VICTORY TO THE PALESTINIANS!

SEE PAGE 6

tns
the next step - 5

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PRINCESS ANNE JOINS ANTI-GAY WITCH-HUNT — page 2

REAGAN GUNS FOR NICARAGUA — page 4

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly | 5 February 1988 | 40p

BRITISH INJUSTICE

Case No.1

THE ARMAGH SIX: SHOOT-TO-KILL COVER-UP

In 1982 they were shot dead in cold blood by a Royal Ulster Constabulary assassination squad. In 1984 judges acquitted the police killers and praised them for their marksmanship. Last Monday Tory attorney general Patrick Mayhew announced that, although he knew there had been a cover-up, there would be no more prosecutions.



EUGENE TOMAN



SEAN BURNS



GERVAIS McKERR



SEAMUS GREW



RODDY CARROLL



MICHAEL TIGHE

Verdict: The British security forces can kill any Irish person with impunity.

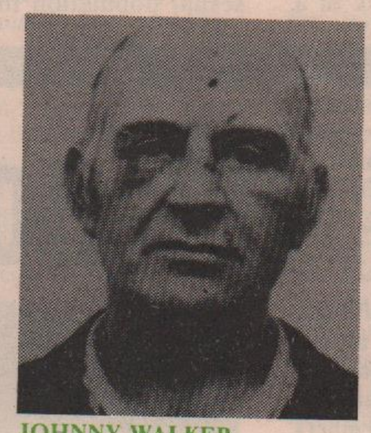
Case No.2

THE BIRMINGHAM SIX: COURTROOM FRAME-UP

In 1974 they were accused of the Birmingham pub bombings and police beat them into inventing 'confessions'. In 1975 these made-up statements and false forensic 'evidence' were used to sentence them to life imprisonment. Last Thursday Lord Justice Lane ignored all the facts and threw out their appeal.



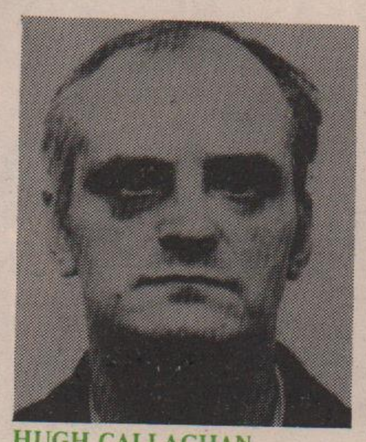
PATRICK HILL



JOHNNY WALKER



GERRY HUNTER



HUGH CALLAGHAN



RICHARD McILKENNY



BILLY POWER

Verdict: The British courts consider that being Irish is crime enough to condemn anybody to rot in jail.

FOR THE FULL STORY, TURN TO PAGES 8 AND 9



EDWINA CURRIE THANKS HRH FOR GIVING THE ROYAL ASSENT TO TORY BIGOTRY

THE AIDS PANIC IN CONFERENCE

PRINCESS ANNE POINTS THE FINGER

Princess Anne shocked the Aids establishment last week. She told a conference of health ministers from 148 countries in London that Aids was a classic 'own goal' by humanity. She claimed that 'the real tragedy is the innocent victims' such as the recipients of contaminated blood and the babies of infected mothers.

The Princess Royal's remarks outraged representatives of Aids organisations such as the Terrence Higgins Trust. The distinction she drew between those who acquired HIV infection through transfusions or in the womb, who deserve public sympathy, and the large majority of sufferers who became infected through homosexual activity or drug abuse, who were implicitly condemned as guilty victims, is indeed offensive. But by grossly exaggerating the risk of a heterosexual epidemic in Britain and evading the anti-homosexual thrust of the Aids panic, British Aids campaigners have opened the way for the sort of prejudice expounded by the princess.

Promoting fears of the more widespread dissemination of Aids in the West by heterosexual contact was a key theme of last week's conference.

Dr Jonathan Mann, director of the Aids programme at the World Health Organisation which sponsored the conference, admitted that Aids had so far been largely confined to homosexuals and intravenous drug users. However, he insisted that 'it would gradually permeate the heterosexual population.'

As we reported in *tns* two weeks ago, there is little evidence of HIV infection permeating the heterosexual population in the USA or Britain. Dr Harold Jaffe of the Centers of Disease Control told an international conference on Aids last June that 'for most people, the risk of Aids is essentially zero. Is the disease going to sweep into the heterosexual population like Africa? I don't see it.' The proportion of heterosexual cases of Aids in the USA declined between 1986 and 1987, from 6.8 per cent to 4.3 per cent.

In Britain, heterosexual spread is even more rare than in the USA. Up to the end of 1987 the total number of cases of Aids acquired by heterosexual contact in Britain was nine, though there were another 35 who contracted the disease abroad, mainly in Africa. The proportion of identified HIV positive individuals who appeared to have become infected through heterosexual contact remains less than five per cent.

Aids campaigners often believe that exaggerating the dangers of heterosexual transmission is a good way of putting more pressure on governments to allocate more resources for research into Aids and for the care and treatment of its sufferers. Princess Anne's statement shows the dangers of this tactic. Aids is already widely regarded as a disease of gay men and drug addicts. Raising the spectre of a major heterosexual epidemic is not only unjustified, it can only encourage anti-gay prejudice.

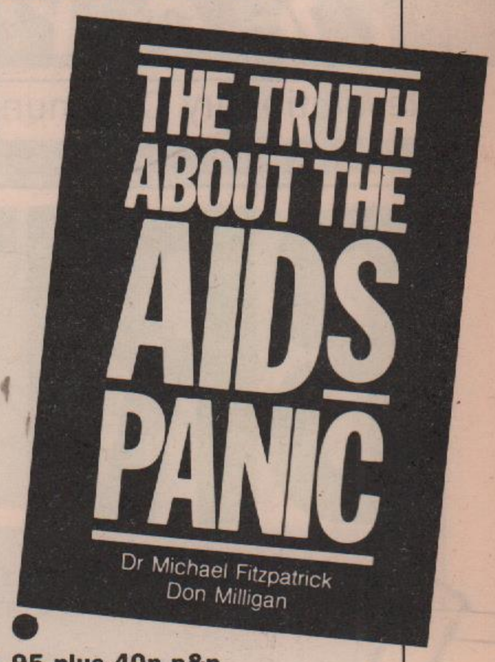
The fact that Aids organisations which originate in the gay scene have downplayed the issue of homosexual rights in response to the Aids panic, creates greater scope for the backlash.

The London Aids conference concluded with the statement that 'Aids is global problem that poses a serious threat to humanity.' This was less offensive than the princess's opening remarks, but it fails to put Aids into a proper perspective. In parts of the third world, especially Africa, Aids is undoubtedly a real threat to all life. However, as a recent Unicef poster observes, 'more people have died from diarrhoeal dehydration in the last two days than have died from Aids in the previous two years,' and asks, 'when is the world going to panic about it?' The biggest contribution that people in the West could make to tackling the health problems caused by Aids and gastro-enteritis is to challenge the domination of Western imperialism over countries in Africa and elsewhere.

ATOMISING

In Britain, Aids is a serious threat to gay men and intravenous drug abusers. We should demand that the government spends more on research and treatment for Aids sufferers. At the same time we should recognise that the government's 'education' campaigns around Aids are entirely ineffective in preventing its spread. They are, however, useful in promoting the ideology of conventional family values and in encouraging a national preoccupation with condoms and other aspects of sexual relationships. While repudiating this atomising and demoralising propaganda, we should redouble our efforts in the fight for equal rights for lesbians and gay men and thus help to remove the oppressive conditions which encourage the spread of Aids among the people who make up 90 per cent of its victims.

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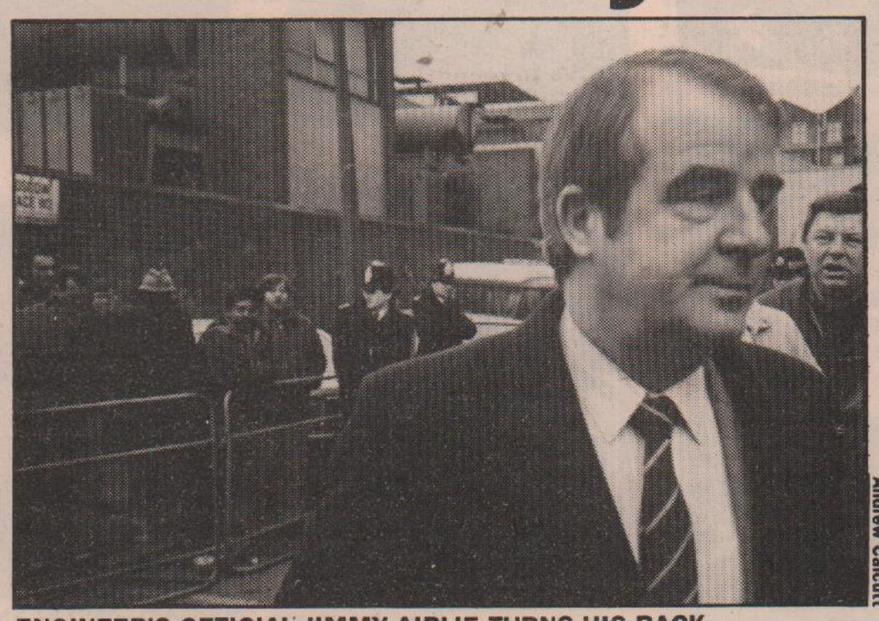
FORD STRIKE CALLED OFF, BUT...

It's not over yet

On Sunday night union officials cancelled plans for an all-out strike by Ford manual workers, and signed a three-year deal which will make their members sweat.

'I'm choked. We were livid when we found out they'd asked for further negotiations. They told us it was just a public relations exercise. But when they were still in there at 2.30pm, we knew it was more than that. I went home to wait for news of a sell-out.'

Gerry is one of 30 shop stewards from the Ford plant at Dagenham, East London, who lobbied Sunday's pay-talks between management and manual union leaders. Outside Ford headquarters in Bayswater the stewards called on their national officials to stick to '10 per cent and no strings', and back-up their demands by bringing out 32 500 hourly-paid workers at 22 Ford plants from midnight on Sunday. But union leaders overturned a ballot majority of nearly 90 per cent for strike action, and accepted a three-year deal for seven per cent in the first year, followed by pay rises of 2.5 per cent above inflation for each of the following two.



Andrew Calcutt

ENGINEER'S OFFICIAL JIMMY AIRLIE TURNS HIS BACK

Union leaders Jimmy Airlie and Mick Murphy, and Ford industrial relations director John Hougham described the deal as a 'historic achievement'. For Ford workers, it is disastrous. Apart from tying down pay for three years, its measures include an increase in job flexibility, the introduction of 'team leaders' and quality circles. It adds up to 'Japanese-style' high-pressure management. The agreement allows for work practices to be adjusted locally, with access to a national negotiating body 'in the event of difficulty'. Union chiefs tried to pass this off as a concession. But it is a gift to management, which can now play off one plant against another.

Ford workers were due to vote on the deal on Wednesday. As we go to press the result is still to be announced. Some plant convenors and most stewards are opposing it, but national union officials have put their full weight behind acceptance. Even if Ford workers vote to accept the deal, however, it won't be the end of the story. Workers at Dagenham have already endured a series of punishing speed-ups, and some will be driven to retaliate against management's latest offensive.

'I put on the doors and tighten the screws on 32 Sierras an hour' said one assembly-line worker in the body plant. 'The only break I get is when somebody else refuses overtime. "Efficiency, efficiency" is all you hear from management. First they tied us to a two-year deal, now it's three years. Soon they'll be coming with a contract for life, with a no-strike clause at the end of it. I'm ready to fight against measures like that.'

DISRUPTION

A series of unofficial walkouts has already led to the loss of 30 000 cars since October. On Monday the maintenance section defied union instructions to work-as-normal. Workers walked out when management told them to carry out another section's work. This kind of disruption is likely to continue. But management can handle it, as long as the action remains sporadic. Last week managers in Dagenham's paint trim and assembly plant suspended 18 workers for going to a union meeting which overran break-time by five minutes. When their fellow workers came out in support, management told them to stay out. Hougham and his lieutenants knew they were in the driving seat.

Management will keep the upper hand as long as workers put their trust in outdated union methods. Murphy's bluff-and-talk tactics are based on the idea that workers can expect a living wage and decent conditions when the company is making a comfortable profit. This approach may have brought concessions in the seventies when the car industry was coining it. But not today.

In 1988 Ford has the biggest market share in British car sales. But management is determined to squeeze every last penny out of the workforce. This is to make up for the low productivity of plants like Dagenham, which run on outdated technology. The handful of robots which Ford is installing won't compensate for the fact that some machines have been in use since the plant was built in the thirties. Nissan's hi-tech plant in the North-east has intensified the competition. Ford managers know they can stay in the running only by screwing profits out of the workforce.

BITTER

Ford workers are furious about the 'money-grabbing methods' of their employers. The paltry £150 they got for accepting cashless pay last year still rankles. They feel equally bitter about Sunday's sell-out by union officials. Yet along with Hougham, Murphy and Airlie, many Ford workers share the idea that their wages and conditions are measured against company profits. When Ford managers point out that continued profitability depends on their employees accepting low pay and appalling conditions, Ford workers have no arguments to use in reply.

There is a way for Ford workers to make their anger count. They must start by adopting the attitude that their needs are all-important and the company's profits count for nothing. Ford activists must take control from union officials who only want to keep their seats at the negotiating table, and organise their own campaign to fight for a living wage and decent conditions. Every plant in Britain should be involved in a coordinated plan of action, based on the recognition that the employers must be made to pay for what we need, regardless of how much it costs them.

Andrew Calcutt

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly No 5 Editor: Mick Hume

DON'T LISTEN TO LABOUR

THE Labour Party has become a sort of early warning system for the British establishment. Each time the Tories announce a particularly unpopular measure — like the poll tax or a block on increased funding for the NHS — Labour spokesmen step forward to tell the trade unionists and others on the receiving end not to take any militant action against the government.

In the past, once working class protests were getting off the ground, the Labour leadership would often stage some token display of support designed to monopolise the movement and keep it safely under Labour's control. Now, however, Neil Kinnock's leadership clique is trying to anticipate possible outbreaks of future trouble, and seeking to kill off resistance to the Tories before it even starts.

The Labour leaders' attitude to the current dispute in the health service shows how far they have shifted over the past few years, under pressure from the Tories. Nurses have long been the group of workers for whom Labour shows most public sympathy. The party has always been much happier depicting nurses as harmless 'angels' who deserve sympathy, than standing alongside traditionally militant workers like the miners. Yet Kinnock has been even faster to tell nurses not to strike than he was to condemn striking miners four years ago.

◆

In 1984 Kinnock maintained an embarrassed silence for as long as possible, and waited until thousands of miners had clashed with riot police, before branding the strikers as thugs and telling them to give in. This time, however, it only took a 24-hour stoppage by one shift of nurses at a single Manchester hospital before Labour spokesman Jack Straw was warning nurses against going on strike. After last week's discussion of the health dispute by Labour's National Executive Committee, party leaders felt that their priority was to reassure the press that they were only supporting 'protests' and not strikes by health workers. 'Industrial action' was never a favourite expression in Labour's leadership circle. But it has now become a dirty word which should not pass the lips of Labour politicians.

The Labour leadership is playing a similar role in other social struggles today, cracking down before militants have even made a move. In local government, for example, English Labour councils which were once fond of making left-wing gestures are now largely going along with government-imposed spending cuts. Scottish councils are following suit and setting up the machinery needed to impose the Tory poll tax. But this has not stopped Kinnock launching a pre-emptive strike against the possibility that there might be trouble ahead. Thus he used the weekend's local government conference in Scotland to lambast 'loony left' councils again, just in case anybody was thinking of standing up to the Tory spending cuts. He also declared non-payment of the poll tax out of the question — a full 15 months before any Scot will have the opportunity of refusing to pay (see opposite).

◆

The open hostility which Labour now displays to any hint of active resistance confirms that it is set on a course away from the working class. The 'Labour listens' initiative, which kicked off last week in Brighton, is a mindless exercise in portraying the party as an empty vessel waiting to be filled with the thoughts of the middle classes. It is not long since another political party tried a similar approach to courting public opinion. That one was called 'Ask the Alliance'. The inauspicious end of the project it sought to promote, in the farcical and fractious SDP/Liberal merger of recent weeks, shows the impossibility of building a classless party of the middle ground in polarised Britain. Yet Kinnock is determined to follow the Alliance down the road to political oblivion, and is renewing the campaign against the left as his next step.

◆

Labour's anti-working class behaviour reflects much more than a simple policy decision. It is a declaration of where the party now stands in the struggles of British society. There could be no better illustration of the need for a new political leadership entirely independent of Labour. Yet the best the established left can offer us is the possibility that Tony Benn will run against Kinnock at the Labour conference, making a doomed challenge for the leadership of a dead party on a platform of old-fashioned Labour platitudes which bear little relation to the harsh reality of political conflicts today.

We should take a warning of our own from Labour's attempt to alert the establishment to the struggles ahead. If resistance to the Tory offensive is to be more than token, it will need to be directed by those who are not afraid to struggle against the system. And we will need to ignore the orders of those who tell us to surrender before the battle begins.

CLAUSE 28

AS we go to press, the Tory Local Government Bill is being debated in the house of lords. Clause 28 of the bill, which seeks to ban 'the promotion of homosexuality', is a charter for further persecution of lesbians and gay men, which we need to tear up from corner to corner. The official opposition to Clause 28, however, is focused on the need to amend it slightly and protect the arts from censorship. Even if the Tories accepted such an amendment, and announced that the works of Oscar Wilde could remain on library shelves, Clause 28 would have achieved its central purpose — to endorse the status of ordinary lesbians and gays as 'sinners' against whom society must be protected.

The present witch-hunt against homosexuals cannot be fought by appealing to the authorities to recognise the artistic worth of books, plays or films by or about homosexuals. Nor should we invest any faith in proposed amendments to Clause 28 which might make it easier for local authorities to claim that their 'promotion of homosexuality' was not 'intentional'. These objections all accept the premise that it is illegitimate to argue for full equality for lesbians and gays. That concession gives the government, the police and the freelance bigots a stick with which to beat homosexuals out of British society. It is a concession we are not prepared to make. Our demand — and the only one capable of countering the reactionary climate — is for the full decriminalisation of homosexuality.



Pandora Anderson

KINNOCK TELLS SCOTLAND...

'WE WON'T FIGHT POLL TAX'

The Labour Party will not fight the Tory poll tax. But don't take our word for it. Labour leader Neil Kinnock stamped on the idea of a campaign for non-payment of the poll tax at the local government conference in Edinburgh last weekend. 'I do not think non-payment is a feasible option,' said Kinnock. 'It's a counsel of despair. Fruitless.'

For Scottish people facing the imposition of this punitive measure from April 1989, Kinnock's submission to the poll tax a year in advance is the true counsel of despair.

The Labour leadership claimed that non-payment was a non-starter because 'not many people would actually refuse to pay'. This amounts to blaming ordinary people for Labour's own refusal to challenge the Tory tax. Successive polls have proved that there is overwhelming opposition to the community charge and plenty of people ready to fight it.

Kinnock argued that a campaign of civil disobedience which flouted the law would play into the Tories' hands by diverting attention from the 'deliberate injustice' of the poll tax. Sheffield MP David Blunkett agreed that a middle way could be found between illegality and abandoning protest. Labour deputy leader Roy Hattersley indicated what this meant when he suggested that Labour councils could drag their feet on preparation for registration and collection, in the hope that the legislation would be emasculated in the house of lords.

FALTER

Urging councils to take their time imposing the tax and telling people to lobby the house of lords is the sum total of Labour's anti-poll tax campaign. Kinnock declared that opposition was so strong that the legislation could still 'falter and fail' before the April 1989 deadline. Even if the poll tax did get passed, he reasoned, it could end up so 'puny and unrecognisable' that it would be easy for a future Labour government to uproot. This approach means asking people to put their faith in Tory wets to amend the poll tax, and to pray for the highly unlikely return of a Labour government some time in the distant future.

Kinnock's up-front attack on those advocating a campaign of non-payment and non-implementation is in keeping with the rightward trajectory of Labour's policy on local government.

The Edinburgh conference told Labour councillors faced with forcing through massive cuts in jobs and services to stay in power and stay within the Tory law. Even the soft-left Labour Coordinating Committee published a pamphlet for the conference telling the left to 'grow up' and get on with passing on the cuts.

FORWARD

Surely now it must be obvious to left wingers who want to fight the poll tax and the cuts that the Labour Party cannot be a vehicle for defending the working class. There is no point lobbying the law-abiding leadership, as the left did in Edinburgh last week, to have a change of heart. Breaking with Kinnock's 'counsel of despair', and organising meaningful resistance among the council workers expected to implement the poll tax and local communities who have to pay it, offers the only way forward.

Those who want to help build such a movement can come to the next meeting of the Smash the Poll Tax Campaign, on Saturday 20 February at 2.30pm, Partick Burgh Halls, Burgh Hall Road, Glasgow, or write to SPTC at PH8 340 West Princess Street, Glasgow.

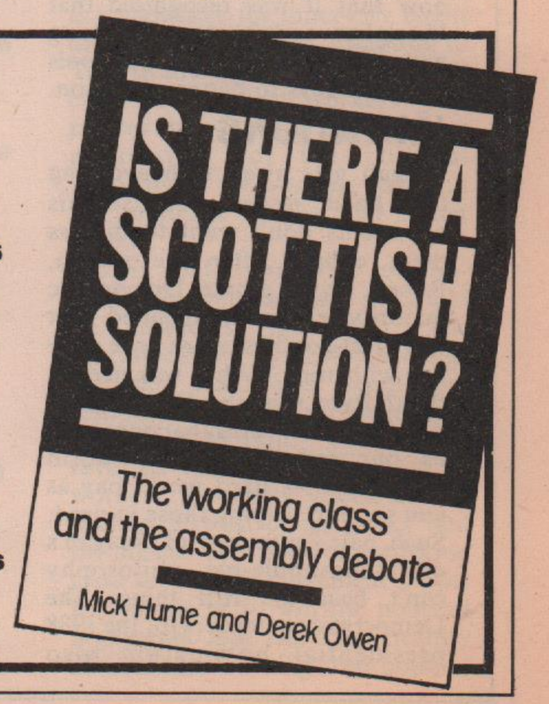
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'STATE OF THE UNION' ADDRESS

THOUGHTS OF A LAME DUCK



OLD HAM, OLD SPEECH: REAGAN

The striking feature of Ronald Reagan's last 'State of the Union' address was his failure to mention the parlous state of the Union's economy and international status

President Reagan beamed like an old ham given an honorary Oscar last week, as he got a standing ovation from a joint session of the two houses of congress before his final 'State of the Union' address. Even Jim Wright, Democratic speaker of the house and one of Reagan's leading opponents, got caught up in the heady atmosphere, shouting 'They love ya, Mr President!' over an open-air microphone that was not meant to be switched on. Reagan responded to this nauseous display of nostalgia for the golden days of his presidency by dusting off an old script and reading a familiar speech to millions of American TV viewers.

RAPTUROUS

Reagan began by announcing that he did not wish to be considered a lame duck. All he had to offer, however, was tired rhetoric about 'the values, principles and ideas that made America great'. Nevertheless, he had to pause several times for rapturous applause. 'In this chamber tonight,' said Reagan, 'there are no Republicans, no Democrats, just Americans.'

The fact that they were American politicians facing their greatest crisis since the Second World War seemed to slip everybody's mind.

What about the October stock market crash, the faltering dollar, the yawning trade deficit? They were not mentioned. How about Irangate, arms-for-hostages, illegal funds to the Contras? Not a word. Reagan may have dropped his initial plan to talk about launching a US mission to Mars. But his rose-tinted view of events is already several worlds away from the reality of America's decline.

Reagan did discuss the record budget deficit, but only to blame congress for making the budget process too complicated for him. He even tried to explain cuts in education spending as a sign of the strength of American values; the cuts were a product of 'no longer having an obsession with dollars' now that it was recognised that 'discipline and hard work' along with parental control over schools were the keys to better education.

IMITATIONS

Reagan gets away with avoiding the hard issues because his opponents don't want to discuss them either. After the speech, Robert Byrd, senate Democratic majority leader, complained that 'the "feel-good" slogans have gone flat with time.' What was needed then? Byrd said the USA had to 'face the hard truths that once gave us our self-reliance and world leadership' — hard work, pay as you go, and helping those in need. Such pale imitations of Reagan's mom-and-apple-pie philosophy can't beat the real thing. The Democratic contenders for the 1988 presidential nomination also prefer to speak in vague terms, lest they alienate voters with threats of austerity, as dreary Democratic candidate Walter Mondale did in his 1984 contest with Reagan.

Reagan's speech centred on a matter he has made his own — the family.

Like his friend Thatcher, Reagan has responded to economic trouble by moving quickly on to the ideological high ground. He referred to the family as 'the very support system the poor need most to lift themselves out of poverty.' As part of his plan to have the poor look to themselves, Reagan went out of his way to let everyone know of his desire to keep women trapped in the home, through an attack on abortion rights. And he couldn't resist mentioning how important Nancy's phoney war on drugs was in maintaining 'family values'. Behind the flattery for the First Lady lies an attempt to make millions of other American women pay the price for the impending recession.

Three quarters of Reagan's address was devoted to home affairs, and even his statements on foreign policy were entirely for domestic consumption. Prime emphasis was placed on Nicaragua, since it is 'so near our borders'. Reagan extolled the 'freedom fighters', his Contras, for forcing some concessions out of the Sandinistas. Upping the rhetoric over Nicaragua is a useful device for Reagan in putting his 'anti-communist crusade' back on top of the political agenda and placating the right wing of his Republican Party, who see the recent Intermediate Nuclear Forces accord with Gorbachev as a sell-out.

PUPPETS

Reagan faces as much pressure from his own party over signing away Euromissiles as he does from the Democrats over the funding of the Contras. But Senator Jesse Helms and the rest of the hardliners needn't worry about their president turning into a peacenik. For all his blather about ending the nuclear threat, another passage in Reagan's speech gives a better indication of what he has in mind: 'Of all our accomplishments, none can give us more satisfaction than knowing that our young people are again proud to wear our country's uniform.'

Circus acts like the 'State of the Union' address worry some in the US establishment.

The *Wall Street Journal* complained that Reagan's talk about local government 'can't fulfil the US world responsibility for political leadership'. Reagan's address confirms that his lame duck government is paralysed, with no intention of tackling its economic problems. The Republican Party will not allow Reagan to impose austerity measures, which US capitalism requires to stay alive, because it knows this would finish off presidential candidates George Bush and Robert Dole. Until the November election for his successor, Reagan can only look to Japan and Germany to keep the US economy ticking over, keep up a stream of platitudes about American values, and hope that the recession holds off until he is safely back on his California ranch.

James Malone

NICARAGUA ON THE RACK

REAGAN'S LAST VICTIM?



NICARAGUAN CONTRAS

As the US congress votes on another round of funding for the Contra terrorists, the pressure of events is forcing the Nicaraguan regime into a corner.

The recent summit meeting of five Central American presidents in San Jose, Costa Rica looked like being the usual stalemate. The five were trying to get some movement into the Arias peace plan for Central America and, as usual, Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega took most of the blame for the lack of progress towards peace. But at the eleventh hour Ortega surprised his critics and offered major concessions to his opponents.

The Sandinista leader agreed for the first time to hold face-to-face talks with the Contra guerrillas; to release all political prisoners once a ceasefire had begun; and to lift the five-year state of emergency in the country. Ortega's concessions are a major about-turn. Some observers saw them as a shrewd gamble designed to undermine Reagan's appeal for a new round of funding to the Contras. The US congress votes on renewed Contra aid on Thursday 4 February and Reagan has indeed reduced the amount requested to $36m from an expected $100m. But in reality Ortega's concessions are a setback for Nicaragua, forced on him by external pressure and the lack of international support.

BLATHER

Reagan has already got most of what he wants in Nicaragua. Ortega previously refused to talk to Reagan's Contra puppets, and demanded instead direct talks with Washington. But US economic pressure and the drawn-out war of attrition have driven the Sandinista regime to a point where it is prepared to make major concessions.

Reagan may have objected to being upstaged by the original Arias peace plan, but he has made good use of the breathing space provided by the negotiations. Following the unilateral Sandinista ceasefire which was part of the Arias plan, the CIA stepped up arms drops and in late December the Contras launched an offensive against radar facilities, mines and coastal targets.

HEEL

Reagan wasn't impressed by Ortega's concessions. A White House statement confirmed that the president would persist in requesting aid for the Contras, noting that 'pressure by the Nicaragua resistance is what brought the Sandinistas to the negotiating table.' The reduced amount of aid requested by Reagan suggests that America believes a little more pressure will bring Ortega to heel, given the enormous political and economic problems now facing Nicaragua. A permanent US blockade has ruined the economy, with inflation running at 1000 per cent and 1987 export earnings only half that of 1980. As Ortega was announcing his concessions in San Jose, electricity rationing went into effect and petrol was in short supply.

WANING

Even if the US congress decides to freeze further spending on arms for the Contras, Nicaragua faces growing internal upheaval. Given the sharp policy turns of the recent period and the depth of the economic crisis, support for the regime is waning. Taking advantage of the end of the state of emergency and the restoration of the right to strike, anti-Sandinista trade unions plan to organise strikes and protests against government-imposed wage-limits.

HOMESPUN

In a desperate search for friends to prevent the Arias plan becoming a noose for the Sandinista government, Ortega last week paid a flying visit to Spain. He hoped to persuade EEC countries to put pressure on the United States. Instead he got an EEC statement calling for the USA to give 'constructive support' to the Arias plan and some homespun advice from Spanish Socialist premier Gonzales on how to democratise Nicaragua.

Reagan might claim that Nicaragua is a Soviet satellite, but the Sandinistas can expect no help from Moscow. When Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze paid the first visit by a senior Russian official to Central America in more than a decade, he conspicuously avoided Nicaragua. Moscow even briefly suspended what little military aid it gives to the Sandinistas last summer, in protest at their initial refusal to cooperate with the president Arias. The Soviets are eager not to identify too closely with Nicaragua's plight so as not to damage their diplomatic links with larger countries in the region such as Mexico.

ISOLATION

Reagan recently boasted that he hoped to see the fall of the Sandinista regime before the end of his presidential term next January. The isolation of Nicaragua has played into his hands. There is a danger that with each new concession from the Sandinistas, the imperialists will simply up the stakes again and demand more. There has never been a more important time for us to show solidarity with the beleaguered Nicaraguans who Reagan has set up to be his last victims.

Russell Osborne

SUN READERS SAY

'I'M NOT A RACIST BUT...'

Last week the *Sun* published the results of a major survey of racist attitudes — Kenan Malik looks at the results and the reaction from anti-racists


Day Two of a vital Sun survey on racism —

BLACK LEADERS 'STIR UP' RACIAL HATRED

● The Sun has compiled the biggest-ever survey of racial attitudes in Britain—and today we present the final results of this important investigation.

● Independent pollsters from Audience Selection Ltd spent five weeks quizzing 4,000 adults, black and white, living in areas with high and low ethnic populations.

● Today we cover racism in the police, politics, home and work. NEIL WALLIS, SUE EVISON and MARK CHADBOURN report.

Loonies are condemned

MOST people in Britain believe black leaders are helping to stoke up the racial tensions they are supposed to fight.

Racist? Not us, says black cop

Extreme

Bigots lose out to Gary's love

WE NEVER GOT A CHANCE

TOMORROW: HELP ME FIGHT RACISM

In typical fashion the *Sun* headlined its two-day survey 'Blacks "Yes" to repatriation', 'Immigration must be curbed', and 'Black leaders stir up racial hatred'. No doubt the *Sun* weighted its questions to encourage a racist response, but even so the results give scant comfort to the gutter press racists.

There was a minority of bigots whose views fitted in with those of Murdoch's rag. Eighteen per cent thought that racism was not a problem, 21 per cent supported repatriation, 23 per cent objected to inter-racial marriages and to black MPs, and 24 per cent denied there was discrimination in the workplace.

STEREOTYPES

The bigots were outnumbered three to one by people who recognised the reality of racism: 67 per cent thought that racism was a serious problem in Britain and 61 per cent thought that employers discriminated against blacks. The majority rejected the anti-black stereotypes which the *Sun* cultivates. Six months ago the *Sun* wrote a scurrilous piece about rasta poet Benjamin Zephaniah, and demanded 'Would you let your daughter marry him?' The answer from the survey was 'Yes' — 58 per cent saw nothing wrong in inter-racial marriage. And 60 per cent opposed repatriation.

The survey also revealed a sizeable minority of anti-racists. More than one in four thought that racism was 'very serious' and 19 per cent rejected tighter immigration controls. What the *Sun* described as a 'very worrying number' — 33 per cent — thought that the police were racist.

The survey demolished some of the myths about working class attitudes to race held by both racists and the left.

It showed that most people do not regard themselves as racist, and many are sympathetic towards blacks who suffer overt racism. However, many people who opposed racist violence or repatriation still said that black immigrants were a problem for Britain. The survey confirmed that people's views on race are influenced, not by the extreme racism of rags like the *Sun*, but by the 'respectable racism' promoted by mainstream politicians.

While most people opposed discrimination, many blamed black people for creating racial tension. Thus, two thirds of those questioned supported tighter immigration controls. 'You don't try to put out a fire by throwing more wood — or petrol — on it, do you?' said one. The same number thought that black politicians were to blame for inflaming racism. These views reflect the sort of understated racism which has been instilled in British public opinion by all of the major political parties.

The Tories, Labour and the Alliance agree that immigration can contribute to rising unemployment and declining services. All of the main parties accept the need for immigration controls. By blaming black people for Britain's social problems, they encourage racist sentiment. The idea that immigration control is necessary to relieve these problems fuels anti-black feeling. Every time Neil Kinnock calls for 'firm but fair' controls, he reinforces the 'I'm not a racist but...' view that most people hold. If this is the message from the political parties, no matter how sympathetic workers might be to black people, it is unlikely that they will break free from conventional anti-immigrant prejudice.

The *Sun* survey confirms that if we want to win white workers to the cause of anti-racism, we have to discredit the view that black people are a threat to white workers' interests and that immigration controls are necessary.

We have to point out that immigration controls are at the *root* of racism: they turn blacks into second class citizens and target immigrants as the source of Britain's social problems. We have to show that *racism* is the threat to the working class: it assumes that British workers and British bosses have a common interest in uniting against the 'threat' from immigrant labour. The working class has nothing in common with its exploiters, and will never be able to unite against them if it shares the same political outlook as the bosses. On the other hand, the working class has every interest in lining up with black workers against the system that thrives on exploitation and oppression.

TIRADES

The official anti-racist movement has failed to tackle this political problem within the working class. Michael Day, the new head of the CRE, epitomised the approach of liberal anti-racism when he replied to the survey findings. He pleaded with *Sun* readers to ignore the 'loony left' who were 'damagingly overzealous' and to 'care more about racism'. Pleas about 'caring' will cut no ice with workers who think that the presence of too many black people is responsible for inner-city blight and the lack of jobs. Adapting to Tory tirades against the 'loony left' can only confirm workers' prejudices about anti-racism. Day was addressing not the political problems of the working class, but the prejudice of the *Sun* leader writers.

This defensive and accommodating approach will not build an anti-racist movement. The central task we face is to challenge the idea that black people are responsible for the problems of a declining Britain. The survey revealed that a large section of workers, especially youth, have a healthy distrust of the police and the bosses. The basis for a working class anti-racist movement exists. It is up to us to win the political arguments that can turn healthy distrust into working class politics.

ARMY BULLYING

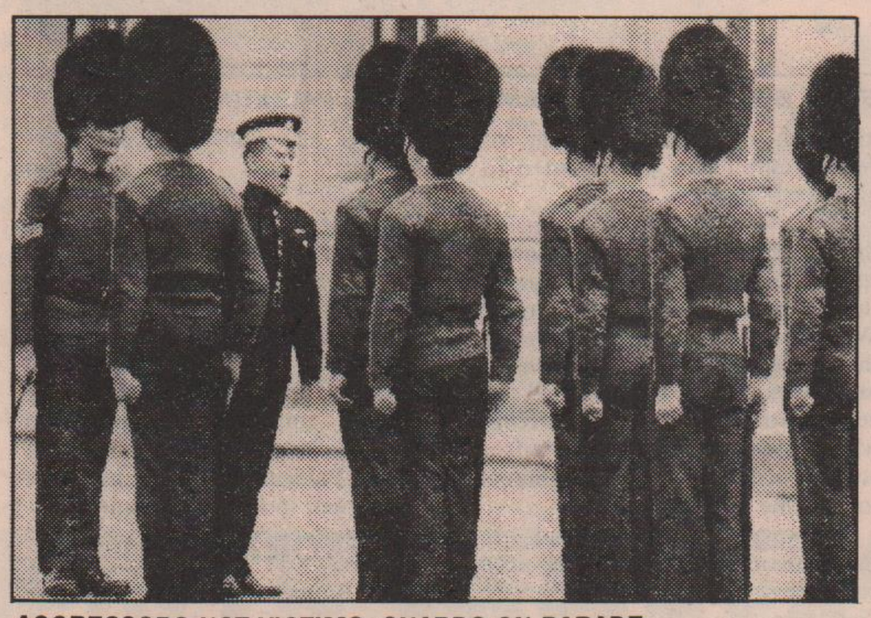
DON'T JOIN THE PROFESSIONAL SADISTS

THE defence ministry has announced plans to hire 50 extra welfare workers to counsel soldiers complaining of abuse by their colleagues. But despite their display of concern, the authorities still need to bully and brutalise recruits inside the army, to train them to terrorise people in the world outside.

'Major Ian Murray Granville Strong, then acting CO of the Royal Signals in West Germany, made no attempt to stop the humiliation of Lieutenant Ben Alexander. Military police later discovered why — the 39-year old major supplied the scissors used for the horrifying haircut.'(*Sun*, 16 November 1987)

Alexander's scalping by seven of his fellow officers last July is one of at least 100 incidents of bullying exposed since January 1986. Junior officers and squaddies have been choked by CS gas, half-drowned in rivers, branded with red-hot pokers, frog-marched barefoot over barbed wire, made to eat soap, drink urine, sit in baths full of shit, beaten with baseball bats, and had their groins shaved and boot-blacked with scrubbing brushes.

Army bullying is nothing new. For years recruits have undergone initiation ceremonies after volunteering to join the British army. The spate of complaints from outraged parents and the growing number of court cases have finally provoked government action. Besides additional welfare counsellors, junior minister of defence Roger Freeman announced a ban on initiation ceremonies.


AGGRESSORS NOT VICTIMS: GUARDS ON PARADE

The authorities' main concern, however, has been to excuse and cover-up all but the most excessive examples of brutality.

***The Times* set the tone last year, pointing out that the word 'brutality' was capable of misinterpretation and, since army life was 'not for the hypersensitive and shy', such abuse could be seen as 'no more than the hurly-burly of communal life'. Meanwhile, it warned its readers to remember that 'the army thrives on discipline'. *The Times* was concerned above all to draw a line. It wanted the military authorities to distinguish between disciplining and torturing the army's volunteers.**

Wherever the authorities decide to draw the line, the brutalisation of army recruits will continue. From time immemorial the basic training of civilians has been designed to accomplish what army bullying only endorses — the dehumunisation of the individual.

The objective of 'basic training' is to destroy any loyalties the individual recruit has outside of the army and its regiments. The army has to rely on the working class for its recruits. The bullying, the 'bull' and the square-bashing all help to instil the 'military spirit', and break the remaining links that these recruits have with their class. For all the talk about the modern army being sophisticated professionals who pride themselves on operating technologically complex weaponry, a soldier in today's army must still be able to kill the state's enemies on command. The reason why the army has open-plan latrines is not because they were designed by Sir Terence Conran. It is because the army high command recognises the need to eradicate the dignity and reserve of a normal human being to get them to kill to order.

Informal bullying in the barrack room has long played an important role in the army. That is why officers not only turn a blind eye to the bullying, but actively encourage it. They want to weed out the 'wimps' who have slipped through the official procedures and weld the rest together in the spirit of an elite force that has successfully endured suffering. In this so-called 'buddy' system, regular troops develop a loyalty only to their fellow comrades and will not hesitate to crush the enemy to save their mates.

The military authorities have no interest in doing anything about bullying. The present concern arises from the fear that the stories might affect recruitment. But this concern is tempered by the appreciation that there is no other alternative to motivate the troops.

No doubt many working class youths who join the army to gain a skill or get some adventure have suffered at the hands of the professional sadists. But we should not waste much time worrying about army bullying. Our concern must be to put a stop to the terror which every squaddie inflicts on the Irish and other opponents of the British authorities at home and abroad. The British army is a killing machine. Anybody who makes the mistake of volunteering for service can expect to get ground up in its cogs.

Jackie Reynolds

ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

YOU CAN'T SQUARE A CIRCLE

There can be no reconciliation between the aspirations of the Palestinian people and the survival of the Israeli state, argues

Daniel Nassim

The recent uprising in occupied Palestine has triggered a new round of international diplomacy. Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, one of the West's favourite Middle Eastern leaders, has just finished a grand tour of the Arab Gulf states, Europe and the USA. US secretary of state George Shultz met Palestinian leaders last week, and UN under secretary-general Marrack Goulding recently completed a tour of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following David Mellor's well-publicised trip.

GRANDIOSE

Every time there is unrest in Palestine or the surrounding countries Western politicians and diplomats are despatched with grandiose schemes to 'solve' the conflict. This year Tory minister David Mellor set the pace with a call for some form of self-determination for the Palestinians. Just after Israel's last invasion of Lebanon in 1982, both the Arab summit at Fez and Ronald Reagan both talked of the need to recognise Palestinian rights. Throughout the history of the conflict in Palestine countless noble-sounding peace plans have been floated.

The problem with all these schemes, however, is that they accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel.

There are certainly differences in emphasis and presentation. Arab leaders generally talk of an independent state in the whole of the area occupied by Israel in 1967. The USA and Britain are usually keen for King Hussein of Jordan to play a part in establishing an autonomous Palestinian region in the West Bank and Gaza. In recent years European leaders have suggested alternatives which fall somewhere between the Arab and Anglo-American positions.

LEGITIMACY

All these schemes, either implicitly or explicitly, include guarantees for Israel's security. The EEC Venice declaration of 1980, for example, stresses that 'all of the countries in the area are entitled to live in peace within secure, recognised and guaranteed borders.' The 1982 Fez summit called on Israel to withdraw to its 1967 borders, thus acknowledging the legitimacy of the Zionist state.

But the Israeli state which was imposed on the area by the Western powers and established at the expense of the Palestinians can never live in peace.

Israel could not have come into existence without Western backing. Zionism — the belief that the establishment of a Jewish state is a solution to the Jewish question — began to grow with the rise of anti-semitism. European Jews gradually lost faith in the possibility of fighting anti-semitism and increasingly looked to the formation of a Zionist state as a solution. But without British help under the mandate and American patronage more recently, the Zionist movement would not have had the strength to establish or maintain such a state.

Britain and the USA were clear about the reasons for supporting Israel. The first British military governor of Palestine talked of the need to establish a 'little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism'. He meant that Jewish settlers from abroad would inevitably come into conflict with the indigenous population and would have to rely on outside support. America's emphasis on Israel as a 'strategic asset' is the modern-day equivalent of Britain's divide-and-rule tactics of old.



ISRAELI TERROR IS ENDEMIC IN A STATE BUILT ON THE OPPRESSION OF THE PALESTINIANS

OPPRESSION

One reason Western leaders can be so sure of Israel as a reliable ally is that it was built at the expense of the Palestinians. The formation of Israel was a blatant colonial project. It involved setting up an exclusive Jewish state on land inhabited by other people. The existence of Israel presupposes the denial of the democratic rights of the Palestinian people. Given that the Zionist state was built on the foundations of oppression, a clash between the Zionist usurpers and the Palestinian dispossessed was inevitable.

There can be no reconciliation between the preservation of the Zionist regime and the rights of the Palestinian people.

From the start the Zionist movement had to discriminate against Palestinians. The Histadrut, the Israeli conglomerate that combines much of the Israeli economy with a trade union department, was set up to exclude Palestinians from the labour market. The first activities of the General Confederation of Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel included organising pickets of Jewish employers who wanted to hire Arab workers.

Today Palestinians from inside the green line are shunted off into a special 'integration department' of the Histadrut. Workers from the West Bank and Gaza pay dues to the Histadrut but cannot become members. To this day the celebrated 'socialist' Kibbutzim, which are part of the Histadrut structure, do not allow Palestinians to become members.

In every sphere of social life Palestinians resident in the area controlled by Israel suffer severe discrimination. Palestinians face restrictions on Palestinian land ownership, poorer welfare benefits and are barred from large areas of the labour market for 'security reasons'. Palestinians also suffer systematic brutality, curfews and arbitrary arrest.

POLICED

The Palestinians who live outside the Zionist state are also denied democratic rights. For the Arab states surrounding Israel the Palestinian liberation struggle is a potentially destabilising force. Palestinians are heavily policed and generally segregated from the indigenous population. As long as the Palestinians are denied the right to national self-determination they will suffer discrimination wherever they are.

In Britain the Labour Party and much of the left express sympathy for the Palestinians' plight, but cannot suggest any clear solution.

An editorial in the Kinnockite *Tribune* newspaper admitted that Labour's soft left had been outflanked by the Tories on Palestine:

'*Tribune* does not often praise Tory ministers, and this editorial may not improve David Mellor's career prospects much. But he was absolutely right to react as he did on seeing the conditions which the Israelis impose on Palestinian refugees, and witnessing the abuse of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli military.' (8 January)

RHETORIC

Both Labour and the Tories talk of an ill-defined 'mutual recognition' between Israel and the Palestinians. If there is any difference between the two it is only in the sense that Labour has been a stauncher supporter of the Zionist state. While both support Israel's right to exist, the Tories have generally stressed the importance of good relations with the Arab regimes. Labour has argued that British interests are best served by cultivating closer links with Israel.

While Labour lets the Tories set the pace, the radical left uses socialist rhetoric to justify its acquiescence to Israeli oppression.

In common with Tory minister David Mellor, British radicals express revulsion at Israel's excesses. The left then goes on to use Marxist rhetoric to justify its support for Israel's existence.

Militant declared that 'the future of all workers in the area, Jewish and Arab, are inextricably linked together, and there can be peace for neither, without the right to self-determination for the other' (8 January). This amounts to calling for the impossible, by demanding guarantees for both the Israeli state and the rights of the Palestinians. In reality there can be no peace in the Middle East as long as Israel exists. It is the existence of a state based on the denial of Palestinian rights that has led to a permanent war situation in the region.

ABANDONMENT

Like *Militant,* another left-wing news sheet, *Socialist Organiser,* talks grandly of the need for a 'socialist federation of the Middle East'. Nobody could object to such a desirable ambition. Unfortunately *Socialist Organiser* goes even further than *Militant* in speculating about 'socialism' in the future, while supporting the existence of the Israeli state today: 'There are two nations, so we call for two states....No solution is possible that does not recognise the national rights of both peoples' (14 January). But there is no comparison between Israel's right to exist and the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Israel is an inherently oppressive state which helps to police the region on behalf of the West. The Palestinians are an oppressed people fighting for their freedom. The destruction of the Zionist state would be a giant step forward for the working class of the region and a precondition for a 'socialist Middle East'.

Trying to reconcile the existence of Israel with the rights of the Palestinians effectively means abandoning the Palestinians to their fate under the status quo.

Socialist Organiser betrays the shallowness of its understanding when its argues that because 'the Israeli right is dominant and very powerful' it 'will take a lot to win Palestinian demands for their own state'. Israel was established by the Zionist *left.* In the process 750 000 Palestinians were expelled from their land. In 1967 the Israeli Labour Party led the invasion of the West Bank and Gaza. Today a Labour defence minister, Yitzhak Rabin, enforces Israeli repression against the Palestinians.

PRECONDITION

Zionist oppression of the Palestinians is not a policy option. The security of Israel depends on brutally suppressing the Palestinian threat to its existence. Israel has only survived the past 40 years through full-scale militarisation of society. Virtually every able-bodied man and many women are in the army.

Stripped of rhetoric there is little difference between Western diplomacy on Palestine and the left's formulas for peace. All make gestures towards Palestinian 'self-determination', all project a peaceful solution into the future, yet all accept Israel's right to exist.

For us self-determination for the Palestinians can only be achieved with the destruction of the Israeli state. Only then can the Palestinians have the right to determine their future. This is the precondition for peace and an end to the permanent state of war in the Middle East.

LESBIAN AND GAY ANGER



Pandora Anderson

ON 9 January in Whitehall the political nonsense of Gay Pride finally gave way to gay anger. The thousands of lesbians and gay men who marched in London were a demonstration of our determination not to be driven back into the closet by the Thatcher regime. But if we are honest we must recognise that it was also a demonstration of our isolation.

Where were the Labour parties and the trade unions who have paper policies on lesbian and gay rights? Where were the miners, print workers, black people and others who have felt the lash of state repression?

Lesbians and gays are being led by people whose strategy amounts to marching us to the top of the hill, reading us the cast list of *EastEnders*, then marching us down again to await a miracle in the house of lords. If Clause 28 really was the work of a few well-placed loony bigots then a bit of public pressure and some manoeuvres in parliament might have a chance. But you have to be extremely naive or dishonest not to notice that Clause 28 is one part of a sustained state-sponsored political offensive which includes the Aids panic, new immigration laws, Alton's Bill, the Broadwater Farm showtrials, etc.

Jill Knight, David Wilshire and Margaret Thatcher are without doubt ignorant, prejudiced and malicious. But that is not why we face this attack. The crumbling system that they run needs to keep a potentially rebellious population divided against itself by appealing to deep-seated prejudices. For the authorities, scapegoating blacks and homosexuals is simply a necessity.

In this situation, the outraged respectability displayed by our 'leaders' is positively grotesque. The Stop Clause 28 Campaign with all its talk of human rights, tolerance and amendments, is putting us on a road to nowhere. As Don Milligan rightly points out (*tns*, 15 January), unless we can break out of our isolation and enlist the support of the wider working class, straight and gay, we cannot prevent our criminalisation let alone achieve our liberation. Lesbians and gays wake up! Don't waste your anger!

Anthony
Nottingham

LAMBETH: RESIGNED TO REDUNDANCIES

OUR Nalgo leadership has decided that it's useless to fight against cuts imposed by Lambeth Labour council, and that we should recognise that the Tories are the ones to blame. A recent mass meeting of council workers assented to the leadership's approach, giving the go-ahead for branch officials to sit down with the council and sell our jobs down the drain.

I'm not surprised that most people are resigned to doing nothing. While our jobs were in the balance, local Nalgo leaders passed paper motions and patted us on the back. When council leader Linda Bellos gave 90 days' notice of compulsory redundancies, they organised a one-day token strike.

Yet there was a positive side to the mass meeting. Most people backed a call for industrial action in support of 71 vehicle engineers locked out by the council. The vote showed that council workers still want to fight. But most will opt for 'new realism' as long as there is no left-wing alternative on offer.

Lambeth council temporary worker

ARGENTINA AND THE WEST

ANDY CLARKSON argues (*tns*, 29 January) that 'Britain's victory in 1982 served to strengthen the hold of the Western powers over Argentina.' During the Malvinas War you also claimed that victory for the Argentine military would be the best result for the working class there. I did not agree then, and I still do not.

As a refugee from that part of the world, I hold no brief for Thatcher's task force. But if the generals had not been defeated by the British in 1982, their position would have been strengthened, to the detriment of Argentinian people.

I can understand you wanting to belittle Britain's outdated imperial adventure in the South Atlantic. But, whoever was responsible for the introduction of democracy in 1983, surely it is to be preferred to dictatorship? Didn't Lenin write that democracy provides the best conditions with which to expose capitalism?

Carlos
Birmingham

PALESTINE: BLAME BRITAIN

I WAS shocked by the brutality used by Israeli troops against unarmed Palestinians. They have indiscriminately shot into crowds of young Palestinians and killed them. They even attacked mosques with tear gas and, when the Palestinians fled outside, they were harshly beaten.

Many Palestinians have been accused of taking part in anti-Israeli protests, and dragged before a military court where Israeli officers hand out punishment on little or no evidence. Palestinians are being deported from their homeland when their only crime was protesting against the Israeli occupation.

It's time that people in the West opened their eyes, instead of listening to the government telling lies to cover up for Israel. David Mellor, a junior minister in the present government, has voiced his condemnation of the treatment of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. But British governments are to blame for the squalor which Palestinians are forced to live in. It was they who helped to give the Palestinians' homeland away to create a Zionist state.

Tony Benson
HM Prison Frankland

SCARGILL: NO SOLUTION

I THINK Dave from Cotgrave pit is wrong to see Scargill as the only future for the miners (letters, 22 January). Our call for a vote for Scargill in the NUM presidential election was based on the threat that Walsh poses to the miners, and nothing else.

Walsh has stated that he wants to return to the good old days of negotiations. Meanwhile British Coal has made it clear that it is not interested in talks unless they are about flexible working. With the odds stacked in the board's favour since the end of the strike, any move towards negotiated compromise can only mean that miners will lose out.

Scargill says he is against Walsh's 'talks at any price'. But he still sees negotiations as the way forward, with some form of limited industrial action as a back-up. In his pre-election speech at the Kellingley social club, Scargill said 'the problem is that the coal board won't talk.' This begs the question: if the board is only interested in talking to the NUM about six-day working, why bother to talk at all?


Pandora Anderson

Ted Horton, director of the South Yorkshire coalfield, made British Coal's intentions clear by issuing warning letters to 11 men from Bentley colliery involved in spreading the recent dispute across the Doncaster area. The board means to crush any opposition to their drive for profitability by next year. We need to be just as ruthless in re-building the NUM based on the sort of action led by the Bentley men.

Dave Burroughs
Wakefield

HEALTH WORKERS' PROBLEMS

I WORK at Pendlebury Children's Hospital which is facing £300 000 cuts as part of a £1m cuts programme due to be implemented in Salford. Inspired by the strike at North Manchester General, hospital workers and local people came together to form an action committee for this area. But we immediately had problems with the 'share out the misery' syndrome. There were people arguing that Pendlebury should take precedence over the local psychiatric hospital. Somebody even suggested 'children not drug addicts' as a slogan for our campaign. If we're going to get anywhere we've got to get one thing straight: we want a decent health service for all, and decent pay and working conditions for all the people who work in it. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that some of us are more 'deserving' than others.

Nupe member
Pendlebury Hospital

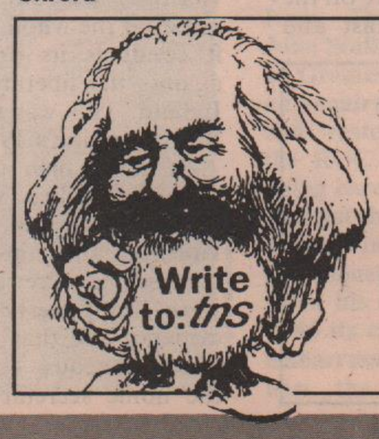
AS a student nurse I joined the Royal College of Nursing because it was the only organisation I knew about. I left it to join Nupe during the 1982 strike, because I opposed the RCN's no-strike position. This time round, I get the feeling that many RCN members support our action although most will not leave the wards except during their breaks. Their confusion has brought home to me the importance of being in a union which includes all sorts of health workers, rather than a professional organisation exclusively for nurses.

Nupe steward
John Radcliffe Hospital
Oxford

OVER 200 nurses attended a joint RCN, Nupe and Cohse meeting at Guy's Hospital, South London. Speakers from the floor displayed anger and determination as well as indecision and moral qualms about strike action. Numerous questions arose about 'emergency cover'. When the chair took the views of union representatives, both the RCN and Nupe gave no-strike positions. The 'protest' tactics they put forward were virtually indistinguishable. With only Cohse opposing, an indecisive vote was inevitable.

Although this meeting left people confused, there is still plenty of opportunity to get things going. Further meetings have been organised about revoking the RCN's no-strike clause and about organising for 3 February and afterwards. These are all new departures for nurses.

Russell
Guy's Hospital



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

IRISH ONLY SO

On Saturday 1000 Irish Freedom Movement supporters joined the Bloody Sunday commemoration march in London, in the week when two cases confirmed that Britain remains the force for violence and oppression in Ireland. Joan Phillips reports



Pandora Anderson

The Crossmaglen Patriots from Wishaw, Scotland, on the march last week

THE BIRMINGHAM SIX VERDICT

GUILTY OF BEING BORN IRISH

Last Thursday three high court judges rejected the appeal of the Birmingham Six against their convictions for the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings. The six Irishmen, who have endured 13 years of solitude in prison and are set to serve the rest of their days inside, are captives of a judicial system which brands all Irish people as potential terrorists.

On 21 November 1974, bombs planted by the IRA exploded in two Birmingham pubs, killing 21 people and injuring 162, many severely. Paddy Hill, Hugh Callaghan, Johnny Walker, Richard McIlkenny, Gerry Hunter and Billy Power were arrested within hours of the blasts and were soon convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The case against the Birmingham Six has long been seen as suspect by anybody who has looked critically at the evidence.

They were convicted on the basis of confessions which were subsequently withdrawn, and forensic evidence which has since been discredited. When the six defendants appeared in court covered in cuts and bruises after their interrogation by the police it was obvious to everybody except the British judiciary that they had been beaten into signing confessions. Expert witnesses soon came forward to demonstrate that smoking or playing cards — activities in which the men engaged before their arrest — would have given a positive result in the tests conducted by forensic scientist Frank Skuse. In 1986 journalist Chris Mullin, now a Labour MP, revealed that he had tracked down and interviewed the men who did organise and carry out the pub bombings, effectively demolishing the case against the Birmingham Six.

BEATINGS

The campaign against the men's convictions began almost as soon as the trial finished in August 1975. Three eminent judges turned down the men's appeal early in March 1976. In June of the same year the courts acquitted 14 prison officers of assault, although it was clear from the court appearances that the six sustained severe beatings in Winson Green prison. In 1977 the six began a civil action for injuries inflicted by the police. In 1980 the court of appeal, led by Lord Denning, the Master of the Rolls, upheld a police appeal for the civil action to be struck out as an abuse of process. In 1981 the house of lords confirmed Denning's judgement.

In October 1985 Granada Television's *World in Action* showed that new scientific tests contradict the forensic evidence which helped convict the six. Home secretary Douglas Hurd ordered an internal scientific inquiry. In 1986 Chris Mullin's book *Error of Judgement* deprived the Crown case of all credibility. In December the same year another *World in Action* programme featured former policeman Tom Clarke, confirming that the men were beaten up by the police. Hurd ordered a new police inquiry. In January last year Hurd referred the case back to the court of appeal; the appeal began in November and lasted a record six weeks.

After the first week of appeal it must have become apparent to all but the most bigoted observer that the Birmingham Six were framed.

SMEAR

After all this, why are the six still inside? In the aftermath of last week's judgement against the men, commentators agonised about whether or not the police and courts had conspired against the accused. But there was never any need for a conspiracy. The conviction of the Birmingham Six must be seen in the context of a sustained campaign by the British establishment to smear the Irish liberation struggle and criminalise Irish opponents of British rule. Only this can explain why six Irishmen who had no involvement in the IRA's military campaign have been caged for life.

The Birmingham bombings were the culmination of a republican bombing campaign in Britain which began in 1972 and lasted almost three years, leaving nearly 50 people dead. The bombings were a desperate attempt to take the pressure off the nationalist areas of Belfast and Derry, where British military rule was at its height of savagery. In the period of the bombing campaign in Britain, nearly 1000 people were killed in the war in Ireland. The British establishment responded to the republican bombings by stepping up anti-Irish hysteria to new levels of ferocity. The media promoted the now familiar stereotype of the fanatical IRA terrorist — evil, cunning and psychopathic — to the centre of public attention. No event played a more important role for the authorities in their campaign to brand every Irish man and woman as a potential terrorist than the Birmingham pub bombings.

CRIMINALISATION

Together, press and politicians whipped up anti-Irish prejudice to a fever-pitch, unleashing a wave of bigotry and violence against the Irish community in Britain. Within days the Labour government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act in one sitting of parliament. This draconian legislation had nothing to do with stopping bombings. It was to become the central weapon in the state's propaganda war against Irish nationalists. The government took advantage of the climate of chauvinist reaction over Birmingham to criminalise the fight for Irish freedom and depict every Irish person in Britain as a potential terrorist. By implication anybody who supported the struggle against British rule in Ireland was a terrorist sympathiser. The PTA provided the framework for constructing an anti-Irish consensus and suppressing opposition to the Irish War in Britain.

The British police, courts and politicians had no need to concoct a conspiracy to convict the Birmingham Six.

They had convinced the vast majority of the British people that any Irishman was fair game for a life-long stretch in prison. They had succeeded in spreading the lie that Irish freedom fighters were nothing more than blood-crazed criminals. The British establishment could not contemplate revoking the Birmingham convictions without calling into question the whole basis on which it conducts its propaganda war against the liberation struggle in Ireland. This was the meaning of Lord Denning's 1980 judgement:

'If the six men win, it will mean that the police were guilty of perjury, that they were guilty of violence and threats, that the confessions were involuntary and were improperly admitted in evidence and that the convictions were erroneous. That would mean the home secretary would either have to recommend they be pardoned or would have to remit the case to the court of appeal. This is such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say: "It cannot be right that these actions should go any further." '

In other words the Birmingham Six will go on rotting in jail to maintain the fiction that British justice has been done against a criminal threat from the Irish people. This too was the meaning of last week's judgement. It proves that British justice is a lethal weapon in the British state's war against the Irish people. The only way to fight for freedom for the Birmingham Six and for all the Irish people is to challenge the authorities' criminalisation strategy, by upholding the Irish people's right to fight for an end to the British occupation and for the liberation of their country.





Pandora Anderson

'The events of this week only confirmed to us that we can't possibly have any confidence in the judicial processes of British courts, just as we couldn't have any confidence in the Widgery inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday. How could we expect anything other than a whitewash when Widgery was an ex-British Army colonel himself? The only thing which we must be concerned about is the possibility of more Bloody Sundays. And of course Bloody Sundays there will be. There is no doubt in my mind that what we experienced in 1972, and what we have experienced since, such as the shoot-to-kill policy, is the inevitable result of the involvement of British imperialism in our country. The only way we can stop more Bloody Sundays is to rid our country, finally, once and for all, of British imperialism.'

***Terry Robson* from Derry, speaking about Bloody Sunday 1972, at an Irish Freedom Movement rally in London last week.**



Frank Stagg Commemoration
Sunday 7 February 1.30pm
Wakefield Prison
West Yorkshire

The Irish Republican Prisoner of War Campaign is organising the annual commemoration to honour republican POW Frank Stagg, who died after 62 days on hunger-strike in Wakefield jail fighting for the right to repatriation to Ireland. Transport leaves Birmingham at 10am from Cambridge Street.

FREEDOM IS THE OLUTION



Pandora Anderson

ore than 3000 people joined last Saturday's march commemorate the sixteenth anniversary of Bloody (above). Police kept the Irish Freedom Movement ntingent out of the end-of-march rally so speakers sed the crowd outside Islington Town Hall (below)



Pandora Anderson

THE ARMAGH SIX VERDICT

Shoot-to-kill is state policy

The British attorney general Patrick Mayhew announced last Monday that there would be no action taken against the Royal Ulster Constabulary over the shooting of six unarmed nationalists in Armagh in 1982. The six were victims of a shoot-to-kill policy authorised at the highest levels of the state security forces. Mayhew declared that although there was evidence of a criminal conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, as revealed in the Stalker-Sampson inquiries into the shootings, it would not be in 'the public interest' to proceed with prosecutions against the RUC. The brazen announcement by the government confirms that any member of the Crown forces can kill any Irish nationalist and get away with it.

In the closing months of 1982 the RUC's covert E4A unit — the shoot-to-kill squad — executed five republicans and an Irish youth in the Border county of Armagh.

- On 11 November RUC marksmen ambushed a car carrying IRA volunteers Eugene Toman, Gervais McKerr and Sean Burns outside Lurgan and shot the three unarmed men to pieces in a hail of more than 100 bullets.
- On 24 November an RUC undercover squad gunned down 17-year old Michael Tighe and Martin McCauley at a farm near Lurgan, while they were inspecting three 60-year old disused rifles planted by the RUC, killing Tighe and critically wounding McCauley.
- On 12 December an RUC patrol stopped and shot unarmed Irish National Liberation Army volunteers Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll through the back of the head on the road into the Mullacreevie estate outside Armagh city.

The six shoot-to-kill 'hits' were presented as routine police operations at the time, and later became the subject of a top-level cover-up.

The RUC created an elaborate tissue of lies around the cases. Police reports claimed that both carloads of republican volunteers had broken through (non-existent) road-blocks, that the three (unarmed) IRA men had fired on the police, and that the two youths at the farm had threatened the RUC. To endorse this last lie they even charged McCauley, who just survived the attack, with possession of firearms and conspiracy to murder. He was found guilty of the lesser charge in 1984. Growing disquiet about the police version of events prompted the authorities to charge four RUC men with murder. The aim was to put them in the dock, let the legal process run its course, find them not guilty and thus vindicate the RUC as impartial upholders of law and order.

FABRICATED

Unfortunately for the authorities, the trials raised further dangerous questions about the nature of British 'peace-keeping' in its Northern Ireland colony. In April 1984 RUC constable John Robinson appeared in court charged with the murder of Seamus Grew. Robinson admitted that the initial police statements were fabricated to conceal the fact that Special Branch and British Army agents had been involved in the operation, and that the RUC had tailed the republicans over the Border into the Republic of Ireland. Nevertheless Justice MacDermott ruled that Robinson had used 'reasonable force' in shooting Grew and Carroll at point-blank range, and acquitted the RUC gunman after commending him for his 'sharp shooting'.

In June 1984 three more members of the E4A gang were found not guilty of murdering Eugene Toman. Lord Justice Gibson threw out the case without even bothering to hear the defence. His summing up broke all legal precedents when he commended the assassins for their 'courage and determination in bringing the deceased men to justice, in this case, the final court of justice'. Two months later Armagh coroner Gerry Curran resigned after finding 'grave irregularities' in the RUC account of the killing of Grew and Carroll.

COVERT

The Armagh killings and the charged reaction to the court cases threatened to blow the cover on Britain's covert war against the Irish. The authorities appointed John Stalker, deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester, to conduct an inquiry, make a few criticisms and 'restore public confidence' in the RUC. They calculated that a rising career cop like Stalker would do what they wanted, by conducting a mock investigation and delaying the inquests into the deaths. But when his report was completed in 1986 its conclusions included some embarrassing observations about how the RUC killing machine operates. The British government agreed with the RUC that something had to be done to blacken his name and get him off the inquiry. Stalker was suspended from the police force after allegations of corruption, and his place on the inquiry was taken by West Yorkshire police chief Colin Sampson. Last week's decision to shelve the shoot-to-kill inquiry was the government's response to the Sampson report.

RIGGED

The way in which the authorities have gone about their cover-up has provoked heated discussion in the media about what really happened in Armagh in 1982. Liberal journalists from the *Guardian* and the *Independent* have written reams deliberating about the veracity of the police story, and sympathising with the plight of Stalker. But if they really want to find out what happened all they have to do is go to Armagh and ask local people, who can tell them exactly how the shootings occurred. The official explanations don't cut any ice with nationalists in Armagh. They know from bitter experience that British law and order is just a code word for colonial terror. They know that the six men were set up and shot down without warning. They know that the RUC story was rigged, the killings whitewashed in court, the inquiries launched as part of the cover-up.

The Armagh shootings were part of a deliberate shoot-to-kill strategy authorised at British government level. In the aftermath of the hunger-strikes in 1981, which left 10 republicans dead in the struggle for political status, the authorities recognised that the nationalist community was more bitterly opposed to British rule than ever before. To undermine the resolve of the republican movement and its base in the nationalist enclaves, Westminster gave the go-ahead to the security forces to mount a campaign of selective execution with the aim of intimidating the Irish into submission. RUC chief John Hermon sent his gang of SAS-trained assassins into action.

DEADLY

The 1982 Armagh shootings only confirmed to Irish nationalists that the British forces are engaged in a dirty colonial war against the Irish liberation struggle. The Armagh cover-up only confirmed that the Northern Ireland courts operate according to British colonial law which sanctions the use of lethal force against republicans and nationalists. The Armagh announcement by Mayhew last week only confirmed that the British establishment is not embarrassed about admitting that shooting-to-kill is state policy. Taking his cue from his superiors' forthright presentation of imperial policy last week, RUC chief Hermon observed that the law allowed the use of 'minimum force' against 'terrorists', but that the IRA's new armour-piercing grenade justified the use of 'deadly force'. After five years of cover-ups and conspiracies it's business as usual for the British security forces in their war against the Irish people.

ACTION IN THE HEALTH SERVICE

FORGING UNITY



Pandora Anderson

The biggest obstacle to effective action in the health services is the disunity among health workers. Mike Freeman examines how divisions are exploited and outlines how they can be overcome

'Why should we support the nurses now — they never supported us when we were threatened with privatisation.' The words of one hospital ancillary worker last week expressed a familiar theme. In the past the government has successfully exploited divisions between nurses and ancillary workers, between ambulance drivers and other health workers, between workers in domestic, catering and laundry departments — which can be fairly easily hived off to contractors — and workers in other departments.

The result is a legacy of sectional conflict and lack of trust which undermines any attempt to mobilise all-out action in the current dispute.

To work out how best to challenge the divisions in our ranks it is important to recognise the ways in which the government is trying to take advantage of the tensions among workers in the health service. The current focus on patient care and the problems of funding the health service suits the government because it can use these issues to stir up conflicts among different sections. Unfortunately, the unions — and many activists in the health service — have not yet woken up to the dangers of these arguments and set about refocusing discussions in such a way as to promote unity in our ranks. Let's look at the government's strategy more closely.

EMBARRASSED

In her Panorama interview last week Margaret Thatcher emphasised yet again the government's commitment to providing increased resources for patient care in the health service. She reminded everybody that her government had set up the special review body on nurses' pay after the 1982 dispute on the specific grounds that the Royal College of Nursing would never go on strike. Thatcher values the RCN because it puts its professional commitment to patient care before its commitment to defending its members' pay and conditions. She offered to meet her friends in the RCN at Downing Street, separately from the leaders of the health service trade unions, who received an appointment to meet the social services secretary John Moore, at the tradesmen's entrance to the government. Embarrassed at receiving such a public embrace from the prime minister at a time when nurses — including members of the RCN — are taking action against her government, the RCN declined the invitation. But Thatcher's approach



Pandora Anderson

NURSES WITH THEIR HANDS DOWN STILL NEED CONVINCING

reveals a key aspect of government strategy.

Ever since the formation of the NHS, successive governments have taken advantage of the commitment of nurses and other health workers to caring for patients to undermine union organisation and action. The effect of the review body set up after the 1982 dispute has been to deepen the division between nurses and other hospital workers. While workers in domestic, catering and laundry services have been subjected to job losses, shift changes and cuts in wages as a result of the privatisation drive launched in 1983, nurses have received slightly better pay offers.

The recent wave of media attention on the shortage of nurses in highly specialised units caring for children having heart surgery or for premature babies has led to proposals that nurses with special training and skills in these areas should receive higher rewards. Thus a new division is being created among nurses, while the gulf between nurses and the rest also increases. It is important to note that even the highest paid nurses will still be badly paid, but they will be slightly better off than cleaning, kitchen and laundry workers. The consequence of promoting the issue of patient care is that health workers are paid according to how close they are to the patient, but because they are divided among themselves, they are not strong enough to put any pressure on the government to get decent pay for anybody.

The second theme in Thatcher's broadcast was the question of resources for the health service. The prime minister repeated her point that her government has increased spending on healthcare, though she failed to acknowledge that this falls far behind what is necessary to maintain an adequate service based in crumbling institutions catering for an ageing population. However, in what was widely regarded as a successful ploy in regaining the initiative in the current dispute, she opened discussion of a range of alternative ways of generating revenue. Thatcher's announcement echoed earlier statements by Moore that he was looking into schemes for increasing private sector involvement in the health service, through extending private insurance, voucher schemes and other measures. While in parliament opposition MPs continued to demand that chancellor Nigel Lawson use his forthcoming budget to allocate more funds to the health service rather than provide 'tax cuts for the rich', the whole debate shifted away from the question of the pay and conditions of health workers to the problem of how the government could finance the health service.

The focus on finance suits the Tories because it allows them to shift attention on to what they regard as the key to successful management of the health service — the drive to raise efficiency.

They have made clear that they will only spend more money on the health service if it is spent more efficiently. Given that by far the largest single factor in health service costs is wages, 'raising efficiency' means health workers working even harder for even less money. The bottom line in the whole debate about health service finance is that health workers pay the price. Measures to raise efficiency will inevitably fall heaviest on ancillary workers, who have already borne the brunt of economies over the past 10 years, and will deepen divisions among the workforce.

DIVISIONS

Unity in the causes of patient care and more funding for the health service means exacerbating divisions among nurses, ancillary workers and others in the health service. As long as the Tories keep these themes at the centre of discussion in the health service dispute, they will retain the initiative and we will be unable to rally our forces against them.

How can we challenge the divisions among the health workers and unite our forces against the Tories? The answer is by emphasising what we all have in common. With the exception of senior managers, nursing officers and consultants, every worker in the health service is poorly paid. Nurses, technicians, ancillary and clerical staff are all among the lowest paid in the country. Health workers also all endure poor working conditions, often involving unsocial hours and sometimes considerable risks of disease and injury. All workers in the health service suffer the effects of a decade of cuts in understaffed wards, unfilled vacancies, shortages of everything required to do a decent job. If health workers got together and drew up a set of demands covering the sort of pay required to maintain a decent living and the sort of safeguards needed to ensure decent working conditions, this could provide a basis for uniting all health workers together.

PARALYSED

A set of basic demands to maintain decent living standards and working conditions could provide the basis for overcoming the divisions that have long paralysed effective action in the health service. Unity around such demands could mobilise a powerful force against the Tories.

If one million health workers were united they would soon be forced to concede to our demands.

For 40 years health workers have been lectured about patient care and puzzled about where the money should come from. It's time we made clear that the first condition for high standards of healthcare is healthcare workers who have decent living standards and working conditions. Let them worry about where the money comes from — so long as it does not come from making us work harder by paying us even less.

THE ENEMIES WITHIN

'THIS is not strike action in pursuit of a pay claim. It is protest action against wholesale underfunding of the NHS.' So declared Michael Meacher, Labour's shadow health minister, after last week's meeting of the party's national executive. Meacher's statement followed the executive's rejection of a motion from the left — Benn, Skinner and Livingstone — that the party should support this week's proposed strike action in the health service. The Labour leadership has become so craven in its quest for respectability that it cannot even summon up the courage to support industrial action by the nurses.

The Labour Party's attempt to redefine the purpose of industrial action in the health service into a crusade for patient care can only reinforce the divisive ideology that the Tories have so successfully promoted against the health workers in the past. It can only weaken resistance and strengthen the government.

It was significant that the resolution finally approved by the national executive to support protests for higher funding for the health service was moved by Tom Sawyer of Nupe and Colm O'Kane of Cohse. After the meeting Sawyer, a top Kinnock aide and normally eager to give his views to the press, became suddenly unavailable for comment. Kinnock's PR men Larry Whitty and Peter Mandelsohm answered the questions, while his top union link man crept out by the back door. As Nupe's general secretary Sawyer is eager to avoid being seen in public to be undermining the action that is being taken by thousands of Nupe members around the country. Yet his response is characteristic of a union leadership that is now much more terrified by its own members taking action than it is by another government attack.



Pandora Anderson

NUPE'S TOM SAWYER

Meanwhile the TUC has brought forward its day of action from June to 5 March, like the Labour Party, to protest against underfunding of the NHS. The TUC health service committee dismissed calls for strike action in support of health workers, but urged workers to 'find time to express their support for the nurses'. For much of the left the appeal for the TUC to take the lead in the dispute has become a major campaign theme. Those who expect leadership from the TUC should recall the events of 1982 (see opposite) and remember that the current strength of the Royal College of Nursing is largely the responsibility of the TUC, which did so much to discredit trade unionism in 1982. The lesson of the past five years, confirmed by the past two weeks, is that if health workers want to win, they will have to take the initiative into their own hands.

Additional reporting by Andrew Calcutt

1982: THE YEAR OF DISCONTENT

THE TUC'S leadership of the 1982 dispute not only produced a demoralising and divisive defeat; it discredited trade unionism and encouraged the growth of the non-striking Royal College of Nursing. We reprint extracts from *the next step*, December 1982.



Pandora Anderson

IN 1982 THE TUC HELD BACK WORKERS WHO WANTED TO FIGHT

POPULAR

'THE TUC welcomed the health service dispute. It was an opportunity for a much-needed display of strength against the Tory government and a chance to rally some public sympathy by using the popular cause of nurses' pay. The TUC wanted to be at the head of a popular protest against the Tory government. But it did not want to lead a campaign of militant strikes to force the government to pay the health workers a decent wage. The result was a drawn out campaign of token stoppages.

April: 24-hour "token stoppage"
May: 24-hour "token stoppage"
June: 24-hour "token stoppage"
July: Three days' "intensive nationwide industrial action"
August: Five days' "intensive nationwide industrial action"
September: 24-hour "day of action", including sympathy stoppages
October: Regional "days of action"
November: Transport workers' solidarity day — cancelled.

'For the TUC the high-point of the campaign was the 22 September "day of action". Many workers from other industries stopped work and more than 100 000 attended a demonstration in London. The minutes of the next day's meeting of the TUC's health services committee record the bureaucrats' sense of satisfaction:

"It was recalled that media coverage had been sympathetic and the government's aims for undermining the event had failed. Speakers at the rally had emphasised their support for the health service workers and not commented on wider political matters. In further comments concern was expressed about the assembly point for the march and toilet facilities."

DIFFUSE

'The toilet facilities were a problem but what mattered was that the speakers had kept politics out of it. This was what the TUC liked: something big and national, but diffuse and directionless. Better to have 100 000 listening to apolitical speeches in Hyde Park than 100 or even 10 causing trouble on picket lines.

'The September day of action was the high-point for the TUC but the beginning of the end for health workers. The origins of the sell-out, however, are to be found much further back. The TUC's health services committee hoped to resolve the dispute through official channels rather than through rank and file action.

'The discussion at the committee on 16 March — *before the industrial action even began* — reveals the cynical calculation behind the bureaucrats' conduct of the dispute. One official tentatively "suggested that some form of industrial action might be necessary". Why were such extreme measures being contemplated? Because "it was important to test the resolve of the NHS staff in how far they were prepared to pursue the common core claim." This was the attitude of the bureaucrats throughout: industrial action was considered and organised to *"test the resolve" of the NHS workers* not to test the resolve of the government!

'The TUC wanted a quiet start: "It was suggested that the committee should organise workplace meetings, perhaps of one hour duration...with full emergency cover provided." The committee suggested that the various unions should consider other forms of industrial action, and outlined its fighting strategy:

"It was important that the unions should show some leadership and exhaust all options which were available to engender an atmosphere against the existing offers. If the staff then showed themselves to be unwilling to respond to the lead of the committee, then it would be clear that the existing offers might have to be accepted."

DISORGANISE

'The committee's perspective was to organise the campaign to create a situation in which the workers would fail to respond to calls for further action. Then the committee could turn around and say "We were prepared to lead an all-out strike, but the members were not prepared to follow." The bureaucrats could then accept the offer and blame the rank and file for not being prepared to fight. Given the militancy of the health workers this situation was difficult to set up. But after eight months of delaying and disorganising the action, the bureaucrats finally succeeded in the aim set out at their March meeting.

'The March health services committee meeting concluded with a declaration of intent...to seek a meeting with Tory health minister Norman Fowler. But the Tories proved unwilling to make any concessions and the NHS workers began to increase the scale of their disruption of hospitals throughout the country. Despite the feeble lead, workers rallied to back the pay campaign with selective walkouts, pickets and other forms of direct action. The action gradually built up momentum through the summer.

CONTROL

'The March meeting had agreed that "it was essential that unions maintained control over the campaign." Staying in control became the officials' biggest problem. In May regional and local coordinating committees were formed under the regional TUC bodies to keep a grip on the campaign. By July the local committees were coming under heavy pressure from workers angry about the lack of leadership. In some areas, when they began to increase the level of disruption, they quickly came into conflict with the TUC. The July health services committee admonished them severely, reminding them that their function "was essentially to discuss, plan and agree the local implementation of the strategic decisions agreed by the committee". It was "not appropriate" for the local committees "to act in a semi-autonomous manner seeking to influence national strategy".

'It soon became clear to most NHS militants that the only way to win their claim was through all-out indefinite action. Pressure for a national lead built up rapidly. The Nupe national conference in June passed a resolution in favour of an all-out strike. The Cohse conference, however, voted against an all-out stoppage. This difference became crucial in the TUC's response to Rodney Bickerstaffe's recommendation of his conference policy:

"While there was considerable logic to Nupe's proposal, the fact that a number of unions were constitutionally restricted, either by their rules or by conference decision, from an all-out stoppage, meant that a recommendation to this effect would split the unity of the unions."

MEEK

'The committee demanded that Nupe repudiate its mandate for an all-out strike — not that Cohse overturn its conference decision against a strike. Nupe meekly acquiesced to the abandonment of the only tactic that could have won the strike.

'By the meeting of the health services committee in late October, the campaign was getting nowhere. The local "days of action" had seen small turn-outs of increasingly angry workers. The committee noted the changing mood and the stark alternatives:

"The members were expressing the view that they could not win. The unions were moving to the position where there had to be an all-out stoppage or move towards an unsatisfactory settlement."

'The TUC had to pretend to push towards an all-out strike in order to get the membership to agree to a settlement. This became the TUC line in the closing weeks of the campaign. It dragged on the dispute until workers became demoralised, then it chose its moment to recommend all-out strike action. "There was a risk that the members might overturn this recommendation, but there was nothing dishonourable about this." The TUC did not "risk" calling for an all-out strike in the summer when workers were ready for it — but it was happy to "risk" such a call when it could be certain it would be rejected.

PRESSING

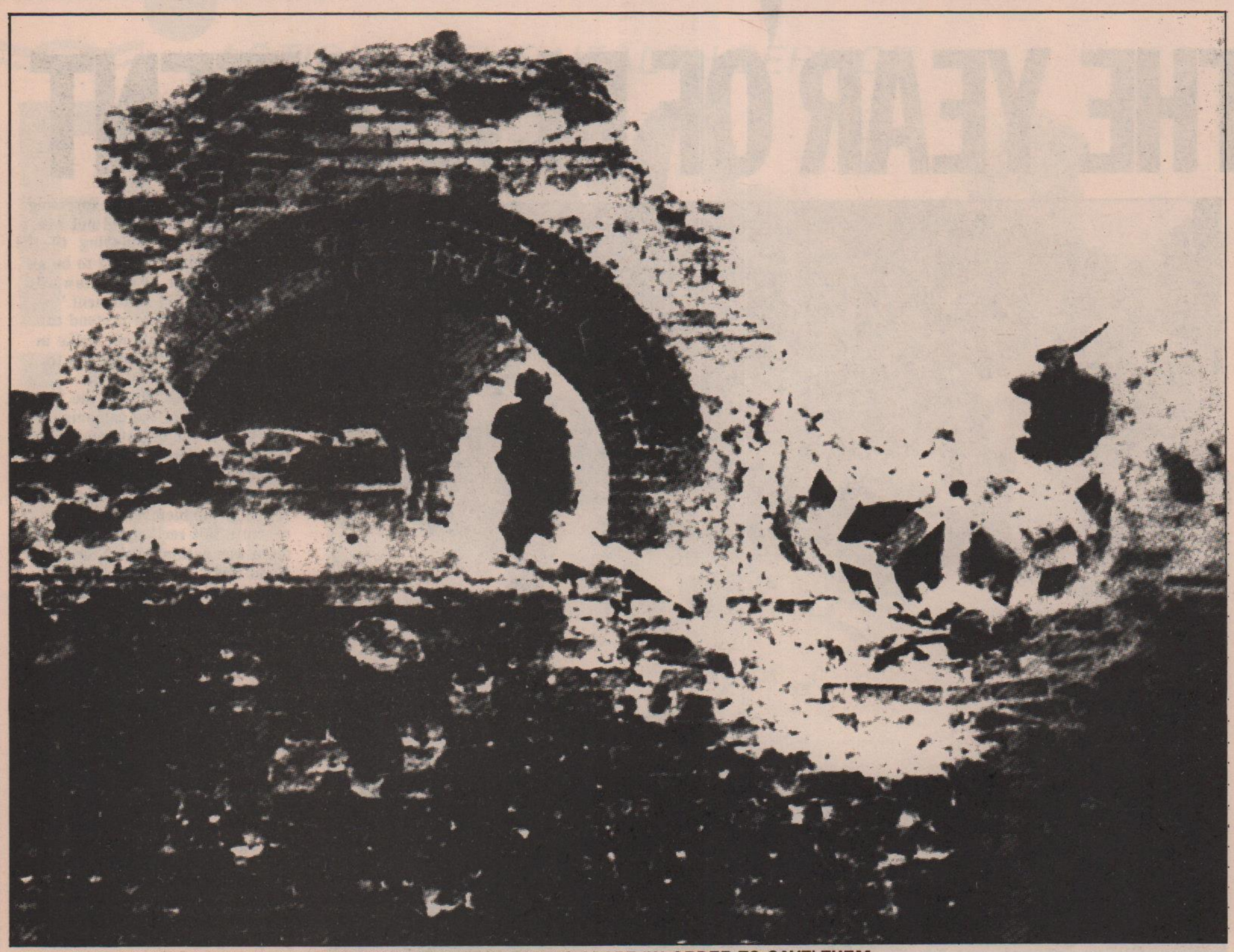
'While the TUC agreed to seek a mandate from all health service unions for an all-out strike, its schemes to make a deal moved on apace. There was one problem however — the transport unions had agreed to a national "transport solidarity day" on 8 November. At the October meeting, it was observed that it might be "unwise" to be proposing a compromise to the government at the same time as the committee was calling for action on 8 November. This consideration was even more pressing at the November meeting when the committee decided to plead with the government's arbitration service, Acas, that it intervene to resolve the dispute.

'Four days later Acas chief Pat Lowry emerged from negotiations to announce that the transport workers' day of action had been called off at his request. Cohse chief Albert Spanswick indicated that the TUC had won nothing in return for declaring an end to the dispute. "We have been made no specific offer" he stated.

MISERLY

'Within days, the terms of the final settlement became clear. The health workers gained *nothing* in the 1982-83 pay round after the increase the Tories conceded in June. In other words, the health workers have been forced to accept a two-year wage deal which promises to bring a substantial cut in real wages. The Tories have also made it clear that they intend to fund these miserly increases by cutting jobs and services in the health service. The last word of the TUC's health committee was that it had "unanimously concluded that these proposals represent the maximum that can be achieved through negotiation".

'The government took full advantage of the TUC's weakness and offered the bureaucrats nothing. Fowler added insult to injury by setting up a pay review body for professional groups in the health service, including nurses, on which the TUC will have little influence. No new pay machinery was proposed for ancillary workers. The TUC leaders tried to use the health service strike to strengthen their own position. To some extent, the bureaucrats' schemes exploded in their faces. They did not dare to unleash enough militancy to force concessions out of the government. Their cynical manipulation and containment of the health workers' action and their failure to win their demands have discredited the officials in the eyes of many workers.'



THE USA RESPONDED TO TET BY BLASTING VIETNAMESE TOWNS APART 'IN ORDER TO SAVE' THEM

TWENTY YEARS SINCE THE TET OFFENSIVE

IMPERIALISM VANQUISHED IN VIETNAM

The Tet Offensive of January 1968 was the turning point in the Vietnam War and the beginning of the end of America's role as the undisputed leading world power. James Malone looks back

At 2.45am on 30 January 1968 a team of 19 National Liberation Front sappers blasted a hole in the wall surrounding the American embassy in Saigon and ran into the courtyard. The attackers, unable to break through the heavy door at the main entrance to the embassy, began pounding the building with rockets and gunfire. For the next six hours the most important symbol of the American presence in Vietnam was the scene of one of the most dramatic battles of the war. By 9.15am the attack had been repulsed, and all 19 were either killed or seriously wounded. But in the city of Saigon itself, an assault by a mere 1000 armed fighters, backed by local political units, held off more than 11 000 US troops and soldiers of the Army of the 'Republic of Vietnam' from the South for three weeks.

The attack on Saigon was one part of a synchronised onslaught known as the Tet Offensive (Tet is the Vietnamese New Year holiday). It was launched by the resistance forces of the National Liberation Front along with fighters in the People's Army of Vietnam, directed from Hanoi in the North. All the major cities, 36 of the 44 provincial capitals, and 64 of the 242 district towns were attacked. 'The enemy struck hard with superb attention to organisation, supply and secrecy,' wrote Philip Habib in his state department report. The power of the liberation forces traumatised Washington, even though by late February most battles had the same result as in Saigon — heavy losses incurred by the National Liberation Front.

Although there were few sustained military gains, Tet proved to be a *political* victory for the liberation fighters against the combined forces of the Americans and the 'Republic of Vietnam' in the South. This was evident in the response to the offensive from Washington.

The *Pentagon Papers*, an internal record of the defence department, confirmed that the attack caught the Americans off-guard. 'The enemy's Tet Offensive, although it had been predicted, took the US command and the US public by surprise, and its strength, length and intensity prolonged this shock.' Reports to Washington from military men like General William Westmoreland, field commander in Vietnam, had previously portrayed the resistance forces as depleted, demoralised and on the verge of surrender. National security adviser Walt Rostow produced reams of computer print-outs for the press showing that enemy desertions were rising while ARVN desertions were declining. President Lyndon Baines Johnson insisted throughout 1967 that victory was just around the corner.

Tet demonstrated that after years of fighting, the Vietnamese resistance still had the energy and capability to do serious damage to the mighty USA. It was the most dramatic setback the Americans had suffered since the Second World War, and it exposed claims of imminent victory to be wishful thinking.

Tet proved that a military victory was not 'just around the corner'. On the contrary, the USA was bogged down in a war it could not win.

The American people sat stunned in front of their TV sets as the Saigon embassy came under siege. 'What the hell is going on?' barked Walter Cronkite, the venerable CBS news anchorman. 'I thought we were winning the war!' The American media began to emphasise the brutal and protracted character of the war. One American colonel's justification for his decimation of Ben Tre — 'We had to destroy the town in order to save it' — was repeated over and again by media commentators to highlight the senselessness of the carnage. Johnson and Westmoreland were later to blame the media for losing America the war.

BURNING

Public opinion polls taken during Tet showed that now only 26 per cent approved of Johnson's conduct of the war, and 78 per cent thought the USA was not making any progress in Vietnam. A steady 45 per cent, however, still supported the war. The polls were a welcome boost for anti-war protesters nonetheless.

The Tet Offensive caught Washington preoccupied with other burning issues. American overseas strategic manpower reserves were stretched to the limit in early 1968 when North Korea seized the *USS Pueblo*, and tensions along the thirty-eighth parallel dividing Korea led South Korea to consider an immediate withdrawal of its 49 000 men from South Vietnam. At home the Johnson administration faced rising racial conflict, which exploded in the riots in 125 cities after Martin Luther King's assassination in April.

DICTATE

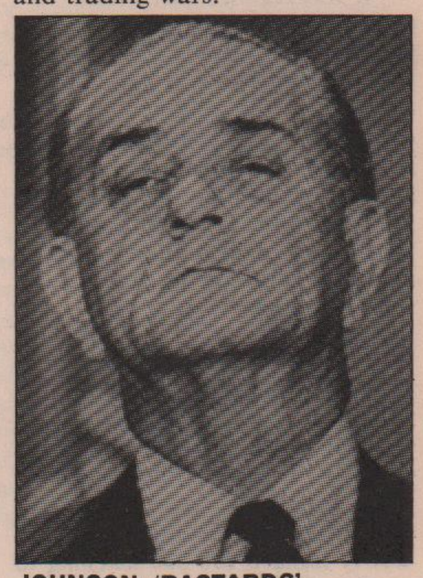
Before Tet, sections of the US establishment had discreetly admitted that America was slipping from its post-war pre-eminence in world affairs. Tet accelerated and made public this discussion about US decline, and it became the focus for an unprecedented debate on the limits to America's world power.

During the post-war period, the American ruling class was confident of its ability to mould the world in its own image. The USA emerged from the Second World War in a position to create a new international order and dictate the new rules to allies and enemies alike. America's unrivalled domination over the world economy provided the basis for a new international equilibrium and post-war expansion. The USA's capacity to police every corner of the globe was crucial for ensuring a stable world order.

The escalation of the war in Vietnam coincided with the visible economic decline of the USA relative to the dynamic growth of West Germany and Japan. The newly emerging balance of economic powers was bound to have political repercussions: now that US hegemony was threatened the Western allies would no longer feel obliged to follow the American line all the way.

Indeed, one of the major constraints on the USA during the Tet crisis came from the pressure applied on Washington from its European rivals over the ensuing gold and dollar crisis.

Since 1965 inflation had soared thanks to government borrowing to finance the war build-up, and the USA had a $7 billion deficit in its international balance of payments in the last quarter of 1967. At the end of February a panic led to a flight from the dollar and the prospect of a gold embargo raised the threat of exchange rate and trading wars.



JOHNSON: 'BASTARDS'

On 14 March several European nations began to redeem dollars for US treasury gold to recoup the bullion they had lost supporting the dollar. After losing $372m that day, and fearing much more to come, the treasury arranged to have the gold market shut down. An emergency meeting with European central bankers was called in Washington for 16 March. Negotiators only had to look out the White House windows and see protesters holding anti-war placards to be reminded that this was no purely economic matter. The European bankers refused to use their gold to save the dollar, and called on the administration to rein back its spending. The European nations were hinting that the USA no longer called the shots in the world economy.

The multiple constraints placed upon the USA, both on and off the battlefields of Vietnam, led to growing dissent over foreign policy within the ruling class. On one side

stood those who remained steadfast supporters of America's role as global policeman. On the other side were those who argued that the USA should retreat from its world responsibilities, limit its geographical commitments to a smaller selection of 'vital interests' and rely less on military force.

Both sides had to admit that international relations were not as simple as when Pax Americana reigned supreme after the Second World War.

After Tet this debate took the form of an argument over whether or not to step up the war effort. The American Joint Chiefs of Staff requested a call-up of reserves, a move that would be politically unpopular for Johnson. Its chairman, General Earle Wheeler, went to Vietnam to consult with Westmoreland, and returned with a request for 206 000 more men to supplement the 510 000 already there.

WORSE

Influential figures in the Pentagon, however, were convinced that sending in more troops could only make matters worse. They made their views known in an ad hoc committee set up by Johnson to review the request for further military aid. The committee was headed by secretary of defence Clark Clifford, who recommended that it consider the troop request not only in the light of immediate strategic aims, but in its long-term ramifications as well. The members of the task force were split roughly between the presidential advisers who favoured support for the troop request, and the deputies of the defence department who argued against escalation. The hawkish Clifford had a change of heart and backed his deputies, proposing that the administration do nothing decisive until it completed a full-scale review of the 'political and strategic guidance' of the war.

Paul Nitze, a member of the defence department and a participant in the committee, outlined how he saw the debate shaping up at the time:

'In one view, US foreign and defence problems would continue, indeed might become more serious as a result of Vietnam, and could well call for even more emphasis and greater prudence than had been devoted in the past. In the contrasting view, the problems of the past had arisen largely from our own errors springing from overemphasis on foreign policy, and particularly its defence aspects.'

WISE

Not satisfied with Clifford's suggestion that action be delayed, Johnson sought more advice from his Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam, the so-called Wise Men. These authorities from the worlds of finance, industry and corporate law had approved an escalation of the war back in November 1967. By the time Johnson met the Wise Men at the end of March, he had already received the vote of 'no confidence' from international financial leaders. Another shock came on 12 March when Eugene McCarthy, a fellow Democrat and anti-war presidential hopeful, had a surprisingly strong showing in the New Hampshire primaries. Four days later Robert Kennedy announced his intention to seek the presidency, the same day that the gold market was closed.

The verdict from the Wise Men was a devastating blow for Johnson.

The majority concluded that America had to reduce its involvement in Vietnam and find a way out of South-east Asia. This desertion led Johnson to remark after the meeting that 'the establishment bastards have baled out.' The post-war consensus on American foreign policy, which had encompassed the executive, the broader establishment and the public, had collapsed. 'I felt', said Johnson in his memoirs, 'that I was being chased on all sides by a giant stampede coming at me from all directions.'

On 31 March the isolated president appeared on television. He announced a halt to the bombings and a willingness to enter negotiations with Hanoi. Then he revealed that he was withdrawing from the 1968 presidential nomination and retiring to his Texas ranch.

Despite his pledge to scale down US involvement, Johnson was committed to maintaining the struggle until he left office at the end of the year. A day after his speech, in which he promised to halt bombings in return for reciprocal actions from Hanoi, US planes attacked sites about 500 kilometres north of the seventeenth parallel which divided the country. Bombing attacks in April and May were more ferocious than those in the previous two months.

A new proposal in Johnson's speech involved an expansion of the armed forces of the 'Republic of Vietnam' to replace US troops. This became the central plank of what president Nixon termed his 'Vietnamisation' policy. Policy makers now spoke of a 'decent interval' before an American withdrawal. Johnson no longer talked of 'victory' — instead, a 'shield' was needed to protect the growth of ARVN. America was forced to admit its limitations, even if it was incapable of facing up to its decline as *the* world power.

BARBARITY

All the USA could do in Vietnam after Tet was take its campaign of destruction and death to new heights of barbarity, to extract as heavy a price as possible from the Vietnamese, while making plans to get out. Tet had shown that the Americans had no chance of swinging the war in their favour, and they knew it.

The USA's road out of Vietnam took a long and tortuous route during the Nixon and Kissinger years. From equipping the South Vietnamese troops under 'Vietnamisation' to the invasion of Cambodia and the Christmas bombings of Hanoi in 1972, it finally ended in 1975 with the American ambassador being lifted off the roof of the US embassy by helicopter as the NLF marched into Saigon and renamed it Ho Chi Minh city. Washington's every



NIXON: BOMBER

move during these years was designed to extricate the USA from a war it had effectively lost by March 1968. The zig-zag course of bombings and diplomatic deliberations by Nixon and Kissinger from 1968 onwards reflected the tensions over foreign policy within the US ruling class, which had never had to deal with such a defeat or suffer such damage to its global credibility.

The final defeat in Vietnam strengthened those forces within the US establishment which wanted America to downplay its role as global policeman and concentrate more on the narrower national interests of US capitalism.

The lack of enthusiasm for military interventions was subsequently dubbed the 'Vietnam Syndrome'. The defeat in Vietnam coincided with Nixon's fall from office over the Watergate bugging scandal. The notion of a strong 'Imperial Presidency' was thus doubly tarnished, and congress imposed new limits on the president's ability to send US troops and military aid overseas.

HARDLINE

By the late seventies, however, the tensions caused by the approach of economic recession led to a re-assertion of globalism within the US ruling class. With the other capitalist powers closing the gap on the USA, and unrest in the third world escalating, Washington had to re-assert its supremacy. The policy of cautious management and diplomacy had to be ditched so that the USA could show the world it was still number one. Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980 as the figurehead of the resurgent hardline current within the American ruling class. Central to the hardliners' case was a re-interpretation of Vietnam along the lines of 'Rambo'. The USA lost the war, they argued, because the 'bureaucrats' weren't 'trying to win', that is, they didn't supply the forces with sufficient firepower. This turned the truth on its head: the USA dropped more bombs on Vietnam than ever before in the history of modern warfare (see box). But it served as an excuse for the USA to take a more belligerent attitude to trouble-spots in the third world.

Reagan promised a reversal of the 'Vietnam Syndrome' and a resurgence of American might worldwide. He has invented 'communist conspiracies' to rattle his sabre at in Central America, the Middle East and Africa. But Reagan's attempt to compensate for America's decline with a show of strength has met with little success. Behind the bluster, Washington remains wary of repeating the Vietnam experience. The humiliation of seeing the US marines bombed out of Lebanon in 1984 increased Reagan's fears. Thus he has stuck to attacking easy targets like the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada, and refused to involve American forces directly in conflicts in Central America.

IMPOTENCE

Today, America in decline would be even less capable of dealing with the consequences of a Tet-style offensive than it was 20 years ago.

Pressures on the USA from the third world and the rival Western powers make the question of America's 'crisis management' the major issue in world politics today. Every sign of American impotence in the face of resistance re-opens the debate within the US establishment, sparked off after Tet, over how far the USA can throw its weight around. Thus Reagan's foreign policy has become an unstable mix of intrigues like the Irangate episode, and displays of aggression like sending an American armada into the Gulf.

The more senile, vicious and unpredictable American imperialism becomes, the more necessary it is to put a stop to it. The legacy of Tet still haunts Washington. It should also serve to inspire those struggling to free the oppressed from the claws of the American eagle.

How America was humbled

THE Vietnamese people had spent many years fighting for self-determination by the time the Americans were kicked out in 1975. France was the traditional imperialist power dominating the country, but lost control over the region to Japan during the Second World War. After Japan's defeat, the French tried to move in again. Ho Chi Minh's liberation forces declared war on the French invaders in 1946. In 1950 the USA began direct economic and military grants to the French. When the French were defeated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the USA took over.

Under the 1954 Geneva Agreements, Vietnam was divided along the seventeenth parallel. North and South were recognised as distinct territories, but the USA gradually redefined the accords to create the illusion of two nations. By the end of 1961 the USA had 3200 military advisers in South Vietnam, and John F Kennedy's package of medical and technical aid was aimed to win over the 'hearts and minds' of the people. It was not until 1965, however, that Johnson initiated a massive escalation of ground troops.

The South Vietnamese army (ARVN) had been trained by US advisers to fight a conventional war; but the National Liberation Front was engaged in guerrilla warfare. Inside ARVN, there was a sharp differentiation between the Catholic officer corps and the Buddhist ground troops, with many officers being from the North as well.

Most importantly, the South Vietnamese troops used as American stooges had no will to fight. The NLF, on the other hand, was a strongly motivated force for liberation. The Americans could never win the 'hearts and minds' of the Vietnamese. For example, when ARVN took over a village they brought with them landlords, who proceeded to collect back rents. When the NLF liberated a village, this inspired the peasants to seize their land.



THE LIBERATION OF SAIGON, 1975

The South's depleted economy was only held together by US aid. This was exacerbated in the latter stages of the war when the USA had more South Vietnamese brought into ARVN. By the early seventies over half the able-bodied men of South Vietnam were in the armed forces. Once a major exporter of rice, South Vietnam now produced almost nothing. Refugees worked for the Americans as construction workers, dockers, domestics and prostitutes.

The Americans sought to compensate for problems on the ground with devastating bombings. By 1967, more bombs had been dropped than in the whole of the Second World War, and by 1970, more than on all targets in the entire history of mankind. Napalm scorched villages and 'defoliants' destroyed the countryside. Yet all of America's genocidal use of technology could not win the war.

Tet proved to be the turning point. The NLF drove the US and ARVN troops out of parts of the countryside and took over some of the cities. The USA and ARVN were able to dislodge the NLF, but only after great effort. An estimated one million refugees were created in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive alone.

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Nixon took over after Johnson's demise, and his idea of 'peace with honour' turned out to mean more bombings. Nixon could not contemplate a full withdrawal because he knew it would guarantee an NLF victory. His gradual replacement of US troops by a beefed-up South Vietnamese army led to ARVN becoming the fourth largest military force in the world in 1975. In response to the NLF general offensive of February 1969, Nixon launched a secret war against NLF supply routes in Cambodia. The four-year bombing campaign was kept under wraps. The people who knew about it were the millions of Cambodians who died.

When the Americans left in 1975 their record of destruction was unparalleled: in the course of the war they deployed six million US troops, dropped 10 million tonnes of bombs and spent $30 billion. The claim that not enough money or willpower was devoted to the American cause is a lie. They threw everything they had at the Vietnamese, but they were beaten by an army which used bicycles and attacked from the sewers of Saigon.

THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL IN LENIN'S TIME

OUR HISTORY AND OUR FUTURE



John Riddell (ed), *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress (March 1919),* Pathfinder Press, £7.25

'If the First International foresaw the road that lay ahead and indicated its direction; if the Second International assembled and organised millions of proletarians, then the Third International is the international of open mass action, the international of revolutionary realisation, the international of the deed.' Thus read the manifesto of the Third Communist International, founded 2 March 1919 in Moscow, signed by representatives from 17 different countries.

The collapse of the Second International at the outbreak of the First World War, when its leading parties sided with their respective governments, made the foundation of a new international a necessity for the Bolsheviks. The corollary of Lenin's theory of imperialism, developed during the war, was that proletarian revolution was an immediate goal. Capitalism had exhausted its progressive stage, and the new international was needed to organise the world revolution. The hope and urgency invested in this project burn through the documents collected here.

PRINCIPLES

There were two key elements behind the formation of the Third International. First, a theoretical struggle for revolutionary principles. As far back as the Stuttgart conference in 1907 the Bolsheviks had recognised the tendency of the leadership of the Second International to compromise with imperialism — calling not for the imperialist powers to get out of the colonies but for them to implement a progressive colonial policy. During the war Lenin organised internationalists into the 'Zimmerwald left', who opposed Karl Kautsky's concept of the international as a body for peacetime — 'Struggle for Peace, Class Struggle in Peacetime' — and put forward the demand to 'Transform the Imperialist War into a Civil War'. The policy in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviets as organs of class power provided the foundation for the new international.

The second element is pointed out in Lenin's introductory essay, 'The Third International and its Place in History'. The Third International emerged in 1918 when the long years of struggle against opportunism and social chauvinism, especially during the war, had led to the formation of several Communist parties and other sympathetic currents in Europe. But Germany was the crucial link. When Lenin heard that the Spartacus League was to found the German Communist Party he sent out the message via radio, the fastest means available, to found the new international.

This book is the third in the series on the Communist International, a genuine labour of love by the editor John Riddell. The previous two, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International 1907-1916,* and *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power,* cover the period up to the formation of the Third International. For this reason they are more stimulating, and should be read before the latest book, which gathers together the complete proceedings, resolutions, debates and decisions of the congress as well as the reports received on various countries, for the foundation of the Third International.

'Great days' as Trotsky called them, they certainly were. Despite the decline and defeat of the new International in the twenties, these documents, and the volumes to follow, remain essential reading for all communists today. The theoretical and organisational decisiveness of the Bolsheviks and their revolutionary energy is our history and our future.
John Gibson

REVOLUTION IN AFRICA

SECOND TIME AROUND

Mohamed Lamine Gakou, *The Crisis in African Agriculture,* Zed Press, £6.95
Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (ed), *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa,* Zed Press, £9.95



These books form part of a new series, produced in conjunction with the United Nations University, to look at economic and political alternatives to the post-independence crises in African countries. Both suggest that 'popular' revolutions are needed to break the spiral of decline.

The bulk of Mohamed Lamine Gakou's book is devoted to the West's long history of exploitation in Africa. Of particular interest is the section on the subordination of peasant labour to capital accumulation. This subordination has taken many different forms, with one constant — the failure of capitalism to develop African agriculture. Gakou calls on African countries to 'delink', at least partially, from imperialism to stand a chance of proper development. His alternatives, however, amount to no more than the familiar proposals of economic nationalism such as import controls, and he gets bogged down in demands for higher taxation and wage controls to pay for his plans. At the political level, Gakou believes that delinking from imperialism can be achieved by a movement for popular democracy.

Movements for popular democracy are the subject of the essays edited by Peter Anyang' Nyong'o. Those that concentrate on the post-independence experience of specific African countries — Congo-Brazzaville, Zaire, Ghana, Liberia, Swaziland — are very useful. However, each author has the same answer: the struggle failed because it was not sufficiently democratic, by which they mean sufficiently pluralistic. They hanker after the coexistence and cooperation of all class interests as the basis for an effective unity against the common enemy, imperialism.

The problem with this commitment to a popular all-class alliance is that it obscures the role currently played by the post-colonial state so far as the African working class is concerned. The dangerous illusion is fostered that the state can be captured by the 'people' and democratised. But to accomplish this task in Africa the politics of the 'lesser evil' have to be elevated to the absurd. Hence Nyong'o argues that, compared to Liberia's present leader, former president William Tolbert had 'the decency of a bourgeois democrat' in spite of his order to open fire during the April 1979 'rice' riots, resulting in 100 deaths. Samir Amin, in his introductory essay, shows no embarrassment in claiming that the African state is 'too weak'. Even for Emmanuel Hansen, in his otherwise excellent essay on Ghana under the Rawlings dictatorship, the army has a 'multi-class nature'. In this context the popular revolution becomes an exercise in drawing the African working class behind the very state powers which they would otherwise be fighting on their own account.

DIVISIONS

The strategies of economic nationalism and pluralism advanced by these books represent a reprise of the politics which were popular during the post-war struggle for African independence. Thus the oft-repeated call in *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa* for a 'second independence'. But the independence which the West granted to African countries was always accompanied by arrangements and measures which guaranteed the political conditions for continuing economic exploitation. The West's most effective method of undermining anti-imperialist struggles has been the stimulation of ethnic tensions and divisions, as the situation in southern Africa today demonstrates. Neither of these books makes a single reference to this vital political problem, reflecting the failure of the popular democratic movements to tackle it, not to mention their tendency to exploit it.
Andy Clarkson

OBITUARY

RAYMOND WILLIAMS

Raymond Williams, the foremost thinker and writer in Britain on culture and society, died last week at the age of 66. His death represents a loss to those interested in exploring how we experience and represent the world in which we live.

From a working class background in rural Wales, Williams proceeded via grammar school, Cambridge and adult education at Oxford to become Professor of Drama at Cambridge University from 1974-83. He wrote novels such as *Border Country* (1960) and *Second Generation* (1964), and political commentary such as *May Day Manifesto* (1968) and *Towards 2000* (1983).

It was as a critic that Williams made his most important contribution, first writing on drama, then on English literature more widely and finally on culture generally. He became well-known in 1958 for his *Culture and Society,* an attempt to appropriate for 'socialist humanism' the positive elements (solidarity, community, etc) from Romantic and radical literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was a moralistic and populist riposte to the individualism and elitism of the Great Tradition of TS Eliot, FR Leavis and the Scrutiny school. But it shared many deficiencies in method with them, not least an insufficiently conscious and critical handling of basic concepts such as 'English literature' itself.

The Country and the City in 1973 and *Marxism and Literature* in 1977 marked a significant development towards a more Marxist approach to the subject. As he said himself later, he was now looking at writers and their works 'not only in their historical background but within an active, conflicting historical process, in which the very forms are created by social relations which are sometimes evident and sometimes occluded'. Although at times his style was coy and ponderous, Williams always tackled the vexed questions surrounding the relationship between the fundamental forces at work in society and artistic production with subtlety and skill. He pursued a steady path between the vulgar Marxists on the one hand and fashionable distractions on the other (notably the post-structuralists).

Under the rubric 'cultural materialism' ('the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing') he emphasised the importance of widening the field of study, questioning the categories given to us by the dominant culture and specifying new ones of our own. There always remained a strong idealist bent to his method, nurtured no doubt by his academic isolation. It expressed itself most clearly in his more directly political writing, in the gradualist, reformist and utopian prescriptions of *The Long Revolution* and *Towards 2000.*

Limited as it was, Williams' leftwards trajectory was against the grain, not only of the traditional path towards a more conservative old age, but also of the political mood of his time. Only 18 months ago he complained of the poverty of the response to Thatcherism: 'Is there never to be an end to petit-bourgeois theorists making long-term adjustments to short-term situations?' The reward for his growing intransigence has been the almost total silence with which his death has been greeted by the establishment and their media.
Pat Ford



WILLIAMS: IGNORED AS A REWARD FOR HIS GROWING INTRANSIGENCE

SUPPORTERS GET TOGETHER



Pandora Anderson

MANY supporters who attended our dayschool on women's rights said that its most useful function was to put them in touch with those from other areas. The breaks in the day were as vibrant as the sessions, with Fight Alton's Bill campaign activists swapping plans for future work. London women said it was the first chance they'd had to hear the problems facing women's rights campaigners in the provinces. The caucus for NHS workers was particularly useful, bringing together experiences from across the country.

Since the dayschool there has been a strong lobby for a supporters' conference so that RCP activists can meet each other and discuss our perspectives in detail. The Political Committee has bowed to popular demand, and the conference will be on Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 February. Attendance will be strictly limited to 'signed up/paid up' RCP supporters, so that we can have the full and frank discussion that is only possible when we can assume the audience is in broad agreement with our aims.

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The conference will concentrate on three main areas:

- RCP strategy and tactics — the comrades leading our campaign work on Ireland, homosexual rights, women, and the NHS cuts will outline the issues for activists to take up, the problems we face and what we can achieve.
- How the RCP works — party organisers will explain how the party runs and what being a party member means.
- Political problems — we'll have a detailed look at some of the things that stand in our way.

All supporters are invited to register in advance at a cost of £5. There will be a pooled fare (to make it easier for our Northern and Scottish supporters to come down).

The conference will be held in London, and admission will be by Supporter's Card only. Accommodation and a creche will be available — but let us know in advance.

Agenda:

Saturday 27 February
9.30-10.30 Registration
10.30 Plenary: British politics and the party today
12.30-1.45 Lunch
1.45 -3.45 Workshops:
Fighting Alton's Bill
Campaigning against Clause 28
Irish solidarity
3.45-4.15 Tea break
4.15-6.15 Workshops:
A guide to the British left
Health workers' struggles
The problems of economism
Evening disco

Sunday 28 February
10.30-12.45 Workshops:
How the RCP works
Selling and using *tns*
A guide to state repression
12.45-2pm Lunch and student caucus
2pm Plenary: Where do we go from here?

Further details and tickets from your local supporters' groups, or ring (01) 729 0414.

NHS ACTION ROUND-UP



Our supporters have been arguing for health workers to up the action, and for other workers to support their demands for a living wage and decent working conditions.

GLASGOW: There was heated debate last week when more than 50 activists and union officials from all over Glasgow met to discuss what action to take in the health service dispute. An Astms (technicians' union) steward explains what happened.

'As a result of discussion at the Glasgow-wide meeting, from Monday (1 February) there could be indefinite strike action involving key sectors in Glasgow's five major hospitals. It's not the best possible option, but it is an advance on the original token proposals drafted by the Scottish TUC.

'Joint trade union committee representative Tom Smith opened the meeting by speaking in favour of the STUC call for a 24-hour stoppage followed by a rolling programme of action. He also said that individual hospitals should organise their own action, because coordinated, city-wide action was not feasible.

'The majority of stewards rejected this suggestion. "What's the point of a 24-hour stoppage?" asked a rep from Glasgow Royal Infirmary. A TGWU steward from Southern General Hospital stressed the demoralising effect of 24-hour token action. Many others agreed with him.

'I spoke for the shop stewards' committee at the Western Infirmary, and explained that we had rejected the STUC call for 24-hour action as a waste of time. I also pointed out that, on the basis of our experience of the 1982 health strike, we would not be prepared to leave the joint trade union committee in charge of our action. Instead, we called for "a concerted campaign of strike action involving all major hospitals in Glasgow."

◆

'The upshot of the debate was that stewards agreed to take back a proposal to bring out key sectors in turn at the Western, Glasgow Royal, Southern General, Victoria and York Hill. This tactic is not enough to win. When a similar tactic was used in 1982, it led to sectional arguments between some groups of workers, while others felt vulnerable and isolated. But at least it shows that the district officials and Labour Party politicians have not been able to take complete control. They are closing in on us, however, and if we don't start arguing now for all-out action, they will drag us down to defeat.'

MANCHESTER: At a meeting on 27 January, nurses, ancillary workers, porters and patients came together to form the south Manchester action committee. Pam Lawrence reports.

'There were more than 100 people wanting action. A Cohse steward from North Manchester General, where 38 night nurses started the ball rolling on 7 January, said that the hospital would be coming out again on 19 February. It looks as if hospitals in south Manchester — Christie's, Withington and Wythenshawe — will also take action. Nalgo council workers have already voted for a walkout on that day in support of health workers.

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'Also present were representatives of the local health authority — management. Somebody pointed out to them that cuts and atrocious working conditions were the same whether implemented by the Tories or by "sympathetic" local bosses. There was little support for the idea that autonomy for local health authorities would give health workers a better deal.

'The main message of the meeting was a resounding "no" to the £1.7m cuts package due to be implemented in this area. But the fact that the Tories' local agents were allowed to take part in the discussion, as if they were on our side, shows that we must get cracking and argue for health workers to run their own show instead of relying on middle class support.'

LONDON: At Hackney town hall in East London, more than 400 Nalgo members voted to come out alongside London health workers on 3 February. Barbara was one of them.

'I invited a Cohse steward from Middlesex Hospital in Bloomsbury to speak at our meeting. She began by saying that she'd left her halo and wings behind, and that she was calling for council workers to support health workers in their demand for decent pay and conditions. The applause for her was tremendous, and everybody voted for action on 3 February. But what does it mean in practice? Chances are that most Nalgo members will not cross picket lines. But many will go sick or take leave on 3 February rather than take an active part in the strike. When our branch officials accepted a redeployment scheme for Hackney council workers, they fostered an atmosphere of demoralisation. Yet the enthusiastic support for health workers shows that trade unionists have by no means given up. We have got to find a way of cementing their enthusiasm into hard and fast action.'

Revolutionary Communist Party
Stop the Alton Bill
WOMEN NEED ABORTION RIGHTS



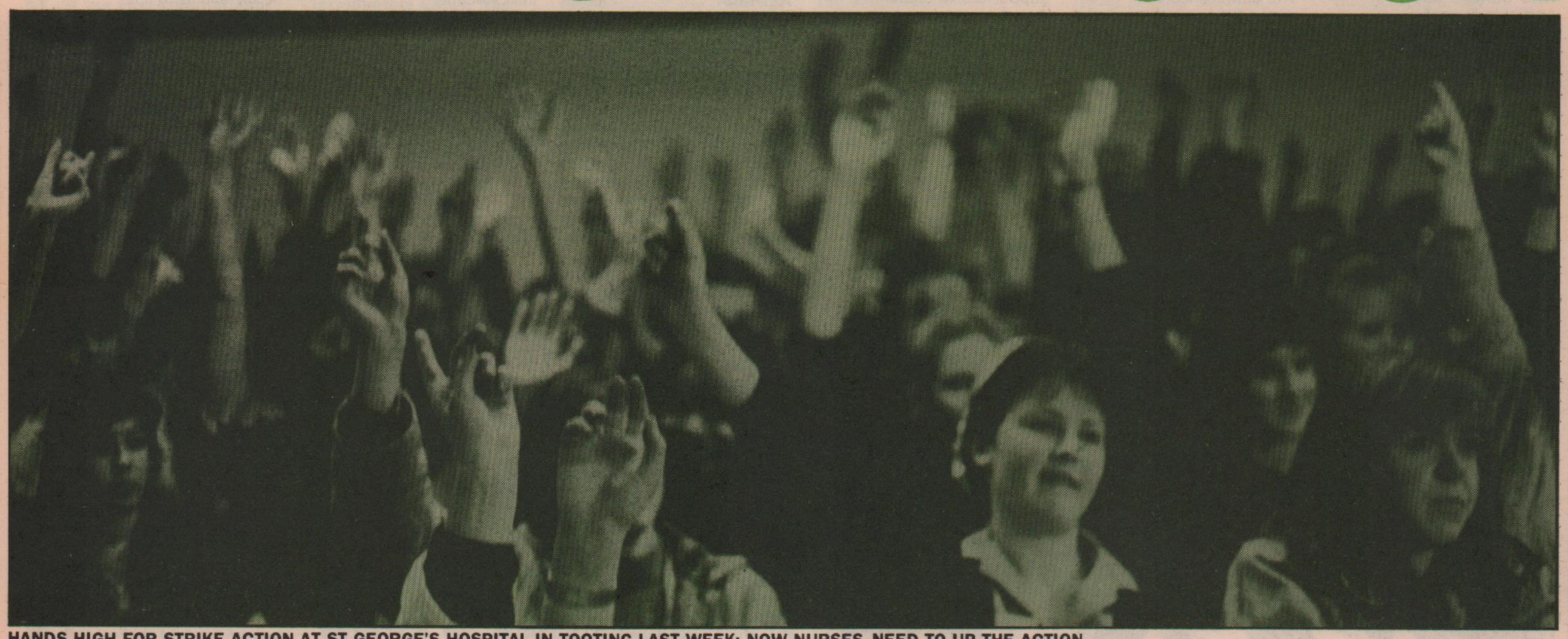
BECOME AN RCP SUPPORTER

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the next step

ONE-DAY PROTESTS WON'T WIN A PENNY

HEALTH WORKERS NEED NATIONAL ACTION



Pandora Anderson

HANDS HIGH FOR STRIKE ACTION AT ST GEORGE'S HOSPITAL IN TOOTING LAST WEEK: NOW NURSES NEED TO UP THE ACTION

IF the Tories only planned to give health workers a hard time for one day in a month's time, then the 'day of action' planned by the TUC for 5 March might be an appropriate response. But it is a pathetically inadequate defence against a government which has spent nine years keeping health workers on the poverty line in worsening working conditions, and has now announced plans for more systematic 'efficiency' cuts and speed-ups.

To defeat the Tories, nurses and ancillary workers need effective industrial action now, not a token gesture next month. And to get that action, they're going to have to take control of the struggle into their own hands.

The TUC and the Labour Party are at pains to insist that they support 'protests' but not strikes by health workers. The professional body, the Royal College of Nursing, is sticking to its no-strike pledge. All of them are telling the health workers to look as harmless and pitiful as possible, in the hope of begging a few concessions from the Tories. But we should have learned by now that displays of weakness only encourage the Thatcher government to be more aggressive. Instead of trying to avoid annoying the Tories and the media, we need to recognise that only action which upsets their plans can put them under pressure.

The Labour politicians, union officials, top doctors and other dignified critics of Tory health policy all want to use the plight of the health workers to gain sympathetic publicity for their own ends. But none of them are interested in fighting for the living wage and decent working conditions which every nurse and ancillary needs — and which are the basic preconditions for any improvement in healthcare for millions of other people.

Ordinary health workers will have to take control of the campaign if they hope to organise industrial action which can win real gains. That must involve uniting across the sectional lines which have often undermined action in the health service before. And the only way to achieve such unity is to break free from the professional administrators who run the RCN and the bureaucratic officials in the leadership of Nupe and Cohse.

Health workers should set up action committees in the hospitals, to bring together nurses, ancillary and technical staff to organise joint action under the control of hospital staff — not managers, doctors or union officials. All emergency cover provided during disputes should also be under the workers' control. Such committees can provide the basic units from which nationwide action can be coordinated. They would also be a big step on the road to forming a united hospital workers' trade union — a body which could be of far more use to nurses and ancillaries than the TUC and its dead-end days of action.

HOW HEALTH WORKERS CAN WIN **MEETING**

Thursday 4 February 7.30pm
Friends Meeting House
Euston Road
(Euston tube)

HOW TO UNITE THE HEALTH WORKERS **See pages 10 and 11**