VICTORY TO THE PALESTINIANS!

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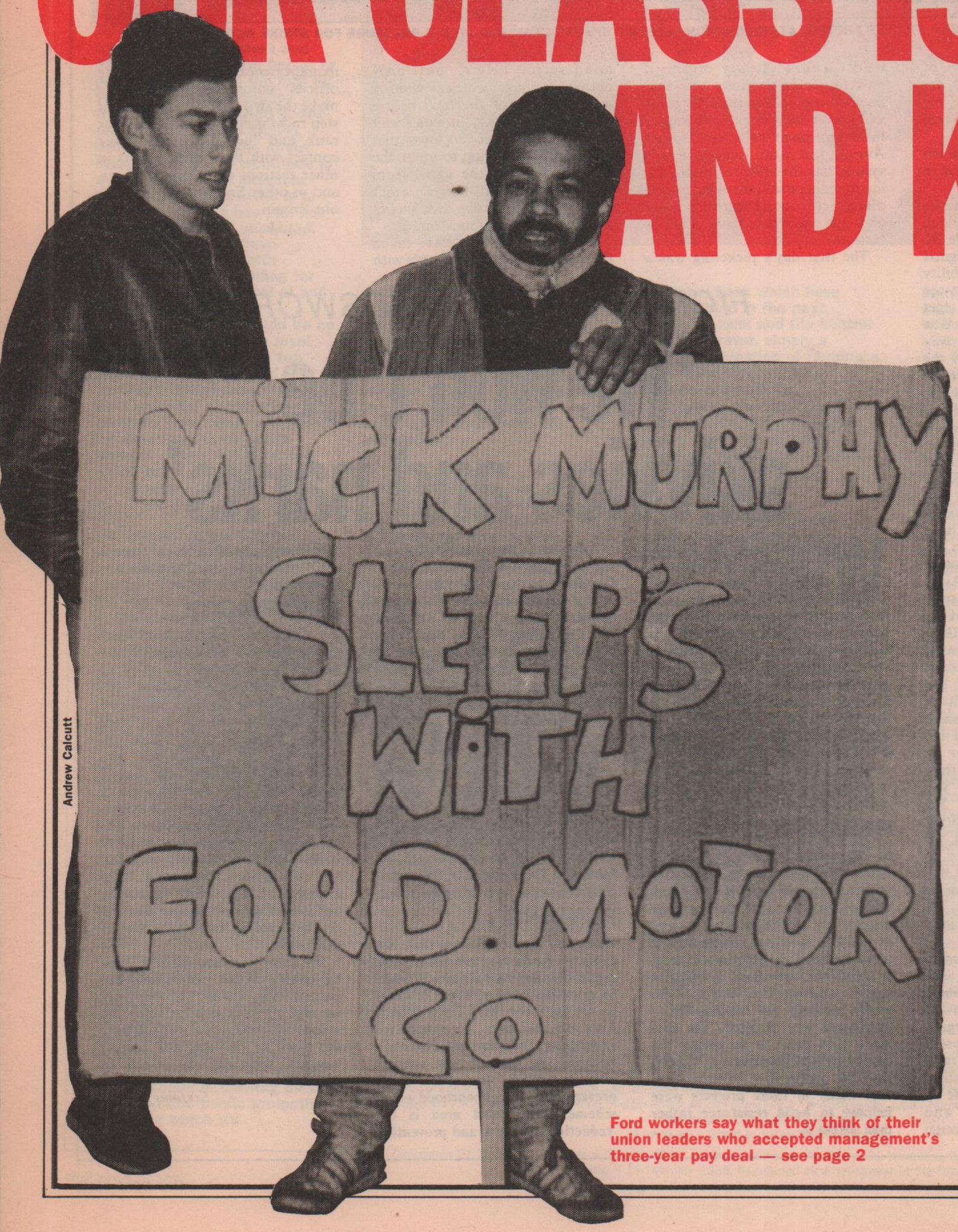
HOW TORY HEALTH CUTS PROTECT CAPITALIST PROFITS

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• Ford strike • NHS strikes • Ferry strikes

OUR CLASS IS ALIVE AND KICKING



Andrew Calcutt

Ford workers say what they think of their union leaders who accepted management's three-year pay deal — see page 2

...but our leaders are a dead loss

THE Tories tell us that the working class is dead and buried beneath the share certificates and filofaxes of Thatcher's 'popular capitalism'. But the British worker is proving to be an angry and combative corpse.

(Continued on back page)

TAKE CONTROL...

THE FIGHT IS ON AT FORD'S



Andrew Calcutt

FORD'S DAGENHAM LAST FRIDAY: PICKETS PROTEST AT THEIR UNION LEADERS' SHABBY DEAL AND UP THE PRESSURE FOR STRIKE ACTION

The lights have gone out in Dagenham, Halewood, and Bridgend, and in 18 smaller Ford plants throughout Britain. The biggest industrial dispute in Britain since the miners' strike began at midnight on Sunday, when 32 500 hourly paid Ford workers began their first national strike since 1978, in pursuit of a 10 per cent wage rise with no productivity strings attached.

Less than two weeks ago, union leaders emerged from negotiations with a three-year pay and productivity deal which they described as an 'historic achievement'. It would have meant a seven per cent increase in the first year, followed by 2.5 per cent above the inflation rate for each of the next two years, in exchange for sweeping changes in work practices including further job flexibility, and the introduction of assembly line 'team leaders' and quality circles to enforce speed-ups.

Rank and file Ford workers made national union officers eat their words.

In a secret ballot after mass meetings last week, they voted two to one to reject the deal, and backed up their decision with widespread unofficial action culminating in mass pickets at Dagenham. National officers had no choice but to call an all-out official strike from Monday 8 February.

HARDER

Ford workers are in a fighting mood. The two-year deal signed in January 1986 meant a cut in real wages. Before the current strike, grade two production workers in Dagenham were taking home 'breadline wages' of £120. Management's offer would have given them less than £10 extra in their pockets over three years. While pay has been kept down, productivity has risen by 40 per cent. Management's strategy is to make fewer workers work harder.

Four cushion builders in the car seats section now do the work of nine. One production worker described Ford as 'a slave camp': 'They are introducing an electronic system which will turn us into robots. On top of that they want to lose another 5000 workers. If people leave they are not replacing them, and the long-term sick are being pushed into voluntary redundancy. They are even having a go at the rules of the sick benefit society, so you only get paid if a company doctor says so.'

Since October Ford workers have fought back with a wave of unofficial strikes costing the company 30 000 cars in lost production. Their initiative forced union leaders to take action. But management is equally determined to tough it out.

DISADVANTAGE

Ford managers made themelves more vulnerable to strike action by adopting 'just in time' production, whereby Ford (UK) supplies components on a tight schedule to all the company's European operations. Yet although the current strike will have an immediate effect, management cannot afford to give in. The combination of total flexibility and new technology at Nissan's expanding plant in the North-east puts Ford at a serious disadvantage. Drastic changes in work practices are the company's only hope of competing. Although profits are high, Ford managers view the current dispute as a life and death battle.

National union officials have left Ford workers ill-prepared for a decisive contest.

Their collusion in management's job-shedding programme, which cut the Dagenham workforce by 14 000 over eight years, has resigned many workers to further flexibility and job losses. Many strikers see the strike as a way to 'get something in return'. This is a concession to management's way of thinking, and it shows how the defeats of the past decade have left their mark. Yet Ford workers will not win anything worth having unless they stick to their demand for '10 per cent and no strings'.

By recommending management's offer, national union officials utterly discredited themselves, not least among plant-level union organisers. Now that they have been bounced into calling an all-out strike, national negotiators Mick Murphy and Jimmy Airlie want to use it as a lever in their efforts to talk a bigger slice of the cake out of management. Their gentlemanly approach is woefully inadequate.

COMPLACENT

Despite their anger and militancy, local officials share some of the shortcomings of those higher up the union ranks, including their underestimation of what it will take to beat the bosses. Joe Gordon, a well-known militant convenor, casually dismissed the threat of police intimidation in Dagenham. 'I don't believe it will come to that' he said — just as vanloads of police buzzed the plant, and foot patrols moved in to enforce the 'six pickets' rule.

We can't afford to be complacent when the employers and the government will use every force against us.

At plant level effective organisation is hampered by the present union structure, which stifles rank and file coordination and initiative. At Dagenham the panel, made up of full-time convenors and national officials, is the sovereign body. It has already organised picketing along strictly sectional lines. Workers from the body plant will picket the Chequers entrance, the engine plant will cover Thames Avenue, and so on. This regimented system has the effect of maintaining bureaucratic control by cutting off direct contact between rank and file activists from various sections.

The first day's picketing was a nondescript affair, but only because management was waiting to see the lie of the land before planning its strategy. It won't wait for long. The employers know that there are men willing to break the strike if they get the signal from above, and Ford bosses won't hesitate to use strong-arm tactics to try to force a submission.

Ford workers who have taken the brave step of joining battle with management must break out of the official union strait-jacket and make the strike their own. The first step to winning the full claim is for rank and file activists to make contact with their counterparts in other sections of their own plant, and in other Ford plants throughout Britain.

Andrew Calcutt

FIGHTBACK IN HANDSWORTH

'We won't be skivvies and narks'

When we set up the Handsworth People's Campaign to fight the cuts we didn't have many facts and figures. But we could see what was happening. We knew that if we simply sat back our local projects, advice centres, nurseries and jobs were likely to go after April. We also knew that we would get nowhere by looking to the Labour Party to organise the fightback — after all it's a Labour council that's making the cuts. We decided that our campaign would fight the cuts by mobilising local people.

RESISTANCE

In Handsworth we get most of our funding from the Tories' inner-city programme and from Birmingham council. After the 1985 riots both the government and the council poured money into the area to try to prevent a repetition of the uprising. Most of it went into setting up community centres and the like. But now the whole strategy for funding inner-city areas has changed. The cuts mean that there is no longer the money to fund community projects. And the authorities have realised that many of these projects were helping to build resistance rather than defuse it.

A report to the council's finance and management sub-committee in October spelt out the change. It argued that current council funding 'promotes many projects which at an individual level are very beneficial but the demonstration of the collective impact of the wide spread of projects funded is often not practically feasible'. In other words, the projects might be vital to the people of Handsworth, but the council cannot justify them according to its penny-pinching criteria. From now on only 'projects which are specifically invited to put forward proposals against detailed objectives and criteria for particular initiatives will be considered' for funding. The council wants total control over every last penny spent.

FUNDING

What are the objectives that the council wants to promote? The report detailed four areas which will be open for funding. First, it wants to set up an Urban Development Area to promote 'economic regeneration and physical renewal'. Second, the council will support projects which promote 'crime prevention' — neighbourhood watch schemes. The third area is the 'reduction of stress and prevention of ill-health', and finally, the council will support the 'promotion of enterprise'.

CHEAPSKATE

By 'economic regeneration' and the 'promotion of enterprise' the council means it wants to see more of the sweatshops which are springing up in the area funded by the Tories through the local Task Force. When it talks about the 'reduction of stress and the prevention of ill-health', the council means that it will support projects which provide cheapskate services, of the sort it is cutting even now. By promoting 'crime prevention' the council hopes to persuade people to spy on each other and turn informers. But we won't be skivvies and narks. We want proper jobs and services, and we want the police off our backs.

We know we cannot fight the cuts by talking to the people who are implementing them. The only way we can hit back is by winning the support of local people who will bear the brunt of the cuts and council workers who will be asked to process them.

Stefanie Boston

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party weekly | No 6 | Editor: Mick Hume

THE CAMPAIGN HEALTH WORKERS NEED

WHO is going to run the health dispute and what are health workers fighting for? These are the two closely connected questions which we must find answers to if we are to take forward the struggle against the government in the NHS.

After the state of the health service hit the headlines at the end of last year, the royal colleges which represent the medical establishment made much of the early running. They lobbied ministers and exposed the worst cases of children waiting for operations. But their aim was only to secure extra finance for the specialist areas of the health service which are closest to the top doctors' hearts. The moderate and elitist approach of the medical dignitaries holds out no prospect of achieving anything for the mass of ordinary health workers.

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In recent weeks, nurses and ancillary workers have begun to push themselves to the fore in the health service dispute, a trend which culminated in one-day hospital strikes around Britain last week. The direct involvement of the workforce is a step in the right direction. But the question of who is to run the campaign has still not been satisfactorily answered.

Many on the left have responded to the health workers' action by calling for the TUC to take control of and coordinate the diffuse initiatives. Yet this would be no better than leaving the royal colleges in charge. The top trade union officials and the leading hospital consultants have one vital shortcoming in common. They share a distaste for direct action by health workers — the sort of action which holds out the only hope of success.

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The leaders of the official labour movement never wanted last Wednesday's protests to happen. The Labour Party and the TUC have been so subdued by the experience of the Thatcher years that even the thought of a 24-hour strike is too extreme to contemplate. Before the one-day stoppage, Labour spokesman Robin Cook warned nurses not to strike. Once Wednesday was over, the union leaders breathed a big sigh of relief and quickly assured the press that that was the end of industrial action. Instead, Labour and the TUC would be directing the health service campaign into parliamentary debates and public relations exercises, leading up to the TUC rally on 5 March — carefully planned for a Saturday, so there is no need for anybody to stop work to support it.

Tom Sawyer, deputy leader of the National Union of Public Employees and a member of the Labour Party executive, dismissed calls for further industrial action. 'A strike is not an end in itself,' he stated, 'it is a means of drawing public attention and public sympathy to a case which we passionately believe is right.' This view from the union leadership puts industrial action by thousands on a par with an emotional news story about a young hole-in-the-heart sufferer. Both are presented as one-off publicity stunts designed to embarrass the authorities.



Mark Wilson

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A strike is certainly not an end in itself. But neither should it be a 24-hour appeal for sympathy and charity, like some sort of Red-Nose Day on the picket line. To be effective, industrial action must put genuine pressure on the employers by challenging their control and disrupting their plans. This is the only sort of protest which the Tories will have to take notice of. The government has had plenty of practice in the art of ignoring publicity stunts and Labour Party speeches in parliament. If the TUC and Labour leaders are left in charge of the health campaign, they will waste the workers' anger and energy in a hopeless round of Saturday afternoon rallies, and ensure that the impetus is lost.

The way ahead lies through organising effective, all-out industrial action. And the people in a position to organise it are the health workers themselves. They need to set up action committees which can unite nurses, ancillaries and technical staff across the sectional lines which have divided them in the past. Achieving rank and file control is not, however, simply a technical question of forming a committee. It requires a political strategy for overcoming the divisions among hospital workers. This brings us to the second question: what are the health workers fighting for?

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Today, everybody from the Royal College of Nursing, through the TUC, to left-wing political groups, agrees that the main demand of the campaign must be 'Defend the NHS'. They want to prioritise protests against the deteriorating level of services in the hospitals, and play down the issues of health workers' pay and working conditions. This approach is supposed to be a soft way of sneaking the health service campaign into people's affections. Its advocates hope that, by depicting nurses as hard-pressed angels and carers rather than low-paid workers, they can win wider support for putting extra resources into the health service. This demand to 'Defend the NHS' may unite medical consultants with the general council of the TUC and the editorial boards of various radical newspapers. But it can do nothing to benefit or bring together health workers.

Focusing on the need for a caring health service puts the onus on rewarding the 'efficiency and professionalism' of those who work in the NHS. Yet these are the buzz-words which have been used to attack health workers for 40 years. In a health service run according to the dictates of capitalist accounting, 'efficiency' always means speeding up, cutting corners and condemning health workers to deteriorating working conditions. And the authorities have consistently appealed to nurses' 'professionalism' and commitment to their patients, to persuade them to put up with poor pay rather than disrupt services. Any funds invested in the NHS on the basis of improving efficiency and professionalism will be bought at the expense of further hardship for the majority of health workers.

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Prioritising the demand to 'Defend the NHS' and demanding funds for caring services can only intensify divisions among the health workers. It is clear that not everybody who works in the NHS can make the same claim to be a professional carer. According to these criteria, the further away from the intensive care unit you work, the less deserving your case. Some specialist nurses may win an improvement in pay through such a campaign. But most nurses, and all cleaners, porters and other hospital staff, will be left with a miserable standard of living. Thus the divisions among health workers will be consolidated, and management's task of driving the cuts through the gap will be made considerably easier.

The Tories are already trying to split the NHS workforce between the professionals and the rest. Last week, nurses were infuriated by leaked reports that the government planned to give them a miserable three per cent pay increase. But Tory ministers moved fast to reassure them that there would also be extra increases for those nurses considered to be the most important carers. Tory anti-strike propaganda has pursued the same theme, declaring that those nurses who really cared for the NHS and their patients should be on the wards, not on picket lines. If we focus on the defence of professional NHS services and call for rewards for health workers who care, we will be walking into the Tories' divide-and-conquer trap.

●

There is one way to unite all health workers in a campaign of effective action. That is to prioritise the issue which they all have in common — the fight for decent pay and working conditions. This is a concern which can cross the lines between skilled nurses, students, domestics, porters and others. It can shift the argument away from who contributes how much to caring for patients, towards a discussion of how much all health workers need. Winning a big improvement in wages and working conditions also happens to be the precondition for providing decent services for the rest of the population — something we can never get while health workers are overworked, underpaid and demoralised.

The way ahead in the health service dispute lies through a rank and file campaign of effective industrial action, based on the demand for a living wage — to be determined by health workers themselves — and improved working conditions. Such a campaign will not win any sympathy from the TUC, the RCN, the Labour Party or the medical establishment. It could, however, turn the immense, but passive, public sympathy for health workers into active solidarity from other sections of the working class. This is a development which the authorities fear greatly. That's why they have tried to criminalise the involvement of other workers in the health dispute, by broadcasting scare stories about 'extremists' and 'outsiders' on nurses' picket lines last week. But when it comes to winning against the government, nurses will find such support far more useful than another press statement from Tom Sawyer about his 'passionate belief' in the NHS.

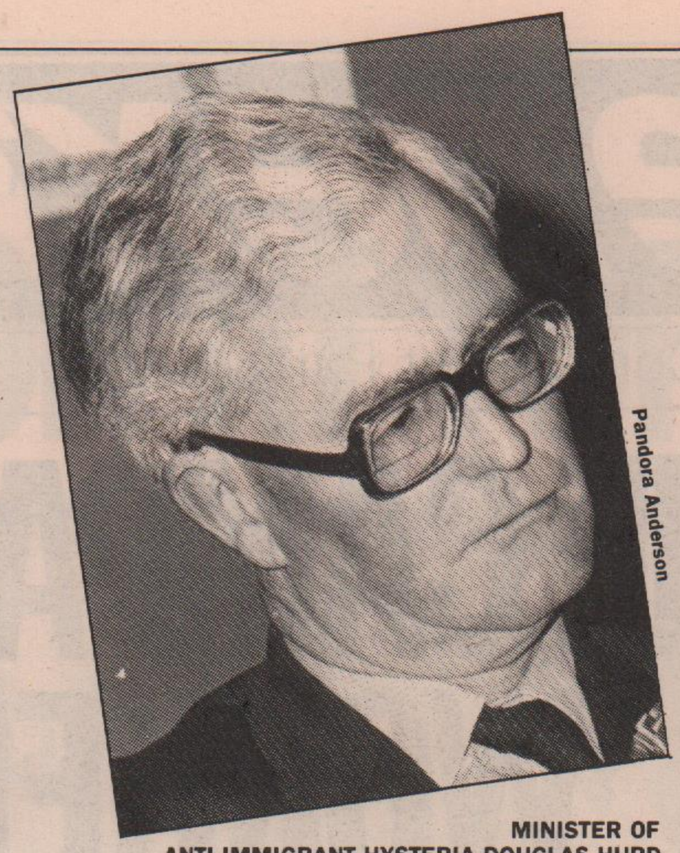
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THE TORIES' NEW SCAPEGOATS

HURD ORDERS TAMILS OUT



Pandora Anderson

MINISTER OF ANTI-IMMIGRANT HYSTERIA DOUGLAS HURD

This week the home office is due to deport six Tamil refugees after fighting for a year to kick them out of the country. Kenan Malik explains why the Tories are targeting refugees

Nadarajah Vilvarajah arrived in Britain in February 1987, as a refugee fleeing the civil war in Sri Lanka. This Wednesday, a year to the day since he arrived, he is due to fly out again from Heathrow airport.

Vilvarajah is not leaving voluntarily. He has been sent packing as the result of an extraordinary campaign mounted by home secretary Douglas Hurd. Almost as soon as he set foot in Britain, Vilvarajah found himself behind bars; for several months he was incarcerated in the prison ship, the *Earl William*. The best legal brains in the home office spent much of last year plotting how to get rid of him. Hurd took the case to the house of lords — the highest court in the country — and even threatened to change the law if necessary to kick him out.

Why has Hurd gone to such lengths to deport a handful of refugees?

Hurd is not simply being vindictive. Changes in immigration patterns have made the issue of refugees central to Tory race policies. As large-scale immigration has ground to a halt, the Tories have targeted ever-smaller and more peripheral groups of foreigners to sustain their anti-immigrant propaganda. Attacks on everyone from refugees to polygamous wives now play a key part in rallying public support behind a Britain 'under siege' from immigrants.

MANIPULATION

Throughout the past nine years, race and immigration have been key issues for the Tories. Thatcher swept to power in 1979 on a platform of popular support for tighter immigration controls, promising to 'end persistent fears about levels of immigration'. The Tories have manipulated these fears to impose stricter controls on black people and to blame immigrants for Britain's social problems.

Tory policies have all but halted black immigration. In 1976, 26 700 immigrants from the Indian subcontinent were allowed to settle in Britain. By 1986 this had fallen to 14 430. Nearly all were wives or dependants of those already here — less than 700 men were allowed in.

The Tories' success in stopping primary immigration has presented them with a problem. How can they generate scares about 'floods' of immigrants, if there are none? The Tories have tried to compensate by turning their attention to other targets — in particular visitors, dependants and refugees.

In 1986 the Tories created a panic about visitors from the Indian subcontinent, Ghana and Nigeria. Immigration officials bumped up the refusal rate for black visitors to Britain and blamed the subsequent chaos at Heathrow on 'floods' of blacks trying to get in.

VIRULENT

Last year, the authorities switched the focus to Bangladeshi wives. Tower Hamlets council, backed by the courts, refused to provide housing for dependants of Bangladeshi men, some of whom had been settled here for over 20 years, claiming that they were a 'burden on the ratepayer'. The Immigration Bill published in the autumn institutionalised the idea that dependants of black people settled here are a drain on British resources. It decreed that black people must prove their dependants would have 'no recourse to public funds'. The bill also introduced a new target — polygamous wives. According to the government's own figures just 25 polygamous wives have entered Britain in the last 10 years. Yet the proposed law includes special measures to protect Britain from this 'flood'.

The Tories have saved their most virulent propaganda for refugees.

While immigration has fallen sharply, the number of refugees seeking asylum, though small, has continued to rise. In 1980 there were 3060 'active cases' — refugees awaiting a decision on their status. By 1986 this had risen to 10 089. The number of Tamil refugees has risen even more dramatically. In 1980, 18 Tamils applied for asylum; in 1986 the figure stood at 1009 — 10 per cent of all active cases.

The Tories have made full use of this rise in the numbers of refugees. In 1980, 64 per cent of those applying for asylum were granted refugee status. By 1986 the figure had fallen to 13 per cent. Two thirds of refugees are now given 'exceptional leave to remain', which permits them to stay but deprives them of all rights. It allows the Tories to keep a constant check on their activities — and thus increase their surveillance of the black community as a whole. And by not kicking them out straight away, it provides a focus for a sustained propaganda campaign.

In May 1985, the Tories orchestrated a wave of popular hysteria at the arrival of a few hundred Tamil refugees at Heathrow, claiming that they were a threat to British workers' jobs and living standards. The *Financial Times* argued that 'the last thing the country needs as it tries to cope with record unemployment is a flood of new immigrants.' The *Sun* simply screamed: 'Keep those Tamils out of here!'

Last February the arrival of 64 Tamils was the signal for yet another round of racism. Hurd claimed that the 64 were not 'genuine' refugees but part of an 'immigration racket'. Only a desperate protest by the men, who stripped to their underpants on the Heathrow tarmac, prevented an immediate deportation.

Hurd took full advantage of the refugees' subsequent legal battle to remain here. He argued that allowing the Tamils to stay would open the floodgates to 'very large numbers of people who are footloose' and organised a high-profile campaign to kick them out. In December the law lords gave their seal of approval to Hurd's approach and told the Tamils to get out.

SCAPEGOATS

The Tories' year-long campaign against a handful of refugees has helped paint a picture of an overcrowded Britain besieged by hordes of 'footloose' foreigners. Despite the increasingly bizarre nature of Tory anti-immigrant propaganda, the strength of racist opinion allows them to win support for their policies.

At a time when workers are challenging the Tories' economic policies, scapegoating refugees is a useful way of easing the pressure on the government and pointing the finger elsewhere.

If we are to be successful in combating the Tories we need to reject every attempt to scapegoat any section of the working class. That means fighting for the right of all immigrants and refugees to enter Britain without qualification.



RUNWAY PROTEST BY TAMILS DESPERATE TO AVOID DEPORTATION LAST FEBRUARY

Home office bans 'foolproof' test

Home office minister Timothy Renton will announce this week that the government is to ban the use of 'genetic fingerprinting' to settle immigration disputes — despite a secret report which shows the technique to be scientifically foolproof.

Genetic fingerprinting allows scientists to establish whether there is a blood relationship between two people by comparing the DNA — genetic material — from tissue samples. Immigration welfare groups have lobbied for some time to be able to use the method to settle disputes in immigration cases.

Most immigrants who are refused permission to enter Britain are dependants of men already settled here. In most cases the home office refuses to accept the family relationship as 'genuine'. More than 50 per cent of Bangladeshi immigrants who want to come to Britain are refused entry on this basis. Genetic fingerprinting could establish without a doubt the validity of any blood relationship.

The home office agreed to use the method for a trial period in Bangladesh. The results showed the technique to be highly effective. They also proved highly embarrassing for the government. In 80 per cent of the cases, those tested were true relatives. And many of those previously refused entry were shown to be 'genuine' cases.

The trial exposed Britain's immigration procedures as simply a device to keep black people out and to brand immigrants as 'liars' and 'cheats'. The government's refusal to accept the technique shows that it has no intention of allowing facts to get in the way of its racist policies.

The government's rejection of the report has been widely condemned by immigration groups. For many black people genetic fingerprinting appears to be the only way to get round Britain's barbaric immigration laws and be reunited with their families and loved ones. However, anti-racists in Britain should have learned that arguing for the authorities to play fair is no way to defend the rights of immigrants.

The British authorities cannot be trusted to apply any immigration test to the advantage of black people. They will use any procedure which gives them the right to distinguish between 'genuine' and 'illegal' arrivals to endorse the idea that immigrants need to be vetted, watched and policed.

Every British government has manipulated the immigration procedures to its advantage, and subjected immigrants to humiliating tests to prove that they are 'genuine' cases. The most barbaric were the 'virginity tests' which the Labour government introduced in the seventies — Asian women had to undergo internal examination to 'prove' their marital status. Genetic fingerprinting is a more humane method to establish family relationships, but the Tories would only be interested in using it for the same end — keeping immigrants out, and branding all black people as potential 'illegals'.

We cannot blame immigrants for using every means available to gain entry. But anti-racists should reject the idea that black people have to prove themselves genetically fit to enter Britain. We should forget about trying to persuade Tory racists to be fair to immigrants, and organise instead against Britain's entire racist immigration system.

HEALTH WORKERS ON STRIKE

'NOTHING COULD HAVE STOPPED US'

The media portrayed the one-day strike and protests by London health workers as a low-key affair exploited by 'violent extremists'. But, as two nurses from Bloomsbury told *tns*, it was a determined display of anger over poor pay and cuts by health workers. And the violence was done by the police. We have changed the nurses' names

Tracy: 'After a brilliant rally outside University College Hospital, we decided to stick to the roads and march down to Trafalgar Square. There were nearly 1000 of us, headed by the Bloomsbury health workers' banner which one of us had made.'

Jennifer: 'We marched down Gower Street and Shaftesbury Avenue, stopping the traffic and singing "Join our demonstration, for better pay." We knew the demonstration was illegal. But we thought having nurses in red capes would be an insurance policy against the police. It didn't work.

'A senior police officer kept saying to me "I need to know who's organising this so I can tell them what rules they're breaking." He kept putting his arm on me, and I was saying "I am a nurse, get lost." He tried to stop me going round with a bed pan to collect money for the strike fund. He tried the soft approach and then he tried being authoritative. But nothing could have stopped us that day.

'We had got this far ourselves, with no encouragement from the trade unions who had tried to downplay it. There was no way anyone was going to spoil it.

'They tried to use a police van to divert us down Northumberland Avenue, away from Trafalgar Square. But we all just walked around the van, and there was nothing they could do.'

Tracy: 'Once inside Trafalgar Square, we held a rally with speakers from hospitals all over London, and from other unions taking solidarity action. The Manchester night nurses, who started the whole thing off last month, said "If we can do it, you can do it."

'After an hour, we formed up to march down Whitehall. Just as we turned into the road, two rows of police came from nowhere. They linked up and we knew there was no way we would get through. But the people at the back couldn't see them. We were crushed between the police and the marchers behind us.'

Jennifer: 'It was all nurses at the front getting crushed. None of them had experienced police hostility before. The police were vicious and they were punching us. My ribs were crushed up against the police van. I became hysterical. I really thought I was going to die, because they just didn't care. Nurses were shouting, "How can you do this? We are supposed to work with you!" And they were just laughing. They were getting a buzz out of hitting nurses. One policeman got his knee right up my crotch. It was so degrading.'

Tracy: 'I hopped on to the bonnet of the police van. Somebody handed me a megaphone. I said "Did we come here to be stopped or to demonstrate?" I started chanting "What do we want — more pay!" and others joined in. As far as we were concerned, the police were the obstruction, not us. Then they decided they'd had enough. A sergeant and two policemen pushed me and pulled me off the van, got me under the arms and took me away.'



'POLICE WERE GETTING A BUZZ OUT OF HITTING NURSES.' Mark Wilson

Jennifer: 'Everybody started chanting "Free the nurse, let her go." We were trying to get through the cordon and the police started hitting out. One nurse was bruised all down her left side. She was kept in hospital overnight. I was winded. My friends pulled me over the van, then the police said "You're nicked." Other nurses clung to me and said "If you take her, you're taking the rest of us." Eventually they let a few of us go down towards Downing Street. It was nasty down there. The police were sneering at us, saying "Look at you, you're pathetic."

'We knew we wouldn't be allowed to deliver our letter to Maggie, so we went back to rejoin the march. On the way, we caught sight of a barricade with police in riot gear. I also saw a black boy being dragged across the street by a gang of policemen. They were calling him "nigger", and I tried to stop them. One of them turned round and punched me in the face. They locked him up, and we were banging on the van until they pushed us away.'

Tracy: 'I was inside one of the green vans, in a four-foot square cubicle. I could hear the police trying to move the demonstration away, and people were shouting "Not without the nurse." I was taken to Rochester Road police station. They tried to frogmarch me in. But I refused to be manhandled. Inside the station, they subjected me to a body search, and then put me in a cell with no light. I lay on the concrete slab, and the blankets stank of urine. Four hours later they let me go.'

Jennifer: 'The police wanted to get us away from parliament. They made us go south of the river, over Westminster bridge. They were openly shoving and pushing at us, whereas at the start of the day they were still quite pleasant. We decided not to have a rally in Jubilee Gardens because the police had forced us to go there. So everyone went to the picket lines, or back home.

'The media said it was extremists egging nurses on. But it was all nurses at the front. We told reporters what really happened, and they distorted it. We were shocked that they didn't show what was going on. Now we know it's useless to rely on them.'

Tracy: 'Media coverage won't get us what we need to live, whether it's sympathetic or not. But getting our own show on the road on Wednesday is something to be proud of. We will build on it.'

Jennifer: 'We held a meeting the day after the strike and more people came than ever before. We set up a Bloomsbury strike committee. We are not going to allow union officials to dampen us down, and we are not going to rely on them. We are going to keep our own momentum going, with a demonstration and a mass meeting. We will be showing a video of the day's events, so that people who weren't there can see what happened.

'I was shocked and frightened by the police. But it also made me more determined. It has brought us together and made us stronger.'

Tracy: 'Maybe I was naive in thinking that a nurse's uniform would be an insurance against police brutality. Many people were upset about what happened on the day, but we cannot afford to let it stop us. We just want to make sure that there's a lot more people involved next time.'

TWO HEALTH UNION STEWARDS VICTIMISED

Sacked for exposing the cuts

HEALTH union chiefs insist that last Wednesday's one-day strike around Britain was the beginning and the end of industrial action in the NHS. Now, they say, the health workers must pursue other methods to win public sympathy, like lobbying MPs and courting the media. But the sacking of two local Cohse officials for talking to the press shows that whatever low-key tactics the unions try, management will up the stakes.

Health workers at Hill End Psychiatric Hospital near St Albans began indefinite strike action early last month, after management suspended Cohse branch secretary Jane Barclay-Taylor and steward Doug Landman for talking to the press about the fatal effects of hospital cuts in West Hertfordshire. Now the health authority bosses have gone a step further and sacked both of them. The victimised St Albans health workers have been left with no option but to retaliate, by trying to spread their action to other hospitals and local industry.

'Psychiatric services manager Paul Farmer handed me a dismissal notice on 29 January,' says Landman. 'I am appealing to the health authority. Meanwhile, the strike continues.

'After more than a month there are still 20 workers out. We are building towards further action throughout the district, following on from the 24-hour district-wide stoppage in January which 500 health workers took part in. We have also organised an inter-union meeting to call for support from activists in non-health service unions. It will involve members of the transport workers', engineers' and general and municipal workers' unions from neighbouring industrial plants such as British Aerospace and Marconi.'

The St Albans sackings should be a warning to all health workers. The softly-softly approach of press conferences and public relations is no match for a management which is determined to defeat resistance to the cuts. The only answer to such aggression from the employers is action like that envisaged in West Herts, which could force management to back down. By telling their members not to take action, the health union leaders are leaving people like Landman and Barclay-Taylor defenceless.

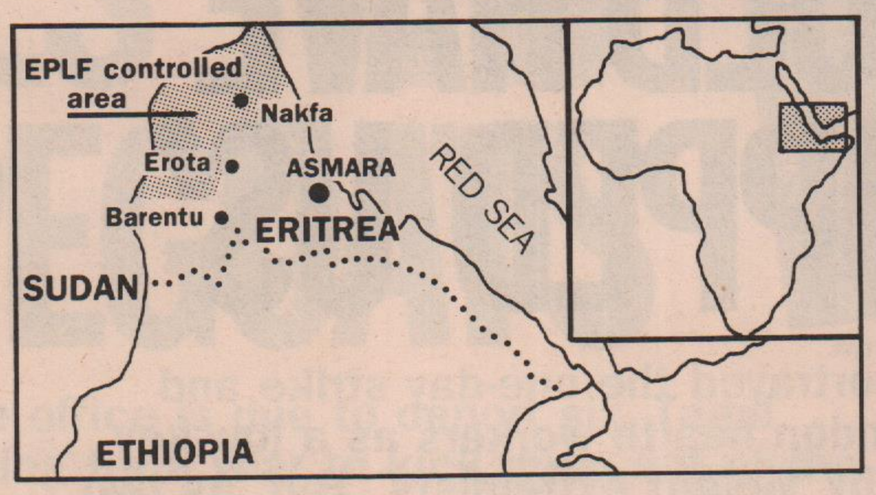
FOOD AID FOR AFRICA

THE JOKE'S ON ERITREA

Behind the jollity of Comic Relief, the West's political use of food aid in the Horn of Africa is a deadly serious business

A unit of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) recently destroyed a United Nations convoy outside the Eritrean capital of Asmara for 'mixing relief work with military activity'. American official Charles Redman called the attack 'an outrageous action' and UN secretary-general Javier Perez de Cuellar agreed. Despite this fake concern for famine victims, the West and its aid agencies are helping Ethiopia to pursue its war against the starving people of Eritrea.

The former Italian colony of Eritrea lies to the north of Ethiopia on the Red Sea. In 1962 it was annexed to Haile Selassie's empire. When he was overthrown in 1974, Ethiopia's new military rulers, the Dergue, feared that concessions to the Eritreans might encourage some of Ethiopia's 80 other nationalities to secede. The Dergue has pursued a bloody war against Eritrea ever since. More than 250 000 have died in the war since 1962, and there are an estimated 500 000 Eritrean refugees in neighbouring Sudan.



MUSSOLINI

The Western powers have a bloody history of intervention in the conflict. After the Second World War the USA favoured returning Eritrea to Italy, which had occupied Ethiopia and slaughtered thousands of Africans under Mussolini in the thirties. However, Washington soon realised that backing Ethiopia's claim to access to the sea through Eritrea could prove more profitable. From 1949, the USA pushed for a federal solution in the UN, under which Eritrea would become an 'autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown'. In December 1950, the UN general assembly ratified this formula by 46 votes to 10. Nobody bothered to consult the Eritrean people.

Selassie was so pleased with this arrangement that he sent an Ethiopian contingent to help the UN invade Korea, the only non-Nato country to do so. He also agreed to let the USA use the British-built Radio Marina station on the outskirts of Asmara as a centre for its global communications network. In 1952 US secretary of state John Foster Dulles summed up Washington's cynical attitude to the Eritrean question:

'From the point of view of justice the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country be linked with our ally Ethiopia.'

Today the Western powers still maintain that their security in the Horn of Africa overrides the demand for justice for devastated Eritrea. Since the seventies, the USA has tried several different tacks to increase its influence. But the one consistent theme in US policy has been contempt for the suffering masses.

When Selassie was ousted by US-trained Ethiopian military officers in 1974, the USA was not too upset. However, by 1977 Washington had become disenchanted with the Dergue's radical policies such as agricultural collectivisation. President Carter incited neighbouring Somalia to attack Ethiopia. With Soviet and Cuban help the Dergue secured its Ogaden border, then turned on the Eritrean liberation movement, which had managed to liberate most of its country between 1974-78. The Eritreans were largely driven back into an enclave.

American aid policy in the Horn of Africa today is designed to entice 'Marxist' Ethiopia back into its camp.

First, Washington gave limited support to the EPLF, to put pressure on Ethiopia. As news of the last Ethiopian famine broke in October 1984, the USA started to smuggle small quantities of food across the Sudanese border to the EPLF-controlled region of Eritrea. But the trickle stopped when Addis Ababa allowed US aid agencies access to the Ethiopian-controlled parts of Eritrea. Since May 1985 the Western aid agencies have helped Ethiopia 'pacify' the occupied area of Eritrea with large food shipments. Because of this deal, the Western media kept quiet about the Dergue's brutal persecution of the Eritrean people throughout the extensive coverage of the 1985 famine.


EPLF FIGHTERS

'DIABOLICAL'

With aid via Sudan cut to a trickle, the Eritreans have come to view the Western aid agencies as allies of the occupying Ethiopians. They have called the Red Cross 'an agent of the diabolical designs of the Dergue'. After the attack on the UN convoy the Red Cross launched an 'Open Roads for Survival' campaign to secure safe passage for food convoys. It received immediate support from the Reagan regime. Since only government-held areas benefit from Western food aid, this 'safe passage' campaign to restrict military operations is directed at the EPLF alone. Meanwhile, the Ethiopians continue to bomb the few aid convoys which enter the liberated areas of Eritrea, without attracting a word of condemnation from the West.

Ethiopia has become dependent on the West during its war against the Eritreans. Aid agencies like the Red Cross, Oxfam and Save the Children play a part in prosecuting that war. In return for Western help in crushing the Eritreans, the Dergue announced last month that it is to moderate its 'socialist' agricultural collectivisation and settlement policies — a concession which the West has demanded for years. The food weapon is in the frontline of the arsenal used against the Eritrean people.

Andy Clarkson

DESPITE THE ANGLO-IRISH DISAGREEMENT

IT'S BUSINESS AS USUAL

Despite warnings that the Anglo-Irish agreement is under threat, Dublin will continue cooperating with Britain

'Is Her Majesty's government, for some purpose not so far divined, positively pursuing a course of provocation of the Irish people and government?' So asked the *Irish Times* in a week when Anglo-Irish relations came under renewed pressure from two British legal decisions. Attorney General Sir Patrick Mayhew announced that there would be no more prosecutions of Royal Ulster Constabulary officers involved in covering up a shoot-to-kill policy which left six nationalists dead in County Armagh. Then the appeal court in London sent six Irishmen back to jail despite overwhelming evidence that they had been framed for the Birmingham pub bombings.

CONTEMPT

This official British contempt for Irish sensibilities has angered many Irish people. It has also embarrassed the Dublin government, by exposing its subservient role in the Anglo-Irish agreement, signed two and a half years ago.

Irish justice minister Gerry Collins responded to the shoot-to-kill decision by declaring Mayhew unfit for public office. Such a remark would often lead to a diplomatic breach between two countries. But Northern Ireland minister Tom King brushed it aside as 'understandable'.

What King understands is that Irish politicians must go through such ritualised posturing to maintain their credibility at home.

King is also confident that official Irish retaliation will go no further. Dublin is as eager as


HAUGHEY: POSTURING

London to cover up the truth concerning the Armagh killings. A full exposure of the shoot-to-kill episode would undoubtedly blow the cover on the role of the Southern security forces in policing the Border. Already, allegations of complicity between British security forces and the Irish garda (police) have begun to emerge in the press.

- The *Economist* revealed that an Irish garda was present as an observer when 17-year old Michael Tighe, one of the men murdered in Armagh, was gunned down as he stumbled on some antiquated rifles planted in a shed by the RUC.
- According to *Phoenix*, Ireland's *Private Eye*, the RUC officers involved in the Armagh killings helped the garda carry out its own cover-up operation in the notorious McGovern/Dowra affair. In 1982, Irishman James McGovern was arrested by the RUC before he could cross the Border to give evidence against a garda charged with assault. The garda in question also happened to be the brother-in-law of the then Irish justice minister Eamonn O'Doherty. The same article carried allegations that senior garda officers, some recently promoted, had been recruited by British intelligence for undercover security operations.

The political fall-out from recent events has not affected such cooperation. Security forces on both sides of the Border continue cracking down on those who actively resist British rule in Ireland. In the week of the shoot-to-kill and Birmingham Six decisions, Irish police uncovered a large cache of arms just over the Border in County Donegal. Four republicans are currently detained in the South awaiting extradition to the North.

The most striking thing about Dublin's reaction to recent events is the absence of opposition to continued security cooperation under the Anglo-Irish agreement. When some backbenchers from his Fianna Fail party suggested that Dublin could use the newly signed extradition treaty as a bargaining counter, Irish premier Charles Haughey warned his 'wild men' not to try to prove their republicanism on the radio.

When the agreement was signed in November 1985 it was hailed as a breakthrough for Anglo-Irish relations. Britain promised to deal with overt instances of injustice in the North. In return, Dublin promised total cooperation in cracking down on the IRA.

Two and a half years on, Britain has not even agreed to Dublin's most modest proposals, such as the provision of bilingual placenames in nationalist areas. Tory ministers have ruled out any question of reforming the no-jury system of Diplock courts. Meanwhile Dublin is playing a high-profile role in Britain's war against the republican movement, seizing tonnes of arms and ratifying the extradition treaty, under which nationalists arrested in the South can be handed over to the murderous RUC.

With each passing month it becomes more obvious that the Anglo-Irish agreement means only a crackdown on those fighting for Irish freedom, and the further submission of Dublin to the will of Whitehall.

All Haughey and Collins can do in response is wring their hands and whine, more in sorrow than in anger, about a cultural misunderstanding between the two countries. As long as the fight for Irish freedom is a mortal threat to the authorities in both London and Dublin, no number of British court decisions can end Anglo-Irish cooperation against republicans.

Mark Reilly

NURSING GRIEVANCES

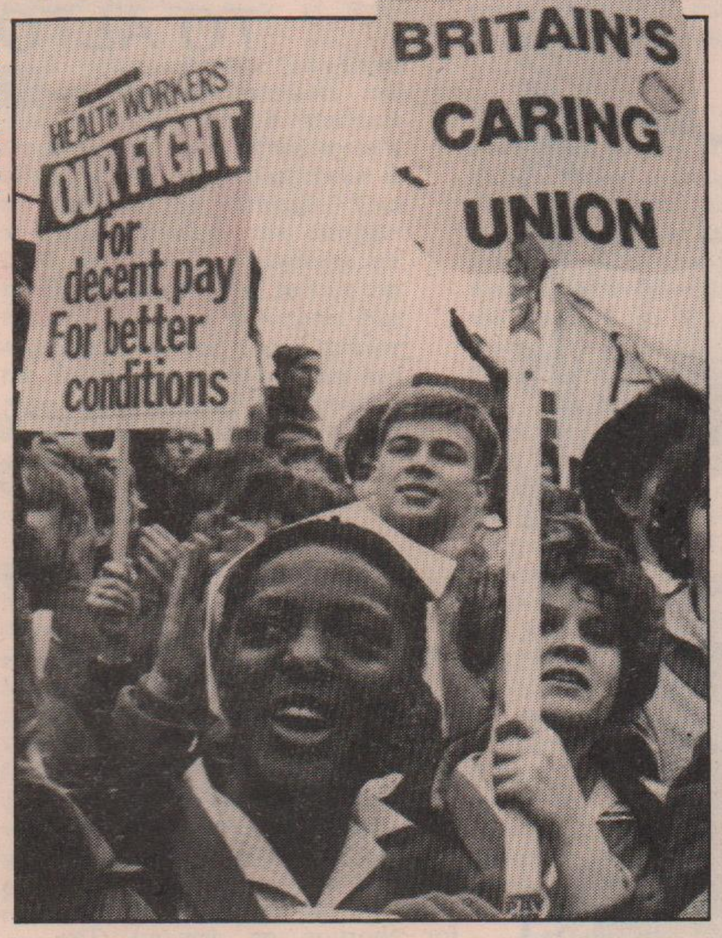
AS a second year student nurse in Oxford, I earn £320 a month. Out of this I pay £110 rent and £30 bills. I find it difficult to survive on such a pittance. Although I am a student, I work as hard as a staff nurse, and do more of the 'dirty work'. I think students should be entitled to a decent living wage.

I have been a student for 18 months. The six wards I have worked in have all been short-staffed. I am committed to nursing, but I am not Florence Nightingale. Why should I be deprived of a living wage just because I do a job which involves caring for people?

I regularly go home from work feeling guilty because patients are not receiving adequate care. We are expected to stay late and work unpaid overtime. That's what's propping up the health service. Why should I have to do this for no pay?

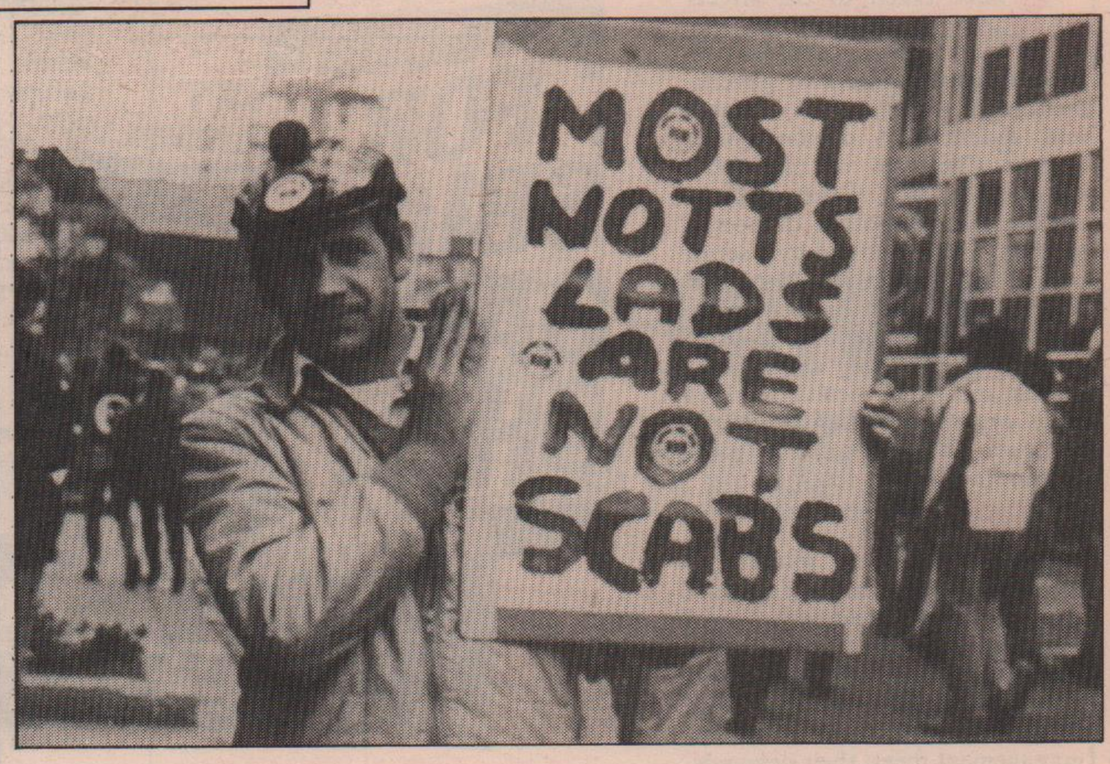
I was a member of the RCN, but I have recently joined Cohse because I was fed up with the RCN's 'angelic' attitude. We need to strike because we are badly paid. If a strike was properly organised it would not harm the patients. We must fight for our future as nurses, and for free healthcare for everybody.
Alison
Oxford

Pandora Anderson



ADVICE about providing emergency cover is the last thing nurses need from the RCP at the moment. We have been fed this sort of moral remedy for generations. We are brought up to feel responsibility for human life, as a moral duty. Outside of these Victorian conceptions of our 'profession', we are poorly paid, largely women workers who carry the health service on our backs.

We are not responsible for the provision of care in the NHS according to its present structure. The appeal to nurses' individual consciences is a guaranteed way of immobilising us and ensuring that we do not exercise the massive potential power that we have.
Sarah
North London



NEW WAY FOR NOTTS MINERS

I DISAGREE with Dave (letters, 22 January) when he says that Scargill is the only option. Neither Walsh nor Scargill offer any way forward. Like Roy Lynk, Walsh wants UDM-style talks so he can negotiate six-day working for pathetic pay rises. Whereas Scargill is an old-style militant from the seventies who talks about action but has no strategy for combating employers. I criticise both of them.

Dave blames the Notts miners for what happened in the 1984-85 strike. But what we needed to do at the start was raise miners' awareness, whip up the militancy that did exist, and then have a ballot — not hand over the running to Scargill.

Scargill may have been right to predict pit closures. But his tactics were all wrong. Now the government has got the NUM on the ropes.

Nostalgia for working class communities — flat caps, pigeons and whippets — gets us nowhere. What we need is a strong movement in the pits and regular weekly branch meetings. We have to win over a majority to the NUM in Notts. To get it we will have to reject Scargill's backward-looking approach and look for a new way forward.
Gary
Ollerton

ABORTION IN CANADA

A FEW years ago I was involved in a campaign in Canada around the defence of a doctor, Henry Morgentaler, who went out of his way to provide abortion facilities despite the restrictions in the law — in Canada you need permission from several doctors and the time-limit is somewhere around the 16-week mark.

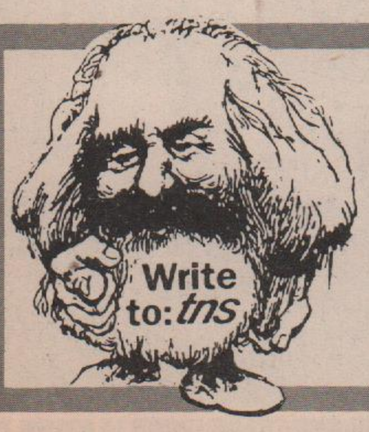
Morgentaler was sentenced to seven years for setting up an abortion/contraception clinic in Quebec where you could walk in off the street and get an abortion. He tried on his release to establish clinics in Winnipeg and then Toronto. The police used to raid the Winnipeg clinic in mid-abortion, confiscate equipment, seize files and arrest staff. The Toronto clinic was similarly raided but finally fire-bombed out of existence by pro-lifers.

The women's movement and the left took up the cause and ended up challenging the laws in the courts. Canada's general moral and political climate is similar to Britain's, and I expected the case to be thrown out. However, the Supreme Court has ruled that the abortion laws are in contravention of human rights, and it looks as if Canada's laws are about to be liberalised. This goes against current anti-abortion trends everywhere else. Is it something to take heart from or merely a judge's brainstorm?
Shelley
South London

STATE SURVEILLANCE

AS youth workers in Merseyside we have had to submit to a police check in compliance with recent government legislation. The Criminal Justice Act, which was introduced following media coverage of child sexual abuse, means that anyone working with children, either part-time or full-time, paid or voluntary, must be cleared by the police. In principle, the idea of the law is to prevent sexual offenders from working with children. In practice it gives the police an opportunity to gather together whatever information they can lay their hands on. At present that includes information about family background, records of schooling and employment, details of foreign travel, membership of groups or political parties, and brushes with the law. This list is continually being extended.

This surveillance has no relevance to the work we are doing. It simply illustrates how an issue like child abuse can be used by the state to target particular workers.
***tns* reader**
Merseyside



Write to *tns*
BCM JPLTD, WC1N 3XX

LAMBETH UNIONS SUPPORT SCABBING

AS if management weren't enough of a problem, officials from other unions have tried to sabotage the strike by engineers at Lambeth council. Seventy-one vehicle engineers are still locked out of the Shakespeare Road depot in Lambeth, after the Labour council said it would only allow a return to work if the engineers submitted to a six-month productivity trial on bonus agreements which should have been paid since November.

The local leadership of the TGWU, Nupe and Ucatt got together to write a letter to council leader Linda Bellos denouncing the engineers for alienating public opinion, and advising Bellos to get their work done in the private sector if necessary.



LAMBETH COUNCIL LEADER LINDA BELLOS

Rank and file members of all three unions are furious about the letter. Within hours of hearing about it, a Nupe branch meeting forced its leaders to apologise and to send another letter to Bellos stating that Nupe members gave full support to the engineers and wanted nothing to do with the earlier letter.

The engineers are determined to stick it out. Other workers are determined to give them support. But if they want to make their support effective, they'll need to take matters into their own hands, and organise a campaign under rank and file control.
Temporary worker
Lambeth council

CLASS PRO

FROM FORD AND THE NH TO ALTON AND CLAUSE 28

CLASS PO

Health workers and sea campaigners and lesbian and gay and miners — they've all tak action. Now, argues Frank Rich some political muscle be

Since the start of the year people all over the country have taken to the streets and picket lines in ever increasing numbers to protest against attacks by government and employers. A sizeable and spontaneous demonstration against Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which seeks to outlaw the promotion of homosexuality, was followed by a series of marches against the Alton Bill which aims to curb abortion rights. The NHS has been in a state of ferment for some weeks, and nurses and other health workers have organised action over pay and cuts. The spirit of resistance is evident in industry too.

SURPRISE

In early January miners at Bentley colliery in South Yorkshire brought the coalfield to a virtual standstill. Last week pit deputies staged a one-day strike which shut down the mining industry, and threatened further action unless management meets their demands. The seamen went on strike and some have persevered in the face of court injunctions and capitulation by their union leaders. It is unclear how the dispute will end. A new mood of militancy is apparent in the motor industry, where Ford manual workers have rejected the pay deal negotiated by their union leaders and voted for action, forcing their officials to call a national strike from Sunday.

This upsurge of militancy seems to have caught everybody by surprise.

There is general confusion about the meaning and significance of the new protest movement. Sections of the press, notably the *Sunday Times*, have dug out their 1978-79 reference books and portrayed it as a re-run of the 'winter of discontent', when public sector workers took to the streets against the Labour government. Others have suggested that it represents a return to the trade union militancy of the early seventies, when miners, dockers and others took on the Tory government of Edward Heath. Many left wingers boast that we are experiencing a long-awaited upturn in the class struggle, after years of quiescence under the Thatcher regime.

What unites all these explanations is the tendency to look for patterns of conflict from the past, and a failure to analyse the upsurge of protest in relation to present conditions. Unless we look at events from the perspective of 1988 it will be impossible to assess what they mean for the class struggle today.

SOBERING

Since the beginning of the Thatcher era in 1979, and more specifically since the beginning of the miners' strike in 1984, there has been a steady and cumulative decline in resistance. The capitalist class has succeeded in containing all forms of domestic opposition, and the Tories have gone from one victory to another. The defeats suffered by different sections of workers such as the printers, and the humiliation experienced by campaigns like the local government anti-cuts lobby, have had a sobering effect on the labour movement.

As the Tories have marched from one electoral victory to another, Thatcher has managed to acquire a reputation for invincibility. As a result the fear of taking on the employers has grown and so too has the conviction that 'it is not possible to fight'. This sense of pessimism and lowering of horizons has enabled the leaders of the official labour movement to win a degree of acceptance for their conservative perspective of new realism. So what has happened to change all this?

Up to the June 1987 general election the Tory strategy was based on a gradual and selective offensive against the working class.

Thatcher skilfully attacked one section after another. The objective was to isolate her opponents and prevent the emergence of a more general movement of struggle. The Tories were anxious to avoid provoking wider social conflict, and carefully picked off their targets one by one. Their third successive electoral victory was the signal to change course.

DOMINATION

The Tories understood that it would be merely a matter of time before British capitalism plunged into a new recession. They appreciated that such a recession could unleash a new wave of class conflict. To prepare for the conflicts ahead the Tories decided to raise the stakes and strengthen their position relative to their opponents. As a result the ruling class offensive has become more far-reaching. Attacks on civil rights, new police powers, more repression, harsher working conditions and further curbs on employment rights have become the norm. Virtually the entire legislative programme of the Conservative government is designed to shift the balance towards the establishment of a more authoritarian system of political domination.

The new upsurge of protest reflects a growing recognition that Tory policies are going to have a profoundly negative impact upon people's lives. Work practices and civil rights which used to be taken for granted are now being called into question. A fear of what the future holds in store unites the diverse manifestations of protest of recent weeks.

A number of different groups in society now know that their backs are against the wall, and have felt compelled to take some sort of stand.

The Alton Bill is the most severe legal threat to women's rights in the past two decades. Clause 28 is a direct assault on the position of lesbians and gays, and one which extends into every aspect of everyday life. For Ford workers the management pay and productivity offer means selling their souls for three years. The seamen face drastic alterations to traditional work practices and mass redundancies. Health workers are confronted with the collapse of the NHS and the prospect of working in even worse conditions for a pittance. For all these people the Tory attacks are a qualitatively new turn for the worse.

The upsurge of protest reflects a spontaneous recognition that something must be done to stop the Tory offensive. At the moment this recognition is fairly restricted. It is confined to an awareness of the implications of these attacks for the specific group concerned. Nevertheless this spontaneous resistance is a very positive development. It indicates a crucial shift away from the idea that it is not possible to fight. Most importantly the current protests anticipate the type of reaction to the Tory offensive that will become more general in the years ahead.

STAID

The movement of protest is a new development, but it is not a departure from the prevailing political climate. Even the most militant expressions of protest coexist with the staid political atmosphere created over the past decade.

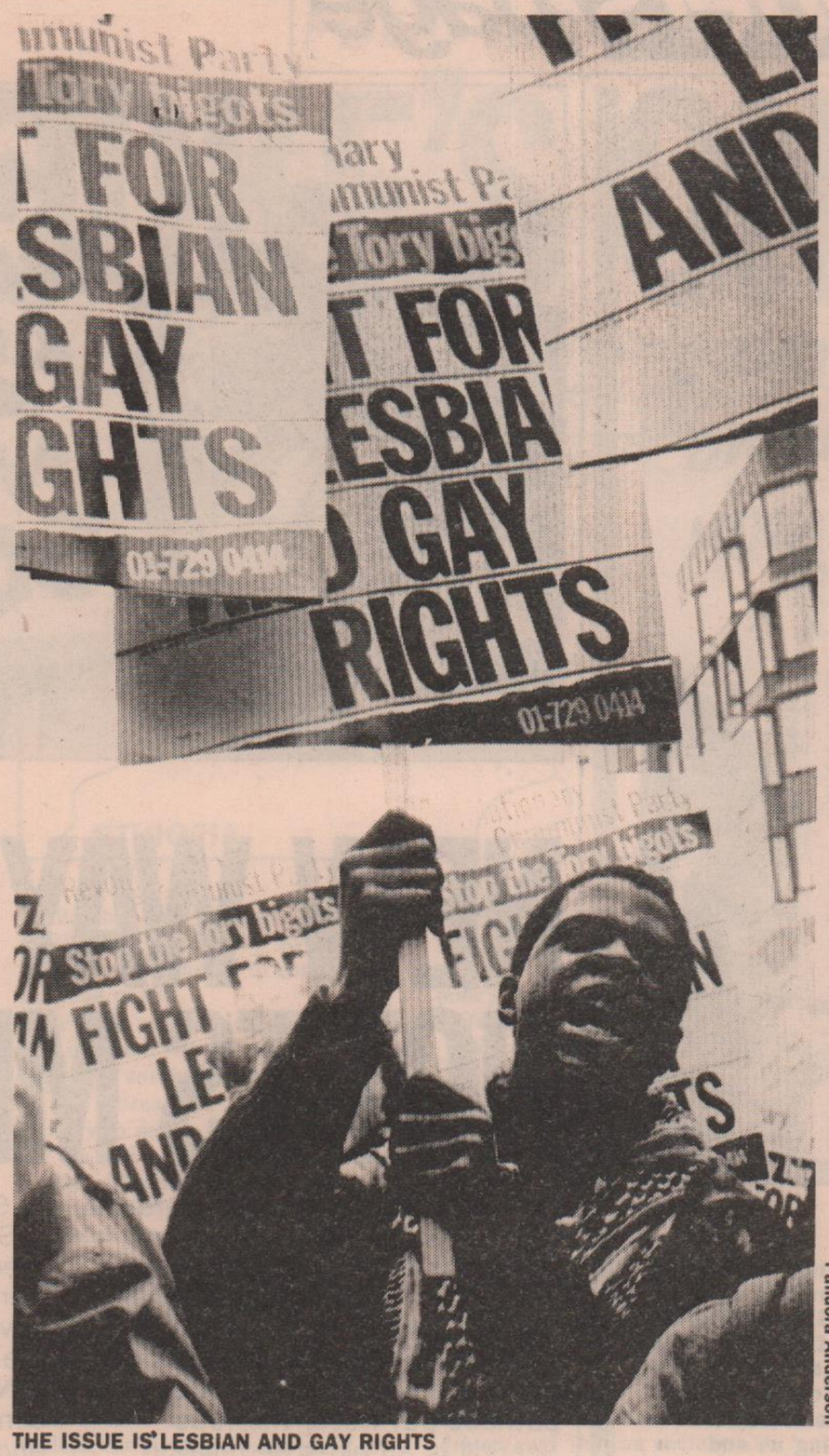
In particular the contemporary protests do not challenge the new realism of the official labour movement.

The mood of passivity and conservatism which is codified in the perspective of the official labour movement exercises a strong influence over the new struggles. This is one of the most ironic features of the period, and one which is common to all the campaigns we have examined.

Many leading activists in the official campaign against the Alton Bill have been preoccupied with running a safe and respectable campaign. Their approach has been singularly defensive, emphasising a narrow defence of the 1967 Abortion Act, instead of going on the attack and fighting for abortion on demand. The slogan which most clearly expresses the necessity to extend women's rights — Free abortion on demand — has been dismissed by many in the Fight the Alton Bill campaign as unrealistic. This defensive realism has even led activists to propose that the campaign should focus on health cuts since this is less offensive to moderate opinion than fighting openly for abortion rights.

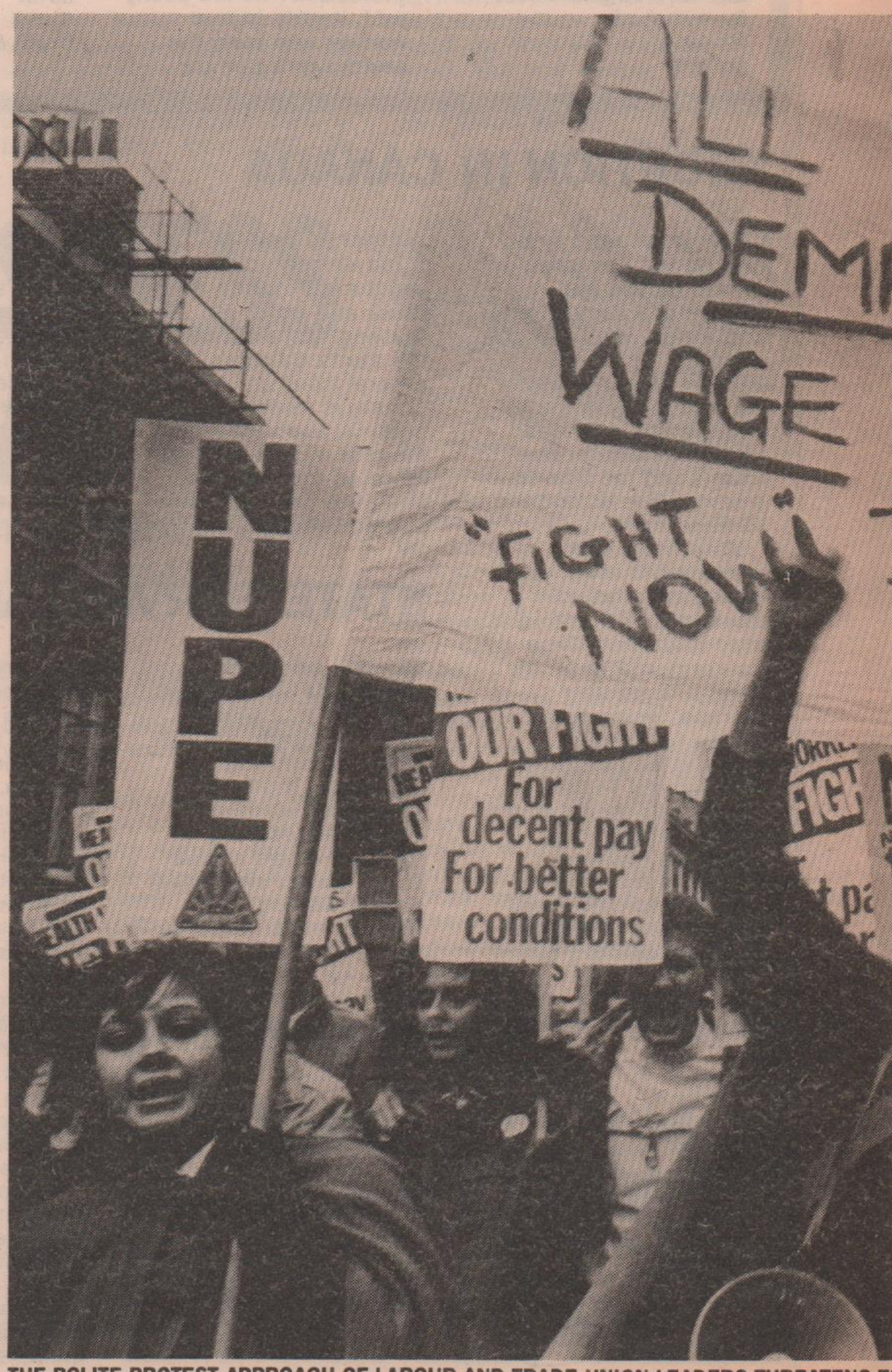
The same conservatism imbues the campaign against Clause 28. Some radical activists have argued that the campaign should concentrate on attacking the Local Government Bill as a whole. But this means fudging the issue of lesbian and gay rights in a diffuse campaign against Tory attacks on local councils. Alternatively campaigners have tried to draw attention to the effects of Clause 28 on the arts, rather than highlight the dire consequences of the legislation for homosexuals. Typically the campaign eschews 'politics' and is keen to project an image of respectability by enlisting the support of moderate politicians and celebrities.

The same problems are apparent in the struggle in the health service. Instead of putting the issue of



THE ISSUE IS LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS

Pandora Anderson



THE POLITE PROTEST APPROACH OF LABOUR AND TRADE UNION LEADERS THREATENS TO

TESTS NEED ITICS

hen, women's rights ctivists, carworkers n strike and protest rds, we need to put ind these struggles

wages and conditions to the fore of their demands, the unions are promoting a 'Defend the NHS' publicity campaign. The needs of health workers are buried in slogans which appeal to the popular desire for a better health service. In this way questions of vital importance to our class are obscured. There is a marked reluctance to argue for strikes and other forms of industrial action, and instead the union leaders prefer to speak in vague terms about protest. Instead of appealing to class interests the unions are intent on mobilising the medical establishment and other respectable institutions to champion the campaign. Politics are frowned upon and political activists are attacked for bringing the NHS campaign into disrepute.

The conservative atmosphere that influences these struggles means that they remain sectional and are rendered ineffectual.

In contrast to past struggles these campaigns do not seek to change things or to challenge the government politically. The predominant point which every leader is at pains to emphasise is that their intention is not political and that politics has no place in their movement.

Of course despite all these protestations the protests *are* political: they are a political response to the government's offensive. To pretend otherwise is to confuse the struggle. This approach devalues the struggle itself, by pinning everything on public sympathy and relying on fair play from our opponents. But respectable opinion is no match for the Tories. The capitalist class has never been defeated by publicity stunts. Only the resistance of the working class can force the Tories to retreat.

RESTRAINTS

Despite the conservative influences on the direction of the protest movement, the present wave of struggle has the potential to become more effective. The spontaneous instincts of those in struggle can drive the movement further and involve wider sections of workers. The question at issue is whether this spontaneous action will develop its own political perspective or whether it will remain under the influence of conservative realism. This is where working class activists and revolutionaries have a key role to play. Our task is to challenge the prevailing political influences so that the struggle can break free from the restraints that hold it back.

There is a danger that the present spirit of militancy will soon run out of steam. The union leaders are hoping that a few days of action will bring the situation under control so that they can get down to the business of behind-the-scenes negotiations. The Labour Party finds the whole affair embarrassing. As an aspiring statesman, Kinnock does not want to be associated with pro-abortionists, strikers and lesbians and gays. He has even criticised the shabby attempts of the Scottish Labour Party to organise a campaign against the poll tax as too risky to contemplate.

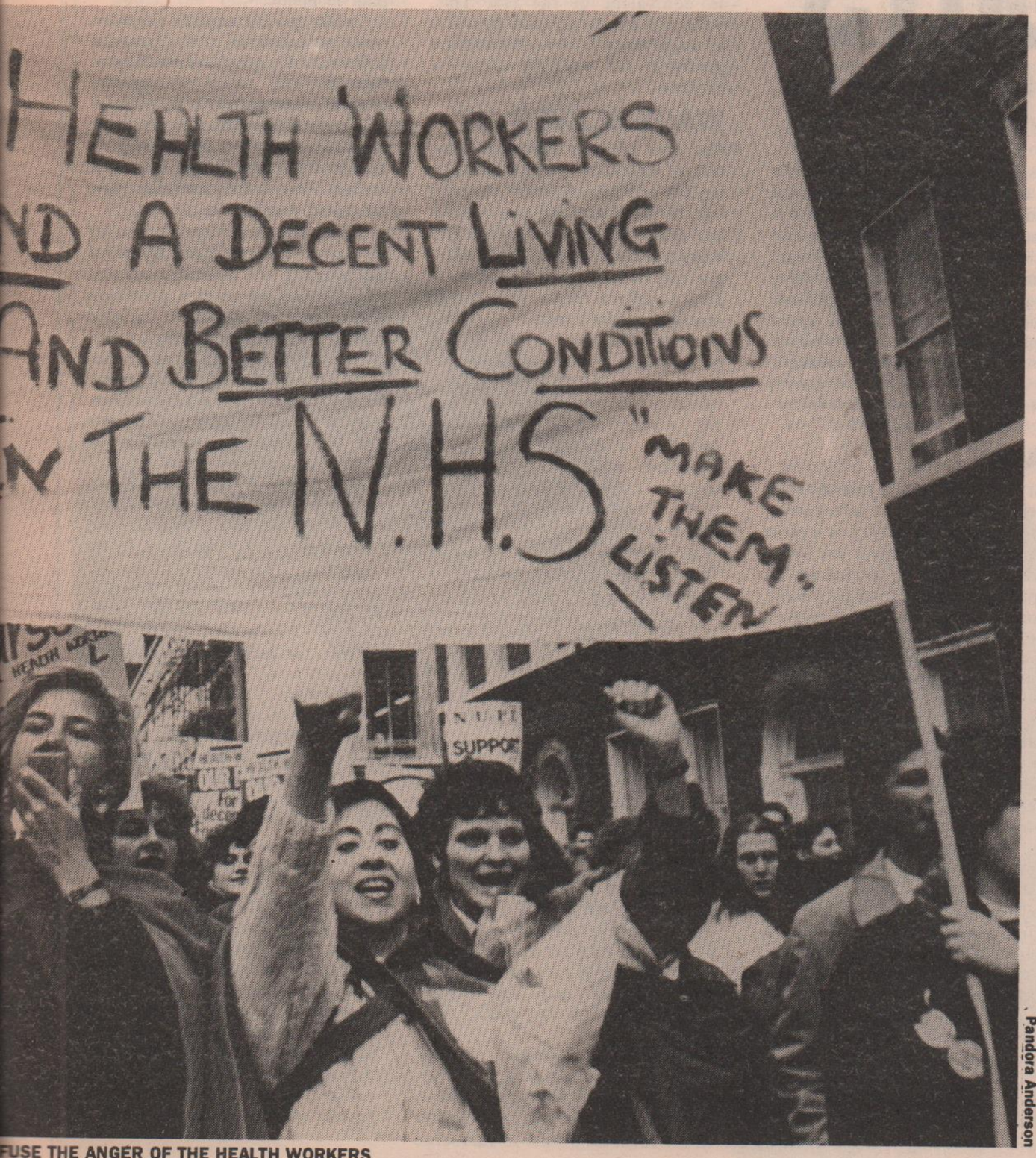
ISOLATION

The Labour and trade union leaders are putting pressure on all those involved in struggle to fall in line. They have succeeded in slowing down the tempo of the health workers' struggle and are working overtime to undermine the impetus for action at Ford. They have dissociated themselves from the fight against the Alton Bill. In the short term this unwillingness by labour bureaucrats to support the struggles that are taking place can only increase the isolation of the different campaigns. In the long term, however, this could prove to be their undoing. Marxists can use this experience to politicise the struggles by exposing the duplicity of the Labour leaders and putting the case for class politics.

Time is running short. There is a danger that lack of progress will soon lead to a loss of impetus. Militants could become marginalised as their fellow workers retreat in the face of obstacles. There is a possibility that the movement could fragment in a welter of recriminations.

Only the politicisation of the struggles can steel the movement to deal with its enemies.

RCP supporters must use every opportunity to make the most of the time that is left. It is important that the experiences of the current struggles become a positive lesson for those going into action in the period ahead — and not another argument against fighting back.



Pandora Anderson

FUSE THE ANGER OF THE HEALTH WORKERS

propaganda war

THE PERSECUTION OF THE MOONIES

THE government's decision to drop its high court action to revoke charitable status from the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church caused a storm of controversy in the house of commons last week. Attorney General Sir Patrick Mayhew claimed that the government had insufficient evidence to challenge the group's claim to tax exemption on the grounds that it was a registered charity for religious education. Conservative, Liberal and Labour MPs criticised the government's climbdown and demanded tough measures against the Moonie cult.

The Tory government's discomfiture reveals the establishment's difficulty in distinguishing between a cult religion and the mainstream variety. The opposition MPs' calls for state persecution of the Moonies, however, set a dangerous precedent which could have much wider repercussions.

◆

'In English law', according to the Attorney General, 'there is a strong presumption that any trust for the advancement of any religion, without distinction, is charitable unless the contrary is proved by evidence admissible in court proceedings.' Mayhew was forced to admit that he would find it very difficult to convince a court of law that the Unification Church was fundamentally different from all the other churches which receive official subsidy.

Moonie theology is millenial and messianic — just like the charismatic, evangelical style of religion that is currently sweeping the established Christian churches. The Reverend Moon founded his church in Korea in 1954 on a distinctive interpretation of the Bible. The Moonies believe that the Fall is the result of a sexual liaison between Eve and the archangel Lucifer, followed by further fornication with Adam. Because Jesus did not marry, he could only offer humanity spiritual, not physical, salvation. Most Moonies believe that the Reverend Moon is the Lord of the Second Advent, though he has not personally claimed divine status.

▼

Wacky? Certainly. But, is the gospel according to Moon much more far-fetched than tales about immaculate conceptions, virgin births, resurrections from the dead, assumptions into heaven and diverse miracles which are the common fare of mainstream Christianity?

The Moonies are well-known for their insistence on celibacy before marriage and fidelity afterwards, and for their cult ritual of mass weddings. At a time when the British government and the established churches are all preaching the virtues of chastity and monogamy in the era of Aids, it is difficult for the Attorney General to justify singling out the marriage-mad Moonies for persecution.

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Labour left winger John Fraser led the chorus of condemnation of the Attorney General: 'The essence of the law is that a religious charity should direct itself to the benefit of the public and not positive harm and right-wing political activity.' The Moonies are indeed an obnoxious and reactionary cult. Their list of front organisations includes the International Federation for Victory over Communism and God's Light Infantry, and they are well-known for their links with the CIA and right-wing fundamentalist campaigns.

But what's new? The Catholic Church is a formidable mobiliser for anti-abortion groups and the Church of England is in the vanguard of the anti-gay backlash. Left-wing demands for government action against the marginal activities of the Moonies are an evasion of the task of combating religious reaction where it has a real impact on British society. They also invite the state to extend its repressive activities in a way that can only give it greater legitimacy to clamp down on any group it decides to label as subversive. The inevitable victims of any such increased repression will be on the left.

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Our response to the Moonie controversy should be to uphold the freedom of religious worship, while demanding an end to the whole system of state subsidy of religion through the sham of charitable status. We want to see the back of the Reverend Moon, the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury and all the rest, but we will pay a heavy price if we ask the Tory government to do it for us.



CHANCELLOR NIGEL LAWSON SHARES A JOKE ABOUT THE TAX CUTS CON AT THE BRITISH BOSSES' ANNUAL JAMBOREE

BUDGET CHOICES

WHY THE TORIES FAVOUR TAX CUTS

Tony Kennedy examines the capitalist logic behind Tory attempts to cut public spending

Medical consultants, trade union leaders and left-wing radicals are urging the government to forgo tax cuts in next month's budget in favour of increased spending on healthcare. Opinion polls show that a majority of people in Britain favour the compassionate alternative to Tory policy. But heightened public concern over declining standards of healthcare will not defeat a government bent on reversing the decline of British capitalism.

Sentimental concern about the plight of society's underdog is a tradition long associated with liberal sections of the British establishment.

Indeed the founding of the welfare state after the Second World War suggested a future of officially sanctioned compassion for the less fortunate. All but a few stalwart reactionaries registered approval for 'free', comprehensive welfare services. These attitudes extended to the tax system. Under 'progressive' tax policies, employers and the highly paid would give up a bigger slice of their incomes than low-paid workers. The lower orders would benefit from services paid for by the wealthy.

WELFARE

The consensus established around state services affected more radical thinking too. Left wingers applauded the principle of state-run 'cradle to the grave' welfare. Nevertheless, aware of its middle class, philanthropic connotations they gave the notion a radical edge. The welfare state was presented as an historic victory wrested from Britain's obstinate rulers by the working class. Today, populist slogans such as 'No tax cuts for the rich' and appeals for additional spending exemplify the left's belief that the capitalist state can be a vehicle for progressive change.

The view that the state can ensure a decent living for everyone is illusory. The capitalist state responds not to abstract moral precepts about what is humane, but to the hurly-burly world of profit-making. Taxes and service provision are a burden on profits. With the capitalist system in the throes of recession, the Tories have no option but to cut back on state services.

TAXES

All taxes are a deduction from the surplus-value generated by the capitalist exploitation of the working class.

This is obvious in the case of taxes on business profits (corporation tax). In the 1984 budget the government radically reduced the tax liabilities on company profits. Surcharges on very high profits were abolished. Standard rates of corporation tax were reduced while the profit levels at which higher rates are paid were increased. For companies with annual profits below £100 000, the corporation tax rate now falls in line with income tax. In the last budget it fell from 29 to 27 per cent.

At first sight it seems illogical to maintain that income tax too is paid wholly out of the surplus-value appropriated by the capitalist class. Only in exceptional cases is this obvious. For instance, annual dividends paid to shareholders come out of company profits and are liable to income tax. And since capitalist employers add no value to production, their personal incomes must also be paid out of surplus-value. But what about those taxes deducted from workers' pay packets? Surely this means that taxes come out of workers' wages as well as profits?

VALUE

For capitalists, purchasing workers is simply an investment, just like buying a factory or a piece of machinery. Workers are taken on because of their unique ability to produce new value, in particular, unpaid surplus-value. However, just like any other component of capital investment, labour-power costs money. The cost of labour-power corresponds to the cost of those goods deemed by society to be the basic level of subsistence for the labourer, whether it embodies only a few consumption items or stretches to videos, cars and foreign holidays. This represents the value of the commodity labour-power.

Whatever the rate of income tax, workers' wages after tax tend to reflect the value of labour-power. Hence, a rise in the rate of income tax forces wages up. In effect an increased income tax burden ends up as rising labour costs for the capitalist and, therefore, a deduction from surplus-value.

Of course this situation is not absolute. Capitalists can try to offset the burden of rising income tax by attacking living standards and driving wages below the value of labour-power. But such opportunities are limited in the short term and risk provoking class conflict.

The current upsurge of strikes in industry and services is mainly a response to the employers' attempts to rationalise wage costs.

Taxes on the sale of goods (value added tax) have a similar effect on profits. Employers may incur the cost directly by paying the tax without raising sale prices. Otherwise they can raise prices by an equivalent of the tax. This, however, exerts upward pressure on wage costs as the consumption goods of the working class rise in price.

WAGE-SLAVES

The fact that all taxes are paid out of capitalist profits is better understood by employers than the left. Slogans like 'No tax cuts for the rich' sustain a belief that the working class should devote its energies to calling on the capitalist state to reform the tax system. The implicit endorsement of lower taxes for the poor unites the left with British business. Noting that taxes as a proportion of national output have risen under the Tories, the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors are calling for basic income tax rates as low as 10 per cent. This has little to do with improving the lot of Britain's wage-slaves. Capitalists understand that lower income tax rates reduce labour costs.

STATE SPENDING

While taxes are a deduction from surplus-value, state spending makes little contribution to raising future surplus-value. Most state spending is 'unproductive' from the standpoint of the capitalist class.

Forms of state spending that come closest to raising surplus-value are the various forms of subsidies given to industry. A recent department of trade and industry white paper on promoting small businesses involves plans for a new system of investment grants and financial help for design, technology and marketing information.

Subsidies, however, simply involve redistributing surplus-value away from one sector, through taxation, towards another in the form of grants. In this sense they may aid future profits if the recipient companies are commercially viable. Most subsidies, however, go to unprofitable concerns, such as state-run industries. Aid to nationalised industries depresses profit levels since it finances the running of commercially unviable concerns. This explains why nationalised industries have been at the centre of the Tory offensive against the working class. Mass job shedding, low wages and work flexibility in shipbuilding, steel and mining are essential if British capital is to maintain already poor profits.

State spending on infrastructure (roads, rail, communications and the sewerage system) is also a direct deduction from existing profits. Business generally favours higher spending in this area because it reduces production costs in the future. For private capitalists, narrow and pot-holed roads, collapsing sewers and faulty telephone lines cost money. Big cuts by the Tories in infrastructural spending are particularly irksome to British bosses. The CBI is urging the government to switch resources from services to infrastructure to ensure that Britain is not shackled with an outdated system which adds to business costs.

BURDEN

Social security, health and education take up nearly half the present state budget of around £170 billion. This spending is a burden on profit-making. Even its indirect aid to profits is minimal. For capitalists there is little economic rationale in maintaining millions of unemployed workers even on minimal subsistence. Likewise, state employment of civil servants, teachers and hospital workers is very different from taking on labour in the private sector. Since they produce no surplus-value their wages are not a capital investment for the purpose of making profits, but simply a drain on existing profits.

The rationale for state spending on services is political rather than economic.

Unlike private capital, the state must be sensitive to the broader concerns of capital accumulation. Because the needs of private capital contradict the general welfare of the population, the state is responsible for preventing its victims from becoming a source of unrest. This is the capitalist logic behind the welfare state.

The state always tries to minimise the political costs of maintaining the capitalist system. The quality of service provision has never lived up to the inflated claims of its early exponents. Wages in the unproductive service sector have always been much lower than in the private sector. This is especially important given the labour-intensive character of public service provision.

NECESSARY

The Tory offensive against the state sector has little to do with Thatcher's personal affinity for philosophical dogmas popular among nineteenth-century street traders. Twentieth-century capitalism is too decrepit to countenance 'self-reliance' and free-for-all competition. Thatcher appreciates that state spending is necessary, but she wants to make sure that it is channelled into areas where the benefits for the system will be felt. With profits ever more scarce there is no point paying millions of wage-slaves to provide others with services which reap no profitable return.

The capitalist class allocates spending according to the laws of the profit system. There is thus no point engaging our rulers in a technical debate about how much to spend and where it should go. Our sole concern should be to forge a movement to force the state to pay for what we need in the course of fighting to overturn its system of wage-slavery.

STOP CLAUSE 28

THE ISSUE IS LESBIAN & GAY RIGHTS

Last week three lesbians abseilled, SAS-style, into the chamber of the house of lords. Unfortunately, argues Don Milligan, the politics of the Stop Clause 28 campaign are no match for their audacity

The three lesbians who so outraged the lords were protesting against Clause 28 of the Tory Local Government Bill which aims to outlaw the 'promotion' of homosexuality. But this militant demonstration was part of a movement which is channelling the anger of lesbians and gays into lobbying the rich and famous, the house of lords and various local authority committees, all of whom have no capacity to fight for our rights. The watchwords of the Stop Clause 28 campaign are human rights, civil liberties and artistic freedom, all chosen to appeal to a liberal sentiment that no longer has much influence in society.

The middle ground of moderate opinion on questions of sexuality and morality is fast disappearing as the climate of reaction deepens under the impact of economic crisis. This trend is expressed most sharply in public attitudes to lesbians and gays. A recent Harris Centre poll for *Weekend World* revealed that approval of legalised adult homosexuality is down from 66 per cent in 1979 to 48 per cent today. The survey indicated that 83 per cent of those questioned were opposed to schools presenting homosexual relations on a par with heterosexual ones; 52 per cent opposed public funding of homosexual counselling; 68 per cent believed that lesbians and gays should not display affection in public; and 55 per cent believed that the public sale of gay or lesbian newspapers and magazines should be prohibited.

Popular prejudice against homosexuality has always been strong.

But from the late sixties and into the eighties, lesbian and gay organisations gained wider public acceptance of equality. This trend was brought to a halt by government sponsorship of the Aids panic from the end of 1986. The authorities have taken advantage of the Aids panic to whip public opinion into line behind a renewed offensive against homosexuality.

Within a month of the launch of the Tories' 'Don't Die of Ignorance' campaign, *New Society*, the house-journal of British liberalism and the weekly equivalent of the *Guardian*, had identified lesbians and gays as the source of contagion:

'But the fact does remain that homosexuals were the people who brought Aids into this country. Aids was brought here by homosexuals, British and American, who had their beady eyes caught by advertisements in the gay press which told them, in so many words, how cheap and easy it was to have a holiday in the sun of Haiti or Morocco — and have a native thrown in for the price of a pina colada. That this is so should be a matter of great shame and regret to our homosexual community. (Sue me.)' (20 February 1987)

This piece was penned by Julie Birchill, former punk chronicler for the *NME* turned trendy journalist for *The Face*, who set out to imbue bigotry with street credibility.

More recently the Princess Royal backed up Burchill's stance, without trying to cover her tracks with 'anti-racism', by blaming homosexuals for infecting the 'innocent' with the Aids 'plague':

'The real tragedy is the innocent victims, people who have been infected unknowingly, perhaps as a result of a blood transfusion, and a few who may have been infected knowingly by sufferers seeking revenge.'

In the bigoted world of Julie Burchill and Princess Anne, homosexuals are 'guilty' of contracting, importing and spreading disease.

They have been accused too, in places like Haringey, of recruiting schoolchildren to lives of perversion and permissiveness. The creation of these nightmares has been the work of all sections of the establishment. The right wing, represented by MPs David Wilshire, Dame Jill Knight and Elaine Kellett-Bowman, has been backed by the royal family, the church, mainstream politicians and the media. Now liberal opinion too is manning the moral barricades.

It is in this climate that Clause 28 looks certain to become law. When it does, the 'intentional promotion of homosexuality' by local authorities and schools will be outlawed. The precise meaning of the new law will be established in court cases brought against Labour councils for supporting organisations, publications and teaching that put homosexuality on an equal footing with heterosexuality. The effect of this law will be to reinforce the unlawful status of lesbians and gays. It will enable the police to impose a more rigorous enforcement of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. This is the law that defines gay men's efforts to meet each other as 'soliciting' and 'importuning', and defines all sexual relations between men in any circumstances as 'gross indecency'. The passage of Clause 28 will fuel demands for the suppression of the lesbian and gay press because it preaches 'obscenity' and 'indecency'.

In this climate of reaction attempts by the Stop Clause 28 campaign to appeal to a liberal middle ground supportive of human rights, civil liberties and artistic freedom are doomed to failure. A polite public relations-style campaign cannot match up to the scale of the state's attack. Worse still, such a campaign can never advance the cause of homosexual liberation because it seeks to enlist the support of people who do not even believe in equal rights for lesbians and gays.

The approach of opposing Clause 28 because it endangers the artistic depiction of homosexuality is fatal.

It means evading the threat of the law to *homosexuals* by highlighting the threat to artistic licence. This will not cut any ice with the authorities, but it will surely sidetrack our campaign away from the central issue of lesbian and gay rights. The approach of currying favour with the house of lords is just as dangerous. The majority of the opponents of the clause in the lords are against teaching children that homosexuality is an equally good form of sexual expression. Almost all are opposed to the complete decriminalisation of homosexuality. Even those who uphold some vague concept of civil liberties, like the Archbishop of York, voted against the clause only because they considered it 'too blunt an instrument'. The archbishop went on to assure the house of lords that he had no wish to encourage the excesses of the 'loony left' fringe.

Robert Kilroy-Silk, failed Labour MP and aspiring chat show host, typifies the right-wing nature of the opposition to Clause 28:

'It is pointless, counter-productive, impolite, unnecessary and downright discourteous to thrust their sexuality and their social and economic demands and their lifestyle in everyone else's face. To go further and insist in studiously strident tones that homosexuality is as good, if not better, a way of life than heterosexual relationships, that it is just as "normal". To go on to insist, as many did, and still do, that homosexuality should be promoted in schools, is asking for big trouble. Of course it is. Any sensible and reasonable person can see that. And trouble is what they've got.' (*The Times*, 29 January)

According to this view from 'liberals', lesbians and gays who make no secret of their sexual orientation or who are too vocal in their demands for equal treatment, have only themselves to blame for the anti-homosexual backlash. Even an arch-reactionary like Digby Anderson, director of the Social Affairs Unit, can agree with this. Writing in *The Times* last week, Anderson echoed the liberal critics of Clause 28 in accusing 'political extremists' of jeopardising the position of the 'discreet, retiring' homosexual *Times* reader (3 February).

You cannot fight for homosexual rights if you concede that lesbians and gays do not deserve equal treatment.

Yet this is the basis of much of the opposition to Clause 28. No doubt the moderate critics of the clause do not want to see a backlash against homosexual people, nor do they want tougher laws. But the limitations of liberal tolerance, as expounded by Kilroy-Silk, mean that their differences with the moral censors are only a matter of degree.

We cannot afford to hand the struggle for our rights over to people who have no intention of fighting for them. Nor can we rely on Labour councils to take a stand against Clause 28. If their capitulation to Tory laws against overspending on jobs and services is anything to go by, Labour councillors are not going to stick out their necks for lesbians and gays by refusing to attend court hearings when they are summoned to answer charges of 'intentionally promoting homosexuality'. Labour councils will do Neil Kinnock's law-abiding bidding and send their lawyers scurrying into court to plead that they had no intention of promoting homosexuality. The Labour-controlled Association of London Authorities has already set up a programme of training seminars for councillors and voluntary sector groups to prepare them for cooperation with the terms of the clause.

The chances of Clause 28 being thrown out by parliament are nil. The chances of it being amended in a way that benefits lesbians and gays are nil. The chances of Labour councils defying the law are nil. We have to face up to the fact that the Thatcher government has secured wide public support for its attack on homosexual people, and we have to set about changing this state of affairs. We can only do it by winning the support of working people for the fight for democratic rights.

We have to win over council workers and wider sections of the working class to an understanding that the promotion of family values and the outlawing of homosexuality are a device for dividing and disorienting our movement. We have to spell out that the authorities are waging their campaign of moral reaction to focus the attention of society on inward-looking private fears. They are promoting a preoccupation with personal morality and family life to enable them to control society more easily. Britain's rulers know that a nation of private families is a collection of isolated individuals who pose no threat to the capitalist order.

Winning ordinary people to the banner of homosexual liberation is an essential part of the wider struggle to unite the working class against the system of exploitation and oppression.

Campaigning for the complete *decriminalisation* of homosexuality — the abolition of all unequal laws, rules and regulations used by the state against lesbians and gays — is the basis for building such a movement. It is also the only approach that will make it possible to mobilise local government workers against the anti-gay laws. We cannot expect people to take on their employers and the state unless they have been won to the slogans of the Stop Clause 28 campaign — Equal Rights for All, Fight for Lesbian and Gay Rights.



USA vs EEC

HI-TECH TRADE WAR

Two weeks ago America and Europe fell out over hi-tech trade with the USSR — Gemma Forest analyses the new antipathies that are likely to follow



APPLAUSE: SHEVARDNADZE

Last month Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze visited Helmut Kohl in Bonn and pulled off a major coup. The media focused on his attractive offer to rid West Germany of the threat of short-range Soviet nukes; but his real success was in denouncing the USA and getting a standing ovation.

Through the shadowy Coordinating Committee on Multilateral Export Controls — Cocom — America prevents its allies from selling the things they'd like to sell to the East. Cocom-banned technologies are supposed to cover weapons, atomic energy equipment and those civilian industrial goods — robots, machine tools, lasers and especially chips, computers and software — which are susceptible to military application. In practice the inventory of gadgets covers nearly anything the USA believes West Germany and other trade rivals can sell Moscow. Shevardnadze denounced this state of affairs to a gathering of 200 West German industrialists and he was applauded.

LAMBASTED

Eager for profitable sales opportunities in the East, the president of West Germany's Association of Chambers of Commerce stood up to attack Cocom's strictures. Foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher lambasted American attempts to force Europe to tighten up hi-tech controls as 'antediluvian' and a product of the Cold War fifties. Given that Bonn's exports to the USSR have dropped by nearly 50 per cent in the past two years, Shevardnadze's polemical words fell on attentive ears.

But while opinion polls show that almost 70 per cent of West Germans do not feel threatened by the Kremlin, the USA is furious at their leaders' repudiation of Cocom's constraints.

The USA is not especially concerned about the Soviet Union having access to Western hi-tech goods. But it is vitally concerned that its allies are flouting its authority and opening up markets which threaten its interests. To whip the recalcitrant states into line, the USA is resurrecting the anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Cold War era.

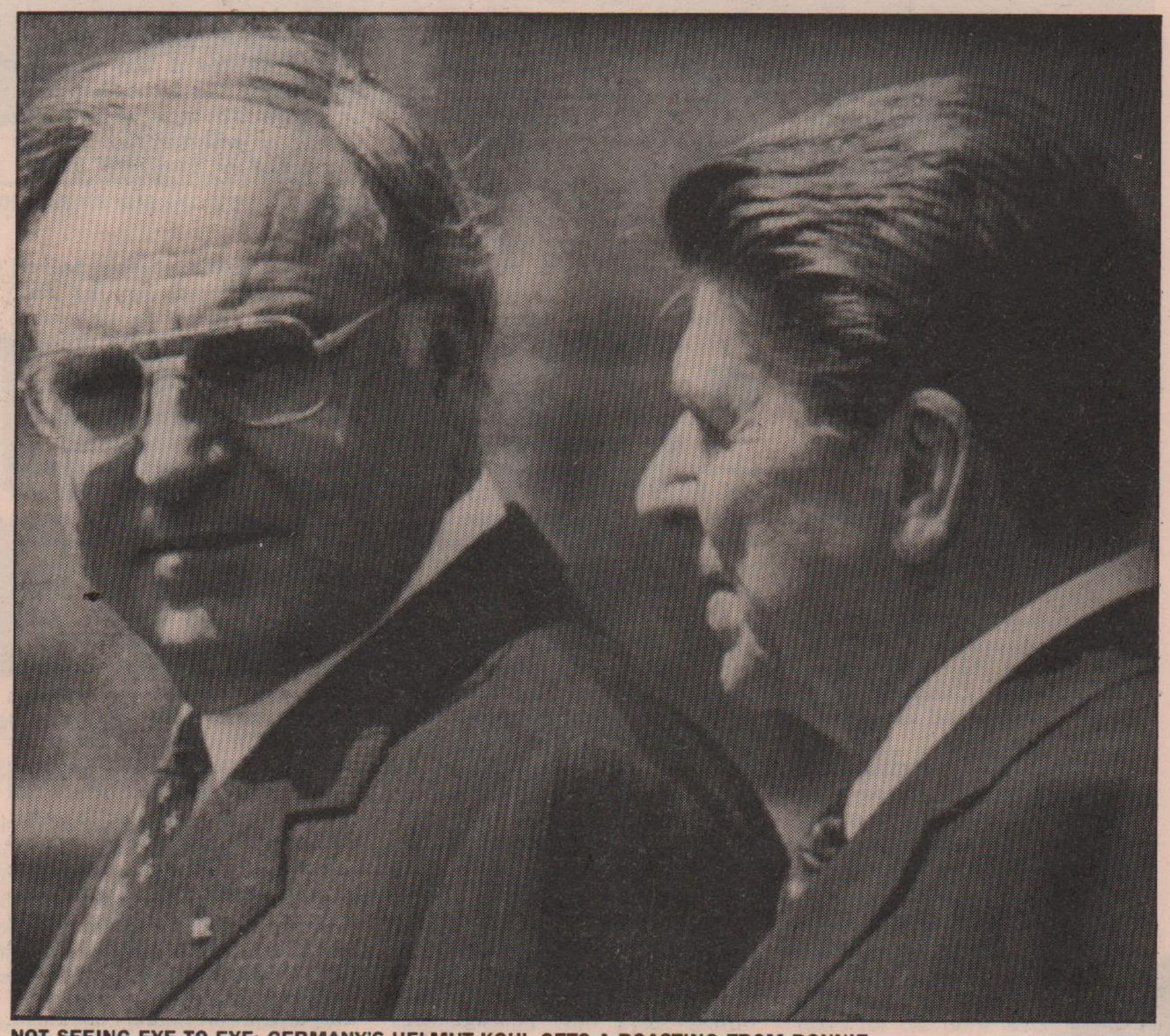
WEDGE

Moscow is desperate for West Germany's technology: the country is the largest single exporter to the USSR. It is also keen to drive a wedge into the Western alliance, and it knows that West Germany, left out of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit, bereft of even France's or Britain's nukes, and faced with a stagnant economy, would like to do business. For its part, Bonn would like to swap computers for satellite launches, a field in which the Soviets have pulled ahead of the USA since the Shuttle disaster. And, as Kohl enthused, Frankfurt's banks 'are ready with know-how and financing offers' (*Time*, 1 February). Nor is West Germany just interested in short-term deals. In the long term it would like to push Gorbachev into introducing capitalism in the USSR. As West German president Von Weiszacker made clear, instead of Cocom reprisals, the goal should be 'that the Soviet Union improve its performance at the price of opening its system'.

The USA cannot regard developments such as these with equanimity, particularly since the tango in Bonn follows a diplomatic offensive against Washington, embracing Britain and France as well. At stake is the stability of West-West military and economic cooperation, and, in the first place, Cocom.

HEGEMONY

Cocom was founded in 1949, the same year as Nato, and today embraces all Nato countries (bar Iceland and Spain), plus Japan. Like Nato, its purpose was less to blockade an exhausted Soviet Union, but more to establish US hegemony over its imperialist competitors. In the fifties East-West trade was miniscule, and even today Cocom's secretariat amounts to little more than a dozen officials hidden in an annexe to the US embassy in the Rue de la Boetie, Paris. Once West European economies became more dependent on East-West trade in the climate of detente in the sixties and seventies, however, an America in decline became more nervous about it.



NOT SEEING EYE TO EYE: GERMANY'S HELMUT KOHL GETS A ROASTING FROM RONNIE

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 gave Reagan his first excuse to put the frighteners on his allies.

The declaration of martial law in Poland in December 1981 gave him his second. At the Western leaders' summit at Ottawa that year Reagan made a public issue of Cocom. Reagan allocated $30m of defence department money to Project Exodus, a 'technology transfer control programme' aimed at intercepting dodgy exports by US firms in particular and foreign companies in general. In June the following year the Siberian pipeline controversy exploded. Reagan announced that any US firm, its European subsidiary, *and any European-owned concern using US-licensed technology* would be prevented from selling the Soviet Union equipment with which to build a pipeline to pump Siberian gas to Western Europe. The US president concealed his true intentions behind Cold War rhetoric. Reagan complained that Western Europe's continued desire to sell Moscow 125 US-designed 25-megawatt turbines bolstered Soviet economic potential, allowed the USSR to divert scarce resources to military ends, and mortgaged Bonn's future to imports of Soviet energy.

The US-USSR accord on Cruise and the SS20s last year confirmed that Reagan's anti-Sovietism does not conflict with his desire to save dollars and presidential prestige by high-profile deals with Moscow. But his attempt to use the Siberian pipeline issue as a stick to beat Europe with was only the first of many US strictures which have infuriated the Western powers.

When Reagan tried to impose US law on European firms, governments from Mitterrand on the left to Thatcher on the right instructed them to defy him. Within days Washington forbade American firms from further dealings with the offending European companies, and threatened 40 per cent duties on imports of EEC steel. Europe replied by reneging on earlier agreements not to undercut US farms in agricultural export markets.

Only a sense of the depth of the crisis within the Western alliance eventually allowed tempers to cool.

But not for long. In 1984 they flared up again, when British trade and industry secretary Norman Tebbit berated Cocom for giving the US judiciary powers in Europe it did not deserve.

Today West Germany, Britain and France have lodged a joint protest against proposed legislation to prevent any non-US company from doing business with the USA on the Pentagon's say-so (*International Herald Tribune*, 27 January). In Europe's view such reprisals impair European industry's ability to capitalise on US research, allow US firms to catch up with European technology and export their versions to the USSR, and of course do nothing to hinder Soviet military efforts.

Europe argues that by the time the USSR gets hold of Western technology exports they are often obsolescent anyway. Moreover, the Soviets are not known for their ability to apply Western inventions rapidly or widely. But just when Soviet-American relations have never been warmer, Washington is having none of this. It wants to increase the pressure on its allies worldwide.

On the surface America's hard line appears to be the result of four incidents last year. First the Japanese Toshiba Machine Company sold the USSR computerised milling machines, which, according to the Pentagon, make the propellers on Soviet submarines undetectable without the expenditure of billions of dollars. At the same time Norway's state-owned Konigsberg Vaapenfabrikk was found guilty of a similar crime. Then in November US customs agent Dan Supinck, working undercover on the West Coast, lured Frank Christie, a 51-year old elder of the Church of Scotland and a member of Britain's Institute of Directors, into selling oil pumps to Libya. Finally, in December, Washington stopped Bonn from selling a £2m, four-man, mini-submarine to North Korea on the grounds that, despite the export of a similar machine to North Korea in 1983, it could now be used to smuggle in agents to South Korea.

SUSPECT

In fact the military value of all these technologies is highly suspect. But that has not prevented the USA from casting its net still wider, pushing Asian computer leaders like Australia and Singapore to adhere to Cocom rules, and complaining of laxity on the part of non-Cocom members like Austria and Switzerland. A meeting in Versailles a fortnight ago signalled the seriousness of American intent; it was led by John Whitehead, second only to George Shultz in the US state department, and involved the highest ranking officials ever to engage in Cocom negotiations. The USA demanded stiffer penalties, more police and customs officials and a longer period of retrospective action for Cocom rules. Europe demanded a shorter list. An uneasy truce was reached, but the USA is determined to make Cocom an issue in Europe. This could easily backfire given the growing strength of anti-Americanism this side of the Atlantic.

Reagan's administration has gone to these lengths because a military focus on its allies' export policies is the only way to relieve the economic and political strain of its trade deficit back home. Meanwhile European resentment is growing. Only recently British trade minister Alan Clark added his voice to the chorus of disapproval. There can be no doubt that tensions will multiply over the months ahead, leading to the prospect of major embargoes.

The working class has no interest in siding with European employers against the US militarists.

We hold no brief for Gorbachev, but we could not care less who he gets a new shiny underwater propeller from. Our aim should be to unite our forces against the Western system of global domination that makes war inevitable and expects us to pay the price.

DIPLOMACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THE WEST'S FAVOURITE FRAUD



THE INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE BUSINESS MIGHT HAVE BENEFITED FROM THE WEST'S SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY, BUT THE ONLY PLANES THE ISRAELIS USE TO 'SOLVE' THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION ARE BOMBERS

Talk about an international peace conference in the Middle East is designed to disarm the Palestinians. Daniel Nassim explains

The Palestinian uprising has given an unexpected boost to the international airline business. Before the demonstrations and street-fighting in the occupied territories started on 9 December, the Middle East diplomatic process had been temporarily grounded. Since the upsurge in resistance against Israel, Western leaders have shuttled around the Middle East and Arab leaders have busily toured Western capitals.

RANKED

Until the uprising, most of the diplomatic envoys with responsibility for the Palestine conflict had stashed away their suitcases. In the USA it was accepted that Middle East diplomacy would be given a low priority during election year. The Arab summit in November for the first time ranked Palestine below the Gulf War in its list of priority problems. But daily confrontations between stone-throwing Palestinians and Israeli soldiers soon brought out the diplomatic bags.

Western and Arab leaders have united around the need for an international peace conference in the Middle East.

Pro-Western Arab leaders were keenest to get a conference off the ground. After Tory minister David Mellor's high-profile attempt to defuse tension in Gaza, the West's favourite Arab leader, Egyptian president Mubarak, toured Western capitals to lobby support for a conference. Jordan's King Hussein swiftly followed his Egyptian counterpart.

Western leaders have followed the Arab initiative. Richard Murphy, the US state department's top Middle East official, went to London and Paris before travelling on to the Middle East. On Monday an EEC foreign ministers' conference met King Hussein and endorsed the idea of an international peace conference. Britain has sought to stay at the forefront of the diplomatic drive. Mellor affirmed that the Tories' 'support for an international conference is well-known and it is not a position from which we will easily be driven'. Next week Labour leader Neil Kinnock will try to catch up with the jet-set by going on a late package tour to the Middle East.

BILATERAL

Support for the idea of a peace conference even extends inside the Israeli political establishment. Labour leader Shimon Peres is one of the biggest supporters of a conference. The right-wing Likud advocates bilateral negotiations with Arab leaders instead. Both wings of the Zionist establishment welcome Western diplomacy as an aid to Israel.

Taken together, the supporters of the conference idea are a dubious force for peace in Palestine. Britain promoted the growth of Zionism on Palestinian soil before the Second World War, and continues to support the Zionist state. American money and guns prop up Israel today. Jordan's King Hussein massacred thousands of Palestinians in the 'Black September' of 1970. And Israel itself has only survived by launching genocidal wars against the Palestinians. Their collective credentials indicate that they are not seeking a just peace for the Palestinians. Instead, their phoney 'peace process' is designed to derail the Palestinian resistance to Israel.

The aim of the shuttle diplomats is to hype up the prospect of a Western-backed solution to the conflict in Palestine.

They have no illusions in their ability to construct a genuine agreement between the oppressive Israeli state and its Palestinian victims. But the West and its allies want to keep the hope of a diplomatic solution alive among Palestinians, to draw them away from militant resistance and towards talks and compromise. For the British, American and conservative Arab spokesmen, 'the process' is everything and peace is only a platitude. Thus there is plenty of support for a conference but no clear idea of its purpose. Instead, one round of talks leads to a preliminary set of negotiations which is followed by yet more 'talks about talks'. And so it goes on, while the Palestinians continue to suffer the attentions of the Israeli armed forces.

WOOLLY

In a typical display of woolly rhetoric, Ronald Reagan told the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram* that he believes any conference should be the prelude to direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states (*Jerusalem Post*, 28 January): 'There must be real movements in the direction of finding a political solution which will end the Arab-Israeli conflict. This matter is basic and vital.' What is truly vital for Reagan is that there should appear to be 'movements in the direction' of peace. Meanwhile, the 'basic' fact of Washington's military and financial support for Israel remains unchanged.

The Western powers are also keen on the idea of a conference which could compel Arab rulers explicitly to recognise the Israeli state. Arab recognition of Israel as a rightful partner in the diplomatic process is a major step towards legitimising Western intervention in the Middle East. By implication, it means accepting the right of the West to interfere in the region through its stooge Zionist state.

PARIAH

One of the most favourable recent developments for the Western powers is the increasingly open acceptance of Israel by the Arab regimes. In 1978, the USA oversaw a formal reconciliation between Egypt and Israel through the Camp David accord. Then, Egypt's relations with Israel were widely condemned and Cairo became the pariah of the Arab world. But the Arab states' re-establishment of ties with Egypt after their last summit showed that fear of unrest in the Middle East is bringing them round to the idea of openly recognising Israel.

Egyptian president Mubarak was at pains to reassure Israeli journalists that his latest diplomatic initiative poses no threat to the security of the Israeli state: 'Israel has nothing to fear from an international conference. It should scare no one since it will bring us to direct peace talks' (*Jerusalem Post*, 26 January).

The only people who have anything to fear from a 'peace process' based on the recognition of Israel are the Palestinians.

The primary concern of both Western and Arab leaders is containing the unrest in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For the first time in 20 years Palestinians in the territories have staged a mass rising against the Israeli occupation forces. The demonstrations have been spontaneous and uncoordinated. But they represent a potentially destabilising force in the region, which the imperialists and the Arab elite share an interest in stamping out.

Egypt's initiative is a rehash of the 1978 Camp David accord. That plan for Palestinian 'autonomy' — negotiated between Egypt, Israel and the USA — was specifically designed to minimise unrest in the occupied territories. Under the plan Israeli forces would withdraw from Palestinian population centres. A Jordanian-backed police force would keep control of the main Palestinian areas, while the Israeli army would keep control of 'strategic locations'.

The original accord promised the granting of 'autonomy' to the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza within five years. In reality they denied Palestine the right to full self-determination, and endorsed Israel's right to defend itself against the Palestinians. Four years later Israel exercised that 'right' by invading Lebanon to drive out the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and presiding over the massacre of Palestinians in the process. By neutralising Egypt the Camp David accord freed more Israeli forces to crush the Palestinians in Lebanon.

FREEZE

Mubarak's updated autonomy plan is mildly more radical than the original version. The Egyptian leader is calling for a freeze on Israeli settlements in return for a six-month cooling off period by the Palestinians. But the Israelis do not have the people or the money to build many settlements at present.

So the only part of Mubarak's plan with any meaning is the demand that the Palestinians stop fighting.

By pushing aside the issue of self-determination the politicians and diplomats hope to divert Palestinian resistance into diplomatic channels. Western leaders are particularly keen for Palestinians to get off the streets and invest their hopes in talks across negotiating tables.

It would be understandable if ordinary Palestinians who have suffered so much were attracted to the idea of winning peace through diplomatic means. In reality, however, Arab diplomacy has never bothered the Zionist state. Israel's real concern is putting down Palestinian resistance. Palestinian demonstrators cannot be defeated by rifles and tear gas grenades alone. Zionist leaders are happy for the diplomatic process to distract the Palestinians, while they get on with the job of containing forceful resistance.

SHAM

Western diplomatic manoeuvres in Palestine have gone on for more than 70 years. When Britain carved up the region after the First World War it made contradictory pledges to Arab and Zionist leaders, promising both control over the area now ruled by Israel. Since the Second World War, Western rulers have supported Israel's oppression of the Palestinians while maintaining a continuous sham 'peace process'. The intensity of diplomatic activity depends on the level of Palestinian resistance at the time. Since 1948 every US president has launched a new initiative on Palestine.

All the diplomatic manoeuvres in the Middle East are a charade designed to neutralise the Palestinian struggle.

Israel is happy for Palestinian demonstrators to become passive observers of international shuttle diplomacy. For the Palestinians the 'peace process' is a dangerous diversion from their struggle against Israel and its Western backers. Diplomacy only benefits the Western powers, Arab rulers and Israel — plus the international airline business.

THE FUTURE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

ROBOCOP



RoboCop, **Paul Verhoeven (director)**
The scene is Detroit, in the future. A television news programme blandly reports on a presidential visit to a Star Wars space platform and on Pretoria's impending use of the neutron bomb. But things haven't changed that much. The adverts are pushing private healthcare, and soon there is news of a good old-fashioned strike — against the effects of privatisation in the police force. It has been taken over by a sinister corporation which sees law enforcement as 'urban pacification', a precondition for the smooth employment of two million workers in building Delta City. The new management's answer to the disgruntled workforce and to their longer term needs is the development of a robot policeman.

If all this sounds serious and heavy duty, it certainly isn't. Paul Verhoeven effortlessly insinuates such issues into what is essentially a fast-paced and very funny piece of comic strip. He doesn't allow any serious consideration of them to get in the way of the chases and the mayhem which are set in train by the grisly murder of honest cop Murphy. What is left of Murphy's body forms the basis of the robot policeman. It turns out to be invulnerable to everything but the returning human consciousness, seeping back into a brain the corporation had tried to wipe clean.

With a very sure touch Verhoeven plunders just about every known movie genre — the vigilante, the futuristic sci-fi, the fantasy, the gangster, the horror, the western, and a few television ones too. Never labouring the point he weaves in themes and references from the likes of *Superman, Dirty Harry, Blade Runner, Terminator, The Fly, Dallas* and *Hill Street Blues*. At the same time he carefully maintains the momentum through a plot that is both simple and clever. The result is a witty, lighthearted, lightweight adventure story.

To be sure, he can wield some very traditional stereotypes. The corporation is the slick and callous machine which has been the villain of many a populist melodrama. And we have the usual underclass of slimy, vicious lumpen morons who are threatening civilisation as we know it. In the background hovers the memory of an ideal nuclear family clustered around our fearless hero. But then as Verhoeven observes with his tongue firmly in Murphy's cheek, 'Role models can be very important for a boy.'

It is not, however, a film to take too seriously. As well as, and more often as part of the violence and excitement, there is great humour — such as the demonstration of the latest robot prototype to the board of directors, an encounter in the executive washroom between the bitter rivals for corporate power and a robot which can't negotiate the stairs. The political issues are resolved in favour of the status quo, but then what would you expect — at least they're there.
Pat Ford

THE STALKER AFFAIR

AN INNOCENT ABROAD

John Stalker, *Stalker,*
Harrap, £12.95

When John Stalker went to Northern Ireland in May 1984 to begin his investigation into the shooting of six unarmed nationalists by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the leader of the force, Sir John Hermon, invited him to lunch at the golf club. 'During the meal Hermon handed me a handwritten note, sketched out on the back of a flattened out cigarette packet. It outlined my family tree on my mother's side. She is Catholic, and her parents were born in the Irish Republic....Before we left the golf club he said to me "Remember, Mr Stalker, you are in a jungle now." ' The deputy chief constable of Manchester chose to ignore the warnings.

The background is well-known. In October 1982 the IRA, using explosives from a hayshed supposedly under surveillance, blew up three RUC men in Armagh. The British state unleashed their RUC Headquarters Mobile Support Units in an orgy of revenge. On 11 November unarmed IRA men Eugene Toman, Sean Burns and Gervais McKerr died in a hail of 109 bullets. On 24 November 17-year old Michael Tighe (of no organisation) was shot dead in a hayshed. On 12 December unarmed Inla men Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll were gunned down just outside Armagh city. And it wasn't over yet. In June 1984 Lord Justice Gibson signed his own death warrant when he commended the killers of Toman, Burns and McKerr for bringing the men 'to the final court of justice'. The warrant was executed in April 1987 when the IRA blew the judge up.



Pandora Anderson

NAIVE: JOHN STALKER LEARNED LITTLE FROM HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE BRITISH STATE

Stalker was determined to expose the shooting of Tighe in particular — 'the act of a Central American assassination squad — truly a police force out of control,' demonstrating his naivety on several accounts. First, the home office obviously wanted him to do a brisk whitewash job, and did not want him playing the boy scout. Secondly, he failed to appreciate that the police were not out of control at all, they were SAS-trained and officially sanctioned. After all, Margaret Thatcher had visited the precursor of the HMSU, the Bessbrook Support Unit, in December 1979 and told them 'I don't want to know what you're doing, but are you enjoying it?' Thirdly, he can hardly have expected Hermon (who appeared to have been involved in the cover-up himself) to stand idly by while Stalker destroyed him.

For two years Hermon and the RUC Special Branch were simply obstructive, refusing to hand over the tape which MI5 had made of the hayshed shooting. When Stalker persisted, it was decided to remove him. At a Police Federation annual conference on 19 May 1986 Sir Laurence Byford, the chief inspector of constabulary, Philip Myers of the home office police inspectorate and James Anderton, the chief constable of Manchester, secretly decided to take Stalker off the inquiry, and Hermon gave his statutory approval. On 29 May Stalker was told that he was under investigation himself and out of Northern Ireland for good. His removal having been achieved and there being no case against him, Stalker returned to work three months later. But Anderton made it clear he was no longer welcome and in March 1987 he resigned.

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Stalker seems to have learnt very little from his bruising encounter with the British state. His anger is reserved mainly for Hermon and Anderton (a very deserving pair it must be said), while he extends his sympathy to the government which 'has to take a broad view' of these matters, taking national security into account. This is no doubt partly a tactical move on his part to lessen the chances of a prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. (John Morris, Labour's shadow Attorney General, has become the champion of this act, condemning the government for being 'inconsistent' and 'irresponsible' for failing to prosecute.) Stalker continues to believe, however, what his political masters know is impossible, that the RUC could be 'honest and neutral in its relationships with *all* the people of Northern Ireland'. That's why he had to go.
Francis Walsh

REWRITING THE HISTORY OF PALESTINE

DAMN LIES

Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (eds), *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question,*
Verso, £8.95

This book is first and foremost a demolition job. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, academic and journalist, have assembled a collection of essays which unravel the lies and dismantle the myths used to defend the Israeli state and justify the oppression of the Palestinian people. They do not suffer from a lack of material.

In her book *From Time Immemorial* Joan Peters, aided and abetted by the American press, popularised the idea that it was only in the years 1946 to 1948 that the bulk of the Palestinians arrived in what became Israel. Here, Norman Finkelstein takes her book apart, showing her statistics to be inconsistent, her analysis illogical and her quotes simply faked. This disgraceful fraud, published in 1984, has been rapturously received in the United States and is now in its eighth edition.

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Another Zionist myth has it that the Palestinians fled their homes in 1948 because they were ordered to do so by their leaders. Hitchens sifts the evidence and finds not one shred to support such a thesis. On the contrary, he adduces several sources to show how it was the systematic Zionist terror, like the massacre at the village of Deir Yassin, which led to the exodus of 750 000 Palestinians within a couple of months.

The hypocritical and hysterical reporting of the Palestinian question by the Western media also comes under the hammer. In his essay 'Terrorism and American Ideology', Noam Chomsky exposes the monstrous lie of 'international terrorism', and its function in legitimising US foreign policy and its 'client state' Israel. He contrasts the Western response to incidents like the Achille Lauro hijack with the state terror of Israel and the USA. He remorselessly lists their atrocities, from Israel's involvement in the mass murder of civilians in Beirut or Tunis to the bombing of Libya by the United States in 1986.

The final chapters contain a thorough profile of the Palestinian people, including their history, their present demographic distribution and their varying economic and political status in Israel, the occupied territories and beyond. The account underlines the tremendous difficulties facing their unification. Nevertheless Said, himself a Palestinian with close ties to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, is at pains to emphasise that the Palestinians, even in adversity, have 'all the attributes of nationhood', save their homeland.

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Blaming the Victims does a valuable job in exposing the intellectual bankruptcy of the apologists for the Israeli state. But when they pass from demolition to construction the authors move on to shaky ground themselves. Said opens and closes the collection with an appeal to 'the international community' for 'peace and justice' for the Palestinians. The book is based on the assumption that if everybody is properly informed by crusading journalism and true scholarship then justice might be done. But the creation of the state of Israel was not the result of spurious scholarship and a compliant media, however they may help to sustain it. Its creation was a central plank of imperialist strategy in the region. And there is no 'international community' sensitive to persuasion; there are everywhere two sides, imperialism and those fighting it, in this case the Palestinian people.
Simon Quinn

'REALISTS' & 'ULTRA-LEFTISTS'

THIS week three supporters from different parts of the country reported similar problems when they raised discussion on the way forward for current campaigns. In each case, our people were accused of being 'ultra-left' and lectured about the need for 'realism'.

- One activist involved in setting up a local group to campaign against the anti-homosexual Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill (see page 11) told us about a dispute which broke out when he raised discussion on the aim of the campaign. He argued that the campaign had to demand 'equal rights for all' and 'fight for lesbian and gay rights'. Others in the meeting thought that it would not be possible to win support from people outside the lesbian and gay scene if they used slogans about homosexual rights. Instead they suggested that the campaign should focus on 'freedom of expression', and should publicise the concern of the Arts Council about the effect that Clause 28 might have on literature by EM Forster, Oscar Wilde, etc. This, they argued, was a stand that everyone who values culture would support, and because it was less extreme it would be easier to build a broad-based campaign involving teachers, librarians and journalists.
- Now that Liberal MP David Alton's bill to restrict women's access to abortion has gone into its committee stage in parliament, it's possible that all kinds of amendments will be put to it. Some Fight Alton's Bill campaign meetings have already started to discuss which amendments, if any, might make the bill acceptable. A suggestion which drew support from women at one such meeting was that the bill should be amended to grant free abortion on request up to 12 weeks, while tightening restrictions on later abortions. Another suggestion was that we should be prepared to compromise and accept an upper time-limit for abortion of 24 weeks. Our supporters present disagreed. We argued that both of these positions meant agreeing to attacks on women's rights. As women need free abortion on demand, that is what we should fight for. We were told that we were being 'unrealistic' and that today it is not possible to build support for such an 'extreme' demand.
- Last week our supporters around the country were arguing for solidarity with the health strike from other groups of workers. Some left wingers and union officials objected that this was 'provocative', counter-productive and utopian.

It's interesting that the arguments against our demands and the advice to be more 'realistic' have not come from ordinary health workers, women or homosexuals who want to fend off Tory attacks on their rights. The plea for 'realism' has usually come from members of other left-wing organisations, or left-wing trade union or Labour Party officials. Ordinary people have often been the ones to back us up. They recognise that the demands we put forward are realistic in as much as they reflect their *real* needs today.

For lesbians and gays it is simply not realistic to capitulate to anti-gay attitudes. Nor is it realistic to imagine that we can build effective opposition to Clause 28 without challenging the roots of anti-homosexual chauvinism. Any further restrictions on access to abortion will force more women to continue with unwanted pregnancies. Caring for an unwanted child, and carrying the heavy responsibilities that entails, is not a realistic way for women to live. And it is not realistic to expect health workers to win their fight without winning active support from other workers.

Our demands are not 'extreme', they relate to what the working class needs. And it's clear that workers are prepared to fight for what they need, given the chance. Last Wednesday the nurses who sought support might have been 'naive', but they won backing from many workers. They got results because they knew what they needed and they went for it. The Tories don't debate whether their actions are 'ultra-right' or 'moderate'. They do what their class needs to win. We need to learn that lesson.

The debates about 'realism' in the current campaigns do not reflect any 'ultra-leftism' on the part of our supporters. Rather, they indicate how much of the established left is becoming 'ultra-moderate' under the pressure of the Tory offensive. Left wingers have lowered their horizons to the level at which they hope they can connect with a public opinion heavily influenced by the Tories. In the process, they are forced to condemn basic demands for democratic rights and working class solidarity as the deluded visions of 'extremists'.

Defeat is the only thing which the left's 'heads down' approach makes realistic. It accepts important premises of the right's case — that homosexuals have no right to fight for equality, that women have no right to fight for abortion on demand, and that health workers should stand alone. By contrast, we are confident that it is possible to campaign unambiguously for lesbian and gay rights, that it is possible to win support for free abortion on demand, that it is possible to build solidarity for the health workers. But only if we use every opportunity to convince people of the need to stand alongside those under attack. If we don't raise the big issues, we'll never win the wider support needed to win.

Anne Burton



Pandora Anderson

BECOME AN RCP SUPPORTER

Name .....

Address .....

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Tel .....

Postcode .....

Public meeting
Stop Clause 28, No bans on lesbian and gay rights!
Thursday 25 February
7.30m
ICC, Mansfield Road
Nottingham

Workers Against Racism Benefit
with Camels at Play and Mango Groovy
Thursday 18 February
9.30pm
Eden, Greyhound St
Nottingham

IRISH FORUM

LESSONS FOR WITHDRAWAL: ALGERIA AND NORTHERN IRELAND
A series of four fortnightly discussions on the Irish War start in London next Wednesday 17 February. The forums will be at 7.30pm in Room S53, St Clements Building, at the London School of Economics, Houghton St (off Aldwych), WC2, (nearest tubes: Holborn or Temple).

the next step

OUR CLASS IS ALIVE AND KICKING

(Continued from front page)

- Ford workers are out on national strike for a decent pay rise without strings.
- Nurses and other health workers are taking industrial action against poverty-line wages and workhouse conditions.
- Seamen have just gone up against anti-union laws in an attempt to repel job-cutting employers.
- Others — from teachers and council staff to miners and TV technicians — have been involved in industrial action this year.

These sparks of life are a tonic to trade unionists and anti-Tories everywhere. Over the past nine years the Tories have tried to kill off workers' will to fight. They have imposed secret ballots and outlawed secondary action. They have blamed strikers for unemployment. And they have promised to build a Brave New Britain in which sweating for the employers and scabbing on our workmates would be a rewarding experience. But the current round of conflicts confirms that, as long as the division between the exploiters and the exploited remains at the centre of British society, ordinary people will have to hit back.

The strikes show that the recent victories the government and the employers have won over the working class are far from final. But let's not imagine that things are back where they were before Thatcher arrived. We should not expect a re-run of seventies-style industrial disputes. We are now in a different contest altogether. The bosses and the state which supports them have raised the stakes. In the last week alone, they have proved willing to use the police, the courts, the media and scab armies to undermine action by health workers and seamen. The Ford workers can expect the same treatment, as the Tories back up the firm to prevent a trend-setting wage rise.

To deal with the intensity of industrial struggle today, we will have to up the action and meet the challenge of the new political offensive. The first problem we have to confront is the stifling influence of the professional bureaucrats who run the unions at Ford, in the NHS and elsewhere. The strikes and protests have not only proved that our class is a vibrant and powerful force; they have also shown that our leadership is a dead layer at the top of the working class movement.

It looks like the leaders of the official labour movement live in a different world from their members.

- At Ford two weeks ago, union negotiators Mick Murphy (transport workers) and Jimmy Airlie (engineers) hailed the three-year pay and productivity deal they signed with management as 'an historic achievement'. But all their members could see was an historic concession to Ford bosses. The deal obliged the workers to sell their souls to the company for three years, for which privilege they would have to work harder and faster. They threw the package out in a ballot, and Murphy and Airlie were forced to call the strike from Sunday night. But these union bureaucrats can hardly be trusted to lead an effective fight against an attack from management which they initially welcomed with open arms (see page 2).

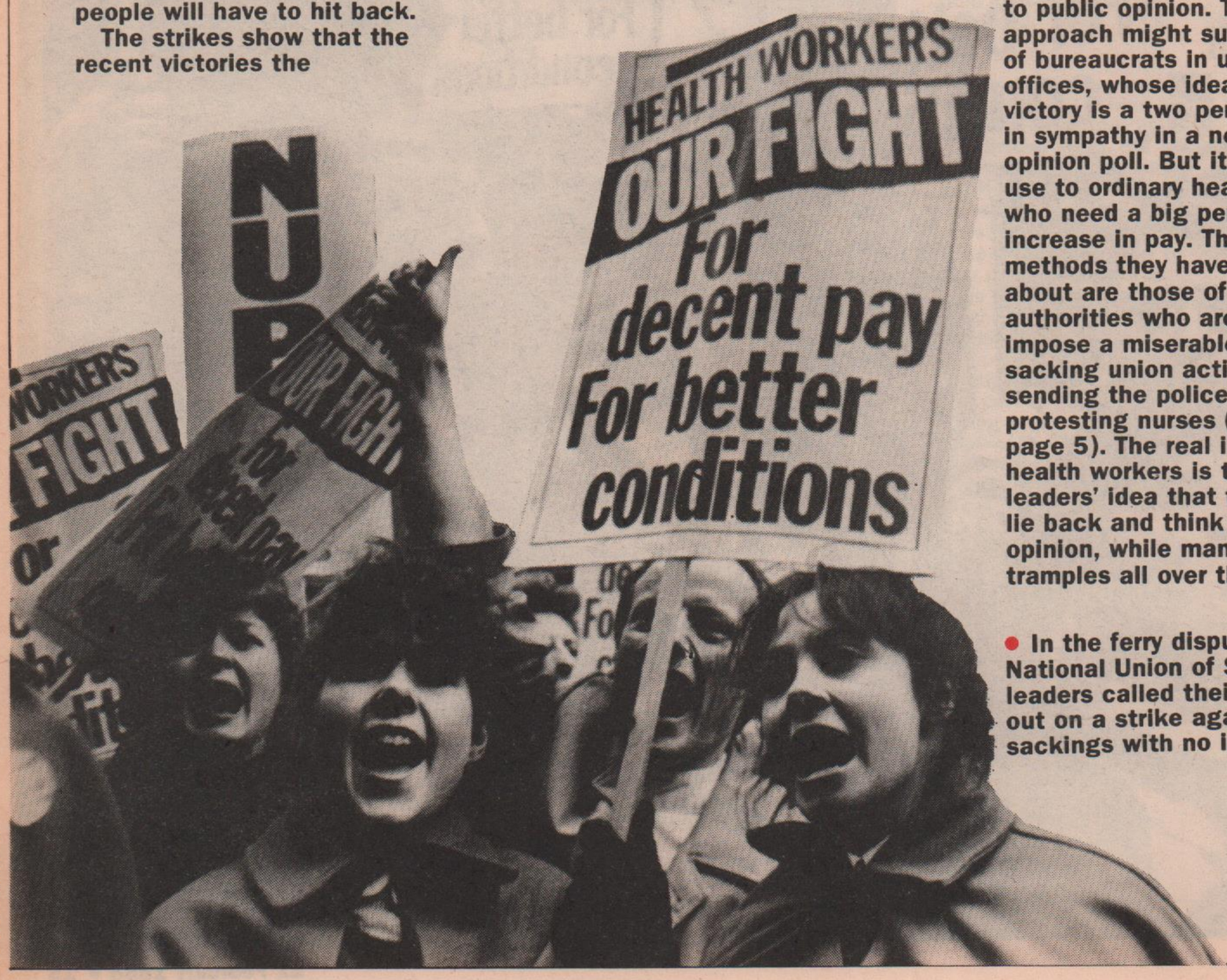
- In the health service, union officials are telling nurses and ancillary workers not to take serious industrial action in pursuit of a pay rise or against the cuts. After last week's one-day strike, Tom Sawyer, the deputy general secretary of Nupe and a top Labour Party fixer, condemned the idea of militancy as 'crude' and 'insulting' to nurses. Instead, the union officials want health workers to look harmless and pitiful, to appeal to public opinion. This approach might suit the needs of bureaucrats in union head offices, whose idea of a victory is a two per cent rise in sympathy in a newspaper opinion poll. But it is of little use to ordinary health workers who need a big percentage increase in pay. The 'crude' methods they have to worry about are those of the authorities who are trying to impose a miserable wage rise, sacking union activists and sending the police to brutalise protesting nurses (see page 5). The real insult to health workers is the union leaders' idea that they should lie back and think of public opinion, while management tramples all over them.

- In the ferry dispute, National Union of Seamen leaders called their members out on a strike against sackings with no intention of trying to win it. The officials knew that a national strike would be declared illegal under secondary action legislation, and they never contemplated confronting the law. The NUS officials played a little game of 'now we're on strike, now we're not' as a gesture to try to hold on to some status at the negotiating table. But the consequences for their members in the real world outside have been serious. Seamen have been victimised, divided and left to face aggressive national companies one local area at a time, while NUS leaders go to court to plead that they told their members to give up and go back to work.

- The national leaders of the TUC and Labour Party are even further removed from the reality of the class struggle. Last weekend, while workers were doing battle with bosses around Britain, the TUC was discussing plans for a 'new unionism' which rejects industrial action and recruits members by offering them credit cards and cheap insurance. Meanwhile, the Labour Party leadership was endorsing a policy document which declares the 'market forces' of capitalism to be 'generally satisfactory' — at a moment when thousands of workers were taking on market forces in a fight for a 'satisfactory' living standard. It is a fitting tribute to the irrelevance of Labour today that Bryan Gould, the Labour leader most closely associated with the party's move to mimic Thatcher's free enterprise policies, is the MP for Dagenham — home of the biggest Ford plant hit by the strike this week.

We cannot win the current battles, or the many others that lie ahead, while we are led by people who think that industrial action is alien to trade unionism. Instead, we need to up the action under *our* control. The union rank and file have already displayed their dissatisfaction with the existing institutions and leaders of the labour movement — by rejecting the Ford deal, by refusing to obey the officials' first instructions to return to work on the ferries, and by organising protests in the health service against the bureaucrats' wishes. Now we need to turn this discontent into a full-scale revolt, and seize control of the strikes and struggles from the hands of those who stand in our way.

Rank and file control is the precondition for organising the sort of action which can match the political power and determination of the government and the employers. Our one hope of fanning the sparks of resistance is to get out from under the wet blankets of the labour movement bureaucracy.



Pandora Anderson