●●●MARCH FOR IRISH FREEDOM

Saturday 30 January
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London
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the next step – 4

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HOW TO STOP CLAUSE 28

—see pages 3 and 10

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly 29 January 1988 40p

There's only one way to beat the Tory health cuts...

STRIKE!

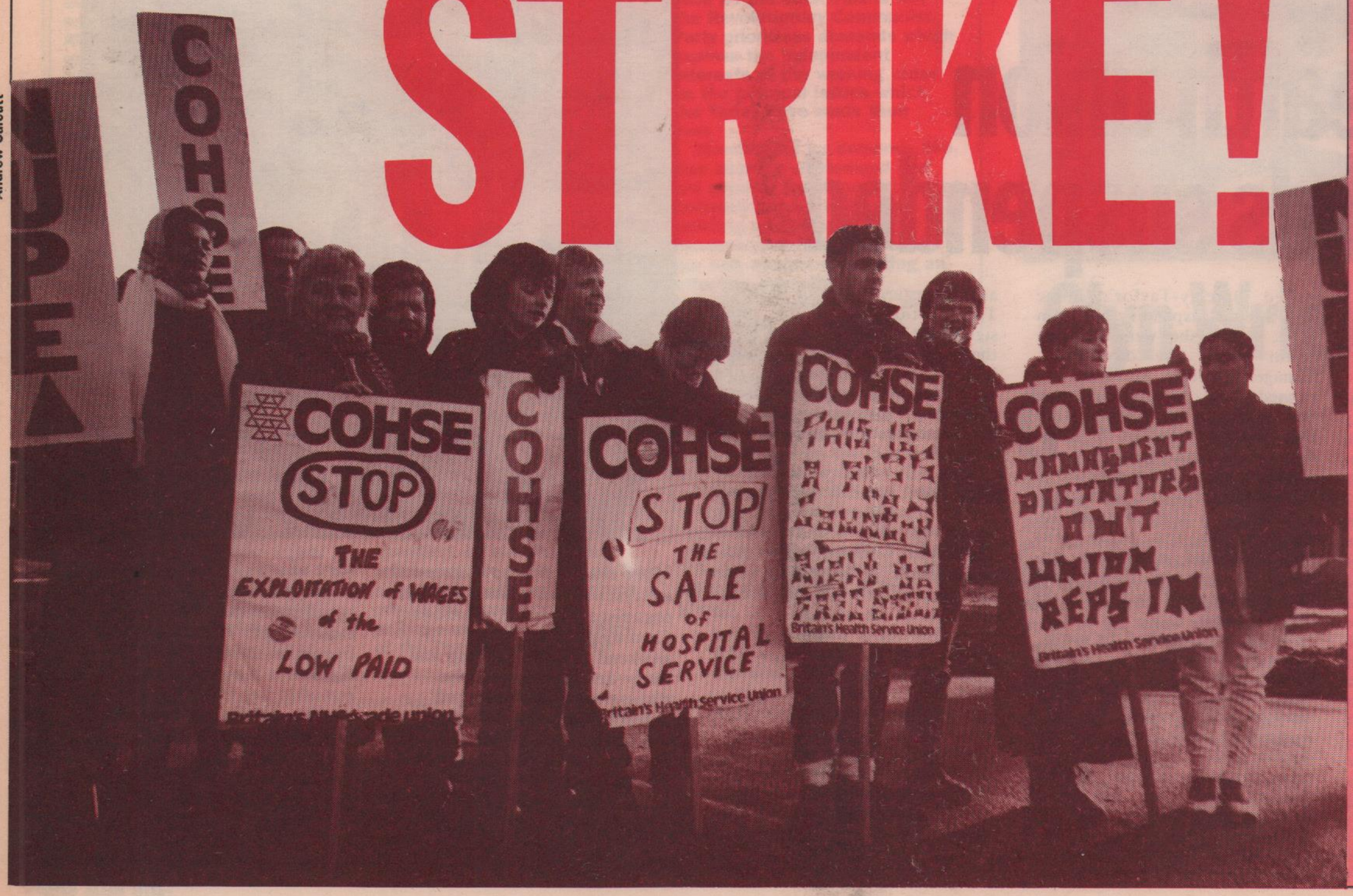
'GET your tanks off our streets' Tory minister Norman Fowler told the health unions last week, as support for action against the cuts spread across Britain. The Thatcher government has declared war on Britain's one million health workers. It will take a coordinated campaign of hard-hitting, all-out industrial action to turn the tables on the Tories. Today, health workers need to get every available tank out on to the streets.

Yet the politicians and other public figures who claim to oppose the health cuts are telling nurses and ancillary staff not to strike. The top doctors, Labour Party health spokesman Robin Cook, Tory wet MPs, Royal College of Nursing chief Trevor Clay and some health union officials have all suggested that health workers will damage their cause by taking industrial action. Instead, these dignitaries insist, the campaign against the cuts should centre on parliamentary debates and getting publicity through the media. But such a 'campaign' would be the surest guarantee that the government will win the war.

Whether they are delivered by Neil Kinnock or a Tory backbencher, windy speeches about the health service in the house of commons put no pressure on the government. Thatcher and her team can simply soak up all the mild insults their opponents throw feebly across the floor of the commons. Meanwhile, the hatchet-men in the real world of hospitals and clinics outside the commons continue carving through pay, jobs and services.

A media campaign is no match for Tory aggression. What use are press releases from the royal colleges to health workers facing yet more speed-ups and cutbacks? Management has already indicated that it will show no mercy to trade unionists who attempt to gain a

Continued on page 2



Andrew Calcutt

'Legalised murder'

IT'S OFFICIAL: the British security forces are allowed to get away with murder in Northern Ireland 'in the public interest'. That was the reason attorney general Patrick Mayhew gave on Monday for not prosecuting senior Royal Ulster Constabulary officers involved in covering up shoot-to-kill operations. Ken Livingstone was thrown out of the commons for calling Mayhew 'an accomplice to murder'. There will be more such murders unless the British government's gunmen are thrown out of Ireland.

In November and December 1982 crack RUC assassins, trained by the SAS, shot dead six unarmed Irishmen in cold blood in County Armagh. In 1984 four of the police gunmen faced murder trials. They were all acquitted and praised by the judges for their marksmanship. Lord Justice Gibson congratulated the killers for bringing three unarmed republicans to 'the final court of justice'. The IRA passed comment on such British justice last year, by blowing Gibson up.



Phil Murphy

After the trials, the Tories appointed Manchester deputy police chief John Stalker to conduct a whitewash investigation. But when Stalker unearthed evidence of top-level collusion in the killings and the cover-up that followed, he was discredited and driven from the force. Mayhew's announcement on Monday finally put the official stamp of approval on the assassination policy.

In the week of the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, when British troops shot dead 14 unarmed Irishmen in 1972, Mayhew confirmed that such massacres are not a thing of the past. As Sinn Fein councillor Tommy Carroll, whose brother Roddy was among the six victims, said on Monday, 'legalised murder is the basis of British rule in Ireland.' Let's turn Saturday's Bloody Sunday commemoration march into a mass protest against British terrorism in Ireland, and demand an end to the colonial occupation which makes murder legal.

(Continued from page 1)

STRIKE!

sympathetic hearing in the media. North West Hertfordshire Health Authority has suspended two Cohse members who dared to speak to the press about the fatal effects of local cuts (see below). In any case, the media are no friends of low-paid workers like nurses and domestics. As the struggle in the health service continues, we will doubtless see the press barons weigh in on the side of Tory ministers like Fowler in their attempts to discredit and divide health service staff.

Focusing on parliament and the press can only serve to demobilise the thousands of angry health workers who want action against the cuts. The one way we can put real pressure on the Tories is through effective industrial action. At present, support for some sort of strike is growing. But the talk among union officials is of a campaign building up to a one-day national strike to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the NHS — in July! This raises the prospect of a drawn-out series of token protests, of the kind which proved so ineffective during the year-long dispute over health workers' pay in 1982. Instead, we need to move fast and organise all-out action — with emergency cover under health workers' control — to win a decent pay rise and stop the cuts.

The question of organising for industrial action in the health service raises several important political and tactical problems. These are discussed more fully on page 15. But the most pressing priority is for ordinary nurses and ancillary and technical staff to take control of the campaign and to coordinate action across union and departmental lines. Health workers must reject attempts by the medical establishment, the Labour Party, the RCN or anybody else to hijack the struggle against the cuts and channel it into a useless round of parliamentary bun-fights and press conferences.



Joe Boatman

ALTON PREPARES ABORTION COMPROMISE

OUR RIGHTS ARE NOT NEGOTIABLE

Mass protests by women's rights campaigners marked the second reading of David Alton's Bill to outlaw late abortions last week. As the legislation goes into the committee stage where it is likely to be amended to ensure a safe passage through parliament, how should we be conducting our campaign against it?

'David Alton on yer bike, We will fight for women's rights' was one of the slogans ringing through London streets last Thursday night when more than 10 000 angry women marched for abortion rights. The torchlit demonstration was organised by the Fight the Alton Bill campaign, and brought together hundreds of local FAB groups, women's rights activists and left wingers. Its size showed the great potential both for beating Alton and building a movement to advance the cause of women's liberation. Hundreds of women who marched on Thursday came to a dayschool organised by the Revolutionary Communist Party on Sunday to work out how best to take the struggle forward.

EVIL

Last Friday it became clear how Alton and his supporters would proceed with the anti-abortion offensive. Alton's Bill to amend the 1967 Abortion Act, by reducing the time-limit for terminations from 28 to 18 weeks, sailed through its second reading in the commons with a majority of 45 votes. The debate provided an opportunity for bigots like Tory Bernard Braine to condemn all abortion as evil. But the significance of the discussion lay in Alton's admission that he was prepared to compromise. He told the commons that so long as his Bill was not 'emasculated beyond all recognition' he would be happy to accept anything that would 'rationalise' the present law.

There are two compromises likely to amend the Bill before it comes up for its third reading in early spring. The first one, to set the legal upper limit at 24 weeks, is favoured by the medical lobby, Tory leader Margaret Thatcher, and the Liberal leader David Steel, architect of the 1967 Act. A Bill setting a 24-week limit would very probably succeed; since it would satisfy most objections to the Alton proposals. The second compromise likely to be tabled concerns women who find they are carrying handicapped fetuses. There is talk of a 'stop the clock' option. This would mean that once tests for fetal abnormalities had begun the woman would be assured of an abortion even if the result came through after the 18-week limit. This would silence critics who complain that Alton's Bill would penalise women waiting for the outcome of tests such as amniocentesis and ultrasound which are not performed until late in pregnancy.

FOCUS

Such alterations might satisfy the medical profession and most politicians, but they won't wash with us. We are opposed to *all* attempts to further restrict access to abortion, and determined to fight for a wider extension of abortion rights. All women faced with the prospect of bearing a child they do not want should have the right to an abortion as early as possible or as late as necessary.

Our aim should be to shift the discussion away from theological and medical questions about the moment life begins or the age of viability, and focus the debate on the issue of women's rights.

The biggest success of our opponents has been in creating an entirely false debate around the abortion issue. Often anti-Alton campaigners have handed the initiative to the anti-abortion lobby by emphasising the problems the Alton Bill would pose for women forced to give birth to handicapped babies. This has meant that the central issue of women's rights has been downplayed, and the medical profession which supports a 24-week limit has been able to dictate the terms. Now that Alton has shown willing to compromise, the ground has been cut from under his opponents' feet. Our starting point has always been that the right to abortion on demand is a necessity for women for whom having a baby would mean the loss of a job, economic hardship, and social pressure. There are millions like Michelle from *EastEnders*, for whom the right to abortion is the only hope of escape from an impossible situation.

Fighting for free abortion on demand is the only strategy consistent with a defence of women's rights, and the only argument capable of politically defeating the anti-abortion lobby. Over the next few weeks we cannot afford to let the campaign against Alton slip. Re-focusing our arguments is the precondition for putting the issue of women's rights on the agenda and stepping up the fight for real freedom.

Health union stewards suspended

All over Britain hundreds of thousands of health workers are preparing to hit back at their penny-pinching employers. Nurses, domestics, ambulancemen and clerical staff have all voted to go on strike. Their enthusiasm for action is unprecedented. But one strike already underway in Hertfordshire shows that NHS managers will pull no punches when they retaliate. Favourable press coverage will not save us then. We must answer in kind, as health workers in Hertfordshire have done, with direct action.

On 7 January occupational therapy nurse and Cohse branch secretary Jane Barclay-Taylor appeared on Radio Bedfordshire to explain how health authority plans to close down Hill End Psychiatric Hospital in St Albans would cause stress among patients and could lead to suicides. Within 12 hours an official from North West Hertfordshire health authority visited Barclay-Taylor's home with a letter suspending her from work. When she went into the union office five days later, management told her she was banned from hospital premises. Barclay-Taylor and fellow steward Doug Landman locked the office door, and managers 'started whacking on it' and threatened to have them removed. Landman, already on a final warning for speaking to the press, was suspended and now faces dismissal. Management is determined that neither will work in the hospital again.

'When news reached the wards,' said Barclay-Taylor, 'nurses started walking off. And they've been walking ever since.' After a week on strike 85 nurses from Hill End visited other hospitals in the district to ask health workers to take solidarity action. On 22 January more than 500 health workers from seven hospitals, including all grades of nursing staff and domestics, came out on strike. Their action is all the more significant because it took place in the heart of the London commuter belt, an area which the Tories like to regard as no-strike territory. 'They ought to come down and see for themselves,' warned one of the strikers.

The Hill End victimisations show what we can expect when NHS managers start playing rough. The power of the press does not stretch to defending workers under attack. In the coming weeks the establishment will mobilise the media in an all-out assault on our campaign for a living wage and decent working conditions. Our only weapons are united, effective strike action, and our ability to go out and win active support from other workers.

Messages of support and donations to Cohse/Nupe joint action committee, c/o 14 Telford Road, London Colney, St Albans, Hertfordshire.



Pandora Anderson

More than 400 people attended a dayschool on women's rights organised by the Revolutionary Communist Party last weekend. A wide-ranging and lively debate informed the discussions, which covered subjects from the rise of the moral right to the Marxist theory of women's oppression. The majority of people had been active in the campaign against the Alton Bill, and were able to focus the debates on the problems and possibilities they had experienced. The most important conclusion of the discussion was the need to redouble our efforts in the coming months, and use the insights gained at the conference to polish up our arguments and professionalise the campaign against Alton.

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly No 4 Editor: Mick Hume

STOP THE FUDGING

THE latest legal attacks on abortion rights and homosexual people reveal the no-nonsense character of the right's political offensive in Thatcher's third term. The Tories and their allies no longer feel the need to balance their bigoted opinions on social issues. Instead, the debate about Liberal MP David Alton's Bill to restrict access to abortion is littered with references to the 'evil' done by women who terminate unwanted pregnancies. And the anti-homosexual Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which could lead to widespread censorship and discrimination, is defended by the right on the grounds that lesbians and gay men are 'sinners' against whom intolerance is justified.

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The left has tried to oppose these legal attacks. But many are unwilling to match the Tories' up-front approach. Instead, there is an undercurrent of fudging in the left's response to Alton and Clause 28. People are fighting shy of tackling the questions of abortion and homosexual rights head-on, and are seeking an easier way to win support. The most common manoeuvre is to try to reduce the issues to a level at which, left wingers believe, more people will be sympathetic to their cause. Thus they depict the attack on abortion rights as just another aspect of health service cuts, and tack the struggle against Alton on to the end of a general demand to 'defend the NHS'. Similarly, many left wingers want to bury the fight against Clause 28 within a woolly campaign against the entire Tory Local Government Bill.

This fudging of the issues makes no sense. It cannot defeat the attacks on the rights of women and homosexuals. Nor can it strengthen the campaigns against the cuts in local government and the health service.

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The Tories and others like Alton have won wide support for their reactionary proposals by exploiting specific prejudices in British public opinion. One of the most important of these is the belief in 'traditional family values'. The attack on abortion rights is built around the idea that women's primary role should be as mothers and carers in the home. The attempt to outlaw any hint of homosexuality is similarly founded on the notion that the only legitimate relationships are monogamous ones within the sanctity of marriage. How can we hope to challenge these moralistic hang-ups by avoiding the issues at stake?

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Shouting 'Fight the health cuts' is no answer to the Alton Bill. If people share Alton's view that abortion is too readily available, they are unlikely to be up in arms about cutbacks in NHS abortion facilities. Public opinion polls confirm that a majority of people see no contradiction between opposing general cuts in the health service, and supporting a specific cut in the legal time-limit for abortions. The problem is even clearer on the Local Government Bill. There is no reason why those who are unhappy about Tory proposals for further cuts in council services, or about the poll tax, should automatically extend their opposition to Clause 28. Given the current state of the debate about the 'threat' from lesbians and gays, it would be easier to find people who agree on the need to throw out the Tory Bill — except for the 'commonsensical' Clause 28.

Any attempt to avoid the central issues of the oppression of women and homosexuals will leave these victims of Tory policy defenceless. It means shunting the question of their democratic rights off into a political siding, where they will be easy targets for the sexual terrorists of the right wing. It will also impair the ability of the entire working class to combat Tory attacks like those on the health service and local government.

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Thatcher was not elected because people believed she would pour money into public services. The Tories' penny-pinching attitude to such services has always been their weak point. But they have managed to undermine the opposition to these policies, thanks to their dominance of wider political issues like law and order, defence, and the position of black people, women, lesbians and gays. For example, the Tories have been able to turn aside criticisms of their cuts in local government spending, by blaming 'loony left' Labour councils which they accuse of spending too much money on 'homosexual propaganda'. The acceptance of the Thatcher/Alton view about women's role as child-rearers and all-purpose 'carers' within the family has also helped the government to get away with disguising health cuts as a policy of encouraging 'care in the community'. Unless we challenge the moralists' directly on such political issues as the rights of women and homosexuals, they will be able to keep control of the debate and force through their anti-working class proposals.

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Public support for such initiatives as the Alton Bill and Clause 28 ties ordinary people to the worldview of the Tories. It is only by breaking these ideological chains, and puncturing Thatcher's political defences where they have proved strongest, that we can create an effective opposition to any Tory policy.

Our response to Alton and Clause 28 is to call unequivocally for free abortion on demand and for full equality for homosexuals. Our critics on the left often respond by arguing that the working class is not ready for such straightforward anti-establishment ideas. This insistence on tailing-ending the existing level of consciousness within the working class is a historic mistake among left wingers. If we sit back and wait for people to wake up one morning with the sudden realisation that they should struggle for democratic rights, then they will never be 'ready' for the fight.

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The task of those who want to end oppression and exploitation and create a new society is to seek to *raise* the level of consciousness in the working class. We should not simply echo the existing ideas of people whose outlook has been influenced by nine years of Thatcherism and the collapse of the official opposition. We need to challenge many of the political prejudices which are held by those who will oppose the Tories on economic questions such as the cuts. This is why the Revolutionary Communist Party prioritises demands which express the independent interests of the working class on the political issues which the Tories have made their own.

Standing up for demands like free abortion on demand and full equality for homosexuals is certainly not a short-cut to building a resistance movement. But it represents our only chance of creating an effective opposition, by breaking the reactionary bonds which have held our class back. We cannot fight the Alton Bill, Clause 28 or any other aspect of the current offensive by trying to hold a movement together with handfuls of fudge. We need a party founded on the firm ground of anti-capitalist politics, which will throw itself into the fight to free the oppressed and to liberate the working class from the political influence of the Thatchers, the Altons and the rest of that gang.

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ARTHUR SCARGILL RE-ELECTED

A SHORT BREATHING SPACE

We welcome Arthur Scargill's re-election as president of the National Union of Mineworkers. But only because it shows that a core of miners still identify with their militant traditions and reject John Walsh's attempt to turn the NUM into a company union.

In itself, Scargill's return will not provide any protection for miners facing a fierce onslaught from management.

The 46.2 per cent of the vote won by Walsh, for his platform of seeking reconciliation with British Coal, indicates the growing conviction among many other miners that militancy does not work. This problem goes further than the election results suggest. In areas like South Wales, miners who voted for Scargill want more negotiations with the coal bosses. They re-elected him out of loyalty, not because they rejected the Walsh strategy.

WASTE

Any negotiated deal in the coalfields today would be done at miners' expense. British Coal has made it clear that no concessions are on offer, and that they want to impose six-day working, shake out more jobs and weed out more NUM activists. Last week management at Bentley pit in Yorkshire issued photographs of pickets involved in the recent strike there, with a warning that they would be sacked if there was any repetition of the action. The defeat of Walsh will give miners a short breathing space to organise against the employers and the advance of scab unionism. But if NUM militants look to Scargill for leadership, they will waste the opportunity.

DISILLUSION

Scargill's brand of bureaucratic trade unionism, with its ineffective gestures like the current overtime ban, is no match for the new and more aggressive methods adopted by coal bosses. The gap between his militant rhetoric and his inability to organise action that could count has only helped to disillusion the more passive NUM members. Activists cannot afford to entrust their futures to another five years of the tired Scargill approach.

Instead, they need to look to their own rank and file forces and organise to rebuild their union from the bottom up.

There is no time to lose. The moderates on the NUM executive are already lining up to override the deflated Scargill and take the union along the disastrous path championed by Walsh. NUM activists need to coordinate their response now. The priority must be a campaign to win the disillusioned miners back to the cause of a struggle against British Coal, by developing a fighting strategy that holds out the hope of success. Let's start by forgetting any idea that the re-election of Scargill, or the continuation of his methods, will solve a single problem for the miners in the firing line.



Glyn Wriglesworth

On Thursday 21 January Glyn Wriglesworth from Pontefract, Yorkshire, died of heart failure. Glyn was only 27, and leaves behind a wife and two young children. Glyn spent most of his adult life as a miner at Kellingley pit. He was active in the historic struggles of the 1984-85 strike, and the experience led him to take a broader interest in politics. Like many of his fellow strikers, Glyn found it hard to adjust to the new regime imposed at the end of the dispute, and left the pit last year.

Glyn bitterly resented being forced to work down a pit in conditions that made it very difficult to spend time with his family and spend time on politics. He hated the British Coal bosses whose drive for profit was made at the expense of the men they exploited, and he spent 12 angry months fighting for some dignity for miners whose livelihoods were threatened by closures. But Glyn was not just a militant miner. He was somebody who didn't like what he saw going on all around him, and recognised the necessity for a political movement to fight the system. He felt passionately about the war in Ireland, the oppression of women and the fight against racism. He was prepared to speak out about the things he felt strongly about, and most of all to stand up for the oppressed. The greatest tragedy is that he didn't have a chance to play a part in building the sort of society he would have loved to see. We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife Sharon, and to his family and friends.

Joan Phillips



A DIVIDED CLASS: BLACK PROTESTER MEETS WHITE BIGOT ON A MARCH AFTER THE HOWARD BEACH KILLING

THE RACIST STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY

A WALK ON THE WHITE SIDE

Alan Harding, just back from New York, found racists in charge from the mayor's office down to the city suburbs

The first Saturday of the year was bright and crisp, and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, New York City, looked a pleasant enough place. The first thing you notice on the bustling streets is the Italian shop signs — salumeria, cafe Bari, calcio (football) — and the street murals announcing that Zoff, Rossi and the other footballing blues from Italy were World Cup winners in 1982. Bensonhurst is almost 100 per cent Italo-American working class and white — just like Howard Beach in Queens, three or four miles up the road.

The two neighbourhoods have more in common. The second thing you notice on the streets of Bensonhurst is that there are no blacks. Howard Beach and Bensonhurst are both racist 'no-go' areas. We were in Brooklyn that day not to sample the pizza, but to join a demonstration against the rising wave of racist violence on the streets of the city.

WOLF PACK

Just before Christmas two young black brothers, Sylvester and Steven LaMont, narrowly escaped serious injury when they had the temerity to walk the white streets of Bensonhurst. They had walked in from the black Marlboro housing project on the east of the neighbourhood, looking for deposit cans and bottles for which they would get five cents an item. The white 'wolf pack' that attacked them with sticks, bottles and a marble table top yelled 'Niggers, what you got in the cart? Are you robbing houses?' The brothers said that only the intervention of passers-by saved their lives.

But it didn't stop the police arresting the black youths on suspicion of theft.

The LaMont brothers were lucky. Almost a year before to the day, the car carrying a group of black youths had broken down on the Belt Parkway alongside Howard Beach. They walked into the neighbourhood looking for help. One of them, Michael Griffith, never got out of there again. A racist gang attacked and beat up the black youths. When Griffith tried to escape on his hands and knees, a car driven by a good friend of the attackers ran over his head and killed him. The driver was never tried, but four of the white gang did eventually end up in court. The verdicts on them were delivered just days before the Bensonhurst attack: no murder, three convictions for manslaughter and one acquittal. It remains to be seen how long they will serve.

CLAMOUR

The Bensonhurst attack was the no-nonsense reply from the racists. A token conviction wasn't going to put these guys off when a racist police force and general anti-immigrant hysteria made it clear that there was open licence on blacks in New York. The city's notorious mayor, Ed Koch, had added his voice to the racist clamour: 'Many whites are physically afraid of blacks, and if you ask lots of whites, they will tell you that's true. Many blacks are physically afraid of other blacks. Blacks are not physically afraid of whites....Their fear is of being rejected, of having their persona attacked, not their body.' Koch claims to have developed his analysis as a result of 'talking to people'. He might have been talking to some of the racist residents of Howard Beach and Bensonhurst. But he clearly hadn't heard what was said by the black people who planned to march in Bensonhurst that day, in protest against racist violence.

'COMMIES'

We were on time but the demonstration wasn't. We later found out that the buses had been misdirected by the police and the marchers were still gathering in the safety of the Marlboro project. But the streets of Bensonhurst were far from empty. Thousands of local people lined the road. They were all waiting for the demonstration.

Groups of white youths played touch football, old men put their heads together: 'You know the commies have said they are going to subvert us from inside.' Women exchanged information: 'They [the blacks] won't have inter-marriage and won't have nothing to do with Jews.' There was a lot of laughing, but only at the idea of anyone trying to come into their neighbourhood. They were not waiting to welcome the marchers.

ABUSE

When the march finally set off from the project, and headed up to the 62nd Precinct police station, it was already clear why the demonstrators were chanting 'This is Johannesburg'. But the overwhelming hostility still came as a surprise. The 400 demonstrators had to walk through a sea of angry abuse, pressed in on all sides by a crowd straining to break through the 1200-strong police lines. The counter-demonstrators flew the Confederate and the Italian flags, invoked the Ku Klux Klan and wore T-shirts proclaiming 'I'm a racist pig'. The most haunting and unsettling refrain was 'Howard Beach, Howard Beach' endlessly repeated.

It didn't seem melodramatic for the march to be shouting 'Freedom or Death'.

After five minutes outside the police station the march wheeled and headed back to Marlboro, while the racists tried to break up the back of the demonstration. Mobs of white youths, one at least 200-strong, hurtled off to try to intercept the march. This section of the Bensonhurst community had made clear what it thought of black people's right to walk white streets.

It was bad enough seeing the division in the American working class eyeball to eyeball. It was worse to watch the bravery of the march participants mobilised behind a useless strategy. The official demand of the demonstration was for the Bensonhurst community to turn those responsible for the LaMont attack over to the police, just as community leaders in Harlem had turned in black youths who had attacked a Polish taxi driver that same week. Such a call entrusts the struggle against racist violence to New York's racist police force and courts. It leaves anti-racist activists marching behind the little Stars and Stripes which waved at the head of the Bensonhurst march, appealing for assistance from the same US authorities which hold the world record for institutionalised racist discrimination.

The misdirected approach of the march organisers reflects the confusion among American anti-racists today. The civil rights movement is in a quandary, as the moderate strategy it has pursued in recent years proves no match for the resurgence of fierce racism within the USA.

ELITE

In the years following the explosion of the black inner cities in 1968, the state adopted a double-edged strategy for dealing with black unrest. First it murdered and imprisoned the best-known black militants. Then it set about encouraging the growth of a black middle class with a stake in US society, which could help to head off the fire next time. For a while this policy appeared to work for a small, middle class section of black America. State-sponsored black businesses sprang up in deprived areas, and a black political elite emerged in local government; New York's Koch was soon isolated as the only remaining white mayor of a major US city. Jesse Jackson went a stage further and ran for the presidency in 1984. But by then, the constitutional approach to promoting black equality was already running out of steam fast. Today it has come to a dead halt.

Reagan's massive budget deficit means that there are no more hand-outs for the inner cities.

CLAW

Now the authorities' concern is to claw back the concessions of the past. And the increasingly reactionary climate in Reagan's America means that there is no longer a place in the sun for the black middle class. Over the last decade the proportion of blacks reaching university, getting out of low income housing or into any form of professional or supervisory employment has beeen falling. For the majority of blacks, things are far worse. Back in 1960, before any of the post-riot reforms, the jobless rate among black youth was 25 per cent; by 1986 it had risen above 40 per cent. In 1975 the black population's median income was 62 per cent of the white total; by 1986 it was down to 56 per cent.

The traditional leaders of the civil rights movement are dissatisfied with what they are getting for themselves, and more and more distant from the concerns and aspirations of the mass of black Americans. Jackson is running for president again, but his determination to distance himself from any hint of radicalism reflects the way in which the 'official' black movement is keeping its head down under pressure from the right.

OUTRAGE

Against this background a new coalition of community leaders, for the most part lawyers and clergymen, has rejected the passivity of the old black establishment in the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) and initiated direct action. This was the motivation for the 'Day of Outrage' on 21 December 1987, organised to meet the Howard Beach verdict. Black militants protesting against the court cover-up and institutionalised racism blocked the tunnel and bridge connections between Manhattan and Brooklyn. They brought rush-hour traffic to a halt before police hauled off 69 of them.

The same organisers, lawyers Alton Maddox and C Vernon Mason and the reverends Herbert Daughtry and Al Sharpton, were at the head of the Bensonhurst march. Their militant tactics have brought condemnation from black conservatives such as the NAACP. Radical journals like the *Village Voice* have also spent less time condemning the racists than dwelling on theories that such black militancy is publicity-seeking and counter-productive.

SWELL

The radical argument that organising and marching against racism is part of the problem gives an accurate measure of the scale of the struggle ahead. The voice of radical white America would be better employed convincing its readership to swell the ranks of the 15 white faces on the Bensonhurst demonstration.

Building an active anti-racist current among white Americans is the best way to convince black people that there is an alternative to calling on the racist authorities to come to their aid.

Until a movement exists which refuses to condemn black activists for fighting back and puts itself on the line to argue anti-racist, anti-American politics in the white working class, many more courageous men and women will walk to police stations behind the US flag and there will be more bad days in Bensonhurst.

BROADWATER FARM REVISITED

'THEY'VE TURNED THEIR BACKS ON US'

Last week Haringey Labour council invited Lord Gifford to return to Broadwater Farm to conduct a second inquiry into the estate's problems. But as far as local residents are concerned, the council itself is the big problem. Kenan Malik reports

'The way the council have handled the cuts,' says Millard Scott of the Broadwater Farm Youth Association, 'it's no different from the way the police treated us on October 6th.'

On 6 October 1985 Broadwater Farm exploded into the headlines as black youth on the North London estate rose up against police brutality. The previous day, another police raid on a Tottenham home had led to the death of black mother Cynthia Jarrett. In the street-fighting which followed — the fiercest ever seen in Britain — hundreds of police were injured and one policeman, PC Blakelock, was killed.

Relations between police and black youth have changed little since then. But today, the tenants think the Labour council is as big a problem as the police.

'The flats on the estate have never been so bad,' says Sheila Ramdin, chair of the residents' association. 'The whole place is infested with cockroaches. In Tangmere block there's a gap between the patio of one flat and the wall of the next. Every time it rains the water just comes pouring through the gap.

'The flats are real fire-traps. Smoke seeps from one flat to the other. It happened to me on the night of the riot. I live above the sweetshop and when that went up the kids' room completely filled up with smoke. They nearly died.'

Many residents supported Haringey council when it set up the Gifford inquiry after the unrest of 1985 to look at the problems of the estate. Today they feel differently.

COCKROACHES

'The inquiry achieved little,' says Sheila. 'A few new projects have opened. The Painting Project employed about 20 people. There's been some money for the gardens and to clear the cockroaches. They've employed half a dozen people doing murals on the estate. And that's about it.'

According to the council submission to the new inquiry, it spent £350 000 in 1986-87 on repairs on the estate, and £156 000 this year on estate projects. The figures are a fraud. The money for repairs came not from the council but from central government. And, as the Building Design Services report reveals, not a single major project has got off the ground. The enterprise workshops are 'awaiting DoE approval'. The social service offices and the Lordship recreation buildings are 'awaiting finance'. The council is 'undertaking feasibility studies' on the community centre.

Even the essential repairs are not complete. The only successful council policy appears to be the wall murals.

The main demands of the tenants — for a community centre, for nursery facilities and for jobs — have been ignored. 'We were promised a community centre 15 years ago,' says Sheila. 'All we've got is a grotty little room. We've put in a bid for £5m for a proper centre but we know we're not likely to get anything. But cuts or no cuts we're entitled to it. There are 2000 people on the estate — where are they meant to go?'

Even more pressing is the lack of childcare facilities. 'The creche only operates during the day,' said Sheila. 'It only takes 10 kids. There's one nursery on Lordship Lane. Takes about 20 kids. There's another on Adams Road. But that's under threat of closure. They've already got rid of all the part-time staff and had to close one class. Even before that there was a waiting list of over a year. How can people get a job if there are no nurseries? Child-minders cost £30 a time. If you've got three kids that's £90 a week. Who can afford that? People can't even afford the council nurseries now they've put up their rates to £10.'

THREATS

When tenants argued that there should be workplace nurseries for the proposed enterprise co-ops on the estate, the council threatened to cut off all funding. 'They said if you push too hard for nurseries, then there will be no co-ops'.

The Labour council has cut every essential facility on the estate.

'Toby Harris (Haringey council leader) last week swore that the Mothers' Project and the Nursery Project will be OK,' said Sheila. 'But there have already been reductions. At the Broadwater Farm school the head said to me, "We're short of dinner ladies, the temporary staff are going, 10 per cent of our capital funding's already been cut and there's more in April." How is the new inquiry going to stop this damage?'



Kenan Malik

'THINGS HAVE NEVER BEEN SO BAD': SHEILA RAMDIN, RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION CHAIR

Just five hours before Gifford convened his second inquiry, Haringey council agreed £20m of new cuts. None of the projects 'awaiting finance' will see the light of day.

Haringey might not have the money to meet tenants' needs, but it is willing to cough up to help the police keep a tighter grip on the estate. Last February the council built barriers across all the roads on the Farm as part of a police riot-control scheme. The whole project was done secretly. 'We never saw them do it,' said Leonardo Leon of the residents' association. 'They used outside contractors and did it by night.'

After October 1985 many black activists on the estate looked to the Labour Party and Haringey council for support. Bernie Grant, then leader of the council, won widespread support in the black community for telling the police they 'got a bloody good hiding'. Last June he was elected as MP for Tottenham. Two months later he repaid his supporters by voting with the Tories to implement cuts on the council. Today he denies having made anti-police statements.

Local activists have nothing but contempt for Grant's betrayal of their trust.

'People might deny what they once said, they might deny the feelings they once had towards the community,' says Millard Scott, 'but after the riots those words brought them a lot of success. Now they've turned their back on us. Now they're using bully-boy tactics and pretending that we don't exist.'

Lock-out in Lambeth

Lambeth Labour council locked out 71 vehicle engineers last week. Their crime: refusing to do extra work for nothing.

In a series of agreements with the engineers' union (AEU), Lambeth council promised bonus payments for flexible working and covering vacant posts. But council promises turned out to be worthless. In the New Year management failed to meet the terms of another bonus agreement, signed only two months before. When mechanics, drivers and maintenance workers at Shakespeare Road depot refused to do extra work unless they received the agreed rate, Lambeth council ordered them off the premises and docked their pay. They have been locked out since 20 January.

The lock-out is taking place against a background of wholesale cuts. Staffing at Shakespeare Road is 15 per cent below complement, and 30 more jobs are due to go next year. Throughout Lambeth the picture is equally bleak. Last week protesters in the town hall public gallery threw eggs at Labour councillors voting for £40m cuts covering every council service from nurseries to cemeteries.

DIKTAT

The prospect of a left-wing Labour council carrying out Tory government diktat has led to widespread confusion among council workers and local residents. Tory councillors have seized the opportunity to blame 'loony left' extravagance for the cuts, and some workers are starting to believe them.

Labour councillors who are committed to carrying out cuts would be better off in the Tory Party. After all, it's Tory policy they are implementing. Hard-left councillors who oppose the cuts should make a clean break from their Labour colleagues, and help to organise a real anti-cuts campaign among council workers and the community in Lambeth. Unless left wingers show where they stand, the left will be discredited and the Tories can continue to make political capital out of the crisis in inner-city boroughs like Lambeth.

Gaby Hart

'No schools, no votes' in Strathclyde

THE centre of Glasgow came to a standstill last week when more than 5000 parents, teachers and students lobbied a meeting of the majority Labour group of Strathclyde regional council. Demonstrators came in busloads from all over the region to protest against council plans to shut 37 primary and 20 secondary schools by June next year, with more closures to follow in 1990. 'Tories close factories, Labour shuts schools' they chanted. 'No schools, no votes'.

Strathclyde Labour council claims that falling pupil rolls justify school closures. But parents and teachers disagree. 'In the past, we were told there were too few teachers and too few facilities — and they were right,' said one parents' representative from Barmulloch, Glasgow. 'Now we are told there are too few weans.' Most parents agree that fewer students should mean better staff-student ratios and better facilities per student, not fewer schools and less teachers.

Labour councillors have been taken aback by the strength of working class opposition to school closures. They know now that East Kilbride parent Eddie Hughes was right when he said, 'If Charles Gray (council leader) put school closures in the Labour Party manifesto, he could hold election meetings in a phone box.' Inside Strathclyde House, they watched last week's demonstration through half-closed venetian blinds, and started worrying about the forthcoming district elections.

Derek Owen

ANOTHER COUP ATTEMPT IN ARGENTINA

THE TORTURERS ARE BACK ON TOP

In Argentina last week, Lieutenant-Colonel Aldo Rico attempted his second abortive coup in 12 months. Andy Clarkson reports on the return to prominence of the Argentine military, after its defeat in the South Atlantic War



BUENOS AIRES NIGHT LIFE IN THE '70s — OR THE '90s?

Rico's latest mutiny was backed by 100 troops and suppressed after a brief skirmish in Monte Caseros, a town 400 miles north of the capital Buenos Aires. It came only a month after he got out of jail, where he had been awaiting trial for organising another coup last April. At Christmas, however, Argentine president Raul Alfonsin released Rico from detention along with eight other middle-ranking officers charged with human rights offences. At the same time, Alfonsin promoted the notorious navy torturer, Captain Alfredo Astiz, to Lieutenant-Commander.

The government's accommodation to the military indicates that, whatever the outcome of Rico's displays of bravado, the Argentine army is returning to power under cover of Alfonsin's democratic regime.

Ever since the demise of the populist Peronist movement, the military have been the sole source of stability in Argentina. Despite their defeat in the 1982 Malvinas War, and the return to formal democracy the following year, the Argentine authorities are well-aware that at times of crisis only the army stands between them and the masses.

ABSOLVED

Rico's first coup was in protest at the scapegoating of junior army officers for 'following orders' during the brutal 1976-82 military dictatorship. Hundreds of thousands had turned out to back Alfonsin's stand against the army rebels at the time. Alfonsin promised there would be no deal and Rico capitulated. Two months later, it turned out Alfonsin had made a deal. He steamrollered through his *punto final* law, absolving all junior officers of crimes they might have committed for 'carrying out orders' between 1976 and 1982. General Dante Caridi, Alfonsin's army chief who captured Rico in Monte Caseros, welcomed *punto final*, but only as a step in the right direction. He wants an amnesty for all senior army officers implicated in atrocities too.

The Argentine officer corps remains the rock upon which Argentinian capitalism either survives or falls. With his concessions to the rebels after Rico's first coup and his liberation of Rico and his cronies, Alfonsin has shown that he fully understands this fact of Argentinian political life.

'DISAPPEARED'

The army seized power in 1976 when the Peronist movement that had guaranteed political stability in Argentina for 30 years split apart and its right and left factions fought each other for control. Over the next six years, the army arrested up to 30 000 left-wing Peronists, who subsequently 'disappeared'. During that dictatorship, the mothers of these *desaparecidos* began to parade through Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo every Thursday demanding to know what had happened to their sons and daughters.

The Argentine military fell from power after their defeat by Britain in the South Atlantic War of 1982. The British media boasted that Thatcher's task force had brought democracy back to Argentina. In fact, Britain's victory was to have the opposite effect. It served to strengthen the hold of the Western imperialist powers over Argentina.

The West was willing to approve the installation of a democratic regime under Alfonsin, which could reconcile the angry masses to capitalism in Argentina. But this was only to provide a breathing space. Five years on the Argentine rulers have to go in hard against their people, to sort out the economy at the West's bidding.

And as the going gets tough, the military returns to prominence to carry out the orders of Western bankers and financiers.

Alfonsin has tried to win credibility by telling the mothers of the *desaparecidos* that those in the army found guilty of violating human rights would be punished. They no longer believe him. Now the president of the mothers' group complains bitterly that the president who 'based his 1983 campaign on human rights' has 'forgotten all his promises'. Last week she denounced Alfonsin's concessions to the military as 'shameful': 'We believe General Dante Caridi and Rico are the same thing.' As the army torturers are pardoned and even promoted, the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are still demonstrating every Thursday. Now, however, the women are once more being beaten and arrested for protesting against military terror.

Alfonsin responded to Rico's second coup by instituting his court martial and ordering a purge of the army. But this is a cynical gesture from a politician who knows that he is in no position to tell the army what to do. And unlike last April, this time there was no massive display of popular sympathy for the president exhibited on the streets of Buenos Aires. These days, in 'democratic' Argentina, the only people that can expect mercy are the military. For the masses of Argentina there seems to be less and less to choose between Alfonsin and the old army dictators.

ELECTORAL CHARADE IN THE PHILIPPINES

'Undeclared martial law'

The local elections in the Philippines last week represented little more than a game of musical chairs for different factions of the local elite. But nearly 100 people died in the process.

Elections are traditionally a dirty and bloody business in the Philippines and last week's was no exception. Like a referee at some prizefight, president Corazon Aquino called for the contest to be 'clean, peaceful, honest and orderly'. Instead it turned into the customary brawl. By the time the vote-counting began, 86 people were reported dead — including 36 candidates. Allegations of fraud and violence led to the elections being postponed in 24 provinces and seven major cities. The chief election organiser was still happy to report that, compared to the 155 deaths during the 1971 elections, this round was relatively peaceful.

Aquino blamed the trouble on left-wing 'extremists' and the guerrilla fighters of the New People's Army. Speaking at the bedside of a wounded candidate from her own party, she alleged that 'the enemies of democracy...are out to plunge our country into anarchy and derail the elections.' But there is precious little democracy in the Philippines today. Aquino's elections were a charade to the millions of landless peasants eking out an existence in the countryside and the low-paid workers in the cities. The electoral contest only had real meaning for the different factions within the Filipino ruling class.

WARLORDS

Competing power-brokers, notably the president's brother, Jose 'Peping' Cojuangco, and Liberal Party leader, Jovito Salonga (both nominally part of Aquino's 'People's Power' coalition), are now forming marriages of convenience with the right-wing politicians and local warlords who hold real power in the country. More naive observers were shocked to discover that, for electoral purposes, the Aquino family had aligned itself with candidates of former president Marcos' KBL party. But the Aquino dynasty is fighting for survival and anything goes.

Aquino came to power after the fall of Marcos in 1986 by winning the confidence of the rebellious population. Her regime has since resorted to its own brand of military rule to keep those same masses under the heel. Few of the urban and rural poor remain loyal to her 'People's Power' movement. She is desperately seeking new allies among the upper classes who have the firepower needed to keep control over the Philippines. The manoeuvring around the elections was part of this process.

Aquino now offers an open policy of counter-insurgency in response to demands for land reform and democratic rights. Indiscriminate use of army firepower today exceeds the worst of the Marcos era. The old dictator's notorious armed thugs, the Civilian Home Defence Force, have been re-formed in 150 state-backed gangs of anti-communist vigilantes. The mass left-wing trade union federation, the KMU, describes the current situation as an 'undeclared state of martial law'. Through a series of attempted coups against Aquino, the army has won concessions which restore much of the power it enjoyed under Marcos.

Against this background the election results — delayed by fraud and ballot-box theft — will mean little to most Filipinos. The polls' main significance is that they signal the end of the 'People's Power' coalition which ousted Marcos in 1986.

RESISTANCE

There was one other factor which nobody could ignore in this election — the growing impact of popular resistance to the Aquino regime. The organised left made a poor showing in the election: the left-wing Partido ng Bayan was unable to stand many candidates and faced active sabotage of its campaign by the army. But New People's Army guerrillas made a big impression. In many areas of the country candidates were only able to stand with the agreement of the NPA and after paying them a levy.

Aquino's administration is starting to look more and more like a reincarnation of the Marcos regime, dominated by what her assassinated husband Benigno once called 'guns, goons and gold'. And, as in those earlier times, repression is making direct resistance increasingly attractive to ordinary Filipinos.

Russell Osborne

letters page

PCF PARASITES

THE 1980s have been years of steady decline for the French Communist Party. Its membership and electoral support have fallen dramatically since its exit from government in 1983. The PCF has reacted by playing up its working class image, in the hope of holding on to its remaining support. PCF posters in the working class suburbs of Paris have stopped carrying the French tricolour and started featuring the hammer and sickle.

This change of tack, superficial though it be, has attracted some working class youth, including Arabs and blacks. In headier days, they would have been an embarrassment to the PCF's electoral designs. But the ageing bureaucrats who run the Stalinist machine are now making a play for their allegiance. Thus, the party which has always supported racist immigration laws (on the hypocritical pretext that illegal immigrants are vulnerable to exploitative bosses!), recently endorsed a commando-style operation by its youth section which wrested a young black from police hands as he was about to be deported to Africa.

One of the stars of the PCF's recent congress was Tahar Raad, a 28-year old Arab who made 55 recruits to the party in his first three hours as a member. The delighted bureaucrats had to break up his cell to make it more manageable.

The fact that the PCF is able to play this game is an indictment of the French left. Dissident breakaways and Trotskyist groupings alike have preferred to censure the undemocratic nature of the party rather than challenge its underlying political outlook. Until this is done, Stalinist parasites will continue to survive on the backs of a new generation of working class militants.

Louis Dufoix
Paris

ALTON AND BACKSTREET ABORTION

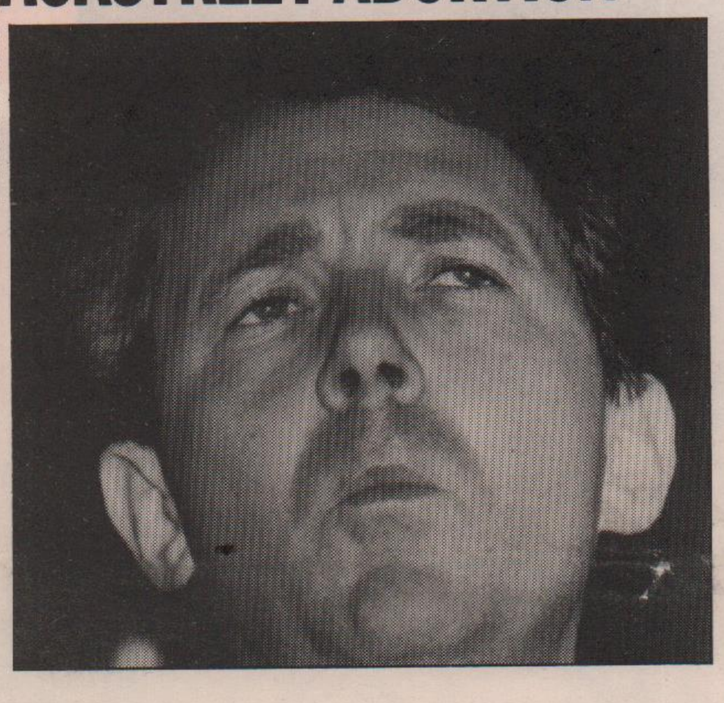
SOME women in Fight the Alton Bill groups think that 'No return to the backstreets' should be our main slogan. But this demand neglects the fact that abortion under legal conditions can be as traumatic as a backstreet abortion. Humiliation, fear and psychological effects are the result of abortion being considered as a deviation from the natural role of women as mothers.

The 'No return' slogan also gives the impression that concern for women's physical health is the main reason for objecting to Alton's Bill. But if physical health was our first priority, we would be better off campaigning against smoking, which causes the death of thousands of women each year.

We must not let abortion rights become a medical matter. Our campaign should be based on the recognition that Alton's Bill stretches beyond the pain and terror of a backstreet clinic. Any further restriction by the authorities will mean that fewer women will view abortion as morally legitimate, whether they fulfil the legal conditions or not. It will mean that women will be seen by more people as natural mothers and carers; and it will indicate a degree of confidence among the moral guardians of the establishment. We need to break that confidence by fighting for an equal, independent place in society.

Paula
Clapham

Pandora Anderson



LABOUR COUNCIL COPIES MURDOCH

AROUND 50 manual workers from Southwark Labour council's leisure and recreation department recently picketed the town hall in protest at plans to impose new contracts of employment. The new contracts mean wage cuts of up to £40 a week. To get them through with the minimum fuss, the council has dispensed with the management-union negotiations and invited individual workers to attend interviews with a management team whose job is to pressure them into accepting the new conditions.

A year ago, Southwark Labour council kept silent when one of its members was jailed for an 'offence' committed outside Rupert Murdoch's Fortress Wapping. Now the Labour group is using Murdoch's anti-union methods to enforce Tory cuts. It just goes to show how far 'left-wing' councils have moved to the right.

Ian
Southwark

BROAD LEFT BEATEN

ELECTIONS for the national leadership of the transport union (TGWU) end on 5 February. Described in the media as a battle between hard and soft left, the reality is a sorry contest between leadership loyalists and right-wing hacks. The broad left is running on a ticket of full support for general secretary Ron Todd. They don't come much more soft left than that. Yet his followers have been described in the press as extremists.

Subservience to Todd, matched by his loyalty to Kinnock, means that the broad left is unable to stand up on any real issues. Its timid platform has failed to generate the support which it needs. John Prescott's decision to scotch the deputy leadership contest indicates that the broad left knows it is beaten. Prescott and his backers knew that the broad left would not get a majority on the union executive, and that he would not get the union's one million block vote. Without that, he faced utter humiliation.

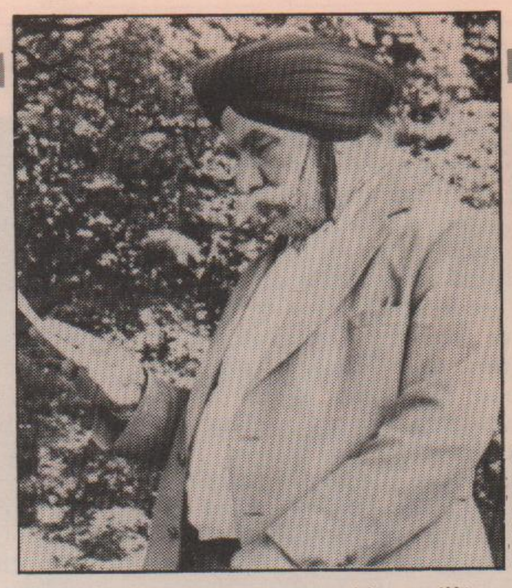
But the broad left has always been about capturing positions rather than changing the transport union. For many years the quickest route to a full-timer's job was to join the broad left. With the right in the ascendant, that route will be closed. The remaining broad left executive members will be furious when the right hand-picks its own officials. But while the broad left gets upset, most members will remain disinterested; and that's how they feel about the elections. They have nothing to gain from the sight of two electoral machines competing for the privilege of exercising patronage within Britain's biggest union.

Mick Gavan
TGWU member
East London

SIKHS NEED NOT APPLY

WHEN I applied for a job at Famous Names chocolate factory, the health officer told me I would have to remove my turban to comply with the health and safety act and the company's hygiene rules. She said I would have to wear a white hat to stop 'foreign objects' falling into the food. I suggested I could wear a white turban which I would leave to be cleaned in their chemicals. This was not accepted.

I rang Bristol Commission for Racial Equality. They rang me back within five minutes to say that the company could get away with it. The CRE in London said nothing could be done, and they wouldn't offer legal assistance. I then attended a Campaign Against Racist Laws meeting where I met Usif. Together with my father, we formed the Kamaljit Action group. We sent letters to Famous Names but the company ignored it, so we started to hold meetings to publicise the case and fight it.



David Rourke

It's not just me who's getting pushed around. There were others who did not get a job for the same reason. But they did not take it up because they did not have the back-up. If I can get it, I thought, why not fight the case to prove we can stand up for ourselves? After we got leaflets out and held our first meeting, a lot of people started to get interested, including some of my Jamaican friends. Together we can fight this kind of discrimination.

My advice to others is to fight, but get the support first. You can't take on big companies alone. But don't go to people like the CRE. They fob you off and tell you nothing can be done.

Kamaljit Singh
Bristol

Protest outside Kamaljit Singh's industrial tribunal: Prince's House, behind the Arnolfini, Prince's Quay, Bristol, 10am 8 February.

HEALTH WORKERS NEED NATIONAL ACTION

THE dispute over nurses' unsocial hours payments shows how the government treats its workers, and how the current political atmosphere has the unions in a state of indecisiveness. It took a strike to get the threat to unsocial hours payments withdrawn — a strike which should have been national, if the health service unions had taken control of the situation. Instead, just one hospital (Manchester) began the show of nurses' strength — strength which seems to have been forgotten by government and health service unions alike.

On the day after the strike, all negotiations were handed over to the union leadership. The result of their talks was referral to the pay review body. Prior to the 1987 general election was the only time the Tories have accepted this body's recommendations. If this is not an indication of the lack of leadership, you only have to look at Yorkshire where the unions had agreed to a cut in the subsistence allowance paid to mobile blood transfusion workers. On implementation, workers walked out and union officials had to re-negotiate.

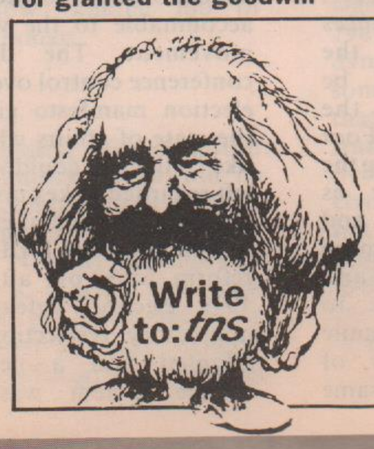
How about addressing the closure of hospitals at a national level? Plans for 7000 YTS places in the NHS should also be publicised. The future of NHS workers is in the hands of health service unions. It is up to them to tap the strength shown by the nurses and be decisive with every grievance.

Ged
Liverpool health worker

SUCCESSIVE governments have taken for granted the goodwill of health workers, who have always been reluctant to take strike action. We understand the risks and dangers to those we care for. But the real danger lies in the contemptuous attitude of the present government.

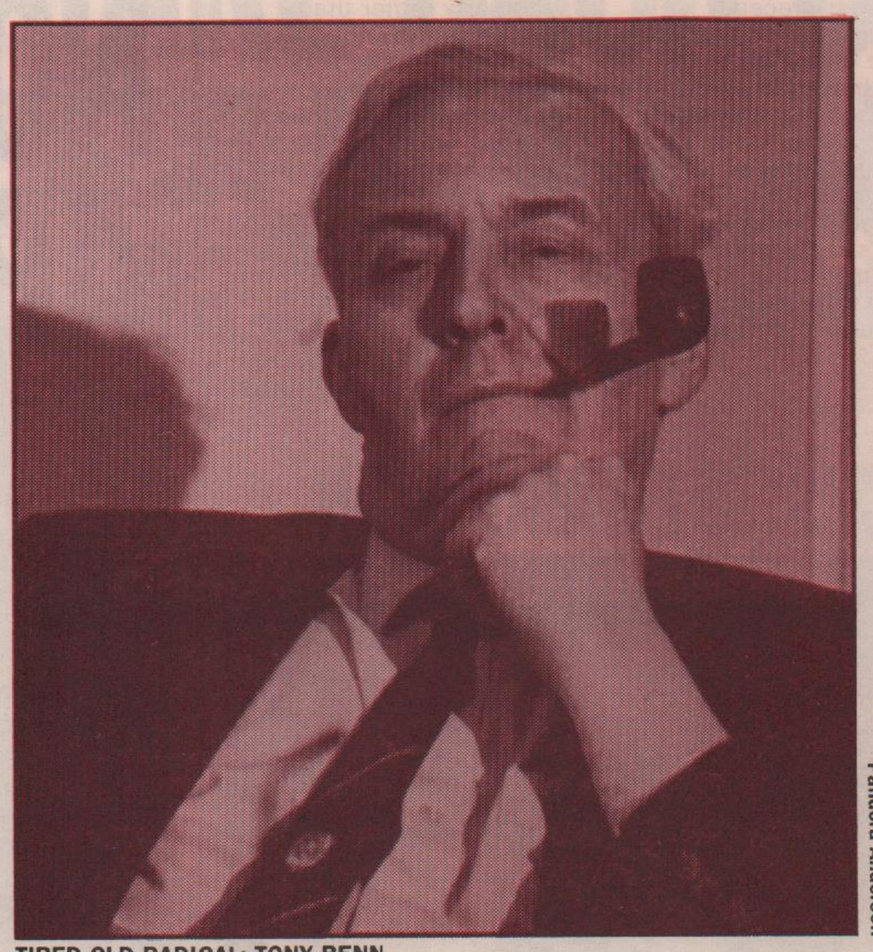
Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire Hospital closes on average twice a week due to lack of beds. Emergency admissions are sent across town to another hospital, which may also be closed. In these circumstances, patients may be sent to another hospital which is ill-equipped to deal with acute admissions. Clearly their lives are at risk.

Peter
Sheffield



Write to *tns*
BCM JPLTD, WC1N 3XX

JOHN PRESCOTT A
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TIRED OLD RADICAL: TONY BENN

Pandora Anderson

John Prescott's decision against challenging Ro the position of deputy to Neil Kinnock is not humiliation — it also exposes the e constitutional reforms won by the Labour eighties. Mike Freeman and J



HUMBLED AND HUMILIATED: JOHN PRESCOTT ANNOUNCES HIS CLIMB-DOWN DECISION TO THE PRESS

'I have always made it clear that my prime intention was to place the question of the role of the deputy leader at the centre of the debate,' declared a humbled John Prescott last week. He was trying to put a brave face on his decision, under sustained pressure from the Labour leadership to call off the campaign to replace Roy Hattersley that he launched at the TUC congress in Blackpool last September. But, in the year of impending world capitalist recession and a renewed Tory offensive on the working class in Britain, who wants a debate about the role of Labour's deputy leader?

'The deputy leader', according to Prescott, 'would typify the new campaigning approach — travelling the country, building the party and leading the way in creating a mass, modern, dynamic party that people will want to join and vote for.' This is typical of the sort of waffle that Neil Kinnock has made the characteristic Labour Party response to any political event.

What everybody would like to know is exactly how Prescott proposes to revive Labour's popularity and electoral performance.

Prescott's draft manifesto for the deputy leadership, published in the *Guardian* on 15 January, emphasises two key issues. 'First, there is the party's chronic membership crisis' — a problem he proposes to resolve by offering cut-price party membership to trade unionists. But it is not the cost of a membership subscription that deters trade unionists from joining the Labour Party. The problem for Labour is that neither the party's programme nor the performance of its leadership inspires enthusiasm or even interest among the vast majority of trade union members. This is why most trade union members do not vote Labour and only a tiny minority bother to become party members.

Prescott is aware of the high level of indifference towards Labour among trade union members. His second key theme is the 'need to give our members and potential supporters a greater understanding and conviction in our case'. His solution is to relieve the deputy leader of his shadow cabinet parliamentary responsibilities so that he can stump the country campaigning to win popular support for Labour's policies. But what policies? Here Prescott is silent. He leaves the matter of Labour's programme to the policy review that was set up by Kinnock and is proceeding under the firm grip of Bryan Gould and the rest of the leadership clique. While giving the leadership a free hand to push Labour even further towards the sort of pro-capitalist policies that filled its last election manifesto, Prescott can only emphasise the virtues of the office of deputy leadership.

Many Labour activists feel that Hattersley spends too much time on long lunches in Westminster and in maintaining his reputation as a professional Yorkshireman through writing sentimental memoirs and whimsical newspaper columns. No doubt a hardworking, barnstorming Prescott would be a more dynamic deputy leader, attracting appreciative audiences at Labour clubs around the country. But these would be dwindling gatherings of the faithful — and Michael Foot discovered in 1983 that rallying the activists is not the same as widening Labour's appeal and winning elections. It will take more than cheap subscriptions and Prescott's forceful speeches to build a mass, modern, dynamic party around the policies of Kinnock and Gould. The same team, we should recall, was not conspicuously successful in last June's general election. Yet Prescott has now settled for the promise of a debate at this year's party conference on the role of the deputy leader — a pledge instantly repudiated by the Kinnock team on the grounds of the constitutional impropriety of the party leader setting the conference agenda.

Prescott's narrow preoccupation with the deputy leadership post and his utter neglect of the critical issues of policy that face the labour movement in Thatcher's third term reveal the inward-looking and empty character of the inner-party opposition to the Kinnock leadership. Indeed the pathetic collapse of Prescott's leadership bid marks the dead end of the drive to use the Labour machine to make the leadership more responsive to the rank and file.

This perspective has dominated the activity of the Labour left since the heyday of the campaign for Labour Party democracy in the early eighties.

Tony Benn's campaign for the deputy leadership in 1981 was the high-point of left-wing influence in the Labour Party in the post-war period. The fact that he came within a hair's breadth of defeating Denis Healey revealed the strength of rank and file animosity against an old guard that had been discredited by its involvement in the Wilson-Callaghan governments of the seventies. The Benn campaign was the climax of the movement for constitutional reform around the demands for the reselection of MPs, for widening the process of electing the party leader beyond the parliamentary party and for conference control over the manifesto. Like Prescott today, Benn and his supporters made no attempt to change the *policies* of the Labour Party to make it an effective force in defending the working class against the impact of an unprecedented Tory attack on jobs and working conditions.

Radical campaigners for democratic reforms in the Labour Party argued that the reason for the betrayals of the Labour governments of the seventies was that the leadership was not accountable to the rank and file. Hence, the argument ran, Wilson, Callaghan, Healey and the rest could implement wage controls, raise unemployment, cut welfare spending, send in the troops to break strikes, etc, — all in defiance of the decisions of a left-dominated party conference. For the left, the solution was to change the structure of the party to ensure that in future the leadership would carry out the will of the rank and file.

Measures to compel all sitting MPs to go through a local reselection process during each parliament were designed to put pressure on MPs to support the policies approved by the activists on the constituency management committee. The proposal that the leader should be elected by an electoral college, which included representations from the unions and the constituency parties as well as from the parliamentary party, aimed to make the leadership more accountable to the wider labour movement. The demand for conference control over the party's election manifesto aimed to end the state of affairs where a leader like Callaghan could veto what the left regarded as key policy items on the eve of a general election.

The campaign for Labour Party reform took off after Labour's 1979 election defeat. By 1981 mandatory reselection had been adopted and a new electoral college system was in place. Although the left never won its demand for conference control over the manifesto, it did succeed in changing the balance of power inside the party. The left's much-vaunted conference triumphs of 1980 and 1981 were enough to drive the right-wing 'Gang of Four' — Owen, Williams, Jenkins and Rodgers — out of the Labour Party to form the ill-fated Social Democratic Party. Yet after Benn's defeat by Healey, the momentum for reform was lost. The fact that the left chose to challenge the leadership on issues of organisation, rather than on matters of policy, allowed the right-wing old guard to rally around Foot and the same old programme of counter-crisis austerity measures on which Labour had been campaigning for a decade.

After Foot's 1983 defeat by Thatcher, the first beneficiaries of the left's electoral college were Kinnock and Hattersley, who emerged as leader and deputy leader respectively.

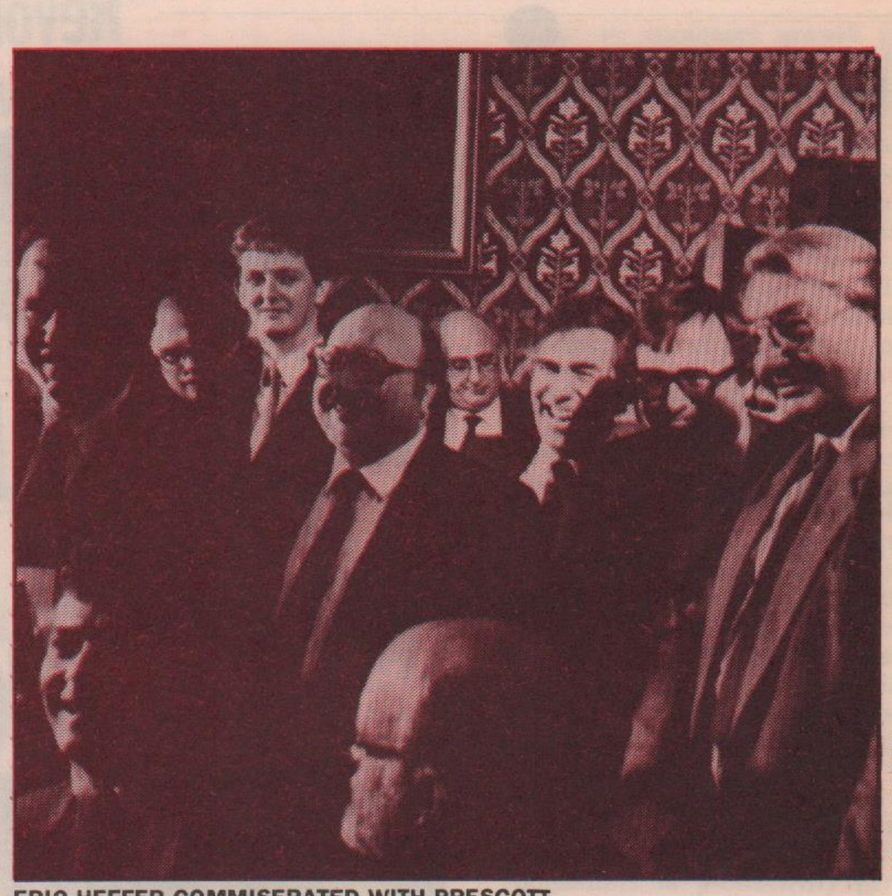
One of the first casualties of Thatcher's third election victory last year was mandatory reselection. While the precise form of constituency selection remains to be resolved, Kinnock has made clear that parties which defy the leadership in these matters will have candidates imposed and if they object they will be suspended. The 1987 election campaign also made clear that when it comes to making policy, Labour's party conference is subordinate to the team of public relations and advertising consultants in Kinnock's private office.

Seven years after the heady days of 1981, the deputy leadership election — conducted through the ultra-democratic electoral college — is about all that remains of the left's historic conference victories. Prescott's anticipated conference speech on the role of Roy Hattersley will provide a fitting epitaph for the left's drive to turn

ABANDONS HALLENGE

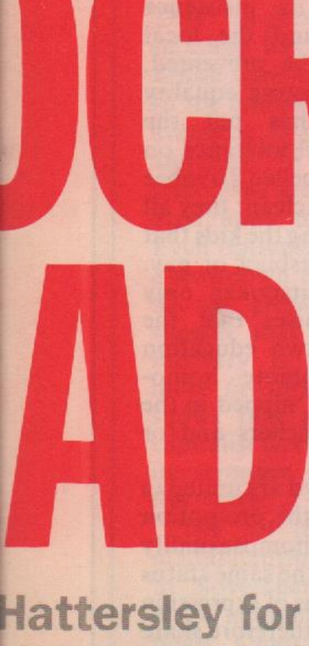
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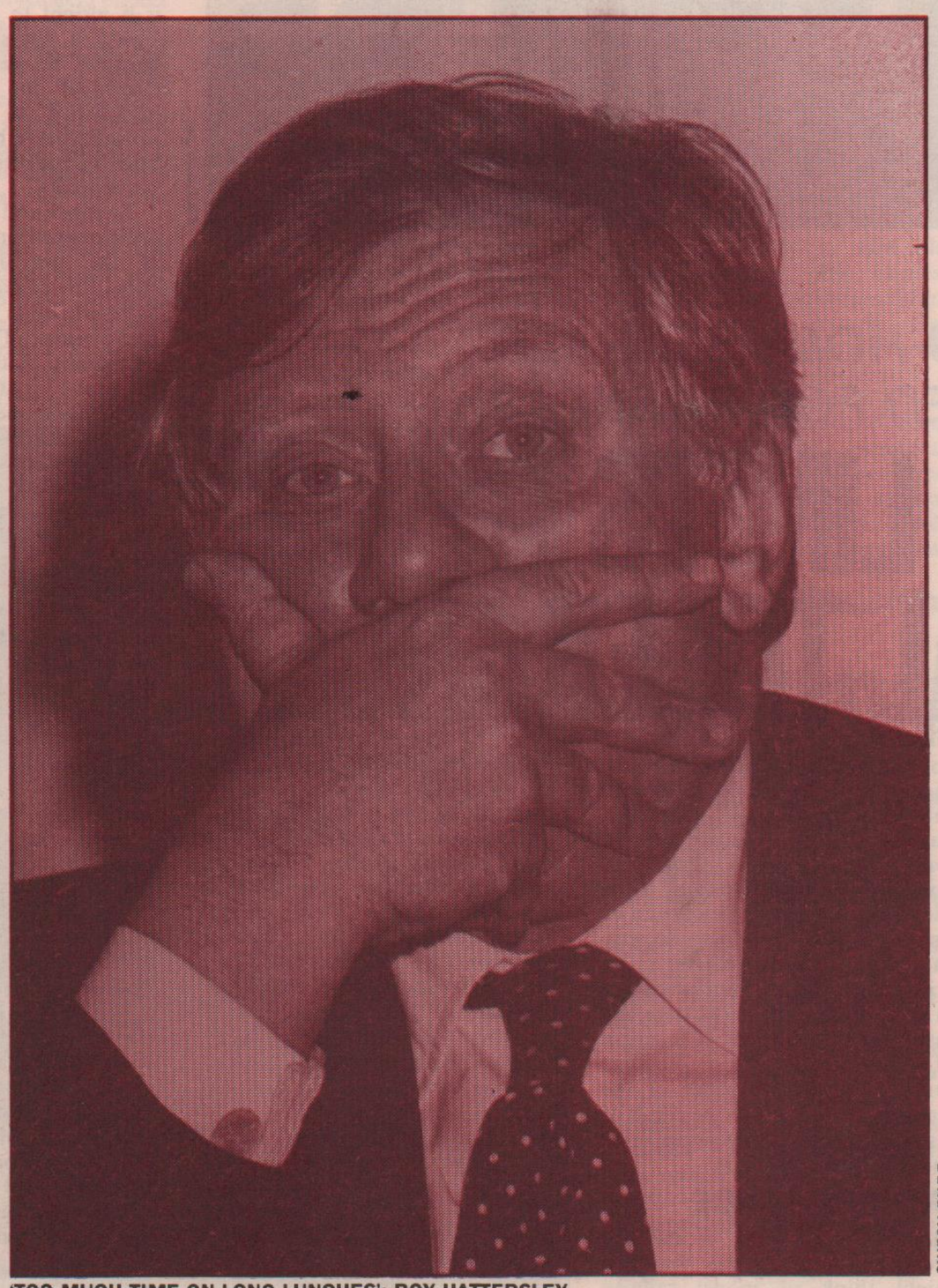


Andrew Calcutt

ERIC HEFFER COMMISERATED WITH PRESCOTT, BUT DID NOT COMMIT HIMSELF TO TAKE HIS PLACE



Andrew Calcutt



David Rourke

'TOO MUCH TIME ON LONG LUNCHES': ROY HATTERSLEY

This week the Campaign Group is launching a major drive to end Labour Party support for the Nato alliance. This may be no bad thing, but it seems a strange place to start to build the sort of resistance to the Tories that the labour movement so desperately needs.

Now that Prescott has pulled out of the deputy leadership contest the left's bluff has been called. Heffer turned up at the press conference at which Prescott announced his withdrawal, but was reticent about revealing his own plans to contest the election. He said that the Campaign Group would carefully consider putting up candidates against Hattersley, or even against Kinnock: 'Why go for the monkey, not the organ-grinder?' Dennis Skinner contented himself with condemning the 'authoritarianism' of the leadership in leaning so heavily on Prescott to dissuade him from standing. Whether or not the hard left decides to risk further humiliation at the hands of the Kinnock regime, it lacks any distinctive policy positions which it can put forward as the basis for a serious political challenge to the leadership.

Prescott's half-cocked campaign against Hattersley expresses the resentment of the only member of Kinnock's shadow cabinet with any roots in the trade union movement at the influence of the middle class clique that now rules the Labour Party. A former seaman and union militant in the sixties, Prescott has worked his way up through Labour's ranks. He now finds himself surrounded by former student politicians like Jack Straw and Robin Cook and career civil servants like Bryan Gould and Frank Dobson. In 1985 and 1986 Prescott played an important role as intermediary between the party leadership and the unions. He was instrumental in pressing the unions to accept unpopular policies on jobs, wages and union legislation. However, in the run-up to the 1987 election Prescott baulked at the brazenly anti-working class style of the Kinnock team and found himself sidelined while Gould moved to centre stage. Though he came second in the July shadow cabinet elections, Kinnock gave him only the low ranking job of energy spokesman.

Prescott resented his exclusion from the Kinnock clique, but he was deeply compromised with the Kinnock policies — especially in the unions. Nobody did more to sell Labour's support for wage controls and pre-strike ballots to the unions than Prescott. Hence it was not surprising that he found little support for his deputy leadership challenge in the unions or in any other section of the party. The leader of his own union — Sam McCluskie of the National Union of Seamen — played a key role for Kinnock in persuading Prescott to back down. There was little sign of any other prominent trade union leaders rushing to his rescue. The Tribune group of MPs, of which Prescott has been a prominent member since his arrival in the house of commons in 1970, made clear its disapproval of his candidature. Even his own constituency party was far from unanimous in backing his stand. In the end the only support for Prescott came from the Campaign Group rump, the tired old radicals whose speeches sound like a record on which the needle got stuck some time towards the end of 1981.

The experience of the left since 1981 offers conclusive proof of the futility of the project of trying to democratise the Labour Party.

The left turned its back on the real world and devoted its energies to transforming the Labour Party machine. Its transient successes merely reinforced its attachment to Labour while never loosening the grip of the labour bureaucracy over the party. The Labour Party was founded by the leaders of the trade unions to pursue their interests in the political sphere; they have always provided the money — and much of the organisational expertise — and they still rule. Today the union cabal Trade Unions for Labour provides the cash while hacks like general secretary Larry Whitty or Kinnock aide Tom Sawyer are effectively seconded from the unions to run the party. The Labour Party cannot be made accountable to its rank and file because it is already fully accountable to the labour bureaucracy. Its programme expresses the bureaucracy's commitment to the British establishment, while trying to appeal to the bureaucracy's base of support in the working class movement.

The left's drive to reform the structure of the Labour Party, while accepting the programme of the bureaucracy, ensured that the domination of the leadership would remain intact. Benn's vigorous challenge to Healey in 1981 expressed the confidence and dynamism of a left that still had some belief in itself and some hope that the Labour Party might be transformed into a force for progress. Prescott's abortive challenge to Hattersley reveals a left consumed by fatalism and despair, lacking even self-respect and confident only of its inability to influence the direction of Kinnock's party.

the machine of the labour bureaucracy into a vehicle for the interests of the working class.

The humiliation of the left at the hands of the Labour leadership over the past decade follows from its basic misconception of the nature of the Labour Party. The fundamental problem with the Labour Party is not its structure, but its politics. Labour's programme expresses the commitment of the leaders of the trade unions and the party to the survival of British capitalism. The failure of the left to challenge the pro-capitalist policies of the leadership on domestic and international issues in the early eighties ensured that the leadership retained political control, even though the left gained limited influence at certain levels of the party machine. On every key issue the left lacked an independent and distinctive voice — on the rapid rise in unemployment in 1980-81, on the Irish hunger-strikes in 1980-81, on the Falklands War in 1982, on the miners' strike in 1984-85. The result was that the right retained the initiative and could easily move to re-assert control over the machine, leaving the left isolated and ineffectual.

The plight of the Campaign Group following Prescott's withdrawal from the fray reveals the impotence of the Labour left today.

While no friends of Prescott, Tony Benn and Eric Heffer abhor the Kinnock leadership and, full of nostalgia for 1981, they cherish the deputy leadership election. An article in the current issue of *Campaign Group News* describes the electoral college as 'the party's newfound democratic gain'. Two weeks ago Benn declared his approval for Prescott's proposed challenge, emphasising that such electoral contests were a vital part of Labour's internal democracy. But he has no more ideas than Prescott about the sort of policy positions the left should put forward against the Kinnock team.

John Lloyd of the *Financial Times* and Polly Toynbee of the *Guardian* have both tried to deal with the possibility of a backlash against homosexuals. But, argues Don Milligan, their articles only reveal the limits of the liberal conscience



Joe Boatman

HOMOSEXUALS BLAMED FOR BACKLASH
THE LIMITS OF LIBERAL TOLERANCE

The British are decent chaps, who like to do things in moderation and play cricket. This prejudice is dear to the hearts of the educated middle classes and their representatives in the church, the media, the arts and the professions. According to their philosophy the British people possess a keen sense of justice and fair play, which has always inoculated the nation against extremism. All this is now being called into question by the growth of intolerance against homosexuals.

The Tory crusade against lesbians and gays and the gathering backlash against homosexuality are imposing severe strains on a liberal establishment that prides itself on its independence of thought and its compassion for the underdog.

EROSION

Two prominent liberal journalists, John Lloyd of the *Financial Times* and Polly Toynbee of the *Guardian*, have recently wrestled with the implications of the anti-homosexual offensive. The fact that they have felt compelled to put pen to paper to address this issue in such a self-conscious way is revealing. Their conclusions indicate the rapid erosion of the 'liberal conscience' under the impact of the advance of reaction.

In a piece entitled 'No Chance of a Backlash' Lloyd nails his colours firmly to the mast. He argues that there is no chance of bigotry gaining a hold on public policy and behaviour because 'we are now too diverse, too secular and too individualistic for an illiberalism to become a backlash' (*Financial Times*, 14 January). Lloyd draws comfort from low church attendances and from the small number of people drawn to fundamentalist Christian sects. He contends that because religious observance is a minority pursuit 'there is no central, generally recognised authority on which to base such a backlash.'

PROSCRIBE

The decline of religion was also a feature of late Victorian society. But this did not hold back the emergence of a social purity movement in the 1880s and 1890s which preached bigotry against homosexuals. The fact is that official morality is not the private preserve of the church. The state is the 'central, generally recognised authority' ultimately responsible for enforcing the moral code. The rise of intolerance and repression against homosexuals today is in keeping with the establishment's concern to proscribe all alternatives to family life as immoral and sinful.

Lloyd ignores the fact that most people who have joined in the chorus of condemnation against lesbians and gays are not at all raving religious extremists.

Marjorie Seldon put the 'secular' case succinctly in a letter to the *Independent* against the promotion of homosexuality in schools:

'Most parents know that boys and girls in adolescence can be ambivalent about their sexuality. "Crushes" on other girls, other boys, are a passing phase. For an adult, a teacher, to identify such ambivalence as latent homosexuality to be helped by "promotion" is a disservice which might ruin a young life.' (13 January)

There is no mention here of St Paul, no attempt to appeal to fundamentalist religion. Seldon simply states that sexual orientation is not as fixed as many would like, and therefore schools must exercise guidance and discipline to ensure that as many people as possible are prevented from harbouring homosexual desires. In assuming that homosexuality is bad and harmful to children, Seldon demonstrates none of the respect for diversity that Lloyd imagines will prevent the backlash against homosexuals. In declaring that 'the draconian clause is necessary' (Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill banning 'the promotion of homosexuality'), she shows how middle class intolerance leads on to an acceptance of repression.

OUTSIDERS

Lloyd sticks blindly to his belief in widespread tolerance of 'diverse sub-cultures'. Of the gay scene he says, 'It is hard to imagine that it is not just one more sub-culture in a society very largely composed of sub-cultures: that if they are outsiders, it is because almost every group, and many individuals, now prefer that designation.' Thus Lloyd implies that the exclusion of homosexuals from ordinary society, the legalised repression, the criminal status of homosexuality in the public policy of the state, the insistence that no positive mention of lesbian or gay sex or lifestyles must sully the innocence of the classroom — all this is the result of lesbians and gays 'preferring' to be thought of as outsiders!

INDIFFERENCE

Lloyd likes to think of the gay scene in the same way that one might think of model railway enthusiasts or perhaps a local Methodist chapel. Perhaps he thinks that the fire-boming of the *Capital Gay* offices in December, the organised beatings of gay men in the streets, or mass police raids on gay bars are just ordinary events in the life of any sub-culture? Perhaps next week it will be the turn of *Angling Times* or the members of your local rotary club? For Lloyd the oppression of homosexuals — the denial of equal rights by the state — is a matter of indifference.

It is so irrelevant that he denies that Clause 28 is part of a backlash, and will contribute to further attacks on the rights of lesbians and gays to live in society on the same terms as everyone else.

Polly Toynbee has no difficulty in accepting that there is a backlash against homosexuals:

'It started with Aids and the "gay plague" panic, when the grudging tolerance won by gays crumbled. Since then it has accelerated....Help lines around the country are reporting an increase by about 30 per cent in the numbers of calls reporting gay-bashing incidents. The Gay London Policing group reported four times more attacks on gays in three months of last year than in the entire year before. There was a CS attack on a gay pub in Rochester.' (*Guardian*, 14 January)

Toynbee is open about the bigotry unleashed against homosexuals by right-wing moralists and government policy. But she argues that homosexuals have only themselves to blame: 'The tragedy for the gay movement is that it has nurtured within it the seeds of its own destruction.' What Toynbee means is that the gay movement has invited stigma and proscription through its 'extremism' and lack of 'moderation'.

CONTRADICTION

Toynbee concludes her article in similar fashion to Lloyd by reassuring her readers that liberalism is still alive:

'There is still a large and powerful well of liberal tolerance, a natural majority in the land that is not hell-bent on persecution. But it will stay a silent majority in a clash between the moral right and extreme left-wing gay militancy.'

Toynbee's whole article contradicts this conclusion.

Her view is that so long as they keep themselves to themselves, and behave themselves in public, then homosexuals can be tolerated. This is also the view of many reactionaries, and was the premise on which the 1967 Sexual Offences Act was passed. Toynbee's attack on Jenny Wilson of the moderate Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action (Olga) for donating books on lesbian and gay themes to school libraries is a consummate expression of this view. Toynbee, 'the liberal' who defines any lesbian or gay groups that insist on fighting for equality as 'extremist', has much in common with Dame Jill Knight, 'the bigot'. So too has Lloyd, who noted in another article that British culture preserves 'a "live and let" attitude only by constant care on the part of the gay minority'. (*Financial Times*, 23 January)

CONVERGENCE

The government's attack on homosexuals and its insistence that the schools and the local authorities should be prevented, by law, from promoting equality for homosexuals has put the champions of liberal tolerance on the spot. It has compelled Toynbee and others to come clean: they all draw the line at telling the kids that it is alright to be lesbian or gay. Lloyd is not so outspoken only because he recognises that the efforts of one or two education authorities to promote homosexuality have been 'nipped in the bud by parents, teachers and/or bureaucrats'.

Toynbee and Lloyd are united in their opposition to the promotion of the idea that homosexuality should be afforded the same status as heterosexual forms of expression and pleasure. They therefore share a common platform of opposition to equal rights with right-wing bigots whom they hold in contempt.

Whether they accept it or not, the middle class leaders of liberal opinion in Britain have moved into line with the right-wing moralists and the Synod of the Church of England. They do not agree with equal rights for lesbians and gays, and like Toynbee they are prepared to attack us for fighting back against our oppression. The middle ground has disappeared. The appeal of moderate homosexual organisations and groups for the defence of civil liberties and human rights are falling on deaf ears. Their trust in moderate opinion, and the hopes that they have placed in the strength of the liberal establishment, have been betrayed. Today it has become acceptable to label homosexuality as 'sin', and to preach intolerance against sinners.

DECRIMINALISATION

We cannot make concessions to the moralists or the liberals. There can be no compromise on the issue of homosexual rights. We either give them up or we fight for them. Neither should we be scared off by Toynbee's tirade about the gay movement being 'hijacked' by the Revolutionary Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. The march of events only confirms that we need a political movement that is prepared to stand up to the bigots and fight for our rights.

We should be satisfied with nothing less than the complete decriminalisation of homosexuality.

The response of Toynbee and Lloyd shows that we cannot look to liberal opinion for back-up. Instead, we must fight for the working class to line up with lesbians and gays in the struggle for equality. We have to fight for acceptance throughout society of the view that an individual's choice of sexual partner is not a problem. Those who seek to make it one are the real problem confronting the working class and the oppressed.

THE BRITISH ECONOMY NOW

CRASHING, NOT BOOMING

Tony Kennedy reveals some home truths about British capitalism

At four per cent, last year's rate of growth in the UK economy was the biggest annual increase since the sixties. Scarcely a day now passes without some puffed-up Tory minister coming on to announce that Britain is now on the verge of economic greatness once more. Yet all of the posturing about British capitalism being born again is based on a few carefully massaged statistics and naive faith.

Behind the hype, the British economy has no way of coping with the approaching world recession.

Britain's economic growth over the past few years compares favourably with that of its rivals. The revival of UK output since the 1980-81 world recession places Britain third in the growth table of the top 12 capitalist nations — behind only Japan and the USA. Throughout the sixties Britain was bottom of the league and it languished in eleventh place in the seventies.

MODEST

This improved international standing has nothing to do with British capitalism being rejuvenated. In the booming sixties UK growth averaged a modest 3.1 per cent annually. In the 'miracle' years since 1982 growth has averaged an even more modest 2.8 per cent. Even optimistic forecasters expect a slowdown in the next few years. So the growth statistics do not suggest that any real economic recovery is underway. Britain's more favourable standing merely shows that the crisis facing the capitalist world has caught up with its stronger rivals over the past few years.

The 5.4 per cent rise in UK manufacturing output in the year to November 1987 has provided more ammunition for those who boast about Britain's economic resurrection. Yet here the gap between Tory fiction and economic reality is even more apparent.

Britain might exceed many of its rivals in overall economic growth today, but the all-important UK manufacturing sector has fared worse in the eighties.

Every major capitalist nation except Japan experienced a big fall in manufacturing output during the 1980-81 recession. However, all except Britain regained their pre-recession output levels by 1983. Britain did not reach this position until last year. By then Japanese manufacturing output was a third up on 1979.

Despite a sustained shake-out in UK manufacturing in the eighties it continues to be dominated by sectors of declining importance in the world. Britain has lost 40 per cent of its clothing and textile industry since the early seventies. Yet it still employs some 500 000 people — a staggering 10 per cent of all UK manufacturing workers. The food, drink and tobacco sector accounts for a high proportion of Britain's largest private concerns. Electrical engineering, electrical appliances, steel, shipbuilding, metal goods and mechanical engineering are a shadow of their former selves. But these decrepit sectors still dominate the UK manufacturing scene.

British capitalists have little presence in the newer, more profitable, hi-tech sectors of manufacturing. There is no British company of international renown in the field of consumer electronics (personal computers, TV, video and audio equipment). Those that exist in semiconductor-based production are either defence-oriented (and state-sponsored), narrowly specialised or just small-fry. Britain's prominence in technology-intensive sectors is restricted to aerospace, second behind America, and chemicals, lorded over by ICI.

FOREIGN

Where manufacturing in Britain shows signs of life there is usually a foreign company close by. Austin Rover may no longer be a mass car producer but American, Japanese and French motor companies are investing heavily in new plant within Britain. The domestic appliance sector (washing machines, cookers, vacuum cleaners, microwaves, etc) is increasingly dominated by the subsidiaries of Electrolux (Swedish), Philips (Dutch), Bosch-Siemens (German) and General Electric (American). British-owned concerns now constitute the smallest appliance sector in Europe — only a third of the size of its Italian counterpart.

The superior performance of foreign capitalists in Britain is based on their ability to modernise through investment in fixed capital.

Few British capitalists are able to match their overseas rivals in this. Figures for fixed investment in manufacturing in the eighties reveal how Tory policy has only given a shortlived superficial boost to British industry. In 1984 and 1985 there was a modest increase in investment. However, this was provoked by government plans to phase out tax relief on capital investment in 1986. Once the tax measures took effect capital investment faltered. In 1986 UK manufacturing investment per employee was only half that of Japan and two thirds that of the USA.

Even these figures understate the size of the 'investment gap' in British manufacturing. Low rates of investment over decades mean that plant and equipment in Britain are much older and less efficient than elsewhere. To close the gap British capital must outpace its rivals in the proportion of domestic resources devoted to investment. Yet investment as a percentage of gross domestic product in Britain is half that of Japan and significantly below the faltering rates in Europe and America.

British capitalists claim that 'capacity constraints' are the main barrier to continued growth in manufacturing. The image of UK factories working at full-throttle seems reassuring. In fact, capacity constraint simply means that capitalists have exhausted the potential for running clapped-out machinery at breakneck speed with harassed workers on the lowest wages in the West. It underlines the inability of British capitalists to turn the tide of decline through long-term and large-scale investment.

Since 1980 labour productivity in British manufacturing has risen between 25 and 50 per cent. But this has little to do with investment in new machinery. Most of the gain is due to the massive shake-out of workers from industry since 1980. This has left behind a smaller workforce producing more in less time. Although output increased last year, another 66 000 jobs disappeared from manufacturing.

SUBSTITUTE

Despite its improvement Britain continues to fall behind its competitors in productivity performance. Recent figures from the International Monetary Fund show that labour costs embodied in each unit of UK manufacturing output are increasing more rapidly than those of its major rivals. Workers in West German and French manufacturing are 55 per cent and a third more productive respectively than their UK counterparts. This doesn't mean that workers in Europe work harder or earn less than the British. In fact, the opposite is true. The figures show that imposing slave-labour conditions as a substitute for investment in technology will not salvage Britain's ailing industries.

The public pronouncements of business leaders and politicians on the British economy bear little relation to the real state of things.

But the fact that the official opposition parties now repeat the fairy tale of booming Britain shows the Tories' success on the ideological front. Popularising an economic analysis that reveals the reality of capitalist decline is essential in the struggle to get rid of this degenerate order.



THE 'SERVICE ECONOMY': POOR PRODUCTIVITY, POORER WAGES

Why manufacturing matters

Manufacturing accounts for less than 23 per cent of annual output in Britain today, down from 26 per cent since 1979. In West Germany the figure is 33 per cent and in Japan 30 per cent. America is the only major power with a lower figure than Britain for the share of its output which comes from manufacturing. This so-called de-industrialisation of Britain is now a hotly debated topic among economists. The point at issue is whether or not British capitalism can sustain its international position while production becomes more service-dominated.

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In the four years to June 1987 jobs were added to the non-manufacturing sector in Britain. In the same period manufacturing employment fell by 325 000. This was on top of the shake-out of two million manufacturing jobs in the 1980-81 recession. Changes in non-manufacturing employment primarily involved an expansion of private sector services — banking, insurance and finance, hotels and catering, retailing, wholesaling and leisure, cultural and personal services.

The criterion of capitalist strength is profitability. Profits originate in that portion of labour performed by workers which goes unpaid. Creating this 'surplus-value' is the aim of capitalist production. For capital, only labour which produces surplus-value is productive.

Manufacturing is crucial to surplus-value production because of the relative ease with which productivity increases can be made in this sector, mainly through the introduction of technology. Rising productivity enables the goods which the working class consumes — from food and clothes to cars and videos — to be produced in less labour-time. This leaves more of the worker's labour-time to be appropriated by the capitalist as surplus-value. Rising manufacturing productivity also cheapens the cost of machinery, which helps maintain profit rates.

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Employment in service industries may or may not be a source of surplus-value. The problem from the standpoint of capitalism is that productivity increases in service industries are difficult to achieve. In Britain productivity growth in hotels, catering and various personal services is only a sixth the rate for manufacturing. In effect, these industries contribute little to raising the rate of exploitation of the working class. The need to compensate for this explains why wage levels and conditions tend to be particularly harsh in service sectors.

The financial services sector has become the central source of profits for British capitalism in the eighties. Paradoxically, workers in the banking, insurance and finance sector yield no surplus-value. Financial services involve managing paper assets (money, stocks and bonds) which constitute claims on values produced by productive labour elsewhere. These bits of paper have no intrinsic value; shuffling them around the world — one of the City of London's main functions — can't create any new value either. The profits in the financial sector represent a deduction from the surplus-value created in the productive sector of the world economy. When the pace of these financial operations slows down the City will cease to be the jewel of the British economy. More importantly British capitalists will have little to fall back on. This is what the October stock market crash heralds for British capital.

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The decline of manufacturing and the expansion of the City show the parasitic character of British capitalism today. With its manufacturing base decimated and the bottom falling out of the coupon-clipping business, there is nowhere left to hide.

THE USA STILL BACKS ISRAEL BECAUSE...

'IT'S CHEAPER THAN THE SIXTH FLEET'

Despite its criticisms of Israeli tactics in the occupied territories, Washington remains the main force backing the repressive Zionist state. Daniel Nassim explains

Israel's brutal clampdown on the Palestinians has led to sharp criticism from its closest ally. For the first time since Reagan took office the USA is condemning Israeli tactics in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. The White House has issued a statement against Israel's 'harsh security measures and excessive use of live ammunition'.

SNUG

The Reagan administration has had snug relations with Israel in the past. Between late 1980 and the end of 1987, the USA vetoed 14 United Nations resolutions which it considered to be anti-Israeli. Yet last month the USA abstained on a UN resolution deploring the 'killing and wounding of defenceless Palestinian civilians', and this month Washington even supported a resolution calling on the Zionist state not to deport Palestinians.

Despite appearances there is no fundamental shift in US policy.

George Shultz, the US secretary of state, underlined this point in a statement after the UN vote against deportations. He said the USA was upset by the upsurge in the West Bank and Gaza — but not that upset:

'The US regards its friendship with Israel as a key and unshakeable relationship. No one should misinterpret a vote as meaning anything else. In fact, I suppose the ability to differ occasionally with a friend shows the depth of that friendship.' (*Jerusalem Post*, 8 January)

While Shultz was smoothing relations with words the US congress was speaking even louder with money. Israel already gets $3 billion a year from the USA, far more than any other American ally. Now a refinancing agreement on Israel's debt will mean an extra $2 billion hand-out to the Zionist state. Since Israel's Jewish population is only about 3.5m, this adds up to an American subsidy of well over $1000 for every man, woman and child.

PRIVILEGED

To clear up any doubts about the US commitment to the Zionist state, Washington is also beefing up the Israeli military machine which has murdered more than 70 Palestinians in recent weeks. A special $180m US grant to develop an anti-missile defence system marks Israel's entry into the Star Wars programme. The Reagan administration has also signed a 10-year agreement granting Israel non-Nato ally status. This gives the Israeli military industry privileged access to the US market.

All of this American aid to Israel is not motivated by altruism. In Reaganspeak the Israeli state is a 'strategic asset' for the USA.

In return for its dollars and political support Washington gets an ally that can be relied upon to counter any anti-Western developments in the Middle East.

American politicians know that Israel is unlike any of their other allies in the Middle East. The Israeli state was imposed on Palestine after the Second World War with the backing of the Western powers. Its existence denies the Palestinians their right to self-determination. Thus, Israel will always generate hostility in the Arab world. To counter the continuous Palestinian threat to its survival, Israel must rely on the continued support of the USA. Any challenge to Western interests in the region is therefore a threat to Israel, and Washington knows that the Israelis will wade in on its side against the Arabs. President Richard Nixon captured the essence of the US-Israeli relationship in the seventies. When asked why Washington continued to prop up the Zionist state, he replied that it was cheaper than sending in the sixth fleet.



AMERICA'S LOCAL BOOTBOYS: ISRAELI SOLDIERS AT WORK

In return for political and economic support, Israel has loyally countered threats to Western interests in the region.

- In 1956 Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt after Nasser, the Arab state's radical leader, ordered the nationalisation of the Suez canal. Israel's desire to crush the Palestinians in Gaza fitted in well with Anglo-French resentment at Nasser nationalising 'their canal'. The USA was upset at Israel and the Europeans acting without its permission, and soon forced the three aggressors to withdraw. But the uncharacteristic rift was quickly smoothed over and Washington resumed its alliance with Israel against the Arab world.
- In 1967 Israel crushed the armies of the surrounding Arab states in the Six Day War. The war enabled Israel to extend its control over the Palestinians by occupying the West Bank and Gaza, while battering the aspirations and image of the radical Arab leaders. After 1967 Washington threw its full weight behind the victorious Israelis, and Israel came to rely on the USA, rather than the other Western powers, for its survival.
- In 1978 and again in 1982 Israel invaded southern Lebanon. Israel's main concern both times was to push the Palestinians even further from its borders. It also wanted to maintain what was left of the sectarian Lebanese state. Israel's invasions provided the pretext first for the entry of UN forces and then a 'Multi-National Force' including US, French, Italian and British troops.

Israel stands as a constant reminder to its Arab neighbours of the risks they run if they try to oppose the USA. Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian leaders know that if they do not deal with anti-Western unrest in their countries, there is always a threat that Israel will move in. Israel also provides a convenient focus for the anger of ordinary Arabs which can distract attention from the USA itself.

Despite Israel's loyal service to the USA their relationship can be strained, as recent events confirm. Israel's immediate concern is always to find ways of dealing with the threat from the Arab world. In particular Israel must counter the danger posed by Palestinians fighting for their freedom.

Washington recognises the value of Israel's special role, but has far broader concerns in the Middle East. The USA must try to maintain good relations with the Gulf states and the other main Arab regimes. Israeli aggression can sometimes threaten Washington's wider interests in the Arab world.

The US condemnation of Israel's deportation policy earlier this month was prompted by messages from Washington's closest Arab allies — Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. They warned the Reagan regime that unrest in the occupied territories could damage their ability to cooperate with the USA. The Irangate revelations about secret US arms deals with Iran have already severely strained America's relations with conservative Arab leaders. Washington is now especially keen to keep on the right side of its Arab allies.

The US authorities need to keep up a delicate balancing act to maintain good relations with Israel and the Arab regimes, and sometimes to play the two off against each other.

This is reflected in the tension between the Arab and pro-Israeli lobbies in Washington. Israel's supporters in the USA claim that the interests of the Zionist state are always in danger of being overwhelmed by superior Arab wealth and lobbying power. Zionists point to the state department, the American equivalent of the foreign office, which has more than 20 desks dealing with Arab states and only one for Israel. They bitterly oppose arms sales to the Arab states.

The argument that Washington is dictated to by the Arab states has little credibility. The USA still wields far more economic, political and military might than all of the Arab states combined. Washington's close relations with Israel are themselves an indication of the weakness of the Arab lobby.

FAVOURITISM

The view that the 'Jewish lobby' in America runs US policy in the Middle East might appear more credible. The 50 000-strong American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is among the most efficient lobbying organisations in the USA. In his recent book, *They Dare to Speak Out*, former Republican congressman Paul Findley outlines a popular interpretation of US foreign policy, which has made the book a best-seller among Palestinian sympathisers: 'It is no overstatement', he declares on the first page, 'to say that AIPAC has effectively gained control of virtually all of Capitol Hill's action on Middle East policy.' Things may look that way to Findley, who lost an election after AIPAC launched a campaign against his mildly anti-Israeli views. But in reality, the US government calls the important shots in its relations with Israel.

Washington's favouritism towards Israel is not a result of 'Jewish voting power'. The USA gives enormous privileges to Israel because it knows the Zionist state is a reliable ally. While Arab rulers may vacillate when they come under pressure from their own people, Israel has no such problems with conducting a staunch defence of Western interests.

The ability of the USA and Israel to disagree openly while remaining such firm allies is, as George Shultz says, an indication of the closeness of their relationship.

America's need to consider broader regional and global factors means there is always room for conflict with Israel's narrower concerns. But the vastly superior US economic, political and military weight ensures that it is the dominant partner in the relationship.

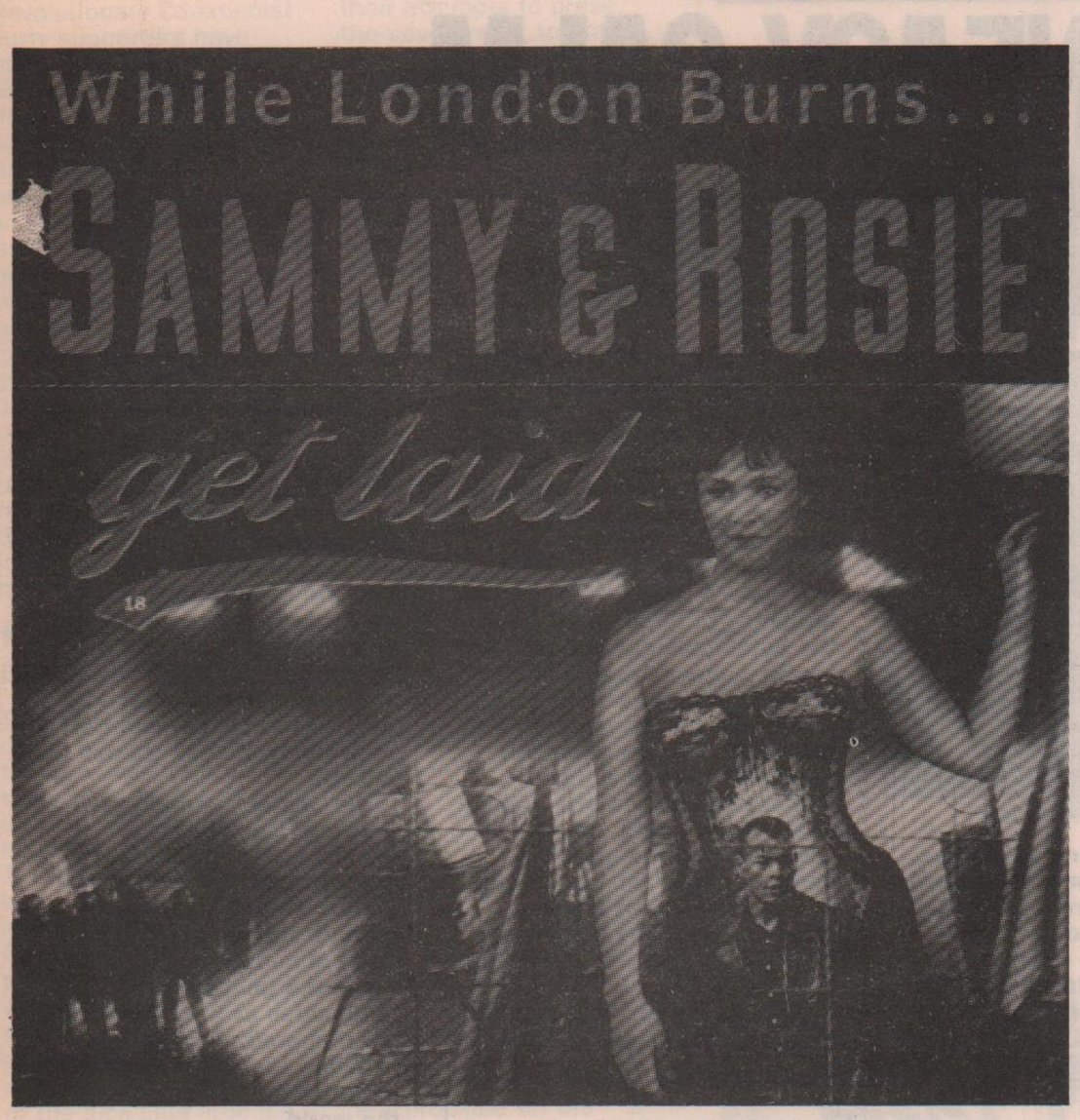
Criticising Israel is a convenient way for the USA to minimise its own embarrassment at the unrest in the West Bank and Gaza. The UN provides a conveniently powerless forum in which Washington can sound concerned about the plight of the Palestinians. Meanwhile, every Israeli soldier terrorising the Palestinian people is fed, clothed and armed with generous helpings of US dollars.

Pandora Anderson



Pandora Anderson

THOUSANDS MARCHED IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIANS IN LONDON LAST WEEK



◆ ANOTHER FILM ON THATCHER'S BRITAIN

SAMMY AND ROSIE GET DEMORALISED

Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, **Stephen Frears (Director)**

Writer Hanif Kureishi and director Stephen Frears, the team that hit the jackpot with *My Beautiful Laundrette*, are not going to have it so easy with their new film. First, they had to endure the ludicrously ignorant abuse of Oxford historian Norman Stone on the 'rancidly provincial', 'disgusting', 'worthless and insulting', nature of their work. Apparently Professor Stone (and the *Sunday Times* leader writers) object to 'depressing' films, 'messy' plots and most of all unrepresentative views of little England. With complaints of this calibre Kureishi was already congratulating himself, but now most of the serious critics have dismissed *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* with the condescension they usually reserve for the one after the promising debut.

***Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* is a restless meditation on the problems of everyday life for a bunch of deracinated people living in 'a decaying Europe' (as one of the characters puts it) which you and I recognise as Notting Hill. Sammy (Ayub Khan Din) is a freelancing, alternative sort of accountant of Pakistani extraction and his English wife Rosie (Frances Barber), a social worker of middle class extraction who is not yet entirely numbed by the exigencies of her work and play. Their open relationship, already under strain, is thrown into crisis by the arrival of Rafi (Shashi Kapoor), Sammy's father, a once prominent (and still wealthy) Pakistani politician who it transpires was responsible for considerable repression and torture. Ties of family and friendship, self-interest and political conscience are soon entangled and strained.**

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This highly dissatisfied trio have no firm bearings or values on which they can rely. Rafi is the hardest case. He can only buy his son's affection, but even so his daughter-in-law rejects him. He wanders through a riot-torn London which bears no resemblance to the England he knew long ago, failing to rekindle an elegantly fading old flame, Alice (Claire Bloom), and finding real friendship only in an enigmatic black nomad, Danny (Roland Gift) who picks him up along the way. The hard pragmatism which has served Rafi in the past is no use to him now; but then Sammy and Rosie's 'freedom with commitment' and Alice's 'loyalty and honesty' have failed them too. Danny is the only person who can handle it, the only person who looks as if he belongs in this thankless inner city, and it is he who expresses the shrewdest understanding of the situation.

This is a much superior film to *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which for all its brio and wit also inclined to the glib and whimsical. Those tendencies are not entirely absent from Sammy and Rosie, but this is a more serious and dyspeptic work. Critics who complain of the riots, the police brutality, the evictions, etc, as being a trivialised backdrop misunderstand their function. For the characters these are public events, part of the fabric of their social life, exerting their pressures just as much as Margaret Thatcher's gloating speeches. For the most part, however, they are not experienced directly but rather as spectacle and background, upon which they have no immediate purchase. The point is made most sardonically as they stroll through the riot as if invisible — or as if the police and rioters are waiting for them to move on before resuming battle.

The quickfire succession of scenes, public and private, and the brisk use of stylised chunks of dialogue or surreal fancies (such as the ghostly ex-victim who now ferries Rafi to his new underworld) work well. There is a wealth of surface detail but little enough to get a grip on, but that is the problem facing Sammy, Rosie and Rafi too as they struggle to survive and, if they can, do right by themselves and those around them. There are some dud and heavy-handed scenes and some clichéd images (such as the ragged troupe of busker/hippies) but the film does not lose sight of the main problems, for which credit is also due to the actors, especially Frances Barber and Shashi Kapoor.

To be sure, Kureishi has nothing to offer his benighted characters other than the old refuge of personal and sexual relationships. Sensual physical contact looms large as the only relief the film has available, and it ends with a desperate hug. Yet when the characters get laid, it is so patently an unsatisfactory climax in any sense that it is entirely appropriate for the whole business to be sent up as it is with the cheeky use of a triple split screen.

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This is a bleak film, a study in demoralisation which in many ways is demoralised itself. Being neither a social worker nor a politician Kureishi is obviously not in the business of making helpful recommendations, but it is difficult not to feel from this graphic account of bewildered impotence that he is as transfixed as his characters by their intense personal preoccupations. Should I leave my husband? Should I hate my father on account of his political misdeeds? Important problems no doubt, but there is more to life than that, even (perhaps especially) for three people adrift in Notting Hill.

Pat Ford

◆ WOMEN'S LIBERATION FIVE YEARS ON

'A LOSS OF ANGER AND URGENCY'

Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell,
Sweet Freedom,
Blackwell, £5.95



The first edition of *Sweet Freedom* was hailed as a valuable history of the women's movement, and so it was. It traced, clearly and accurately, the development of the movement from the sixties on, and it dealt thoroughly with the position of women at work, in the family, in education and in the unions. This revised and updated edition provides further useful information on the social changes affecting women which have taken place since the book was first published in 1982. It also includes an account of 'the dramatic developments of the eighties': Greenham Common, the peace movement, miners' wives, black women's groups, reproductive rights controversies, women against sexual harassment, and the new women's committees.

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Not a lot has changed for the better since 1982, and much has changed for the worse. The authors document the continuing discrimination against women workers despite legal changes, the increasing burden of domestic work even for working women and the effects of government cuts in the welfare state, such as the growth in 'community care'.

Unfortunately, Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell haven't changed much either. They claim to have suffered a 'certain loss of anger and urgency', but in truth those qualities were also lacking in the first edition. And the central weakness remains: the failure to acknowledge that the explosion in energy, anger and ideas which characterised those early years never produced a serious strategy by which women might fight their oppression. The four demands of the Women's National Coordinating Committee in 1971 (Equal pay now, Equal education and job opportunities, Free contraception and abortion on demand, and Free 24-hour nurseries) provided an excellent basis for such a strategy, but there was never any coherent or consistent attempt to organise around them. Instead, middle class feminists like Coote and Campbell celebrated our very weakness, the diffuse nature of our ideas and organisation, as a positive virtue.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the movement barely touched the lives of working class women. The emphasis moved away from fighting for what the mass of women needed and on to personal politics, individual choice and stale old Labourism; a process well-exemplified in the shift from 'Free abortion on demand' to 'A woman's right to choose' to 'Defend the '67 Act'. The movement imploded amid sectarian bickering, and many of the fragments joined the Labour Party, in spirit if not in body.

Despite five more years evidence, Coote and Campbell are still trying to brazen out the fact that what they call 'one of the most important political developments of this century' has little to show for itself. To compensate, they exaggerate both the incidence and the influence of feminist ideas, as for example when they claim the fighting contribution of the miners' wives as 'an expression' of changes in consciousness, and irresponsibly overestimate the significance of this contribution for the advance of women generally. They brazen out too the surrender to the Labour Party of their much-vaunted autonomy, to a party which can find space for only one woman in its shadow cabinet. They recommend again, in suitably coy terms, that 'intervening in the politics of Labour' is the way 'to engage with power directly'.

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The authors sum up the project thus: 'The women's movement continued to embrace a variety of theoretical and practical approaches to understanding female subordination and asserting the power of women — with individuals and groups forming different kinds of alliances around different issues.' This evasive formulation is an attempt to mask the empty centre of the movement, and to deny the experience of confusion and retreat which so many women have felt. More importantly it is a denial of the urgency of starting to fight again around those first four demands for what we need.

Sara Hardy

REPORT FROM THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE

UNEASY CALM BEFORE THE STORM

The January meeting of the Revolutionary Communist Party's Political Committee discussed the current international situation and the balance of forces in Britain. Here we reprint a summary of the discussion

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A DECEPTIVE calm now prevails in the Western world. Despite last year's crash, the ruling classes are determined to keep up an attitude of 'business as usual'. Goverments are making a concerted attempt to talk up the prospects for the world economy. This hype has reached its most bizarre heights in Britain, where politicians and pundits still have the nerve to predict more 'economic miracles'.

Despite all of these assurances about prosperity ahead, the last few months have been marked by sharpening tensions in the world economy. There is now a greater awareness that an economic war among the major capitalist powers could break out at any time. The European press is full of pessimistic warnings about the future. Continental capitalists are publicly voicing their fear of being squeezed out by Japan and the USA. They are even debating the prospects for establishing a common Euro-currency to help fight their overseas rivals.

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Everybody now accepts that, until the US presidential elections in November, Washington is in no position to tackle its deep-seated economic problems. It would be political suicide for Reagan's Republicans to implement the unpopular austerity measures which US capitalism requires for its survival. This means that Japan and Europe will have to carry the extra economic burden of keeping the USA afloat. Reagan's inaction may help to create an impression of stability in the short term. But it also stores up bigger problems for the future. Time is a luxury that the US ruling class cannot afford. The longer it vacillates on the economic front, the more difficult it makes the job of maintaining some sort of equilibrium in the imperialist world.



IN LIMBO: REAGAN

Since the crash, competition between capitalists has become more intense and bitter. There is a new boom in takeover operations. Large cash-rich companies are buying up 'bargain' shares in competitors hit by the crash, as a prelude to taking them over. Survival is now seen as a question of cut-throat competition, and it is clear that the number of casualties will be high. In such circumstances, the next crash will not simply effect shareholders and bankers. More and more, such a crash threatens to have a knock-on effect on industry and production.

The perpetuation of a degree of economic calm is only made possible by the relative absence of open class conflict within Western nations like Britain. This continuing political stability has given the Tory government a breathing space to try to sort out its economic affairs.

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Political trends which we have often discussed in *tns* have been consolidated over the last few months. In Britain the Tories have experienced a decline in popularity, but the lack of an effective opposition means that they can carry on.

It is evident that the Thatcher government has lost its direction. It has no meaningful policies to offer its allies in the capitalist class, and its outwardly confident pronouncements have a hollow ring. The Tories have been put on the defensive over their handling of the health service. This issue can cause them problems in the short run. However, as long as Thatcher's difficulties are restricted to the NHS the Tories will be able to ride out the storm. The NHS has never been a Tory trump card. They can only be finally defeated if they are tackled on the issues where their strength lies — law and order, defence, etc.

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The break-up of the SDP/Liberal Alliance has become obvious to all. The farcical merger negotiations reveal the insubstantial base of these parties. The attempt to construct a non-class party makes no sense in a highly polarised society such as Britain. The political centre has proved to be an illusion in Thatcher's Britain.

Against this background, the paralysis of the Labour Party has become the most important feature of British politics. This paralysis is not a new phenomenon; what is new is the extent to which Labour has been marginalised. To all intents and purposes, Labour has ceased to be a focus of opposition even within the walls of parliament. It has failed entirely to take advantage of the demise of the Alliance. Labour has become a caricature of the Alliance with its attempt to become a policy-free listening party. Labour leader Neil Kinnock now sounds even more verbose and hollow than before, and carries less and less conviction with the electorate.

Labour has abandoned the role of parliamentary opposition to disgruntled Tory backbenchers and mavericks. Even Tory MPs were surprised by the ineffectiveness of the Labour frontbench in its response to the recent education Bill. In the end Tory rebels were publicly complaining of Labour's failure to fight Baker's Bill. Outside parliament, Labour plays even less of a role. It has allowed the medical establishment to lead the opposition to the Tories' health cuts. Elsewhere, Labour's slogan remains a simple one — 'retreat'.



Pandora Anderson

MORE VERBOSE: KINNOCK

A corollary of Labour's paralysis is its growing tendency to accommodate to the establishment and its media. Labour's main concern is not to offend, and to gain a reputation for pragmatism and respectability. Local Labour authorities are now busy implementing cuts and making deals with private industry. Labour's much-vaunted campaign against the poll tax in Scotland is just a press release filed away somewhere in the Walworth Road offices of its London HQ.

The Labour left has become invisible. The fiasco of John Prescott's aborted campaign for the deputy leadership is symptomatic of the left's malaise. There is now an undeniable crisis on the British left. This crisis shows itself above all at the level of ideas and political perspective. The old hand-me-down ideas of the past are proving less and less plausible with the passing of time. All that most of the British left can look forward to this year are reunion events to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of their golden hour in 1968.

The present period presents exciting possibilities for Marxists. Despite surface appearances, the capitalist system can only survive through the sharpening of its internal conflicts. Those who grasp the underlying tendencies at work, and who are prepared critically to examine the world, have the potential to influence events in the world.

The intellectual crisis of the left makes it more possible, and more important, to demonstrate the relevance of RCP politics and theory. The party must be ready to learn from its experiences and to study the prevailing trends, so that our ideas are adequate to resolve the crisis facing the working class. This must be a key element of our preparation for the coming economic recession and social crisis, which will engulf the capitalist world and decide the future of the working class in Britain and around the world.

LIVING MARXISM

Many people nowadays regard Marxism as a dry old dogma with little to offer in the present. **Living Marxism** is a series of discussions on current events and issues which aim to demonstrate that Marxist theory is an invaluable tool for understanding and analysing the world in which we live.

The Discussions are held on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm. The first series this year will cover the following topics:

9 February: What is imperialism?
16 February: Marxism and literature
23 February: The arms race and the problems of peace
1 March: Reform and revolution

The venue is the University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.
The tickets are £1.50 per session (£1 unwaged) or £4 (£2.50) for the course.

To order your tickets in advance and get a suggested reading list to help you make the most of the course, fill in the form and return it to **Wendy Ellis,** BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Or phone us on (01) 729 0414.

I would like ..... tickets for the whole course/session no .....

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HOW HEALTH WORKERS CAN WIN

AROUND the country Revolutionary Communist Party supporters have been mobilising support for industrial action in defence of wages and working conditions in the health service. Our objective is to rally the widest possible united action of nurses and other hospital workers to force the Tory government to pay up. As momentum gathers for all-out national action the political direction of the dispute becomes more and more important. Here are some of the arguments that have been coming up in the course of our intervention in the hospitals.

• 'Taking it out on the patients'

Thatcher and her ministers are stepping up the counter-attack against the nurses by arguing that industrial action can only injure hospital patients. The same argument is being pushed by the leaders of the Royal College of Nursing, the professional organisation with more than 250 000 members. This cynical appeal to the nurses' commitment to the care of the sick cuts little ice with hospital staff who daily witness the effects of government cuts on standards of healthcare. Everybody knows that the sick are dying because beds have been closed and operations postponed. Others are suffering because they do not get adequate care in hospital in understaffed wards or because they get discharged too early as a result of relentless cost-cutting.

The current wave of protests shows that nurses are defying the prejudice against industrial action which has helped to put them among Britain's lowest paid workers. The revolt against the no-strike policy of the Royal College of Nursing reveals a growing recognition that a professional lobby organisation is inadequate for nurses who need coordinated, hard-hitting action to win decent wages and working conditions.

The existing health service unions — Nupe and Cohse — have lost influence since their disastrous leadership of the 1982 dispute. Now is the time for members of these unions — including nurses, porters, cleaners, workers in the kitchens and laundries — to get together in the hospitals to organise joint action under the control of the rank and file. It is important that emergency cover is provided so that the Tories cannot seize on particular cases for propaganda advantage. Ordinary hospital workers know what is required to maintain a basic emergency service and they should not let anybody else interfere in organising it.

• 'Distracting attention from parliamentary manoeuvres'

Tory backbenchers who are critical of the government's health policies have urged nurses not to take industrial action, lest this distract attention from their attempts to press the government to make more funds available for the NHS. This argument has been echoed by Labour Party spokesman Robin Cook and, in more muffled tones, by Rodney Bickerstaffe, the Nupe general secretary. Both have taken an equivocal line in response to the upsurge of militancy, emphasising the virtues of their propaganda attack on the Tories in parliament and the media and expressing concern that adverse publicity about hospital strikes might hamper their subtle diplomacy.

Politicians and union leaders are given to making inflated assessments of their own influence in the world. What Cook and Bickerstaffe seem to forget is that the only reason why they are making speeches in parliament or appearing on television is that the nurses took strike action, first in Manchester, then in Scotland and then at hospitals around the country. The real situation is the exact reverse of the bureaucrats' prejudices. The only thing that puts any pressure on the government is industrial action and the manoeuvres of the politicians can only undermine the momentum that is building up in the hospitals.

• 'Save our NHS'

There are two distinct, though related, issues in the current controversy around the health service. The first is the effect of a decade of cuts, initiated by the last Labour government and stepped up by the Tories, on the quality of healthcare. While, as Thatcher never tires of saying, overall spending on the health service may have increased since 1979, this has fallen far behind the rising demand resulting from demographic factors and the need to replenish decaying buildings. The second issue is the living standards of workers in the health service, which includes some 500 000 low-paid ancillary workers as well as a similar number of nurses. Not only are wages poor, but many hospital workers endure long and unsocial hours in difficult conditions. The effect of the financial crisis is to intensify the burden of work and to end job satisfaction, leading to a chronic decline in morale.

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At present the resistance to the Tory government's health service policies is focused on the issue of declining standards of patient care. The impetus for the current wave of publicity about the inadequacy of facilities for heart surgery for children comes from the highest level of the medical profession. The royal colleges have got together to launch a high-profile campaign to embarrass the government into paying out more money for particular medical priorities. The doctors' campaign has given the green light to the nurses and the ancillary workers to take action against the government. They too have emphasised their concern, not merely to defend their own living standards, but to win more resources to improve standards in the health service.



NO TO PRIVATISATION, CERTAINLY, BUT NO TO IN-HOUSE TENDERS TOO

The danger of health workers emphasising their commitment to improving standards in the health service is that it makes them vulnerable to Tory attempts to improve standards at the expense of the wages and conditions of hospital workers. The government has made clear its interest in raising the efficiency of the health service and in exploring alternative sources of funding — such as private insurance and charity, which is already playing a vastly expanded role in popular areas such as children's heart and kidney surgery. Many senior doctors would be quite happy to go along with measures to improve funding for their specialities and for specialist nurses. Such measures would do nothing for the vast majority of nurses and hospital workers except to intensify sectional divisions and weaken unity even further.

If health workers are even to defend their existing wage levels they are going to have to emphasise that, however the Tories want to fund the health service, hospital workers must have decent pay and conditions. It is essential that nurses and other hospital workers do not allow their struggle for a living wage to be channelled into a debate about whether Nigel Lawson should cut taxes or increase health service spending. No matter how Lawson balances his budget, he and his colleagues will be trying to force workers in the health service to work even harder for even less money. The preoccupation of the royal colleges with their own spheres of medical expertise will provide no protection for the position of the nurses, the porters and all the rest. It is worth remembering that when the doctors were satisfied with their own position in the health service they were bitterly hostile to the attempts of hospital workers to improve their poverty-line wages through trade union organisation and action.

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At a time when everybody is declaring that the best way for health workers to defend their position is by proclaiming their commitment to patient care, it may not be popular to argue that we should put the interests of health workers to the fore. Of course we believe that the government should be forced to pay out more money to provide decent healthcare for everybody. But we must recognise that for 40 years, successive governments have exploited health workers' commitment to patient care to maintain some of the worst wages and conditions in the country. If we are to defend living standards in the health service against the ruthless Tories, we cannot afford to give any ground to the sentimental propaganda that has always undermined the unity and effectiveness of industrial action in the health service. Let the Tories and the royal colleges haggle about where the money comes from and we can concentrate on uniting our ranks against them.

• 'Stop privatisation'

In Scotland the main focus of militancy in the health service is the government's drive to push out domestic, catering and laundry services to private contractors. The first round of health service privatisation has already swept the hospitals in England and Wales. Since 1983 costs in these areas have been cut by 18 per cent, at the expense of thousands of jobs. Even worse than the effects of privatisation have been the consequences of the in-house tenders accepted under threat of privatisation in many health authorities. In these tenders health service managers, often with the cooperation of union officials, have drawn up schemes for running services with drastic cuts in jobs and changes in working conditions. In 1983 *tns* was the first paper to expose the complicity of the union officials in in-house tenders and RCP supporters were active in campaigning against them.

Workers in Scotland should be forewarned by the shameful record on privatisation of the health service unions in the rest of Britain. Scottish Nupe leader Ron Curran has pledged that his union will not cooperate in efficiency-saving or in preparing in-house tenders. This is a welcome stand which health workers must make sure that the union sticks to in every hospital. 'No to privatisation, No to in-house tenders' is the only slogan consistent with the interest of all health workers.

• Rank and file organisation

It is important that health workers do not allow militancy to be dissipated in fragmented 'days of action'. Union officials are already sponsoring limited actions on different days around the country, while some talk about a national strike on 'NHS day' in July. But we can't afford to wait for six months! We need some short, sharp, all-out industrial action *now*.

Workers in the health service have long suffered from sectional divisions, from the influence of professional organisations and prejudices and from ineffective trade unions. To pursue effective industrial action in the hospitals workers need to set up action committees that bring together nurses, ancillary and technical staff to organise joint action under the control of hospital staff — not managers, doctors or union officials. Such organisation can provide the basic units from which nationwide action can be coordinated and from which a united hospital workers' trade union can be built.

Mike Freeman

Anti-racist benefit for Workers Against Racism

WITH: POP, DICK AND HARRY, THE HIP FLASKS, THE BATS, THE BIG FUN CLUB

The Riverside, Newcastle
Thursday 11 February, 8pm
Tickets £1.50 or £2 on door

thenextstep

Sixteen years since Bloody Sunday

BRITISH TERROR BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Sixteen years ago, on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, British paratroopers shot dead 14 unarmed marchers in Derry. Today Britain terrorises Irish nationalists less publicly, through SAS executions in the dead of night and sessions inside Castlereagh torture centre. Below Derry nationalist Charlie McMenamin gives an insider's view of Castlereagh. Opposite his brother Frankie describes recent cases of British torture.

"CASTLEREAGH is the most notorious interrogation centre in occupied Ireland. Situated in a mainly Loyalist area of Belfast, it fits perfectly your interrogators' first and foremost purpose as part of your torture: ISOLATION! The only defence against this is to remain silent.

Looking at the place from the outside it looks just like any large police station. But behind all the false impressions and — more to the point — behind the main building surrounded by a brick wall, fencing and barbed wire are the interrogation chambers. They are in a wooden-structured, two-storey building which consists of 30 cells for holding prisoners, both male and female, and about 20 interrogation rooms with no windows. You do not see daylight for the seven days you are likely to be held: CONFINEMENT! The only defence is to remain silent.

From the moment you are arrested every move you make is written down: how long you sleep, how much you eat, every time you go to the toilet or take a drink of water, blink your eyes or cough. They can tell within an hour whether or not you are a very strong or weak person, and depending on this outcome they decide best on how you should be interrogated. Your whole background and character are looked at to see what type of temperament you have: ANALYSED! The only defence against this is to remain silent.

Any person who might have the misfortune to be detained in this place will have, at the end of their stay, suffered some of the most degrading and humiliating talk and treatment. You will have been subjected to all the usual derogatory remarks about your family; for example, your mother's a woman of the street, your father goes to bed with your sister, etc: HUMILIATION! The only defence against this is to remain silent.

Threats on your life and that of members of your family are common. Large numbers of interrogators gather outside your cell and make threats about how they are going to beat you up if you refuse to speak. They will slap you about the head to try to confuse you, bend your fingers back, pull your hair, punch your privates and make you stand for long periods. Each interview lasts no less than four hours; now and again they put their coats over the video cameras that are supposed to be there to monitor the interrogations. Needless to say, they serve no purpose whatsoever. In the past they have been known to bring guns into the interrogations to scare people into making statements: FEAR! The only defence against this is to remain silent.

People can become very confused during interrogations, even to the extent that the torturers can take over their minds. They use the hard man, soft man technique. One Branch man will tell you that he is only there to help you, and he won't let any of the rest of them abuse you, he'll get you out and home, etc. Then another one will come bursting in and start slapping you about, shouting at you, telling you your mother is dead because of you and so on. This is repeated every couple of hours. People have been known to become so scared and confused that the Branch had them down on all fours and barking like a dog or begging for mercy. One man was strangled to death by his interrogators in Castlereagh and others have tried to commit suicide: DISORIENTATION! The only defence against this is to remain silent.

When a person is put through all this they get to worrying about their family and friends. Your mind becomes clouded, your thoughts crowded. You get to a stage where all you can think about is what might happen next: ANXIETY! The only defence against this is to remain silent.

All this amounts to nothing less than torture. It happens day in, day out to people as young as 14 or as old as 60. The aim of the incarceration in Castlereagh is to take people away from their normal environment, detached from friends and society, usually for seven days, dehumanise them, break the will and spirit of the prisoner. The one and only defence against all of this is for the person to use their right to remain silent all the time."

This Saturday we have the chance to speak out against British terror in Ireland. On the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, we will be marching against the British occupation of the North of Ireland, and all of the brutality that it involves. We will be marching to show our support for the fight for Irish freedom. TROOPS OUT NOW! SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE!

RALLY

Speakers: Mick Hume and Derry activist

7.30pm Friday 29 January, Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19 (Archway tube)

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

MARCH

Saturday 30 January

Assemble 12.30 Whittington Park, Holloway Road London N19

DERRY VICTIMS

IN the past few weeks the Royal Ulster Constabulary has lifted about 30 people in Derry, and taken them to Castlereagh holding centre in Belfast or Strand Road barracks in Derry for long bouts of interrogation and abuse. This level of harassment is 'normal', but the ill-treatment is getting worse.

- ***Jim Meenan*** **from the Bogside was heading into town with his baby daughter a week last Saturday when he was stopped by the RUC and taken to Strand Road station. While he was still holding his daughter three RUC officers began to punch and kick him until the young girl became hysterical. Meenan was separated from the baby and dragged into a cell, where he was subjected to further physical and mental abuse. His captors insulted his family and cracked jokes about IRA volunteers killed by the security forces. Meenan was held until Monday afternoon. The RUC offered him money to turn informer. He refused and was released without charge.**

- ***Arthur Forbes*** **from Strabane was arrested by the RUC two days before Meenan and held in Strand Road barracks, where he was tortured during interrogations. 'I was poked and slapped in the face, and they kept accusing me of carrying out a blast bomb attack in the centre of the town.' The RUC accused Forbes of being an IRA member, and told him that his brother who was arrested at the same time had turned informer. 'They kept hitting and striking me throughout the interviews. The last interview was the worst because five RUC men gathered round and started calling me a "murdering terrorist". Forbes spent five days in hospital on an oxygen tank with a burst ear drum and other injuries.**

- ***Paul Caruana*** **from the Creggan has been waiting three and a half years to take the RUC to court for the torture he underwent in Castlereagh. In August 1984 he was arrested and held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which allows seven days' detention without charge. He was beaten constantly for two and a half days. 'I was slapped about, punched, kicked, spat upon, black bags put over my head to stop me breathing. They gave me every kind of beating, like being spread on the floor and them jumping on me. You name it, they did it. They held my mouth open, spat in my mouth and closed it. Then they put plastic bags over my head.' The RUC threatened Caruana's life, before despatching him to hospital. This month his case came up in court, only to be thrown out by the judge who ruled that the doctors were lying, and Caruana's injuries had been self-inflicted.**