTTISH SOLUTION?

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the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly

No 1

Editor: Mick Hume

1968 AND ALL THAT

IN 1988 we will be snowed under by books, broadcasts, articles and arguments about 1968. That was the year when radical protests and fierce conflicts reached fresh heights around the world, from mass strikes in France and racial violence in the USA to war in Vietnam and civil rights protests in Northern Ireland. It was a time when thousands marched against governments and talk of the socialist transformation of society was in the air. Twenty years on, the left seems to have been marginalised and the reactionaries are in the ascendant — a state of affairs symbolised by Thatcher's celebration of 3000 days in office. But the capitalist order is more vulnerable today than it was in 1968. We need to learn some lessons from the last 20 years to take advantage of the new situation.

The *Times*, the traditional newspaper of the British establishment, chose the events of 1968 as the subject for its first editorial of 1988. The paper's New Year statement remembered it with distaste, as a period of 'decadence and absence of restraint'. But, boasted *The Times*, capitalism was able to ride out the crisis of 1968 because of the intrinsic strength of the system:

'The reason why 1968 did not end in catastrophe was the democratic freedom and economic prosperity created by the system. Those freedoms, and that prosperity, were valued too much by "the masses".'

The idea that a general granting of 'freedom' to 'the masses' sustained the system 20 years ago is a nonsense. It was precisely the denial of real freedom which sparked some of the best-known conflicts of 1968. And when the oppressed demanded democracy, the Western authorities replied with violence.

The *Times* editorial claims that the only 'example of true repression' in 1968 was the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Yet in 1968 the USA stepped up its brutal colonial war to keep Vietnam in chains. Police and troops occupied and terrorised the black districts of more than 100 American cities after riots followed the assassination of Martin Luther King. The West's Israeli allies dug into the newly occupied areas of Palestine. Loyalist mobs began beating Catholic civil rights demonstrators off the streets of Northern Ireland.

Where the Western authorities survived these crises, it was through the exercise of massive force, not the extension of freedom to the masses. And repression only served to provoke new

resistance. Twenty years on, the defeat in Vietnam still haunts US foreign policy, the British government faces a mortal threat from the liberation war in Northern Ireland, and the Israeli authorities have to tap all their resources of brutality to keep control over the defiant occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. There is little in the legacy of the 'freedoms' granted in 1968 to give the ruling classes confidence in a stable future for their system.



AMERICAN TROOPS, VIETNAM, FEBRUARY 1968

The *Times*' theory about the impact of prosperity in 1968 is closer to the truth. But it has no relevance in the deteriorating economic conditions of the late eighties. In 1968 the world economy was still at the tail-end of the post-war boom. Two decades of relative prosperity had given Western rulers strength and confidence to face the crisis. It had also encouraged illusions in the existing economic order among important sections of the Western working class. Thus large-scale workers' protests were often confined to narrow issues such as wage rises, rather than being directed against the exploitative basis of the capitalist system itself. This helped the authorities to contain the conflict within manageable limits.

The world economy has slipped a long way in the last 20 years. The system went into crisis in the early seventies and it has never fully recovered. The stock market crash of October 1987 was the signal that a new international recession is on the way. The panic over the plunge of the dollar in the New Year indicates the instability in the world economy. The US economy is getting into ever-deeper trouble and, whatever Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson might claim, the British

economy is even less capable of escaping the impact of the recession ahead.

The relative prosperity which gave Western governments the power and confidence to survive 1968 is long gone. They are entering a new era of crisis from a far weaker starting point. After years of making sacrifices to overcome the problems of the economy, many workers will be less willing than the 1968 generation to believe that the next recession is a temporary hiccup for a basically prosperous system.

The objective factors which helped the ruling classes to overcome their difficulties in 1968 no longer apply. Today they are struggling to cope with an economic system spinning further and further out of their control, and with political unrest around the globe which they no longer have the power to put down. In this sense, despite surface appearances, the prospects for anti-capitalists are better than they were 20 years ago. The problem remains the subjective factor — the state of political consciousness on the left. The failings in this sphere in 1968 were the most important reason why the system survived. Today, the continuing influence of the stale ideas of the radicals of '68 is an even bigger barrier to the left taking advantage of the impending crisis.

The 'new left' which emerged in the sixties had some positive features. For example, it was the first left-wing trend for decades to insist that political issues such as racism, imperialism and women's oppression were of central importance. Yet the leading left wingers approached such matters as single issues from the standpoint of a liberal concern with civil rights, rather than as part of a concerted campaign against capitalist oppression. They broke from



CIVIL RIGHTS MARCH, DERRY, NOVEMBER 1968



STUDENT PROTESTS, PARIS, MAY 1968

the corrupted brand of communism preached by the Stalinists, but threw out the baby with the bathwater and rejected Marxism altogether.

Much of the Western left adopted an elitist attitude, dismissing the working class as a spent force bought off by 'consumerism'. Instead of attempting to organise a collective working class struggle against the system, the radicals upheld the virtues of individualism, summed up by the idea of 'doing your own thing'. The American and European left's preoccupation with the 'lifestyle politics' of a radical student culture was no match for ruling classes prepared to use organised state violence to protect their power.

In 1968 the left failed to give the movements against the Vietnam War, racism and women's oppression a coherent anti-capitalist direction, by connecting them with the struggles of the organised working class. The setbacks which inevitably followed swung the balance of forces back in the system's favour by the seventies. The arrival of economic recession removed

the basis for the radical liberalism which had flourished in the boom years. The middle classes moved to the right, and the left retreated further into individual concerns and community politics. Many found refuge in the social-democratic parties. Today's Labour left is largely a product of this process.

The left has never seriously questioned its outdated ideas which proved so inadequate 20 years ago. Instead, it has tried to adapt them to the harsh conditions of the eighties. Thus most of the British radicals of '68 have ended up as firm supporters of Neil Kinnock's Labour Party, chasing middle class support by championing the nonsensical cause of 'individual socialism'. The idea that the working class no longer exists as a force for social change has become an article of faith among many British radicals. At a time when the Tory government is preparing to combat the crisis of its system through a new and ruthless attack on our living standards and rights, the left is still fighting the battles which it lost before the victims of the YTS scheme were born.

There is much to be learnt from the last 20 years. The most important lesson is the need to base all of our efforts on a solid foundation of anti-capitalism, and a commitment to politicising the struggles of the working class in that direction. Above all else, the missing element in 1968 was a revolutionary party to take on that task. There has never been a more important time than the present to set about filling that gap.

The *Times*' assessment concluded with the dismissive statement that 1968 'has nothing to offer 1988 but a warning'. The contrast in conditions between 20 years ago and today should indeed warn the ruling class of the increasing fragility of its system. It should also warn the left of the need to break with the stale ideas of the sixties, if we are to realise the ambition of building a new society which inspired many people in 1968.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL ATTACKS LESBIANS AND GAYS

The Tories have
launched an
unprecedented
legal attack on
lesbian and gay
rights —
Don Milligan
reports

NO BANS ON HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS

A clause banning the 'promotion of homosexuality' has been slipped into the Local Government Bill. Ostensibly Clause 27 is designed to ban the presentation of positive images of homosexual people in schools. But its scope extends from the choice of books in the public libraries to the suppression of lesbian and gay student groups. The Bill states:

'A local authority shall not (a) promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship by the publication of such material or otherwise; (c) give financial or other assistance to any person for either of the purposes referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.'

In many towns the local authority is the largest employer. The council generally owns most of the meeting rooms and halls, grants licences to cinemas, subsidises the local theatre, issues permits for cultural or political events in parks, in the streets and public shopping precincts. Local education authorities run the colleges and schools and pay the union fees of students at university. They also control the licensing of pubs, clubs and discos. If Clause 27 succeeds councils could come under pressure to close down access to these facilities and amenities to lesbians and gays.

CLAMPDOWN

Within months of the Local Government Bill reaching the statute book most telephone advice services, community centres and voluntary organisations could lose their funds, offices and equipment. Local authority advertising in the gay press could be prohibited. Councils could be prevented from publicising or financing publicity about facilities for lesbians and gay men. Teachers will be prevented from providing accurate information about homosexuality in schools and colleges.

Clause 27 signals the end of the more liberal attitudes towards homosexuality which developed during the sixties and seventies.

It is the most wide-ranging legal attack on the rights of homosexual people since the passage of the Labouchere Amendment in 1885 and the Vagrancy Act of 1898. These laws defined all male homosexual acts as 'gross indecency' and all attempts by homosexual men to meet each other as 'soliciting'.

The criminal status of homosexual men was further refined by the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. Any hope that this law had legalised homosexuality was soon dashed. In June 1972 the house of lords pointed out that the 1967 Act merely exempted homosexual behaviour, in certain strictly defined situations, from criminal

penalties. But the Act did not make it 'lawful in the full sense'. In 1979 the Home Office was able to report a fourfold increase in convictions for homosexual offences.

Despite the strict interpretation applied to the 1967 Act by the police, it was still possible for homosexual organisations to establish themselves throughout the seventies and early eighties. From 1971 a public-access gay scene began to emerge. Public social events were organised and later 'pay at the door' commercial clubs came into existence. Lesbians and gays launched newspapers and distributed publicity. For the first time it became possible for a minority of homosexual people to live more or less openly in the big cities.

WITCH-HUNTS

Margaret Thatcher's government has incorporated Clause 27 into the Local Government Bill as part of an attempt to crush the gay scene and to drive homosexuals out of public life. If Clause 27 becomes law every bigot on every council in the country could enlist the support of chief executives, local newspaper editors and policemen to close down local services and meeting places for homosexual people.

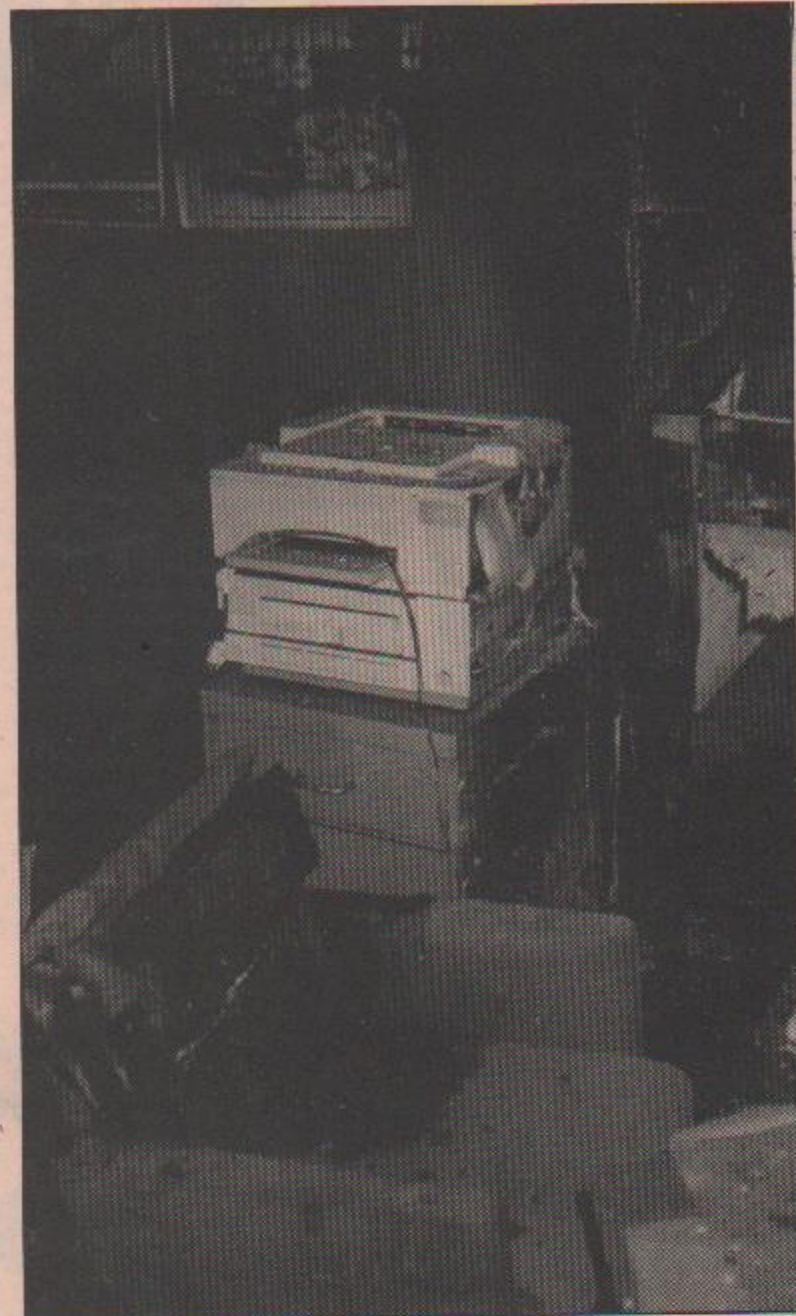
It will usher in a more rigorous use of the Sexual Offences Act alongside raids, arrests and witch-hunts.

The government permitted backbench bigots like Elaine Kellett-Bowman, Dame Jill Knight, and David Wilshire to lead the fight for Clause 27. Thus it appears as if the government has bowed to popular pressure from constituency MPs by backing the amendment. In reality the Tories are responsible for creating the political climate in which such reactionary moral crusades can take off.

COMMANDMENTS

Tory junior education minister Angela Rumbold got the ball rolling in September last year when she introduced a circular from the department of education and science on sex education. The Tories declared that sex education 'should be set within a clear, moral framework in which pupils are helped to appreciate the benefits of stable family life, and to recognise the physical and emotional risks of casual and promiscuous behaviour'. The government circular was sent to every state school in Britain. It went on to insist that 'there is no place in any school in any circumstances for teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour, which presents it as the "norm", or which encourages homosexual experimentation by pupils.' Indeed, warned the Rumbold circular, 'encouraging or procuring homosexual acts by pupils who are under the age of consent is a criminal offence.' Clause 27 carries these moral commandments far beyond the bounds of the classroom.

The inclusion of Clause 27 in the Local Government Bill shows that



CAPITAL GAY'S FIREBOMBED OFFICE: STOPPING THE BIGOTS MEANS FIGHTING FOR LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS

'queer-bashing' has become official government policy. There is now no middle ground when it comes to the issue of homosexual rights. Breaking with the long-established tradition of the free vote on so-called moral 'issues of conscience', the government imposed a three-line whip in the house of commons to ensure a maximum turn-out of Tory MPs to vote through Clause 27. The government no longer feels any compunction to balance its attack on homosexuality with reassurances about defending civil liberties. David Wilshire, the MP who introduced Clause 27, declared that there was no need for the Tories to hide their true colours:

'There is absolutely no need for me to stand here and apologise for seeking to prevent local government from doing something it should not be doing. There is no

need to apologise for making it less likely that people will be confronted by homosexual propaganda or to apologise for standing here and defending the family.' (Daily Telegraph, 16 December 1987)

The government is determined to make lesbians and gays the scapegoats for the social problems resulting from the breakdown of its system.

It is keen to exploit the fears and insecurities bred by recession and to encourage people to retreat into an inward-looking and conservative preoccupation with family life. To this end the Tories have promoted a public preoccupation with dangerous diseases (Aids) and sexual 'deviancy' (homosexuality), and targeted lesbians and gays as a threat to the British way of life.

The battle-lines have been clearly drawn by the bigots. But

the left has become more and more defensive as the right has gone on the attack. From the Labour frontbench to the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists (Olga), opponents of the government have tried to base their opposition to Clause 27 on the argument that homosexuality cannot be 'caught or taught' in schools. Their insistence that they are not 'promoting' homosexuality begs the question — then why bother opposing the offending clause?

There is no point in denying that, if they are pursued systematically, the positive images policies of Labour councils will tend to raise the public profile of homosexuality. The promotion of positive images of homosexuality and equal opportunities policies will encourage lesbians and gay men to live more openly in society. These policies could also contribute to the creation of a climate in which more people engage in homosexual relationships. Indeed it was supposed to be the purpose of these policies not simply to enable closeted homosexuals to 'come out', but also to enable people who have repressed their homosexual feelings to express themselves.

SENSIBILITIES

For the government and its band of bigots there is little distinction between simply releasing the genie of homosexuality from the bottle, and promoting homosexuality in general. They are of the opinion that 'there seems to be more of it about', and they want to stamp it out. It is no answer for the left to plead that it did not mean to offend the bigots' sensibilities by promoting homosexual lifestyles.

Our response is unequivocal. There does seem to be more homosexuality about, and that is all the more reason why we should fight for equal rights for homosexuals. We should not be defensive. There is no reason why an individual's sexual orientation should constitute a problem for society. From the point of view of the working class it matters little whether an individual is homosexual or heterosexual or somewhere in between.

What matters is that we oppose every attempt by the authorities to make the oppressed pay for the problems of their system.

The Labour Party has refused to take a stand for lesbian and gay rights. While the frontbench leadership collaborated with the government by refusing to vote against Clause 27, the party's left-wing councillors are working with the Association of London Authorities. They are concentrating on back-door manoeuvres to ensure that Labour councils stay strictly within the law. Along with the Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists, the ALA is sponsoring amendments in the house of lords to 'ameliorate' the worst effects of the new law.

DECRIMINALISATION

This strategy will focus opposition to Clause 27 in the parliamentary sphere and ensure that lesbian and gay organisations are kept busy negotiating some form of compromise formula with Labour councils. But there is no point appealing to a middle ground which no longer exists, or trying to get the house of lords to play fair. The old liberal slogans like 'live and let live' have no place in a struggle against a government which is promoting a pogrom.

The Tories have made it clear that they will go all the way to outlaw all forms of homosexual activity. The only effective rejoinder is a campaign demanding full equality for lesbians and gays. We should be fighting for the removal of Clause 27 and the complete decriminalisation of homosexuality. Our slogan must be EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL, FIGHT FOR LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS.

THE ISSUE IS WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The debate about abortion, which has raged since Liberal MP David Alton introduced his Bill to reduce the time-limit on terminations from 28 to 18 weeks, has largely ignored the central issue of women's rights. Joan Phillips points out why this is a problem

David Alton's Bill to outlaw abortions after 18 weeks' gestation comes up for its second reading in parliament this month. It has met with concerted resistance from the medical lobby, as well as from women's groups and the left. What is their case?

A committee of leading medical bodies, embracing the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of GPs, the British Medical Association, the British Paediatric Association and the Clinical Genetics Society, has made public its opposition to the Alton Bill. It produced a medical report in early December arguing that an 18-week limit cannot be justified on scientific or humanitarian grounds.

Most members of the medical profession accept that 24 weeks of gestation marks a physiological and anatomical boundary below which the lungs are not expected to function, and therefore oppose Alton's 18-week limit on scientific grounds. They also accept that the majority of severe malformations in the fetus can only be diagnosed reliably by ultrasound scanning at or after 18 weeks' gestation. They oppose Alton's 18-week limit on the grounds that it would be inhumane to insist on the continuation of a pregnancy when the fetus was known to be seriously abnormal.

CURBS

In keeping with this diagnosis, the committee has called for a new 24-week limit on terminations — the existing time-limit is 28 weeks. The medical lobby is giving maximum support to a 24-week amendment to the Alton Bill which will be introduced at the committee stage after the second reading this month. Alton has made clear his willingness to accept some compromise on his 18-week limit on strictly medical grounds, such as in cases where it is clear that the pregnancy would result in a severely handicapped baby.

It seems likely that some new legislative curbs on abortion rights will be in force within 12 months.

Much of the opposition to the Alton Bill from the left has had the same narrow focus as the medical profession. Objections to the 18-week limit have tended to focus on the problems confronting women who discover that they are carrying an abnormal fetus. Again, in line with medical and liberal objections to the Bill, radical opponents of Alton have highlighted the plight of those women whose personal and social circumstances make

them candidates for late abortion. Reams have been written about the young, socially deprived women of low intelligence who out of ignorance or fear conceal their pregnancies.

While these are both genuine problems, they are hardly likely to strengthen our case against Alton. An amendment to allow late abortions on grounds of fetal abnormality or to set the time-limit at 24 weeks would remove all of these objections to Alton's Bill. But it would still represent an attack on women's right to abortion. Unlike the medical establishment, we are resolutely opposed to any restriction whatever on access to abortion. Why?

For us abortion is not just a question of ensuring the most humane treatment of women condemned to give birth to severely deformed babies, or of protecting the most vulnerable women from the upset of an unwanted pregnancy. Abortion is a question of the rights of women and our ability to organise against our oppression.

Control over pregnancy lies at the heart of the position of women in society.

Our lack of control over reproduction imposes severe restrictions over every aspect of our lives. Women are not only expected to bear children, but also to care for them as dutiful mothers from birth to adulthood. Women's role as child-rearers confines them to the home, where they are expected to combine the tasks of nursery worker, teacher, cook, cleaner, nurse and housekeeper. As a result of their family commitments women are forced to accept an inferior position in the world of work and society generally. The vast majority of women are confined to poorly paid jobs, with little responsibility and few prospects. Women are excluded from playing a full role in political life. The marginal participation of women in the trade unions and in wider politics is a true index of our lack of rights.

UNNATURAL

There is nothing natural about the second class status of women in society. Women's role in child-bearing is a biological necessity given our present level of science and technology. Our inferiority in the family, the workplace and political life, however, is not a consequence of nature, but of the way that capitalist society is organised. The capitalist system depends on women's unpaid work in the home, on our low-paid, insecure position in industry and

services, and on isolating women in the home and atomising the working class into inward-looking family units.

We are opposed to Alton because we regard the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy as vital for women. Abortion is an extension of contraceptive facilities to allow women to avoid or reduce the burden of childcare. This is essential to enable women to extend our involvement in work and politics and thus to strengthen our capacity to fight against our oppression. The demand for free abortion is essential to extend the democratic rights of women and to advance the overall interests of the working class. Let's look in more detail at why the fight for abortion rights is central to the struggle for real freedom for women.

• Trapped in the home

The role of the family is to provide a framework for maintaining and reproducing the working class, day in day out, week in week out, year after year, generation after generation. The modern nuclear family is founded on the domestic slavery of the wife. Women carry the main burden of keeping the family together, as the child-bearers and chief child-rearers, cooks and cleaners, nannies and

nurses. The capitalist class gets these services free of charge. This is why it is state policy to encourage marriage and having children, and why contraception and abortion are restricted.

Over the past decade the burden of domestic work has become even heavier for most women. Women have to carry the stresses and strains of coping with jobless husbands and making ends meet with tighter budgets. Cuts in welfare services and the drive towards 'community care' for the elderly, the disabled, the sick, the mentally ill and mentally handicapped have increased the workload of women in the home. These pressures often make women the victims of domestic violence and family breakdown. A heavier workload in the home makes it more difficult for women to get out and play a full part in the wider life of society. Attacks on contraceptive and abortion rights can only undermine women's ability to escape from the drudgery of domestic work.

• Trapped in the workplace

Women are caught in a vicious circle. Women are second class citizens in the labour market because of their role as carers in the home. Women are forced into the family because their subordinate position in the world of work means they cannot survive outside it. Women are stuck in second-rate employment on the margins of the economy. They are concentrated in relatively few occupations,

frequently those with a large demand for part-time or temporary labour, offering low pay and poor conditions. In 1986, 42 per cent of full-time women workers were employed in clerical and related occupations, and 19 per cent in education, health and welfare. Women working part-time are concentrated in catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal services.

LIVELIHOOD

A recent report by the Market Research Society revealed that while 60 per cent of married women work, only 10 per cent of those with children under five have jobs. Becoming pregnant often means becoming unemployed. Laws such as the Employment Protection Act offer little help to pregnant women, and none to those who have been in their job for less than two years. The Tories have just announced that people who give up jobs 'voluntarily' — because, for example, they are pregnant — will have to wait six months instead of three before qualifying for unemployment benefit. For many women free and easy access to abortion is the only way to sustain a livelihood. We cannot rely on contraception, and we cannot risk losing our jobs by being pregnant. We cannot afford to live on social security or to wait for the state to provide decent nurseries.

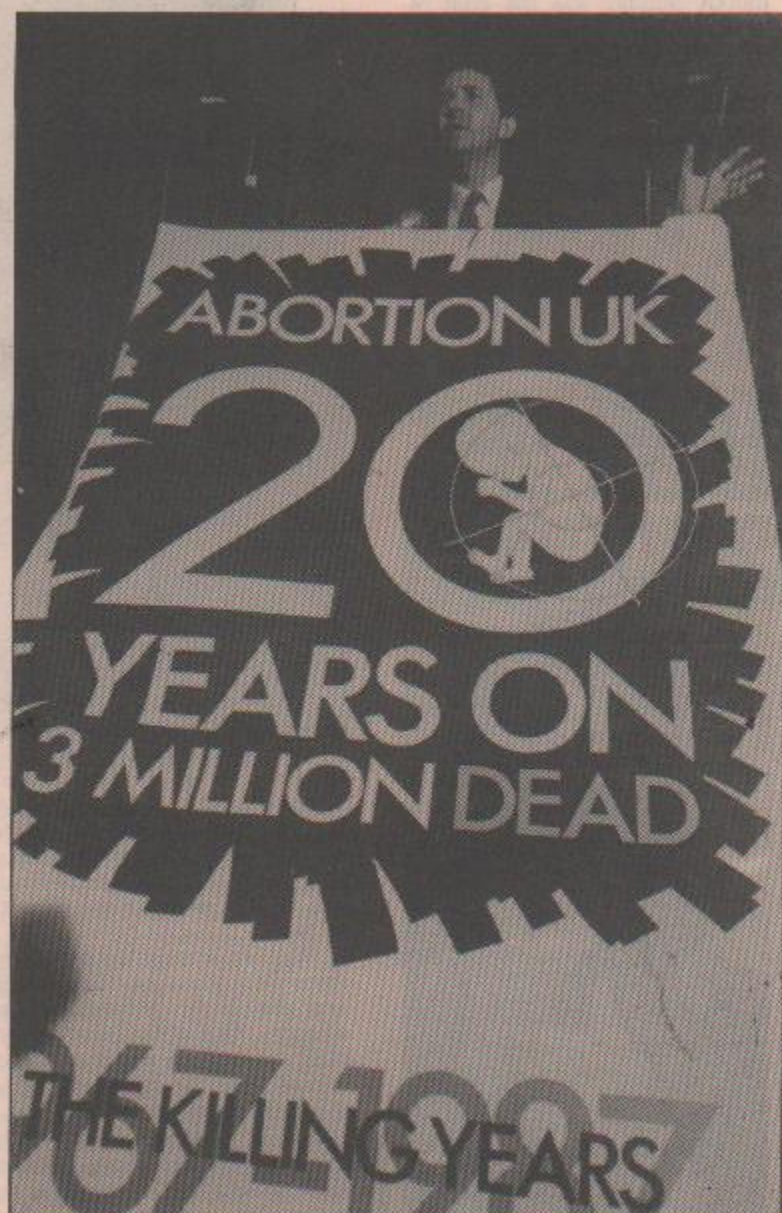
• Trapped in the family

The vast majority of women have no experience of involvement in trade unions or political struggle. A report by the Equal Opportunities Commission last summer showed how women have been excluded from playing a part in public life outside the family. It detailed their absence from public institutions, local councils, parliament, the trade unions and other bodies. Women's primary role as domestic skivvies has limited our involvement in society, kept us out of collective struggles, and tended to make us more conservative in our political outlook.

FREEDOM

Free abortion on demand is essential to enable women to extend our involvement in work and politics. The whole working class has a direct interest in taking part in the struggle for abortion rights. Only by exercising control over pregnancy can women, especially working class women, begin to act together against a social order that ties us to the family, exploits us at work and degrades us in every sphere of our existence.

Women need the right to have an abortion as early as possible and as late as necessary. We must reject any attempt further to restrict access to abortion facilities. For us the central debate is not about 18 weeks, 24 weeks or disabled fetuses. It is about women's right to live free from oppression. The call for free abortion on demand should be at the centre of our campaign against the Alton Bill. Winning support for this approach is the way to beat the Bill, and to strengthen the forces committed to women's liberation.



PRO-LIFE PROPAGANDA FROM LIBERAL MP DAVID ALTON

Pandora Anderson



SIXTEEN YEARS SINCE BLO

IRISH VICTIMS OF B

Sixteen years ago this month, British troops shot dead 14 men on a peaceful demonstration in the Irish city of Derry. To remind British people of what Army 'peace-keeping' in Ireland is all about, we reprint Mick Hume's conversations with one man who lost a loved one on that Bloody Sunday, and two women whose relatives have since been shot by the British forces of occupation



They say that everybody in America knows where they were on 22 November 1963, when president Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. The Irish equivalent is Bloody Sunday. Everybody knows where they were on 30 January 1972, the day 14 men were executed by British paratroopers who fired on a massive civil rights march in Derry, Northern Ireland. Everybody you ask in Derry knows they could have died that day: one tells you he slipped running from the firing just as the boy next to him got hit, another says he would have been walking beside his best friend who died, but stayed home to look after his children instead. In Britain, Bloody Sunday may be at best a blurred memory, at worst ancient history.

But the people of Derry have not forgotten. And few will ever forgive. Cities like Derry in occupied Ireland are a dark mystery to most British people, shrouded in clouds of government propaganda. It's an atmosphere added to by the smog that hangs over the city on a winter evening. Derry has no natural gas and no smokeless fuel. As a colonial outpost, it is denied the comforts its British overlords enjoy at home. So the chimneys of the nationalist areas pump pollution into the Irish sky. By dusk the air in the backstreets of the Bogside district is as black as

Jack the Ripper's London. But on Bloody Sunday, the London government reached out to the edge of the Bogside and committed a crime that killed twice as many people in the space of 10 minutes as Jack did in his whole career.

'The British government planned, at cabinet level, to put our people off the streets, to shoot them if necessary,' remembers Jim Wray. 'They were prepared to take that chance, they took that chance, and they gave us Bloody Sunday.'

COFFIN

Jim Wray lives in the Bogside. He was on the march on 30 January 1972. So was his oldest son, also named Jim. But when young Jim came home he was in a coffin with five British bullets in his body. Now his father sits in front of the fire, waiting to start his night shift at work. He lights another Woodbine and begins his version of the events of Bloody Sunday. You can tell it's a story that has run through his mind a thousand times before.

'The civil rights movement was people on the streets, looking for justice which we're denied in the North of Ireland. We were not "terrorists", we weren't even armed, 20 or 30,000 people marching at a time. We were an embarrassment to the British government, who had no answer to it. So the British government planned to scare us off the streets for good.'

GUTS

The British media say that Bloody Sunday was the fault of 'IRA terrorists' who fired at troops from the march. But there were no IRA men on the march.

And, according to Jim Wray, it was only when the paratroopers knew for sure that they had a 'soft' target that they went in for the kill.

'During the parade the British Army shot two members of the public, to find out if the IRA were part of the parade. If the IRA had returned that fire you wouldn't have had a Bloody Sunday. The British Army would have known that the IRA were there and, make no mistake, they hadn't the guts to face the IRA. They say they were shot at first. I've photographs of the British Army entering the area on Bloody Sunday in bunches of a dozen. Well if the IRA had been



JIM WRAY WON'T FORGET

firing at them they would soon have sorted themselves out, they wouldn't bunch.'

When the British Army opened fire, Jim Wray's son was one of seven Bloody Sunday victims shot in the back. 'My son had been brought down, he was shot in the back, and he lay wounded on the ground. One man saw Jim move and knew my lad was only injured. So he made an attempt to get out to Jim, and as he approached the Army opened fire. Jim's body was lying there as a trap and anybody who went to save him was going to be shot.'

'Well later the British Army came into the area, they passed over his body, walked into an alleyway. One of the paratroopers took up position about nine foot behind Jim, the other two went through the alleyway. They shot — murdered — three young people, and as they came back again one of them kicked Jim's body into the gutter. Jim lay there, he waited for a minute, and then he raised his

head to look in the direction of the soldiers.

'He didn't know there was one still behind him. As he looked up they shot him, from a distance of nine foot, in his back, as he lay in the gutter. He was a wounded man already. My son was shot five times on Bloody Sunday, three times in the back. He was 22 years old.'

GANGSTER

Jim Wray scoffs at the idea that the Army was out of control that day. He knows the British government deliberately murdered his son. But he doesn't only blame the Heath regime that ordered the executions. He blames Labour premier Harold Wilson — 'the raincoat gangster' — who sent in the troops in 1969 as 'peace-keepers'. 'They didn't come in here waving olive branches, they came in here with high velocity rifles trained on the nationalist areas.' And he blames every British government that has continued the occupation of Ireland since his



THE BRITISH ARMY IN ACTION AT A P

son's death.

The bitterness and contempt the Irish feel for the British authorities is a monument to Bloody Sunday as obvious as the stone memorial that stands on the edge of the Bogside.

As Jim Wray spoke a young girl came in delivering milk. The bottles reminded him of the battles the Bogside has seen since the troubles began. 'For 16 years', he laughed, 'the cheapest weapon the Irish people have had to fight back with is a milk bottle and a spot of petrol. Yet Britain has not thought to tell the dairies to put their milk in cartons. The brutality of the British Army is only matched by its stupidity.'

The brutality of the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary on Bloody Sunday and since has convinced people like Jim Wray that the Irish would have to fight for their freedom. 'The British government takes no notice of elections. They say "Vote, but vote the way I tell you to vote." Where's the democracy in that? The IRA is the

BLOODY SUNDAY

BRITISH WAR CRIMES



REPUBLICAN FUNERAL IN DERRY

more were convinced that the British government would only bend before armed resistance. Those who support the republican movement today are the same as those who marched for civil rights; ordinary people trying to cope with the extraordinary situation of life in a British colony. People like Julie Doherty and Lynne Brown, whose husband and brother were two IRA volunteers shot dead in Derry, in December 1984.

PAINFUL

Julie Doherty works for a photography outfit in the Bogside (but she doesn't like having her picture taken). She is a war widow with a young son. Her husband Danny was on active service when undercover troops and police shot him 30 times in the back, as he rode a motorbike into the grounds of Derry's Gransha hospital. She is suspicious of foreign journalists. 'I had an American interview me once. When I saw his article it was like a storybook. I was waiting for a romantic IRA man to start running across the hills to the sound of romantic music. Don't write it like that, it's not like that. It's too painful to be romantic.'

I don't suppose there's anything romantic about meeting your future husband in prison. 'Danny had been in jail since he was 17 when I got to know him,' says Julie Doherty. 'He was in Portlaoise in the South, and republicans get it even worse there than they do in the British jails. I visited him for three years. Five months after he got out we were married. We'd been married a year when he was shot.'

Julie Doherty doesn't think any specific incidents convinced her husband to join the IRA. It 'just seemed natural' for a young nationalist who wanted a better Ireland. As a youngster Danny Doherty was a Catholic altar boy, in a town where being born a Catholic means being at the bottom of the pile.

'Danny was the same as a lot of young people in this town, he grew up with British soldiers everywhere, that's the thing that hits you. And you want to know why there are Brits walking your streets, you want to know why the RUC beat up your people, because when you're a wee'un you don't realise you're a second class citizen. And when you find out why, you want to change it.'

COMMITTED

She is angry at the British media lie that IRA men are cowards who kill for kicks. 'I think for him to join the IRA it took a big kind of person,' says Julie. 'You have to sit down and think "What if I killed a man?" People say the IRA are cold-blooded murderers, but with our Catholic upbringing and all it's hard enough for the IRA to go out and shoot soldiers or policemen. It's hard being an IRA man, you have all these things to consider. I think you would have to be a special kind of person, really dedicated. Danny was really committed. He put the IRA in front of me. I minded coming second, I was his wife, but I supported them 100 per cent and I would never have said, "I don't allow you."'

Talking to Julie Doherty as she fiddles nervously with the wedding ring on a chain around her neck, you start to see what being 'an ordinary person in an extraordinary situation' means.

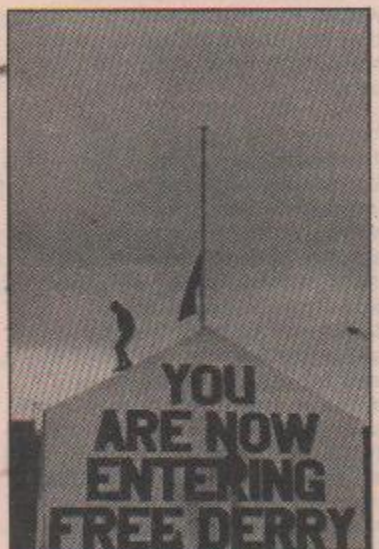
'We have the pressure of the war,' she says, 'and we still have the pressures of growing up, being married, you know the normal pressures you would have in England, on top of the war. I remember saying to him once when I was mad, "You think more of the IRA than you do of me. I'm stuck in this house on my own. Why do you have to go out?" And he said, "Julie, I don't want my kid to have to go out and fight when he's 16. Do you want to sit here in 16 years' time telling me you think our son's involved? I don't want that for him so I'm doing it now."'

'He knew he wasn't going to win the war on his own, but he wanted to do something about it. And the way he knew to do something about it was to go out with a gun. And I really admired and respected him for it. It wasn't like "Oh, my hero" or anything. But he was really brave.'

FEAR

Julie Doherty knew the dangers of being married to an IRA man in a war zone. She wasn't surprised when he was shot, 'but that didn't ease the pain. I think if it had been my son it would hurt but I could always have another wee'un. But not another Danny. I used to wake him up at night and say, "If you die on me I'll kill you." We're surrounded by death but you never get used to it. Every death's different to cope with. And his was the thing I feared most of all.'

'Coping with it' is what a lot of Derry families have had to do in the years since Bloody Sunday.



BLACK FLAG AT HALF-MAST

And the Fleming family from Gobnascale have had to cope with more than most. Sitting in the frontroom of her family home, Lynne Brown (nee Fleming) told us about her brothers. Their pictures cover the walls. Three of them have been jailed by the British authorities for their belief in Irish freedom. And her youngest brother, William, died for the same cause, with 38 British bullets in his back, on the back of Danny Doherty's motorbike. In the same week her cousin, Kieran, drowned escaping from another British assassination squad.

'William was 19 when they shot

him. All he's known through his life was the war, the troubles started when he was only a child.' His face smiles down from the mantelpiece, a sharp young man dressed for a wedding. 'With my brothers being involved and being in jail, the family was always being harassed, you know the house getting raided. It wasn't really harassment to us after a while, that was just life. Sometimes we were raided four times in one week, twice in one day.'

British propagandists like to portray young men like Willie Fleming as the victims of 'tribal loyalty', who fought for an outdated cause just because their family expected them to.

Lynne Brown's not having any of that: 'William was very politically aware, always reading. It wasn't just that he went out because his brothers were in prison or because of family ties. He had his own reasons, he wasn't pushed into anything, he did it because he wanted to do it, believed in it.'

GRIEVE

Julie Doherty and Lynne Fleming don't pretend that their menfolk were 'innocent bystanders'. But they were war casualties, and the British government is to blame for the war. 'The way I look at it,' says Lynne, 'William was a soldier and he was in an army, the IRA. If they hadn't got William he would have got some of them, that's war. The IRA aren't murderers, they're just fighting the enemy.' Julie goes further: 'I would say my husband was murdered by the RUC and the British Army, because I believe there are war crimes. There was no warning or nothing, he hadn't even a chance to draw his weapon.'

Both women still grieve for their loved ones, but neither wishes that they had kept out of the conflict. Lynne: 'If William had been killed in a road crash you'd think it was a wild sorry way to die. But because he believed in what he was doing, it eased the burden on us.' Julie:

'Danny died fighting and when they fired the volley of shots in salute over his coffin I near burst with pride. I'd have been more content if he'd got a shot back at them.'



Phil Murphy

LYNNE BROWN (NEE FLEMING)

Jim Wray junior, Danny Doherty and William Fleming are just three of the many Derry people who would still be alive if Ireland was free and united. Bloody Sunday may have been years ago, but the nationalist community in Northern Ireland still live with the fear of foreign assassins every day.

And, like Julie Doherty, thousands of them are 'more content' that their young men and women are getting a shot back at the British forces of occupation. Those in Britain who call themselves socialists but condemn the IRA as 'terrorists' would do well to mark Jim Wray's parting words, as I left him with his Woodbines and his memories: 'If you haven't the courage to walk with the freedom fighter, at least have the shame not to criticise him.'

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THE ROAD TO BLOODY SUNDAY...

BEGAN in the late sixties when Catholics in Northern Ireland started a peaceful civil rights movement to protest against Britain's sectarian system, which gave Protestants privileged access to jobs, houses and political power in the 'province'. Their marches were met with ferocious repression from Loyalists and the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

CONTINUED in 1969 when Loyalists launched an anti-Catholic pogrom, with the RUC leading mobs in attacks on the Bogside district of Derry, and the British government sending in troops to keep its Northern Ireland colony under control.

REACHED the last mile in August 1971, when the Unionist regime in Northern Ireland and Edward Heath's Tory government imposed internment without trial. Troops and police rounded

up hundreds of nationalists in concentration camps, many of whom were beaten or tortured.

ENDED on 30 January 1972 when, after top level consultations between the government and Army chiefs, the Parachute Regiment attacked a huge anti-internment march in Derry. Troops shot dead 13 unarmed Irishmen on the spot and maimed many more, one of whom died within weeks. Nationalists staged strikes across Ireland, there was a riot in Downing Street, the British embassy in Dublin was burnt down, and people queued to join the IRA and fight for Irish freedom. The resistance which exploded after Bloody Sunday led to the virtual collapse of the Northern Ireland state and the imposition of direct rule from the imperial parliament at Westminster.

only way we'll win democracy. The freedom fighter of the IRA is fighting to give us back our dignity.'

SLAUGHTER

As I left Jim Wray to get ready for work, I passed his graffiti-covered gable wall. Scrawled at the centre is the legend 'JOHN WRAY YOU'RE DEAD MEAT'. It's a threat to another of Jim's sons, written by a member or members unknown of the British security forces. And it's a reminder, if any were needed, that Bloody Sunday was no one-off act of terror. A lot of people in Britain who were outraged by Bloody Sunday don't even blink when British Army and RUC gunmen shoot republicans in cold blood today. It's different, they say, these men are terrorists. In fact it's just the same.

Before Bloody Sunday, many nationalist men and women in Northern Ireland still hoped that they could achieve justice by demonstrating peacefully.

After that act of slaughter, many

THE Revolutionary Communist Party held its three-day annual conference in December. Conference adopted new perspectives for party work in 1988, and elected the party leadership. Here we reprint extracts from the perspectives, assessing the political character of the present period.

Much of the conference discussion focused on how to forge stronger and more stable links between the party and the working class. Conference agreed that the main task of the new Political Committee will be to ensure that the party extends and consolidates its periphery and base of supporters. To realise this objective, it will be necessary to get the party's new supporters to organise themselves at their place of work and among their friends and acquaintances. Readers of *tns* will be encouraged to take more responsibility for the content and distribution of the paper. We will be discussing these matters in future issues of *tns*.

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST
PARTY CONFERENCE

OUR PERSPECTIVES FOR '88

THE past year has been a period of swift change and volatility, symbolised by the way in which the image of economic expansion was damaged overnight by the stock market crash. Within a couple of months of our December 1986 conference it had already become clear that, despite the hype about a boom, the capitalist class was facing difficulties in retaining its grip over its system. In its February 1987 perspectives document, the Political Committee noted the new mood:

'Internationally, the situation is dominated by the instability and unpredictability of the capitalist system. Not since the early seventies have economic affairs been so much in the news.'

The volatility of the economic situation was underlined by the political problems which hit governments throughout the West. Yet the new significance of events made little impact on

public consciousness. The absence of influential revolutionary forces meant that there were few who could point to the importance of what was happening to the capitalist system. Thus, the emerging trends towards an economic crisis early in the year were able to coincide with growing public confidence in the British economy. Even individuals who felt insecure about their own circumstances seemed to have some hope that the economy in general was recovering. It is a sign of the fast pace of events that just as a measure of economic confidence has been consolidated in the popular consciousness, it has been put to question by the crash.

Swift changes have also become apparent at the political level. Back in December 1986, at the time of our last conference, a Labour victory in the coming general election appeared to be a possibility. By March 1987, the

dramatic decline of Labour indicated that the Tories had already won the election three months before polling day. This decline finished off what was left of the strategy of the British left. As a report from the Political Committee argued back in March, the left's dependence on an increasingly unlikely Labour victory had reduced it to a state of paralysis: 'Whereas before, waiting was a prelude to a Labour government, today waiting itself becomes the totality of the strategy.'

The weakness of much of the left and the absence of a significant revolutionary factor meant that the volatile situation did not breed political instability. Instead, it had the opposite effect. Stability and the strengthening of reaction became the order of the day in Britain in particular, and in the Western world in general. Thus the Tory government was able to achieve another political victory at precisely the moment that the capitalist system was spinning further out of its control.

The breakdown of the Bretton Woods system of international finance in the early seventies signalled the coming of the worldwide crisis of capitalism. In the same way, the City crash on Black Monday in October should be understood as the herald of the new recession. In the years between these two events, the capitalist system experienced two major recessions. The effects of the second downturn between 1979 and 1982 were more far-reaching than the first. Indeed, it was the most severe recession since the Great Depression in the thirties. The superficial measures which world capitalism took to counter the effects of the 1979-82 recession did little to overcome the fundamental problems of the system. The cumulative impact of these recessions means that the coming downturn will be even more profound.

In the early eighties the capitalist class had some options available to deal with the recession. These are now of less significance. For example, credit has been extended on an enormous scale over the past decade, to keep the system

running. But the system cannot continue living on borrowed time and accumulating debts. There are now real constraints on the ability of the capitalist class to manipulate the credit mechanism in the years ahead. Similarly, government spending is already at a very high level. Any major increase would invite further instability. The ineffective response to the October crash from Washington, London, Tokyo and Bonn showed that no government's domestic economic policy can make much difference today. The problems can only be tackled at the level of the world market.

The international dimensions of the crisis are more obvious than at any time since the thirties. Japan and West Germany, the two high performers in the sixties and seventies, have slowed down and are now confronted with major problems of their own. Although the world crisis of capitalism is focused on the USA, none of the major imperialist powers can evade the consequences. For some time the USA has stayed afloat by running up budget deficits which are financed by capital flowing in from abroad. Japan, in particular, has become heavily committed to sustaining the US economy. The big question now is how long can the USA sustain its economy through the cooperation of its imperialist rivals?

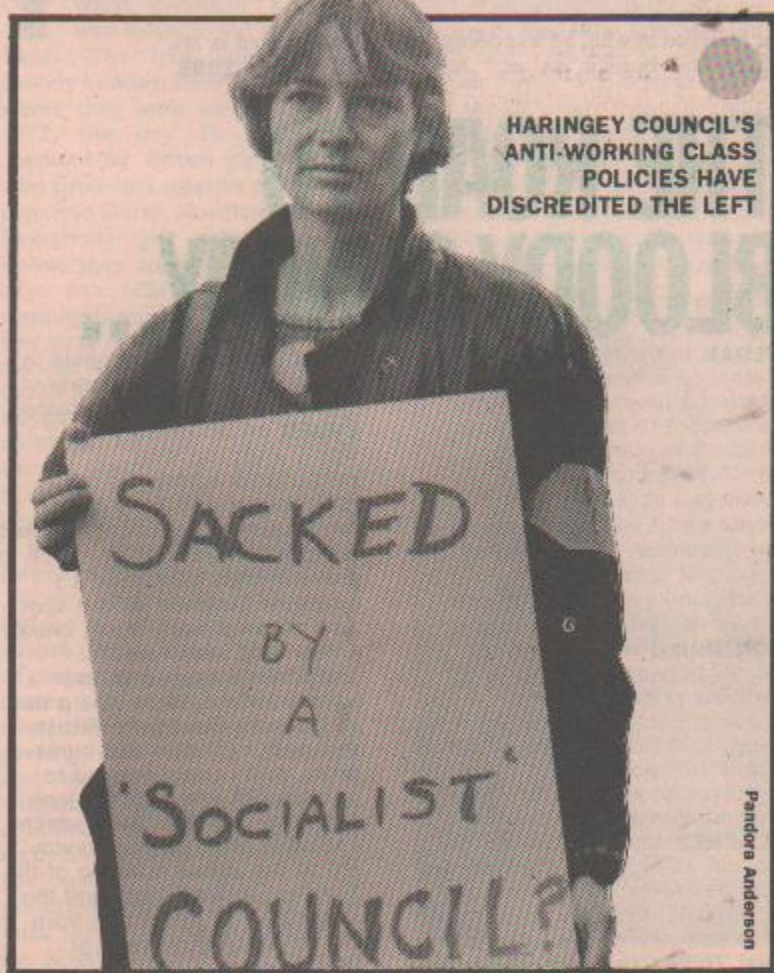
In principle, all sections of the imperialist world are interested in preventing the collapse of the US economy. For some time to come, the other capitalist powers will do what they can to reach an agreement which could stabilise the world economic situation. However, with every new development the price of keeping the USA afloat becomes higher. Things will eventually reach the point where the risks and the burden of carrying the USA become unacceptable to America's rivals. The precise timing of this crisis point cannot be predicted, since it will be the product of economic and political factors.

The contradictions of world capitalism today assume their most acute form at an

international level, where the powers cooperate and compete for survival at the same time. But these contradictions also express the conflicts which are emerging within the confines of each national capital. Within the US, German or Japanese nation, capitalists compete for resources. Different interest groups fight for their claims and are forced to take a short-term view. This tension is brought into focus in the political sphere, where short-term direct self-interest is often at variance with what are, in the abstract, the objective needs of capital. The escalation of these tensions brings in an element of unpredictability. It forces each capitalist state to think more and more in narrow national terms, until international cooperation is forced to give way to out and out competition.

Even at present, national capitals are not oblivious to their self-interest. However, we are still at the stage of preparation and contingency measures rather than the pursuit of outright unilateral policies. It is possible for this state of affairs to continue for some time. On the other hand, international cooperation could break down at any time. Instead of crystal ball gazing we have to grasp the implications of a situation that is inherently explosive. In the short run it is likely that some international agreement will be achieved to prevent the situation from getting out of hand.

Even if world imperialism succeeds in making an orchestrated short-term adjustment it will not be able to prevent a shift into recession. The trends towards recession are already evident; the only question is how and with what force they will assert themselves. It appears that a slowdown in economic growth will be soon apparent and that a full-scale recession can be expected at any time. It is necessary to recall the present background to the recession. Investment and productivity growth are already low and state spending and unemployment are already at high levels. That must mean that capitalism has less resources than previously to



HARINGEY COUNCIL'S
ANTI-WORKING CLASS
POLICIES HAVE
DISCREDITED THE LEFT

Pandora Anderson

insulate society from the effects of recession.

Britain is in a weak position to protect itself from the effects of a global recession. British capitalism is fully exposed to the international economy, and its fate is closely interlinked with that of the USA. Any serious global dislocation will have a direct, unmediated impact on Britain. The service sector, the pride and joy of Thatcherite Britain, is exceptionally vulnerable to a recession. And any serious decline in services will have far-reaching effects in terms of austerity, unemployment and cuts in state spending.

It is ironic that the crash came precisely at the time when a consensus around Tory economics was becoming consolidated. Just as many people had begun to forget about mass unemployment and de-industrialisation and were beginning to expect the return of prosperity, their expectations have been cruelly exposed by events. It will take time for the recognition of economic instability to sink into public consciousness. But as more people are forced to draw the inescapable conclusions about where Britain is heading, we can expect a major crisis of confidence in the economy.

In such circumstances the recession and the ensuing crisis of confidence will not necessarily strengthen anti-capitalist forces. It is much more likely that, at least in the short term, people will experience the recession in an individualistic and insecure fashion. Economic insecurity at an individual level is susceptible to reactionary influences, especially when there is no credible working class alternative on offer. Indeed in a climate of renewed imperialist tensions, reaction may become structured in a coherent chauvinist and militarist mood.

The coming recession will not inevitably generate a process of radicalisation. But it does provide the conditions for the growth of the revolutionary movement. The erosion of economic confidence strengthens the case for an anti-capitalist argument. It makes it possible to challenge individualistic strategies in the working class, and to project a collectively organised struggle against the system as the only solution for the proletariat.

In Britain the situation offers fantastic opportunities for revolutionaries. It will force many workers to recognise, at least instinctively, that the old solutions are irrelevant.

practice these principles have little meaning for the individual worker. Reaction is not yet consolidated in working class consciousness.

In any case it is not what the mass of the working class does that is decisive. The important factor is the mood of the most active sections of the working class. Among these more politicised workers, the problem is not that of reaction but the crisis of political strategy. With the decline of trade unionism in the eighties the energies of politicised workers turned to the Labour Party. Electing a Labour government became the entire perspective of left-wing workers. During the past few years everything was subordinated to the realisation of this objective. Since the defeat of Labour in the June 1987 election, this strategy has been exposed as useless by events. Consequently, the working class is without even a bad strategy — it lacks any sense of political direction at all.

The political crisis in the working class shows the necessity for new solutions. But the crisis of leadership cannot be resolved in the short run. For some time to come the defensive outlook of active workers will continue to prevail.

bureaucracy, have deprived Labour of its traditional mediating role in class conflicts. The gap between the objective conditions today and Labour's traditional role explains why the party has lost its direction. This is why a group of ex-student politicians have succeeded in capturing the leadership of the party.

The decline of the traditional Labour right shows most strikingly that Labour is dead as a political force. In the past this group acted as go-betweens operating between the capitalist class and the proletariat. From the outset the right controlled Labour and gave the party its sense of purpose and stability. Without the right, the party's irrelevance to capitalist society becomes evident.

It is important that we understand what is meant by our analysis of Labour's death. It does not mean that the Labour Party will disappear next year or the year after. The Liberal Party died 70 years ago — yet it is still around today. What we mean by Labour's death is that it has ceased to play its traditional role. In the past, Labour's ascendancy was secured because its policies corresponded to the needs of capitalism — for example, the policy of state intervention and nationalisation. Today capital has no need of the Labour Party. Should Labour get elected into government, it will not be because it has a specific role to perform. It will not be because capital requires the labour bureaucracy to contain the working class. British capital now needs a much more direct relationship with the working class. If Labour gets elected it will only be because the Tories have made some major mistakes. As a large parliamentary party, Labour is still best placed to benefit from the inevitable Tory blunders.

The coming economic recession will have destabilising consequences for the Tories. This poses the possibility of a Labour revival. Such a revival cannot be precluded from our calculations. However, according to our analysis, the Labour Party has become too unstable to return to its traditional political role. If Labour revives it is more likely to replace the Alliance and adopt a form of organisation that is further removed from the labour movement. The immediate impression is of paralysis. Labour has not been able to make anything of the crash and it still continues to ape Thatcher. Two factors are likely to reinforce this trend. First, the present leadership is

on a trajectory away from the working class. It is not psychologically disposed to retrieve what it has just thrown out. Second, the Labour leadership is under little working class pressure. There exists no political or even trade union focus for the assertion of class pressure. Without such a focus the only pressure which Labour experiences comes from the capitalist class.

The impact of capitalist pressure on the official labour movement needs little discussion. Realism is the slogan of the day. Under this impact the trade union bureaucracy has come to adopt practices that in the past were considered to be anathema. The EETPU-style business unionism has triumphed inside the TUC. Even the left wing of the labour movement has fallen in line. Left-wing local authorities are now trying to save their necks by carrying out the Tories' dirty work. Local government has become a disaster area where the left has been forced to coordinate the attack on workers.

The relationship of the left to the working class is even weaker than it was a year ago. The left is in disarray and it faces a major crisis of identity. It has spent the past year behaving well so as not to infuriate the Labour leadership. But despite its abandonment of principles, it is still scapegoated for all the failures of the official labour movement. For now the left is more reluctant than ever to rethink its strategy. The Chesterfield conference showed that the left has a remarkable capacity for self-delusion and is extremely sensitive to any criticisms that question the old assumptions.

Inside the unions the left retains a few positions achieved through bureaucratic manipulation. Scargill, the hero of the left, no longer has the authority that he enjoyed in the past. Local government, the last refuge of the left, is proving to be more of a trap. On the councils the left faces not only political defeat but also something of a moral collapse. To this day the left has done nothing decisive to dissociate itself from the anti-working class attacks of Labour councils in Camden, Hackney and Haringey.

The contrast between the movement we need to take advantage of the approaching crisis of capitalism, and what is currently on offer from the official labour movement, could not be more stark.



Pandora Anderson

NAIL-BITING TIMES FOR THE PUNTERS AT DEBENHAM'S SHARE SHOP

It is reasonable to assume that the crisis of confidence will be greater than it was in the seventies. At that time people had lived through the post-war boom and could be forgiven for thinking that the crisis was only a temporary dislocation. Today matters are entirely different. Most workers have only just begun to think that perhaps there could be some sort of economic recovery. After the experience of the 1979-82 recession, and the legacy of mass unemployment and industrial collapse, another downturn will not be dismissed lightly as a temporary affair.

Insecurity about the economy can easily translate itself into a crisis of confidence at the political level. It should be recalled that support for Tory politics was underwritten by a belief in the efficacy of Thatcherite economics. Once this belief is put to question, there is a potential for the emergence of political hostility to the Tory government. Whatever happens it is unlikely that the Tories will be able to retain their coherent facade of purpose. The re-assertion of recessionary tendencies will put the Tories under pressure and on the defensive. This perspective led us to argue, even before the crash, that Thatcherism had reached its high-point.

The Tories are fortunate. They can attempt to solve their problems without having to fear their political opponents. The Alliance has disintegrated and Labour has yet to find its feet.

Many on the left believe that such factors as the Thatcherite home-owning/share-buying revolution, the collapse of manufacturing employment and the rise of the service sector, have destroyed the traditional class outlook among British workers. There have been important changes in the structure and composition of the British working class. Yet these changes are not the decisive ones in explaining the current mood of individualism. Instead, the irrelevance of old-fashioned Labourist politics and organisations is responsible for undermining a collective identity within the working class. As a result of the decline of the official labour movement, the capitalist class now exercises a more direct influence over workers than at any time this century.

The Thatcher years have taken their toll. The mass of the working class is indirectly and sometimes directly under the influence of reaction. The more active sections of the working class remain defensive and modest in terms of their aspirations. It is not so much that workers have become more right-wing, but that they experience politics as individuals rather than as a class. Under these circumstances the working class is deeply divided and lacks direction. It would be misleading to exaggerate the strength of reaction in the working class. There may be a general acceptance of reactionary principles on many social issues, though in

The common response to Labour's failure is to retreat further. Nevertheless, the instinct that something new is required exists — it needs to be brought into the open through political struggle. This ought to be possible in a situation where the failure of the official labour movement to make anything of the crisis becomes more apparent.

The June 1987 election proved that the Labour Party has ceased to play its past role as the alternative party of government. The new, more aggressive requirements of the capitalist class, and the collapse of the old labour

AFTER EIGHT YEARS LABOUR HAS YET TO RATTLE THATCHER



VOTE FOR SCARGILL?

OVER three-quarters of Joan Phillips' article 'Arthur Scargill's election agents' (*tns*, 4 December) is devoted to exposing Arthur Scargill for the bureaucrat that he is. Joan also emphasises the irrelevance of the NUM election contest to 'the real concerns of rank and file miners', and at the same time highlights the hypocrisy of *Socialist Worker's* campaign for Scargill. Then, in the final two paragraphs, she falls into the same trap, by calling for a vote for Scargill on the grounds that his opponent John Walsh stands for open scab unionism, UDM-style.

Surely, though, the strength of the miners' union lies in the current level of class consciousness among rank and file members, which is not going to change overnight simply because of the presence of a right-wing rather than a left-wing bureaucrat. In any case, the election of John Walsh would simply indicate the existing weakness of the movement. However, it seems very unlikely that he will even scratch the surface of King Arthur's support, which seems to be as solid as ever. This means that Joan is telling miners to do what they are already doing, ie, support Scargill. But simply to echo the popular sentiments of the rank and file seems to go against everything the RCP stands for.

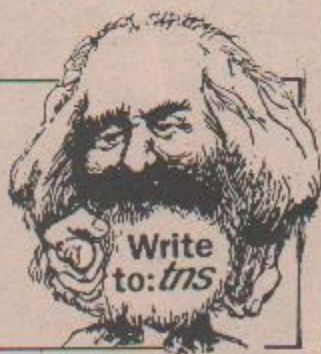


David Bourke

Joan concludes by saying 'A genuine rank and file movement can be built only in opposition to Scargill's machine.' This is true, but it carries little conviction when tagged on to her earlier statement that 'there is only one reason why miners should vote for Scargill — John Walsh.' Given the current high level of support for Scargill, the only way forward is to expose the irrelevance of the NUM contest, rather than lending it credibility, and to argue for the sort of rank and file action that we have recently seen at Frickley and elsewhere.

Roy
South London

Write to *tns*
BCM JPLTD,
WC1N 3XX



AFTER ENNISKILLEN

BRITISH leftists who give critical support to the Irish republican movement and to its armed struggle need only look at the last week in November to see what a totally inappropriate and base response the notion of critical support is.

Thoroughly inflated by the whole spectrum from the right to the cringing left baying for the blood of the IRA in the aftermath of the Enniskillen bomb, the security forces North and South of the Border launched a massive intimidation/internment exercise.

As the British Army lifted the elected representatives of the nationalist people North of the Border on the sole basis of their membership of Sinn Féin, and as South of the Border the police raided republican homes, newspaper offices and such potential bombers as women workers at the Well Women Centre in Dublin, how did the critical supporters show their

support? Having condemned the IRA, the only 'support' they can offer republicans are pleas to the British Army to 'steady-on', use 'limited force', etc.

Listening to some of these leftists, you would think there is no war in Ireland. They would also have you believe that they are engaged in the struggle for socialism. One of the biggest and most barbarous enemies of socialism, the British establishment, surrounds them and wages war on those who would break from its rule. Yet the leftists' chauvinism will not allow them to take sides, as they believe that Britain is reformable.

Joan Phillips' article 'Why we back Irish freedom fighters' (*tns*, 20 November), stands out like a beacon. It shows that the RCP is the only party prepared to take on the enemy at home — the British capitalist state.

Seoirse O Sionain
Brentford

OBVIOUSLY we cannot justify any act in which innocent people have been killed. But the British government, British Army, Royal Ulster Constabulary and the media are all guilty of a cruel exploitation of events at Enniskillen.

Was there such outcry after Bloody Sunday in 1972, when 14 Catholics were shot dead by the British Army? Or in 1975 when three members of the Miami Showband were shot dead (just down the road from here) by the Ulster Volunteer Force? Or some months ago when eight IRA volunteers were shot dead by the British Army in Loughgall?

As I write, 40 Sinn Féin people have been 'listed' for 'questioning' at Castlereagh. I wonder how many Loyalists from the UDA, UVF, UFF or PAF will be listed? Answer: none.

Christy
County Down

MEDIA LIES AND HEALTH CUTS

WE had a dispute recently in the blood transfusion centre in Newcastle. Management's hatchet-man had been driving us mad with his schemes for flexible working, etc. The last straw was when he told everyone they had to sign on and off at the centre, even if they were doing a session near where they lived. The union reps called a meeting, which voted overwhelmingly for action. Everyone who works here is in Nupe, but this was the first example of united action by drivers, clerks, technicians and nurses.

We went on a one-day strike, a work-to-rule and an overtime ban.

It was only a matter of hours before the BBC News announced an emergency blood shortage, and appealed for donors. On Tyne Tees television, our official Phil Lenton put our side and management spokesman Dr Lloyd clearly said that existing blood stocks would last for at least three weeks. But the BBC report had already done the damage.

A couple of days later, we held another meeting, where we took the advice

of the union to stop the action. Union officials are taking our grievances to the health authority, and management's hatchet-man is staying out of sight. But there is a good chance we won't get any satisfaction, considering the pressure for cuts and efficiency. What can we do if the situation arises again? We will have the media against us whatever we do. No one here wants to endanger lives, but we do not want to be trodden on.

Health worker
Newcastle

WHY BOSSES BACKED UNIONS

JOHN KELLY'S answer (letters, 27 November) to his own question 'Why employers chose different strategies of controlling workers,' is fatally flawed, as is his understanding of the 'real developments' of trade unionism in the seventies. The RCP's view that 'unions have been unable to defend their members during the recession because of the dependence on the employer' is neither curious nor, as he suggests, is it uncommon.

What were the real developments of the seventies? Faced with a massive upsurge in militancy, employers, the Labour Party and the Tories all looked to those they considered capable of defusing the situation — the trade union bureaucracy. Kelly states that because hotel chains, etc, were not faced with such militancy, they were able to persist with a strategy of 'union avoidance'. Wrong! A more apt description is that they had no need for a strategy which entailed trade union dependence.

Even though they were promoted as advancing trade unionism, the bulk of union/management agreements signed in the seventies were designed to protect the unions against their members. In return for agreeing to police their membership on behalf of a grateful employer, the unions were in effect granted security of supply and a licence to operate.

Take the deal agreed in 1974 between the Central Electricity Generating Board and its signatory unions. This formalised what had been a relatively informal closed shop arrangement. At that time, the extremely high level of cooperation required between unions and management to push through productivity deals resulted in an equally high level of dissatisfaction among the workforce. The prospect of rebellion, made real through the emergence of the breakaway Electricity Supply Union, sent employers and union officials scurrying away to 'seal all exits'.

Trade unions may have been strengthened. Trade unionism certainly was not.

The whole gist of the Donovan report back in the sixties was to wake employers up to the fact that improvements in industrial relations could best be obtained via trade unions. All research undertaken about closed shops during that period shows that the employers were the initiators — not the workers. Trade union leaders were more than willing to participate. This is the main reason why they are in limbo today — Thatcher no longer needs them, and workers don't particularly trust them.

GMB member
Yorkshire

JANUARY is a hectic month in the fight for women's rights.

Anti-abortion campaigners have chosen 22 January as 'Pro-Life Day' in parliament. Liberal MP David Alton's Bill to reduce the time-limit on abortions from 28 to 18 weeks is coming up for its second reading. Tory MP Kenneth Hargreaves' Bill for the Protection of the Unborn Child is due for an airing, too. Hargreaves' Bill addresses the 'ethical problems' of embryo research, but it also has implications for the interpretation of the law on abortion.

Supporters of the Fight the Alton Bill campaign are trying to meet this offensive head-on. They have called local demonstrations around the country on Saturday 16 January, and organised a mass rally and lobby of parliament to be followed by a torchlit demo on the 21 January, the day before the Alton and Hargreaves Bills are read.

The Revolutionary Communist Party is adding another event to this action-packed agenda. On Sunday 24 January we have organised a dayschool in

London to discuss the way forward in the fight for women's rights. The aim of the day is to discuss the strategy and tactics we need to turn the tables on our opponents in 1988.

By 24 January we will know what we are up against. If the Alton Bill sails through its second reading as expected and goes into 'committee' — the next parliamentary stage where MPs have the opportunity to amend it — the pro-choice campaigns will be in trouble. They just do not have the arguments to defeat a 24-week limit.

There is a consensus that Alton's 18-week limit is too extreme. On the other hand many people are unhappy with the existing law and would prefer a reduction to 24 weeks. If the Alton Bill is amended to 24 weeks during the committee stage there's a good chance it will be carried. The medical profession has come out in favour of a 24-week limit.

The arguments that many FAB campaigners have used against the 18-week Alton Bill — that this limit is well below the age at which a fetus achieves

viability and that it would force women to bear abnormal babies — cannot challenge the rationale behind a 24-week deadline. Babies have been born at 24 weeks and survived, 24 weeks allows time for amniocentesis tests used to detect abnormalities in the fetus, etc (see page 5).

SHARPER

If we are to campaign effectively against all reductions in the time-limit — which has always been the position of the RCP — then we have to sharpen up our arguments. Our first task is to put the question of women's rights at the centre of the debate about abortion. The dayschool will be an opportunity to do that.

Alton has stated on several occasions that he will be pleased with any reduction to women's access to abortion. His Bill is just the start of a mounting legal challenge to our rights. We have to plan how to organise to fight for the principle of free abortion on demand. The conference has to address this matter with the utmost urgency.

FIGHT

Every anti-abortion Bill brought before parliament in the past has failed to make the statute books, but none has been defeated politically. All have fallen as a consequence of manoeuvring in the commons. This one-clause Bill gives little scope for parliamentary machinations. We have a straight political fight on our hands and we need the arguments to win.

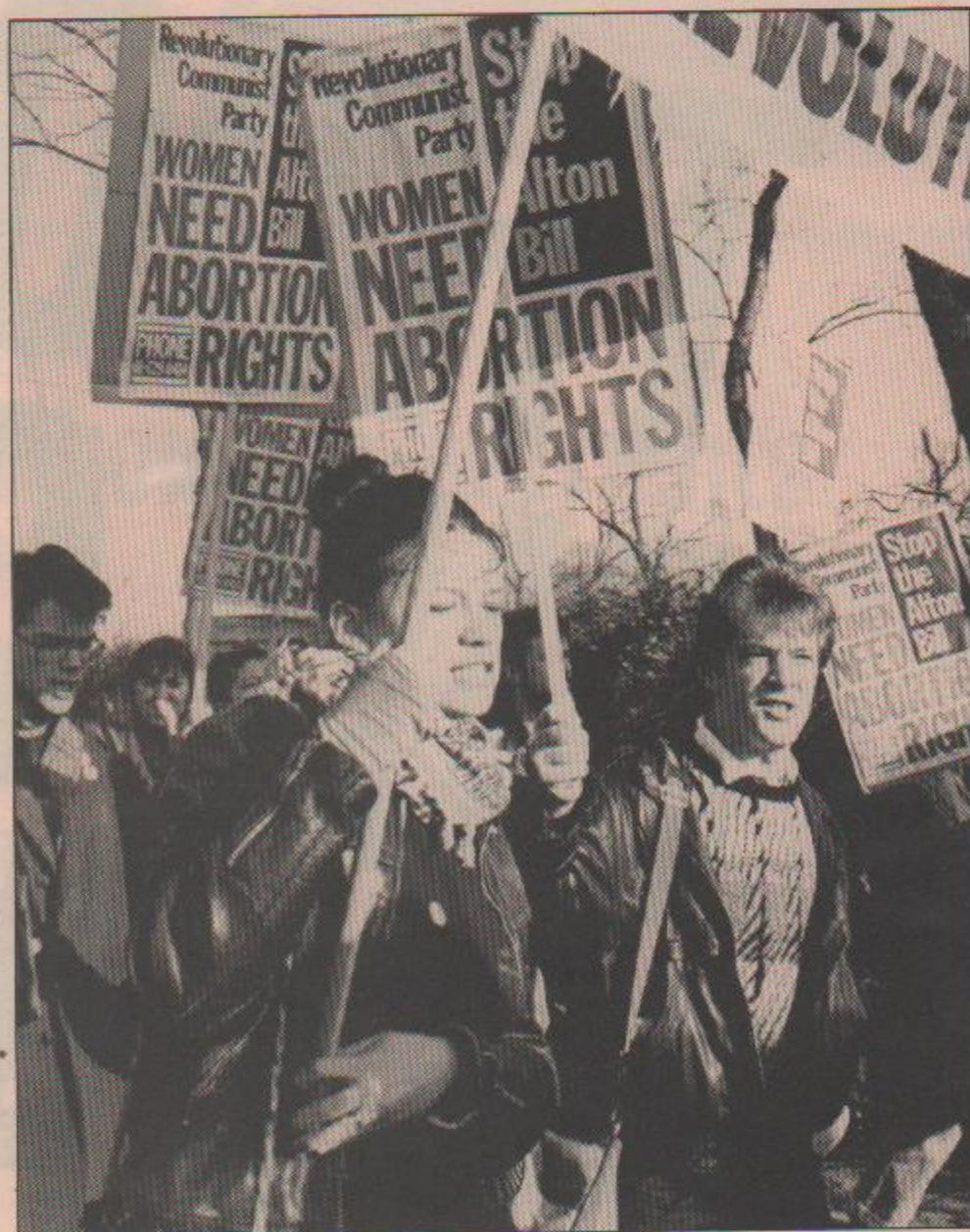
Some activists have complained that they are finding it difficult to build a movement against the moralists. It is difficult. When Tory MP John Corrie mounted the last serious challenge to abortion provision in 1979 it was in a different context. The TUC mobilised many rank

and file trade unionists and university women's groups mobilised thousands of students. Today there is nobody left with the influence or ability to mobilise for us. We have to start from scratch.

To build a successful movement we have to learn the lessons from the past, we have to discuss the problems we will confront, we have to clarify our aims. We hope our dayschool will be a start. We hope that members of left-wing

ON TO THE OFFENSIVE

Joe Bestman



Time to take the offensive

FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Sunday 24 January 9.45am
Caxton House
St John's Way
London N19 (Archway tube)

Plenary sessions on:
Women and the family — the root of the problem
The way to fight

Workshops on:
The rise of the moral right
Health and ethics (led by a woman doctor)
The Marxist theory of women's oppression

Sign up now!

Waged £4 Unwaged and Students £2
Free creche and accommodation
Phone **Janice Bryan** for further details
on (01) 729 0414

- ☐ I need transport
- ☐ I need accommodation
- ☐ I need creche facilities
- Price paid
- £4 waged
- £2 unwaged/students

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone number

Organisation/Trade union

Number of children coming

Ages of children

MARCH!

Join the 'free abortion on demand' contingents on Saturday 16 January in the following places:

- **South London** meet Clapham Common 12 noon
- **Hackney** meet Homerton Hospital 2pm
- **Liverpool** meet Wavertree Park, Botanic Rd/Picton Rd 11am
- **Leeds** meet Town Hall 11am
- **Manchester** meet Polytechnic, All Saints Site, Oxford Rd 12 noon
- **Birmingham** meet Cambridge St 11am

Become an RCP supporter

- ☐ I want more information about the RCP
- ☐ I want to become an RCP supporter
- ☐ I want to sell tris
- ☐ I want to make regular contributions to the RCP

I want to help set up a new branch in

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone

dayschool will give us all a clearer view of what we need in 1988.
Anne Burton

the next step

**Irish Freedom
Movement 01-729 0414**

RALLY

Speaker invited from Derry
7.30pm Friday 29 January
Caxton House,
129 St John's Way,
N19 (Archway tube)

Followed by a benefit disco
Admission (rally and disco)
£3/£1.50 unemployed

TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND NOW



DEMONSTRATE

Saturday 30 January
Assemble 12.30
Whittington Park,
Holloway Road
London N19

Sixteen years after
Bloody Sunday, march
against the British
occupation of Ireland

Supported by the Irish in Britain Representation Group,
the Troops Out Movement, the Labour
Committee on Ireland, the Irish
Freedom Movement