WESTERN POWERS OUT OF THE MIDDLE EAST- see page 10

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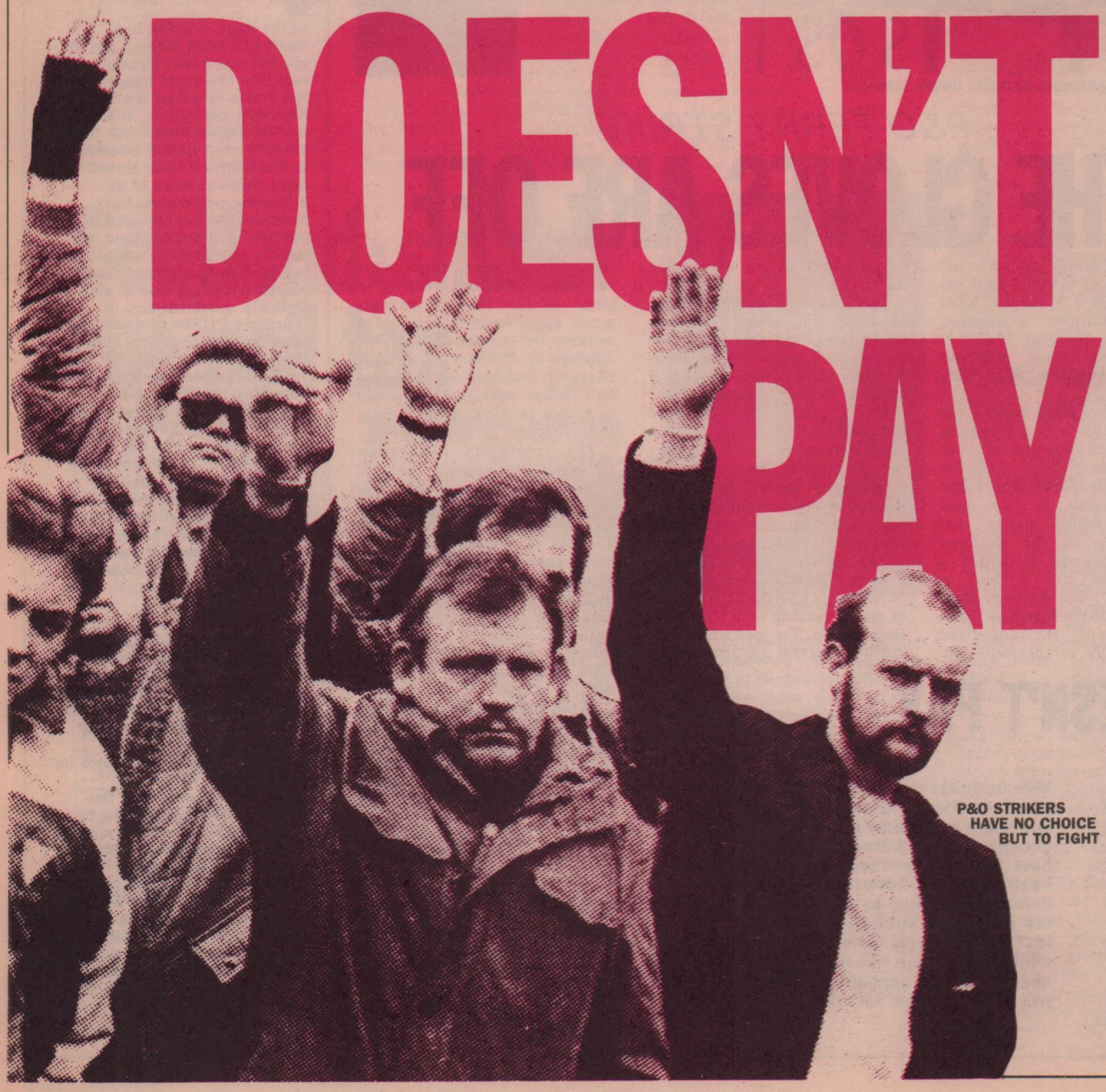
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WHAT FUTURE FOR SOCIALISM IN EUROPE? — see pages 8 and 9

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly | 29 April 1988 | 40p

DON'T BELIEVE THE TORIES

MODERATION DOESN'T PAY



P&O STRIKERS HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT

'MODERATION IN ALL THINGS' is the message of the moment. Everybody from Thatcher to the Labour leadership now claims that the way to succeed is to behave yourself and avoid militancy. The voice of moderation now seems to dominate each debate.

- **Opposition to the government's benefit cuts is being led by Tory wets, who are requesting slight adjustments to the harsh new housing benefit rules which might help small savers.**
- **The row over the Tory poll tax now focuses on the house of lords, where some peers want to re-raise the amendment which would allow those on the very lowest incomes to pay less.**
- **Thatcher claims that the 'generous' proposals on nurses' pay are a reward for those who refused to take strike action.**

All of these debates are about Tory attacks on the working class. Yet we are denied a say in them. The cult of moderation leaves decisions about our living standards in the hands of middle class politicians and peers. They are concerned with protecting the electoral position of the Tory Party, not with defending working class people. Their moderation offers us nothing.

The 'concessions' being canvassed are empty ones for most people. The alterations in housing benefit which the Tory dissidents want would not touch the savage cuts in social security for millions of unemployed and low-paid people. The proposed amendment to the poll tax would not affect the amount which the vast majority of us will be expected to pay. And Thatcher's pay offer to health workers is in fact a derisory and divisive measure, which will leave most of them in poverty (see page 3).

Even when the Tories do grant such empty concessions, they take them back with the other hand. Last week a leaked document exposed government plans to raise the general level of poll tax to pay for a minor subsidy to the worst-off families.

(Continued on page 2)



AFTER THE MEDIA HYSTERIA, THE SWOOPS AND ARRESTS

British double-talk

In a surprise speech last week, foreign secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe apologised to the Irish people on behalf of the British government and appealed for a new era of cooperation between London and Dublin. Noting the impact on Irish opinion of the shoot-to-kill controversy, the rejected Birmingham Six appeal, the shooting of Aidan McAnespie and the Gibraltar killings, Howe said that he did not 'underestimate the hurt felt by the Irish in recent months'.

In fact, the British government could not care less about Irish sensibilities. Its sole concern is to prevent any slippage of support for constitutional nationalism. By speaking out strongly in favour of the Anglo-Irish agreement, the Tories hope to bolster the moderate nationalists and isolate the hardline republicans. Howe's overtures to Dublin were greeted with outrage by Loyalist politicians in Belfast. But the British had revealed their true intentions the day before, when troops and police swooped on republican areas of West Belfast and arrested 13 more nationalists in connection with the deaths of two soldiers who threatened an IRA funeral in Andersonstown last month.

After the Titanic, the Ultimate Dream?

LAST week, Belfast shipyard Harland and Wolff secured the order to build the world's biggest luxury cruise liner. Costing an estimated £260m, the *Ultimate Dream* will be more than twice the size of the *QE2*, and will provide work for Harland and Wolff's workforce for the next four years. Loyalist politicians were jubilant. According to Peter Robinson, deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, the contract has 'established Harland and Wolff as world leader in the shipbuilding marketplace'.

In reality, the future of the shipyard depends on winning a subsidy from the British government. Harland and Wolff has survived the slump in the shipbuilding industry only because it has been granted over half the total subsidies that London has doled out since nationalisation in 1977. Since the Second World War British shipbuilding has been in terminal decline, yet Harland and Wolff has survived because of its unique position in the Irish war zone.

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In the past, Harland and Wolff had been singled out for special treatment because it kept the Unionists happy. Since the Tories removed the Loyalist Stormont parliament in 1972 and instituted direct rule from Westminster, British subsidies to the shipyard have served to allay Unionist fears of an economic withdrawal from Northern Ireland followed by a political pull-out. Harland and Wolff's workforce is almost 100 per cent Protestant and has played a leading role in anti-Catholic mobilisations.

Around £100m in government subsidies is needed to clinch the order for the liner, but the Tories have been cool about coughing up. There is no possibility of the British state ever letting the Loyalist working class sink: the government will pay any price to prop up British rule. But after the failure of the Loyalist campaign against the Anglo-Irish agreement, Thatcher is under less immediate pressure to throw more good money after bad in Belfast.

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The Loyalist protest against the accord failed precisely because there was never any question of Britain ditching the Union. Having faced down the Unionists on that issue, the government may well be prepared to face them down on this one too. While it is committed to servicing the Northern Ireland economy to the tune of billions of pounds a year, the government would like to cut down on its commitment to subsidising firms like Harland and Wolff, which is losing millions of pounds every year. In 1912 Harland and Wolff lost the *Titanic* on its maiden voyage, in 1988 it may lose the *Ultimate Dream* before it is built.
Andy Clarkson

LIVERPOOL

We don't owe our loyalty to Labour

The struggle against the council's cost-cutting plans in Liverpool is in danger of being derailed by loyalty to the Labour Party in the May local elections.

• A week last Monday, more than 100 recreation and open spaces building workers began strike action over compulsory redeployment, pay cuts and natural wastage leading to the loss of 80 jobs. When they put pickets on three council depots the next day, many drivers, tradesmen and labourers stayed out.

• On the Wednesday, 350 scaffolders, flaggers and general labourers from the DLO depot in Long Lane walked out in protest against management's scheme to shed more labouring jobs there. Long Lane depot is losing jobs every week. The running total is now nearly 200.

Some strikers argued that whatever we did we had to avoid losing Labour votes in the May council elections. Some Long Lane pickets even went canvassing for Labour councillors who are cutting jobs at their depot, saying that 'a Labour employer is better than a Tory or a Liberal.' The dangers of this approach became apparent on Monday when council leader Keva Coombes worked out a deal with the recreation convenors to get a quick return to work before the elections. The employers got their flexibility measures and we got a token increase in consolidated bonuses. A Liberal/Tory coalition in Liverpool is a depressing thought. But nothing could be more demoralising than sacrificing our livelihoods for a Labour council which has proved more than willing to make Tory cuts.
Liverpool council worker



STRIKING SEAFARERS DEMAND UNION SUPPORT

P&O FERRY STRIKE

THE GLOVES ARE OFF

In its most drastic step yet to end the deadlock in the 12-week old ferry dispute at Dover, P&O has withdrawn recognition from the National Union of Seamen and issued dismissal notices to hundreds of striking seafarers.

On Monday P&O became the first big British ferry company to end the closed shop and refuse to recognise the NUS in collective bargaining. It placed adverts for job applications in two mass circulation dailies stating that 'membership of the National Union of Seamen is neither a qualification nor a bar to employment'. The company plans to pull out of the Merchant Navy Establishment, the unionised labour supply arrangement regulated jointly by the unions and the employers.

This strikes at the heart of the industrial relations structure which has governed the industry for 40 years, and signals P&O's determination to smash the union if it stands in the way of change.

On Tuesday P&O delivered dismissal notices to more than 1000 workers still on strike over the company's new pay and conditions proposals. As we go to press, scab crews are preparing to bring ferries into Dover, and police are preparing to break picket lines.

The seafarers struck in February in protest at P&O's plans to get rid of 500 jobs and reduce the number of crews working each ferry from three to two. The media has made much of the fact that the workers stand to work fewer weeks in the year than ever before. They fail to point out that the new arrangements would mean that instead of working the current 24 hours on followed by 48 hours off, which is effectively a 48-hour week followed by a 72-hour week, seafarers would be forced to work seven 24-hour shifts followed by seven days off.

The employers have been ruthless in their attempts to smash resistance to the new set-up. Their decision to end the closed shop and sack recalcitrant employees follows a series of unprecedented legal moves against the seafarers' union. Twice the courts have extended their interpretation of the Tories' anti-union laws to prohibit a national seafarers' strike in solidarity with the Dover workers. P&O have shown they will stop at nothing to crush the workforce.

In this situation, the strikers have no choice but to respond in kind, and pursue a no-holds-barred strategy.

Unfortunately, the union leaders have ruled a national strike out of order on the grounds that it will break the union. They fail to appreciate that *unless* there is a national strike the union will be smashed. Union chiefs like Sam McCluskie are living in the past. They think that contests between unions and employers can still be resolved around negotiating tables, when everything that has happened in the past few months shows that matters will be settled on the field of struggle.

MODERATION DOESN'T PAY

(Continued from page one)

And many nurses will find their miserly pay rise disappearing thanks to housing benefit cuts. The Tories can play these games because they are under no real pressure to pay up from the working class. So long as the opposition is led by moderate figures asking for charity, we will be the losers.

The only gains which mean anything are those wrested from the authorities through struggle and held on to by the organised power of ordinary people. Moderation is of no use to a working class faced with an unprecedented Tory offensive. What will wet MPs or dukes do for the P&O ferry strikers, who face the sack, and attacks from the law and a scab army because they refuse to accept sweated labour conditions? They have to fight. Yet they, and others like the health workers, have had their angry defiance attacked by Labour leaders who tell us to stop struggling and follow the lead of the 'responsible' opposition in parliament. There has never been a clearer need for a new opposition movement which will fight for what we need.

NURSES' PAY AWARD IS NO VICTORY

DON'T LET THEM DIVIDE US

Far from being a victory for health workers, argues Tony Kennedy, the government's pay offer deepens divisions



Pandora Anderson

ONLY UNITED ACTION WILL WIN DECENT WAGES

The government's decision to implement the recommendations of the review body on nurses' pay has been celebrated as a step forward for health workers and a setback for the Tories. The increases in nurses' pay averaging 15.3 per cent appear to be more than three times as high as those for teachers, civil servants and other state sector workers. In addition, the government has promised to fund the deal by adding £749m to the NHS budget, rather than by taking the money from existing health service resources.

On closer inspection it becomes clear that health workers are the real losers from the deal.

For a start, the basic increase is a derisory four per cent. Whatever nurses get on top of this will depend on where they end up in the new grading structure which will be finalised later this year. Some nurses working in highly specialised units in the health service stand to gain the full award, while others who lack special training and skills will gain very little. Thus a new division is being created among nurses, while the gulf between the nurses and other health workers also increases. Even those nurses who get the top whack will still be badly paid, but they will be better off than cleaning, kitchen and laundry workers.

SUFFER

Student, auxiliary and state enrolled nurses (SENs) make up the majority of those responsible for patient care. Under the review body proposals salaries of student nurses outside London will rise between 6.3 and 7.8 per cent. For a third-year student nurse this will mean a net income of about £82 for the basic 37.5 hour working week. Despite getting extra money for working in inner London, no student nurse will reach £100 take-home for a basic week's work. Only a small minority of auxiliary (non-qualified) nurses, mainly in London, can expect a basic take-home pay exceeding £100, despite rises ranging from 7.6 to 33 per cent. Few SENs (partially qualified) will reach £130, while most (qualified) staff nurses will receive a basic net weekly income of £120 to £150 — far below the national average.

The review body proposals will not end low pay among nurses. They will still have to work long, unsocial hours to earn enough to scrape by on. NHS management has already attempted once to impose a flat rate of £1.20 an hour for working extra unsocial hours, to cover all grades. At the same time unpaid overtime is becoming an unwritten law for nurses trying to cope with severe staff shortages. Many of the lowest paid nurses will suffer from recent changes in the housing benefit and income supplement rules.

For every extra pound it puts on nurses' pay, the state stands to get almost the same amount back as a result of these changes.

The new 'clinical grading structure' recommended by the review body involves thoroughgoing changes in definitions of skills and qualifications and much wider pay differentials among the various grades of nursing. The result will be to open up a pay gap between nursing professionals and unskilled nurses. This will encourage nurses to regard individual achievement as the best route to decent pay, rather than to see collective action as the way to overcome the problem of low pay which afflicts every worker in the health service.

CHEAPER

The vast majority of nurses will gain nothing from the new grading system. There are already long waiting lists of nurses desperate to obtain the qualifications needed to increase their earnings. But the government has no plans to provide the necessary resources to teach them the required skills. There is a cheaper alternative. Given the understaffing which prevails it is common for unqualified nurses to take on special responsibilities for no extra pay. The government therefore has no interest in upgrading thousands of nurses into higher pay brackets.

The review body recommendations are in keeping with the Tories' plans to rationalise health provision. The divisive character of the pay and grading system complements their longer-term strategy of hiving off well-provisioned, specialised units to the private sector. Meanwhile, the NHS will carry on paying poverty-line wages and providing a third-rate service. The new national lottery to raise £50 million a year for the health service shows that saving lives has now become a charity.

The union leaders must take the blame for allowing the government to impose its divisive deal.

Instead of building all-out action by health workers around the unifying issue of pay and conditions, the union leaders appealed for public sympathy by emphasising the divisive issue of patient care. This simply played into the Tories' hands.

PRESSURE

The union leaders pleaded that the health service was a sacred institution and that those who worked in it were special cases. When this argument was used to justify industrial action by ancillary staff, technicians and ambulancemen in 1982, Thatcher took it a stage further and said that those closest to the patient — nurses — were the most deserving of all. The government set up the review body on nurses' pay in 1982 stating that they were singling out nurses for special consideration.

The publicity given to the predicament of the nurses in recent months — to the exclusion of the plight of ancillaries, clerks and technicians who have borne the brunt of the Tory shake-out of the health service since 1982 — served to deepen the divisions among health workers. Just days after they announced their intention to fund the nurses' pay offer, the Tories confirmed that other health workers would have to make do with rises of just 4.8 per cent.

The inevitable consequence of promoting the issue of patient care is that health workers are paid according to how close they are to the patient, but that none of them are paid well because they are too divided among themselves to put real pressure on the government. To unite our forces against the Tories we have to emphasise what all health workers have in common. If we drew up a set of demands covering the wages we need for a decent living and the safeguards we need to ensure decent working conditions we would have the basis for uniting all health workers together.

Scotland: smash the poll tax

At a meeting in Partick last Friday of 'Stop It', Labour's anti-poll tax campaign, Strathclyde Labour councillor Bill Miller congratulated the Tories for introducing the poll tax as it meant 'more public meetings'. The meeting provided an election platform for Pat Chalmers, Labour's local councillor on Glasgow district council, who explained how she was using her election canvasses to distribute anti-poll tax leaflets. Labour's anti-poll tax campaign might boost flagging attendance at meetings and help to win votes at elections, but it cannot hide the fact that Labour councils are already implementing the Tory tax.

Strathclyde council has tried to disguise its role as the Tories' tax collector by laying the blame on Jack Wood, the region's poll tax registration officer. Miller complained that Wood's special powers meant that he was not under the council's control. The council may not control Wood — but it has done its best to make life easy for him. Wood has the full run of the council including access to telephones, computers and typists.

Miller also denied that the council employed snoopers, claiming that Wood was responsible for the hiring and firing of his staff. Yet all snoopers are on Strathclyde's payroll and the council allowed Wood to circulate an internal letter to every department inviting council employees to become official scabs.

'MISTAKE'

Meanwhile, Glasgow district council's 'non-cooperation' with the tax involves allowing snoopers to use council property for their briefing sessions. Chalmers admitted that the buildings had been used 'by mistake'. She added that a decision to cancel a briefing session on 18 April was the result of councillors' protests. In fact direct action from anti-poll tax campaigners, not empty rhetoric from the Labour council, drove the snoopers out. Chalmers claimed that all lettings to snoopers had since been cancelled. Why, then, have all snoopers received letters on council notepaper which inform them that their 'seminar' has been re-scheduled for Monday 25 April 'in the same location'?

Voters in Partick have a chance on 5 May to show Chalmers what they think about Labour's role as Tory tax collectors. Elaine Murdoch,



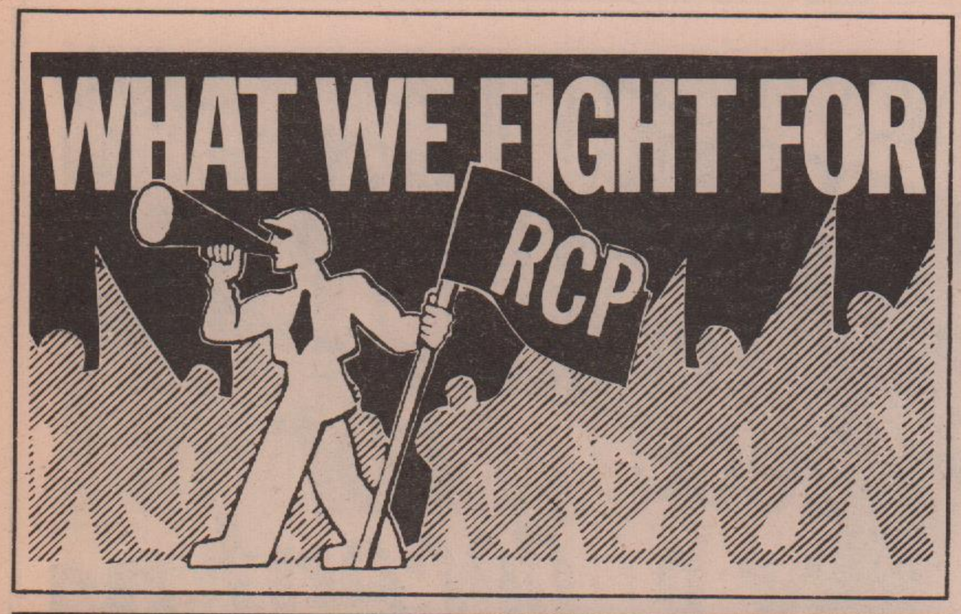
Hugh Cameron

POLL TAX FORMS ON FIRE

the Revolutionary Communist Party candidate, is challenging Chalmers at the polls on a platform of total opposition to the poll tax. Murdoch, and Derek Owen the RCP candidate in Crosshill ward, are using their election campaign to build support for a campaign against the tax. Labour councils have already shown their willingness to cooperate with the Tories. We will only stop the tax by organising a mass working class campaign of defiance. If you want to smash the poll tax:

- **contact the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign on (041) 552 6800.**
- **join the RCP election campaign. Talk to a *tns* seller or contact the campaign at PH8 340 West Princes Street, Glasgow.**

Carol Taggart



NEW READERS START HERE

The working class in Britain and throughout the West has suffered a series of setbacks in recent years. These setbacks have strengthened those who argue for moderation, 'realism' and a strategy of defensiveness. The Revolutionary Communist Party takes a different view.

We believe that these setbacks are the responsibility of the old parties and union machines of the official labour movement. In Britain the Labourist tradition has exhausted itself and can no longer relate to even the most modest aspiration of the working class. The exhaustion of Labourism in no way undermines the potential of the working class to change the world.

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The RCP is committed to the construction of an independent working class movement. Only a movement which recognises that the interests of workers are irreconcilably opposed to those of the employers can fight effectively in the struggles ahead.

For the RCP, working class politics cannot be reduced to trade unionism or the affairs of the workplace. Workers must take a stand on every issue and express an independent point of view if we are to liberate ourselves. The fatal flaw of British Labourism is that it restricts workers' horizons to economic matters, while it allows the employer class to monopolise political debate. Workers must define every problem from our point of view and fight for the rights of every section of society if we are to constitute a politically independent class.

While the RCP supports the fight for real reforms or improvements in the lives of the working class, we believe that no durable gains can be won within capitalism. The RCP argues that the overthrow of capitalism provides the necessary precondition for the liberation of the working class and of society as a whole.

The British state exists to protect the wealth and privilege of the capitalist class. The RCP aims to destroy the state, which maintains the conditions for exploitation. We believe that the state cannot be used for progressive ends. Any attempt to use the soft side of the state, such as local government, inner-city partnerships, or police authorities, lends legitimacy to the entire state apparatus. It can only strengthen the authority of the capitalists' coercive machine.

The RCP believes that workers have no nation. British workers share the same interests as the exploited in other countries. British workers have nothing in common with their employers and must resist the appeals of patriotism and chauvinism. As internationalists we recognise that the enemy is at home. Since Britain remains an imperialist power around the world, the only international role it can play is that of the oppressor.

The class struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle against imperialism. The RCP supports all anti-imperialist struggles. Workers who live in the imperialist heartland have a special duty to back those fighting against the British oppressor. Thus we fight for the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and for Irish self-determination. We opposed Britain's colonial war in the South Atlantic, and support the return of the Malvinas islands to Argentina. We oppose British and Western interference in the Middle East. We support the destruction of the Zionist state in Palestine and of the apartheid regime in South Africa. We uphold the same principles in every struggle against imperialism. The RCP is a fervent opponent of all forms of British militarism, nuclear, and 'non-nuclear' alike.

The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Workers must defend the oppressed if we are to fight for our own liberation. This is why the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism. The struggle for the emancipation of women is another fundamental issue for the working class. We unreservedly oppose any form of discrimination against lesbians and gays and call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Workers must take a stand on these issues, not out of altruism, but because it is in our class interest to fight for the fullest extension of democratic rights.

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Workers need combat organisations capable of defending our interests. The existing organisations of the labour movement are singularly unsuited for this task. The RCP believes that the Labour Party is a bosses' organisation that should be fought and exposed. Despite its working class constituency the Labour Party has always followed the dictates of the capitalists. Whenever Labour has been in office, it has always betrayed the hopes of workers. The RCP is against giving any electoral support to Labour. Workers need a party that is 100 per cent our own and only responsive to proletarian interests.

The existing trade unions are heavily bureaucratised and incapable of representing the aspirations of their members. The RCP argues that rank and file trade unionists should fight to take control of the movement. Trade unionists should organise across the workplace and industry and demand that we run our own affairs. Rank and file committees organised on an industry-wide basis could ensure that the unions truly belong to their members.

The RCP's aim is social revolution in Britain and internationally. We believe that this perspective is no less essential in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union than in the West. Only the working class has the capacity to liberate humanity. Our job is to contribute practically to the realisation of this objective.

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If you would like to discuss these issues further, please write to RCP, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX

HAMMERSMITH NALGO

DEBATING IRELAND IN THE UNIONS

Hammersmith Nalgo president John Fitzpatrick recounts the left's recent success in raising the Irish War in his union branch

A dramatic debate on Britain's occupation of Ireland shows no sign of abating in the Hammersmith branch of Nalgo in London. For many years my union branch, composed mainly of white-collar council workers, has had a formal policy recognising the right of the Irish people to self-determination, and calling for the immediate withdrawal of British troops. Recent events in the Irish War, in Gibraltar and at Belfast funerals, brought this policy under considerable pressure, and involved hundreds of trade unionists in a heated debate over the issues raised.

FURIOUS

The first move came on 10 March when two members brought an emergency motion to a branch meeting, to condemn the killings four days earlier of the three republicans in Gibraltar, to send a message of support and sympathy to their relatives and friends, and to pay the costs of inviting a republican speaker from the Six Counties. The motion was moved by Oliver Donohue, whose support for a free Ireland goes back to his attendance on the first civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon in 1968, and was seconded by an Irish Freedom Movement supporter.

There was a furious debate. One speaker declared that he had relatives in the British Army who were currently fighting the IRA; another replied that members of his family had been killed by the British Army. A white man said he was outraged that anybody could even consider passing such a motion; a black woman said she was outraged that anybody thought the British Army should be in somebody else's country. An RCP supporter argued that the Irish people were fighting for their democratic rights, and as trade unionists we should support them.

The motion was passed by 50 votes to 19 with 16 abstentions.

As president of the branch I promptly sent a letter of solidarity. That was when the backlash started. Over the days which followed, the republican deaths in Milltown cemetery and the deaths of the British soldiers in Andersonstown gave it added momentum. On 23 March a specially requisitioned branch meeting re-debated the motion. Even though the letter had been sent, the money had not been paid for the republican speaker, nor had a statement condemning the killings been issued to the press. This time the right wing in the branch had mobilised and the meeting was packed and tense. The debate was even better than the first, and speaker after speaker defended the original action.

Those against the motion claimed that we should condemn all violence, and that the IRA were 'murdering terrorists'. Others said it was irresponsible to call for withdrawal of troops because of the bloodbath which would ensue. A member of the local Irish Workers Group replied that there were bloodbaths already, and stressed that there was a war going on in which we had 'to take sides'. I defended the Irish freedom fighters and pointed out that trade unionists had 'more in common with those fighting the British state than with those who were running it'. This time the motion failed by 122 votes to 80, with 11 abstentions, but there was no demoralisation or dismay on the left. We knew that we had won the arguments and were delighted to have carried as many as 80 fellow trade unionists with us.

It was at this point that the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the local gutter press got hold of the story, denouncing the 'lefties who back the IRA', and me in particular for the letter of solidarity. Reporters harassed me at work and at home. They started ringing branch secretary Tony Phelan too, but the branch officers remained rock solid in defence of the actions which had been taken in accordance with branch decisions. The only person who gave in to any of this was John Daly, the Nalgo general secretary, who issued a statement condemning the letter and threatening disciplinary action.

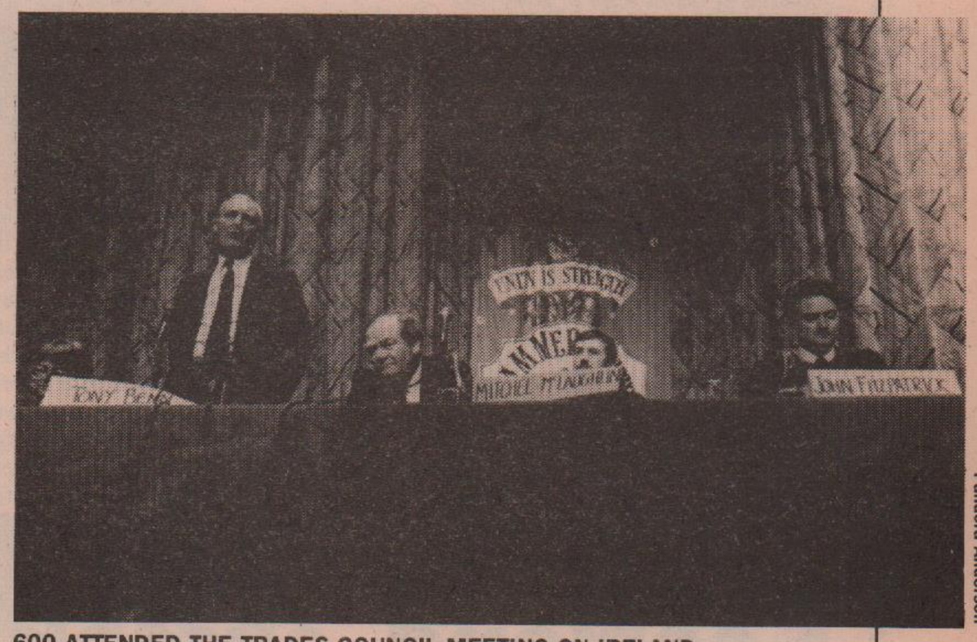
Meanwhile the debate spread to the wider trade union movement in West London, as the Hammersmith and Fulham Trades Council itself denounced the Gibraltar killings, sent its own letters of sympathy to the families, and held a public meeting in Hammersmith town hall on 14 April. The meeting attracted over 600 people to listen to Mitchel McLaughlin of Sinn Fein, Tony Benn MP, Liz Curtis of Information on Ireland, and myself speaking for the Irish Freedom Movement.

The joint shop stewards' committee at Charing Cross Hospital backed the meeting, as did the Housing Associations branch of Nalgo.

Before the meeting local Tory councillors continued to whip up their supporters in Hammersmith Nalgo by asking the council to condemn Nalgo's motion and ban Sinn Fein from the town hall. The Labour council, too terrified to debate the issue with the Tories, dissociated itself from Nalgo's stand, and said it would happily ban Sinn Fein as soon as Thatcher did, but not before.

Emboldened by their earlier success and all the media attention, the right wing in Hammersmith Nalgo called a further meeting for 19 April. They now demanded that a public retraction of the letter be issued and that branch policy on Ireland be rescinded. The branch officers moved an amendment against this, and in favour of re-affirming the policy of recognising the right of the Irish people to self-determination and campaigning for the immediate withdrawal of British troops.

Somebody claimed that the majority in Northern Ireland were in favour of British rule, so that was the end of the matter. Another said that Britain had been very good to Ireland over the years, letting lots of Irish people come here. I explained how the Irish people were denied their democratic rights by partition and British force, and insisted on the importance of campaigning for *immediate* withdrawal because we wanted an open acknowledgement that Britain had no right to be in Ireland at all. Another left activist denounced the hypocrisy of those who claimed to be in favour of non-violence, but 'washed their hands' of responsibility for what British troops were doing in the Six Counties. This time the vote was 87 to 86 on a ballot in favour of our amendment, after three recounts had produced a tie.



600 ATTENDED THE TRADES COUNCIL MEETING ON IRELAND

Pandora Anderson

We were jubilant of course, and not just because we had won by one vote. We know that we have a long way to go to convince all 1700 members of the branch, but winning and holding more than 80 people is a good start.

For the first time in years we have drawn hundreds of members into a full discussion on Ireland.

The left has fought together on the issue with great effectiveness. Only two Socialist Workers Party members spoilt things with a bit of petty sectarianism. When our branch secretary asked the branch executive committee to express their support for branch officers, the SWP moved an amendment blaming the officers for the backlash and accusing them of not conducting an open debate with the membership. The right wing on the executive lined up behind the SWP, but their attempt at sabotage was defeated by the left, by 15 votes to eight.

The battle is by no means over. The right wing is preparing a motion of no confidence in the branch officers. We are ready for them. We know their arguments are incoherent and dishonest. We have learned that if you stand your ground and put forward your politics boldly and openly it is possible to win wide support.

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly | No 16 | Editor: Mick Hume

'THERE ARE THINGS STRONGER THAN PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITIES'

RON BROWN, Labour MP for Leith, Edinburgh, has been suspended from parliament for a month after damaging the Mace and refusing to make an acceptably supine apology to the house for his action. Only 26 of the 650 MPs voted against kicking Brown out, the Labour shadow cabinet has moved to have him suspended from its parliamentary party, and the Amalgamated Engineering Union has cancelled its sponsorship of him. If the leaders of the official labour movement think it a sin to crack such a royal relic as the Mace, we should have no illusions in their ability to break the power of the modern British establishment.

The Mace is part of the Crown jewels, the booty accumulated by the thieving magpies of the British monarchy down the centuries. Yet it is revered as a symbol of British democracy, and the commons cannot sit for business until the Speaker is in his chair and the Mace is on the table. In truth, the awe in which this ugly antique is held is a symbol of all that is rotten and reactionary about British politics. In the mid-seventeenth century, Oliver Cromwell branded the Mace 'a bauble'. In the late twentieth century, the leaders of the Labour Party and the unions regard it as sacred and have expelled Ron Brown for daring to drop it.

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The Labour leaders' slavish concern with parliamentary procedure has led them to panic about the number of MPs being suspended from the house for misbehaving. Seven MPs have been suspended so far in this session of parliament; there have been only 24 suspensions during the 40-odd years since the Second World War. Most of the recent suspensions were of Labour MPs who made futile gestures. In the past, parliamentary firebrands made political attacks on the Tories which led to their suspension. The current crop of trouble-makers among Labour MPs (schooled in the booing and braying of student politics), simply make a noise. The suspension itself becomes their political statement. This trend captures the impotence of an opposition which believes in confining political struggle to parliament, at a time when the government has a commons majority of more than 100.

Ron Brown does not properly fit into this category. He has a record of involvement in real struggles; in 1972 he was sacked by the South of Scotland electricity board, for leading an unofficial walkout in support of the miners' strike. His juggling with the Mace was an outburst of anger at the Tory social security cuts. He displayed more spine than other Labour protesters by refusing to read out the cringing apology written for him by party officials. 'Since you want a grovelling statement I am not going to read it,' Brown told the Speaker; 'With regard to the Mace — whatever that is — I accept responsibility for any damage. I didn't write this rubbish.'

It was Brown's refusal to play the game and apologise which really enraged the Tories and brought the Labour frontbench running to their aid. The establishment demands above all else that MPs show respect for its parliamentary talking shop, and for the Mace and other trappings which serve to mystify the process by which political power is exercised in Britain. The Labour leadership will fall over itself to show that it shares this concern. In so doing, it is falling for the trick used to entrap the political representatives of the labour movement. The British establishment insists that Labour MPs lick the Speaker's boots, but its own political champions are always ready to flout the formal rule of parliament to defend their class interests.

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The Tories understand that real power is exercised, not through the parliamentary puppet-show, but by the capitalist state machine — the army, police and civil service — headed by the cabinet. Margaret Thatcher displays her own contempt for the commons by announcing new policies in press conferences or TV broadcasts, rather than on the floor of the house. The Labour Party protests that this is simply an abuse of her big majority. But it is more than that. Thatcher recognises the commons as an empty shell which disguises the domination of the capitalist class over British society. Tory leaders have never needed a majority of MPs behind them to justify bypassing parliament. The most famous occasion on which they usurped parliament's position was in 1914, when they were in opposition.

The Liberal government of the day attempted to pass a bill granting Ireland a limited form of home rule within the Empire. In response Andrew Bonar Law, leader of the Conservative Party, declared that they would 'use any means — whatever seems likely to be the most effective' to wreck the government's plans. Bonar Law's menacing observation that 'there are things stronger than parliamentary majorities' remains a neat summation of the establishment's attitude to formal democracy. The 'stronger things' which he had in mind were the arms of the state and the wider forces of reaction in society, which were soon mobilised against home rule. The bill was killed off when cavalry officers at the Curragh near Dublin refused government orders to move North and put down the Unionists. The British ruling class might try to convince us that authority is invested in the mystical powers of the Mace. But it puts its own trust in the genuine power of its military machine.

The authorities keep the parliamentary show on the road to contain political protest within the walls of Westminster, while they get on with governing outside. Despite their displays of outrage over Brown's behaviour, the top figures in the British establishment are keenly aware that no demonstration in the commons can pose a real threat to their rule.

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In the middle of the furore leading to his suspension last week, one newspaper reported that Brown was also due to speak at a May rally in Edinburgh, called by a local republican band to mark the anniversary of the death of Irish revolutionary James Connolly. In the eyes of chief constable William Sutherland, this was a far greater crime than anything Brown might do in parliament. 'We deplore the presence of Ron Brown at this IRA march', stated Sutherland; 'It's a different thing throwing the Mace in the commons to throwing republican bands into our streets.' A public display of support for Irish freedom can panic the police chiefs of the British state faster than any parliamentary protest.

This brings us back to the Labour leaders, who don't understand the relationship between the democratic and repressive aspects of the state. Believing that the Speaker's robes, the Mace and the other ancient rubbish cluttering up the commons are the trappings of true authority, Labour leaders have long tried to restrict working class politics to parliament. Neil Kinnock and his fellow New Realists have taken this doctrine of passivity to new extremes. They are hammering anybody — strikers, protesters or parliamentary trouble-makers — who 'diverts attention' from their ineffective attempts to debate the Tories in the commons.

It was bad enough in the past when the parliamentary Labour leaders told us to shut up and listen to them, while the working class was trying to cope with the employers and the authorities in the real world. But today, when the capitalist class and its courts and police are launching an unprecedented offensive against our people, the Labour leaders can't even offer rhetorical opposition. Instead they tell us to shut up and listen to dissident *Tory* MPs, who have taken over as the government's leading critics in the commons. Thus, all Labour frontbencher Robin Cook could do this week in response to popular anger against social security cuts, was to table a quibbling little motion about small savers and housing benefits, deliberately designed to catch the attention of unhappy Tory MPs. On the poll tax, Labour is trying to kill off protests in Scotland and to concentrate its 'campaign' on the most archaic and useless outpost of the British constitution — the house of lords.

Labour left wingers who are unhappy with Kinnock's submissive approach are putting their energies into Tony Benn's challenge for the Labour leadership. Yet Benn, perhaps more than any other top politician, operates under a naive belief in the authority of those elected to parliament. Thus his argument against Brown's suspension was that such measures might undermine the power of parliamentary democracy, as if that illusory power were real. In looking to Benn's campaign as the solution to all our problems, left wingers are effectively endorsing the idea that parliament is the place to fight our political battles.

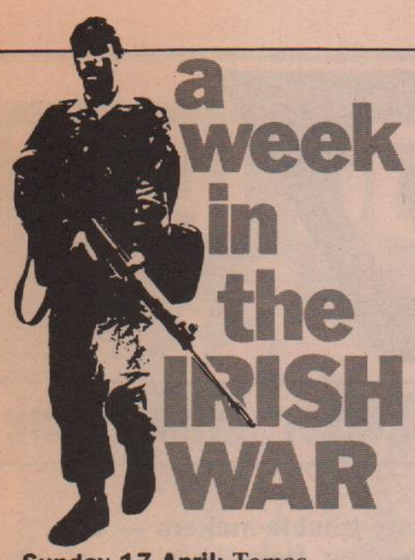
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Revolutionaries have never harboured such illusions. Lenin described the Tory revolt against parliament over Irish home rule as 'the day when the noble landowners of Britain tore the British constitution and British law to shreds and gave an excellent lesson in class struggle.' The lesson was, as Bonar Law said, that there are things stronger than parliamentary majorities. One of them is the capitalist state; and the other is the power of the working class, organised for action against it. Parliament can be a useful propaganda platform. But it can never be a tool to liberate the working class. We need a new opposition movement which is willing and able to lead our forces on to the open field of class battle on issues like the poll tax, social security and the fight for Irish freedom. We cannot afford to leave it to a Labour Party which does not know the difference between state power and parliamentary posturing, and which gazes with reverence upon the 16lb lump of silver gilt which Ron Brown had the audacity to drop last week.

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a week in the IRISH WAR

Sunday 17 April: Tomas MacGiolla, outgoing president of the Workers Party (the rump of the Official republican movement), urged Loyalists to 'give freedom to themselves' in a new alliance against the IRA. Former UDR major, Loyalist MP and arch-reactionary Ken Maginnis, praised the party for its services to the Crown, saying there 'is absolutely nothing that would hinder cooperation' between Loyalists and the Workers Party.

Monday 18 April: A contractor working on an RUC base was injured in a booby-trap explosion near Magherafelt, County Tyrone. Ken Maginnis claimed that privately, Loyalists were saying that if the Social Democratic and Labour Party's objective of a cessation of all military activity could be attained through the current SDLP/Sinn Fein talks, that was 'well and good'.

Tuesday 19 April: Harland and Wolff shipyard won a contract worth £260m to build the world's largest cruise liner. The contract for the shipyard with an almost 100 per cent Protestant workforce would require a British government subsidy of £75m. A joint RUC/British Army patrol narrowly escaped a bomb attack in Strabane, Co Tyrone.

Thursday 21 April: During dawn raids in North and West Belfast, 13 men were dragged from their beds and taken to the notorious Castlereagh interrogation centre. The long-awaited raids were in connection with the execution of two British soldiers at the funeral in Belfast of IRA volunteer Kevin Brady. A contractor working on the roof of Belfast courthouse was injured in a sniper attack. The IRA again warned contractors to cease work on Crown buildings damaged in IRA attacks.

Friday 22 April: In the ongoing saga of talks about devolution, Southern premier Charles Haughey called for a federal solution to the 'Irish problem'. On a tour of the USA to win support for his proposals to supplement the Anglo-Irish agreement with a devolved administration, he made it clear that the intention of political initiatives was to disarm the republicans: 'Violence must first cease as a prelude to political progress.' Dublin opposition leaders condemned Haughey for not condemning violence strongly enough. The RUC issued a warning to shoot grenade-throwers on sight. Faced with a weapon against which they have no protection, the RUC revealed that the 'drogue bomb' had been used 79 times since it was first deployed by the IRA last autumn.

In a speech in Derbyshire, Sir Geoffrey Howe acknowledged the 'hurt' felt by the Dublin government at recent events in Ireland. As a Welshman, he said he could appreciate the Irish view that the English are insensitive. However, real class solidarity lay beyond the mists of pan-Celtic folklore: 'Terrorism poses a threat to both the British and the Irish state.' Displaying something more than the awareness of a dead sheep he recalled, 'We are faced by ruthless men and women who are trying to kill us. My colleagues in government share memories of Brighton that are a constant reminder of that inescapable fact.'

Mark Reilly

FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

RACISM TRIUMPHS AT THE POLLS



LE PEN: 'NOW NOTHING CAN BE DONE AGAINST OUR WISHES'

Racism emerged as the clear victor in the first round of the French presidential elections. Francois Mitterrand, the incumbent president, led the field with 34 per cent of the poll. The leading right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac, the French prime minister, came second with almost 20 per cent and will now face Mitterrand in a second ballot on 8 May. But the man who drew greatest satisfaction from the results was Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the far-right Front National.

REPATRIATION

In the 1974 presidential elections Le Pen obtained 0.7 per cent of the vote. On Sunday, one in seven French voters backed his policy of repatriation, restoration of the death penalty and 'a France for the French'. Le Pen's 14.5 per cent was more than double that of André Lajoinie, the Communist candidate, and just two per cent behind Raymond Barre, a former prime minister and, until a month ago, fancied to do well. Chirac scraped home with barely five per cent more support than the Front National leader. Le Pen might have been eliminated from the presidential race but he has established the Front National as a major force in French politics. His supporters will have the decisive say in the outcome of the second ballot.

'From now on', Le Pen claimed on Sunday night, 'nothing can be done without the Front National nor against its wishes.'

He made it clear that he will only support Chirac in the second ballot if the French prime minister takes harder lines on immigration and crime. Chirac responded almost immediately with a statement that he intended 'to preserve our national identity and to combat illegal immigration'. It is clear that race will be a major focus of the election campaign over the next two weeks.

FAILURE

Le Pen's success was the result of the general chauvinist climate that characterises French politics, and the failure of the other main candidates to address the real problems facing the electorate. In an election where there was little to separate the three leading candidates, Le Pen emerged as the man with something to say.

Mitterrand made a virtue of his lack of policies. He distanced himself from any party and presented himself as a statesman above the hurly-burly of politics. In a pre-election interview he told the nation that he wanted to win on Sunday because he had 'enjoyed' his time as president.

For much of the campaign Chirac kept a low political profile.

His failure to make up ground on Mitterrand forced him to make an issue of immigration in the final week of the campaign. Chirac hoped to capitalise on the racist climate in France and to win votes from Le Pen supporters. Chirac's use of the race card forced the other leading candidates to also begin grubbing around for the racist vote. But Sunday's results show that the tactic backfired. Le Pen proved far more adept at banging the racist drum than a slow-starter like Chirac. Far from winning votes from Le Pen, Chirac strengthened the hand of his far-right rival by making racism the focus of the campaign.

DISASTER

The upsurge of violence in New Caledonia, the French Pacific colony which is the scene of a bitter struggle for independence, helped to consolidate Le Pen's support. When nationalists seized 17 gendarmes and killed three a few days before the election, the presidential candidates immediately condemned the action. Le Pen, who has consistently attacked the nationalist movement, stood to gain most from this pro-French consensus.

For the left, the first round results were an unmitigated disaster. The combined vote of all five left-wing candidates barely matched that of Le Pen. André Lajoinie, the PCF candidate, received just 6.7 per cent of the vote, less than half the 1981 figure. It was a stunning rejection for a party that just five years ago was a partner in power. A more encouraging result was the two per cent polled for Arlette Laguiller, the candidate of Lutte Ouvrière, the main Trotskyist organisation in France. The 596 000 votes for Laguiller show that there is a section of the French working class that wants to fight.

It makes more tragic the failure of the left to provide a real alternative to the racist consensus.

Whoever wins on 8 May, the election results have strengthened the reactionary forces in French politics. Until the left in France begins to challenge the chauvinist climate, Le Pen will play an increasingly important role in determining policy.

Kenan Malik

BOTHA PROMISES APARTHEID REFORMS

A return to 'total strategy'

President PW Botha told the South African parliament last week that he intended to give blacks greater political power. Botha's speech promised a variety of changes including a confederal parliament which will link the apartheid government with the nominally independent homelands, giving elected black representatives power over their 'own affairs', the inclusion of blacks in the electoral college which chooses the president, the admission of blacks to the presidential council and the creation of the new post of prime minister, partly to deal with black representatives.

TROUNCED

The speech is the president's first major statement since the right-wing Conservative Party trounced the ruling National Party in three by-elections last month amid allegations that the government was backtracking on its commitment to apartheid. It marks Botha's attempt to regain the political initiative by rallying moderate whites behind the National Party and reassuring blacks that at least some of their aspirations may be met.

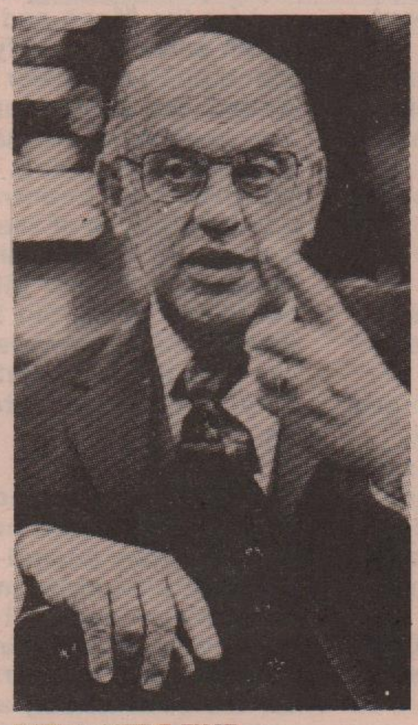
Even if the proposals are implemented in full there will still be no representation in parliament for blacks, who make up over 75 per cent of the population. Botha's planned changes promise only token access to the white-controlled decision-making process through elected black regional authorities which will delegate representatives to an 'EEC-style' forum.

There is nothing new in these ideas. Giving black representatives power over their own affairs means extending the 'homelands' system. The elected councils which will control black townships are the same bodies whose members were branded as collaborators and driven out by township residents only two years ago.

Botha's proposals are a return to the 'total stategy' of the early eighties. This combined intense repression to crush black militancy with minor reforms to persuade middle class blacks to collaborate with the white regime. The reform policy was derailed by the nationwide black resistance movement which threatened to get out of control by 1986. Botha was forced to stop tinkering with petty apartheid and move towards all-out repression. Thanks to military occupation of the townships, a clampdown on guerrilla activity and mass detentions of activists and the banning of their organisations, Botha now feels secure enough to try to re-establish a dialogue with the moderates.

'BETRAYAL'

Botha's proposals have met with howls of protest from the right. The Conservative Party has claimed that they hand over power to blacks and are a 'betrayal of the whites'. In spite of the damage to his standing in the white community, Botha recognises the importance of rebuilding links with moderate blacks while it is possible to do so. He knows that there is little time to create a new layer of collaborators.

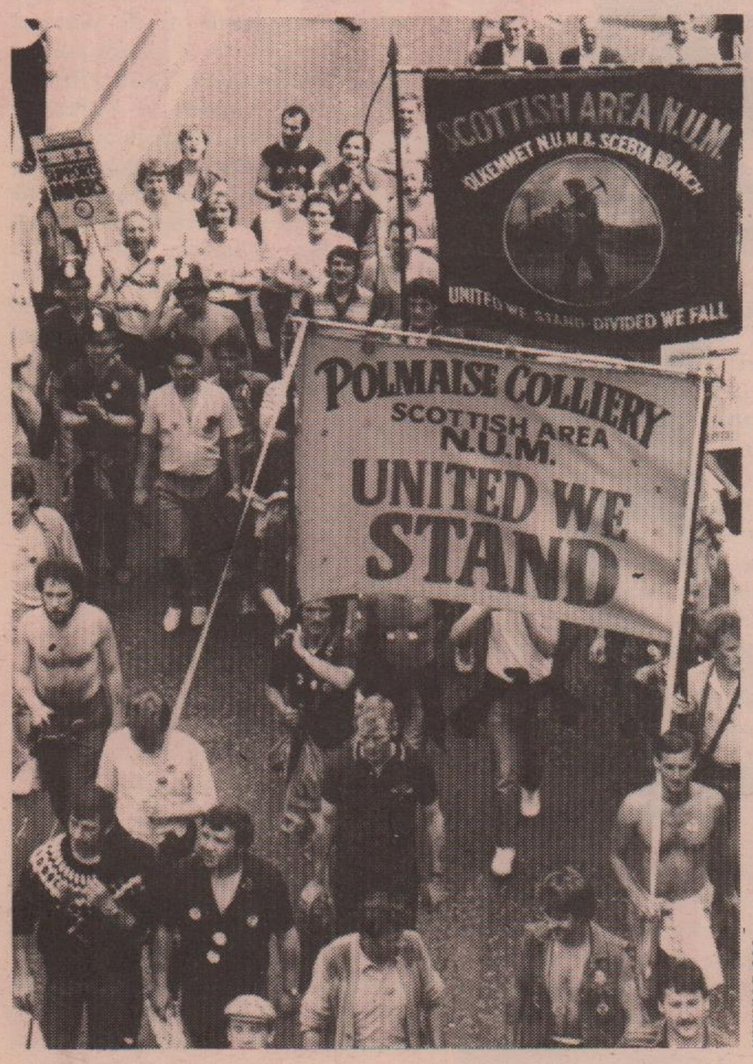


BOTHA: LITTLE TIME

Despite unprecedented repression and the banning of all black political organisations, resistance is again on the increase. In recent weeks there has been a spate of bombings of government buildings and shootouts with the police, as well as an increase in strikes and demonstrations. Botha fears the white right-wing backlash to his concessions to black demands. But he fears far more the renewed rumblings of black resistance.

Russell Osborne

letters page



Joe Boatman

DISTORTING SCOTTISH HISTORY?

MICK HUME and **DEREK OWEN'S** book *Is There a Scottish Solution? The Working Class and the Assembly Debate* is indicative of the chauvinism that permeates the British left. The authors started off well by making a rigorous critique of the Labour Party, which was excellent but contradictory. The authors rightly state that the Labour Party used home rule to further its own political ends, namely to attain governmental power within the British state. However, this makes a nonsense of their later argument that Scottish Labour leaders had an inherent 'Scottishness' which hindered the workers' cause. Surely they had an inherent 'Britishness' which used and abused not only the Scottish question but socialism as well.

The so-called analysis degenerates into one great distortion of Scottish history. Scotland is not an oppressed nation! Yes, the Act of Union led to capitalist take-off but does not imperialism initiate a social revolution wherever it rears its ugly head? Yes, Scottish capitalism prospered but at the expense of the Scottish nation. In short, Scotland was part of England's imperial expansion. English capital remained the driving force and Scotland succumbed to that.

Why is our history distorted? The simple answer is that the authors have to find scapegoats for the failure of the 'British revolution'. Scottish national sentiment can be blamed for the failure of the British road to socialism. The real reason for the failure frightens the British left. There is no British working class: capitalism did not develop on a British basis. That is not to say that Scottish and English workers are not comrades in the international proletariat, but they are not 'Britons'.

I do not agree with devolution and it can never be a 'solution', but if the Scottish people want it then it is a step forward in the fight for democracy. Hume and Owen disagree because they know better than the Scottish working class: how indicative of a British chauvinism that would make the Conservative Party proud!

Gerard J Cairns
Glasgow

SELL-OUT IN SHEFFIELD

SHEFFIELD Labour council has used the new housing benefit regulations to try to solve its cash crisis by imposing extra duties and flexible working on benefit workers. The only way to fight it was by building a united campaign with workers in other sections and departments also facing attacks from the council.

Previously members of the Socialist Workers Party in the branch had argued that the best way to build a cuts fightback was by spreading sectional struggles into council-wide action. When it came to the crunch, though, they refused to back all-out action and argued we could only win support by being 'reasonable'. In three separate ballots, benefit workers voted for strike action and 123 members walked out. The left refused to support any action unless it received 'official' sanction from national officials. Since the national executive refused to back the strike, the left argued for a 'defiant' return to work.

The attitude of the union officials and the left has led to more divisions within the union and greater demoralisation. The left calls for 'united action' but fails to promote it and instead tries to fight the cuts section by section through 'reasonable demands'. This in turn leads to defeat and more divisions. We will have to endure this cycle of defeat and demoralisation until we are able to take on the arguments for 'realism' by promoting coherent working class politics.

Nalgo member
Sheffield

WHY I LEFT THE LABOUR PARTY

THERE are many reasons why I left the Labour Party. The best issue to concentrate on would be the most recent and graphic example of all that's wrong with the labour movement: the health service dispute.

The whole thrust of the TUC campaign has been to try and appear as innocuous as possible, organising a series of one-day (or even two-hour) gestures, and assuring everyone that the health workers were standing on 'protest lines' not picket lines. By appealing to the respectable pillars of British society, there is no way the TUC could sanction the militant industrial action needed to make the Tories back down.

On the 5 March 'Day of Action' in Hyde Park, London, the TUC and the Labour Party provided the spectacle of Norman Willis singing 'When the saints come marching in', Clare Rayner telling us her experiences as a nurse 20 years ago, and Archbishop Trevor Huddleston singing 'We shall overcome'. There were some 50 000 health workers and party activists at that demo, angry and in a militant mood, and all we got were three jaded has-beens without an ounce of fight between them.

It was simply an insult. As the crowd drifted away, their mood utterly changed. I finally accepted that the traditional labour movement no longer had anything positive to offer the working class, or me. My decision to join the Revolutionary Communist Party was confirmed.

I first became acquainted with the RCP through their *Red Front* campaign. From that time I've always had great respect for their arguments. They are directly confronting Tory ideology in a way that can win. That is something the Labour Party has completely failed to do. There is really no alternative.

Mike Saunders
membership secretary
Southville Ward Labour Party
Bristol

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LABOUR'S LAW AND ORDER

UNDER the headline 'Behave or get out' our local paper features Middlesborough housing committee's latest policy development. The Labour-controlled council is looking to the Thatcher law and order drive for inspiration. Faced with an alleged problem of vandalism on one of their estates, the housing services committee has a sure solution. 'Youths who make life intolerable for their neighbours will be evicted,' committee chair Bob Brady threatens. 'I have no responsibility whatsoever to rehouse them. They are reckless in their behaviour and I would consider them to be deliberately homeless.'

At a time when even Prince Charles can see that housing and other inner-city problems have social causes the municipal socialists of the Labour Party insist that individuals bear responsibility for these problems, thereby reinforcing the Tories' moral and political crusade. Some people on the estate are threatening vigilante action saying that 'the police do nothing'. They would do better to organise collective action to put the blame for their problem where it belongs — on the Tory govenment and the Labour councils who make us pay for their crisis.

Tom Reynolds
Middlesborough

TONY BENN'S BLAST FROM THE PAST

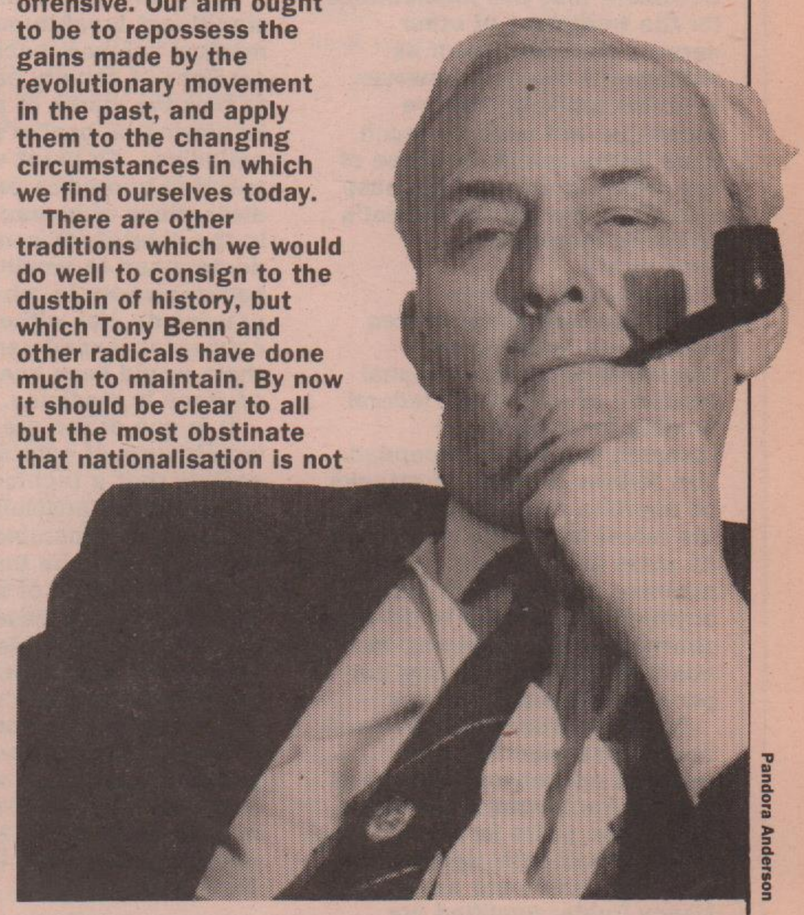
DAVE MURRAY argues that the RCP is wrong to criticise Tony Benn's politics as outdated and contends that we can learn a lot from the past (letters, 22 April). One lesson we can learn from the past is that Benn's brand of state socialism has nothing to offer the working class.

There are some traditions which we would do well to retrieve from the past, but which unfortunately have been ignored by many on the left. Today it is especially important that we have a proper grasp of the theory of capitalist crisis, or an appreciation of the nature of the capitalist state. This is vital if we are to anticipate global economic trends, and withstand the capitalist offensive. Our aim ought to be to repossess the gains made by the revolutionary movement in the past, and apply them to the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

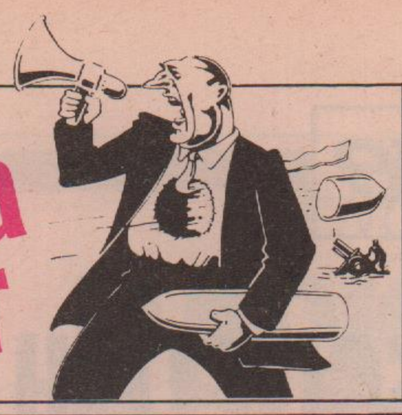
There are other traditions which we would do well to consign to the dustbin of history, but which Tony Benn and other radicals have done much to maintain. By now it should be clear to all but the most obstinate that nationalisation is not a desirable alternative to private ownership. Yet this remains high on the list of priorities for Benn, even after the experience of the steel and mining industries. It should also be apparent that the state is an instrument of ruling class coercion, not a vehicle through which we can set about reforming society. Yet this basic lesson of history has escaped Benn even as the state tools up for the nineties.

Our criticism of Benn is that he steadfastly refuses to learn from the mistakes of the left-wing movement in the past, and consistently fails to face up to the problems confronting the working class in the present.

Tony Crawford
Greenwich


Pandora Anderson

the propaganda war



Return of the bodysnatchers?

AS LIBERAL MP David Alton's Bill to reduce the abortion time-limit reaches its final stages in parliament, the media has added a new twist to the debate. On Breakfast TV last week a panel of pro-abortionists and anti-abortionists debated whether aborted fetuses should be used for brain-tissue transplants. This debate arose after a Midlands doctor implanted brain tissue from an aborted fetus into the brains of two Parkinson's disease sufferers in March and April.

The discussions have taken a macabre turn in the press and on TV, focusing on whether this technique might lead to the creation of a market in human beings to be used for medical purposes. Alton himself raged against the use of human life as 'expendable raw material'. *The Times* revealed a more likely reason for the establishment's fears about the latest development in medical science. It worried that 'if the mother is seen to be helping medical science by aborting the fetus, then abortion might seem to be less morally dubious.'

In other words, if such transplants were to become acceptable, abortion might lose its mystique and become a medical operation like any other, and the fetus might lose its sanctified status and become nothing more than tissue. What is now widely regarded as morally reprehensible might become medically approved.

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The possible usefulness of the new technique has yet to be demonstrated in practice. But so far the recipients of the donated tissue appear to have undergone some tissue regeneration around the site of the implants, and their conditions seem to have made some improvement. The new treatment also has implications for the treatment of other nervous disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease. However, it seems unlikely that the technique will undergo much more development, because of the media storm, and because it involves the establishment's favourite moral panic — fetal rights.

In America, the new technique was banned three weeks ago, pending an investigation by the National Institute of Health. All federal funding for fetal tissue research has been suspended. This follows a series of attacks on abortion rights in the USA, the latest being the removal of all state funding from family planning clinics which have anything whatsoever to do with abortion — from lobbying for abortion rights to sharing car-parks with abortion clinics.

The US government has been able to establish an anti-abortion consensus because of the equivocal character of the opposition to its forthright promotion of fetal rights. Pro-abortion healthcare expert Nancy Dubler qualified her support for fetal brain implants by reminding us that 'fetuses deserve respect', and should not be treated lightly.

This sort of equivocation from women's rights campaigners will bear no fruit against a concerted establishment promotion of the rights of fetuses. Fetuses can only have rights at the expense of women, and now it appears, at the expense of medical progress.

There has been much discussion here and in the USA, about whether women going into hospital for abortions should be asked to fill in forms consenting to the use of the aborted fetus for medical research and experimentation. If such a development did indeed come about it would prove to be yet another obstacle for women seeking abortions. By equating the aborted fetus with a dead human being it would strengthen the anti-abortionists' case. By forcing women to listen to a graphic description of the uses to which the aborted fetus would be put, in much the same way as we are now compelled to listen to a blow-by-blow account of the abortion procedure, it could make some more reluctant to proceed with the termination they need.

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We should not let the establishment's professed concern for fetal life blind us to the real motives behind the promotion of the latest panic. Nobody in America tries to ban blood transfusions because there is a market for blood for transfusions in the USA. Nobody in Britain tries to ban kidney transplants because of the possibility of opening up a market in donor organs. By raising the idea of the creation of a market in 'human life', the authorities are stoking irrational fears.

Every time there has been a significant breakthrough in medical science, backward sections of society have tried to halt the march of progress by playing on people's prejudices. So great was the reaction to medics carrying out dissections of human corpses in the nineteenth century, that doctors had to employ bodysnatchers to rob the graveyards. Yet without such elementary experimentation there would have been no advance in medicine.

It is one of the greatest indictments of capitalist society that a technique which holds out the possibility of relieving considerable human suffering could be banned because a bunch of bigots object to taking tissue from an aborted fetus destined for the incinerator. The benefits of Professor Hitchcock's technique are far from certain. But we will never be in a position to discover what those benefits might be if we let the neanderthals in the anti-abortion lobby have their way.

Sara Hardy

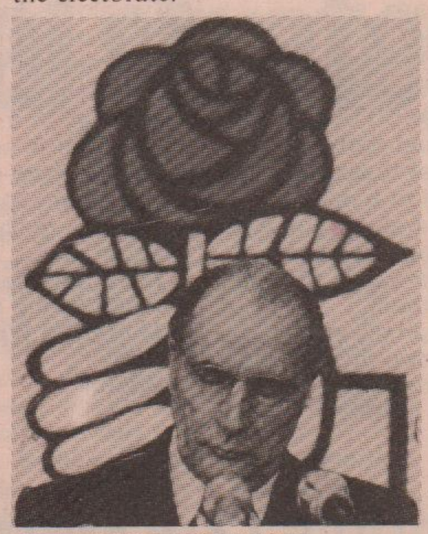


THE REALIGNMENT OF EUROPEAN SOCIALISM

SOLVING THE CRISIS OF WORKING CLASS POLITICS

Frank Richards looks at the shift to the centre in the European socialist parties, and at the refusal of the left to come to terms with this realignment

Throughout Europe the traditional parties of the working class are in decline. The classic illustration of this trend is the demise of the French Communist Party, which until recently was considered to be the natural party of the working class. Today the PCF's candidate in the French presidential elections is a marginal figure, and the party has been reduced to a rump which can count on the support of only around five or six per cent of the electorate.



MITTERRAND: NOT UNIQUE

It appears that the European socialist parties have either followed the French communists into virtual oblivion or undergone a metamorphosis to secure their survival. Francois Mitterrand, the French Socialist Party candidate in the presidential elections, personifies the approach of the new-look European socialist parties.

During the course of the presidential campaign, Mitterrand has distanced himself from any political stance which could be interpreted as leftist. Mitterrand and his party have directed their campaign at the political centre. Leading French socialist politicians are now arguing that the left and centre have much in common. Mitterrand claims to stand for unity around the political centre.

Mitterrand is by no means a unique phenomenon.

In Britain we are all too familiar with the New Realism of the Kinnock-Hattersley leadership of the Labour Party. In Germany the Social Democratic Party is cast in the same mould. A leading left-wing figure in the party recently argued that workers should take a wage cut in exchange for a shorter working week. Oskar Lafontaine, who is the symbolic hero of the socialist left in Germany, was unabashed. He had no inhibitions about advocating a reduction in working class living standards as a contribution to solving the problems of the economy.

What Lafontaine recommends as a solution to the problems facing the German working class, the Spanish socialist prime minister Felipe Gonzalez implements from a position of power. The Spanish socialist government imitates the Thatcher model and has no compunction about turning on its trade union supporters.

When we look at the policies of the social democratic parties on a Europe-wide scale it becomes evident that there is a certain pattern at work. Mitterrand, Kinnock, Lafontaine and Gonzalez may speak different languages, but when it comes to policy there is nothing to distinguish them.

Throughout Europe, left-wing activists are debating how their parties lost their socialism. Usually the outcome of this discussion is to ask whether or not European social democracy is capable of some form of socialist renewal.



Unfortunately such discussions about the demise of socialism are based on a fundamental misunderstanding. All the evidence of history confirms that these parties were never socialist in the first place. How has this confusion come about?

During the past 50 years the term socialism has undergone a series of modifications.

For Marxists, socialism has always been the product of the liberating impulse of the working class. For the European left, socialism has meant something very different. In general, European radicals have tended to equate socialism with state intervention in industry and social life. From their perspective, the more the state increased the scope of its activities, the more socialist it became. In this way nationalisation and welfarism came to be seen as the high-point of socialism.



For Marxists this perspective was fundamentally flawed. There is nothing inherently progressive about state intervention. The nationalisation of industry is simply an alternative form of capitalist management. Far from championing the virtues of the state, Marxists are implacably opposed to the state. Marx argued that the destruction of the capitalist state was the pre-condition for building a communist society.

While state socialism has nothing positive to offer the working class, in certain circumstances it has been welcomed by the ruling class. Indeed, this explains why state intervention became so popular in Europe from the thirties onwards. A certain

KINNOCH

rapprochement between socialists and capitalists over the issue of state intervention occurred in the late thirties and was systematised decades later.

By the thirties it was clear that capitalism could not continue to function if it simply relied on market forces.

Individual capitalists were powerless to rebuild their crisis-ridden economies. As they became increasingly conscious of their weakness, the capitalists turned to the state for assistance. By the mid-forties the capitalist state had become the pivot of economic life in Europe. The state subsidised important sectors of the economy and nationalised those industries which could not survive on their own.



In these circumstances European socialism came into its own. The pro-state policies of European radicals corresponded directly to the needs of capitalism. State intervention became the norm. Keynesianism became the common doctrine of the European left and the capitalist class. In this period a political consensus was forged between the parties of the left and of the right. In Britain, Labour and Tory governments followed each other without any significant shifts in policy.

The left-right consensus on state intervention broke down only in the late seventies. By then the new crisis of capitalism demanded a different approach. The employers needed austerity and a major reduction in state expenditure. Monetarism replaced Keynesianism. In the polarised climate created by mass unemployment there could be no room for compromise and consensus.

In Britain the onset of the Thatcher regime signalled the beginning of a new era. As Thatcher argued insistently, socialism had to be destroyed. By this Thatcher meant that the institutions of consensus, which were now seen as a barrier to the single-minded pursuit of capitalist domination, had to be swept away.

In the conditions of the eighties the policies of European socialism make no sense.

This brand of reformism never had anything to offer to the working class, and by the eighties it was no longer of any use to the capitalist class. Throughout Europe the traditional parties of the working class were confronted with two options. They could either stick to their old outdated policies and risk becoming irrelevant. Alternatively they could change their policies and adopt the new programme demanded by the capitalist class. In the end they pursued both options.

The left wing of European socialism kept faith with the old policies and paid the price of political demise. The right wing proved less tenacious and with almost indecent haste adopted the programme of Thatcherism. Yesterday's state socialists became today's New Realists. Kinnock, Mitterrand and their friends are the result of this process. They are realists who recognise instinctively what is expected of them. The old left of Tony Benn and Eric Heffer cannot come to terms with the New Realist outlook. They prefer to close their eyes and dream about a bygone era when Clement Attlee ran Britain and nationalisation, not privatisation, was the order of the day.

In the course of adjusting to the dictates of the capitalist parties, European labour parties have been forced to shift their political focus. In the past, at least they had their own programme — state socialism. Today all they have left is a craving for political influence. The political programme of European social democracy is exhausted. It has no relevance for any significant section of society.



LAFONTAINE: 'CUT WAGES'

The exhaustion of a political tradition is rarely perceived by those who represent it. Nevertheless the instinct of self-preservation survives. That is why every socialist party in Europe has gravitated towards the centre. In so doing they have adopted the outlook of New Realism and set out to project an image of moderation. This shift to the centre has the potential to do away with the traditional parliamentary division between left and right. It could result in a situation where parliamentary politics is all about who can best occupy the centre.

Whether this realignment is consummated depends entirely on the nature of the class struggle in the period ahead.

Ironically, even in this phase of political decline, the European socialist parties are still of some use to the capitalist class. They play a crucial role in absorbing the attention and energy of left-wing and working class activists. Instead of thinking about building an alternative to the discredited labour parties which could begin to resolve some of the problems confronting the working class, the left is preoccupied with reforming the exhausted labour parties and largely ignores the pressing issues of the day. In Britain the Benn-Heffer campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party indicates how far the left is prepared to go in its refusal to face the real world.



As soon as Benn and Heffer announced their campaign for leader and deputy leadership of the Labour Party, the far left declared its total support. It appears that for some time to come this campaign will provide the left with a focus for rallying its forces.

In all essentials the Benn-Heffer campaign follows the pattern of left-wing politics established in the eighties. For the past decade the British left has avoided fighting around issues of substance. Instead of promoting a political alternative, the left has devoted its energies to reforming the Labour Party and to winning positions inside the apparatus. Campaigns around the question of inner-party democracy provided the main focus for left-wing activity in the late seventies and early eighties. The high-point of this activity came in 1981, when Benn narrowly lost the deputy leadership to Denis Healey.

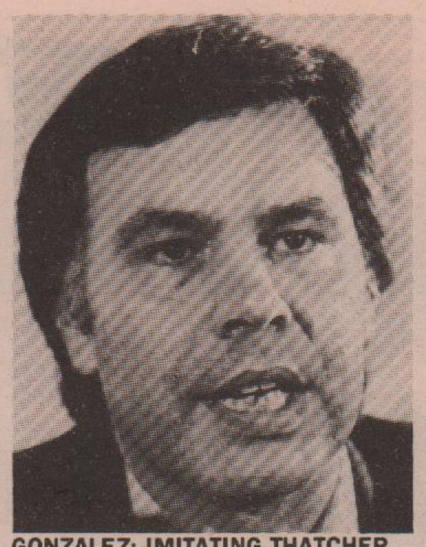
The striking feature of this kind of campaigning is its conscious evasion of the struggle for a political alternative.

Since it explicitly rejects the idea of building support for a political alternative to the Labour Party, left-wing campaigning invariably has an inward-looking orientation. Activists develop expertise in committee-room manoeuvring, rather than on the field of the class struggle. Passions are aroused over organisational matters, rather than over political issues.



The internal orientation of the left has meant that it has become more and more out of touch with reality. The left has been caught in a vicious circle. The more it senses its isolation from the real world, the more the left becomes committed to campaigning inside the party, and avoiding the real world. This retreat from the class struggle is a voluntary act of political evasion.

The left's preference for internal party campaigns is not surprising. Its own policies no longer have any relevance and it has nothing left to fight for. The left's lack of confidence in its own ideas is apparent in the Benn-Heffer campaign. The focus of the campaign is Kinnock's authoritarian style and the need to democratise the party. Instead of setting out the policies which the working class needs to adopt to beat back the Tory offensive, the left has little to say about anything except the necessity of improving the internal life of the Labour Party.



GONZALEZ: IMITATING THATCHER

It is bad enough wasting time trying to reform a party that is wholly committed to the preservation of the capitalist order.

It is indefensible to pursue this course when the working class has no independent alternatives of its own. At a time when workers are under attack on every front, new solutions and policies are more important than ever before.

The Benn-Heffer campaign has nothing to do with the needs of the working class. The impetus behind the campaign is the left's desire to strengthen its position inside the machinery of the official labour movement. It is a survival operation. The left understands instinctively that it lacks a credible alternative, and therefore cannot sustain an independent political existence. Only by clinging on to the corpse of the official labour movement can the left guarantee its own survival.



For most of the British left, entrism is not an option but a matter of life or death. Even far-left organisations which pride themselves on being organisationally independent of the Labour Party operate within the framework of the official labour movement. Whenever a dispute breaks out the far left is always the first to propose a lobby of the TUC. In the NHS dispute the left was more concerned with getting the TUC's seal of approval than with encouraging health workers to organise independently. Today this form of parasitism is the mainstay of left-wing politics in Britain.

That is why the main organisations of the far left, from Militant to the Socialist Workers Party, declared their support for Benn and Heffer's campaign for a less authoritarian Labour Party.

The Benn-Heffer campaign will prove to be a resounding failure. Even if the left had more support it is inconceivable that it could revitalise the Labour Party. The official labour movement is the property of a privileged group of bureaucrats who serve the capitalist class. It also appears that the Labour Party is no longer capable of playing the role of a party of government. At present it even has big problems playing the role of an effective party of opposition in parliament. The Labour Party's policy review is an admission that it lacks purpose and direction.



It is ironic that just about everybody across the political spectrum, with the exception of the far left, realises that British politics have reached the end of a cycle. The Labour Party in its traditional form is dead; it can only survive as a parliamentary contender if it becomes a born-again party of the centre. Even if it does this there is no guarantee that it will make it. There is no objective basis for a party of the centre. Only a party of the right that poses as the party of the centre has any future — and the Tories are already playing that role. Kinnock might have a chance if the Tories commit a series of blunders and allow Labour to form a government by default. Waiting for the Tories to make mistakes is just about all the Labour Party can do.

Instead of trying to revitalise the Labour Party we ought to welcome its demise. The present period has demonstrated conclusively that the Labour Party is an anachronism. Of course the Tories are the immediate beneficiaries of this development. But the collapse of Labourist politics provides a compelling argument for constructing a genuine working class alternative.

Our task is to make sure that the lessons of the period are learned by our class.

There is no way that we can take on the Tories with a more compassionate version of capitalist policies. Since capitalism cannot be made to work in the interests of society it must be overthrown. Straight anti-capitalist policies are the only ones which have anything to offer the working class. Organising around such policies will create a movement that can shake up the existing political system.



The realignment of European socialism shows that we are entering a new era of class politics, one which throws up new problems and demands new solutions. It underlines the urgency of building a new working class movement. The problems confronting us in this task should provide the focus for debate in future issues of *tns*.



David Rourke

FROM STATE SOCIALISM TO NEW REALISM



TEHRAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PROTEST AGAINST WESTERN INTERVENTION

AFTER THE KUWAIT HIJACK

IMPERIALISM AND ISLAM

Why do the Western media and governments repeatedly rant against 'Muslim extremists' in the Middle East, and what should our response be? **Daniel Nassim** explains

The British and US governments are using the outcome of the Kuwait Airways hijacking to push for an even harder line against 'international terrorism' in general, and 'Muslim fanatics' in particular. Thatcher and Reagan have condemned Algeria for letting the hijackers go in exchange for releasing the hostages. The message from Downing Street and the White House is 'we will not let hijackers get away with it next time.'

RESISTANCE

In reality neither Britain nor the USA is particularly concerned about the fate of the hijackers or the hostages. Their priority is to use the outcome of the hijacking to legitimise further Western intervention in the Middle East.

The 16-day hijacking crisis was used in the West to reinforce the stereotypes of 'mad Muslims'.

Since the overthrow of the pro-Western Shah of Iran in 1979, and the arrival in power of Ayatollah Khomeini, Western powers have blamed Islamic fundamentalism for many of the problems of the Middle East. Yet they are quite happy with pro-Western fundamentalist regimes such as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Western newspapers rarely complain about the conservative Saudi rulers who do not allow women to drive. The real concern among US and British statesmen is not the Muslim religion, but the militant resistance to Western domination in the Middle East expressed by Shiite Muslims. Western politicians have built up the image of 'mad mullahs' to justify attempts to deal with this resistance, such as the present naval intervention in the Gulf.

TERROR

The strict moral and social codes of Shiite Islam are not in themselves a threat to Western influence. What worries the Reagans and Thatchers is the radicalisation of the Shiite masses in response to political developments in the Middle East. The Shiite majority in Iran rose up against the Shah as a political puppet imposed by the West. In Lebanon the Shiites have taken up arms against the discriminatory system imposed by the old French colonialists and supported by the Western powers. In the eighties, Shiite resistance has driven the US marines and the Israeli army from Beirut.

Radical Islam has become the dominant outlet for expressing this hostility to Western and Israeli intervention in the Middle East. The weakness of communist and traditional nationalist ideas have been major factors in the rise of the radical Islamic movement. It has succeeded in displacing the discredited left as a channel for popular anti-imperialist sentiment.

The overthrow of the Shah and the victories in Lebanon were a tremendous boost to the prestige of radical Muslims.

More astute Western commentators recognise that the people of the Middle East are motivated by resentment against Western interference rather than simply irrational religious fervour. Edward Mortimer, one of Britain's top Middle East pundits and an expert on Islam, discussed the implications of the hijacking in the *Financial Times* last week. He argued that the actions of hijackers 'reflected a political analysis which is shared almost unanimously throughout the region. According to this, the destinies of the Middle Eastern nations are controlled not by themselves but by external "imperialist" powers.'

For Mortimer, however, imperialist domination is just a myth popular among Middle Eastern peoples. He still ends up arguing for tougher Western measures against Arab 'terrorist blackmail'. For us, Western imperialism is the real force for terror in the Middle East, which has long sought to hold the masses to ransom. We support the struggle against Western intervention because imperialism is the major barrier to progress.

BARBAROUS

Many regimes in the Middle East are reactionary. But we should still defend these countries against imperialism. The root cause of the backward character of capitalist countries in an area like the Middle East is their domination by the West. The fact that the major capitalist powers can afford formally democratic systems, while third world countries are more often run by dictators or absolute monarchs, has nothing to do with any 'madness' among Middle Eastern or African people. It reflects the difference between oppressor and oppressed nations in the world. If imperialism is responsible for reaction and oppression, it follows that any victory for the Western powers over a backward capitalist state can only worsen conditions for the peoples of the third world.

No Middle Eastern tyrant can match the barbarous measures which imperialism inflicts on those it dominates.

Iran is an example of a country that should be defended against Western intervention. The rulers of a country such as Iran have their own narrow reasons for coming into conflict with imperialism. They are seeking to extend their own influence, rather than to liberate the masses. Yet whatever the character of the regime today, a victory over the Western powers can ultimately benefit the masses of the Middle East. It can undermine the Western-imposed order, and unleash popular aspirations for real liberation.

RADICALISM

Iran is not being targeted by the West because the Khomeini regime is viciously anti-gay, anti-women and anti-working class. Since the fall of their stooge the Shah, the Western powers have used every means at their disposal to wear down the anti-imperialist sentiment of the Iranian people and bring Iran back under their influence. A successful Western intervention could only consolidate the reactionary character of the regime or open the way for even more backward rulers.

The Algerian regime shares some of the features of Iran. Algeria was forged in a struggle against the French occupation in the fifties and sixties. The apparent radicalism of its rulers, the heirs to the FLN liberation movement, is a reflection of the strong anti-imperialism among ordinary Algerians. Yet there are definite limits to the radicalism of the Algerian regime. It has recently been making overtures towards the Western powers, and flight KU422 was allowed to land at Algiers after pressure from France and Kuwait.

LIBERATION

The fact that the imperialists are now targeting Algeria indicates the desperation of the Western powers in the Middle East. Popular hostility to Western domination is so strong that even essentially moderate regimes have to make some radical gestures.

The Western powers thus become ever more reliant on direct intervention to maintain their influence.

In the Middle East, imperialism is the perpetrator of terrorism which we should stand against. The Western powers support Israel against the Palestinians, attack the Shiites in Lebanon and send their war fleets to threaten the Iranians in the Gulf. We should reject their 'mad mullahs' justification for oppression, and support the people of the Middle East in their struggle for liberation from Western terror.

Western terror comes home

REAGAN'S latest rampage in the Gulf provided a useful weapon for him to beat his Democratic Party opponents at home. By sending the US navy into action against Iran, and dropping hints about a US mission to capture the Kuwait Airways hijackers, the US administration tried to project a tough and militaristic image. The aim was to combat Reagan's reputation as a lame duck, and to beef up his Republican Party's reputation as his vice-president, George Bush, prepares for the presidential election.

Military conflict overseas is used by Western rulers to hammer home their view that foreign terrorists are a threat to ordinary people. The suffering of people overseas is used to legitimise greater repression at home. Both the Tories and the Reagan administration have become adept at using the carnage in the Middle East to consolidate their domestic support. In both the hijacking and the clashes in the Gulf the Tories promoted themselves as the firmest opponents of foreign terror.



HURD: NEW PLANS

They dropped hints about a possible SAS intervention against the hijackers, and Thatcher stood fully behind Reagan's bully tactics against the Iranians in the Gulf.

It did not take long for the Tories to use the outcome of the hijacking to promote more powers of repression at home. As part of the planned revamp of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, home secretary Douglas Hurd announced plans to curb fund-raising by 'terrorists' or by their 'front organisations'. The PTA has already been used for 14 years to intimidate Irish people in Britain. New powers on funding would allow the Tories to clamp down on Irish solidarity groups in Britain, and anybody else they decide to define as a 'terrorist front'.

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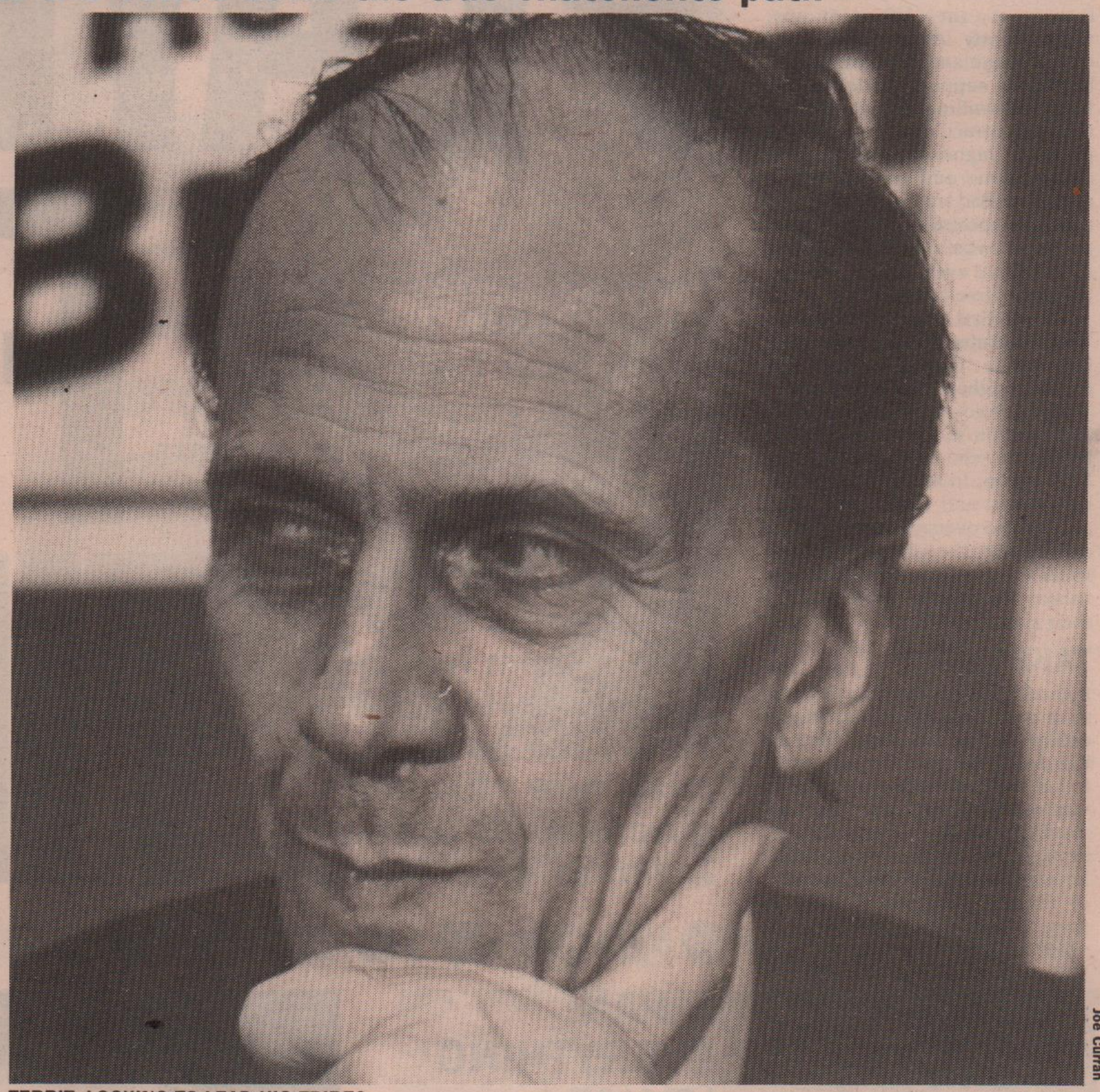
The Tories' use of events in the Middle East to justify repression in Britain provides a powerful argument as to why we should take sides with the oppressed there. It confirms that we share a common enemy with the people of the Middle East — Western imperialism. The British state now tightening its control over political protest here is the same institution which backs US piracy and Israeli terror in the Middle East. If we let Thatcher and Reagan get away with their 'anti-terror' campaigns, it will further strengthen their hands against us.

NORMAN TEBBIT

TRIBUNE OF THATCHERISM

In a period of uncertainty, argues Kenan Malik, Norman Tebbit points the Tories down the true Thatcherite path

Last week Norman Tebbit complained about 'those who talk of the white African tribes as outsiders, as though they had arrived at Cape Town yesterday. They themselves have hardly had time to complete the journey from Heathrow to Hounslow West before claiming British rights.' Tebbit, addressing the South Africa Club, also attacked the 'stinking hypocrisy' of apartheid's opponents who offer 'sickening racialist excuses for the genocide committed elsewhere by one black tribe against another'.



Joe Curran

TEBBIT: LOOKING TO LEAD HIS TRIBE?

'OUTSIDER'

These racist comments provoked howls of protest from Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Labour foreign affairs spokesman George Foulkes, who accused Tebbit of being 'motivated more by concern for business interests than for morality'. Even the Duke of Edinburgh, not usually noted for his liberalism, felt compelled to condemn apartheid.

Media commentators reported this wide-ranging criticism as further evidence that Tebbit has become the wild 'outsider' of British politics.

Tebbit's latest outburst comes hard on the heels of his advice to Prince Charles to stop meddling in politics and get a job, and follows his long-running campaign to tame the BBC. For some people Tebbit's high-profile reactionary interventions are evidence that he still has aspirations to be Tory leader. For others they confirm that he is an animal, ('a semi-housetrained polecat' in the words of Michael Foot), not fit to be seen in civilised company.

The former Tory Party chairman does not hide his desire to lead the party, and doubtless his table manners leave something to be desired. But the reason for his outspokenness is neither his leadership aspirations nor his lack of social graces. It is his awareness of the political needs of British capitalism. Tebbit knows that 'business interests' not 'morality' will revive the British economy. At a time when many within the Tory party are questioning the openly pro-capitalist policies adopted by the government, Tebbit reminds the doubters that there is no alternative for the British ruling class.

TRIBUNE

Tebbit cut his political teeth as one of the coterie around Margaret Thatcher in the seventies. The Thatcherites recognised that to revive British capitalism the ruling class would have to abandon the policy of class peace which had characterised post-war British politics and confront its opponents head-on. They also recognised that this would require the creation of a harsh new political climate. Thatcher emphasised the virtues of family, race and nation, asserted that traditional morality and law and order were the solutions to Britain's problems, and promoted the ideas of individual rather than social responsibility. She set out to stamp the authority of the ruling class on every issue, and to break all of the old taboos of British politics. Tebbit has long been the most prominent tribune of the Thatcherite 'revolution'.

The Thatcherites swept to victory first inside the Tory Party and then at the national polls in 1979. Over the past 10 years the Tories have had considerable success in redefining the terms of political debate and putting the opposition on the defensive. 'What was seen only a decade ago as outrageous political adventurism', Tebbit reminded last year's Tory conference, 'has now become the new orthodoxy, the new realism within which parties must exist or be confined to the sidelines.'

At the same time Tebbit warned his audience that the job was not yet finished and they now had to 'establish a new political consensus'.

Tebbit's comments were an indication of the problems still facing the Tories. While the Tories have easily dealt with their political opponents they have found it more difficult to solve the problems of the British economy. The superficial economic upswing of the past two years has helped the Tories promote the idea of a 'booming' Britain, but it has not removed the need to solve deeper-rooted problems facing the British ruling class — the restructuring of British industry and the need for far harsher measures against the working class.

ASSAULT

Since her third election victory Thatcher has embarked on an unprecedented assault on the working class. The poll tax, the new social security regulations, the budget, the attacks on the NHS, the housing and education bills, the new restrictions on trade union rights — all are designed to bludgeon the working class. To force these policies through, the Tories need to politicise every aspect of society along Thatcherite lines. Thus Tebbit has taken on established institutions — from the monarchy and the Church of England to the BBC — which have dared to question the new Tory orthodoxy. In Tebbit's words, the Tories have 'to establish a new political consensus' which outlaws any form of dissent.

The pace of the Tory onslaught and its impact on society is now starting to worry even confirmed Thatcherites. The recent poll tax rebellion was led, not by a 'wet', but by Michael Mates, a Thatcher loyalist. John Marshall, who has led the protests about the social security regulations, is also on the right wing of the party. Even the *Sun* thought Tebbit had gone too far when he began knocking Prince Charles. The rebellion in the Tory ranks shows that sections of the establishment are getting cold feet about the social consequences of government policies.

In the face of this uncertainty, Tebbit's task is to lay down the law for the Tories. He has warned the rebellious elements within the party that the capitalist class has no option but to follow the current path. Tory economic policy 'might suggest we are not as nice as we should be', Tebbit noted after the budget. 'That is all very interesting', he reminded doubters within the Tory ranks, 'but the real question is does it work?'

Tebbit understands that the important issue is not whether people consider the Tories to be nice or moral, but whether their policies work in terms of intensifying the assaults on the working class.

Since leaving the cabinet, Tebbit has been uniquely placed to float ideas and tackle opponents in a way which would be impolitic for ministers. Before last June's election Tebbit had anticipated many of the themes that now dominate Tory propaganda. His role as a cabinet minister, however, limited his ability to lash out at will. Pre-election reports that he had told the cabinet that 'nobody with a conscience votes Conservative anyway' caused such embarrassment that Tebbit felt compelled to sue the offending newspapers for libel. Now, as a backbencher, he feels no such compunction to observe the niceties of convention. He can lay down markers for future Tory policy and test the water for new proposals, without directly implicating the government. This is the purpose of his latest round of over-the-top attacks.

OPTION

Tebbit's attacks on 'dangerous' Prince Charles or 'tribal' black Commonwealth countries would still be difficult for one of Her Majesty's ministers to carry out. So he steps in to drag the level of political debate down another notch, rewrite another section of the rules of political conduct, and make it easier for other top Tories to indulge in such attacks in the future.

Tebbit's increasingly outrageous comments are an indication of the dire problems facing British capitalism and the Tories' need to push their political offensive against the old ways still further.

Far from being a real loner or outsider, he is pointing out the direction in which the government has to go. The Tories may be able to make small concessions on some economic issues for the purposes of expediency. But as a general strategy, the wet option is not realistic in the harsh conditions of today. Tebbit's job is to drive that message home. As disquiet mounts over government policy, we can expect the Chingford skinhead to hit the headlines even more frequently.

POLL TAX POLITICS

THE Tories devoted their TV broadcast last week to defending the poll tax. Its tone was a Tebbit-style political attack on the opposition. The Tory propagandists understand that this gives them a better chance of pushing through unpopular measures than any 'wet' attempt to pose as the party of economic fairness.

The broadcast began with a bit of the unconvincing statistic-juggling which is now a familiar part of Tory presentation on issues from the health service to welfare benefits, attempting to show that cuts will make people better off. Then it was down to business, promoting the poll tax as a political measure to tame the 'loony left' councils.

According to the broadcast, the amount of poll tax we will pay depends on the 'efficiency' of our local council. An efficient authority is understood as one which cuts spending on vital services to the bone, puts the screws on its workforce, and steers clear of all radical political gestures.

The broadcast used a traditional English tea-set as a device to illustrate the difference between efficient and inefficient councils. The tea was the council's available funds. First of all a nice Tory council carefully poured an even amount of tea into cups representing 'sensible' services such as 'dustman'. Then a loony authority was shown slopping it about all over the table, and over-filling cups representing 'extravagant' expenditure on 'police monitoring', 'over-manning' and 'gay seminars'. The camera closed up for an extended shot of the 'gay seminars' cup receiving more tea than the rest of the service put together.

The message was clear: if you have to pay a high rate of poll tax, don't blame the Tories, blame your 'irresponsible' Labour council for spending money on issues like lesbian and gay rights or anti-racism, and failing to give its workers a dirty enough deal. To ram this home, the broadcast ended with former ratepayers receiving projected poll tax demands from three authorities — a very low one from Tory Rochester-upon-Medway, an above average one from right-wing Labour Newcastle, and an astronomical one from crazy Camden.

Over the past decade, the Tories have often used political attacks on the opposition parties and the oppressed to excuse unpopular policies. Hardliners like Tebbit understand that creating a reactionary climate around such debates is still their best line of advance. They can't sell the poll tax as an egalitarian economic measure. But by presenting it as a political purge of lesbians and gays and left-wing loonies, the Tories stand a chance of mobilising Tebbit's army of saloon-bar drinkers behind the poll tax crusade.

PLAYING FOR TIME

The stock market Crash of October 1987 signalled a drift back towards a world economic recession. Since then the big capitalist powers have been playing for time and putting off the inevitable painful adjustments which their system requires to survive. Here we survey the policy crisis now afflicting governments from Japan to West Germany

THE USA: WAITING TILL NOVEMBER

Tough economic decisions are being postponed until after the presidential election

American capitalists tried hard to forget Black Monday. Last month the financial services giant Shearson Lehman Hutton proclaimed 'The worst is over' in banner headlines across full-page newspaper ads. But when the US trade figures for February revealed a $13.8 billion deficit, the Dow Jones stock exchange index fell 101 points in one day. Painful memories of October's Crash came flooding back. Evidently the worst is yet to come. Investors and politicians are now voicing their fears of another crash and the start of a recession in the near future.

Even before the announcement of the poor trade statistics the state of the economy provided shaky grounds for optimism. Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve, recently told congress that 'there has seldom been a time when the outlook for the US economy was so uncertain.'

Most US commentators know that the global economic imbalances behind the Crash are still present.

The USA continues to depend on massive inflows of capital from Europe and Japan to finance its budget deficit. The other big imbalance between the major economies — the US trade deficit and the corresponding West German and Japanese trade surpluses — also remains. These 'twin deficits' underlie the present instability.

FEARS

The USA needs to reduce consumption, cut state spending and rationalise industry to start to get to grips with its economic weakness. American officials, however, have ruled out a squeeze on the home economy for now. Austerity plans are politically damaging in an election year. The Democrats would find it easy to blame Reagan's heir apparent George Bush and his Republican cronies for the resulting chaos.

The announcement of the Reagan administration's compromise budget package last November was a clear indication that the USA was not willing to cut spending substantially. The budget deficit will still be above last year's figure of $148 billion. A recession this year would drastically reduce revenues and increase welfare payments.

Without a decisive economic policy Reagan administration officials fret nervously about each month's trade figures and worry about a collapse in the dollar. Their apprehension is a sign that the economic crisis is out of their control.

Since 1986 private capital inflows from abroad have diminished, an indication that foreign investors have less faith in the future of the US economy. Consequently, America has relied on European and Japanese central bankers to support the dollar. The USA is unwilling to raise interest rates to attract private capital. It fears that higher rates will lead to contraction and spark off a recession. Bad trade figures always raise the spectre of a run on the dollar — which would make the USA's rivals even less keen to stop the dollar free-falling.

For the first time in 50 years the USA is earning less on its overseas investments than foreigners are earning on their US investments.

The US government alone paid $23.5 billion in interest in 1987 to foreigners who have lent it some $270 billion. In addition, American companies and banks owe huge amounts to overseas lenders. In the near future, the USA will have to run a substantial trade *surplus* just to pay foreigners for the use of their capital.

TAKEOVERS

February's trade figures show that such a turnaround is highly unlikely. American competitiveness has definitely been helped by the fall of the dollar, which hit a post-war low at the start of the year. But the US trade deficit continues to grow. Rising consumer spending at home still sucks in large amounts of foreign-made goods. The US trade bill passed by congress last week has been shorn of its most blatant protectionist amendments. But Reagan could still sign a restrictive, anti-foreign bill by the time it reaches his desk.

The controversy over foreign takeovers highlights Reagan's dilemma. Outside investors — especially the British and more recently the Japanese — have been gobbling up American companies. Highly publicised attempts by foreign 'predators' to acquire US companies have led to growing resentment and anti-foreign feeling among Americans. Reagan tried to placate these worries by approving a measure to block foreign takeovers if US security is felt to be threatened. But he is not keen to go further because the USA relies so much on foreign investment.

Reagan and Bush hope that their holding operation can see them through to the November election before the next downturn. But seven months is a long time. Their future does not look promising and events may force them to act sooner than they would like.

James Malone



REAGAN WON'T BITE THE BULLET AND MAKE THE CUTS

JAPAN: EVERYTHING IS NOT ENOUGH

Since October, Japan has done more than any power to keep the international economy on an even keel. But the best efforts of the world's strongest economy will not be enough to stave off the recession

Japan has done best of the big economies since the Crash. Despite the yen appreciating by 33 per cent in the past 18 months Japan is growing at almost twice the rate of America. This triumph over the higher yen has even been compared to the nation's emergence from the ashes of the Second World War.

Japan's success has been warmly welcomed internationally. In contrast to the 'Zap the Jap' sentiment voiced by US and European leaders a year ago, Japan has been congratulated for its reflationary policies. For the last year, and particularly since the Crash, Western leaders have emphasised the need for Japan to play a more responsible global economic role. All agreed that Japan had to reduce its massive current account and trade surpluses which were held to be responsible for the instability of the world economy.

Japan has responded by opening its economy to imports, stimulating domestic demand and allowing the yen to appreciate. But the Japanese are not simply bowing to international opinion. Rather, Tokyo has recognised that world trends today are no longer so favourable to its trade, and has switched to a short-term emphasis on domestic reflation.

This has created a *temporary* unity between the needs of Japanese capital and the interests of the world economy.

Japan's stimulation of domestic demand led to a four per cent increase in Gross National Product in 1987. Through a combination of easing access to credit, tax cuts and massive state spending, domestic demand increased by over five per cent — more than double the rate for the first half of the eighties.

Credit has been boosted through five cuts in interest rates to reach an historical low of 2.5 per cent. Banks increased their housing loans by Y4 trillion last year — more than seven times the average of the previous four years. The resulting housing boom has prompted a 47 per cent increase in housing starts from the 1983 low.

Easy credit has been combined with increased state spending. A Y6 trillion (US$45.6 billion) supplementary budget in June increased public works projects by 20 per cent. As a result, domestic industrial production rose by 10 per cent and domestic investment turned upwards. Having stagnated through most of 1986, fixed investment grew by almost 10 per cent for most of 1987 with construction firms leading the advance. Unemployment has also fallen as a result of reflation.

Increasing employment and consumer spending have boosted demand. Retail sales rose by five per cent with electrical appliances and electronic goods surging 14 per cent; new car sales rose to record levels. Consequently,



TOKYO TRADERS FEEL THE PAIN OF BIDDING UP THE US ECONOMY

WEST GERMANY: THE LOCOMOTIVE SLOWS

Europe's largest economy can maintain its vital export markets only by making the working class pay for economic restructuring

Until the late seventies Germany was the engine pulling the rest of Europe and other parts of the world economy into recovery. But since the early eighties, the West German government has introduced harsh rationalisation policies which have slowed its economic growth. The US treasury has pleaded with Bonn to reflate. But West Germany remains more concerned with strengthening the base of its economy than with introducing superficial palliative measures, which could boost short-term growth without restructuring German capitalism.

In 1987 the West German economy grew by less than two per cent.

This year some forecasters doubt that growth will be much more than one per cent of real GNP. The poor growth reflects the problem of declining exports and a flagging domestic economy. In December Germany ran a record trade surplus, but future prospects look gloomy. As the world's largest exporter, West Germany exports a third of its GNP. The prospect of declining exports is a big threat to economic growth.



GERMAN CHANCELLOR HELMUT KOHL DROWNS HIS SORROWS

The falling value of the dollar and realignment within the European Monetary System (EMS) are making German exports more expensive.

PAIN

Exports to the US expanded rapidly in the early eighties, acting as a stimulus to West German growth. But since the dollar dropped below DM2 at the end of 1986 German businessmen have been talking about the *Schmerzgrenze* (pain threshold). After the October Crash the pain got worse. At present 10 per cent of German exports go to the USA and 20 per cent of all exports go to dollar markets. A decline in Germany's share of these markets seems inevitable unless German industry is made more competitive. The motor industry has been hit as nearly a third of German cars are sold on dollar markets. Porsche in Stuttgart have already announced cutbacks.

A bigger problem area for West Germany is Europe, which takes more than two thirds of its exports. The prospect of the revaluation of the Deutschmark within the EMS now threatens the advantage German exporters have enjoyed in past years. In addition, the slowdown in domestic demand within Europe means that exports to the continent will no longer fuel export-led growth. Until 1986 West Germany's expansion in the USA and especially Europe compensated for problems in other markets. Now German companies will find it hard to expand growth anywhere.

Bonn has introduced some mildly reflationary policies since 1986. But it has resisted US pressure to reflate more extensively. West German capitalists do not depend on the state of the global economy to the same extent as Japan. They are more concerned with their European base, and with getting in shape to dominate the proposed 'open' continental economy from 1992.

West Germany's refusal to follow the reflationary road has heightened tensions with the USA.

German industry needs to restructure to remain competitive. The earlier strength of the German economy enabled it to avoid dramatic production shake-outs of the sort imposed in Britain at the start of the eighties. But this left the West German economy flabby while its competitors were forced to become leaner and fitter. German industry has suffered a declining market share in the more dynamic sectors of the world economy, such as electronics and electrical goods. Germany can no longer rely on the industries of the past to lead the economic recovery.

CUTS

The Kohl administration has attempted to cut state subsidies to the coal, steel and mining industries. The steel industry has announced plans for the loss of 35 000 jobs over two years. Job losses in the coal industry also seem inevitable as plans are afoot to remove coal price subsidies.

The only way West German capitalists can solve their economic problems is by making the working class pay. Oskar Lafontaine, leading Social Democrat in Saarland, is already arguing that any cuts in working hours must be paid for in wage cuts. Europe's economic locomotive is running out of steam.

Helen Simons

imports to Japan have increased by almost 20 per cent.

For the first time since the early seventies the real growth rate of imports exceeded exports.

Japan has also raised its politically sensitive defence spending. In this year's budget, defence spending has been increased by 5.2 per cent to Y3.7 trillion ($29.1 billion). This boost will enable the defence agency to buy 12 more US F-15 fighter planes. More significantly, prime minister Noburu Takeshita agreed indirectly to subsidise the Western intervention in the Gulf. This will be achieved by increasing the amount of financial support the government pays to keep US military forces in Japan.

TENSIONS

Japan's reflationary measures are, however, not a sustainable strategy. In the end it will have to resolve its economic problems at the expense of its rivals, by increasing its global interests. For example, Tokyo has agreed a 28 per cent rise in this year's budget for third world aid, to increase Japanese influence in parts of the globe which other powers have traditionally regarded as their spheres of interest. Thus, however Japan's short-term reflation might aid the other major economies, its longer-term trajectory can only increase international tensions.

Despite Japan's economic success it cannot stop the recession for long. Tokyo's best efforts have failed to solve the deep-seated problems of the USA. The US trade deficit increased stubbornly last year despite Japan's reflationary measures. Neither can Japan isolate itself from an unhealthy world economy. Japan needs to improve its competitiveness to maintain its economic position. But if it takes measures which precipitate a US recession, it could damage Japan's own exports. Thus Tokyo is postponing the moment of truth.

Charles Longford

FRANCE: STILL IN THE DOLDRUMS

French economic performance has been sluggish throughout the eighties

On 8 May French voters choose their next president. The socialist incumbent, Francois Mitterrand, is expected to win another term. A continuation of the two-year old 'cohabitation' between the president and prime minister Jacques Chirac's conservative majority in the national assembly would be welcomed by French capitalists. Left-right bipartisan rule has enabled the employers to step up the offensive against French workers.

There is an important difference between the evolution of French counter-crisis policies and those of other leading capitalist powers. During the world recession of the early eighties most Western leaders adopted austerity economics as the new capitalist wisdom. In France, however, Mitterrand's May 1981 presidential victory was followed by an attempt to maintain Keynesian-style expansion. Aid to industry rose, state services expanded and banks were nationalised.

The strategy seemed to work. France was the only major capitalist nation, apart from Japan, where total output did not fall in any year from 1980 to 1982.

In reality, Mitterrand's policies aggravated France's structural economic weakness. In 1982 industrial output fell for the third successive year. The decline in capital investment accelerated while bankruptcies and unemployment rose. The clearest indicator of French economic weakness was its external position. The 1982 current account deficit of FFr78 billion was nearly three times that of the previous year.



FRENCH PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC OFFERS AUSTERITY

By mid-1983 Mitterrand officially endorsed the new economic realism already operative elsewhere. French industrialists demanded less state interference and more government backing for the drive to rationalise industry. External deficits weakened the franc and threatened the French commitment to currency stability through the European Monetary System. Industrial overhaul and a stable currency required domestic austerity.

CONTRAST

Until 1986 the main achievement of economic retrenchment was in relation to working conditions. Real household incomes have risen overall by only five per cent in the last five years. In 1988 money wages are expected to rise slightly less than inflation. French workers also labour longer hours than their British, West German or American counterparts.

French rulers rarely express the optimism about the future that is common among their British counterparts.

This is partly a result of the contrasting economic performances of the past few years. Overall growth for both France and Britain has been more or less even since 1980 — around 1.7 per cent a year. However, Thatcher's early 'short, sharp shock' policies enabled British capital to benefit from the world economic revival of the past few years. Thus, Britain's economic growth has varied between minus 2.9 per cent in 1980 and 4.8 per cent in 1987.

EVEN

The later initiation of austerity in France has meant a fairly even performance year on year. Annual growth since 1980 has varied within a narrow range of 0-2.1 per cent. This means that in France there is no basis for illusions about economic miracles and dreams of being great once again.

Overriding all this is the renewal of worldwide recessionary trends. French capitalism has been in the doldrums throughout the eighties. Having made concerted efforts to strengthen the domestic economy, the capitalist class now finds that it can expect, at best, more of the same.

Tony Kennedy

PERESTROIKA

GORBACHEV GOES WEST



THE SOVIET LEADER SIZES UP US PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDER, GEORGE BUSH

Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika – New Thinking for Our Country and the World,* Collins £12.95

This is a book written for Western consumption. The 'personal' foreword and repeated endorsements of the US-inspired panic about 'terrorism' make this clear. The bulk of the book is dedicated to one of the most important aims of Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* (restructuring) through *glasnost* (openness): to exploit the decline of American authority and create a more advantageous international climate for the USSR.

To this end, Gorbachev's attitude to Western imperialism is the most conciliatory and apologetic ever adopted by a Soviet leader. Like a trade union official overwhelmed by the experience of being allowed to negotiate with his boss for the first time, he name-drops every reactionary Western leader who now takes him seriously. Writing in platitudes — 'We are all passengers aboard one ship, Earth' — Gorbachev complains that if only the rest of the world was as reasonable and broad-minded as the current Soviet leadership, it would be a much safer place.

Abandoning all talk of capitalism, classes, economic crisis or any other aspect of contemporary reality, humanity is troubled only by the short-sightedness of a handful of Western leaders. The problem according to Gorby is that certain Western leaders fail to recognise that the differences between societies are no reason to assert the superiority of any particular state. If on domestic affairs he sounds like a Thatcherite (referring to 'spongers', 'the psychology of dependence' and women returning 'to their purely womanly mission'), in the international sphere his sickly pleas for harmony would have gone down well at Woodstock.

The book does inadvertently set the record straight on a couple of issues widely misunderstood in the West. First, it becomes clear that *glasnost* is not the work of a Western-minded liberal faction battling against the inertia of an intransigent bureaucracy. Gorbachev is categorical that there is no real opposition to the principle of *glasnost* within the Soviet bureaucracy. The Soviet leaders realise that they have little choice but to try to reinvigorate Soviet society, after what Gorbachev refers to as the 'profound crisis' of the early eighties, when the credibility of the Soviet system fell to an all-time low among workers. It is also worth remembering that Gorbachev was appointed by his predecessor Andropov, the real initiator of the *glasnost* policy. He didn't sneak in while the Politburo was asleep, as some Western commentators imply.

The problem he faces lies not in objections to the broad objectives of *perestroika*, but to its potentially disruptive consequences for the power-bases of individual bureaucrats if people start to expect a rise in living standards, rather than just the screening of a previously banned film. As Gorbachev says, 'There are people who support the innovation but believe that *perestroika* should not affect them.' The raising of expectations where there is little prospect of material improvement is a real problem for lower-level administrators and regional party bosses in the frontline of popular disaffection. Boris Yeltsin even had to question whether there was any serious intention of material improvement behind the *glasnost* hype in order to maintain his credibility in sophisticated Moscow, and paid for it with his job.

Gorbachev's book is also useful in highlighting the importance of the intelligentsia in the bureaucracy's plans, an aspect completely missed in the West. Encouraged to an unprecedented extent (and given a section in the book, unlike the proletariat), their nationalistic, anti-working class and backward outlook is being promoted as the exemplary worldview for Soviet citizens.

Contrary to popular opinion, the new Soviet policy has not made the world a safer place. Ever since the consolidation of the Soviet bureaucracy in the late twenties, it has been a profoundly conservative force in world affairs. But that didn't stop the Second World War. It was, and still is, Western expansionism that leads to such conflagrations. The fact that the Soviet Union is prepared to go so far in accommodating to an increasingly militaristic imperialism, shows the desperate measures needed to maintain its stagnant and anti-working class society.

Adam Eastman

FILM

'PRAGUE SPRING' AS SOFT PORN

The Unbearable Lightness of Being, **Philip Kaufman (director)**

It was never going to be easy, making a film of a multi-layered philosophical novel. Philip Kaufman says that he tried to capture the spirit rather than the letter of Milan Kundera's *Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Wisely too, he has bolstered the narrative while cutting the narrator. That the film is nevertheless something of a disaster may have a lot to do with shortcomings at the heart of the book itself, but that is another story. This is Kaufman's own film and should be judged accordingly.

Tomas (Daniel Day-Lewis), a young Czech surgeon, is enjoying life in the Prague of the late sixties. A philanderer, with many lovers but not much in the way of relationships, he is soon forced to concentrate his mind. He has to choose between his favourite diversion, Sabina (Lena Olin), who boasts a fetishistic bowler hat, an alluring line in underwear and a way with mirrors, and a gauche young newcomer from the country, Tereza (Juliette Binoche), who makes up in directness what she lacks in sophistication. Tereza cuts through his temporising by moving into his flat and then marrying him, although this turns out to present little impediment to his incorrigible womanising.

Their affair blossoms in the heady days of the 'Prague spring' of 1968, when under the liberalising leadership of Alexander Dubcek Czech society enjoyed a shortlived cultural and political renaissance. Tereza has no sooner started out on her career as a photographer than her camera is pointing down the barrel of a Russian tank rolling down the main streets of Prague on a most unwelcome fraternal visit. The couple try exile in Switzerland, and then life back home under the newly repressive regime which ensures that Tomas



TEREZA (JULIETTE BINOCHE)

can only work as a window cleaner because of some trifling political misdemeanour.

The dramatic centre of the film, and a most uninteresting one, is Tomas' inability to refrain from satisfying the latest woman to hurl herself at him, and the strains this places on his relationship with Tereza. His amorous exploits with Sabina, Tereza, and others are basically tasteful soft porn. They are justified within the film by the saturnine doctor's pretentious mutterings about the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each experience. He just can't help it, apparently, he is doomed to sub-Nietzschean existential bliss among the suspender belts.

With the exception of Lena Olin, who carries off her love-making with considerable poise, the actors do not really distinguish themselves. Even the talented Day-Lewis seems to pose beyond the considerable posing of his character; and Binoche is simply the latest in a long line of young, pretty and cute French actresses. Actual footage of the Soviet invasion is blended with recreated scenes featuring our heroes with great technical skill, but too self-consciously to be effective. In any event, the political events are strictly background, clumsily introduced by snatches of explanatory dialogue and finally passed over altogether as the couple find true happiness working down on the farm in some misty-focused bucolic idyll. This banal and sentimental resolution is summed up in the laughably tearful funeral of a dog. I didn't really care what happened after that.

Pat Ford

the next step



SOME supporters have been quite critical of recent articles in *tns*. Two themes have been the main cause of irritation. The first is the amount of space we are giving to the Labour Party leadership contest. The second is last week's feature on the anniversary of Trotsky's Transitional Programme.

The content of the criticism is that the articles do not seem relevant to many of the people who buy *tns*. One supporter complained that while selling the paper he was trying to explain why Tony Benn couldn't change the Labour Party and he found that few people who bought papers even knew that there was a leadership contest in the Labour Party. Some buyers, he explained, had never even heard of Tony Benn. If this problem arises with coverage of the Labour Party, it would seem to be far worse when we discuss the issues raised by Trotsky in the twenties and thirties.

●

These kind of criticisms of *tns*, however, miss the point altogether. They reveal a problem not with *tns*, but with the way that some understand how the paper should be used. For this reason, it's worth restating who and what *tns* is for.

tns is the flagship of the RCP. It aims to present our view on contemporary issues in a clear and accessible form. The paper seeks to give greater insights into the way society works, to create discussion about how ordinary people can organise to defend their interests. We want our readers to understand how a revolutionary party is essential to this fightback.

●

tns is written for people who want to understand current political issues. We don't expect our readers to have a fully-fledged Marxist analysis of society — but we do expect political interest and curiosity. Every week our paper contains two kinds of articles. Some are directed at first-time readers, others are directed at experienced political activists. All the articles, however, assume that our readers identify themselves as anti-establishment, and want to learn more about our politics.

Our articles on racism, for example, take as their starting point that our readers see themselves as anti-racist and want to fight the oppression of black people. The coverage in *tns* aims to arm readers with the best arguments and examples to do just that. Our coverage of the Labour Party, assumes that our readers are interested in what goes on in British politics. While few people, even those in the Labour Party itself, have the determination to follow the minutiae of internal party manoeuvring, we assume that even people reading *tns* for the first time will be aware of political debates that are aired on the TV news.

There are many people who can't see the point of discussing Britain's role in the third world, who think racism or the oppression of women has nothing to do with them, who think that politics is boring — and perhaps who haven't heard of Tony Benn. We hope that if these people pick up a copy of *tns* they'll change their minds. But *they are not the people we write the paper for.*

●

We know that *tns*, for a while to come, will be a 'minority interest' paper. But the more politicised minority it addresses are the potential leaders of the working class. They are the ones who do know about Tony Benn's challenge to Neil Kinnock. They are also the people who, at the present juncture in British politics, will be most aware of the need for a new opposition to the Tories. Arming these people with a Marxist understanding of the world is the key to gaining influence within the mass of the working class. We want to turn the left-wing minority of today into the working class leadership of tomorrow. We write *tns* to that end, and use it to target a more political audience.

●

The biggest task confronting the working class movement in the eighties is to break through the consensus that exists around the political ideas of the establishment. We have to train activists in a new tradition of arguments. Our paper must be a tool with which we do this. To build a working class movement in the eighties we need to be able to assimilate the experience of the revolutionary movements of the past. We can learn from their successes and their mistakes. We need to develop a political culture that is more informed and more sophisticated than that of the ruling class.

This is what *tns* is all about.

If a criticism is to be made of *tns* it's not that it's too difficult, or that it assumes too much from its readers. If anything our paper needs to be even more substantial, and to give a wider range of in-depth arguments. What do you think?

Anne Burton

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Glasgow RCP dayschool

Revolt on the Clyde

Forum organised by Glasgow Revolutionary Communist Party
Sunday 15 May 12.30-7pm
Govanhill Community Centre
Daisy Street
Glasgow

12.30pm Registration: £2 waged, £1 unwaged. Creche available.
1.15pm Plenary: *Why we need a new opposition* — Frank Richards
2.45-3.15pm: Tea-break
3.15pm: Workshops:
The struggle against oppression
How to smash the poll tax
What's special about the Scottish working class?
4.45pm Tea-break
5.15pm Plenary: *Revolt on the Clyde: the movement we need* — Alan Harding

Tickets available by post from RCP, PH8 340 West Princes Street, Glasgow, or on the door

RCP PUBLIC MEETINGS

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BUILDING A NEW OPPOSITION

BIRMINGHAM: Thursday 5 May 7.30pm. Carrs Lane Community Centre, High Street, City Centre

BRIGHTON: Thursday 5 May 7.30pm. Unemployed Centre, Tilbury Place

LIVERPOOL: Thursday 12 May 7.30pm. Trade Union Centre, Hardman Street

OXFORD: Wednesday 4 May 8pm. Committee Room 1, Town Hall, St Aldates

SHEFFIELD: Friday 29 April 7.30pm. SCCAU Centre, West Street (opposite The Limit)

Bristol Living Marxism series

THE WORLD TODAY

A course of discussions on international relations, every Tuesday at 7.30pm, Griffin pub on Colston Street (near the Hippodrome)

3 May: America's Weakness
10 May: The Middle East
17 May: *Glasnost* and Gorbachev
24 May: Cracks in the Western Alliance

Tickets cost £2.50 for the full course, £1 for individual sessions. Available from *tns* sellers or on the door.

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Joe Boatman

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TEBBIT: THE TRUE FACE OF THATCHERISM — see page 11

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly 29 April 1988 40p

Fight for Lesbian and Gay Rights

THE BANS AND BEATINGS BEGIN

SECTION 28 of the Local Government Act, banning the promotion of homosexuality, comes into force in June. But even before the gay-bashing charter is operative, the bigots are on the rampage.

● This week Tory councillor Peter Murphy caused uproar when he submitted a motion to a special meeting of Haringey council calling for a clampdown on all lesbian and gay activity in the borough. He demanded that the lesbian and gay unit be disbanded, that local bookshop Reading Matters be closed down because it stocks lesbian and gay literature, and that grants to lesbian and gay organisations be curtailed. Some Tories on the council objected to the strident tone of Murphy's motion, but they all agreed with his three proposals.

● Wolverhampton council has banned local gay activist Arthur Law from showing his video about the anti-homosexual witch-hunt on council property. *Get Your Clause Off Our Lives* was to be shown at Lighthouse, a local media centre, before the council slapped a ban on it. The video reveals how the council has taken every book about homosexuality off its library shelves, at the same time as it is lending out the violently anti-homosexual video *The Boys Next Door*. Tory councillor Gordon Jones declared that 'homosexuality is a sickness which should be medically treated.'

● Gangs of thugs have launched a series of vicious attacks on people at several London nightspots: Backstreet, Heaven, the London Apprentice and the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. A week ago a dozen Leeds United supporters charged into the crowd queuing outside Heaven, shouting 'poofters' and 'queers' as they punched and kicked the club-goers. One person was knocked unconscious and kicked in the head. On the same night three people were attacked on their way home from Backstreet in Mile End. A week earlier three men charged into the London Apprentice in East London, one produced a gun and fired several rounds into the pub which was packed with about 600 people.

● The Independent Broadcasting Authority is following in the footsteps of the BBC by censoring scenes of homosexuality. Earlier this year *EastEnders* star Barry was 'straightened out' by the BBC. Now the IBA has forced the Channel 4 soap *Brookside* to withdraw a scene showing lovers Chris Duncan and Gordon Collins in bed together. The authority declared that this sort of thing was unsuitable for Saturday afternoon family viewing.

The bigots are not waiting until June before they stick the boot in. Yet the Labour-controlled Association of Local Authorities is trying to argue that it is unlikely that Section 28 can be used to stop local councils from supporting lesbian and gay activities. How they came to this conclusion is anybody's guess. Surely it is now clear to everybody that 'queer-bashing' is sanctioned at the highest level.

The *Guardian* recently revealed that Margaret Thatcher fought to keep the Clause in the Local Government Bill and took a keen interest in its passage through parliament. The freelance bigots in Haringey and Wolverhampton, the censors at the BBC and the IBA, and the thugs who terrorise gay nightspots are all taking their cue from the government.

Fighting for lesbian and gay rights means challenging the prejudice that homosexuality is a crime or a sickness. Convincing people to take a stand for the decriminalisation of homosexuality is the way to start undermining this reactionary view. We have to persuade council workers and ordinary people that a person's sexuality can never be a problem for the working class. It becomes a problem only when our enemies try to use it to divide us.

The Tories have created a climate of intense chauvinism against lesbians and gays. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by taking a hard line against it. This is the message we want to get across on the march against Section 28 this Saturday.



Supporters of lesbian and gay rights protested at Monday's meeting of Haringey council, where Tory councillor Peter Murphy proposed a ban on council backing for homosexual initiatives because 'we must not promote Aids in schools'. Section 28 will give such bans legal backing

Pandora Anderson