**THE BUDGET AND THE MYTH OF THE BRITISH 'ECONOMIC MIRACLE' — see pages 3, 10 and 11**


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**THE BIG LIE ABOUT IRELAND — see pages 8 and 9**


Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly | 18 March 1988 | 40p


## Irish victims of shoot-to-kill campaign

# 49 FUNERALS

**• Gervais McKerr • Eugene Toman • Sean Burns • Michael Tighe • Roddy Carroll • Seamus Grew • Patrick Elliot • Francis McColgan • Niall McMonagle • Anthony O'Hare • Martin Malone • Brendan Covery • Gerard Mallen • Thomas Reilly • Bridget Foster • Brian Campbell • Colm McGirr • Mark Marron • Declan Martin • Henry Hogan • William Price • John Downes • Tony McBride • Danny Doherty • William Fleming • Sean McIlvenna • Paul Kelly • Gerry Logue • Charles Breslin • Mickey Devine • Davy Devine • Francis Bradley • Tony Gough • Seamus McElwaine • James McKernan • Declan Arthurs • Seamus Donnelly • Tony Gormley • Eugene Kelly • Patrick Kelly • Jim Lynagh • Patrick McKearney • Gerard O'Callaghan • Anthony Hughes • Aidan McAnespie • Mairead Farrell • Daniel McCann • Sean Savage • Kevin McCracken**

**BEFORE the three Irish republicans shot dead by the SAS in Gibraltar could be buried in Belfast, the British Army had shot dead another IRA volunteer. That makes 49 funerals of Irish nationalists shot dead by British forces since the controversy over a shoot-to-kill campaign began in November 1982. There are only half a million nationalists in Northern Ireland. If the same proportion of the British population had been shot dead by the Army and the police, the death toll would be 5500 in just over five years.**


**(Continued on page 2)**




Phil Murphy

THE RUC HARASSES A REPUBLICAN FUNERAL IN DERRY LAST YEAR

# TROOPS OUT NOW!

MAIREAD FARRELL

# A WOMAN AT WAR

**FOR** years the British establishment has peddled the lie that Irish freedom fighters are little more than deranged psychopaths, or gormless victims of fantastic tales of British atrocities told by grandmothers around kitchen fires. The life of Mairead Farrell, shot dead by the SAS in Gibraltar, tells a different story. Born in West Belfast, her parents were not republican, and as she said herself, it was the experience of those years growing up in the Falls Road which led her to take up arms.

Mairead's academic abilities gave her parents hope that she would take a university degree and pursue a professional career. Mairead had other ideas. In 1976, as the Labour government was withdrawing political status from republican prisoners, she enlisted in the Belfast Brigade of the IRA. Within months she had been captured while on a bombing mission. One of those in the three-person unit, Sean McDermott, was shot dead as he tried to escape. The other, Kieran Doherty, was to die on hunger-strike in 1981 protesting against the removal of political status.

## BARBARIC

For the next 10 years of her life, from the age of 19 to 29, those years when most young people are getting jobs or starting families, Mairead Farrell was taking on the barbaric prison regime in the Six Counties. In opposition to the removal of political status, Mairead led the 'no work' protest. In retaliation, the prison authorities locked the prisoners in their cells for 23 hours a day, and refused to allow them to 'slop out'. When the screws realised the prisoners were throwing urine out of the cell windows, they boarded up the windows.

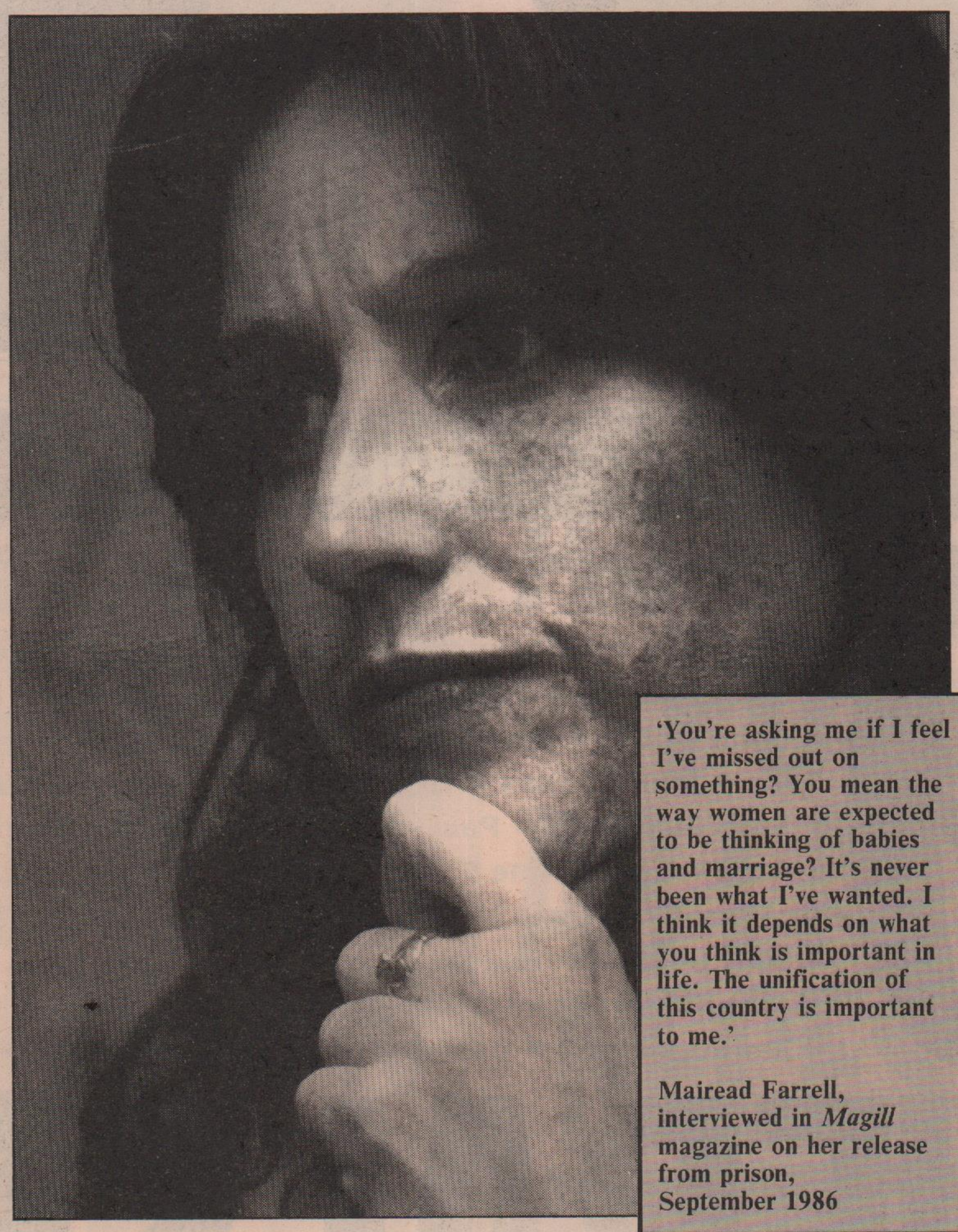
They lived in these excreta-encrusted caves for 13 months. On 1 December 1980 Mairead and two other women, Mary Doyle and Mairead Nugent, went on hunger-strike. That fast was broken by the Northern Ireland office, which agreed to the prisoners' demands, then reneged when they had given up their fast.

## DIGNITY

When Mairead was released in 1986, one of her first acts was to report back for duty to the IRA. At the same time she enrolled at Queen's University Belfast for a course in politics and economics. Even the seats of learning in Ireland are organs of British rule, and even in death, they spare not their malice on Irish freedom fighters. When news of the Gibraltar killings reached Belfast, students at Queen's demanded that the authorities close the college for the funerals and the flag be flown at half mast as is the custom when a lecturer or student dies. The college authorities refused.

The students at Queen's, like thousands of nationalist people, recognise Mairead Farrell as one of their own, who, were it not for the British occupation, could have studied and lived in peace, but who would rather have fought with dignity and honour than live as a slave to the British Queen.

**Mark Ryan**



**'You're asking me if I feel I've missed out on something? You mean the way women are expected to be thinking of babies and marriage? It's never been what I've wanted. I think it depends on what you think is important in life. The unification of this country is important to me.'**

**Mairead Farrell, interviewed in *Magill* magazine on her release from prison, September 1986**

# 49 FUNERALS

**(continued from front page)**

**• FOURTEEN of those killed in this campaign were nationalist civilians with no active involvement in the conflict. The first was 17-year old Michael Tighe, shot repeatedly by a Royal Ulster Constabulary hit-squad in a haybarn near Lurgan, County Armagh in November 1982. His death has since been at the centre of the Stalker affair. Other civilian casualties of the shoot-to-kill campaign include youths sentenced to summary execution for joy-riding or arguing with British Army patrols. The latest to die was Aidan McAnespie, shot without warning by a soldier as he walked near the Aughnacloy Border post last month.**

**• The other 35 shoot-to-kill victims were republican volunteers — 29 from the Irish Republican Army, five from the Irish National Liberation Army. Some were unarmed and shot without warning — like IRA volunteers Mairead Farrell, Sean Savage and Daniel McCann, shot at close range by the SAS in Gibraltar (see centre pages). Some died in gun battles — like IRA members Declan Martin and Henry Hogan, who defeated an SAS squad, killing one soldier, before themselves being shot dead by SAS reinforcements in February 1984 at Dunloy, County Antrim. Most were ambushed while on armed operations against the British forces. And many were wounded, then executed with a single shot through the head.**

**These are all casualties of Britain's colonial war in Ireland. The civilians were killed because the British forces of occupation regard all Irish nationalists as hostile natives. The republicans were killed because they would not endure military rule by a foreign power without a fight. None of them would have died as they did if Ireland was united and free from the attentions of 30 000 British troops and paramilitary police.**

**The five-year shoot-to-kill campaign is an intensification of the war which has raged in the North of Ireland since 1969. The two sides in the Irish War have been out in force again this week. On one side, the thousands of Irish people who turned out to show their repect for the republicans killed in Gibraltar. On the other, the British forces determined to drive Irish nationalists off their own streets. The Army and RUC have now attacked almost 30 Irish funerals since the end of 1983. There will be more shootings, more funerals and more fighting until the war for Irish liberation has been won. The only way we can speed the end of the slaughter is to support the nationalists in their struggle for liberation, and campaign for the immediate withdrawal of the British Army of occupation.**

**EYE-WITNESS REPORT ON BELFAST FUNERALS — NEXT WEEK'S *tns***

POLL TAX

# Labour says: 'Pay up'

**A fortnight before Scottish householders were due to receive poll tax registration forms, the Labour Party met in conference at Perth last weekend to surrender opposition to the Tory tax.**

**There was loud applause at Perth for speakers who said that they would refuse to pay the poll tax. But there was muted support for a motion proposing a non-payment campaign. Instead delegates voted for a legal campaign against the tax and postponed discussion of an illegal protest until a recall conference in the autumn. This formula keeps Labour on the right side of the Tory law, while keeping up hopes that resistance will come at a later date. Labour leader Neil Kinnock spelt out the true position in his opening speech which mentioned the poll tax only once: 'If you go to the polls, you must pay the poll tax.'**

**Last week's relaunch of Labour's 'Stop It' campaign confirmed that opposition to the poll tax has no place in Labour's policy. Party leaders are urging people to send back poll tax registration forms without filling them in, as the law entitles them to if they feel they should not be treated as household heads. The irony is that the forms will be issued by Labour councils, which have warned that if large numbers of people refuse to pay, they will take 'action to compel payment'.**

**It is not too late to start a real resistance movement. The Smash the Poll Tax Campaign, initiated by Glasgow supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party, campaigns around three demands which are essential to build an effective movement:**

- **Break the Tory law: a commitment to defy Tory legislation and defend those victimised for non-implementation or non-payment of the charge must be the starting point of opposition to the scheme.**
- **A working class campaign: the campaign must be based on working class action, not appeals to middle class sympathy, and should involve trade unionists, community groups, women working in the home and the unemployed.**
- **United action by council workers and the community: the campaign must be built around united action in defiance of the poll tax by the council workers who are being told to implement the poll tax procedures, and working class people who are expected to pay it.**

***Carol Taggart***


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**IS THERE A SCOTTISH SOLUTION?**
**The working class and the assembly debate**
**Wednesday 23 March 7.30pm**
Speakers include Brendan O'Hara, Scottish National Party, Derek Owen, Revolutionary Communist Party, and an invited speaker from the Labour Party
**City Halls, Candleriggs, Glasgow**

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly No 11 Editor: Mick Hume

# THEIR SYSTEM, THEIR BUDGET

**THE protests organised by the health service unions to coincide with budget week were not the stuff to force chancellor Nigel Lawson to do anything about the NHS. One-day strikes here, lunchtime demonstrations there, the handing in of a big plaster cast and a blue cake at Number 11 Downing Street; Lawson could safely ignore it all and get on with worrying about the real problem of his battle with Thatcher over the pound.**

**The official health union protests were never intended to put genuine pressure on the government. They were token acts designed to appeal to public sympathy for the NHS, in the hope that 'the weight of opinion' could somehow persuade Lawson to come up with the cash. 'Give us a break, Nigel' said the slogan on the plaster cast delivered to the chancellor. This notion of appealing to a minister's better nature is naive and dangerous. It is based on a complete misassessment of the way in which the capitalist system works.**

▼

**The idea of focusing the health campaign on the debate about the budget has influenced all sides of the official labour movement over recent weeks. Many left-wing groups took their lead from the union leaders, and campaigned around slogans like 'Make NHS day budget day'. They ought to know better. A state budget is not a charitable hand-out decided according to how generous the government is feeling. It is a presentation of accounts on behalf of the capitalist class, drawn up in strict accordance with the laws of the profit system as applied to prevailing conditions. Today, those laws dictate a shift away from state spending on social services.**

**The world economy is in a fragile state, and the British system is shakier than most (see pages 10 and 11). In these circumstances, the Tories' concern is to cut back on unproductive state spending and concentrate as many resources as possible in the hands of private capitalists. This has little to do with the personal predilections of a Thatcher or a Lawson. Every Western government is engaged in a similar exercise of tilting the balance away from public spending. The USA might run up huge budget deficits through spending on sectors like defence, and the Japanese government might invest in its infrastructure. But all of the capitalist powers share a common need to cut back on the amount of money which, according to the standards of the system, is 'wasted' on health and welfare services.**

**Most Tory ministers might well have no private objection, in principle, to giving a little more to the NHS. But such abstract principles count for nothing in the harsh world of capitalist economics. Their budget options are defined by the demands of a system of production which stands or falls on its ability to improve profitability, rather than to make people better.**

▼

**The most basic grasp of what capitalism is about should tell us that there is no point in asking the government to be good sports over the health service. Yet left-wing organisations which claim anti-capitalist credentials still concentrated on requests for more NHS funds and no tax cuts from the budget.**

**The left sought to identify with the widespread mood expressed in media opinion polls. In so doing, it denied angry health workers any voice of their own. Nurses and ancillaries were left trailing along behind a moderate NHS lobby which looked to the Queen Mother for a lead while complaining about Lawson's 'waste of taxpayers' money' — a middle class prejudice more usually expressed against 'excessive' pay rises and 'over-manning' in the public sector. The result is that health workers have got nothing from the campaign, except another demoralising experience of ineffective action.**

**The only pressure which a government has to take account of in its calculations is that generated by the class struggle. The government will set aside the immediate demands of its system only if the operation of the system itself is threatened by the working class. The way to force resources out of the Tories for a decent pay rise in the NHS is to set about organising for united all-out action among health workers, and active solidarity from others. Instead, the left's concern to keep in with mainstream public opinion has helped to demobilise the campaign. This week, health workers took token action then went home to watch the budget debate on the TV news.**

▼

**The working class has no interest in becoming involved in a discussion about how the ruling class can make ends meet for its system. The crisis in the health service is not an argument for putting tuppence on income tax. It is an argument for a new way of organising society. We can never bring that about by quibbling about how paper wealth is distributed on budget day. The problem with capitalism goes far deeper, to the division between exploiter and exploited at the point of production. This is the source of all the social evils in modern Britain. Demanding 'no tax cuts for the rich' only serves to disguise that fact, by creating the impression that our problems could be solved by a minor adjustment in the chancellor's calculations.**

**An effective campaign of working class action is the only way to force the government to meet health workers' immediate needs. But even that would be a temporary success. The capitalist class will continually attempt to wrest back any gains we make, as its crisis-stricken system grows hungrier for profits at our expense. The ultimate solution is to take on the system itself.**

**It is no use asking the state to give us a break on budget day this year or next year or ever. We have to recognise that state as the guarantor of the capitalist order responsible for our problems, and set about breaking its control over the wealth which we create.**

▼

**London RCP Public Meetings**

**Fight Now to Stop the Tories**

All at 7.30pm
Islington: Tuesday 22 March, Islington Central Library, Fieldway Crescent N5
Haringey: Wednesday 23 March, Black Boy pub, 268 West Green Road N15
Hackney: Tuesday 29 March, Rose and Crown pub, Stoke Newington Church Street, N16
Brixton: Tuesday 22 March, St Matthews Meeting Place, Brixton Hill SW2



Don Reed

**TORY LAWSON CUTS TAXES...AND HIS BIRTHDAY CAKE**

## *THATCHER v LAWSON*

# THE UNSOUND POUND

Tory celebrations about the prospect of another tax-cutting budget were marred last week by disagreements between Margaret Thatcher and chancellor Nigel Lawson over their policy towards the pound. The argument about the sterling exchange rate reveals the difficulties they face in resolving the problems of British capitalism. It provides a timely counter to all the bluster about economic miracles.

Since the Big Bang of October 1986 opened up the City of London to foreign investment, massive amounts of capital have flowed into Britain from overseas. These investments are made in pounds; thus international financiers have had a growing need for sterling. Their demands have exerted upward pressure on the pound against other currencies. Because Lawson was worried about the damage this does to the competitiveness of British exports, he pursued an informal policy of pegging the pound down at the level of three German marks. To this end the Bank of England spent £20 billion in the past year buying up foreign currency.

## DOCTRINAIRE

Despite this, the pound broke through the DM3 barrier last week. Lawson responded by declaring the higher sterling rate to be 'unsustainable'. But Thatcher expressed the contrary view that sterling must be allowed to find its own level, free from government intervention. She gave government backing to a policy directly opposed to Lawson's attitude of careful management.

**The contrasting Conservative views about sterling reflect differing opinions about how rapidly the Tories should proceed with their counter-crisis strategy.**

Thatcher is influenced by a small band of the most doctrinaire academic monetarists. She believes that the expansionary monetary policy needed to buy enough foreign exchange to stop sterling's rise would be bound to cause a renewed round of inflation. Her preference is for higher interest rates. This would attract more capital into Britain and push sterling up. Thatcher wants to make it clear to British capitalists that they must become competitive by stepping up their attacks on pay and conditions — as the Tories are doing in the public sector. Employers cannot, warns Thatcher, expect the government to provide any artificial props through currency manipulation.

Lawson has no disagreements with the anti-working class thrust of Thatcher's approach. But he prides himself on being non-doctrinaire and intellectually independent — and he wants to protect his reputation as Britain's economic miracle man. Most importantly, he is less convinced about the ability of British bosses to live up to Thatcher's expectations.

## ACCELERATE

Lawson believes that a policy of letting sterling rise is self-defeating, since it would only accelerate Britain's rush towards economic crisis. Trade figures for the last quarter of 1987 show how Britain's current account is moving further and faster into the red. January's deficit was the biggest on record. In the short term, a further surge in sterling's exchange rate can only aggravate the uncompetitive state of British industry and produce still worse trade figures. In the longer term, such a rising current account deficit could increase *downward* pressure on the pound beyond the Tories' control. This is because it will raise fears among foreign investors about the future of the British economy, which could lead to a flight of capital out of the country and a run on the value of the pound.

**Lawson appreciates that British capitalists are a long way from recovering competitiveness.**

The protests from the Confederation of British Industry over rising sterling rates illustrate their weakness. Lawson wants to ease the pressure, by cutting interest rates to stem sterling's rise. In the run-up to the budget he argued for modest tax cuts, leaving enough in the coffers to end government borrowing. Lawson claims that this would prevent a cut in interest rates from increasing inflation.

Lawson's real fear is that rising sterling rates will provoke a balance of payments crisis long before the employers have increased attacks on pay and conditions sufficiently to compensate for this. The Tories would then be faced with the prospect of turning the screw on the economy to save sterling. Their economic miracle would be exposed for the myth that it is. Whatever happens to interest rates in the wake of the budget, the debate indicates that the Tories are running out of options.

**Tony Kennedy**

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EXPOSING THE EUROPEAN 'ALTERNATIVE' TO ALTON

# ABORTION RIGHTS ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE

**Fenna King takes issue with those who argue that the European model provides an alternative to Liberal MP David Alton's attempt to outlaw late abortions**

David Alton's Bill to reduce the abortion time-limit from 28 to 18 weeks is now being debated in its committee stage in parliament. Many women's rights campaigners have already accepted that some variant of Alton's Bill will become law, and favour amending it to allow abortion on request up to 12 weeks of pregnancy in line with European practice.

**This is a concession to the 'pro-life' lobby, which is out to criminalise all women seeking abortions, and a retreat from fighting for the right to abortion on demand which all women need.**

Labour MP Jo Richardson is keen to bring British practice into line with European law, which generally imposes only limited restrictions on early abortions. East London gynaecologist and obstetrician Wendy Savage considers that if abortion was available on request up to 12 weeks the number of late abortions would be halved. Labour shadow health minister Harriet Harman recently returned from a fact-finding tour in Europe, welcoming a 12-week limit because it would encourage women to make an early decision.

## NO TO ALL TIME-LIMITS

Certainly we want to see improvements in the system to allow for early abortions, but not at the expense of women's right to have an abortion whenever they need it. The problem with accepting the principle of a 12-week limit is that it endorses the view that abortion is inherently wrong, and something that must be restricted. It is impossible to challenge the state's attempt to criminalise women who have abortions if we concede the argument that late abortions are reprehensible. Once we allow our enemies to establish that some abortions should not be tolerated, then they will be well-placed to go a step further and argue that more and more abortions ought to be made illegal.

The idea that Continental abortion laws offer a liberal alternative is a myth. Every country in Europe imposes restrictions on women's right to abortion. In Britain the 1967 Abortion Act and the 1929 Infant Life (Preservation) Act specify that abortion is permissible up to 28 weeks when a woman can satisfy two doctors that her circumstances fit the strict criteria enshrined in the law. Even so, most women have difficulty getting an NHS abortion after 12 weeks, and some find it impossible to get an abortion at all. In France abortion is available on request by law up to 10 weeks after conception. After this, a woman must convince a doctor and a psychiatrist to permit termination on medical grounds.

## 'EVIL'

The Dutch system has no official time-limit, but it is difficult to get an abortion after 12 weeks and impossible after 24 weeks. In Denmark hospitals are obliged to provide women with an abortion up to the twelfth week of pregnancy. Although here too there is no official time-limit, after 12 weeks, trying to get an abortion is a nightmare. The woman must apply to a committee of doctors, established by the ministry of justice. The Swedish system of abortion on request up to 18 weeks is widely regarded as the ideal. But after 18 weeks every abortion must be approved by the national board of health and welfare.

**Everywhere in Europe the legal system sets up abortion as a social evil.**

The formidable array of rules and procedures which regulate medical practice gives legal sanction to those who want to make abortion morally unacceptable. Whether the law allows terminations at 10, 12, 18 or 28 weeks its effect is the same: it criminalises women who need abortions.

By lobbying for a 12-week limit for abortion on request in line with the European model, women's rights campaigners here are in danger of endorsing the criminalisation of women. As long as the state dictates who can and cannot have an abortion, and when they can have it, women do not stand a chance of achieving equal status in society. We should regard abortion as a right which by definition is not negotiable, and that means making no concessions on time-limits. Fighting for women's rights means campaigning for an end to *all* legal restrictions on abortion.

## NO TO STATE CONTROL

Allowing abortion on request up to 12 weeks might appear to give women more freedom over abortion, but as the European experience proves, it does not challenge the control exercised by the state and the medical profession. As many thousands of women have discovered from bitter experience, abortion on request does not mean abortion on demand.

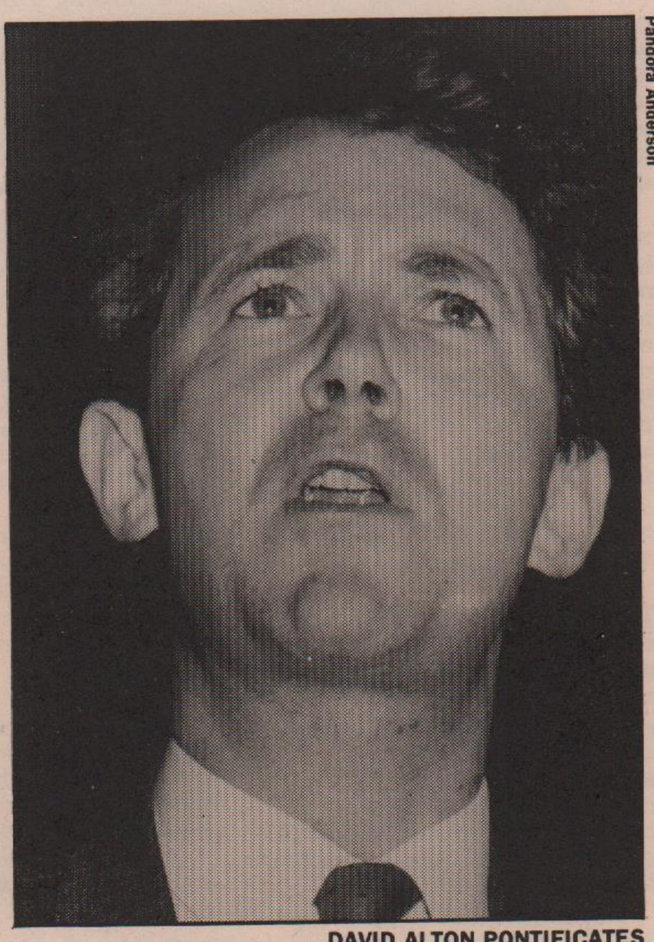
**Women might request an abortion, but the state does everything to make them change their minds.**

Pandora Anderson



JO RICHARDSON PREVARICATES...

Pandora Anderson



...DAVID ALTON PONTIFICATES

The ingenious French authorities have copied the industrial model of a cooling-off period between balloting and striking. Many employers use the time-lag between a vote for a strike and the act of downing tools to put pressure on the workforce to call off the action. In similar fashion the authorities compel a woman who has decided to have an abortion to undergo compulsory counselling before a final decision is made. The one-week waiting period between counselling and termination puts pressure on the woman to reconsider. It is designed to make women think twice about going ahead with an abortion, and gives more scope for husbands, boyfriends, parents and friends to influence the outcome.

It is the same under the supposedly liberal Dutch system. Here the woman must go through a counselling session and a five-day 'bedenktijd' (reconsideration) period. If she sticks to her guns and decides to go ahead, the doctor still has the final say over whether her decision is justified. In Sweden where women are meant to have the right to abortion on request up to 18 weeks, the system makes a mockery of the law. After 12 weeks women have to submit to a special investigation and intensive counselling by a welfare officer. To qualify for an abortion a woman must be a Swedish citizen or must have lived there long enough to be granted the privilege.

Those in Britain who are calling for abortion on request up to 12 weeks ignore the fact that the whole system works to deny women control over pregnancy. The 1967 Abortion Act was carefully framed to give the state and the medical profession full control over terminations. Here women have to confront the bigotry that is rampant in the medical profession, convince two doctors that they are deserving cases, and then go through the trauma of being lectured by an abortion counsellor. So long as this system of state control prevails, any law which allowed abortion on request up to 12 weeks would be of little use to women. Fighting for women's rights means campaigning for an end to all state controls which deny women the right to regulate their own fertility.

## NO TO ABORTION CUTS

Even when the state appears to grant women limited rights to abortion, it denies them the facilities to make this possible. Those who champion the European system demonstrate an ignorance of the shoddy provision available, and choose to forget that our own third-rate service could not support any liberalisation of the law even up to 12 weeks.

Although French law requires all hospitals to provide a special abortion service, in some regions such as eastern France abortion facilities are non-existent. Elsewhere the limited provision just cannot keep up with the demand. Lille Hospital's 16 special beds are always full. Women often complain that the level of medical expertise is appalling, and old-fashioned surgery leaves many infected. The picture of minimal facilities and poor treatment is much the same in every country in Europe.

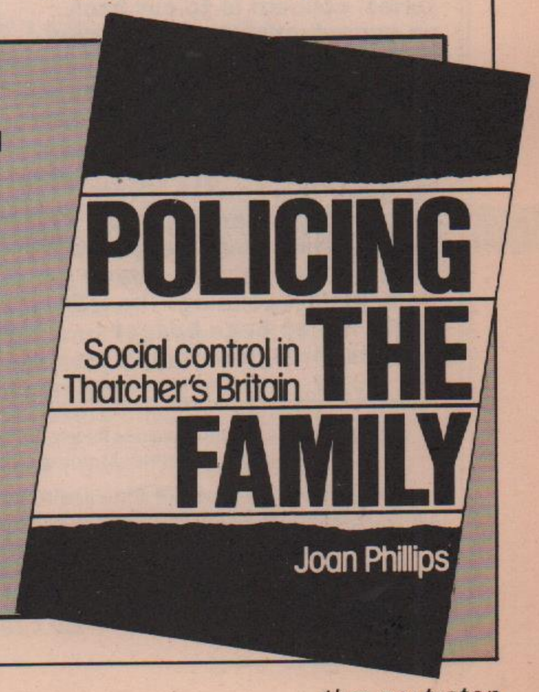
**In many cases European women granted the right to 'request' an abortion are expected to pay for an operation which they cannot afford.**

After 14 years of being lobbied by women's rights campaigners, the Dutch government finally agreed in 1986 to pay for abortions on the health service. But since most women in Holland find it faster and more efficient to go to a private clinic, they are forced to pay about £80 out of their own pockets. In Sweden the state provides a free or subsidised service for teenagers alone.

Abortion services in Britain are the first to go when cuts are threatened. The national health service now offers a skeletal service in most parts of the country, and no service at all in many places. More and more women who manage to gain permission to terminate a pregnancy are forced to go private for a princely sum. Even the service offered by private agencies is now under attack, as the authorities tighten up the rules and regulations. Demanding free and easy access to abortion up to 12 weeks in these circumstances is like asking for manna from heaven. Fighting for women's liberation means fighting for free abortion on demand and the facilities to make this possible.


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**PUBLIC MEETING**
**THEIR MORALS AND OURS**
**Speaker: Joan Phillips**
**Thursday 24 March 7pm**
**Central Library, (off Northumberland Street), Newcastle**



MPs voted by 254 to 201 last week in favour of the witch-hunt Clause in the Local Government Bill which bans local councils from promoting homosexuality. The persecution of lesbians and gays will receive the Royal Assent in April. When the legislation comes into force in June any bigot will be free to take a local council to court to stop them spreading what the Tories have dubbed 'filth on the rates'.

The Clause means that councils could be stopped from funding lesbian and gay groups. Books about homosexuality could be removed from public libraries. Teachers could be sacked if they dare to suggest that homosexuality is anything other than 'unnatural' or 'immoral'. Councils who hire out facilities to lesbian and gay groups will run the risk of being taken to court, the legality of lesbian and gay student clubs will be questioned, and gay pubs and nightclubs will have their licences reviewed.

**Tory bigots had a clear run in parliament.**

The Labour leadership insisted that it too was opposed to local councils which allowed lesbians and gays to flaunt their homosexuality. Labour environment spokesman John Cunningham supported the Clause at the committee stage, and only later decided to oppose it. But Labour's latest *Campaign Briefing* indicates that there has been no change of heart: 'Labour does not think that local authorities should "teach" or "promote" homosexuality. But we believe everyone should encourage acceptance of people's differing lifestyles and sexuality.' Labour has put on a show of liberal tolerance, while accepting the prejudice that homosexuals should be neither seen nor heard.

## HEEL

The Tories have displayed none of the ambivalence of the Labour camp. Nicholas Fairbairn caught their uncompromising mood well: 'Anyone who comprehends the libidinal and psychological origins of male and female homosexuality should understand that it is a major and unnatural perversion.' While the Tories got straight to the point and declared that homosexuality was a perversion, Labour dodged the issue and talked in vague terms about 'human rights' and 'artistic freedom'. Once the opposition had conceded this vital ground, the Tories had won. Margaret Thatcher only had to hint at the 'threat' posed to children by 'glamorising' homosexuality, and Neil Kinnock was forced to come to heel.

Now that the Clause is about to come into effect, the Tories do not doubt that councillors will uphold it. Some will do so with enthusiasm, and some with shows of sadness. But whatever their stance, every Labour council will obey the courts and implement the provisions of the Clause. Gay MP Chris Smith is considering bringing forward a private member's bill to abolish the Clause, while others are planning to take the matter to the European parliament and Court of Human Rights. These responses are calculated to channel the resistance of lesbians and gays along constitutional lines.

## THREAT

**We must reject this approach for two reasons. It does not tackle popular prejudice against homosexuals, and it does not deal with the immediate threat to lesbians and gays posed by the new law.**

Appealing to the courts to overrule the Clause as a violation of human rights does not confront the widespread prejudice that promoting homosexuality is a violation of morality. The Tories have managed to convince many people that homosexuality is an affront to family values and a corruptive influence on susceptible school children. We must persuade people that the oppression of lesbians and gays is a denial of democratic rights that we cannot tolerate, and that a person's sexuality can never be a problem for the working class. The real problem we face is a capitalist class which uses official morality to justify its system of exploitation and oppression.

Pleading with the capitalist courts to overturn the Tory law is a futile exercise which does not confront the attacks on lesbians and gays that are under way now. Instead of putting our faith in lengthy legal wrangles, we need to try to organise effective disobedience among librarians, teachers, and town hall clerical and manual workers now. The law must be turned into a dead letter if we are to prevent the exclusion of lesbians and gays from public life. This means winning working class people to the conviction that they have a stake in standing up for homosexual rights against Tory bigotry.

We have to confront the attack on lesbians and gays head-on, by demanding the complete decriminalisation of homosexuality, and by fuelling resistance to Tory morality.

*MPS VOTE FOR THE CLAUSE*

# 'QUEER-BASHING' BECOMES LAW

**Last week's commons vote to outlaw the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities makes it legal to terrorise lesbians and gays — Don Milligan reports**



THERE'S A LAW AGAINST THIS: WE MUST FIGHT IT

*LONDON COMPACT*

# ALL-PARTY INDOCTRINATION



ILEA'S NEIL FLETCHER

Pandora Anderson

**Tory and Labour politicians are arguing over who should get the credit for London Compact, a joint venture between employers and educationalists. At the launch of their Action for Cities initiative, Conservative chiefs gave Compact a big plug. At county hall across the river, Labour leaders of the Inner London Education Authority were boasting about launching the pilot Compact in Docklands in 1986. But Compact is nothing to crow about. The Docklands experiment reveals it as nothing more than a scheme to indoctrinate school students and vet them for low-paid jobs.**

**Compact's sponsors claim it will build a bridge between Britain's divided communities. They say they want to give local people living amid the dereliction of Britain's industrial past in inner-city wastelands the chance of a bright new future in the developing yuppie belts like Docklands. The aim of London Compact is to provide a transmission belt for local school-leavers to get jobs in local industry. In Docklands, 22 member companies of Compact are promising 300 jobs to fifth-formers leaving four Docklands schools in June.**

## STRINGS

**Yet Compact is a lot like every other cheap-labour scheme. The employers are not giving anything away because 300 jobs, many of them in notoriously low-paid sectors such as retailing and hairdressing, are their standard annual intake. The bosses reserve the right to reduce their intake as required. There are no strings attached to Compact membership. But local students have to tie themselves in knots to get on the 'priority hiring' list. To qualify they must meet the following criteria:**

**'Not less than 85 per cent attendance at morning and afternoon sessions throughout fourth and fifth years; not less than 90 per cent punctuality at morning and afternoon registration throughout fourth and fifth years; fulfilment of 90 per cent of deadlines for all assignments, including homework; certificates of credits gained in Maths and English; satisfactory completion of two weeks' work experience; satisfactory attendance on a full social and health education course, to include participation in a community service project; and evidence of developing self-respect and respect for others.'**

**Unless your name is Goody-two-shoes, you're unlikely to meet these requirements. You're not meant to. Compact's 'personal goals' aim to help employers select only the most conscientious students.**

**London Compact will not create a single new job, nor guarantee any job which currently exists. Member companies have joined the scheme because it gives them free access to as much pre-tested factory fodder as they need. For working class families living on delapidated inner-city estates and hoping for a way out, it is another dead-end exit constructed by Labour local authorities and Tory central government.**



TORY KENNETH BAKER

Pandora Anderson

**Compact is a useful way for the Tories to stamp their moral standards on inner-city communities, and indoctrinate working class kids with the Thatcherite self-help ethic. You can bet you won't get anywhere near the priority hiring list unless you improve your performance rating.**

**A teacher from one of the Docklands schools explained why the Tories are so keen on Compact: 'If I was one of them, every time I looked out of the window and saw these housing estates, I would start wondering how to stop local people invading my patch. Apart from the obvious answer, barbed wire, I might well have come up with a moral fibre-type scheme like London Compact.' All that Labour can say is 'We thought of it first.'**

***Andrew Calcutt***

# Mutilated for being Iranian

**LAST September 37-year old Iranian Mohammad Hajiazim left his car on a double yellow line outside a bank in Hounslow High Street, Middlesex. He went into the bank and stayed inside for less than five minutes. When Hajiazim came out, police charged him with a parking offence and arrested him. They took him back to the station where they punched him and broke his glasses. They beat him so savagely that they smashed one of his testicles.**

**Hajiazim's parking offence came up in court last week. The magistrate found him guilty of 'obstruction,' and fined him £100. There has been no action against the officers who beat him up. That week in September the British media whipped up a frenzy of patriotic fervour against Iranian 'fanatics' who were threatening Western interests in the Gulf. That was enough for the police to mutilate a man of Middle Eastern appearance who parked his car in the wrong place at the wrong time.**

*SOUTH AFRICAN FAR RIGHT GRABS HEADLINES, BUT...*

# BOTHA NEEDS NO LESSONS FROM 'NAZIS'

**The far right in South Africa is big news at the moment. But, argues Russell Osborne, the Botha regime, not the militant right, is still the real problem for opponents of apartheid**

Western TV screens are full of images of Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) leader Eugene Terreblanche surrounded by strutting storm-troopers and chanting supporters giving Nazi-style salutes. In the florid prose of the British press, Terreblanche takes on the characteristics of a Hitler or a Goebbels. The *Sunday Times* describes him as 'a pale-eyed, mesmeric orator who is expert at whipping a crowd into a frenzy'. *The Times* notes this ex-policeman's capacity for 'spellbinding oratory'

Journalistic exaggeration aside, the growth of right-wing Afrikaner organisations has become something of a problem for president PW Botha. The recent by-election defeats suffered by his ruling National Party point to the continuing erosion of the government's traditional Afrikaner power-base.

The opposition Conservative Party won the by-elections and now holds 22 seats in the Nationalists' former Transvaal stronghold. The Conservatives are closely allied to the AWB. The Afrikaans press still backs Botha, and was at pains to point out the Conservative Party/AWB link before the by-elections, in an attempt to scare off voters. But media revelations did little to stem support for the Conservatives, signalling that many Transvaal whites think Terreblanche talks sense.

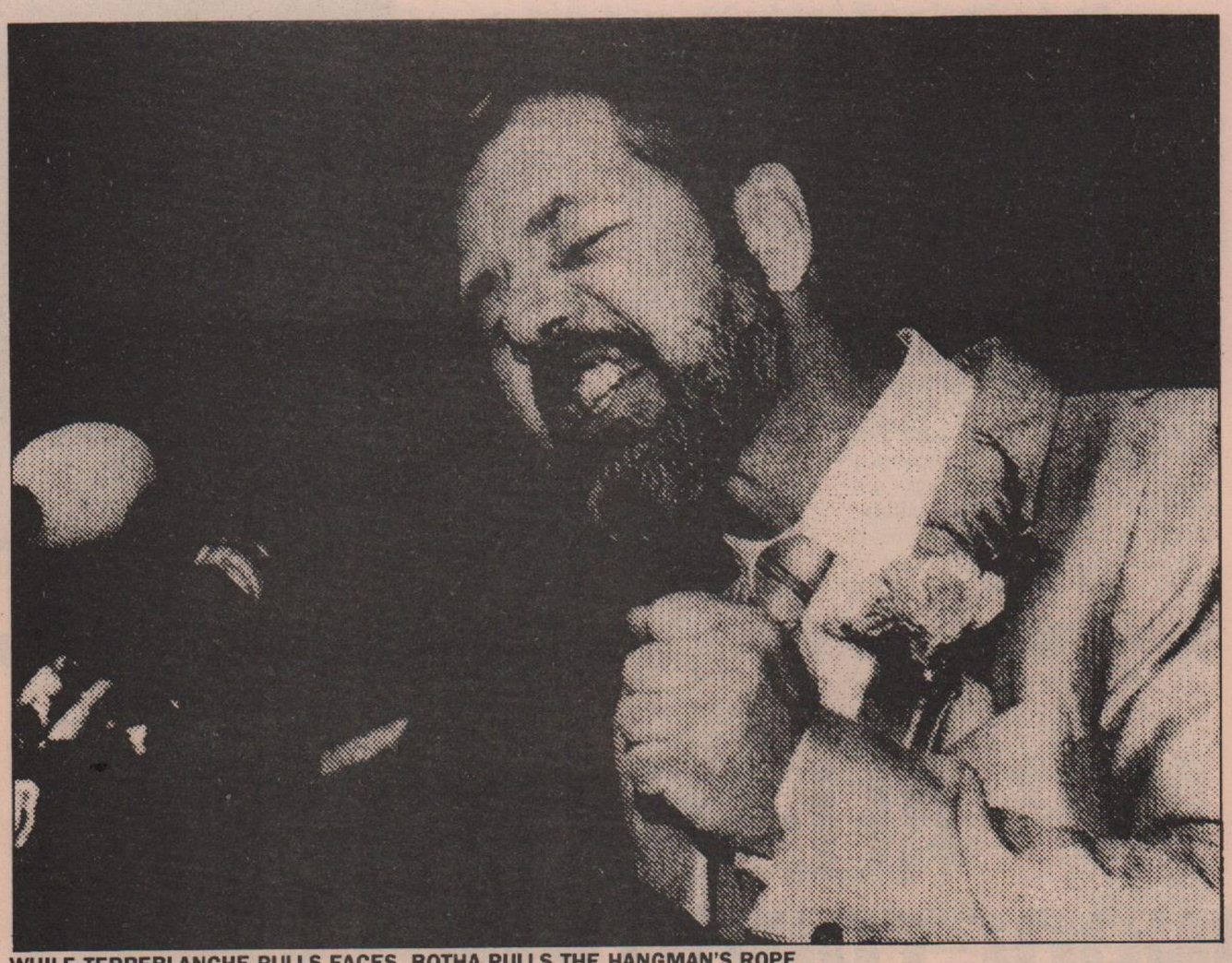
**Less than half the Afrikaners (who make up 60 per cent of the white population), now support Botha's National Party.**

The far right is without doubt a very nasty proposition for opponents of the apartheid regime. Besides its blatant racism and anti-semitism it is also probably responsible for a great deal of freelance violence against radical organisations and trade unions. AWB members openly flaunt a wide range of weaponry, while Terreblanche frequently threatens to take up arms in pursuit of his ends. At a recent rally he spoke of having to 'train for the night when we will have to use violence to claim what is rightfully ours'.

## BARBAROUS

The by-election losses are certainly a psychological blow to the Nationalists, after 40 years of unchallenged power. But their position is not really at risk. A majority of the white population still supports them. In a general election the current swing away from the government would leave Botha with a parliamentary majority of more than 100. Dramatic neo-Nazi parades notwithstanding, he is still firmly in control.

The current emphasis on the far right in the Western media is a dangerous diversion. It allows those who back Botha, like the Tories, to depict him as a well-intentioned reformer who should be supported against the pro-apartheid extremists. This serves to disguise the big problem facing black people in South Africa: an increasingly barbarous Botha regime, which is taking ruthless steps to safeguard the foundations of apartheid.



WHILE TERREBLANCHE PULLS FACES, BOTHA PULLS THE HANGMAN'S ROPE

**While Terreblanche struts theatrically, Botha gets on with the job of containing black resistance.**

The Nationalist government is pursuing a twin-track strategy. It has made some minor concessions designed to derail the black opposition movement and create a layer of pliable black stooges. Meanwhile, it shows no mercy to those who refuse to be bought off by these phoney reforms. The few token reforms which Botha has conceded have provoked resentment among his erstwhile hardline Afrikaner supporters. But these paltry concessions pale into insignificance next to his ruthless campaign of terror against black opponents of the apartheid system.

- It is the Botha government, and not the AWB, which has thrown more than 30 000 opponents into apartheid's jails since the proclamation of a state of emergency in June 1986.

- Terreblanche supporters have assassinated some black activists and trade unionists. But Botha's government organises the systematic liquidation of resistance leaders. Even when official South African police and troops take a back seat in the conflict, the Botha regime is still behind most of the deaths in South Africa.

The government has used its informal network of hired vigilantes, undercover squads and stooge homeland regimes to establish a reign of terror. The combined efforts of these apartheid agents have helped to drive open resistance to apartheid off the streets of South Africa. In the KwaZulu homeland, the conservative black Inkatha movement led by Botha's stooge Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, has done far more to set back the struggle against apartheid than has the AWB. Inkatha thugs have massacred hundreds of black activists in the last few months alone, while Buthelezi keeps up his posture as an opponent of apartheid. In most of the other 'independent black homelands', black trade unions have been banned by the sham governments which carry out Botha's bidding.

- There are almost certainly AWB supporters in high places in the army and police. But South African army genocide against the Namibian, Angolan and Mozambican peoples, and the large-scale shooting of township youth armed with only bricks and bottles, are not the consequence of a few far-right policemen and troops running out of control. The ministry of justice is sending the Sharpeville Six to the gallows. Mass murder is official apartheid policy.

- The AWB laments Botha's lifting of some of the strict segregation laws which made up 'petty apartheid'. AWB goons often harass black residents of formerly white city suburbs, demanding the restoration of measures to keep them out. The Botha regime has certainly altered the letter of the law which forced blacks to live in segregated slums or starve in semi-desert labour 'reserves'. But in practice nothing much has changed. Police and soldiers now drive 'surplus labour' out of town at gunpoint under anti-squatting or public health laws, rather than the old housing segregation rules.

**Pressure from a disenchanted white electorate channelled through right-wing organisations is a problem for Botha.**

It limits his room for manoeuvre in restructuring the apartheid system so as to reduce mass black resistance. But the far right's bluster is only a more extreme version of what has long been the Botha government's stock-in-trade: official, large-scale and systematic violence against the black population. Pointing to the AWB bogey can even provide Botha's supporters with a convenient excuse for measures like his recent ban on 17 anti-apartheid organisations.

## GUARANTOR

The barrier which stands between the black majority and democracy in South Africa is not the AWB, or even Botha as an individual politician. It is the apartheid state over which Botha presides. That state was built on the oppression of the black population, and still stands as the guarantor of the discriminatory capitalist system in South Africa. We should not allow our opposition to the apartheid state to be distracted by stories about the far-right challenge to mainstream Nationalists. When you've got PW Botha in government, who needs a 'Hitlerite'?

## LIVERPOOL PORT WORKERS HOT-CARGO APARTHEID URANIUM

**PORT WORKERS in Liverpool are taking action to halt the movement of products manufactured from Namibian or South African uranium.**

**Last month a consignment of 13 containers of uranium hexafluoride, manufactured by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd at Springfields, near Preston, arrived at the docks. When port workers demanded information about this consignment, they were informed that BNFL would not provide any documentation. But BNFL did admit that 50-80 per cent of their export processing work is done on Namibian uranium, and that all uranium oxide fed into Springfields is systematically mixed — so all the output from Springfields ought to contain that proportion of Namibian uranium.**

### BLOCKADE

**The Liverpool port workers refused to accept BNFL's assertion that it was impossible to identify any particular consignment as South African in origin, and slapped a ban on handling the containers. Although management eventually got nine of the containers loaded, four remained on the quayside after the Atlantic Container Lines vessel sailed for America.**

**On Tuesday 2 March, ACL attempted to load these containers on to another vessel. The port workers again refused to handle the cargo, and BNFL was forced to have them driven back to Springfields. Latest reports suggest that BNFL could attempt to break the blockade by re-routing the containers through Felixstowe, or by obtaining a court order against the Liverpool blacking action.**

### SPIRIT

**Direct action by British workers remains the only effective way of showing solidarity with the black people of South Africa and Namibia. It is no use appealing to the Tories to impose sanctions. As the activities of state-owned BNFL show, they are up to their necks in supporting apartheid. At last week's meeting of EEC foreign ministers, Britain and West Germany even tried to veto any discussion of the new bans in South Africa. Instead of sitting back and looking to the government to act against apartheid, we need to spread the spirit of active solidarity which has been glimpsed in Liverpool.**

**Send union messages of support for the Liverpool port workers c/o Transport House, 37 Islington, Liverpool 3.**

# letters page

## DON'T COMPLY WITH THE CLAUSE

**WE** are activists in the North-West Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Equality. Now that everyone has finished congratulating themselves on the success of the Manchester march last month, our meetings beg the question 'Where do we go from here?'

It seems common sense that we should build towards a bigger, more effective campaign, whose aim is not simply to fight against the Clause but to fight for the full equality of lesbians and gay men. In our last meeting we had a discussion about building support in the trade unions, particularly among council workers and teachers who will be asked to implement the Clause from June. We drew up a motion calling on the union membership to fight for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, to reject the Clause, and to support union members who refuse to implement it.

To our dismay, some people in the campaign have argued against this. They say it is utopian to expect union members who won't fight for their own jobs to support lesbian and gay equality. They also argue that by raising the issue we risk alienating support from less radical sections of the campaign.

The best way to lose support for a campaign is to make it ineffective. A defensive strategy may not alienate liberal churchmen, but it is a step away from building support among ordinary workers — the people who can block the Clause, and who stand to gain from refusing to implement the moral witch-hunt.

The alternative to non-compliance is compliance. If activists back down from building a non-compliance campaign, local authority workers will be pushed into participating in the Tories' offensive. This can only lead to further isolation of lesbians and gay men, and a step backwards for the working class.

**Penny, Ian and Paul**
**Manchester**

## AN AFGHAN ANSWER

**PAUL FLEWERS (letters, 4 March) doesn't think there is any answer for the Afghan masses caught between Soviet occupiers and Islamic fundamentalist rebels. He notes that the Soviets and the mujahideen are both reactionary. However, he fails to take account of the way in which the influence of one form of reaction (fundamentalism) is largely a consequence of the record of the other (Stalinism).**

**Since the twenties, the Soviet Union's foreign policy has been designed to create buffer zones between itself and the Western imperialists. To this end, the Soviets have a long tradition of picking up and then dropping national liberation struggles and left-wing movements. The Soviet authorities have also learnt how to build mutually beneficial relationships with local ruling classes. This opportunistic policy has had catastrophic effects, and it has discredited communism and left-wing ideas throughout the third world. In a number of countries in Asia and the Middle East, where Soviet influence has been strongest, Islamic fundamentalism now occupies the place where the left should be. Afghanistan is a case in point: the growing influence of the mullahs**

## POLICE USE CHILD ABUSE SCARES

**POLICE** recently carried out a dawn raid to capture an alleged 'child abuse ring' on the Broxtowe council estate on the north side of Nottingham. A few days later 'the ring' was released.

Why are scares about child abuse often raised in connection with rundown estates like Broxtowe? There is no evidence to show that child abuse is more common on council estates than in middle class suburbs or upper class mansions. Yet the action of the authorities always seems to be focused on places where working class people live.

The explanation must be that the spotlight on child abuse has little to do with the problem of child abuse itself. Recurring child abuse scares are part of a wider strategy to create more tolerance and sympathy for direct intervention by the state. Whether or not there has been child abuse going on in Broxtowe, the intention of the authorities was to stir up suspicion and win support for a greater police presence in the area. They were successful on both counts. On the day of the raid, people were checking up to see if their neighbours were missing. All the people we spoke to were in favour of police intervention.

Faced with mounting anger and bitterness, the authorities are using the horror we all feel about child abuse as a ticket into our communities. We must remember their motives, and their record of abusing men, women and children throughout the world, before welcoming them.

**Bernadette and Joanne**
**Nottingham**

## HACKNEY SQUATTERS

**HACKNEY COUNCIL justifies its mass evictions policy on the grounds that homeless families in bed and breakfast must have priority over squatters who occupied empty properties on the Stamford Hill estate. Coming from a council which has closed its homeless persons section to the public, with the result that single homeless and homeless families cannot even get into bed and breakfast accommodation, this is pure hypocrisy.**

**Unfortunately, the official union response has been equally negative. Housing director Janet Jones did a deal with a few squatters whereby they would be offered tenancies for the most delapidated flats which homeless families turned down. The senior housing shop steward, a Militant supporter, then presided over a Nalgo housing department meeting which came out against the squatters and criticised the council for abusing normal allocations procedures and work practices. This failure to defend all homeless people, including squatters, against council attacks, left the way open for a great deal of misinformed vitriol from the floor about queue-jumpers, etc. While all this was going on, the police were going on to the estate and forcibly evicting 300 people. The Stamford Hill squatters are now occupying a former Salvation Army hostel, and the council has warned of further episodes in its 'get tough' policy.**

**This is the same council which is using a redeployment scheme to mask hundreds of redundancies, including the loss of 10 per cent of jobs in the housing department. Hackney council is clearly not on the same side as council workers. But our local union officials are too much in cahoots with Labour group councillors to lead the fight for homes or jobs.**

***Hackney council worker***



Pandora Anderson

**WAITING FOR EVICTION FROM STAMFORD HILL**

## BOSSES OUT OF OUR UNION

**ON** the spot sackings are Islington council's new policy, due to be ratified within a few days. Heads of departments will be empowered to implement instant dismissal against employees who, in their estimation, are 'guilty' of offences like bad timekeeping or 'excessive sickness'. If this isn't bad enough, some of the executives wielding these draconian powers are members of my union, Nalgo. When the issue comes up at branch meetings, they will be entitled to listen in on our discussions about how to resist them. My opinion is that managers who want to join a club should apply for membership of the Labour Party. I'm sure they are the kind of people that Margaret Hodge and Neil Kinnock are looking for. But our union should be exclusively for workers who need to defend themselves against council employers, whether Tory, Labour or SLDP.

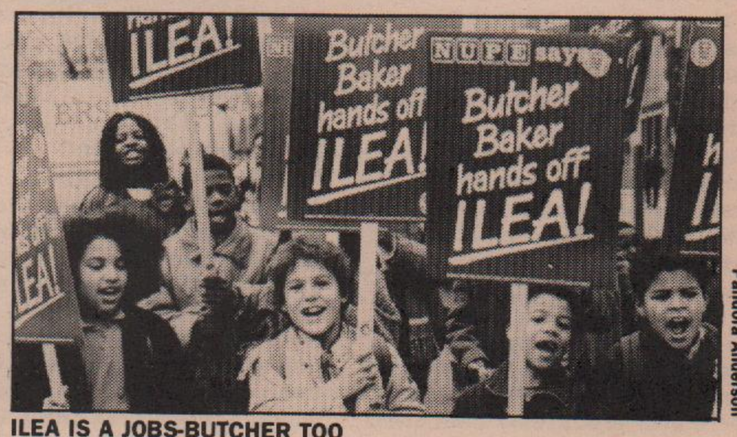
**Islington council worker**

## ILEA: JOBS OR DEMOCRACY?

**I WAS** looking forward to using the article on Ilea (*tns*, 11 March) to argue for all Ilea workers to unite in defence of jobs, pay and conditions. But I found that the article put too much stress on Tory plans to abolish Ilea, and not enough on Labour-controlled Ilea's plans to abolish 6000 jobs.

I agree that abolishing Ilea, as an elected authority, would be an attack on local democracy. But this fact is being used as a cop-out by Labour politicians and union leaders. At the rally after last Tuesday's Ilea workers' march, they argued that we must stand with the Labour administration, cuts and all, against the Tories. Although they came in for some barracking from the 300 activists who stayed around to hear them, their 'Save Ilea (at all costs)' approach has an influence on many of the people who had left, or who weren't on the demonstration at all. I think it would have been better, therefore, to put a more single-minded emphasis on the fact that Labour Ilea is an employer which is just as ruthless as its equivalent in Tory central government.

**Southwark teacher**




Pandora Anderson

**ILEA IS A JOBS-BUTCHER TOO**

**Write to *tns* BCM JPLTD, WC1N 3XX**



## GIBRALTAR: A UNION RESPONSE

**AT our Nalgo branch meeting in Hammersmith on 10 March, a large majority condemned the SAS assassination of three unarmed Irish people in Gibraltar. When somebody criticised the motion, talking about 'the IRA's murder of innocent civilians', one speaker after another demanded to know how anyone in the union could support the British Army's occupation of Ireland. The union reaffirmed its support for the right of Irish people to fight for their freedom. We agreed to send a message of sympathy to relatives of those murdered; and the branch has agreed to pay for a republican speaker to come over from Ireland to address a Hammersmith Trades Council meeting in the town hall on 6 April.**

***Sheona York***
***Hammersmith Nalgo***

# the propaganda war



# TOGETHER WE CAN CRACK IT

**I WANT to grow up on an estate where the big kids don't smash everything up with riot batons and evict homeless squatters. I want to grow up in a place where my gran can open her front door and not be frightened that people will take her things and call it the poll tax. I want to grow up in a world where my sister can get an abortion without being bothered by horrible men with stethoscopes and dog-collars. But perhaps most immediately, I want to grow up in a world where me, my gran, my sister and everybody else can switch on the TV without being assaulted by anti-crime adverts put out by a Tory home office to dupe the public.**

**The high-profile TV advertising campaign — 'Crime: together we can crack it' — features an array of sad-looking school children appealing to us to build a crime-free future. It is a cheap and unsophisticated attempt to manipulate viewers' emotions. The campaign, backed up by a free booklet, marks a new advance in the Tory policy of hyping up scares about crime for political purposes. The government hopes that it will serve several related functions.**

**First, it is an exercise in the politics of 'Don't worry about that, worry about this.' The authorities are always on the look-out for ways to divert our attention from major social problems like unemployment, which are caused by the system, towards manufactured panics about crime or football hooliganism, which are blamed on anti-social individuals. At its crudest, this means telling London commuters that the big problem on the underground is a few robberies — at a time when cuts and staff shortages have caused 31 deaths in the King's Cross fire, provoked passenger revolts over repeatedly cancelled trains, and turned the tube system into a filthy, rodent-infested Dickensian ruin.**

**Second, the anti-crime campaign is designed to win public sympathy for the police, and to endorse the idea that all those who oppose the authorities are criminals. The militarisation of the British police force, and its increasingly up-front, brutal methods, have knocked some big dents in the traditional image of the impartial, unobtrusive, local Plod. The powers that be hope to win back support for the police with adverts emphasising their supposed role in protecting the young, the old and the vulnerable from child abusers, violent robbers and rapists. If the police are public servants, it also follows that the pickets, black youths or gay men they are attacking and arresting must be public enemies.**

**Racism is always the strongest theme underpinning official anti-crime propaganda. Of course the adverts don't say 'Help the police to persecute black people'; they don't need to, because the authorities have already drummed home the message over recent years. For example, the newspaper ads accompanying the TV broadcasts list 'mugging' before rape as a major violent crime. They work on the implicit understanding that 'mugging' is interpreted as street robbery committed by young black males.**

**The last element of the anti-crime campaign is an attempt to turn the working class in on itself and destroy any notion of collective identity. The adverts and booklet emphasise the need to take personal responsibility for crime prevention. We are all advised to build six-foot walls around our homes, fit locks everywhere, and keep a sharp eye out for suspicious characters down our street. The aim is to convert our class into countless little frightened family units, each one safely locked up behind its security system, peeping out from behind the curtains in case the milkman is really an axe-murderer. The home office propaganda talks a lot about 'community cooperation' against crime, and Neighbourhood Watch schemes. What it means is forming a police supporters' club and spying on your neighbours who don't fit in.**

**The latest campaign will probably be really effective only among those who are already sympathetic to its message. Many other people retain a healthy cynicism about such initiatives. There may be 42 000 Neighbourwood Watch committees, but these are overwhelmingly concentrated in middle class suburbs; two years ago a report discovered that there were more in Croydon than in all the inner-city London boroughs put together. Yet even many people who don't trust the Tories would accept that crime is a matter of major concern. Their complaint is that the government should pay the same attention to solving other problems, like the crisis in the health service. But we should go further, and say that the anti-crime campaign is entirely reactionary. Its sole purpose is to weaken the working class, and to strengthen the hand of the state's legal and policing machine against us.**

**There are other issues which demand our exclusive attention today. I want to live in a world where an Iranian can park his car in Hounslow for five minutes without having a testicle smashed by the police and being fined £100 for obstruction. I want to live in a world where an Irishman can walk a few yards to a Gaelic football match in Aughnacloy without being 'accidentally' shot dead by a British soldier. I want to live in a world where a health worker is not called a cheat because she has to do two jobs to make ends meet. The world I don't want to live in is one where the police feel free to maraud around working class estates, while we are preoccupied keeping 'em peeled behind the double-lock double-glazing.**

***Linda Ryan***

# AFTE KI AI

**The response in Britain to the SAS shootings in Gibraltar illustrates how the authorities get away with their dirty war against Irish republicans. Here we reprint extracts from Mick Hume's speech at a London meeting sponsored by the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Irish Freedom Movement last Friday**

**"When the SAS is committed there is normally an understanding that no prisoners will be taken."**

That was how an insider at Army HQ in Northern Ireland explained the Gibraltar killings to one newspaper. *"No prisoners will be taken."* It is clear confirmation that the rules of war are the only rules which the British authorities recognise when dealing with Irish nationalists and Irish republicans in particular. Mairead Farrell, Daniel McCann and Sean Savage are the latest victims of Britain's Irish War.

There has been a lot of debate lately about whether the Tory government has introduced a new shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland. We should be clear that shooting-to-kill is nothing new, and is not just a "policy" to be introduced and withdrawn again, like an inner-city initiative or something. Shooting-to-kill is what the British forces of occupation are in Ireland to do. Why else are they given guns? To protect themselves?

**If protecting its troops were the British government's concern, its best bet would be to leave them locked up in Aldershot.**

What has happened in recent years is not a new policy, but an intensification of the campaign against Irish nationalists. The Tories have now spent more than five years denying that they are engaged in a shoot-to-kill campaign in Ireland. Meanwhile, the bodies of those shot dead by the Army, Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Defence Regiment have piled up so high that we can hardly see the ministers making these denials.

## RUTHLESS

The controversy began at the end of 1982, when the RUC shot dead six unarmed Irishmen in County Armagh. Those shootings have since been at the centre of the Stalker affair. The total number of Irish nationalists shot by the British since then has now risen to 49. Twenty two of them were armed; 27 were not. The nature of the Gibraltar killings illustrates a further advance in the open ruthlessness of British attacks on Irish republicans.

The last time the SAS shot dead three unarmed IRA volunteers was in February 1985. That shooting took place in a cowfield in Strabane, County Tyrone, in the dead of night at 4am. It was a typical SAS operation, sneaking about through Irish fields under cover of darkness and of a media blackout, with only cattle for witnesses. When the SAS ambushed an IRA unit at Loughgall last year, and shot eight dead, they even killed a bystander to ensure that nobody would tell exactly what had happened.

## COCKY

But in Gibraltar last Sunday, the SAS came out in casual clothes in mid-afternoon on streets where local residents and off-season tourists were strolling, and shot three people repeatedly at point-blank range. According to one family, an SAS man who bumped into them even said "Excuse me" seconds before he caught up with and executed Sean Savage. It was a display of cocky savagery that summed up how confident the British forces now are that they can get away with killing Irish people at will in public. The main reason for this arrogance is the state of British politics, and the collapse of the opposition here. This is the problem that we need to focus on as supporters of Irish freedom in Britain.

**The reaction to the Gibraltar shootings among the press and opposition parties here shows why the Tories and SAS are now almost over-confident about such operations.**



IRA 'TERRORISTS' ON PARADE WITH STRONG BACKING FROM NATIONALIST SUPPORTER

First the authorities lied about the presence of IRA bombs and guns; then foreign secretary Geoffrey Howe admitted to the Commons that they had lied and told some new lies of his own. The leaders of the opposition sat there like good little children, taking it all in. When Howe had finished they got up to agree with him. The Labour spokesman said that the House spoke "with one voice" in support of the SAS. Only Eric Heffer raised a doubt about the deaths.

Later that day, Labour MPs and Tory ministers *did* almost come to blows in the Commons — in a row about whether the South of Scotland Electricity Board should obey a court order. As far as the Commons was concerned, the execution of three Irish republicans in cold blood was uncontroversial in comparison. Days later, when the government had consolidated its victory, the Labour leadership came out with a timid request for an inquiry into the shootings. Even then, they waited until Doctor Death had called for an inquiry first, and given it the stamp of statesmanlike respectability.

The authorities begin from the "understanding that no prisoners will be taken". The official opposition replies with "can we have an inquiry please?" This mismatch is the main source of the government's confidence on Ireland.

## EXECUTED

Let's go back to look at the progression of lies which the authorities came out with — and got away with — about Gibraltar. It indicates the scale of official distortion about the Irish War today, and the way it is swallowed as fact.

## R THE GIBRALTAN JOB

# LLING THE BIG LIE BOUT IRELAND

**Before we do so, however, it is important to understand that even if the IRA volunteers had been armed when they were shot it would not alter our view.**

Whatever the circumstances, they were executed by the SAS because they were engaged in the struggle to free the Irish people from British oppression. The cause of their deaths is the British occupation of the North of Ireland. It is worth examining the British lies about bombs and arms, not to establish the "guilt" or "innocence" of the Irish republicans, but to show how the authorities disguise and divert attention from the truth about their colonial war in Ireland.

### LIES

First of all, at 4.45pm on Sunday, the ministry of defence announced that a 500lb bomb had been planted, discovered and dealt with, and that three IRA members had been killed in a gun battle with the Gibraltan police.

Now, this was a bit much even by British government standards. Nobody was going to believe that the Gibraltan police, the Iberian equivalent of the Clapham Common Neighbourhood Watch Committee, had really defeated an IRA unit in a gun battle. Especially not since every news bulletin kept telling us that the three dead republicans were "among the most hardened IRA terrorists". So the authorities modified the story slightly. At 9pm on Sunday, the ministry of defence admitted that "the security forces" had done the shooting — but only after clearly warning the armed suspects. They kept in the bit about the bomb being planted and discovered.

**This story was faithfully reproduced by the British press on Monday morning, in an heroic display of the independence and freedom that Fleet Street editors are always on about.**

The more enthusiastic papers added bits of their own. The *Sun* even found "an eye-witness" who had apparently read the MoD press release. According to the *Sun*, "A teenage boy who saw the shootings said 'The gang were ordered to surrender. They were armed. Suddenly there was a burst of firing and they fell to the ground.' " It might seem strange that this "eye-witness" should describe a casually dressed couple strolling along as a "gang". More strangely still, the same short article referred to the IRA unit as a "gang" on five other occasions. Apparently Gibraltan teenagers have the same vocabulary as *Sun* sub-editors.

### CONGRATULATIONS

The ministry kept up this particular cock-and-bull story until Monday afternoon. Then Howe stood up in the Commons and said it wasn't true. The IRA members hadn't planted any bomb and didn't have any guns on them. He told MPs a new story instead. And they just suspended their disbelief again and soaked it up.

Howe said the "security forces" — he wouldn't mention the SAS — decided there was a bomb in the car when one republican "was seen to spend some time making adjustments in the vehicle". Their suspicions, he claimed, "appeared to be corroborated by a technical inspection of the car". Then the security forces challenged the three who, according to Howe, "made movements" which forced the SAS to shoot them. The press and opposition party leaders accepted the revised Tory version as the full and unabridged facts, agreed that the circumstances justified the shootings, and congratulated the SAS.

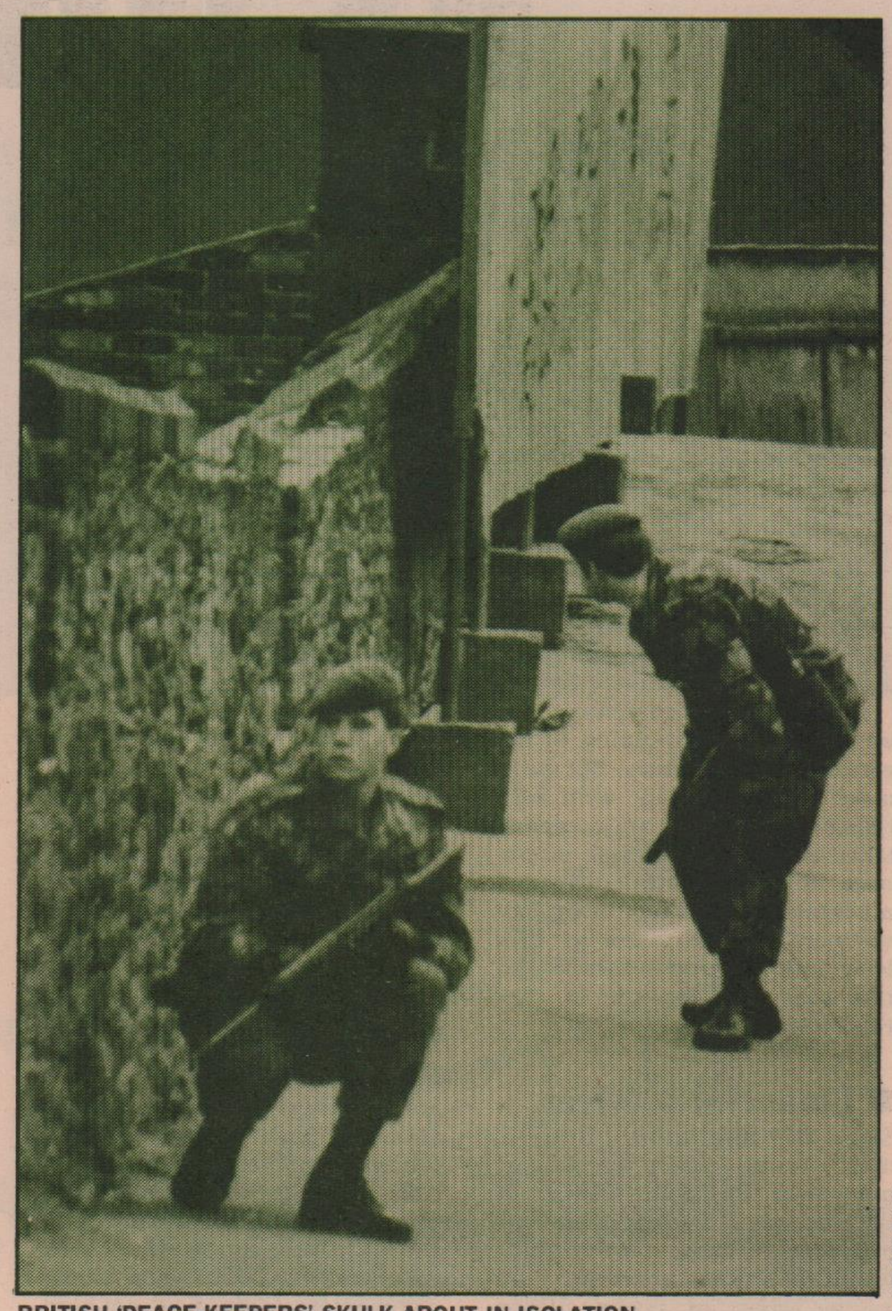
Buried away deep inside the *Irish* papers, however, was an account of a briefing at which reporters had asked a Whitehall spokesman to decode Howe's comments. The official admitted that the suspicious "adjustments" the republican had supposedly made inside the car probably meant he looked in the glove compartment. The "technical inspection", which was supposed to have confirmed that a bomb had been planted, amounted to glancing at the outside of the car; it seems that the Bionic Man has now joined the SAS, with the ability to see a bomb through a car boot. And the threatening "movement" the republicans made was to spin around — which was hardly surprising seeing as, according to independent eye-witnesses, they had already been shot several times without warning at a range of four feet.

### CRIMINALISATION

So a simple deciphering of Howe's coded comments could easily have established that the three dead were gunned down in Gibraltar solely because they were identified as Irish republicans. It was a no-nonsense act of war in which the SAS sought to take out members of the enemy army on sight.

**Yet the official opposition went along with the explanation offered by Tory propagandists, and accepted that the SAS were simply carrying out a crime-prevention exercise on behalf of British tourists in Gibraltar.**

Why do the authorities get away with each successive lie about Ireland? It isn't because the opposition is stupid enough to believe it all. The Labour leadership and the rest put up with the little lies because they accept the big one. The big lie which underpins every aspect of British policy is that Irish republicans are criminals and terrorists who must be dealt with by the forces of British law and order. In the words of Northern Ireland secretary Tom King, the big lie brands the IRA as "a small bunch of thugs and terrorists", or as Labour spokesman George Robertson described them last week, just plain "evil". Once you accept this, any action against republicans becomes acceptable. If you believe the big lie, doubts about the details of one shooting don't matter. The Tories and the SAS can always win through, by insisting that their actions are necessary to achieve the "common aim" of destroying the republican struggle.



Joe Boatman

**BRITISH 'PEACE-KEEPERS' SKULK ABOUT IN ISOLATION ON HOSTILE IRISH STREETS**

The big lie about the Irish, and especially the IRA, has been hammered into British public opinion. It is not surprising that the Labour leaders accept it from the Tories today, since the last Labour government largely invented it in the mid-seventies, when it took away political status from republican prisoners of war and branded them as common criminals. All sides of British politics now depict the IRA as public enemy number one, associated with every evil imaginable. The media's descriptions of the weaponry with which the IRA is supposed to be threatening the Great British public gets more and more fantastic each week. After this week's events in Switzerland, I fully expected to hear that the IRA had developed a new deadly weapon — the avalanche.

### QUIBBLES

The anti-republican hysteria whipped up around the big lie within Britain provides the cover for the more ruthless pursuit of the war in Ireland. The louder they scream about "evil IRA terrorists", the louder we can be sure the gunfire is echoing around the North of Ireland or even Gibraltar.

One problem we face in challenging the big lie about the Irish War is that it even influences those who criticise Tory policy. Take Eric Heffer, the Labour MP who put down the Commons motion criticising the Gibraltar executions. This certainly put his party leadership to shame. Yet even Heffer and his supporters insisted that they wanted to defeat "terrorism"; they only disagreed with the methods used in Gibraltar, and thought that the three should have been captured instead of shot, because they were unarmed.

### TACTICS

This is no way to popularise opposition to the war within Britain. It cannot undermine the British authorities, because it does not challenge the central plank of their justification for committing crimes against Irish people. It is an attempt to take on the little lies about a single shooting, without confronting the big lie about criminalisation.

**Its effect can only be to reduce the debate to a technical one about which tactics the SAS should use, rather than raising the central political issue of Britain's military occupation of Ireland.**

What does Heffer-style opposition offer Irish nationalists who oppose the British occupation? Another spell in jail as a criminal. Mairead Farrell had already suffered 10 years of that generous treatment; she led a prison hunger-strike against it in 1980. And what about the 22 Irish republicans shot dead when *armed* in the last five years? Are we supposed to concede that their deaths at the hands of foreign gunmen were acceptable?

### CRACKS

Many on the left in Britain think that narrowing the debate to one about whether or not a particular shooting of unarmed republicans was justified is an easy way to win public support. In fact it is a guarantee of failure. Unless we challenge the big lie about IRA "terrorism", then people who don't like what happened in Gibraltar will ultimately put up with it, on the basis that the British forces are on the side of democracy.

Conditions are now very favourable for us to challenge the central lie about Irish criminals and terrorists head-on. Recent events open important cracks in the propaganda wall which the authorities have built around Ireland.

**We can exploit these to bring home to more British people the fact that the conflict is a colonial war.**

For example, the open gunning down of republicans in Gibraltar and in Northern Ireland provides strong evidence that British law and order for the nationalists is simply legalised oppression. The support shown for the republicans in Ireland recently is equally strong evidence that they are not isolated criminals. Countless thousands of British people will have seen TV coverage of the funeral of IRA volunteer Brendan Burns in Crossmaglen, South Armagh, the day before the Gibraltar killings. They will have seen local people defending the IRA men carrying the coffin against paramilitary police and soldiers. They will have seen the Army using Chinook military helicopters, the biggest ones Nato has got, to ferry forces in to attack the funeral. You don't have to be an expert to know that the authorities wouldn't use such hardware against a little criminal gang. The Kray twins were not chased around East London by Chinooks.

### RIGHTS

All of this provides ammunition for our argument that there is a war on in Ireland, between the oppressive British state and Irish people demanding their freedom. We have already found that a lot of British people are uneasy about what's going on. We will waste that unease if we get involved in a discussion about what tactics the SAS should have used in Gibraltar. To take advantage of the unease about the little lies the authorities are putting out, we have to address the big one, and take the debate about the Gibraltan job outside the limits acceptable to the establishment.

If we want to end a war in which the SAS takes "no prisoners", it is no good starting an argument about whether IRA members should be captured instead of shot. We have to address the far more basic and fundamental issues: that Britain is an occupying colonial power in Ireland, and that the Irish people have the right to self-determination — and the right to fight for it. The solution is not a new operational manual for the SAS, but an immediate British withdrawal and freedom for Ireland.

The Irish will be a lot closer to winning that freedom when they are actively supported by a British opposition movement which does not sit back and believe that Sir Geoffrey Howe and the Special Air Services Regiment are honest representatives of democracy and justice.

## IS BRITAIN REALLY BOOMING?

# DON'T BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

**Phil Murphy takes a more sceptical look at the prospects for the British economy than did Nigel Lawson in his Budget speech this week**

Across the Western world politicians and economists are trying hard to put the October stock market crash behind them. The 'business as usual' signs have gone up again everywhere. Almost every forecast about the world's economic prospects for this year contains a phrase to the effect that: 'It's as if 19 October never happened.'

With the benefit of hindsight, commentators now argue that initial fears that the crash would devastate production levels were overstated. Those economies like Japan, which were growing relatively fast before Black Monday, are forecast to continue that way in 1988. The experts expect those which were more sluggish, like the USA and West Germany, to avoid recession this year, even if they do not improve.

**Such complacency seems misplaced when you consider that nothing has been done over the past four months to deal with the factors which caused the crash in the first place.**

The US economy, which influences what happens across the globe, continues to survive on state funding financed by massive flows of capital into America from Europe and Japan. West Germany's rulers have yet to get to grips with the domestic recessionary pressures which made them loath to continue to prop up the dollar, and their hesitation sparked off October's financial crisis.

When Black Monday brought the capitalist nations to the edge of the precipice, their survival instincts forced a further bout of liquidity expansion and coordinated interventions on the foreign exchange markets. This means that the capitalist system is living even more on borrowed time (and money) than it was in early October. Another crash is only a matter of time.

Against this background the talk in Britain is all about an economic miracle. The Thatcher government assures us that Britain has turned the corner of economic decline, and things are looking up. Britain's international competitors have joined in the celebrations. Addressing the Institute of Directors' conference last month, Japanese ambassador Toshio Yamazaki declared that the old 'British disease' of low productivity, strikes and balance of payments crises was now a thing of the past.

On the surface the figures certainly look impressive. Output grew by nearly five per cent last year, the best performance since 1973. In recent years output and productivity have been rising faster than in any other major industrialised country. British competitiveness has improved by 30 per cent since 1981 and profit rates have more than doubled since the low-point of the early eighties. What factors account for the buoyancy of the British economy, and can this dynamism last?

### ● Exchange rates

The fall in the value of sterling between 1986 and 1987, which had more to do with dollar-yen-mark developments than with anything intrinsic to Britain, boosted the competitiveness of British goods on the world markets. This helped to stem the deterioration in Britain's trade account and stimulated domestic production in 1987. The pound's appreciation since the middle of 1987 and into 1988, again for reasons which are largely outside government control, will reverse this short-term benefit.

### ● Credit boom

Lending to consumers has far outstripped the increase in domestic production since 1979. Consumer credit has been a powerful force behind the growth of domestic demand which has helped to keep British industry going. It doubled between 1979 and 1986, and grew by another 20 per cent last year. The credit boom appears to have survived the October crash. But each monthly increase in personal debt to yet higher record levels only brings closer the day when debtors will be called to account. The impact of extra borrowing has taken the ratio of savings to income to its lowest level for 30 years.

Bank lending to companies shot up last year, contributing to the general air of buoyancy. But much more of this money went into financial speculation and company takeovers than into real investment in more efficient plant and machinery. Manufacturing investment remains below its 1979 level, and the growth forecast for this year will do little to alter this picture.

### ● Financial services

Since 1979 this has been Britain's most dynamic sector, growing at more than three times the rate of the economy as a whole. There has been more investment in this sector in absolute terms since 1980 than in the whole of manufacturing industry. The increasing significance of this sector for the British economy, in contrast to manufacturing, highlights the transformation of Britain into a parasitic service-based economy which survives by creaming off commissions from the worldwide movements of capital.

The City of London, dominated by American, Japanese and European financial institutions, has taken advantage of the huge increase in international transactions on the foreign exchange and other financial markets. But the money made here, which has contributed significantly to British output figures, depends on the continuation of this global financial merry-go-round.

**It has little to do with British financing of world trade flows, through which London secured its position of financial dominance in the nineteenth century.**

Today 90 per cent of London's foreign exchange business arises from speculative flows of capital between Tokyo, Paris, New York, Bonn and other capitalist centres, taking advantage of the volatility of international exchange rates.

As long as these financial arrangements continue, the City of London and the British economy will benefit. But the fact that the whole phenomenon is outside its control only emphasises Britain's dependence on what is happening in the rest of the world economy, and its inability to produce efficiently and make profits at home. The projected 20 000 City redundancies arising from Black Monday will be nothing compared to the decimation of the City which the next world financial crash will bring.

### ● Industrial rationalisation

Some sectors of British manufacturing have notched up significant productivity increases since 1982 in comparison with their international competitors. But while these increases have been widely celebrated by establishment commentators, they have not been able to compensate for Britain's lack of competitiveness on the world market. The productivity gains are a statistical reflection of the earlier impact of the world recession in Britain, and therefore of an earlier phase of rationalisation.

The major cutbacks in capacity and jobs in British manufacturing took place between 1979 and 1981. Large parts of the most inefficient sectors of British industry were wiped out and two million manufacturing jobs disappeared. Now that most European powers are stepping up closures and redundancies in response to the cumulative impact of recessionary trends — five or more years after the same process occurred here — the statistical gap between Britain and the rest becomes both more striking and more illusory.

Just when what's left of British industry is reporting a record growth in productivity and profit, its European competitors are feeling the squeeze. Europe's largest electronics firm, the Dutch giant Philips, has announced a 20 per cent drop in profits and is planning to rationalise production from 200 to 120 plants, and axe 20 000 jobs. The real difference between Britain and the rest will be seen after this rationalisation, when it will be possible to compare like with like. Philips will remain a world leader in consumer electronics, while Britain's consumer electronics sector gave up the ghost in the early eighties. Even Alan Sugar's Amstrad company, often cited as an example of British regeneration, has only a minimal amount of production capacity in Britain.

**British manufacturing is certainly 'leaner', but it is hardly 'fitter'.**

The growth in productivity is more a sign of weakness and contraction than an indication of strength and dynamism. The slump in British industry during the recession of the early eighties was so precipitate that the rebound inevitably takes the form of big percentage increases in output and productivity.

British competitiveness has improved since 1981. But the gap in productivity levels between British industry and the rest of the industrialised world remains enormous. Even taking the recent gains into account, British manufacturing productivity is two thirds that of Italy, half that of France and West Germany, and even further behind that of Japan and the USA.

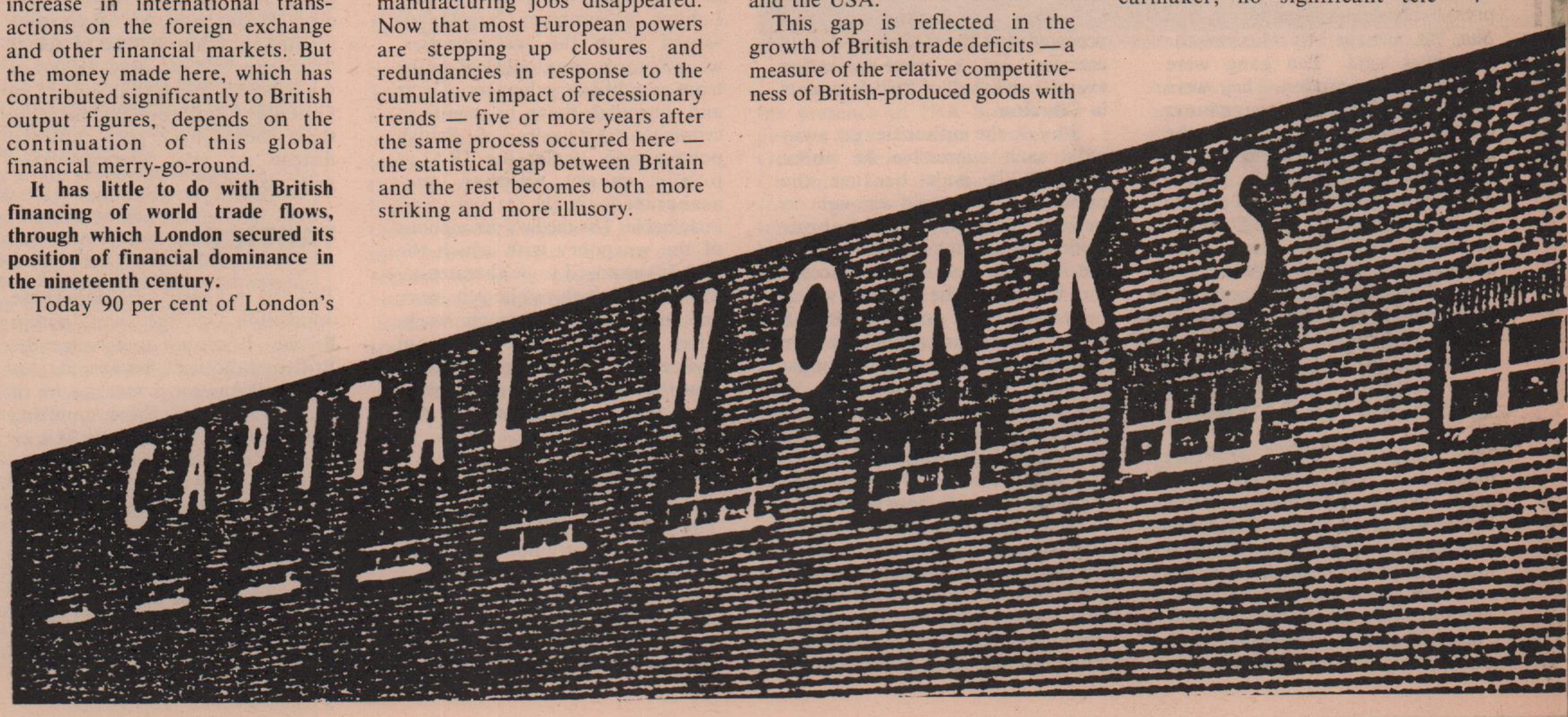
This gap is reflected in the growth of British trade deficits — a measure of the relative competitiveness of British-produced goods with the rest of the world — at the same time as output has recovered. Output in the key electronics sector has doubled since 1980, but the trade deficit has more than trebled from £600m to £2 billion Across manufacturing as a whole the picture is much the same.

**While manufacturing productivity has risen by 46 per cent between 1980 and 1987, the share of the home market taken by imports has increased from 28 per cent to 35 per cent.**

This trend was expressed in the manufacturing trade figures moving into deficit in 1983 for the first time since the industrial revolution. Even in the 'miracle' year of 1987 the trade gap in an important sector like cars rose by three per cent to £4 billion.

The effect of past rationalisation has been to reduce Britain's manufacturing base to a handful of household names — ICI, Glaxo, Rolls Royce, GEC and British Aerospace. Outside a small number of industries — aerospace, chemicals and defence electronics — Britain has few names which rank as world competitors. There are a handful of other specialist producers — Jaguar luxury cars, Courtaulds in textiles — but they no longer have the scale or resources to compete in the bigger markets that matter.

For most of the eighties net investment in industry has been negative: spending on fixed assets has been insufficient to keep up with depreciation. No capitalist economy can prosper indefinitely unless it invests in new technology and more efficient processes. Britain has no international carmaker, no significant tele-



communications enterprise, no firm that can compete in semiconductors.

Foreign firms account for an increasing share of Britain's manufacturing output. Britain is being used by foreign capital as an assembly plant for the world market, and especially the European market. Such companies have contributed to the growth of recent years. The 'British miracle' has little to do with home-grown entrepreneurial panache or technological innovation. The domestic appliance industry, which grew by eight per cent in 1986, is dominated by Sweden's Electrolux and the USA's Hoover. Japanese investment accounts for the rise in television and microwave cooker output. UK car output has risen because Ford and General Motors have transferred production here from Europe, and Peugeot and Nissan have expanded their British operations.

## ● Exploitation rates

Higher rates of exploitation, especially over the past year, have contributed to increases in output and productivity.

**Whether they work in home-owned or foreign-owned concerns, in services or manufacturing, those with jobs have been put under more pressure to improve their performance.**

Improvements in productivity growth are the result, not of a technological revolution, but of workers working harder. The employers have introduced more intensive 'flexible' work systems involving multi-skilling, faster production lines, multi-shifting and more overtime.

In the first 10 months of 1987, overtime working rose from an average 8.6 to 9.7 hours a week. Comparing the ratio of company profits to wages and salaries to give an indication of the *movement* in the rate of exploitation, we find an increase from 25 per cent in 1980 to 31 per cent in the third quarter of 1987.

The employers are stepping up their offensive — against car-workers and seamen, civil servants and health workers — to make sure we pay the price for the crisis of their system. To sustain the myth of the British 'economic miracle', the bosses are compelled to adapt the workhouse conditions of the Victorian era to the economic landscape of the Thatcher years. These measures alone cannot overcome the crisis of profitability, but they can help keep their system alive at the expense of our living standards, working conditions, and health and safety.



Chris Beresford




**THE BRITISH ECONOMY HAS ABOUT AS MUCH CHANCE OF BOOMING AS THATCHER HAS OF LOSING ALL HER MONEY IN THE TOMBOLA DRUM**

# ● In bad shape

**THERE have been significant structural changes in the British economy over the past nine years. But they are not the ones Nigel Lawson likes to boast about. The component parts which make up the balance of payments say it all about what has become of British capitalism. The current account is an indicator of Britain's standing in the world in relation to goods and services: in the years from 1980 to 1987 it moved from a £3 billion surplus to a £1.7 billion deficit. Let's look at the four main factors which underlie this dramatic shift.**

### ON THE 'VISIBLES' SIDE:

● ***Oil trade***
**North Sea oil has been a godsend, moving from a zero balance in 1980, to £8 billion at the peak of 1985, to £4 billion last year. Production will now steadily decline and this contribution will be whittled away.**

● ***Other materials, including manufacturing***
**The most significant secular development as Britain has been priced out of one market after another: from a £1 billion surplus in 1980 to a £14 billion deficit in 1987.**

### ON THE 'INVISIBLES' SIDE:

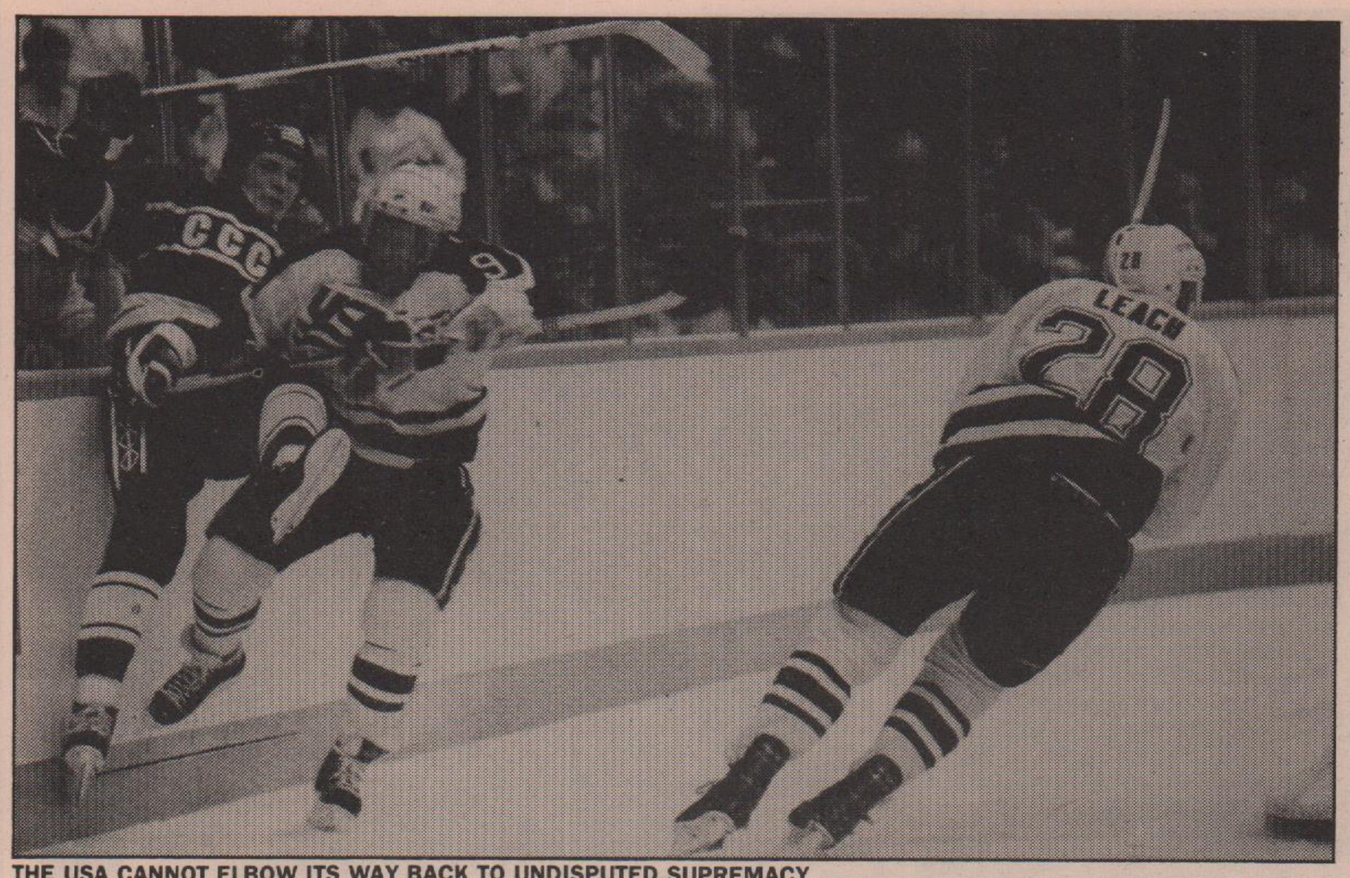
● ***Services, including a major contribution from the City***
**Increased from a surplus of £4 billion to £5.9 billion.**

● ***Net proceeds from the export of capital***
**Over this period the lack of profitable investment opportunities at home has resulted in a threefold increase in direct foreign investment. Contribution to the balance of payments up from zero to £5 billion.**

**British capitalism has become a more parasitic system. It depends on a more exploited working class and on what it can reap from investment abroad or servicing financial operations around the world.**

**Today Britain's rulers preside over a system which is much weaker and less self-sufficient, and one which cannot for much longer avoid going down yet again with one symptom of the 'British disease'. The return of balance of payments crises will expose Britain's true position in the capitalist world. January's record trade deficit was inflated by new customs red tape, but when the figures smooth themselves out in two or three months the deficit won't be much better and we'll be back to runs on sterling. Hence Lawson's 'cautious' budget. The chancellor wants to honour the Tory pledge to cut taxes, but he doesn't want to pump money into the economy which will only boost imports and hasten the payments crisis.**

**We can take some satisfaction from the myth that is circulating about the British economic miracle. If decrepit old Britain is being promoted as a rejuvenated world economic leader from Japan to the US, then the real world crisis must be much worse than we thought. We must make the most of them. By preparing our side for what is to come.**



THE USA CANNOT ELBOW ITS WAY BACK TO UNDISPUTED SUPREMACY

*THE USA IN DECLINE*

# IT'S MOURNING IN AMERICA AGAIN

**In the closing months of his lame duck presidency Ronald Reagan's bluster about 'making America great again' has given way to a mood of anxiety about a nation in decline — James Malone reports**

In the run-up to the Winter Olympics in Calgary, ABC-TV bombarded Americans with bold, red-white-and-blue adverts predicting gold medals all round for Team USA. Viewers tuned in with high hopes, but soon slumped in their chairs as one by one US athletes fell. Disappointed fans switched channels for good when their hockey team took a drubbing at the hands of the Soviets. By the end the USA had won only six medals, the worst showing since 1936.

**This dismal performance was another small reminder to Americans that things are not what they used to be.**

It underlined the sense of general unease about the USA's standing in the world which has become pervasive in recent months. Everything from the Winter Olympics fiasco to the fall of Christian fundamentalist preachers and the problems of the space programme seems to reinforce the feeling of failure in the USA.

A mood of uncertainty has overtaken the American public. A recent *New York Times/CBS News* poll revealed that for the first time since the days of Jimmy Carter's presidency, most Americans are fearful about the future. This air of pessimism contrasts with the upbeat 'It's morning in America again' mood of the early Reagan years. In the early eighties Reagan pledged to restore America's self-confidence, but as the nineties approach he finds his country soul-searching.

## JINGOISM

Reagan's favourite target back in the 1980 election campaign was president Jimmy Carter's helplessness against the Iranian students who had taken US embassy staff hostage in Tehran. Reagan depicted Carter's indecisiveness as a sign of the moral malaise at the heart of US society, and swept into office on a wave of jingoism about Iranian 'barbarians'. Reagan promised to 'make America great again', by ending the so-called Vietnam Syndrome that made the USA wary of asserting itself internationally. He blamed the defeat in Vietnam on a lack of national resolve, and dismissed the Vietnam Syndrome as a psychological problem that could be overcome by a return to the traditional small-town American values of John Wayne.

**Reagan offered moral rearmament at home and military rearmament abroad as the solution to the problem of US decline.**

His government put the issues of pro-family morality, school prayer and anti-abortion high on the political agenda. Reagan's home-spun mom-and-apple-pie philosophy sought to regain the innocence he claimed America had lost sometime in the late fifties. At the same time US rulers boasted that they would make America the leading power-broker in world politics once again. Reagan's big-stick foreign policy was wielded against small nations like tiny Grenada which could not answer back.

## BLUFF

For seven years Reagan's attempt to disguise the continuous process of US decline met with some success. Less than two years ago Americans, gripped with flag-waving patriotism, were celebrating the centenary of the Statue of Liberty with the biggest fireworks display in US history. It was the most flamboyant Fourth of July in living memory. By 1988 Reagan's bluff had been called. The new mood of questioning reflects the intractable problems facing the US economy.

## CRASH

The Wall Street crash last October revealed the fragility of an economy crippled by massive trade and budget deficits. When he entered office, Reagan gave the American people a commitment to 'get the government off your back' through a 'supply-side revolution' of tax cuts. Instead his administration turned to federal borrowing on a massive scale and encouraged a much greater reliance on the state. When Reagan came in, the USA was the world's largest creditor. Eight years later it is the biggest debtor nation. The dollar, which was once thought to be as 'good as gold' and a symbol of US supremacy, collapsed to a record low at the start of this year.

## FEARS

America's economic troubles are widely talked about. Oliver Stone's film *Wall Street*, based on the Ivan Boesky insider-dealing scandal of 1986, is packing movie houses. Paul Kennedy, a British-born professor who happened to write a book on US economic decline, has become a household name. He has appeared on more American chat shows than Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards. His best-selling book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, considers the possibility of the US empire following the British one into terminal decline. Kennedy has been catapulted from the ivory towers of the academic world into American living-rooms because his book keys into deep-seated fears about what lies ahead in the post-Reagan era.

**Unlike the earlier crisis of confidence in the seventies, today's doubts betray an appreciation that the problems will not be so easily tackled the second time around.**

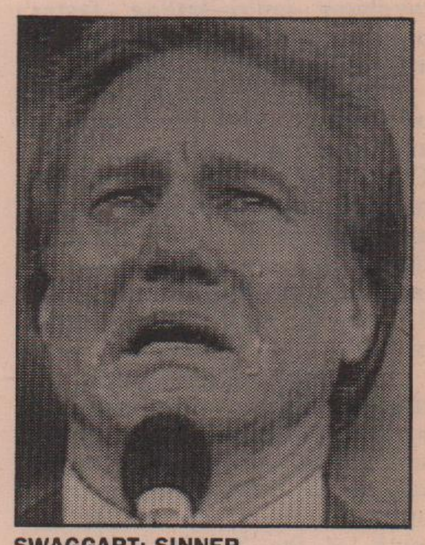
In the seventies the USA suffered humiliating political defeats in Vietnam and the Middle East, but economic recession appeared to many as an aberration. In the eighties, political setbacks such as the Irangate arms-for-hostages scandal have provoked further dismay — and today the USA's economic crisis is no longer seen as a temporary lapse.

## BLOW

Reagan's crusade to revive US fortunes abroad has met with failure too. In 1984 US troops had to beat a hasty retreat from Lebanon after the bombing of their Beirut base sent 242 Marines home in coffins. The invasion of tiny Grenada by a vastly superior US task force is the only clear-cut foreign policy success which Reagan can celebrate. The revelations of arms transfers to Iran and the channelling of funds to the Nicaraguan Contras was a blow to the president's authority. Before Irangate Reagan had inflated the threat of 'mad mullahs' running amok in the Middle East to win support at home for his militaristic stance. When his covert dealings with the Iranians were exposed, his doctrine of anti-terrorism was shown to be a sham.

## DISBELIEF

The contrast between the past and present images of America's space programme is another example of the advance of pessimism. In 1961, president John F Kennedy boosted US prestige after the foreign policy debacle over the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, by promising to beat the Soviets in the space race. By 1969 American astronauts were playing golf on the moon — the ultimate symbol of US supremacy on earth. In 1987 the ageing Reagan set out to erase the ignominy of Irangate by proposing that the USA shoot for Mars. But when his space experts cannot even get the much-vaunted shuttle off the ground, nobody wants to know. Before the Challenger explosion in January 1986, space was optimistically referred to as an endless American frontier. Now Americans look on in disbelief while Nasa announces that it will collaborate with the Soviets to grow protein crystals in space, and Reagan's Star Wars project becomes more and more of a white elephant.


SWAGGART: SINNER

Reagan's attempt to purify the nation has backfired. His born-again Christian following is still reeling from the 'evangelust' confessions of millionaire TV preachers. Michael Agnello of the New Life Church confessed to his flock that 'there's sin in the camp', and proceeded to repent his affair with a Dolly Parton lookalike. Agnello's admission came hot on the heels of Jimmy Swaggart's tearful and televised 'I have sinned' performance before 7000 worshippers in Louisiana. Some people have long suspected that the revivalist spirit of the Christian empire was nothing but a cover for crime and corruption.

**But the recent scandals are particularly damaging because Reagan had staked the future of the USA on the purification of moral values.**

National unease about US decline provides the backdrop for the presidential election campaign (see box). All the candidates are conscious that this sentiment is widespread, yet they are no more able than Reagan to get to grips with the economic crisis which is at the root of US decline. Their main concern is to avoid embarrassment at all cost, and steer clear of scandal and corruption, adultery and drugs. None of the contenders dare come on strong with upbeat talk about 'morning in America'.

The Reagan years show that America's problems cannot be explained by personality failures, nor overcome by political bluster. The USA is in for a prolonged period of doubt and instability.

# Not so Super Tuesday

**Reagan's second-in-command George Bush emerged from 'Super Tuesday' — the string of primaries across the South — as the likely Republican candidate for president. The vice-president carried 16 out of 17 states, making it difficult for his rival, senator Robert Dole, to catch up. The fact that Bush, the wooden second-rater widely dismissed as a 'wimp' last month, has now become the most popular candidate, reflects the unimpressive and inconclusive character of the election contest.**

## CLOSER

**While the Republicans moved towards singling out a candidate, the Democratic results were closer. The colourless technocrat Michael Dukakis proved that he can win support outside his base in the North-east when he took the contests in Florida and Texas. But he is far short of the number of delegates needed to ensure nomination at the party convention in July. Superman lookalike Albert Gore, a conservative Democrat, boosted his ratings by winning five states.**


BUSH: WOODEN

**Jesse Jackson has no chance of winning the Democratic nomination, but his support is still impressive. The black preacher secured 26 per cent of the Super Tuesday vote, behind Gore's 27 per cent and just ahead of Dukakis' 25 per cent. Well over 90 per cent of blacks voted for him, along with 10 per cent of whites. Many see him as a power-broker at a split convention: in 1984 Jackson backed Walter Mondale after a couple of his advisers were given jobs in the national campaign.**

## NOBODY

**Before Super Tuesday Bush said that whoever was the 'clear and convincing winner' would become the next US president. But nobody is dominating the contest, and it is far from certain who will emerge victorious in the election. What is clear is that whoever takes over the reins from the old cowboy Reagan, the next president already looks set to go down in history as a flop.**

# THE USA IS THE BIGGEST DRUGS BARON

## BEHIND REAGAN'S WAR ON LATIN AMERICAN TRAFFICKING

**Washington's half-cocked 'drug thugs' panic against Latin America's *narcotrafficantes* provides further evidence of the crisis of US foreign policy, argues Andy Clarkson**

Latin American 'drug thugs' have almost displaced 'mad mullahs' as the top hate figures within the USA today. Washington's new enthusiasm for hunting dope pedlars like Colombia's Medellin cartel follows Nancy Reagan's 'Just say no' anti-drugs crusade. Her campaign was a thinly disguised crackdown on ethnic minorities within the USA.

**Now the US authorities have exported the idea, using a panic about Latin American cocaine suppliers as an excuse for reasserting US authority over the continent.**

But Washington's scheme has run into trouble — partly because the Latin American drugs industry which it now rails against was largely a US creation in the first place. At least since the Vietnam War, trafficking in hard drugs has been an integral part of US foreign policy in the third world.

In recent years Washington has used the drugs panic to justify hounding small Caribbean islands like the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos, whose rulers had a hand in the cocaine trade. But not all drug traffickers are as bad as each other in the Reagan administration's eyes. For example, Reagan has refrained from taking any action against Mexico, the largest source of heroin and marijuana exports to the USA, also responsible for handling up to 75 per cent of the cocaine trade. As the pressure mounted on the administration to explain such a selective approach, it became clear that the only difference is that Washington cannot risk alienating such an important ally as Mexico.

## CONCESSIONS

Assistant secretary of state for narcotics Ann Wrobleski explained why Mexico has been exempted from US economic sanctions against drug trafficking: 'We cannot afford to risk undermining a friendly regime and its replacement by communist insurgents.' This admission of the need to make politically inspired concessions to the Mexican drugs trade was embarrassing enough. But elsewhere in Latin America, the drugs panic is having more severe repercussions for Washington's foreign policy.

**Senate committee exposés of the drugs trade have revealed that the CIA was behind the boom in hard drugs production in Latin America, and the US Drug Enforcement Administration is complicit in regulating drug imports into the States.**

General Manuel Noriega has been heartily condemned in Washington since he ousted the president of Panama last month. In particular, US congressmen have harped on about Noriega being a drug smuggler. But this is a dangerous line of attack for the USA to pursue. Noriega has been a CIA stooge since the seventies, and set up his narcotics empire with CIA assistance as a way to channel funds to Reagan's favourite terrorists, the Contras based in Nicaragua. In doing this, the CIA was simply carrying out normal procedures. Once in business, Noriega branched off on his own. The CIA's drug trading activities have given Noriega access to alternative sources of income which help him resist US pressure to impose austerity on the Panamanian masses.



THE USA RAILS AGAINST DRUG-RELATED KILLINGS IN COLOMBIA (LEFT), WHILE CIA-BACKED DRUG TRAFFICKING FUNDS CONTRA MURDERERS IN NICARAGUA (BELOW)



The CIA has been a major factor in the international narcotics trade since the Vietnam War. To help fund its local collaborators there, the CIA flew heroin from Burma and Laos to sell to GIs on furlough in Saigon. When the war in Afghanistan began in 1980, the CIA expanded the traditional drug production of that region to help finance the mujahideen's anti-Soviet struggle. There are now 16 heroin-refining factories operating in Afghan refugee camps within Pakistan.

## ADVANTAGES

Drug trafficking has a number of advantages for its CIA operators. It matches a plentiful supply to an inexhaustible demand; small, easily transportable amounts sell at very high prices; and it provides ready access to large sums of money without the publicity of requesting a loan from congress. This last factor is the crucial one.

Since the defeat in Vietnam, successive administrations have been reluctant to send US troops into action in third world trouble-spots. Despite his rhetoric, Reagan is no exception. Instead, the US world policeman has been forced to rely on promoting surrogates like the Afghan rebels and the Contras as 'freedom fighters'. But US presidents have often been constrained by congress from openly offering large-scale aid to these reactionary forces. By sponsoring drug trafficking among its surrogates, Washington found an under-the-counter means of providing the money they need. The problem is that things have started to get out of hand in Latin America.

**Since the slump in world commodity prices in the eighties, hard drugs have become almost the only third world product for which there is a big demand at high prices.**

South of the Rio Grande, everybody wanted in on the drugs boom. From funding 'freedom fighters', the drugs trade became a major source of income for sections of the business classes, the military and the peasantry of the northern half of Latin America. The Medellin crew are the products of this CIA-induced narcotics bonanza.

## INSTABILITY

Washington's new war on the drug barons is an attempt to cope with the instability created by the economic crisis in Latin America. It has nothing to do with any US distaste for their brutal methods; Reagan's much-loved Contras could teach the *narcotrafficantes* a thing or two about murder, torture, rape and corruption. Rather, the USA's own decline as a world power has raised questions about its authority even within its traditional 'backyard'. This problem has been exacerbated by unrest among the starving masses of Latin America, who are suffering under the impact of recession and the austerity imposed on their countries by Western financiers. They are pushing even right-wing leaders to take action, however token, against the USA.

Washington has sought to use the drug-running scare as a lever to pressurise Latin American states into the line. But thanks to the past US policy of popularising the drugs traffic and installing some pushers in power, this campaign only raises the threat of more unrest. After reporting that many Colombian peasants regard the Medellin cartel as 'Robin Hoods' because they provide jobs, houses and transport, *Time* magazine pointed out how Washington's anti-drugs crusade also risks destabilising Latin American regimes: 'If Colombia's political leaders are being challenged by the drug dealers, some of Panama's leaders *are* the drug dealers.'

This problem has prompted some US commentators to argue that a campaign against prominent drug barons is counter-productive. As one Latin American specialist from Southern Illinois University put it: 'Why damage the whole country [Panama] to get rid of Noriega?'

## BACKLASH

The recent exposés of the drugs trade have also created something of a backlash within the USA. Ever since the Irangate affair showed up CIA involvement in trafficking for the Contras, US backing for drug barons has become a source of embarrassing debate. Vice-president George Bush, the Republican frontrunner to succeed Reagan in November, is up to his neck in Noriega's Panamanian drugs racket. As a CIA director in the seventies, Bush had Noriega on his payroll. A former Bush aide, Admiral Daniel Murphy, helped Bush set up a special task force in Florida supposedly to combat the activities of Latin American drug smugglers. In fact, Murphy used the force to put pressure on the Drug Enforcement Administration and the US customs service to turn a blind eye to Noriega's drug trafficking operations.

Even if this particular scandal is swept under the carpet, the political effectiveness of the anti-drugs crusade has been diminished now that leading establishment figures — including possibly the next US president — have been identified with trafficking. And the Bush affair is only a small part of the scandal. From Florida to California, police forces and business communities are involved in the narcotics racket. For instance, the Mexican internal security service, DFS, which is in 'close contact' with the CIA, regularly bribes US customs personnel $50 000 a time to let their dope shipments cross the border.

## CONCERN

The foreign policy implications are even more serious. The hounding of the Medellin 'Lords of Darkness' has acquired an extra urgency with the need to take the heat off the CIA. But behind the hysterical headlines lies a real concern at how many more Latin American products of the CIA's dope trafficking are going to turn 'rogue'. As *Time* put it: 'With the drug merchants increasingly brazen, Colombia is slipping into the kind of lawlessness that may someday risk comparison with Lebanon's.'

The comparison with Lebanon, albeit 'someday', is a worrying one for Washington. The US marines were blown out of Lebanon in 1984, a setback which exposed America's loss of control in the third world.

**Washington now fears losing its grip over its Latin American surrogates.**

Times have moved on since the turn-of-the-century days when president Theodore Roosevelt's gunboat diplomacy could bring the whole continent to heel with ease. A direct US intervention in Colombia, or even Panama, today would set Latin America ablaze and create a crisis of historic proportions for Washington. The 'drug thugs' panic expresses US exasperation at this dilemma for which there are no simple solutions.

## DOCTORS AND DIET

# EAT YOUR HEART OUT

**Dr James Le Fanu,** *Eat Your Heart Out: The Fallacy of the Healthy Diet,* Macmillan, £10.95

Over the past decade it has become widely accepted that meat and dairy products are a major cause of disease and death in Western society. Doctors and nutritionists have taken to the press and TV to tell us that health and happiness depend on a diet low in cholesterol and salt, and high in natural fibre and vitamins.

The arrival of 'health foods' in every supermarket, and the preoccupation with polyunsaturated fatty acids, E-factors, muesli and wholemeal bread show that the middle classes are convinced. The proletariat, however, remaining firmly attached to white bread, sugary tea and meat pies — or worse still, crisps and burgers, coke and milk shakes — obviously needs more public health propaganda.

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Dr James Le Fanu, a GP in Clapham and a medical journalist, has set out to debunk the notions that what we eat is to blame for our ill-health and that a change of diet will improve our chances of survival, focusing in particular on the diet-heart thesis.

Le Fanu opens with the striking contrast between today's medical wisdom and that of 50 years ago. In the thirties, doctors took to public platforms to declare that national survival depended on everybody eating more red meat, eggs, butter and milk — the very same foods that are now labelled as potential killers. Through a detailed survey of the epidemiological evidence, Le Fanu exposes the lack of a sound case for either of these contradictory sets of dietary advice. He shows the remarkably unscientific attitude of doctors who accept plausible theories without adequate evidence and turn a blind eye to the results of investigations which do not fit in with their prejudices.

●

There is a superficial appeal in the notion that fat in the diet is responsible for furring up the coronary arteries and causing heart disease. But it requires really major changes in the diet to change the level of cholesterol in the blood — changes which have not occurred and hence cannot explain fluctuations in the incidence of heart disease. Furthermore, major population studies have shown that people with heart disease do not consume more fat than those without, and that there is no correlation between the amount of fat in the diet and the risk of heart disease. The most important finding of these studies is that, except for those people with abnormally high levels of cholesterol as a result of an inherited biochemical abnormality, reducing the amount of dietary fat has *no* influence on the incidence of heart disease.



Pandora Anderson

**CHIPS WITH EVERYTHING WON'T KILL YOU**

●

Le Fanu concludes that 'the simplest and most powerful argument against the diet-heart thesis is neither the flawed nature of the circumstantial evidence in its favour, nor that it has been refuted by experiment; but that it is an outrage against common sense.' The fact that human beings can maintain a constant internal environment by adapting to a vast variety of different patterns of food intake suggests that diet is unikely to play an important role in either causing or curing a major disease epidemic. It is when he turns to examine how such absurdity has been able to flourish in the midst of the intellectual sophistication of the modern medical establishment that Le Fanu runs into difficulties.

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Le Fanu identifies a crisis of modern medicine which has triumphed over infectious diseases and a number of other ancient afflictions, but remains powerless before chronic degenerative diseases of the heart, circulation and joints. This may explain why the doctors are ripe for jumping at any explanation, but it scarcely explains why their specious theories so readily command endorsement from governments and the media. Promoting changes in diet as the way to better health has an obvious appeal to Western governments which are concerned to encourage a spirit of self-help in all areas of society. Even if it fails to result in cuts in the healthcare budget, dietary propaganda transmits the message that health and happiness can be achieved in the kitchen rather than on the streets. People who are busy reading the small print on packets of soup are not exactly going to build the barricades.

It is significant that the diet-heart thesis and its related preoccupations find the greatest resonance among the middle classes. The public sector professionals in particular are frightened by the march of reaction and the prospect of growing social conflict; they are attracted too by the offer of individual solutions to social problems. If heart disease, cancer and Aids are in a sense metaphors for a decaying order, low-fat, high-fibre diets, jogging and the great condom/safe sex crusade are the pale images of petit-bourgeois resistance. The terrified liberal is now seized with a Messianic fervour to preach these irrational survival strategies to a working class which, having more pressing problems, remains studiously indifferent.

●

Le Fanu has escaped from the medical survivalist bunker and made a bolt to the right. As his excellent analysis trails off into incoherence in his 'final meditations', his main concern seems to be to save the medical profession from the loss of prestige resulting from its involvement in a propaganda campaign which lacks basic scientific validity. What we should be asking is — what else are they lying to us about?

**Mike Freeman**

●

## FIGHTING FOR LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS

# A DEGREE IN OPPRESSION?

**Noel Halifax,** *Out Proud and Fighting: Gay Liberation and the Struggle for Socialism,* Socialist Workers Party pamphlet, £1.00

**This skimpy pamphlet on the history of the fight for gay liberation does not add much to the existing literature, but it does reveal an important confusion about the subject which is prevalent on the left today. Noel Halifax argues that 'working class lesbians and gays are the most oppressed, the least likely to be out, the ones most excluded from the reforms and gains of the sixties and seventies...the fundamental division in society, gay society included, is one based on class.' Here he expresses a fundamental misconception at the heart of the Socialist Workers Party's strategy for fighting oppression.**

●

**Precision is important from the outset in this matter. All workers are *exploited* in the sense that they are subject to a system which forces people, in order to survive, to work for an employer who takes the surplus-value they create. Oppression is a different matter. Sections of society are *oppressed* in the sense that they are denied equal rights and equal treatment by the state, and subjected to all the ill-treatment which flows from this. The relationship of exploitation is the basis of the division of society into classes. Oppression exists because this system is too crisis-ridden to guarantee the basis for equal treatment: enough for all. To survive, the ruling class divides and weakens the working class by treating certain sections of society less favourably and by scapegoating them.**

**Clearly lesbians and gays who are working class suffer on account both of their sexuality and of their class; and working class lesbians and gays will, for many reasons relating to their position in society, be more vulnerable than their middle class counterparts to their oppression. This does not, however, make them 'more oppressed', as if oppression were a quantitative matter. Still less does it mean that so far as their oppression is concerned there is 'a fundamental division' between them and middle class lesbians and gays.**

●

**This has important consequences, because posing such a division suggests that the oppression of non-working class lesbians and gays is of less importance. But unequal treatment, irrespective of how it affects any given individual, is something that the working class cannot tolerate at any price. If we tolerate any instance of oppressive behaviour — whether it be a rich rock star being dragged through the mud because he likes to sleep with young men, or a reactionary imam being fire-bombed at a mosque, or an Asian businessman being beaten in the streets — then we are allowing the ruling class to get away with its divisive prejudices. How can we then successfully resist the influence of these prejudices within our own ranks? Indeed, by targeting rich and prominent gay men or black people, the authorities can give their prejudices a more populist appeal. I have heard left wingers on demonstrations chanting 'Harvey Proctor is a spanker, Harvey Proctor is a wanker', as if the real crime of this Tory reactionary was his sexuality rather than his anti-working class politics. If we set up degrees of oppression, we can expect more of this.**

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**It is easy to see how Halifax has strayed into this dangerous territory. He wishes to play up the importance of 'socialism and the class struggle'. But you can't take short cuts. The working class movement will only heal the divisions in its ranks when it defends in practice all those who are oppressed. It will certainly not heal those divisions by abstractly invoking the class interests which all workers have in common. We know already that 'black and white unite and fight' is a meaningless slogan unless the working class has created the basis for that unity by defending black people and by fighting racism. We should not follow Halifax and the SWP in making the same mistake.**

***Don Milligan***



Pandora Anderson

**ALL HOMOSEXUALS ARE DENIED EQUAL RIGHTS**

# NEW DIRECTION NEEDED AGAINST ALTON

**IT HAS NEVER** been more important to build the fight for abortion rights, because never before has women's access to abortion been more under attack.

David Alton's Bill to reduce the abortion time-limit from 28 to 18 weeks is now poised to go into its penultimate stage in the house of commons — the committee where MPs will discuss and amend it before it comes back for the final vote. But even now its aims are being put into effect.

The City and Hackney Health Authority in East London is already implementing a 12-week time-limit on NHS abortions. As the health cuts begin to bite, more and more health authorities are cutting back on abortion provision. A recent house of lords select committee report spelt out the limitations of private abortion clinics and charities.

Even before the vote on the Alton Bill, the limited access to abortion granted by the 1967 Abortion Act is being curtailed every day. Unless we build an effective movement to fight for abortion rights now, it will be too late for too many women seeking to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

In this sense it is worrying that the Fight Alton's Bill campaign seems to have lost its initial impetus. Many local groups have more or less folded, and those still going have reduced their activity to occasional petitioning sessions.

The anti-abortionists have been quick to take advantage of this lull, touting their new video (introduced by Charlton Heston) around the colleges. In some places they have succeeded in changing student union policy from a pro-abortion to a non-aligned one.

We have to assess why the momentum has gone out of the FAB campaign if we are to relaunch the fight for abortion rights before it is too late.

The most common explanation is that abortion is no longer the focus of public debate. This does not explain anything. We cannot really depend on the media to provide the publicity on which we can build our campaigns. Of course it is a bonus if the issues we campaign around are in the news. But the only way to keep the issue of abortion rights on the agenda of political debate is by building a movement that people cannot ignore.

Five months ago FAB meetings were attended by hundreds of people. Today it is evident from the low attendances that the approach pursued by the national FAB leadership has tended to demobilise support for the campaign rather than give it a fighting focus.

One problem is that very little has been done to equip new activists with the arguments they need to fight the anti-abortion campaigners. Many potential allies in the fight for abortion rights have become discouraged as a result. Activists' meetings often discuss little more than who can put up posters. This is necessary, but not very stimulating. If it is the only thing on the agenda people will not be encouraged to come back.

A recent caucus of representatives from London FAB groups revealed that there was a direct correlation between the success of the FAB groups and the time spent discussing the problems that people were having arguing against Alton. Where there was political discussion people came back again and got involved.

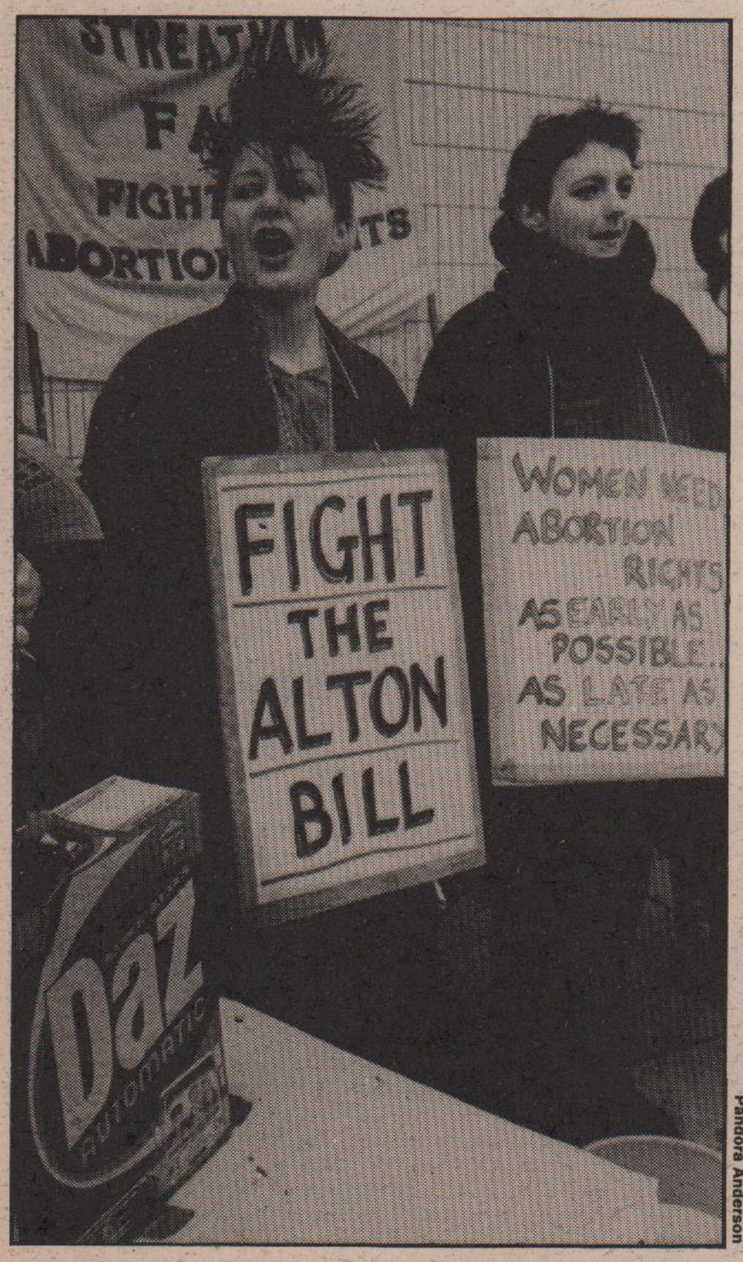
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Another problem is that for the first five months of the campaign there has been no mass national mobilisation for groups to focus their activities around. This week's national demonstration is the first event which has given local groups a chance to muster their forces. Past events have had a largely symbolic character — like the women-only torchlit procession in January. This was planned as a photo-opportunity for the press.

Rather than stressing the need to build a militant movement to take the offensive on the issue of abortion rights, campaign organisers have regarded mobilisations as an adjunct to parliamentary lobbying. Even now, the emphasis of the FAB steering committee is on making convincing submissions to parliamentary committees, and this week's demonstration is seen as something of a sideshow.

The only way to challenge the anti-abortion climate created by the debate around Alton's Bill is to go on the offensive and mobilise the vast opposition that exists. The demonstration this week should be seen as an opportunity to relaunch FAB, by giving activists the political arguments they need to defeat the anti-abortionists and win new allies in the fight for women's rights.

**Anne Burton**




Pandora Anderson

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● **NO MORE DEPORTATIONS**
**Tuesday 22 March 9.30am**
Demonstrate against the threatened deportation of Som Raj from Birmingham. Picket Thanet House, 231 The Strand, London WC2

◆ **IRISH SOLIDARITY EVENTS**

● **London Irish Forum**
**Wednesday 30 March, 7.30pm**
**'Ireland — Britain's Vietnam?'**
Final forum in the Irish Freedom Movement series Room S53, St Clements Building, London School of Economics, Houghton Street WC2 (Holborn tube)

● **London March for Justice**
**Sunday 20 March, 1pm**
March for the release of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, and the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act
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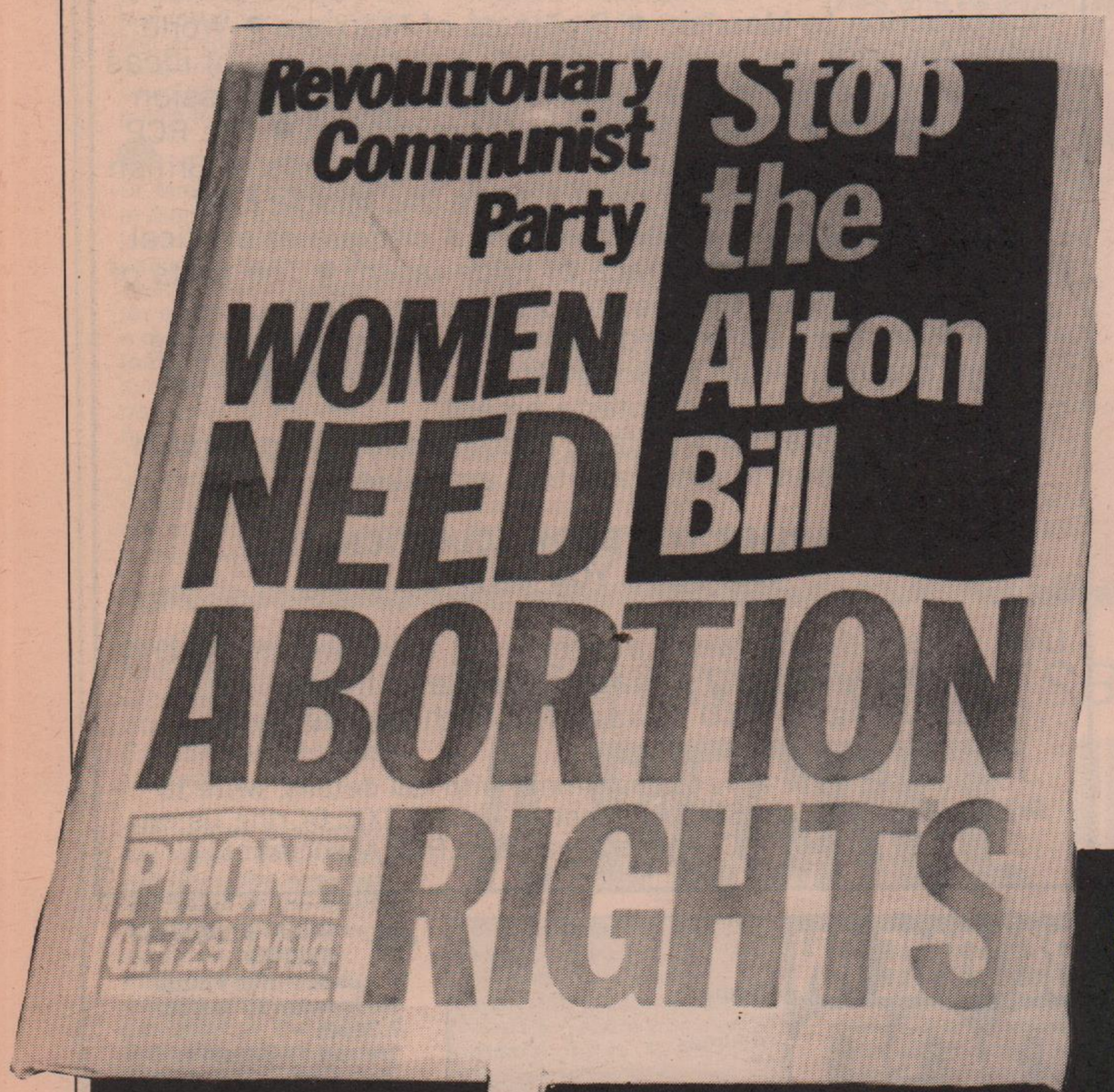
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'QUEER-BASHING' BECOMES LAW — see page 5

ABORTION RIGHTS ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE — see page 4

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly 18 March 1988 40p




# AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE, AS LATE AS NECESSARY

who dare to terminate an unwanted pregnancy can expect far worse treatment.

Liberal MP David Alton's attempt to reduce the abortion time-limit from 28 to 18 weeks has focused media and public attention on the abortion controversy. The debate about Alton's Bill reflects the anti-abortionists' success in shifting the climate of opinion towards an acceptance of further restrictions on women's right to abortion.

Alton and his supporters have successfully elevated the question of the rights of the fetus and removed the question of women's rights from the agenda of political debate. A recent report by a house of lords select committee acknowledged this achievement by arguing that time-limits on abortion were now unnecessary. The lords were so convinced that the state, the medical lobby and the professional moralists had established a climate in which women find it increasingly difficult to get abortions, that they concluded that further legal controls would serve no purpose.

We have to win back the initiative from the moralists. That means confronting their arguments head-on, and making the issue of women's rights the focus of political debate. So far, the campaign against the Alton Bill has avoided this challenge. The anti-abortionists have been able to dominate the debate because our side has fudged the issue.

Alton played on people's emotions by presenting countless thousands of aborted fetuses as victims of the abortion laws. Many of his critics tried to reply in kind by stressing that women who were carrying disabled fetuses would be forced to endure the trauma of giving birth if Alton's Bill became law. This attempt to make a play for public sympathy ignored the problems facing the much larger number of women who need abortions for other reasons. Once Alton said he would compromise on the disability issue, the ground was cut from under his opponents' feet. Now that it looks likely that some form of Alton's Bill will become law, his opponents merely favour amending it to provide abortion on request up to 12 weeks.

All down the line Alton's opponents have retreated, until they have lost sight of the issue at stake. Alton's insistence on defending the rights of the fetus means denying the right of women to play a full role in society. We have to say loud and clear that the only issue for us is defending women's rights. As long as the state denies women control over pregnancy, their second class status in society as bearers of children, domestic skivvies and part-time labourers will remain unchallenged.

We need to fight for free abortion on demand to free women from the bind of child-bearing and child-rearing, and from domestic drudgery in the home. We need free abortion on demand to free women from economic dependence on men, and improve our chances of finding decent employment. We need it most of all to free women to play a wider role in political life, and to enable us to start organising against our oppression. Fighting for all these things means making a stand against the moralists and refusing to make concessions on abortion rights.



LAST WEEK artist Rick Gibson was charged with 'outraging public decency' with an exhibit featuring a pair of human fetuses at a London art gallery. If the authorities now consider a work of art which fails to regard the fetus as sacred to be outrageous and indecent, women

Pandora Anderson