# VICTORY TO THE PALESTINIANS! -see page 2

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**WHY TONY BENN IS NOT THE ALTERNATIVE WE NEED — Pages 6 and 7**

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly | 8 April 1988 | 40p

*ONLY BOLDNESS CAN BEAT THE TORIES*

# THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT NOTHING

**WE need a bold opposition with the nerve to stand up and fight the Tory government. The bishops and the Labour Party/TUC bureaucrats do not fit the bill.**

**The official opposition has given up fighting the government and taken to praying for salvation. The Labour leadership is now widely considered irrelevant to political debates. Even right wingers like Enoch Powell and the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* have attacked Neil Kinnock for bowing before the Tories.**

**The TUC is applying for a new job as the employers' doormat. After the Ford Dundee fiasco (see page 4), TUC chief Norman Willis declared that the unions must never upset such a corporation again — that is, they must obey the bosses at all times. Many union leaders are already operating along these lines. The National Union of Teachers is the latest to adopt the timid and placatory approach of New Realism, reflected in the change of union symbol from a burning torch to a begging hand.**

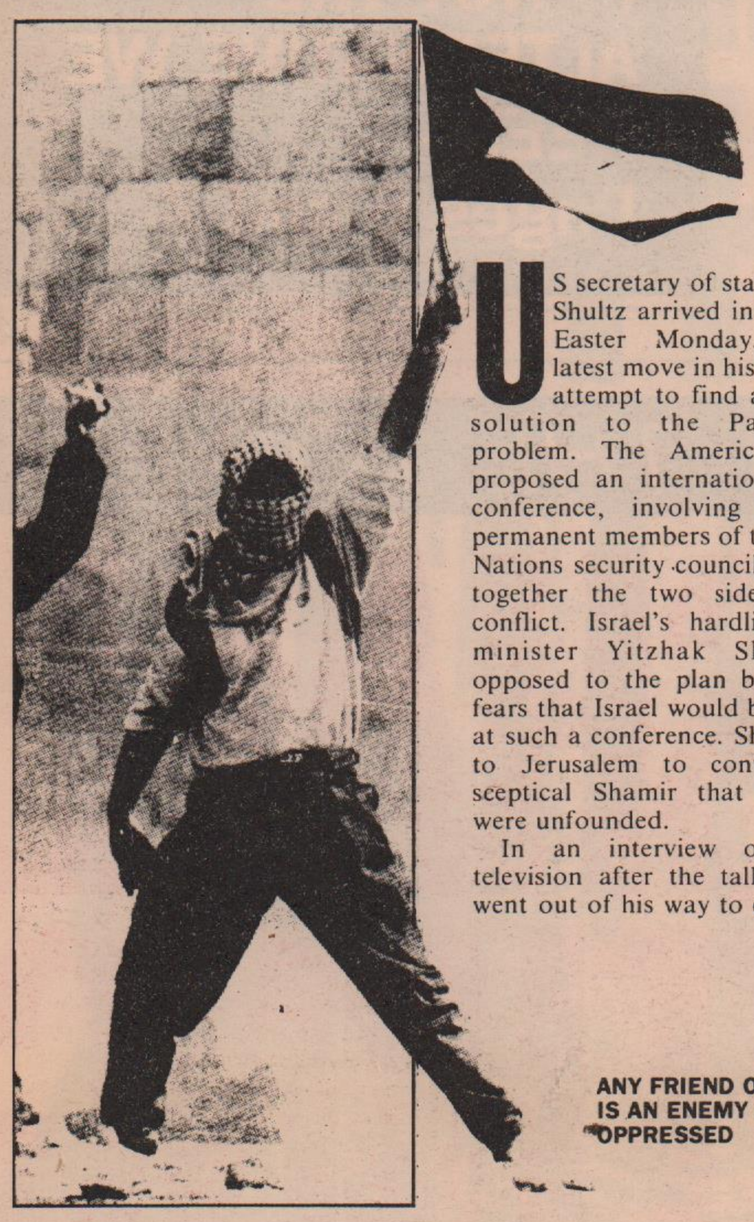
**The opposition's collapse threatens to present the Tory government with a walk-over. For example, the Tories are preparing to implement the first cash cuts in welfare benefit since the thirties next week. This is a vicious assault on the working class. Yet its most prominent opponent is the Bishop of Durham. The maverick 'man of the cloth' declared Tory welfare policies to be 'wicked'; the Labour frontbench merely backed him up with the observation that they were 'downright immoral'. Nobody mentioned the idea of fighting the cuts. Millions of claimants were left with the impression that the Second Coming was their only chance of achieving a decent level of social security.**

**An opposition which tails the Church of England and tries to look meek is no match for a ruthless capitalist class. Sermons won't stop social security cuts, any more than an arty image of an outstretched hand will save teachers from low pay and worsening working conditions. We need a new opposition which is willing to match the Tories in the struggles ahead. To win, it will have to be a lot bolder than the bishops or their acolytes in the labour movement leadership.**

KINNOCK OF LABOUR | BISHOP OF DURHAM | WILLIS OF TUC

## PEACE TALKS HIDE ISRAELI TERROR

# VICTORY TO THE PALESTINIANS



ANY FRIEND OF ISRAEL IS AN ENEMY OF THE OPPRESSED

US secretary of state George Shultz arrived in Israel on Easter Monday, in the latest move in his supposed attempt to find a peaceful solution to the Palestinian problem. The Americans have proposed an international peace conference, involving the five permanent members of the United Nations security council, to bring together the two sides in the conflict. Israel's hardline prime minister Yitzhak Shamir is opposed to the plan because he fears that Israel would be isolated at such a conference. Shultz went to Jerusalem to convince the sceptical Shamir that his fears were unfounded.

In an interview on Israeli television after the talks, Shultz went out of his way to emphasise that he was acting in Israel's best interests. Israel, he announced, had to be strong. 'But strength by itself', he added, 'is not a sufficient condition to give you peace. Peace and security come from negotiations.' In case anybody was still unsure of his intentions, Shultz told the Israeli public that he would on no account allow the peace conference 'to decide what your borders have to be here, there or elsewhere'.

**Shultz's acknowledgement that his peace moves were no threat to the integrity of the Israeli state showed that the real purpose of his trip was not to bring peace, but to conceal the continued oppression of the Palestinian people.**

Shultz knows that the survival of the state of Israel means the continued denial of the rights of the Palestinian people. But he recognises that the Palestinian uprising, now entering its fifth month, is giving heart to oppressed peoples throughout the Middle East and threatening US interests in the region. His peace negotiations aim to distract attention from the Palestinian fight for freedom and restore a measure of stability.

### 'GRASSHOPPERS'

Even as Shultz gave his backing for a 'strong' Israel, Yitzhak Shamir spelled out exactly how he intended to use that strength. The Palestinian people, he explained, 'are like grasshoppers compared to us'; the Israeli forces would 'crush' them as they would grasshoppers. In the week leading up to Shultz's visit the Israelis gave a graphic demonstration of Shamir's policy. More than a dozen Palestinians were killed as the Israelis reacted with savage ferocity to forestall the threat of major demonstrations in the occupied territories on Land Day — when Palestinians inside the Green Line commemorate those who died in 1976 protesting against land expropriation in Galilee.

### RAMPAGE

The Israelis are terrified that the wave of protests might unite Palestinians in the occupied territories with those living within the Green Line denoting pre-1967 Israel. On Tuesday therefore, the authorities imposed an unprecedented clampdown on the occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For three days Israeli forces turned the area into a closed military zone. Palestinians were prevented from leaving their home town. Troops stopped all food and fuel from reaching the territories. Some 20 villages, towns and refugee camps, including the whole of the Gaza Strip, faced a total curfew. 'The soldiers shoot in the air if they just see us in the windows,' said Leila Khaled, a refugee from the Balata camp in Gaza.

**Having sealed off the occupied territories, and excluded all journalists, the Israeli troops went on a rampage.**

On Friday, troops stormed a mosque in the village of Idna near Hebron and shot dead two Palestinians. On Sunday a Palestinian youth was electrocuted after troops forced him at gunpoint to climb on to live electric cables to haul down a Palestinian flag. Israel's defence minister Yitzhak Rabin crowed about the killings. 'In the majority of incidents', he boasted, 'the confrontations were a result of our initiatives.'

Shultz's diplomatic games are a charade whose only purpose is to conceal the continued oppression of the Palestinian people. The savagery of the Israeli response to the threat of Palestinian protest shows that there can be no diplomatic solution to the conflict. Israel survives only through the systematic oppression of the Palestinian people and the denial of their basic rights. Only a victory for the Palestinian people, and the destruction of the Zionist state which is the force for barbarism in the area, can bring genuine peace.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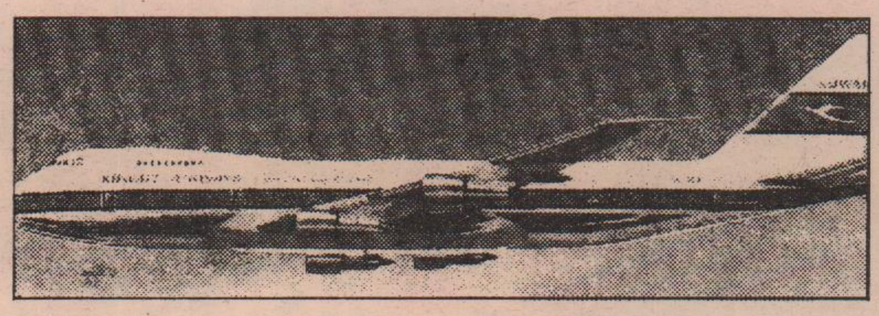

# The West hijacked the Middle East

**The hijacking of a Kuwaiti Jumbo jet with 22 Britons on board has prompted British politicians to revive the myth of mad Arab terrorists — and cover up the Western powers' role in hijacking the whole Middle East.**

**As we go to press the identity of the hijackers is not yet known, but this has not stopped Western 'experts' guessing which 'terrorist' outfit they belong to. According to the Thatcher-Reagan school of history it is fanatical Arabs, generally unshaven and wearing *kaffiyeh* headscarves, who are to blame for the turmoil in the Middle East. The hijacking of flight KU422 came just at the right time for the Western powers, who were worried that the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories might expose too much about the real source of the main Middle Eastern conflict. Now they will attempt to explain away Arab resistance as irrational fanaticism.**

### DOMINATION

**In reality Western intervention is the root cause of the conflicts in the Middle East, which has suffered decades of interference by outside powers from Palestine to the Gulf.**

**The West backed the creation of Israel and sustains it today with huge injections of cash and weapons. Whatever their criticisms of the Zionist state, Western diplomats support Israel's right to terrorise the Palestinians. Despite attempts to distance themselves from the Iran-Iraq war, the Western powers have sold tens of billions of dollars worth of military equipment to both sides since the war began in 1980. The West encouraged Iraq to attack Iran in the first place, after the Iranian masses overthrew the pro-Western Shah.**

**Kuwait, the destination of flight KU422, is caught between the two main Middle East conflicts. It is very close to the fighting between Iraq and Iran, and the oil-rich sheikhdom is home for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees. The massive Western naval task force, still menacing the Gulf, was sent ostensibly to protect Kuwaiti shipping.**

**Its true purpose was to reassert Western power at a time when it was on the wane throughout the region.**

**By popularising the idea that the peoples of the Middle East are deranged fundamentalists and fanatical terrorists, Western rulers hope to hide the fact that their struggles are a response to the oppressive conditions imposed by Western domination. Our job is to point out that the real terrorists are the Western powers who have hijacked the rights of the Middle Eastern masses and to win working class support for the fight against imperialist aggression.**

*Daniel Nassim*

# TEACHERS AGAINST THE CLAUSE

**JUST as the Tories are getting ready to outlaw any promotion of homosexuality in schools, leaders of the National Union of Teachers are getting ready to ditch the fight for lesbian and gay rights.**

**The Local Government Bill contains a clause which will make it an offence for teachers to do anything that might encourage their pupils to take a positive view of homosexuality. Even before the Clause has become law it has encouraged a backlash against lesbians and gays. Bradford's Labour-controlled education authority recently suspended a gay teacher who refused to hide his sexuality, before pressure from local teachers forced the council to reinstate him. In Wakefield the Labour council banned a lesbian support group from holding a workshop as part of an International Women's Day event. Once the Clause receives the Royal Assent there will be nothing to stop the bigots acting on their prejudices — except rank and file trade unionists.**

### DISGRACE

**In this context the failure to agree on any policy in relation to the Clause at last week's NUT annual conference was a disgrace. During a weekend in which the leadership of the largest teaching union was going out of its way to project a moderate image, the conference organisers were keen to avoid standing up for lesbian and gay rights. While ordinary members argued for a resolution committing the union to oppose the Clause, the executive moved an amendment removing all mention of the need for positive images of lesbians and gays. Then in the finest tradition of official labour movement conferences, the leadership discovered there was no time to take the issue to the vote.**

**The standing ovation given to a lesbian delegate proves that there are plenty of teachers who want to fight — it is up to rank and file activists to coordinate the campaign to defeat the Clause which their leaders cannot contemplate.**

*THERE IS NO BRITISH SOLUTION*

# TALKS WON'T END THE IRISH WAR

**The British government's current 'talks about talks' with Northern Ireland politicians have nothing to do with any search for peace**

The recent upsurge of violence has been followed by a flurry of political activity in and about Northern Ireland. Tory minister Tom King has been holding separate 'talks about talks' with Unionist politicians and with the leaders of the moderate nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party. Media commentators have begun speculating about 'a breakthrough' which could create the conditions for a devolved assembly, as a big step towards a political solution to the 19-year old conflict.

## SHAM

In truth, there is no prospect of a British political solution to the Irish War. The current round of talks is just another sham diplomatic initiative. It is designed to maintain the impression that Britain is a force for democratic progress in Ireland, while the Crown forces get on with pursuing their war against republican supporters of Irish unity.

**The Tories know that they cannot negotiate any effective compromise deal in Northern Ireland.**

The contradiction between the British authorities and many Irish nationalists is irreconcilable, because it centres on the fundamental issue of sovereignty. Whatever SDLP leader John Hume and his supporters might do or say, and whatever local assemblies the British might set up, the core of republican supporters will accept nothing less than full Irish freedom from British rule.

Recognising that they cannot end the war on their terms, every British government since 1969 has sought to contain it, and to isolate the republicans from wider support in Ireland and Britain. This British containment strategy involves a sustained propaganda campaign to depict Irish republicans as 'terrorists', 'criminals', etc. It also involves the never-ending pretence of searching for a political solution.

Whenever events make it embarrassingly obvious that the British state is at war with the nationalist community, the government tries to create a political smoke-screen. This is what is happening today.

## BLOODY

This year has been marked by a series of bloody events. It began with the refusal to prosecute top Royal Ulster Constabulary officers involved in a shoot-to-kill campaign, continued with the execution of three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar and the murder of three more nationalists by a Loyalist gun-and-grenade attacker in a Belfast graveyard, and culminated in the killing of two British soldiers who threatened another republican funeral procession three days later. All of this has helped to expose something of the truth about the Irish 'troubles'. It has suggested to the television-watching world that the conflict is not a law and order campaign against a few terrorists, but a colonial war between the supporters and opponents of the British occupation. The Tories' new enthusiasm for talks is an attempt to put the mask back in place.

**The 'talks about talks' are designed to distract attention from the fact of war, and to restore the myth of British justice and democracy in Northern Ireland.**

It is uncertain how much progress towards devolution the Tories can make at the moment. But from the British establishment's point of view, the important thing is that the 'political process' is seen to function; the result of the talks is secondary. The influential *Economist* summed up the diversionary function of such British initiatives last week:

'Northern Ireland needs plenty of politics — concords, initiatives, communiqués, commissions of inquiry and much more — so that its arguments are conducted politically and not by the gun.'

BRITISH POLITICAL INITIATIVES AND MILITARY REPRESSION ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME STRATEGY

In fact the conflict will continue and even intensify; the British authorities are now planning mass arrests in connection with the Belfast killings. Their hope is that the crescendo of talks can drown out the sound of the gunfire. British politicians have tried this trick often before at moments of crisis, in an attempt to restrict resistance to their rule.

Back in 1972, after British paratroopers shot dead 14 unarmed Derry marchers on Bloody Sunday, Labour Party leader Harold Wilson suggested that the Tory government should announce plans to withdraw from Northern Ireland within 15 years. Wilson was well aware that no such withdrawal would take place. His aim was only to limit the damage done by Bloody Sunday and to discourage more nationalists from turning to the IRA to defend them. 'If men of moderation have nothing to hope for', Wilson warned the Tories, 'men of violence will have something to shoot for.' Two years later, as prime minister, Wilson continued this twin-track strategy of phoney political initiatives and repression.

**His government presided over the shortlived power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland, while planning to introduce the SAS and remove political status from Irish prisoners of war.**

The hunger-strike of 1981, in which 10 republican prisoners died struggling to regain political status, provided damning evidence against Britain's claim that republicans were isolated criminals. Before he died on hunger-strike, IRA volunteer Bobby Sands was elected MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. When he died, 100 000 people followed his funeral. The Tory government responded with several more rounds of talks and political initiatives. First it set up an Ulster Assembly in 1982. When that empty shell fooled nobody, the Tories went further and signed the Anglo-Irish agreement with the Dublin government in 1985. Through those years of hype and hypocrisy about 'political progress towards peace', the British authorities ran a shoot-to-kill campaign and introduced a system of supergrass showtrials to repress republicans.

British diplomacy and political initiatives in Northern Ireland have never been an alternative to military repression. They are complementary parts of the government's containment strategy. The idea is to isolate the committed republican community by political scheming, to prevent the military campaign against them from provoking wider resistance.

## 'COFFIN'

The relationship between the two strands of British strategy is well illustrated by proposals from prominent British newspapers that Peter Robinson, deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, should take a leading role in the talks because he has recently become a 'moderate'. Robinson's new willingness to talk has not altered his attitude to Irish republicans. As he told a Loyalist rally last Monday, 'It is not the conference table but the coffin that is the right place for the Provisional IRA.' Such 'moderation' is the stuff of which British political initiatives are made in occupied Ireland.

**The Tories and their predecessors have been most successful in creating their political smoke-screen within Britain itself.**

Over here, many people — and all major political parties — accept that the government's search for a political solution is a sincere one. We should be clear that there is no separation between the two strands of British strategy. It is not that the political initiatives are good and the military repression is bad; both are connected aspects of Britain's war against Irish nationalists. And neither could operate effectively without the other.

However the Tories promote their political and military policies today, there is no British solution to the Irish War. British imperialism is British imperialism, whether it wears the pin-striped suit of a civil servant or the battle-dress of an SAS assassin. All it can offer Irish nationalists is continuing oppression under different packaging. That is the guarantee that the struggle against British rule will continue.

## CONFUSION

The Irish War will only end when it is won. The nationalists are the side struggling for true democracy and peace in a united Ireland. Yet they cannot defeat the British state alone. Britain's containment strategy has succeeded in creating a stalemate within the war zones of the North. To break it, the nationalists require support from the working class in Southern Ireland. The British working class also has a key role to play in altering the balance in the Irish War.

Our aim is to bring British people into the struggle, on the side of the Irish nationalists, by building a solidarity movement here. To do that, we need to cut through all the confusion about talks, 'terrorism' and political initiatives, which so clouds public perceptions on this side of the Irish Sea. We need to equip ourselves with the arguments to destroy all of the myths about Britain's 'progressive' role, and to show our audience that forcing the British authorities out of Ireland is the one solution we should be fighting for.

The Irish Freedom Movement dayschool, 'Time to end the Irish War', in London on Sunday 17 April, is the place to pin down these problems and take forward the campaign to get the troops — and their political paymasters — out of Ireland now.

**PUBLIC MEETING**
**Hammersmith and Fulham Trades Council**

**IRELAND-THE ISSUES**

**Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street,W6**
**(nearest tube:Hammersmith)**

**THURSDAY 14 APRIL 7.30PM**

Speakers:

| | |
|---|---|
| Mitchel McLaughlin | Sinn Fein councillor |
| Tony Benn | Labour MP |
| Liz Curtis | Information on Ireland |
| John Fitzpatrick | Irish Freedom Movement |

Chair:

| | |
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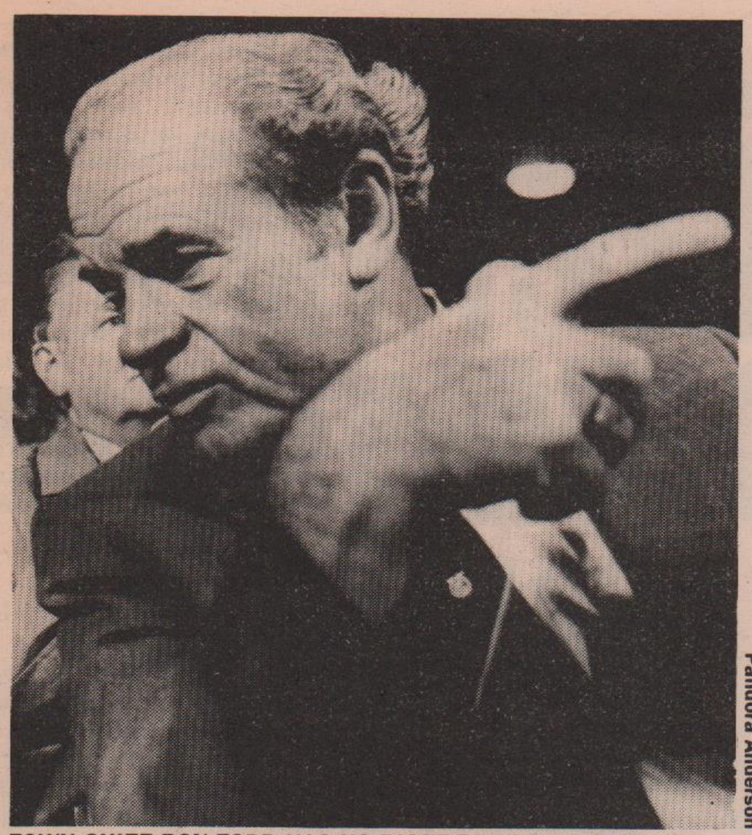
| Oliver Donohue | Trades Council |



Pandora Anderson

TGWU CHIEF RON TODD HAS NO RIGHT TO POINT THE FINGER

*AFTER THE DUNDEE FIASCO*

# SAY NO TO THEIR SINGLE-UNION DEALS

**Joe Hall argues that the TUC's attempt to regulate competition over single-union agreements will intensify in the light of the Ford Dundee fiasco**

'We must never let this happen again' declared TUC chief Norman Willis after it became clear that the Ford Motor Company had pulled out of Dundee for good. Willis did not mean that the unions should never again grovel to the employers only to be kicked in the teeth as they were over Dundee. He meant that they should never again allow the employers to use the excuse of inter-union squabbles to ditch a single-union deal. After Dundee it seems certain that the TUC general council will approve new proposals for regulating single-union agreements. What is the row over recognition all about, and what should our attitude be to single-union agreements?

## INEVITABLE

The trade union chiefs have no objection in principle to single-union deals; they only complain when the sweetheart deal is done by a rival union. An interim report by the TUC special review body obtained by *tns* noted that 'most large unions organising in the private sector are offering single-union agreements to employers, and as there are no generally accepted spheres of influence, some competition and conflict is inevitable.'

**The problem for the TUC is not that these deals are taking place, but that up to now there has been no satisfactory means of regulating union competition.**

At Dundee the AEU took advantage of advance information about the planned Ford plant supplied by its leader Gavin Laird, a director for the Scottish Development Agency. In return for single-union recognition the AEU agreed to wages and conditions far inferior to those obtaining at Ford's 22 other UK plants. When details of the deal became public, the other Ford unions were incensed. Their complaint was not that the AEU had signed away its members' rights, although this is what the transport union tried to argue later, but that it had shafted the other Ford unions. 'Why the engineers,' complained TGWU official Bill Morris, 'when we are the union with the largest number of members in Ford UK plants?' Ford used the inter-union row and the TGWU's threat to boycott the plant as the pretext for pulling out of the Dundee deal.

It seems possible that Ford had no intention of building a plant in Dundee, and simply used the negotiations to test the water with the union leaders. Ford management used the talks as an exercise to find out if the union leaders would ditch the national agreement which covers every plant, at the same time as they were pushing them to accept a punitive pay and flexibility package on behalf of Ford's 32 000-strong British workforce. Whatever Ford's motives in floating the Dundee deal and then killing it off, the company certainly manipulated the unions' cringing willingness to make concessions to great advantage. While the TUC crawled as never before, the Tories were able to blame the unions' petty rivalry for losing jobs.

## QUEUE

Once it became clear that the TGWU would get the blame for scotching the Dundee deal, Ron Todd, leader of the transport union, insisted that he had no objection to a single-union agreement or to the AEU having it, but he could not accept the plant's employees being offered worse terms and conditions than those in other Ford UK plants. This was simply an attempt by Todd to make the TGWU's opposition to the Dundee deal look more principled than it was. If Todd is really so concerned about his members' pay and conditions perhaps he could explain why he tried so hard to sell Ford's recent punitive pay and productivity package to his members, and why his union has signed at least half a dozen single-union deals. The truth is that Todd is concerned to make sure that his union is at the head of the queue for recognition no matter what the cost to his members.

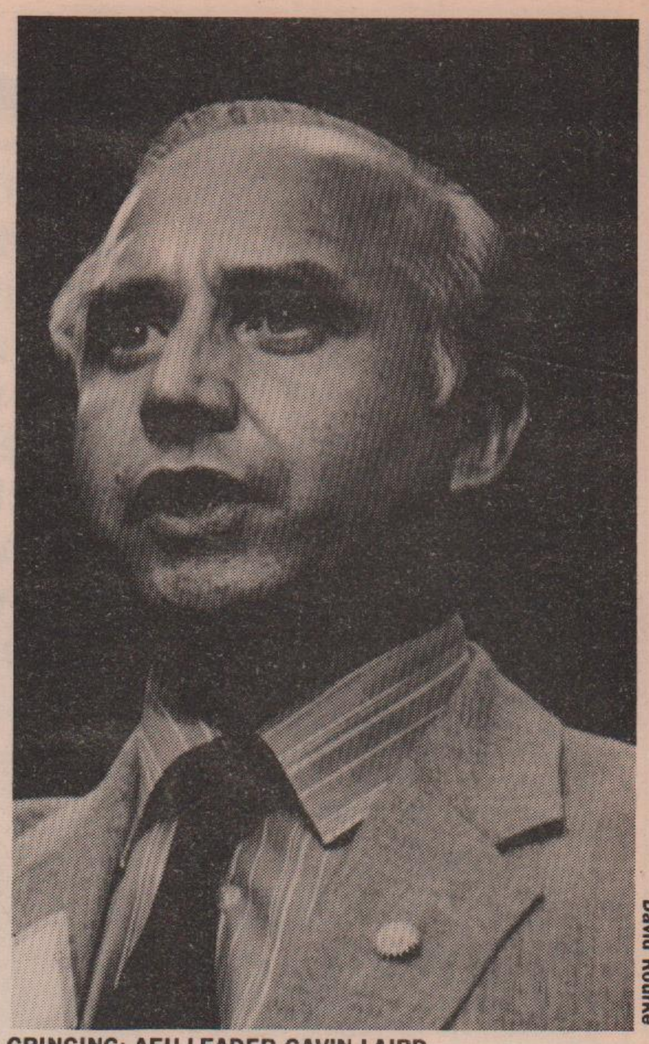
**We have no objection in principle to single-union arrangements — what we object to is the sectional deals pursued by the TUC unions and the terms on which they are negotiated.**

We are in favour of one union organising workers in a single industry with the aim of uniting and strengthening our forces against the employer. This is anathema to the official union leaders for whom single-unionism means making any concession to the employers if it will gain them recognition against a rival union. They have even been prepared to sign away trade union rights, as they did at Dundee, before any workers have been employed or any members recruited.

The TUC report admits that single-union deals have led to a dilution of pay and conditions, but argues that this is the price the unions must pay for recognition in today's hostile climate. It accepts that single-union deals often entail some sort of no-strike arrangement, but claims that the unions have long accepted that they must 'qualify the ability of workers to strike in the interests of stable industrial relations'. The only point at issue for the TUC is how to regulate inter-union competition and prevent fiascos such as Dundee happening again.

The proposals put forward by the special review body amount to formalising what is already standard practice in development areas such as Wales and Scotland. The TUC interim report on the single-union issue gave the example of Wales, where the TGWU led the way in establishing the framework for single-union competition: 'The main unions agreed informally for a period that in exchange for notification from the Welsh inward investment authorities, those unions which wished would each meet a new company. After discussions the new company would then decide which union to recognise and the others would abide by the decision.' The Scottish TUC was trying to emulate the Wales experiment by pushing through the AEU/Ford deal at Dundee.

It has now got to the stage where the TUC sees its role as the organiser of a beauty contest which allows the employers to be the judge of how unions should be organised. If we are to re-establish the idea of independent trade unions we have to insist that the working class, not the bosses, must be the judge of whether their organisations are up to scratch.



David Rourke

CRINGING: AEU LEADER GAVIN LAIRD

# Tories try it on

**Two decisions last week show how the Tories are using the law to test the water as they dismantle the trade unions**

**If proof were needed that the law exists to protect the power and privilege of the capitalist class, then last week's high court decision against the National Union of Seamen provided it. Mr Justice Latey banned the union from even balloting its members employed by Sealink over strike action against possible redundancies. The NUS had decided on the ballot after Sealink boss James Sherwood had threatened to emulate P&O by cutting ferry crews on its cross-Channel operations. This ruling extends the scope of the employment law to prohibit not only secondary action, but also a ballot preceding such action under the 1984 Trade Union Act. When it suits the employers, they can use this act to force a union to hold a ballot before taking strike action. Now the courts have made it clear that, in other circumstances, they will interpret Tory anti-union laws so as to ban ballots. Heads they win, tails we lose.**

**The high court judgement is only the most far-reaching of a series of unprecedented legal moves against the seafarers' union. Earlier the high court had ordered the NUS not to call a national strike whatever the result of a ballot then in progress, and threatened to rob the union of its funds if it disobeyed the ruling. In the past employers have used Tory anti-union legislation to prevent secondary action. But they have never before used the courts, as P&O did in this instance, to pre-empt the outcome of a ballot by arguing that implementing the action threatened in it would infringe government legislation.**

**In another move designed to undermine the unions, the government announced an inquiry by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into work practices in the television and film industries. Employment minister Norman Fowler warned that the investigation under Section 79 of the 1973 Fair Trading Act was only the start of a clampdown on trade union restrictive practices across all industries. The significance of this move lies not in the particular industry that has been targeted, but in the fact that the government has signalled its willingness to use the law for the first time to regulate working practices.**

**The clauses under which the inquiry has been authorised were inserted into the Fair Trading Act by the Heath government of the early seventies as a gesture of even-handedness; it made sense to extend powers against restrictions on the supply of goods and services to the supply of labour too. This was done on the understanding that they would never be used for fear of provoking the unions — the fact that the government is no longer concerned about the reaction is an indication of how powerless the unions have become.**

**The Tories are trying to make union-busting sound modern by presenting trade union restrictive practices as obsolete, and using the law to stamp on any opposition which threatens to upset their plans to make decent wages and conditions a relic of the past.**

# They're all at it

**MANY TUC unions like to pretend that their opposition to particular sweetheart deals done by their rivals is a matter of principle. But, as the TUC list reprinted below shows, their real objection is that some unions have successfully done more such scabbing deals than others.**

## COMPANY / UNION(S)

**AB Electrics EETPU/APEX • BICC Cables GMB/MATSA**
**Bowman Webber EETPU • Cadburys, Chirk TGWU**
**Christian Salvesen EETPU • Eaton Axles AEU • Hitachi EETPU**
**IBC AEU/EETPU/TGWU/TASS/ASTMS • Inmos EETPU**
**Merchant Bar ISTC • Iveco Ford AEU/TGWU/EETPU**
**• Komatsu AEU**
**Matsushita GMB • NEK Cables GMB • Nissan AEU**
**Norsk Hydro TGWU • Orion Electrics EETPU • Pirelli GMB**
**Sanyo EETPU • Sharp EETPU • Shotton Paper EETPU**
**Toshiba EETPU • West Ferry Printers NGA/SOGAT/AEU/EETPU**
**Yuasa Batteries EETPU • Xidex EETPU • UK Optical TGWU**

**thenextstep**

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly | No 13 | Editor: Mick Hume

# THE EVIL IS CAPITALISM

**'A FOOL AND AN ANTI-CHRIST' was how Tory MP Nicholas Fairbairn described Bishop of Durham David Jenkins, after the bishop attacked the government's new social security cuts as 'wicked'. The ease with which the government can brush off such moral assaults confirms that anti-capitalists, rather than anti-Christs, are the only people with the arguments to take on the Tories today.**

**The Bishop of Durham's remarks are only significant because they capture the tone of most official opposition to the Tories today. The Labour Party has now been reduced to echoing the opinions of Church of England dignitaries. When Jenkins said on Easter Sunday that Tory economic policies put statistics before people and would make the poor poorer and the rich richer, Labour frontbenchers were quick to back him up. This is part of the general Labour and CofE preoccupation with 'the greedy society' which Margaret Thatcher is supposed to have created, and which they want to reform by redistributing some resources towards the NHS and the welfare state.**

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**According to the opposition view, too many people in Thatcher's Britain are only out to grab whatever they can get for themselves and damn the rest. The media is full of images reflecting this idea, from the 'Loads-a-Money' lout on *Friday Night Live* to newspaper strip cartoons featuring Yuppies with credit withdrawal symptoms. The arguments about the greedy society, which have dominated opposition thinking since the general election campaign, are based on the belief that the Tories have divided Britain between a prosperous majority and a poor minority. In fact the strength of this idea among opposition spokesmen reflects the Tories' real success — not in making millions of British people rich, but in making Labour and the rest believe that they have done so.**

**The notion of a prosperous majority is a myth of Tory propaganda. If Labour leader Neil Kinnock tried to address the £400-a-week docker he is always on about, he would find that such wealthy workers do not exist in Britain's ports. The biggest areas of employment, like local government, the civil service and the NHS, are still bastions of low pay — and workers in all of them are now facing further assaults. Skilled workers elsewhere have seen their incomes rise slightly. But they are hardly living the life of luxury which Labour spokesmen believe; indeed, much of their extra cash comes from bonus and productivity schemes, implemented through speed-ups and drastic changes in work practices like those which recently caused a wave of disputes in the motor industry. The only people who have truly got-rich-quick in Thatcher's Britain are the top City whizz-kids, a very small number of people whose position is already threatened by the impact of last October's crash.**

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**The Tories have not achieved power by creating a prosperous majority. What they have done is to imbue public opinion with the perception that their economic policies hold out the only hope of progress. They have been greatly aided in this by the widespread view that there is no worthwhile alternative on offer from the official opposition. This is the true import of the moralistic and unrealistic criticisms offered by everybody from the Bishop of Durham to the leaders of the Labour Party. Far from being a problem for the government, they only serve to confirm the lack of credible alternatives to Thatcherism. The most recent opinion polls on political and economic matters bear this out.**

**On Monday, a Mori poll in *The Times* showed that despite their unpopularity over everything from the health service to the poll tax, the Tories are still at 49 per cent — nine points ahead of Labour. The overwhelming factor in the Tories' success is the popular belief that they have the best policies available for the British economy. The number of poll respondents who thought that the British economy would improve under the Tories this year stood at 37 per cent, up from 31 per cent before the budget. The very groups which Labour most needs to win support from, such as the skilled working class, seemed least impressed with the idea that Kinnock could do better than Thatcher with the British economy.**

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**These statistics reflect a basic acknowledgement among many people of the way that the world works, and the unworldly nature of opposition policies. These people recognise, if only semi-consciously, that there are certain rules governing the operation of the capitalist system. This does not mean that they appreciate or accept the underlying reality of the employers' need to accumulate capital through raising the rate at which they exploit their workers. Rather, people acknowledge that factors such as efficiency and competitiveness are crucial to the health of a capitalist economy. In the conditions of a world economy which has been suffering severe problems since the early seventies, increasing capitalist efficiency and competitiveness must mean cutting out waste and concentrating resources in productive sectors. This is a lesson which the Tories have taught important sections of the working class.**

**In light of these perceptions, the opposition's ideas on redistributing wealth towards unproductive spending on health and welfare make little sense to many people. It is not that people are too selfish or greedy to care; given a specific instance, such as the NHS crisis, the overwhelming majority of British people will support an inorease in public spending. Yet these same people can see that, at the level of general economic policy, it makes no sense to try to run a capitalist economy on the humanitarian lines suggested by the CofE and the Labour politicians. Thus whatever sympathy they might feel for the welfare state, they will grudgingly accept that the hard-headed Tory approach is far more convincing.**

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**All of this comes down to one fact: there is only one viable economic policy for the government of any capitalist country to pursue today. It is being implemented not just by the Tories, but by governments of various political complexions across the Western world. Despite their differences over public spending details, even the Labour leaders now openly acknowledge the primacy of market forces in making the world go round. The logical consequence is that there is no alternative to Thatcherism, *so long as you accept the boundaries of capitalist economics.* We do not.**

**The desperate state of health and welfare services in Britain today is not an argument for fiddling around with the finances of a corrupt system. It is an argument for revolutionising the entire basis on which society produces and uses its wealth, by breaking the power of the profit-hungry capitalist class and creating a new order in which production is for need.**

**Many people who hate the excesses of capitalism see such arguments as impossible to win given today's state of public opinion. But we should be careful not to confuse the Tories' success in marginalising their official opponents with any idea that Thatcherite ideology is deeply embedded in the working class. Every available indicator shows that the Tories' standing is intimately bound up with public confidence in their economic policies. If this confidence is dented by events, things could appear very differently. Understanding this is particularly important today, given the current drift of the world economy back towards a full-blown recession.**

**In the same edition of *The Times* that carried the poll on present attitudes towards economic policies, Mori boss Robert Worcester pointed out that, despite appearances, the Tories are skating on thin ice:**

**'The main element holding the Tory share of the voting intention in the upper 40 per cents is the credit Mrs Thatcher is given for management of the economy. If the widely forecast American recession blows its way across the water, then what for Mrs Thatcher's majority?'**

**The recession which will hit the British economy in the not-too-distant future will remove the strongest plank from the Tory platform. It will leave the deeply unpopular aspects of the government's policies unprotected, and open up fresh opportunities for challenging all that they stand for. But if the only alternative on offer is the joint Bishop of Durham/Labour Party appeal for moral economics and minor tax changes, that opportunity will be wasted and the capitalist class will ride out the crisis.**

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**In conditions of recession, the idea of redistributing resources towards the welfare state while keeping British capitalism competitive will seem even less realistic than today. If such a misguided approach remains the focus of opposition, it can only lead to demoralisation among those looking for an alternative, and a growing conviction that nothing can be done.**

**The evil that Tories do is a consequence of their class position, not their un-Christian principles. The only way to win the arguments against them is by putting the case for a new society, freed from the constraints of the capitalist profit motive. The creation of a world in which the majority can truly benefit is not a pipedream; it is a pressing necessity if we are to escape from the scourge of unemployment, poverty, exploitation and oppression. Our aim is not to embarrass people away from self-interest towards Christian charity, but to convince them that the way to improve their lot is to join the struggle against a system which survives at the expense of us all.**

● Don't panic: last week's *tns* did not appear and this week's is shorter than usual because of our Easter conference. Back to normal next week.

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# the propaganda war

## LAST POST FOR 'RED GUARDS'

'COME as Robert MacLennan and no one will notice you,' urged the invitations to the fancy dress party at the Young Liberals' conference in Llandudno last weekend. But even the Democrats' faceless wonder of a leader would have found it difficult to remain anonymous at the party. Just nine delegates turned up for the first session of the conference (the drunk sleeping under the arches on the seafront denied that he was a delegate in fancy dress). If he had turned up, even MacLennan's experience in organising the SLDP's merger talks could hardly have prepared him for a farce in Llandudno.

The Mayor of Aberconwy borough, Councillor Victor Williams, arrived at the conference centre on Friday morning to extend the customary welcome to the delegates. Deciding that it was beneath his civic dignity to address eight men, one woman (and no dogs) he turned tail and left. Half way through the first session the woman disappeared as well. Rachel Pitchford, president of the Young Liberals, decided she'd had enough and took the next train home. And then there were eight...

What the remaining delegates lacked in numbers they made up in rhetoric. They were particularly incensed that the glory that is the Young Liberals might soon be merged with the Young Democrats. 'I see it as a poor successor to the Liberal Party,' declared Andy Cooper, the delegate from Colne Valley. 'All I have to say of the months ahead is "abandon ship and row like hell." ' We can only hope that the lifeboat does not require more than eight pairs of hands at the oars.

### THORN

It was a less-than-grand finale for the organisation once dubbed the 'Red Guards', which had been a big thorn in the side of the Liberal establishment. In their heyday the Young Liberals claimed 24 000 members and hogged the headlines with their stance on issues such as South Africa and nuclear weapons.

The Young Liberals were formed in 1903 by Herbert Gladstone 'to train young people for politics, by debates, lectures, demonstrations, the circulation of books and active political work of all kinds through the year'. By 1910 the organisation claimed 550 branches nationwide. It declined along with the party's senior wing, as the Tories replaced the Liberals as the champions of the British capitalist class. But the sixties revived and transformed the Young Liberals. They became the beatniks of British politics, who worshipped Joan Baez and Jane Fonda, cried 'Judas' when Bob Dylan went electric, grew their hair and marched.

The Young Liberals' role was to act as a bridge between the radical movement and old-fashioned British politics. They sought to combine the revolt of the students with the electoral trudge of a middle class political machine. They evolved what they called a 'dual approach to politics', working inside and outside the established structures. They popularised 'community politics', providing a means by which the radicalised middle class could engage in collective activity without sullying their hands with class struggle. The Young Liberals were prominent in the squatting movement of the early seventies and in organisations such as the Campaign against the Criminal Trespass Law. They helped form the 'Stop the Tour' campaign in 1970 to prevent the Springboks playing in Britain. They were to the fore in the Anti-Nazi League. They were vocal in calling for British withdrawal from Ireland. A Young Liberal delegation even met Gerry Adams at Westminster.

### BRIDGE

If the Young Liberals were a bridge between radicalism and the status quo, the organisations of the British left were the ones who crossed it. The left joined many of the campaigns associated with the Young Liberals — from nuclear disarmament to sanctions against South Africa. Left wingers adopted 'community politics' and the 'dual approach' — combining extra-parliamentary stunts with campaigning for the Labour Party. The left was willing to follow the Young Liberals to gain some respectability. In 1979, on the tenth anniversary of the arrival of British troops on Irish streets, the combined forces of the British left turned out to march behind a handful of Young Liberals on the 'Time to go' demonstration.

The left's accommodation persuaded leading Young Liberals like Peter Hain to join the Labour Party, where they could pursue the same policies with a greater chance of achieving national prominence. Hain has since played a prominent part in moving the Labour left firmly on to the middle ground. He backed Tony Benn in his bid to be deputy leader in 1981. Two years later he helped organise Neil Kinnock's bid for the leadership of the party, and the rightwards 'realignment' of the left which followed it.

The recession and the coming of Thatcherite reality signalled the end for both the Young Liberals and the left-wing radicals they influenced. The new generation of middle class youth didn't mind eating brown rice and listening to Joan Baez (although they preferred Suzanne Vega), but were more interested in looking after number one than in pursuing community politics. Not for them a draughty squat on Elgin Avenue and marching to save the environment; they preferred the comforts of a bijou terrace in Islington and shares in Thatcher's revolution.

The demise of the Young Liberals is symptomatic of the decline of the liberal left. It is a fitting comment on the opportunists of the left that the middle class group which they once courted as a powerful ally at the centre of British politics should end up as eight people huddled together in a draughty conference room in a North Wales seaside resort.

*Kenan Malik*

# THE BEN

# BACKWARDS,

## In their challe have put them alternative in that we don't

The Tony Benn/Eric Heffer challenge to Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock and his deputy Roy Hattersley is a last desperate gamble to revive Labour's left wing.

It's been downhill for the Labour left since 1981. When Tony Benn almost beat Denis Healey in the deputy leadership election at the 1981 Labour conference, it seemed as if the left was a force to be reckoned with. The Labour left appeared to have strong support in the party's constituency organisations, and was firmly entrenched in local government. The Greater London Council and city authorities like Liverpool and Sheffield were the left's flagships. Many activists were convinced that it was only a matter of time before the left took over the party at a national level.

**During the last seven years, however, it has become obvious that the much-vaunted power of the Labour left was entirely illusory.**

The left's grip on constituency parties was the product of bureaucratic manipulation rather than of influence won through mobilising political support. Similarly, left wingers won power on councils because they got themselves nominated as official Labour candidates, and not because they convinced the voting public to support left-wing policies. As a consequence Labour's leading left-wing activists were well-trained in wheeling and dealing behind the scenes, but proved singularly inept at connecting with the concerns of ordinary people in the world outside of the committee rooms.

### HUMILIATION

Because the left did not truly represent anything but itself, Labour's right wing had little trouble isolating Benn and the radicals behind him. Since Neil Kinnock became Labour leader, with the left's support, in 1983, his party bureaucracy has inflicted one humiliation after another on the left without provoking much resistance. Lacking any public power base of its own, the left has been forced to retreat and to await the coming of its moment of glory. So as Benn and Heffer step forward, has the moment arrived?

In all of the early media discussion about the Benn/Heffer challenge, one point has been obscured. During the past five years, the wing of the Labour Party which these two represent went along with the Kinnock leadership at every critical moment. Thus, while Kinnock sought to out-Thatcher Thatcher during last year's general election campaign, the left kept its head down so as not to undermine Labour's electoral prospects.

### SILENT

Benn and Heffer certainly had serious reservations about Labour's wholesale adoption of right-wing New Realism. Yet they never mounted any public campaign against it. Leading left wingers allowed Kinnock to dictate what Labour said and did, while they stayed silent and tried to avoid being branded as splitters. In the crucial months before last year's general election, Benn himself became invisible and allowed Kinnock to monopolise the presentation of Labour policy. This inaction means that the left's criticisms of Kinnock have been mere opinions with no practical consequences.

**Through their silence and refusal to stand up to Kinnock in public, Benn and the rest became accomplices to Labour's drift to the right.**

Kinnock has long made clear his determination to accept nothing more than a token presence of the left in Labour politics. For its part, the Labour left has decided that a token presence is better than none at all. Kinnock had little trouble asserting his authority, since the left lacked public support and influence. Banished to the political sidelines, the Labour left has become increasingly divided and incoherent.

### MODEST

The aim of the Benn/Heffer election campaign is to cohere together the remaining forces of the Labour left. The two Campaign Group candidates recognise that they cannot win wider influence inside Kinnock's party. They also understand that they are in no position to influence public opinion. Their objective is more modest. Through their campaign, they hope to rally the old troops and give some sense of purpose to the demoralised and depleted ranks of the Labour left.

On the day he announced his candidacy, John Carvel of the *Guardian* asked Benn why he was standing when he was bound to be defeated. Benn's reply captured the downbeat mood on Labour's left wing today:

'You see we couldn't be at a lower point than we are, and so in that sense there is nowhere to go but up. The scorn and contempt poured on people who hold the views I hold, coming from all over the place, has been on such a scale now that there is no such thing as defeat.'

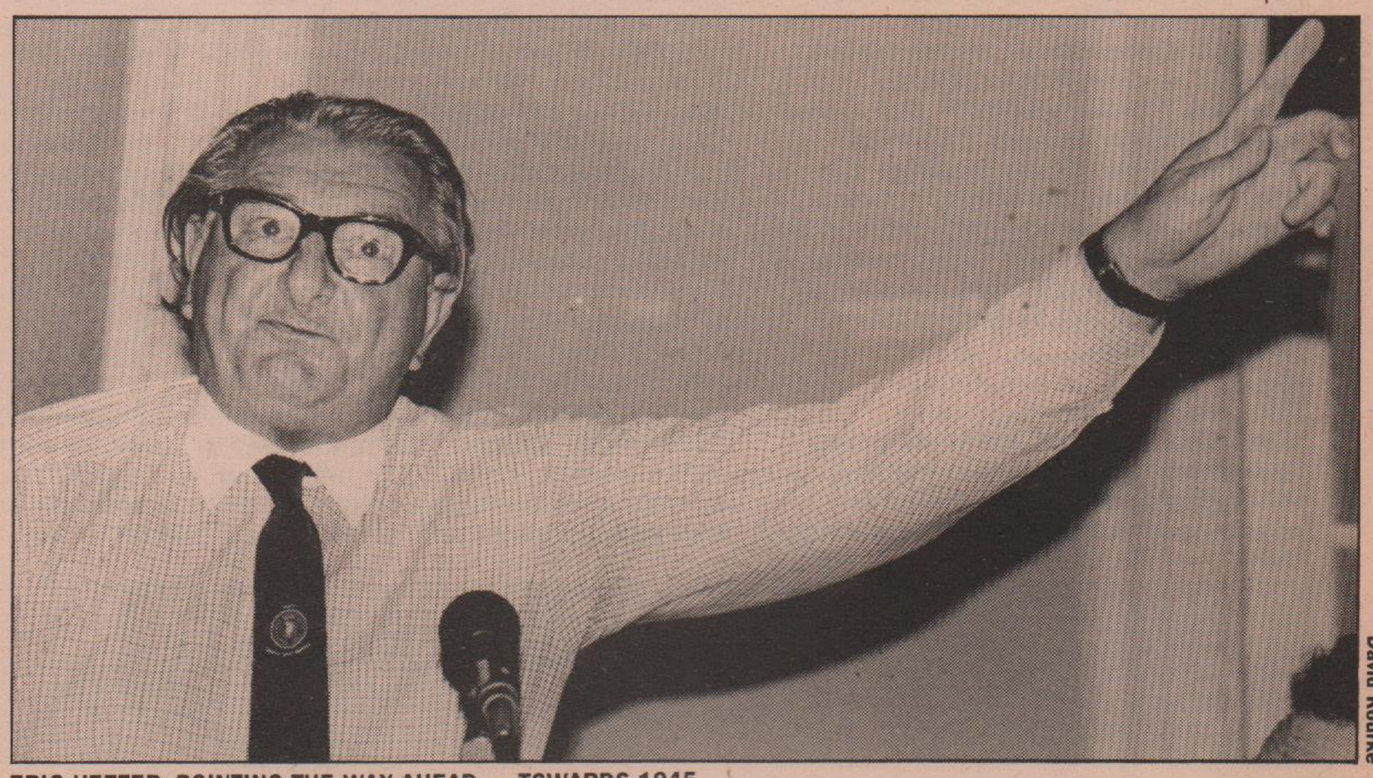
In other words, the Labour left has already been beaten so badly that it is punch-drunk. Benn's highest hope is that simply showing his old supporters that he is still alive might help them to stay on their feet a little longer.

### WAITING

In the absence of anything else to occupy them, it is likely that the Benn/Heffer campaign will attract considerable support from groups further to the left. The far left inside and outside the Labour Party has lacked any direction for some time. It has been doing little more than wait for something to turn up. No doubt the far left will now try to convince itself that something important has turned up, and throw its newspapers and posters into the Benn/Heffer effort. But the left wingers' election campaign lacks momentum. It will not be able to reverse the declining fortunes of the old left.

**The big problem confronting Benn and Heffer is their lack of any distinctive policies, of anything new to say.**

In many respects the Labour left is the most conservative political trend in British society. It hangs on to the discredited Labour policies of the seventies. In their speeches, left-wing Labour spokesmen like Benn and Heffer never tire of



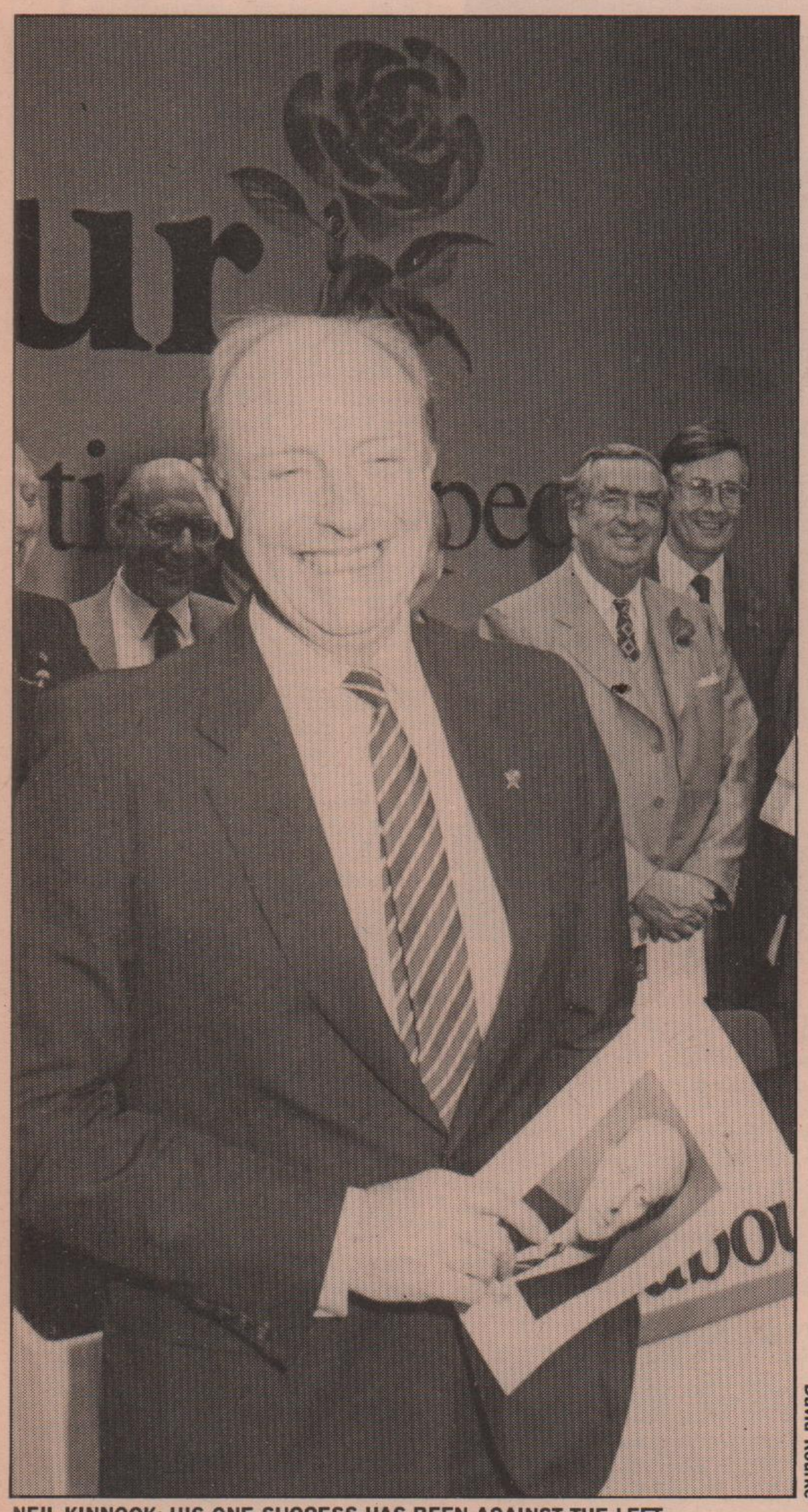
David Rourke

ERIC HEFFER: POINTING THE WAY AHEAD — TOWARDS 1945

## ...N/HEFFER CHALLENGE

# ...CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

**...ge to the Labour leadership, Tony Benn and Eric Heffer ...selves forward as the champions of a left-wing ...British politics. It's important, argues Frank Richards, ...et them get away with it**



NEIL KINNOCK: HIS ONE SUCCESS HAS BEEN AGAINST THE LEFT

David Rourke

reasserting the values of the 1945 Labour government. In the harsh conditions of 1988, such a backward-looking orientation can only come across as embarrassing sentimentality.

During the Thatcher years Benn in particular has developed a special gift for providing rhetorical gestures which are meant to serve as substitutes for real policy. Back in May 1985, the left was involved in a post-mortem on the miners' strike and the defeat of the rate-capping campaign, and a debate about where to head as Kinnock stepped up the witch-hunt. Benn's big contribution was to suggest that the left should go backwards:

'What we need and should be campaigning for is a refounding conference of the Labour Party just like in 1918, where the unions affiliated for the first time, along with the socialist societies and so on....It may be a mid-term or long-term demand, but the demand for the refounding of the Labour Party as a fully federal and representative body is a legitimate demand for the left to make.'

We would have thought that one experience with the Labour Party was more than enough. Benn's attempt to re-run 70 years of history would, under normal circumstances, disqualify him from being taken seriously as a politician.

**It is a measure of the dissolute state of much of the left today that such embarrassing ramblings have been considered as serious strategic proposals.**

During the past year, Benn has if anything become even more eccentric in his political pronouncements. For a brief period he flirted with the ideas of the Greens, as he groped around for some, any, plausible policies. He is also very impressed by the revival of the role of the church in British political life.

### WAG

The decline of the Labour Party has brought church leaders to the fore to pose as the conscience of the nation and wag their fingers at the excesses of Thatcherism. The fact that the bishops can play this role is one symptom of Labour's inability to oppose the Tory government. Until recently the Church of England was always considered as the Tory Party at prayer. So desperate is the old left, however, that it is now prepared to smile upon this reactionary institution as a potential friend. Instead of addressing the working class, Benn looks to Christianity for solutions, in the hope that the moral teachings of the church can find the resonance which Labourism so sorely lacks. Benn's recent Tawney Lecture, for example, was an attempt to promote an alliance of socialists and Christians:

'Looking ahead to the politics of the twenty-first century, worldwide, it is now possible to imagine a new line-up of forces between those who follow the ethical values of Christianity and the economic analyses of socialism, and those who support the values of capitalism and militarism.'

Benn's synthesis of Christian ethics and socialism indicates the dead end of his left-wing Labourism. Traditionally it was the capitalist establishment which sought to bring working class protests under the moderating influence of the church, as a way of heading off the class struggle. Now the spokesman of the Labour left offers up this do-gooder morality as an alternative to the realpolitik of the Tories. Benn is telling us to pray for salvation from the capitalist offensive.

**With such a political outlook, it is unlikely that the Benn/Heffer campaign will even manage to cohere all the remnants of the Labour left.**

It can only expose the left's weakness and its lack of engagement with the real world. We welcome this exercise in self-exposure, because it will help to clarify the shortcomings of what passes for socialism in Britain.

### UNDERDOG

Despite his political incoherence, Benn has played a critical role in Labourist politics. His radical image and his sincere defence of the underdog have served the Labour Party well. From 1980 it was Benn, above all others, who personified the conviction that the Labour Party had the potential to play a progressive role. Many people who were disillusioned with the last Labour government had their faith renewed by the assurance that somebody like Benn could achieve prominence within the party.

In the early eighties Benn went out of his way to attract the hard left to the Labour Party. Back in June 1981, when the far-left groups were filling up his election rallies during the deputy leadership contest, he told them that their home was back within the Labour Party with him. 'If the left joins the Labour Party, as it were,' Benn declared, 'then the influence of the left for socialism within the Labour Party is stronger.' His message did not go unheeded.

### JOINED

Many left-wing activists who should have known better joined, or rejoined, Labour's ranks. Other far-left groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party, hung on to their organisational independence but still threw themselves into Labour politics, by campaigning for Benn to become deputy leader of the party. As late as January 1985, while Benn rambled on about relaunching the Labour Party, *Socialist Worker* wrote that 'he has good ideas'. Last week the same paper demanded that its readers give 'active' and 'uncompromising' support to Benn the Christian soldier's latest crusade.

**Benn's ability to harness the energies of the far left to the Labour Party's electoral machine is probably his most enduring contribution to British politics.**

Over the past few years, he has played a critical role in sustaining the illusion that Labour could represent a progressive alternative party. He thereby helped to ensure that Labour would face little pressure from the left, and that Kinnock could do as he pleased.

### CONFUSION

Benn has been indispensable in helping to channel the anger of left-wing people away from the construction of an independent political alternative. He more than any individual has been responsible for ensuring that the eighties became a decade of political confusion and disarray within the working class. Benn and Heffer's campaign should be seen not so much as a challenge to Kinnock and Hattersley, but as a restatement of their own irrelevance to the British working class.

TONY BENN: 'NOWHERE TO GO BUT UP'

Pandora Anderson

RACISM IN EMPLOYMENT

# HOW BLACKS LOSE OUT IN BRITAIN

**A flood of recent reports show how black people are still pushed to the back of the queue for jobs, reports Kenan Malik**

A recent report by the Commission for Racial Equality showed that black teachers were at the bottom of the class when it came to job prospects. A survey of eight local education authorities, all with a higher than average black population, revealed that just two per cent of teachers were black. Seventy-eight per cent of black teachers were on the lowest scale *I* and *II*, compared to 57 per cent of white teachers. Just five per cent of black teachers were heads or deputy heads, compared to 13 per cent of whites.

The report is the latest in a series which show that even middle class blacks face discrimination in employment. A survey of job prospects for graduates revealed that while eight per cent of white graduates were unemployed a year after graduation, for blacks the figure was twice as high. Those who obtained work had to settle for more menial jobs than their white counterparts.

Another CRE investigation showed that almost a third of black doctors have to make more than 10 applications before they get a job. Black doctors are confined to low-paid and unpopular jobs; a much higher proportion work as locums.

In February, the CRE revealed that St George's Hospital medical school in London deliberately discriminated against black applicants. The school used a computer programme to select potential students for interview. The programme, designed to mimic the human assessors it replaced, gave a higher rating to 'Caucasian' students. 'What is disturbing about this case', said CRE chairman Michael Day, 'is that discrimination is occurring where one would least expect it, at a medical school with a progressive reputation and a relatively high proportion of ethnic minority students.'

**These reports show that racism is endemic in British society.**

Even middle class blacks face racism where they might 'least expect it'. The majority of black people know only too well what to expect. A survey of black employment prospects published last month by the Runnymede Trust concluded that 'the relative employment position of racial minorities remains as bad as, and in some repects worse than, it was when the first Race Relations Act was passed in 1968.' Every study conducted in the eighties bears this out:

David Rourke

DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO CLEAN UP ITS IMAGE, BRITISH CAPITALISM IS STILL A RACIST SYSTEM

**• Employment**
Black people are concentrated in manual and unskilled jobs. The 1981 Labour Force survey found that 31 per cent of black men were in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, compared to 20 per cent of white men. The 1984 Policy Studies Institute survey found that 83 per cent of West Indian and 73 per cent of Asian men were manual workers compared to 58 per cent of white men.

**• Wages**
The PSI survey found that the median weekly earnings of full-time white male employees in 1983 was £129 compared to £109 for West Indians and £111 for Asians. Within each job level, whites were paid more. For example, white skilled manual workers and foremen earned a median weekly wage of £122 compared to £112 for black workers in the same category.

**• Unemployment**
The 1985 Labour Force survey showed that the unemployment rate for West Indian men was 23 per cent, more than double the rate for white workers. More than a third of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis were unemployed. According to the PSI survey, over half of all black unemployed men have been registered as unemployed for over a year, compared to a third of white men.

**• Youth**
For young blacks the position is even worse. The 1984 Labour Force survey showed that 41 per cent of Afro-Caribbeans and 26 per cent of Asians between the ages of 16 and 24 were unemployed compared to 19 per cent of white youth. A study in Sheffield in 1984 found that 73 per cent of black 17-year olds were unemployed compared to 47 per cent of whites. In Birmingham, of the 16-year olds who left school in July 1984, only three per cent of Afro-Caribbeans and seven per cent of Asians had found jobs by November.

**• Qualifications**
A survey of Sheffield school leavers found that discrimination was greater against more highly qualified blacks. The chances of being unemployed for low-qualified blacks was one and a half times greater than for whites, but nearly three times greater for highly qualified blacks.

**• Local Authorities**
A survey in the journal *Labour Research* last May showed that even local authorities with 'equal opportunity' policies continue to discriminate against black people. In only two councils — Hackney and Lambeth — did the proportion of blacks in the workforce even begin to approach the percentage of blacks in the local area. In every council — including Lambeth and Hackney — black workers were concentrated in the lowest grades. Even the 'successes' claimed by councils were a fraud. The GLC introduced a special recruitment policy to increase the number of blacks in the fire service. The proportion of black firefighters increased by 36 per cent — from 1.2 to 1.6 per cent.

Continued discrimination in the labour market and the failure of equal opportunity policies to combat it has put the anti-racist movement on the defensive. In its 1986 annual report, the CRE notes a 'change of emphasis'; it now 'concentrated on areas where there is a real prospect of effecting change quickly. In employment this has involved looking at...the professions, at areas such as entry to accountancy or to higher education generally.' In other words, the CRE has given up any thought of fighting racism and is simply intent on helping a few upwardly mobile blacks. But as its surveys on graduates, doctors and teachers have shown it is not capable of doing even this.

The Runnymede Trust report argues that the importance of anti-racist policies is not to fight racism but to appear to be doing so. 'As long as *some* blacks are regularly accepted [for jobs],' argues the report, 'rejection of others will not be seen as a racial barrier.'

Anti-racists today restrict themselves to calling on the government to implement a US-style policy of 'positive action'. Black people have had plenty of experience of Tory-style 'positive action'. The police killings of Cynthia Jarrett and Clinton McCurbin, the Broadwater Farm showtrials, visa restrictions on black visitors and the refusal of benefits to immigrants — all show that the Tories are not short of ideas about how to treat black people.

**It is simply absurd to expect such a government to lead the fight against racism in the workplace.**

The only force capable of taking real anti-racist action is not the Tory government but the working class. Until anti-racists organise working class defence of black rights black workers will continue to find themselves at the back of the jobs queue.

## Lessons from America

**'Most techniques used in Britain in the context of race relations', points out Elizabeth Burney in last month's Runnymede Trust report, 'have been borrowed or adopted from the United States.' The riots which shook the American cities in the sixties forced the establishment to turn its attention to race relations. It tried to stem black dissent by creating a black middle class with a stake in the system and introduced 'affirmative action' programmes to improve the job prospects of blacks.**

**What has been the effect of these programmes? In 1963 there were 135 elected black politicians. Today there are 7000, with another 60 000 appointed black officials. Every major city apart from New York is run by a black mayor. There is even a black candidate running for president. There are a quarter of a million black managers and administrators, 300 000 black teachers and almost a million professional and technical workers.**

**Even for this privileged layer of blacks life is precarious. 'Many who have finally made it into the black middle class', concluded a recent *Business Week* survey of black professionals, 'still live in economic insecurity.'**

### POVERTY

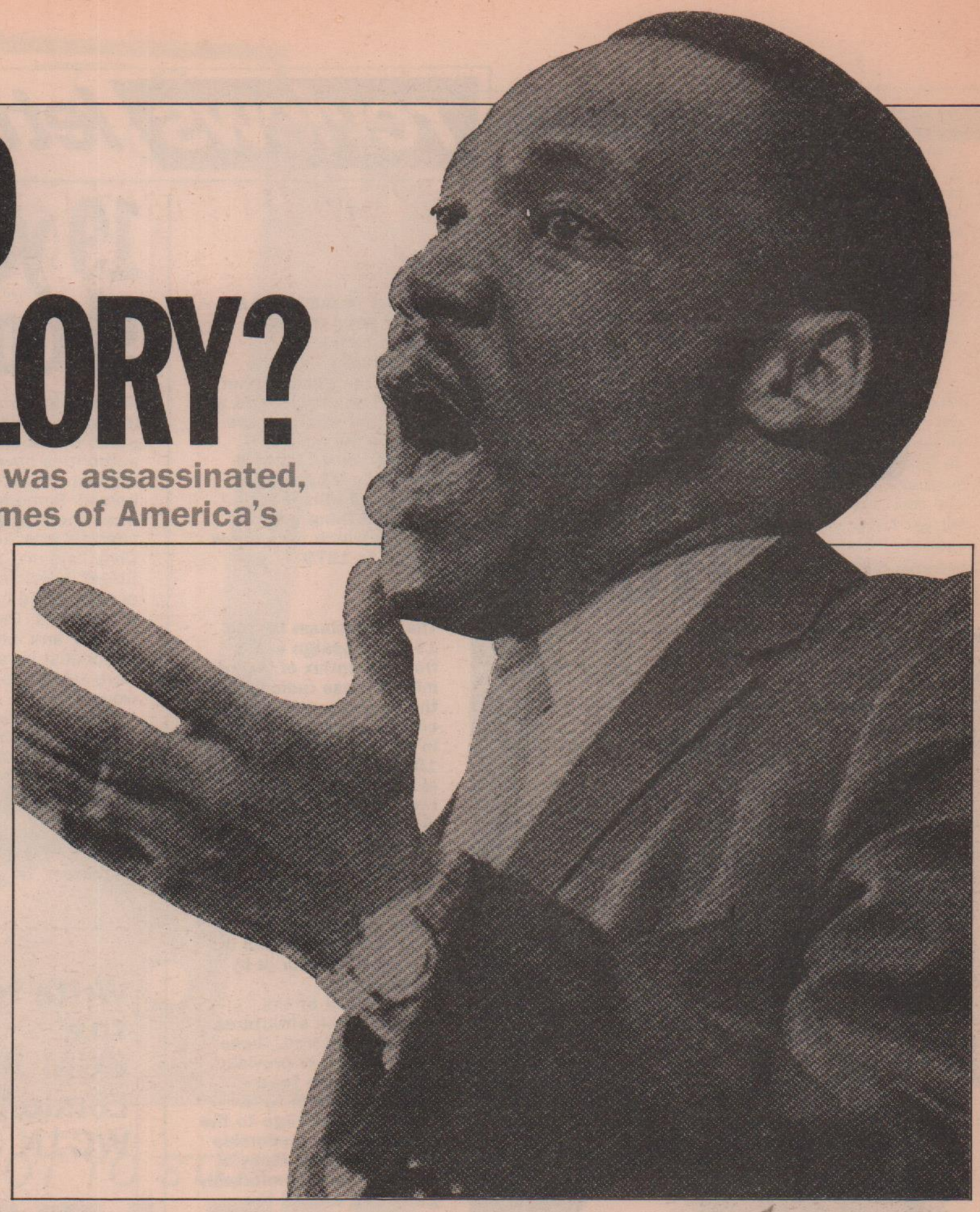
**The majority of blacks have not secured even the precarious gains of the black elite. The gap betwen the black middle class and the rest of the black community is growing. In 1986 the top one fifth of black families received 47.7 per cent of the wealth; the bottom fifth received 3.4 per cent — down from 4.1 per cent in 1980. Since the end of the sixties, the number of blacks below the poverty line has increased by 20 per cent while the number of whites has fallen by five per cent. In 1986 31.1 per cent of the black population lived below the poverty line. For whites the figure was one in 10. The median black income is still only 57 per cent of whites' and the gap between black and white incomes has increased over the past decade. The proportion of black high school pupils going to college has fallen from 33 per cent in 1976 to 26 per cent 10 years later.**

**The real lesson from America is that 'positive action' has propelled a small layer of the black community into relative affluence. Even for this layer equality with their white counterparts is a pipedream. For the majority of blacks government policies have brought no change.**

# BOUND FOR GLORY?

*MARTIN LUTHER KING 1929-1968*

**Twenty years after Martin Luther King was assassinated, Alan Harding assesses the life and times of America's leading civil rights campaigner**



Martin Luther King is the only black man to have one of the USA's few national holidays named after him, on the date of his birth on 15 January 1929. The son of a pastor from Atlanta's prestigious Ebenezer Baptist Church, King grew up on prosperous 'sweet' Auburn Avenue, the capital of the black bourgeoisie. Following graduation from Morehouse College in 1948, King entered Crozer Theological Seminary, having been ordained the previous year into the ministry of the National Baptist Church. He was one of six blacks in a class of 100, and he finished first in his graduating class. He graduated from Crozer in 1951 and received his doctorate in theology from Boston University in 1955.

King met Coretta Scott in Boston, and they married on 18 June 1953. King became minister of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954. Known as 'the big people's church', its small but influential congregation emanated respectability. The segregation of white supremacist Montgomery jarred King, who had become accustomed to integrated life in Boston. He got involved in the moderate National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and became the figurehead of the black civil rights movement which grew out of the Montgomery bus boycott.

## MOUNTAINTOP

On 3 April 1968 King was speaking in Memphis, Tennessee, where black sanitation workers had gone on strike in protest against low pay and the killing of two black garbage men. It was a protest far removed from the tradition of civil disobedience and Christian forebearance that had been his hallmark. King was predicting the success of the struggle, when his speech took a different course, but one consistent with his whole career as an evangelist and civil rights leader:

'I don't know what will happen now. But it really doesn't matter to me now. Because I have been to the mountaintop. I don't mind. Like anybody I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.'

**King's musing was almost prophetic. At 6.08am the next day he was killed by James Earl Ray, while the police who were supposed to be guarding him were absent.**

Within hours the black ghettos in 125 US cities had erupted in anger and protest. The authorities sent 65 000 troops on to the streets, and 1500 arrests and 38 deaths later a semblance of order was restored. The local DJs played James Brown to keep people's minds off politics, and the TV stations replayed old film of King himself calling for peaceful protest. Right to the end the US establishment found a use for Martin Luther King.

Martin Luther King has been given a public holiday alongside George Washington, not because his strategy of reconciliation worked, but because it offered US rulers the chance to reconcile blacks to their oppression. Today the lives of American blacks are just as scarred by racism as they were when King made his 'I have a dream' speech in Washington in 1963, or his 'promised land' speech in Memphis in 1968. King has been feted by the US establishment because he sacrificed his life for a tradition that saw racism, not as the hallmark of the capitalist system and the American way of life, but as an evil aberration that could be overcome by love and self-denial.

## CROW

The collapse of the Southern slave economy in the Civil War of 1861-65 did not set American blacks free. The victorious Northern industrialists who ran the Republican Party soon came to an accommodation with the Southern Democrats who had championed the slave plantation system. To secure the presidency in 1876 the Republicans promised to curtail civil rights, and re-establish white supremacy. Every black man, woman and child lived in dread, under a comprehensive system of legal and informal repression known as 'Jim Crow'. Between 1882 and 1903 2060 blacks were lynched, and the Southern nights were lit by the flaming crosses of the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia.

From 1900 to 1930 1.4m blacks left the South, but migration was no escape from oppression. 'Jim Crow' followed the train lines to the industrial centres of the East coast and the Midwest. Only the Great Depression halted the flood, and between 1940 and 1950 another 1.6m moved North.

**US capitalism prospered on the vicious exploitation of black labour, and on the ethnic divisions in the working class embodied in 'Jim Crow'.**

Confronted by a labour movement inspired by the example of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the bosses, the federal authorities and the union leaders combined to break the unity of workers of different ethnic backgrounds by unleashing an anti-black pogrom. In the 'Red summer' of 1919, 70 blacks were lynched, and 38 people were killed in the Chicago race riots the same year.

## OBSCURED

'Jim Crow' pervaded every aspect of social life. In 1926 Atlanta outlawed black barbers from clipping the hair of white children and women. In Birmingham a 1930 ordinance made it unlawful for a black person and a white person 'to play together or in company with each other' at dominoes or checkers. Petty discrimination such as this served to reaffirm the inferior status of blacks. From the 1880s to the Second World War every black lived under the claws of 'Jim Crow'. It is not surprising that the struggle for civil liberties became the rallying cry of black opposition, and that the nature of racial oppression was obscured.

The US advance to world power had repercussions for the lives of black people. Three million registered for service in the segregated armed forces in the Second World War. The demand for labour to supply the war effort brought one million black workers into the factories, and increased the number of black federal employees from 50 000 in 1933 to 200 000 in 1946. The prosperity of the post-war years led an educated and vocal section of the black population to demand a ticket to the American Dream. The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, which had been founded in 1910 to put the case for black professionals and businessmen, more than tripled its membership between 1934 and 1944.

## BIGOTS

For many blacks the NAACP's strategy of fighting for desegregation through the law courts was too slow. The average annual income for a black worker in Montgomery, Alabama, was $970 in 1955 before the historic bus boycott began, and barely 2000 blacks were registered to vote. Early in 1955 a weary Mrs Rosa Parks was arrested for sitting in the whites-only section of a bus. Her action led to an almost 100 per cent black boycott, which became the national focus of the civil rights struggle.

**King assumed leadership of the bus boycott which sparked black resistance.**

Thousands of black men and women challenged Southern bigots and braved the electric goads, truncheons and guns of the state troopers and the Ku Klux Klan. They marched into Southern cities and took Freedom Rides into 'no-go' areas in clapped-out buses. New organisations such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee sprang up, constrained neither by the desire for respectability of the old NAACP or the Christian self-restraint of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

## KENNEDY

Leading establishment figures were quick to recognise King's talents. They shared his dislike of ultra-segregation in the deep South, not because it was an affront to human dignity, but because it was an impediment to an integrated labour market. They wanted to break down the more archaic forms of racial discrimination, and King's strategy of non-violent direct action and the respect he had in the black community would be a bulwark against the social unrest that was bound to follow. So when King was arrested on a sit-in protest in the run-up to the 1960 presidential elections, Democratic candidate John F Kennedy intervened to secure his release. This action won Kennedy the black votes that brought him to the White House with a slim majority over Republican Richard Nixon.

Kennedy had no intention of challenging racism, or alienating white racist voters. But a few token concessions were not enough to buy off black workers whose daily experience told them they had no place in the system. The uneasy coalition of black groups, with King as its figurehead, began to break up. The strategy of integration was challenged on the right by black entrepreneurs who wanted black capitalist businesses, not seats on white buses, and by radical black nationalists who knew that the system had nothing to offer and who wanted nothing less than an end to oppression.

The focus of black resistance moved North. In 1964 there were riots in Harlem, in 1965 nine cities, in 1966 in 38 and in 1967 in 128. The response of many young blacks to being called up to fight in Vietnam was summed up by Muhammed Ali when he explained 'No Vietcong ever called me nigger' and refused to fight for the oppressor.

**The radicalisation of the black movement threatened to sweep King aside.**

He had reaffirmed his commitment to the system by condemning blacks who fought back against white murder squads in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. The *New York Times* commented that 'respected business leaders now know Dr King and his people are doing their best to prevent a God-awful revolution.' The problem for King was that many black workers knew it too and they did not like it.

King was forced to adapt to the new mood of militancy. His deeply held Christian beliefs remained, but they were put to the service of a crusade for social justice. In 1967 he declared that 'as long as profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people,' racism, militarism and exploitation 'are incapable of being conquered'. King wanted to see an end to injustice, but he did not want the social revolution this demanded. The need for social justice was the message he brought to Memphis in April 1968, but his idea of salvation was still on the other side of Jordan.

## FREEDOM

The message we should recall from the past is not King's promise of redemption in the promised land, but the pledge by another inspirational black leader to fight for freedom in the present:

'Hurl me into the next existence and the descent into hell won't turn me. I'll crawl back to dog his trail forever. They won't defeat my revenge, never. I'm part of a righteous people who anger slowly, but rage undamned. We'll gather at his door in such number that the rumbling of our feet will make the earth tremble.'

Black Panther George Jackson was murdered by racist screws while serving an indefinite prison sentence for holding up a petrol station.

LABOUR'S LEFT

# STRATEGIC MYOPIA

David Rourke

**Patrick Seyd,** *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left,* Macmillan, £6.95

**AS the depleted ranks of the hard left form up for another ritual joust with Neil Kinnock and his dented shield bearers, this detailed account of the fortunes of the left in the Labour Party in the post-war period makes interesting reading.**

**The constitutional reforms of 1980 (a new electoral college for the leadership election and mandatory reselection of parliamentary candidates) and the narrow defeat of Tony Benn by Denis Healey for the 1981 deputy leadership are widely seen as the high-point of the Labour left in recent times. Following the 1983 general election defeat the left fragmented and declined. In Patrick Seyd's words, 'it displayed ideological uncertainty, programmatic weakness and strategic myopia.'**

**Seyd is better at describing this phenomenon than he is at explaining it. For example, he notes that in the Benn campaign the left 'for the first time ever...engaged in an extensive campaign to win the support of the rank and file trade unionists'. He doesn't explain why they failed; after all Healey won 62 per cent of union votes cast, to Benn's 38 per cent. This wasn't just the block vote at work. The transport workers' union cast its one million votes for Benn, even though those members who were consulted appeared mostly to support Healey.**

▶

**Seyd gets nearest to the mark when he concludes that the left has suffered from a 'concentration on organisational matters' and a 'poverty of ideas'. The very fact that its high-point was marked by organisational changes is testimony to that; but Seyd's own strategic myopia prevents him from hitting the nail on the head. Even though his definition of the 'left' appears to apply at times to everybody in a broad church from Militant to Bryan Gould, his own sympathies are obviously with the current leader. This is not a good vantage point from which to explain the left, because its demise has been no more than part of the demise of the Labour Party generally.**

**It was difficult for Benn to appeal to rank and file trade unionists in 1981 because their experience of the Labour Party since 1964 had been one of betrayal. Benn himself had been a cabinet minister in the Labour governments which put the boot in. It should have surprised nobody that there was little interest in the internal power struggles of a party which had consistently failed to deliver the goods. Benn himself acknowledged as much last week, at the start of the current contest, when he said that Labour's incomes policy 'was the least socialist thing we ever did, for which they threw us out in 1979'.**

▶

**The enthusiasm for the 1981 campaign came from the influx of young middle class radicals in the late seventies. Seyd charts a dramatic decline in party membership from 1964 onwards. This was slowly offset throughout the seventies as the post-'68 generation of university and polytechnic graduates and the more radical of the feminists enrolled. Some working class militants joined up too, mostly employed in the public sector or by trade unions.**

**Transfixed by the weight of the structures they had entered, these elements never provided a serious base for a fighting party or for a left-wing challenge to the control of the leadership and the unions. Many of them are now comfortably gathering around the realigned centre of the party. Seyd records that after Benn's narrow defeat, Margaret Beckett bitterly denounced 'the traitors' who let him down. Last week she left the Campaign Group in protest at Benn's new campaign.**

▶

**If Benn has learned little in seven years, Seyd has learnt nothing. His prescriptions for the left are coded but clear. He suggests that 'the market does play a significant role in stimulating [the economy]'. He criticises the left for avoiding the 'politically sensitive issue of incomes policy'. He highlights the 'very extensive strategic analysis' required to pursue Labour's 'non-nuclear' defence policy. You don't have to be a student of politics to realise that Seyd is in favour of 'social ownership', incomes policy and staying in Nato. This was the substance of Kinnock's 1987 election campaign, which ended in another thrashing.**

**Seyd's book contains much useful information and statistics about the Labour Party and the fortunes of its left factions, but his own 'poverty of ideas' is such that he cannot grasp the point which stares him in the face. In a party controlled by a labour bureaucracy committed to the existing order, the left is doomed to be a 'gadfly' pressure group, or to follow former left wingers like Kinnock and Beckett into the mainstream of the party.**

***Jon Hann***

# 19 years of shoot-to-kill

**I'D LIKE** to comment on the shoot-to-kill policy which the British authorities have used for the last 19 years in Ireland. Remember 1969, when the RUC and the 'B' specials attacked the Divis flats and Bombay Street in Belfast, accompanied by hundreds of Loyalists. They were burning and looting nationalist homes. Dozens were killed and many wounded.

The same was happening in Derry. It was then that Republic of Ireland prime minister Jack Lynch made his famous speech: 'We shall not stand idly by and let the nationalist people be murdered.' What did he do? Nothing except send a few ambulances to the Border to collect a few of the wounded.

January 1972 came along and the British Parachute regiment shot dead 14 civilians. The Derry coroner, himself a former British Army officer, described the killings as 'murder, bloody murder'. But no charges were ever brought against the paras.

In 1982 five unarmed republicans and a young nationalist were gunned down by the shoot-to-kill squads. When Stalker was ready to expose the RUC the British government removed him. And it happened again in Gibraltar where three republicans were murdered by SAS gunmen. Shoot-to-kill continues to this day, and the Brits now know that they can shoot down Irish men and women without any objection from the Free State government.

**Tony**
**Frankland Prison**

**Write to *tns*, BCM JPLtd, London, WC1N 3XX**

## Again on Aids in Africa

**THE** reply by Don Milligan (letters, 4 March) to my comment on the racist fallacy in the Aids campaign misses the point. My challenge to *tns* is to provide a radical alternative interpretation of what Milligan asserts as fact, namely the alleged African origin of the Aids virus.

I do not contest 'the evident fact that there is a serious epidemic in central Africa.' But I have drawn attention to the possibility of a connection between Aids and the presence of considerable numbers of white tourists in the safari holiday lures, and the American military bases in some parts of Africa. It is this connection that I wish to highlight but which both left and right in the West continues to ignore.

In the absence of hard facts, no one has any right to claim, as Milligan does, that 'it seems likely the virus originated in Africa.' In view of the prevalence of the disease among specific social groups in the West, groups which are non-existent in Africa, or insignificant in numbers, it seems more likely that the disease originated in the West and subsequently spread to Africa, where poor medical facilities made things worse.

An Englishman of simple liberal disposition intrigued me with his conviction that Aids might be a secret invention of the right-wing moral backlash in the West, designed to frighten homosexuals into sexual conformity. I thought that was ridiculous. I am sure you will agree. But, ridiculous or not, it may help to draw attention to the real place of origin of Aids.

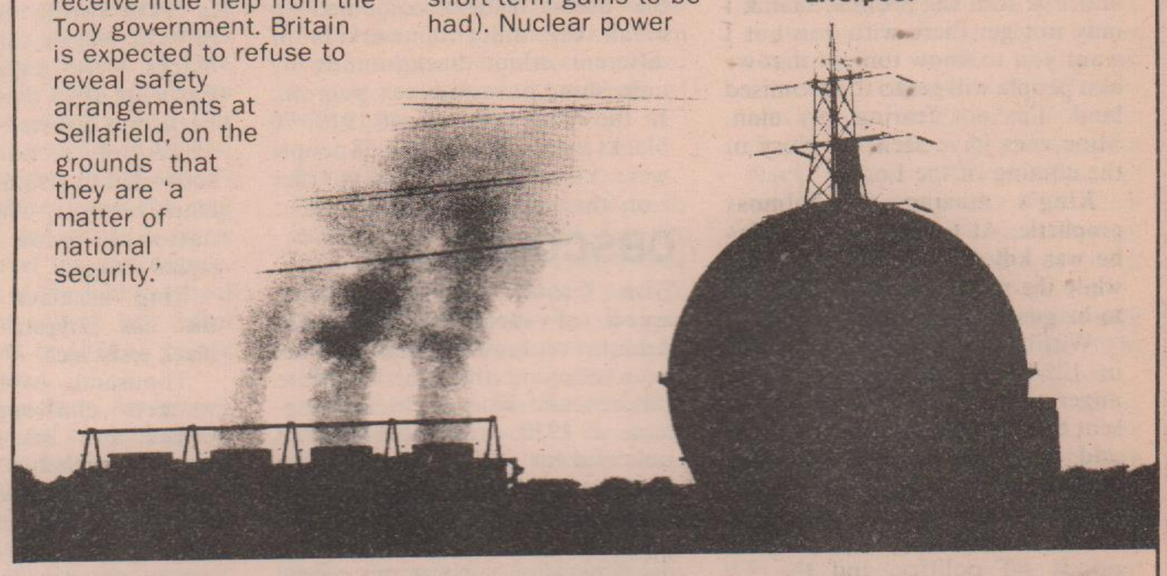
**Tunde**
**West Yorkshire**

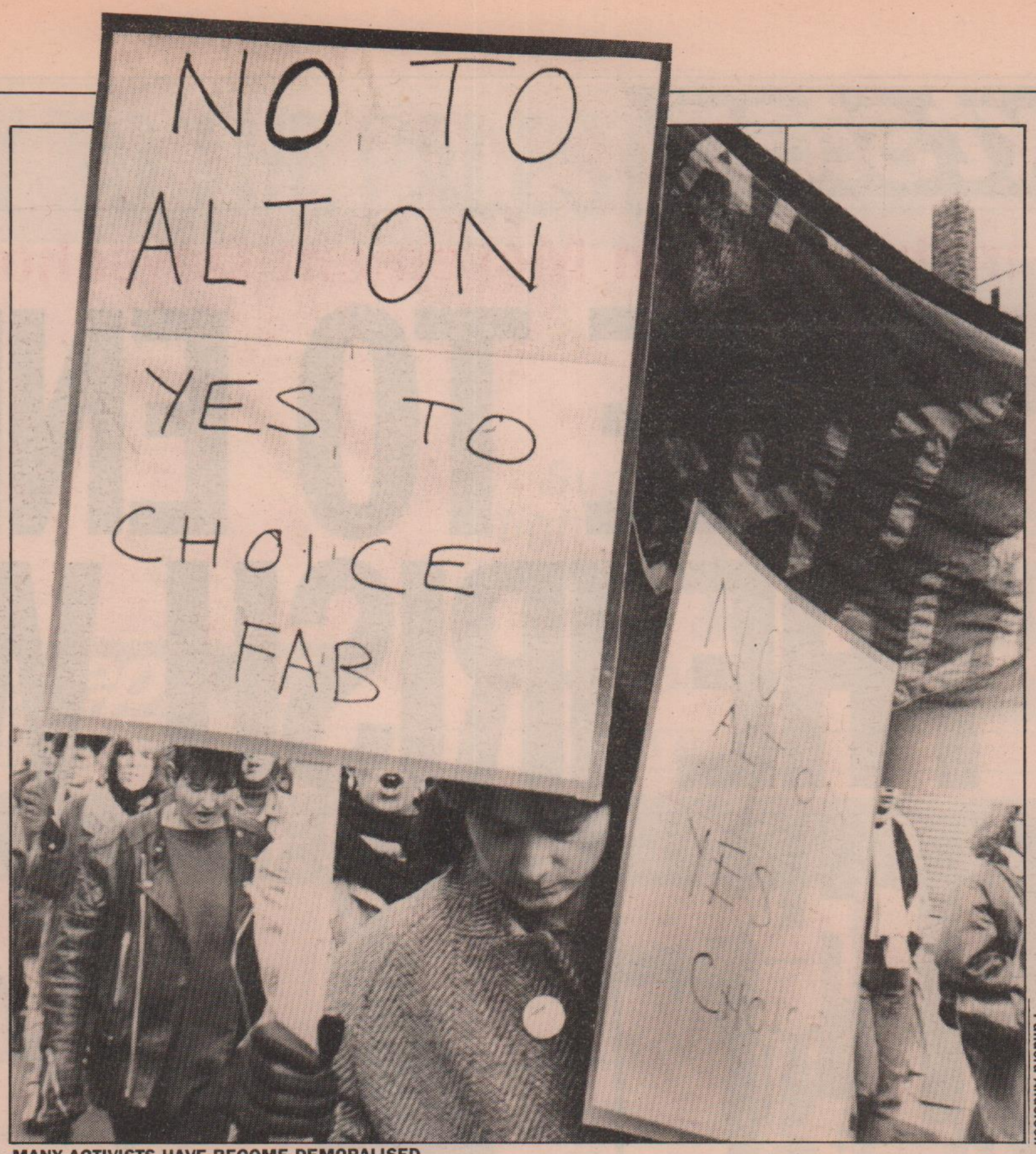
## Nuclear nightmare

**THE** EEC has begun an investigation into illegal activities at nuclear installations throughout Europe, uncovering alarming evidence of serious violations of safety procedures. What emerges is an industry unable to cope with the sheer scale of the problems posed by nuclear waste disposal. The EEC watchdog will receive little help from the Tory government. Britain is expected to refuse to reveal safety arrangements at Sellafield, on the grounds that they are 'a matter of national security.'

The Tories estimate that with another five or six nuclear power stations in operation, they would be able to withstand any future miners' strike. Workers in the nuclear industry will suffer from privatisation, and the government's need for cash to build new reactors (there will be hardly any private investment because there are no short-term gains to be had). Nuclear power workers will see their wage claims held down, and are likely to consider strike action for the first time this decade. A major initiative must be mounted to make contact with these workers. With their support the miners could have won, and winning their support now would be a major weapon against Thatcherism.

**Rob**
**Liverpool**






MANY ACTIVISTS HAVE BECOME DEMORALISED

Pandora Anderson

*HOW NOT TO STOP ALTON*

# WHY FAB ISN'T FIGHTING

**Anne Burton looks at the crisis of the campaign to stop David Alton's anti-abortion bill**

The Fight Alton's Bill campaign (FAB) is the latest victim of the New Realism trap. New Realism is the dominant trend in labour movement politics today. It assumes that left-wing ideas and class militancy are no longer viable, and that the best way to achieve something is to present a respectable campaign with 'realistic' — moderate — demands. The dire consequences of New Realism can best be seen in the trade union movement (see page 4). Now the infection has spread to the fight for women's rights.

## MODEST

FAB was set up by the National Abortion Campaign in October 1987, shortly after David Alton announced his bill to reduce the upper time-limit on abortion from 28 to 18 weeks. Since its formation in 1975 the National Abortion Campaign has formally stood for abortion on demand, the decriminalisation of abortion and adequate facilities to allow all women access to NHS abortions. However, FAB was designed with a more limited brief. Its aim was to cohere the widest possible support on the basis of defending the existing abortion legislation. Campaign organisers argued that it was unrealistic in the current political climate to try to mobilise for anything more radical than the status quo.

**FAB's approach soon revealed several big problems.**

First, while FAB set itself the limited objective of defending the current law against a reduced time-limit, Alton and his supporters launched a wider propaganda offensive against a woman's right to have an abortion.

Alton made it clear that in his view, all abortions were murder. He has taken every opportunity to outline his belief in the absolute right to life from conception. He was prepared to compromise on a reduced time-limit in order to win wider support. But his campaign has centred on the idea that abortion is an abomination, which should only be granted on sufferance in the most restricted circumstances possible. The lobby behind the Alton Bill has put on a no-nonsense display of bigotry, led by such openly anti-abortion organisations as Life and Spuc. It has helped to create a fiercely anti-abortion climate in which, according to opinion polls, the majority of people in Britain now favour further restrictions on abortion rights.

## PRAGMATIC

While Alton was more than clear about his opposition to all abortion, FAB seemed less than clear about its support for a woman's right to abortion. Instead of countering the anti-abortion propaganda with the reasons why women need the right to abortion, the campaign organisers decided on a pragmatic shift of their own. They felt that any hint of militant campaigns for abortion on demand would only alienate people.

**Instead, they hoped to win support the 'soft' way, by stressing the problems that the Alton Bill would cause for those women who would attract the most public sympathy.**

The campaign organisers reasoned that even people generally hostile to abortion might be sympathetic in cases where the baby would be severely deformed. So FAB's main argument against Alton became that amniocentesis tests to detect fetal handicap could not be carried out until 18 weeks. Alton's Bill therefore discriminated unfairly against older women who were more likely to have handicapped babies. The plight of victims of rape and incest and of young women who concealed their pregnancies were also promoted as arguments against Alton.

This argument did nothing to undermine Alton's campaign. In a way FAB was helping Alton to remove legitimacy from many late abortions. By finding special cases where abortion should be allowed (cases of fetal abnormality, rape, incest, etc), FAB's approach implicitly accepted that other instances of late abortion — which make up the vast majority of them — were less legitimate. Many FAB activists were floored when Alton agreed to adjust his bill to deal with the problems of rape victims, and even suggested that he might accommodate compromises in cases of handicap. When it was revealed that the time-limit might be altered from 18 to 24 weeks in the house of commons committee stage, thus allowing time for amniocentesis tests, etc, panic set in among some FAB supporters. Without taking on the central arguments about why any restriction on abortion was an unacceptable restriction on women's rights, they were running out of good reasons why Alton should be opposed. At a recent student women's conference in London, for example, the workshop run by FAB was dominated by women protesting that now Alton's Bill looked like being modified they didn't know how to argue against it.

The second problem with FAB's campaign is that, by setting out to defend current abortion law against Alton, they have become champions of legislation which itself restricts women's access to abortion. The 1967 Abortion Act does not give any woman the *right* to an abortion.

**Under the current law abortion remains illegal unless two doctors are convinced that the woman requesting it meets specified medical conditions.**

Doctors can only perform abortions if continuing the pregnancy will injure the physical or mental health of the woman or any of her existing children, or if the fetus would develop into a severely handicapped baby. Doctors also have the right to refuse to refer women for abortions because it offends their own conscience.

## DENIES

The law specifies that abortions must be carried out in licensed premises — but it does not specify that health authorities must provide those facilities. The 1967 Act gave doctors the right to carry out abortions in certain strictly defined circumstances. It gave women no rights at all. It makes no sense to base the fight for a woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy on the defence of a law that specifically denies women that right.

Leading FAB organisers have argued that defending the 1967 Act is a first step in fighting for the abortion rights that women need. Judith Arkwright, a member of the FAB steering committee, argues in *Socialist Outlook* that 'by fighting to defend the 1967 Act we can build a successful movement to defeat Alton and begin to alter the balance of forces towards women fighting for what we really want.'

**Unfortunately this is not the case. By fighting to defend the premises of the 1967 Act we lay ourselves open to more and more attacks.**

The act puts decisions about abortion in the hands of the medical establishment. Consequently the state does not even need a bill like Alton's to deny women abortions.

At a recent Spuc rally a gynaecologist from Northumberland could boast that no abortions took place in her area because of the control of anti-abortion gynaecologists opting out on grounds of conscience. In many areas, health authorities have imposed their own arbitrary time-limits and criteria for abortions, to help them cope with NHS cuts. An 'Abortion Service Protocol' issued by City and Hackney Health Authority states that they will only give abortions to women aged between 16 and 40 who are over 12 weeks pregnant if it is carried out for strictly medical reasons. In other words, in Hackney the upper time-limit on abortions for healthy women under the 1967 Act is already 12 weeks — much lower than Alton could hope to get on to the statute books today. A recent house of lords committee was so impressed with existing administrative restrictions on abortion that it decided that there doesn't need to be a legal time-limit at all.

## DOWNWARD

The third problem with FAB's 'realistic' approach is that it has focused the campaign on possible ways of stitching the Alton Bill up in parliament, so that we retain the current law by default. This has had a demobilising effect on the campaign and reduced the many women who want to fight Alton to the status of passive spectators. After all, what's the point of organising demonstrations, conferences and protests if you believe Alton's fate rests with the debating skills of Jo Richardson and a handful of MPs?

**This approach has prevented FAB from consolidating support. Instead of building up momentum, the campaign has declined.**

You only have to compare the two demonstrations called by FAB to see the campaign's downward trajectory. The demonstration called on the eve of the bill's second reading in January wildly exceeded the organisers' expectations. It was planned as a small, symbolic, torchlit women-only march to provide an evening photo-opportunity for the press. But thousands more women turned up than were expected. The atmosphere of the march was angry and forward looking. These 6000 women wanted to fight to win. The most popular slogan on the march was 'Women need abortion rights — stop Alton's Bill'.

By contrast, last month's march was disappointing. It was called as a major demonstration on a Saturday afternoon, and was supposed to have been the focus of a four-month mobilisation in the student and trade unions. But the demobilising effects of the official campaign made themselves felt. The march was only half as big again as the torchlit photo-call — with half the anger.

## RIGGING

Without a clear set of arguments against Alton or a clear public focus for the campaign it was impossible for FAB to convince people that the fight was worth giving up a Saturday afternoon for. If you're out to defend the status quo, and if you identify parliament as the main arena for battle, then individuals with influence who can fix things with a word in the right ear take on extra importance. Things like mass demonstrations become an interesting side show, superfluous to the main business of rigging parliamentary debate.

**If we are to beat Alton we need to review the campaign strategy.**

We have to face up to the fact that support has been demobilised over the crucial last four months. The thousands of women who came to our first meetings eager to fight for abortion rights have disappeared from the scene. Many activists have become demoralised, many are confused about what to argue as the bill changes its shape in committee. The FAB steering committee's answer is to focus on celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the 1967 Act. This glorification of our lack of control over our lives can only be a death warrant for the campaign.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has argued from the start of the campaign that the only effective way to fight against Alton is to build a movement against all restrictions on abortion rights — including those imposed by the current legislation. Those who are serious about fighting Alton should take the opportunity to start this fight before it's too late.

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