

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 5 May 1989 • No 14 • 40p

10 YEARS OF THATCHER



THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

After 10 years of Tory dictatorship the only alternative to Thatcherism is an anti-capitalist one. See page 2

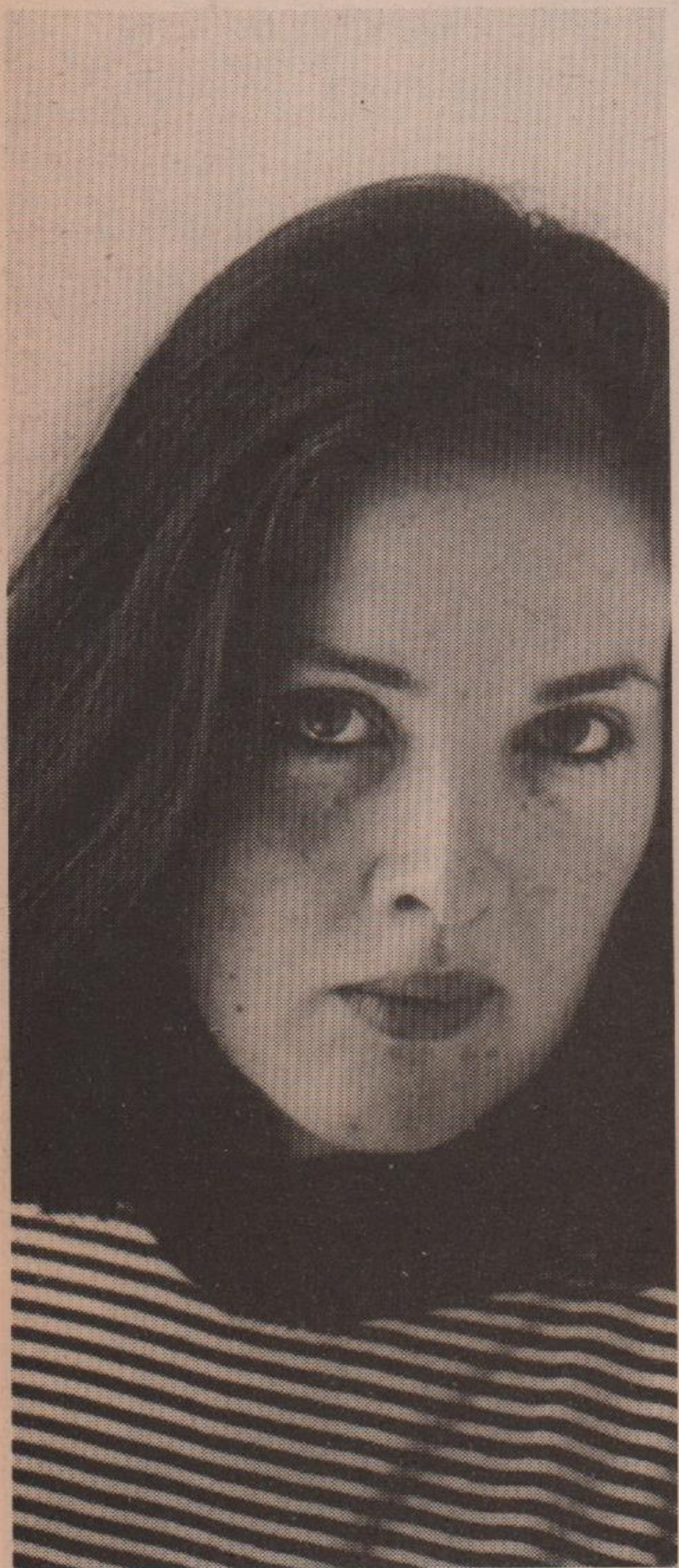


**CHINA: STUDENTS
SHAKE THE
BUREAUCRACY**
Pages 4 and 5

**VALE OF GLAMORGAN:
NO VOICE FOR THE
WORKING CLASS**
Page 3

**EUROPE: 1992
AND ALL THAT**
Page 6

5 May • No 14



Editor: Joan Phillips

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

THE MAJORITY of people dislike Margaret Thatcher and despise her policies, but cannot see how to get rid of her. That's the message from the polls on Thatcher's tenth anniversary. Among the jumble of facts and figures, two stand out. According to a Harris poll, 58 per cent of people want to see the back of Thatcher before the next election. Yet 77 per cent believe she is here to stay for another five years. The polls confirm that the Thatcher ascendancy has nothing to do with the popularity of Tory policies. Thatcher is still in power because most people do not believe that the Labour Party is a credible alternative.

In the tenth year of a most unpopular government, the official opposition manages to be still more unpopular. Today the Labour Party is suffering an identity crisis because the political programme which sustained it for so long is irrelevant. In the post-war years the Labourist project provided the ruling class with an alternative way of managing capitalism. But the establishment is no longer interested in a policy of consensus and negotiation. In the harsh economic

climate of the eighties there is simply no alternative for the bosses but Thatcher's policy of open confrontation with the working class.

Under Neil Kinnock the Labour Party has come to appreciate the irrelevance of its old alternative policies. Yet Labour is so deeply committed to the capitalist system that it could never countenance the only alternative that answers the needs of the working class: an anti-capitalist one. Instead, Kinnock has embraced the policies that make sense for capitalism today: those of Thatcher. By taking on board the central tenets of Thatcherism, Kinnock has admitted that his party has nothing to offer the working class but more of the same. It is no wonder that people are pessimistic about the prospects for change.

There is an alternative to Thatcherism, but it is not Neil Kinnock's party. Today the only alternatives are the aggressive pro-capitalist policies of Thatcher's party, or the unequivocal anti-capitalist policies of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Our alternative is the only one which makes sense from the point of view of the working class: we have to fight for a new society because the present one promises only more impoverishment, degradation, war and barbarism. Our alternative is the only one which can inspire people to fight: because it offers the possibility of working class liberation through the overthrow of the capitalist system.

WINSTON SILCOTT

THE DECISION by students at the London School of Economics to elect Winston Silcott as honorary president of the union is one of the best things that has happened in student politics for a long time. It was good to see so many students take a stand on an important political issue, and refuse to back down in the face of intimidation by the media, the college authorities, the government and right wingers. Their initiative should be emulated by students in other colleges around the country.

The student action was condemned as an outrage by Tory education minister Kenneth Baker. But the real outrage was committed by the government, the police and the courts against Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip, who were framed for the murder of PC Keith Blakelock in the Broadwater Farm showtrial in 1987. The Crown produced not one single shred of evidence against the three men, but the carnival of racism which was whipped up around the trial sealed their fate. They were crucified by police, press and politicians who wanted blood and did not care who's it was.

It is likely that the college authorities will try to punish the student union by changing its constitution or threatening its funds. Some students have cited this as an argument against student unions getting embroiled in political controversies. On the contrary it is an argument for establishing independent student unions, which cannot be penalised for taking political decisions by the authorities which currently control the funding of our organisations. Any attempt by the LSE authorities to interfere in the affairs of the student union should be vigorously resisted by students everywhere.

NATO RIVALS

THE CONFLICT within the Western Alliance over the modernisation of the Nato nuclear arsenal in Europe is not just a row over military tactics. It represents a much more fundamental divergence of interests among imperialist rivals. What we are witnessing is the end of an era of exceptionally cordial collaboration among the imperialist powers.

For 40 years Nato has provided a framework for the USA to regulate relations among the few imperialist powers which dominate the capitalist world. The coherence of the Western Alliance was founded on the acceptance of US supremacy by West Germany, Japan, Britain, France and the rest.

Over the past decade the Western Alliance has begun to fragment as the balance of international power has shifted away from the USA. As America's economic power has waned, West Germany and Japan have grown in stature as key players on the world stage. Mikhail Gorbachev's diplomatic overtures, which many commentators have cited as the cause of the alliance's problems, have simply brought to the surface the tensions generated by this shift in the post-war equilibrium.

Those, such as CND demonstrators in London last week, who discern something positive in the stand taken by West Germany's chancellor Helmut Kohl are living in a fantasy world. Kohl is no less aggressive than George Bush or Margaret Thatcher in the pursuit of his own national interests. His intransigent position is the product both of domestic electoral pressures, and his country's growing assertiveness within the Western Alliance.

As Nato starts to fall apart we have no interest in taking sides with one imperialist power against another. They are all motivated by a determination to pursue their economic interests and spheres of influence at the expense of their rivals—and of the peoples of the third world who are increasingly the victims of Western intervention. Our task is to challenge the culture of nationalism and militarism that is growing in every Western nation. In Britain that means refuting Thatcher's chauvinist tirades against foreigners, and taking sides with those fighting British imperialism whether it is in Argentina or Ireland.

STALIN'S HEIR

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV'S purge of Soviet bureaucrats was accomplished with lightning speed and ruthless calculation. Even Joseph Stalin would have been proud of the steely rigour with which Gorbachev went about his task. Out went scores of central committee members, including the last leftovers from the Brezhnev regime, in one fell swoop. The purge was the classic response of a Soviet leader anxious to find scapegoats for the failure of his reform policies to meet the basic needs of the people.

After four years of perestroika, Gorbachev is no nearer to overcoming the stagnation of the Soviet system than any of his predecessors. The aim of the purge was to deflect mounting criticism away from the leadership and on to recalcitrant reformers in the bureaucracy. But Gorbachev's propensity to resort to purges could end up exposing him. His attempt to shift the blame for the slow progress of his reforms on to what he calls the dead souls in the bureaucracy has less and less credibility. There are now very few Brezhnev men left to carry the can, and Gorbachev is having to attack his own appointees.

Another problem highlighted by the purge is the growing fragmentation within the bureaucracy. By removing many potential opponents Gorbachev was concerned to safeguard his own position. But as the career of Boris Yeltsin has proved, purged bureaucrats do not automatically disappear. Some, such as Andrei Gromyko, are at the end of their active life. But others, such as Guidar Aliyev, Gorbachev's rival for the leadership in the early eighties, are less prepared to go into retirement.

Under the pressure of the growing social crisis, sections of the party are beginning to move in different political directions. Every purge creates a larger force of potential opponents who fear they are losing their privileges for good. The influence of Pamyat, a reactionary, anti-Semitic organisation, in the party, the police and the army represents the growing frustration of this section of the bureaucracy.

Gorbachev's purge has been greeted with acclaim in the West. Yet far from being the saviour of the Soviet people, Gorbachev is overseeing a slow slide into chaos. Neither he nor those he has ousted have any solutions to the economic and social problems facing Soviet workers. As the bureaucracy bends and buckles under the impact of the economic crisis the need for a working class solution becomes increasingly urgent.

TRADE LIES

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS paraded the £1.2 billion trade deficit for March, a fall of £500m on the previous month, as proof that the prospects for the economy are good. Exports rose by £600m in February, while the import bill increased by a mere £100m. The figures for the first three months of this year also suggest, in marked contrast to 1988, that the volume of exports has started to grow faster than imports. Yet even if we take the trade figures at face value, a closer examination reveals that official optimism is contrived.

Nearly half of the rise in exports in March was due to what economic statisticians call 'erratic' items (things like ships, aircraft and precious metals). Because they are relatively rare but extremely large transactions, they are usually treated with suspicion when assessing longer-term trends. But not so for a government desperate to make it appear that its policies are working. No doubt the next time an erratic appears on the debit side of the trade account, the Tories will insist it is a one-off which should be ignored.

Oil also made the export picture look good in March. However, the £122m increase in oil exports needs to be put in context. It is largely the result of more intensive working of North Sea installations in response to the Piper Alpha disaster. In general Britain faces falling oil exports as reserves decline. Oil earnings are also highly exposed to volatile price movements in the world market.

When it is bad, the Tories argue that little can be gauged from a single economic statistic. But when it is better than expected, we are supposed to take it as compelling evidence that Tory policies are working.

WHY THE FUSS?

MICHAEL MEACHER'S statement that a future Labour government would restore trade union legal immunity for some forms of secondary action and picketing has caused a furore in the Labour Party hierarchy. Meacher said that secondary action would be justified among workers such as seafarers, miners and power workers if they had a common interest in the outcome of the dispute. Neil Kinnock intervened in the ensuing row to say that there could be no question of the party supporting a restoration of the powers enjoyed by trade unions before Thatcher came to power in 1979.

There was nothing remotely radical about what the shadow employment secretary had to say. The extraordinary aspect of the affair was the outcry his comments provoked within the party. From the ferocious repudiation of his remarks anybody would have thought that Meacher was advocating barricades on the streets. But the reforms he was proposing would not even restore the rights enjoyed by trade unions in the seventies. The Labour Party is so terrified of being tarred with the brush of trade union militancy that it has become more strident than the Tories in its denunciations of union power.

SPRING OF DISCONTENT?

THERE HAS been a lot of discussion in the media about the possibility of an upsurge of strike action on a scale not seen since the seventies. But so far the only place where strike action has gone ahead is on the underground, and that was organised unofficially by rank and file workers. Elsewhere, on the docks and railways, the union bosses have done everything to sabotage a strike. And where they have balloted for action, in the power industry and on the buses, it is for ineffective one-day strikes. The union chiefs have conspired to undermine the impact of any potential action by enforcing sectional divisions. Thus leaders of the transport union have carefully timed any action by busworkers to start a week after the strike on the underground. And leaders of the rail unions have encouraged divisions between tube drivers and other underground workers.

Those workers who want to fight could pick up some useful tips from the tube drivers. They too face problems (see page 7), but the fact that they have seen the need to organise independently is a positive development. The first point is that rank and file control is key to organising anything today. If we leave things up to the union leaders we can forget about fighting. The second thing is that there is no point settling for half-measures. If we want to damage the employers we have to hit them where it hurts. A final lesson to learn is the importance of overcoming sectional divisions. If we are to maximise our impact nothing less than united, all-out action will do.

LIVING MARXISM

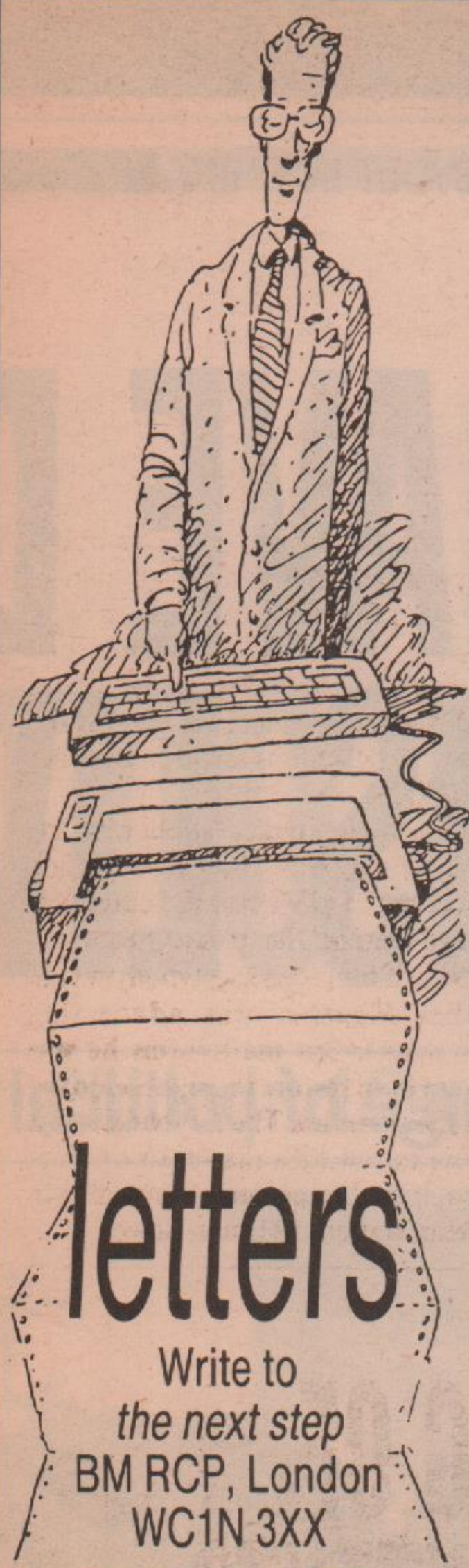
The May issue of our monthly review LIVING MARXISM is on sale now. The theme of the magazine this month is the rise of the new right in Europe. Fascists are winning elections in West Germany, the French National Front has consolidated its base, and racism is on the rise across the Continent. LIVING MARXISM examines the forward march of reaction and suggests how it can be halted.

Plus: The Rushdie affair, racism and book-burning in Bradford; Danger at work—how capitalism costs lives; Scaring women to death—the panic about cervical cancer; Designer terrorism; Who is Boris Yeltsin?; Jim Sillars on the rise of Scottish nationalism; Pamela Bordes and unsexy British politics.

In living: Melvyn Bragg and the South Bank's last stand; Derek Jarman on low budgets, high quality and Channel 4 censorship; The country and western revival.

LIVING MARXISM costs £1.50 or £15 for a 12-month subscription and is available from all good newsagents or from Junius Publications (T13), BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX. Telephone (01) 375 1485.

Publisher Revolutionary Communist Party, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX • copyright
Printer Morning Litho Printers Ltd (TU), 439 North Woolwich Road, London E16
Annual subscription rates (individuals) • Britain and Northern Ireland £26 • Europe and Irish Republic £34 • North Africa and Middle East (airmail) £34 • Americas, Asia, Central and Southern Africa (airmail) £37 • Australasia and Japan (airmail) £40 • Outside Europe —All destinations (surface mail) £44.
Circulation 01-375 1485. Newsdesk 01-375 1485.
Correspondence to The Editor, the next step, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN 014 350 X 5 May 1989. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.



HILLSBOROUGH

IN Sheffield *the next step* sold like hot cakes, with its focus on the responsibility of the Tories and the police for the Hillsborough tragedy. However, at the university, it took Labour Club members on the NUS executive just five minutes to produce an official letter banning us from selling it in the students' union. They claimed the cover was 'offensive to many students who lost friends in the Hillsborough disaster'. This goes to show that sections of the left could give Mary Whitehouse a few lessons in morality and censorship. More significantly, the NUS 'no

platform' policy of banning political opponents ends up being used against those who challenge the authorities. No doubt the coverage of Hillsborough, which put the blame for the tragedy on those who have run a political campaign to criminalise football fans, was offensive to the Tories, the police and those in the Labour Party who have gone along with their anti-hooligan campaign. We must demand the right to produce and sell whatever we want, rather than what a handful of career bureaucrats decide students should read. **Geoff Sheffield**

CAUGHT OUT BY CLASS STRUGGLE?

I WAS struck by your assessment of the state of the class struggle, which seemed to be at odds with the upsurge of unrest across industry (*the next step*, 28 April). You make the point that the tradition of struggle has been discredited, and that there is very little going on in society with which revolutionaries can interact. So where do the struggles on

the underground, railways, buses and docks and in the engineering, television and car industries fit into your tidy analysis? When at last the left has something to get stuck into, your argument that there cannot be a return to old-style militancy seems to me to be perverse. **Keith Johnson Newcastle**

RIGHT OF REPLY

I AGREE that a statutory right of reply in the press would not be worth the paper it's written on (*the next step*, 28 April). But there's nothing wrong with using opportunities to reply, whatever the medium. When printers on the *Sun* refused to print a picture of Arthur

Scargill 'siege heiling' at a miners' rally, the paper was left with an empty front page, which they had to explain the reason for. This was a positive and effective action. Likewise, broadcasters and journalists could be using their medium to put their side of the current BBC dispute across.

As Kenan Malik says, '*the next step* is the place where the working class will find a real reply to Murdoch's filthy lies', but we should take advantage of any platform that is available. **Susan Cope Southampton**



NO BANS ON FASCISTS

SOME weeks ago, the National Front announced that they intended to hold a march in Rochdale to commemorate Saint George's day. After pleas from the Labour council, supported by the Community Relations Committee and the Anti-Fascist League, the march was banned by the home secretary under the Public Order Act. In spite of the ban, the NF stated it would send down members to Rochdale. On Saturday 22 April, several hundred fascists turned up in coaches. Police action towards them consisted of protecting them and allowing them to do as they pleased. Many were to be found drinking in nearby pubs. Police activity towards the small number of protesters outside the town hall was different. To begin with, they suggested locking the protesters in the town hall, where some had gathered to

hear anti-fascist speakers. Eventually they resorted to more provocative action. While fascists further up the road brandished a Union Jack, the police busied themselves, arrogantly moving protesters up and down with their horses, and stopping Asian taxi drivers. By the end of the day, in between frightening youngsters with their Alsatian dogs, they had managed to arrest 14 Asians from the crowd. Whilst Asian residents displayed a willingness and potential for real action against the threat of the fascists, all that the community relations officers and Labour councillors did was to tell them to 'disperse and go home'. The state forces were present at the invitation of the left. Upon hearing confirmation of the ban, council leader Richard Farnell expressed a hope that 'the

people of Rochdale could go about their business without harassment by undesirables.' Asians in Rochdale were subjected to harassment not only from the National Front, but from the greatest undesirables in capitalist society—the police. Once again, the left's pleas for state intervention when it suits them have proved to be ineffective and counterproductive. The state has the concerns of only one minority in mind, those of the capitalist class. It has more in common with the fascists than with the oppressed sections of society. Far from being the public servants the left depicts them as, the police represent the interests of the capitalist state, and cannot be used to combat the prejudice upon which it stands. **Karl Wilds Rochdale**

Election focus

VALE OF GLAMORGAN

WHAT ABOUT THE WORKING CLASS?

Sara Llewelyn reports from Barry Island on how the Labour Party campaign has denied the working class a voice

As burger bars and amusement arcades were decorated with a fresh coat of paint for the summer season on Barry Island, Labour canvassers were adding the final touches to the by-election campaign. Dogged by accusations of political vandalism, their candidate, John Smith, grew increasingly defensive as questions about the dock strike and the poll tax were asked.

'I went to a public meeting held by Labour which had four red-rosed people on the panel. They opened the floor to questions, but after three about the dockers and Labour's economic plans for the future, they closed the meeting', said art student Nic. A furious Ken Jones slammed the farcical public meeting he attended in the Vale of Glamorgan campaign last week. 'The bloke chairing the meeting knew me and wouldn't let me ask questions because he knew I would embarrass them. They've got it all set up, and they're not interested in ordinary working people', he said.

After supporting Labour for most of his working life, Ken, and his wife Edna, were asking themselves what Labour was now offering them.

'I don't trust him [John Smith]: he never comes out firmly on any issue. I might well vote for the Plaid Cymru candidate this time', said Mrs Jones. 'I asked about the poll tax when I saw Labour leafletting in town, and they said they wouldn't break the law. I told them, if their forefathers hadn't broken the law, they wouldn't be standing there then. It's our duty to break unjust laws', said Ken.

A key theme in Labour's election bulletin was the sewage-ridden beaches at Barry Island. 'Everybody knows Barry's beaches are the worst in Europe, but it doesn't really bother ordinary people who can't get jobs', said Craig, who was unemployed for a year. His friends move out of prison to a government painting and decorating scheme and back into jail. 'The Restart programmes are a joke, and the lads are always nicking videos and stuff to get some money on the side', he said.

There is very little industry in Barry, which lies on the South Wales coast, eight miles from Cardiff's ambitious dock development scheme. Tourism brings a few seasonal jobs to the island, a holiday resort for Valley people. A couple of plastic works chimneys dominate the horizon. The docks employ

84 workers, who are now under the threat of casualisation.

While its local candidate has parried questions about what he thinks of dockers going on strike in protest, the Labour Party nationally has made clear its disapproval for such methods.

Unemployment should be put firmly on top of the agenda say people in Barry. 'We're in a trap here really, there's no work in Barry and we can't afford to travel to Cardiff, even if there were jobs there', said one young woman. Her boyfriend Neil, who was unemployed for 18 months, has finally found work as a shop assistant in a bike shop in Cardiff. 'It makes my blood boil that he's only getting £10 on top of benefit for working five long days a week,' said Michelle, who has two young children. 'But we get by because he works Saturdays and gets £20 extra for fiddling.'

None of the election candidates have mentioned jobs or the lack of them. The Labour campaign has been dominated by the NHS, with party officials nervous about an Independent GP who has stood on the Save and Protect the NHS slogan. They have accused him of splitting the anti-government vote. Local opinion polls have highlighted people's concern about the cuts in the health service. But on the whole, the campaign has carried on regardless of the opinions and concerns of local people.

The ridiculous charade involving West Wales MP Alan Williams ripping down Tory posters produced a few bemused smiles in Barry. But the stunt only highlighted Labour's inability to take on the serious task of projecting an effective opposition to the Tories. 'People in Barry don't give a damn about what's going on—they can see through these clowns monkeying about', said one woman.

The first poll of the campaign published last week showed Labour four points ahead of the Conservatives at 45 per cent. The Labour Party has since increased its lead to eight per cent, and looks almost certain to win the contest. A victory in the Vale of Glamorgan will give the Labour Party a boost. But it will not benefit the people of Barry who have been denied a voice by a party which sees working class concerns as an obstacle to winning middle class support.



STOP PRESS

RCP TO STAND IN VAUXHALL

Stuart Holland's decision to resign his parliamentary seat in Vauxhall to pursue an academic career in Italy says a lot about the state of the Labour Party. The seepage of politicians out of the party is starting to acquire the character of rats abandoning a sinking ship.

The loss of Robert Kilroy-Silk and Austin Mitchell, two nobodies who gave up their posts to host third-rate television shows, may not amount to much in itself. But the fact that they have been followed by an experienced frontbencher is a telling comment on the sense of drift within the party. Holland's calculation that a university teaching post offers superior prospects to a career in Kinnoch's party is a better gauge of Labour's chances of making a comeback than any opinion poll.

But while Stuart Holland has the option of escaping to Florence, the people of Vauxhall do not have any such choice. They have to live with the

problems imposed on them by 10 years of Tory rule: problems of unemployment, declining living standards, squalid housing, racial oppression and attacks on democratic rights, which Holland's party has failed to confront or challenge.

Who is going to speak for the vast majority of people in Vauxhall who cannot afford the luxury of a one-way ticket out of Thatcher's Britain? Certainly not the Labour Party, which has spent a decade lying on its back in the face of Tory attacks on our people. It is about time the working class was represented by a party which can provide a focus of resistance to the government and the employers. That is why the local branch of the Revolutionary Communist Party has decided to stand a candidate in the Vauxhall by-election. We will be fighting the election campaign on a partisan working class platform, one that puts the interests of our people at the top of the political agenda.

The death three weeks ago of Hu Yaobang, the former general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, sparked political protests on a scale not matched for a decade. The student demonstrations of the past two weeks have been dominated by defiant slogans and calls for more political freedom. But the confidence of 100 000 chanting voices masks a deeper sense of confusion about the nature of the Chinese reforms and what students should be fighting for.

Complaints of police assaults with electrified truncheons have spurred on demonstrators in some cities, and students have called for punishment for those responsible. But the Chinese government has so far held back from severe crackdowns, although a security force of 20 000 has been deployed in Peking. Premier Li Peng eventually agreed to talks with the students, and televised discussions were first held last weekend.

Impatience

The most striking aspect of the student protests is their reluctance to question the foundations and structure of the Stalinist state. By narrowing the focus of their discontent to corrupt senior officials, and more money for education, the anger of the students is not always directed at the party leadership itself. And by agreeing to talks, which students have been pressing for since the beginning of the unrest, Li, and the directionless and uninspired Chinese Communist Party may have found a way to diffuse the growing impatience of China's vast population.

Officials have issued calls for calm after rioting and more demonstrations, and the authorities have stressed that reforms cannot be achieved overnight.

Chinese perestroika has gone ahead as far as it can without fundamental changes in the political structure. But no hint of glasnost is on the horizon.

The economic reforms begun by Deng Xiaoping in December 1978 have presented the Chinese leadership with serious problems. The expectations of workers and peasants were raised to a level which could never be fulfilled, and the regime is now struggling to feed its one billion population adequately. Almost all the reports from the Xinhua news agency, the government's official mouthpiece, are dominated by the grim state of the economy.

According to some sources inflation is now running at 34 per cent and is a major source of discontent. The trade deficit figure to April was \$1889m, more than the total to July in 1988 (BBC summary of world broadcasts, 26 April). *China Daily*, the official English-language newspaper, announced that China was \$40 billion in debt.

Threatening

Investment in agriculture is the lowest since the Communist Party took power in 1949. Grain output dropped 9.2m tons last year, and that was 13.5m tons below the 1984 figure. It is true that some peasants and small businessmen have become rich and are often the subject of glowing interviews and reports in the Western media. But the prospect of a serious famine over the next few years is a real one as peasants switch from unprofitable grain production to more lucrative sideline occupations. The amount of grain per head available last year was 359kg compared to 395kg in 1984, and is well short of the 410kg per person which is required (*China Daily*, 10 March).

These problems aside, an even more serious problem threatening the stability of the regime is the prospect of unemployment on a massive scale over the next decade.

Formerly the unemployed were described as 'waiting for jobs' and unemployment did not officially exist. But the dimensions of the problem are now so great that this fiction is impossible to maintain.

In a desperate effort to raise productivity in agriculture, the iron rice bowl policy which prevented workers from being sacked is being dismantled. In rural areas approximately 150m workers are now surplus to requirements (not unemployed as is sometimes reported absurdly in the press here).

In the cities the situation is equally serious. Lao Gun, the minister of labour, states that more than 20m workers will be

'SOME HAVE DIED TOO SOON, OTHERS LIVE

Sara Llewelyn reports on the biggest upsurge of political activity



The authorities are straining to hold back student anger, but protesters have yet to challenge the power of the Communist Party.

asked to leave their posts in state-owned enterprises. 'This is aimed to overcome inefficiency and tap the true potential of those who remain.' This process is well under way already in 25 000 enterprises which presently employ 9m workers (12 per cent of state-owned enterprises).

'This reform has fired the enthusiasm of both enterprises and their employees', declared Gun (*Beijing Review*, 19 December 1988). In fact, there have been strikes and go-slows against these measures, although their scale is unclear.

Cyril Lin, programme director at Oxford University's Modern Chinese Studies Centre, argues that China is caught in a no man's land:

'China's economy is now a strange hybrid: a novel category of market Stalinism. It combines the worst features of the Stalinist command economy, and the market system. The advantages in control and redistribution of the former have been lost, while the efficiency of the latter remains to be realised.' (*Guardian*, 24 April)

Some factories only open for a few days a week because of poor distribution of resources. Shops close because they cannot afford to restock.

The 'Rich is beautiful' slogan has been dropped, 10 years after Deng Xiaoping introduced the first agricultural reforms. Some regions, including the prosperous south-east, have benefited more than the poorer provinces inland. But income disparities throughout the country have become more marked. The gap between East Coast suburbs and unemployed workers in the cities, and between poorly-fed peasants and rich agricultural entrepreneurs, has widened.

Bribery

Unhappy with the widening income gap and levels of bribery and corruption, the students called for the bank balances of senior officials and their families to be revealed to the public. Their seven-point manifesto issued last week demanded free speech; a free press; a lifting of restrictions on demonstrations; an

increase in the education budget; the rehabilitation of those victimised by conservative reactionaries; and the posthumous rehabilitation of Hu Yaobang.

Hu's death on 15 April triggered the latest series of demonstrations, which began in Peking on the leadership's doorstep. It was fitting that Hu was buried in his characteristic Western suit and tie, because in life he had come to symbolise the liberalising force at party headquarters.

Hu was forced to resign in January 1987, after the winter demonstrations which he used, and some say instigated, to push for faster reform. Cyril Lin argued that there had been official interference in these, the first mass demonstrations in China since the Democracy Wall movement in 1979:

'The current [December 1986] student demonstrations calling for greater political freedom and democracy could not have occurred without some official sanction. Their purpose would be to serve notice to those opposed to reform

that demands for further economic and political change among the masses is both widespread and urgent, and failure to accommodate these demands could be explosive.' (*Times*, 24 December 1986)

Hu also argued that Marxism and Leninism were outdated, and no longer suited to China's need for economic and political reform.

The choice of demonstration slogans by students on Tiananmen Square last week did not tally with their mentor's views, as tens of thousands sang the 'Internationale'. 'I think the students must be really confused', said Wu Huang, a student in Shanghai two years ago, now living in London. 'On the one hand they're calling for more freedom, but they can see that the reforms which have been made have led to more inequality. I was puzzled by the 'Internationale', but I think they're still idealists. They just don't have a clear direction.'

Chinese students live and study in tough conditions, and the latest demonstrations are an expression of their anger

ED TOO LONG'

ity in China in 10 years



at the dire situation in which they find themselves. They live eight to a room, the quality of their food is poor and resources are scarce. Libraries in many of the country's top universities are empty of crucial textbooks.

Negligence

The 1986-87 demonstrations were marked by a number of specific events and complaints in cities throughout China. Two students were beaten up by security police in Shanghai after a US pop concert in the city. Shenzhen students took to the streets after the local authorities tried to introduce higher tuition fees. In Peking, students were enraged after someone died at the university clinic through negligence. And in Hebei and Kunming, demonstrators angered by the lack of representation at regional government level, were spurred on by Fang Lizhi, the director of the Anhui Institute of Science and Technology.

Two years later the protests have taken a more coherent form. There have been

defiant calls for mass demonstrations on International Workers Day, and on the seventieth anniversary of the first Chinese student movement on 4 May. Campuses have been plastered with the traditional posters and slogans attacking government leaders: 'Our protests are criticised for destroying national stability. Yet we have soaring inflation, party corruption and economic chaos. Who is really to blame for this instability?' (*International Herald Tribune*, 23 April)

At the same time hints of division are already emerging. There have been reports of meetings breaking up after quarrels about what demands the students should put forward. And intimidating threats from public security campus spies have dampened the students' enthusiasm in some universities.

People's Daily, the official newspaper, has issued a warning that 'counter-revolutionaries' will be punished severely.

The fear of repression is well-founded. According to a recent Amnesty report, 30 000 people have been executed by the

regime since 1983. Official posters in the streets carry photographs of those arrested as a result of the government's anti-crime drive: those who have been singled out for execution have a big red tick against their photo. But despite the threat of persecution, the boycott of classes continues, with 90 per cent of students at Peking's top university, Beida, refusing to attend lectures.

It is not yet clear how far the unrest could spread. The students have sent delegations to some factories in the cities, and young unemployed people have joined in the demonstrations. Western journalists have remarked on tighter student organisation in some areas, which could mean more industrial workers will join the protests.

The crowds which gathered at the monument to the people's heroes grew from 500 wreath-layers to 100 000 chanting for democracy. Among them were intellectuals and onlookers who applauded the demonstrating students. Official reports blamed the rioting at Changsha and Xian, where martial law was imposed for 24 hours, on a 'very small number of people with ulterior motives...who continue to fabricate rumours to poison people's minds'

The most striking aspect of the student protests is their reluctance to question the foundations and structure of the Stalinist state

(*People's Daily*, 25 April). The authorities called for stability after a 10-day silence, and ordered people to mourn for Hu in an orderly way at their work units.

Several hundred people have been arrested since the demonstrations began, and official sources say those still detained are not students. Staff at the *Science and Technology Daily*, which first published Chinese reports about the demonstrations, have walked out after the government imposed a ban on further coverage. And students marched from Peking Technical College carrying a banner: 'The *People's Daily* cheats the people. Central TV turns black into white. The *Peking Daily* prints nonsense.'

The scope for more unrest and demonstrations is considerable, given the government's inability to meet the demands of the students. And the slow response of the authorities to the unrest highlights the confusion of the beleaguered leadership in dealing with the multifarious problems China faces.

Gravedigger

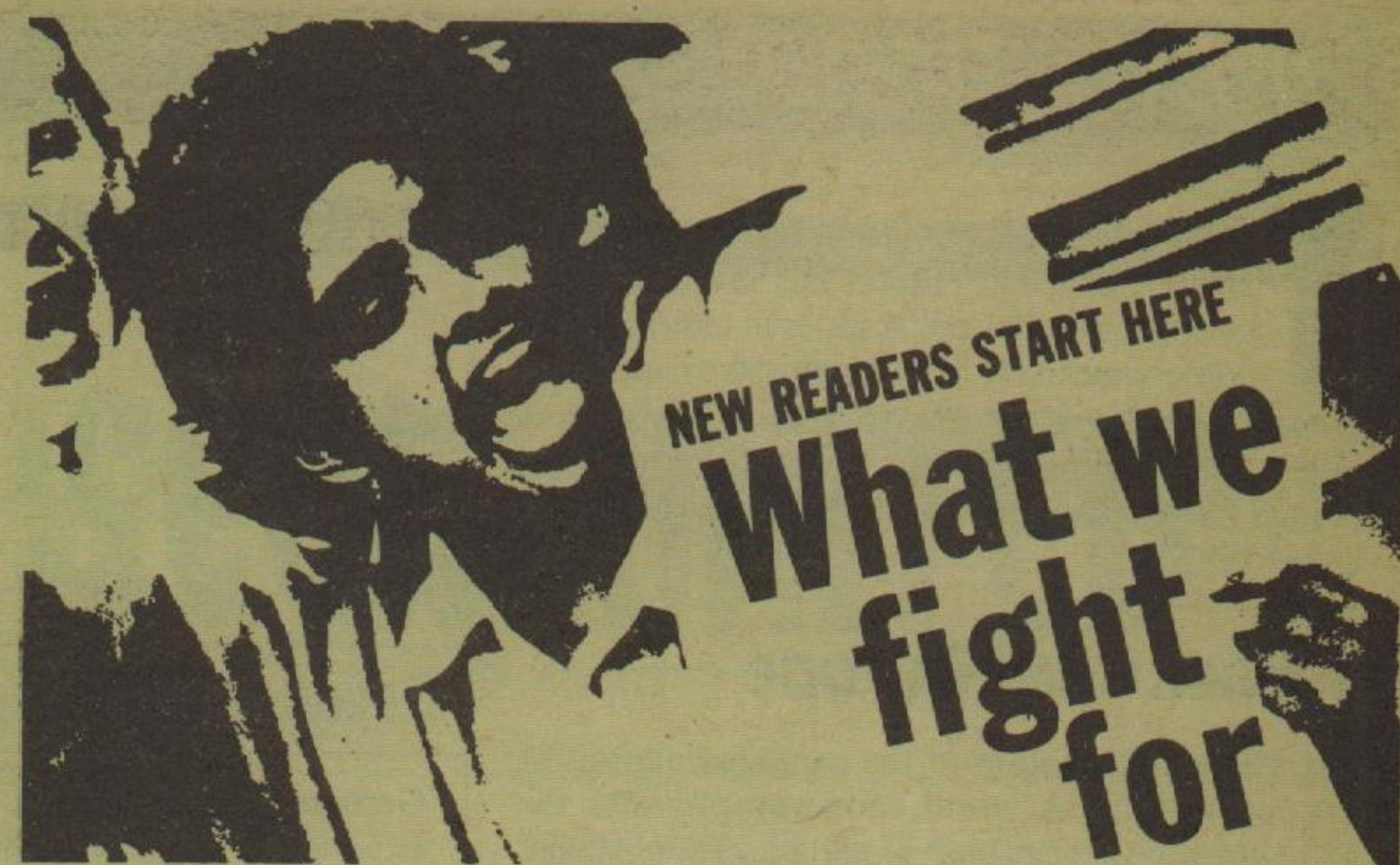
The reforms have gone as far as they can—unless the government gives up on state ownership, which will mean the Communist Party giving up its political power base. Further economic reform does not seem possible without changes in the political structure, but there is no sign of glasnost from behind the doors of the Communist Party headquarters at Zhongnanhai Palace.

No leaders have emerged in recent years to replace 84-year old Deng Xiaoping, who did not even attend the National Peoples Congress in March.

The battle between conservative Li Peng and third-in-command reformer Zhao Ziyang lacks a clearly structured debate. Deng is no longer the people's hero, and in death Hu is seen as Mao's gravedigger. But his drive for reform led to a forced self-criticism, and an early death has prevented a future comeback. 'Some have died too soon, others live too long', declared one student placard.

The government has some tough decisions to make, but no clear leadership is emerging. And despite campaigning slogans for more democracy and freedom, the student movement also lacks direction. But one thing is certain: unless students and workers challenge the Chinese Communist Party's iron grip over their society, more state repression and worsening living conditions lie ahead.

Additional information from Mark Wilson



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The class struggle is inextricably linked to the struggle against imperialism. The RCP supports all anti-imperialist struggles. Workers who live in the imperialist heartland

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

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

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

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

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

If you would like to discuss these issues further, please write to: RCP, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (01) 375 1702.

The debate about 1992 and the creation of a single European market has revealed great confusion on the left. A series of international conferences have been organised by left-wing groups in various countries to discuss the issues it raises. Here we publish the Revolutionary Communist Party's distinctive contribution to the debate about 1992.

1 Backward Europe

The relative stagnation of the capitalist nations of Europe within the world economy provides the main impetus to the project of reducing the obstacles to the free operation of market forces within the European community by 1992. The drive towards greater European integration is not an expression of a progressive development of the international division of labour. It indicates the reactionary tendency of capitalist Europe to protect its position against the USA, Japan and the third world. Eurochauvinism is the product of Eurosclerosis.

2 Fortress Europe

The ancient capitalist economies of Europe are heavily dependent on obsolete agriculture and traditional manufacturing industries, which now need heavy state and EC subsidies to survive. They lag behind the USA, Japan and several newly industrialising countries in the expanding hi-tech sectors. One of the central objectives of 1992 is to protect Europe against the more dynamic capitalist economies.

The EC's mounting trade wars with the declining, but still mighty, American economy indicate Europe's need to strengthen its position against US exports and investment at a time when the USA desperately needs to relieve its deficit problems at Europe's expense. Japan is at present a much smaller force in the European economy but it is growing fast in the hi-tech sectors that matter: hence the intensity of European anti-Japanese protectionism. The EC powers are united in the desire to restrict the incursion of the newly industrialising countries into EC markets, while the Common Agricultural Policy helps to ensure the destitution of third world producers.

3 Europe divided

Though the European powers are keen to unite against the rest of the world, they are divided among themselves. As 1992 approaches the internal conflicts among the European powers are becoming more apparent than trends towards greater unity. While the weaker economies of France, Italy and Spain are desperate for easier access to the wider market, West Germany and Britain are less enthusiastic. West

EUROPEAN UNITY

1992: WHAT WE THINK

Seven theses on 1992 from the Revolutionary Communist Party

Germany has the biggest domestic economy in the EC and the largest volume of trade outside the EC, notably with Eastern Europe. A large proportion of British trade, too, is outside the EC, but its traditional links with the USA and Commonwealth mean that it is at odds with West Germany on East-West issues.

Under Margaret Thatcher's rule, Britain appears the most ambivalent of the major EC countries about 1992. Yet Thatcher's tirades about border security against drugs, immigrants, the menace of terrorism and the role of the social fund are more propaganda postures for domestic consumption than real objections. Other EC powers are equally committed to strong state powers against crime, ethnic minorities and subversion, and Britain is as ready as any country to receive EC subsidies.

4 Euro-aggression

The menace of 1992 is most evident in the sphere of military policy and foreign affairs. Where it is a matter of joint financing of hi-tech military projects which enable the European powers to keep abreast of the global military build-up, there are impressive examples of European integration and cooperation. Closer strategic collaboration among European powers has strengthened Europe's hand in the Middle East and in wider third world affairs.

At the same time, the rising challenge from Europe, particularly from West Germany, to the USA threatens the whole basis of the post-war world order. Meanwhile the accelerating pace of the Gorbachev reforms in the Soviet Union has deprived the Nato alliance of the notional external threat that ensured its cohesion for 40 years. The recent tensions between West Germany (backed by its European neighbours) and the USA (supported by its loyal British stooges) over the modernisation of Nato nuclear forces reveals the destabilisation of the Western Alliance.

The decline of the USA, the revival of West Germany and the reform of the Soviet Union have put the reunification of Germany back on the agenda of European politics. But those who would redraw the map of Europe should recall that the present borders were the product of two major wars

and understand that the capitalist world knows no other way of resolving such matters.

5 Euro-austerity

The inevitable consequence of the less restricted operation of market forces throughout Europe will be the shakeout of jobs in the more backward sectors of the weaker national economies. Mass redundancies can be expected among workers in French building, Spanish steel, Italian banking and British furniture-making.

Permanent mass unemployment and greater labour mobility will give employers a powerful lever with which to hold down wages and enforce more intense exploitation. Vague codes of practice upholding trade union rights, health and safety standards and welfare rights will provide little practical protection for millions of workers facing employers and governments desperate to raise profitability and to curb public spending.

As well as undermining workers' economic position, the drive to 1992 aims to erode still further the ideological independence of the working class movement. While Eurochauvinism seeks to unite the workers of Europe with their bosses against the peoples of the rest of the world, mounting national chauvinism within the EC deepens divisions among the working class movements of Europe itself and weakens the resistance of labour against capital's 1992 offensive.

6 Euroleft in a Euromess

The drive towards 1992 has cruelly exposed the European left. Whereas hostility to European integration is the most distinctive position of the French Communist Party, the Italian Communist Party puts its support for European unity at the centre of its programme. Defined by its anti-EC stand a decade ago, the British left is now firmly pro-EEC. The incoherence of the left's attitudes to Europe reflects the influence of the virus of nationalism: in every country the mainstream left takes its stand where it considers the true interests of the national capitalist class lie.

Now reduced to trailing in the wake of the national state, the left has suffered a long-term decline in influence throughout Europe. The traditional left was discredited by the inadequacies of its programmes and strategies in the first phase of the world recession in the early seventies and has everywhere lost working class support.

Though the left has yet to realise fully the consequences, Gorbachev has dealt a severe blow to the international legitimacy of Marxism by his celebration of the capitalist market and bourgeois parliamentarism in the country of the world's first proletarian revolution.

As 1992 approaches, traditional parties of the labour movement have become either pillars of capitalist orthodoxy with support from a range of centre forces (notably in France and Spain) or marginal organisations with limited support in traditional sectors of the working class. Unable and unwilling to challenge the decay of working class politics, groupings of the far left have either dissolved into the rump of the old labour movements or have taken refuge in diversionary 'new social movements'.

7 Neither for, nor against

From the point of view of the working class, there is nothing progressive about the 1992 project. The aspiration towards greater international cooperation and harmony cannot be realised through the capitalist framework of the EC. Indeed the drive towards closer integration of the European capitalist powers can only intensify tensions between Europe and the rest of the world as well as unleash conflicts within Europe itself.

At the same time, we cannot uphold the existing order, or any defence of greater national sovereignty, against 1992. These are simply different ways of organising the relationships among the European capitalist powers. We are not interested in choosing among different forms of capitalist domination: our objective is to overthrow capitalist domination in Britain, in Europe and in the world.

Our focus for 1992 should be on fighting racism. Throughout Europe issues of race and immigration provide a central focus for reaction and repression and a ready device for dividing and paralysing the working class movement. A common anti-racist struggle across Europe can help to unite the working class against capital, in each country and across national barriers. Our slogans for 1992 should be 'No to Eurochauvinism! No to national chauvinism! Yes to proletarian internationalism!'

Revolutionary Communist Party Regional Dayschools

COMMUNISM AFTER GLASNOST

The Western media are gloating over recent developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The message behind *glasnost* seems to be 'bring back the market—communism does not work'.

We are organising discussions around the country to counter this celebration of capitalism. The aim is to provide a forum for a critical assessment of developments in the East, and their consequences for us in the West.

Discussions on:

Marx and communism

Soviet Union • Eastern Europe

Third world • Is a revolution possible today?

London Region

Sunday 7 May, 10am

University of London Union, Malet Street, WC1

Nottingham Region

Saturday 13 May, 10.30am

International Community Centre, Mansfield Road

South West Region

Sunday 14 May, 10.30am

Shepherds Hall, Old Market Street, Bristol

Newcastle Region

Saturday 20 May, 1pm

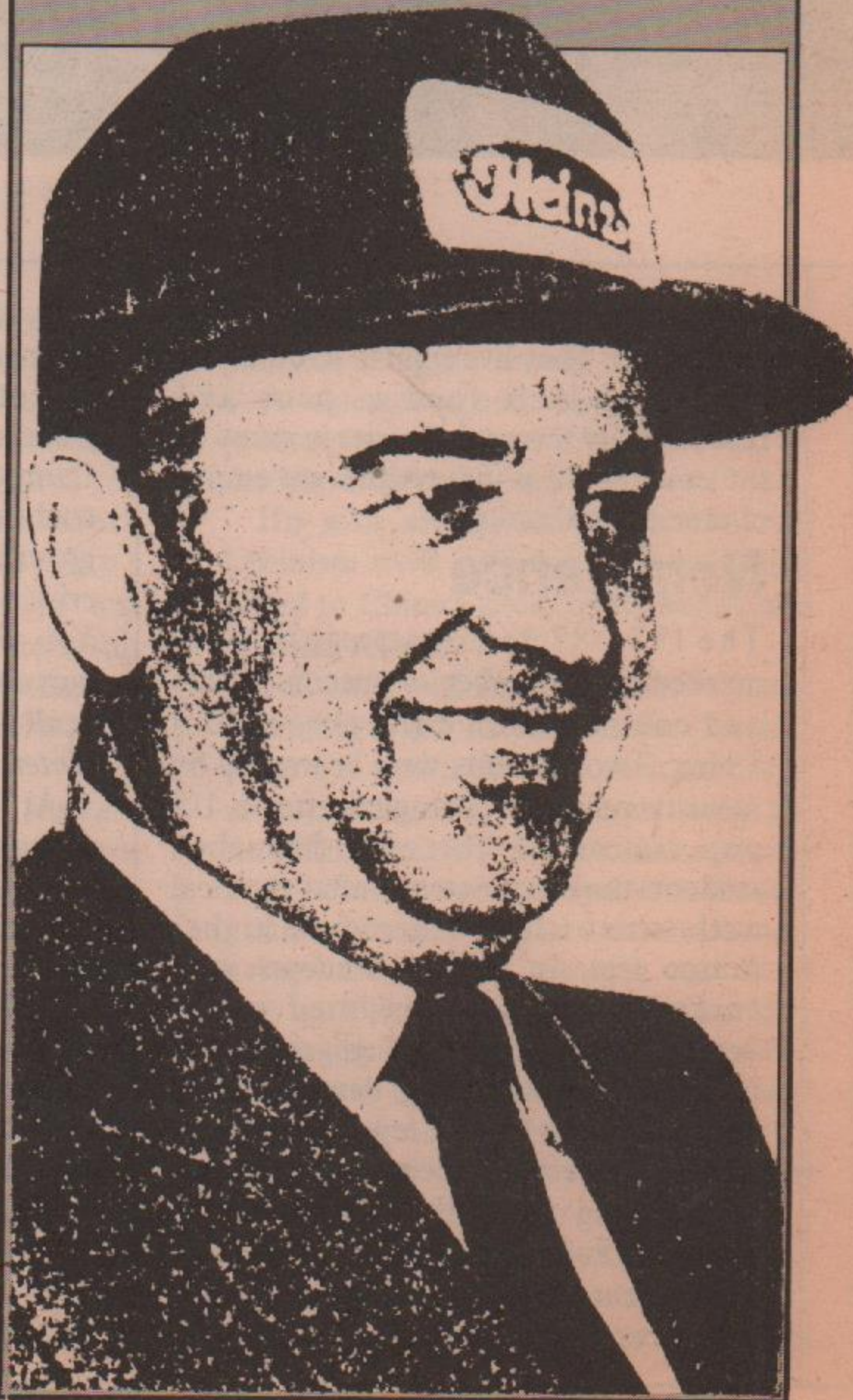
Tyneside Cinema, 10 Pilgrim Street

Northern Region

Saturday 27 May, 11am

Manchester Polytechnic, Mandela Building, Oxford Road, Manchester

For further details ring
(01) 375 1702



Workers across Europe should unite against the chauvinist, anti-immigrant policies of their governments

The week in politics

'We can win', says Tony, 'if we act together for an all-out united strike'. Tony is a tube driver on London's Piccadilly line. Monday's all-out tube strike, called by the NUR and the white-collar union TSSA, has given heart to underground workers and rattled management.

NUR and TSSA members voted overwhelmingly last month to take action against London Transport's 'reorganisation' plans. LT is gearing up to privatise the underground. Large chunks of the system—LT builders, cleaning services and depot maintenance—have already been hived off into private hands. Before the lines themselves are privatised LT has to make them profitable. That's what the reorganisation aims to do. Under the 'Action Stations' plan management has torn up the current grading and promotions agreements and made profitability the main criterion for station managers.

At the same time drivers are incensed at LT doubling their workload—but refusing to increase their pay. Over the past few years tube bosses have got rid of most of the guards and switched to one-person-off-operated (OPO) trains with drivers doing all the work. Out of 2500 drivers, 1650 now operate driver-only trains. Drivers are demanding a £64 a week increase to compensate for the extra work and strain. Management refused to consider this. The employers are also planning to introduce continental shift working—under which drivers would lose enhanced pay for working weekends; scrap the 'banked rest day' which provides cover for annual leave; and get rid of the 'assistant prepare staff' who help drivers prepare trains before they go into service.

TUBE WORKERS, BUS DRIVERS: ALL OUT ON 8 MAY!

'WE CAN WIN IF WE'RE UNITED'

Denis Ryan and James Newman spoke to tube workers about winning

Drivers were not balloted over next week's strike. But they have already taken matters into their own hands. Two unofficial days of action last month, which stopped three out of four tubes running and brought chaos to London, showed how angry drivers are.

Management is sweating at the thought of next week's strike. The two one-day strikes showed the power of underground workers to hit the City and bring business to a halt.

The government knows that any prolonged stoppage would rock Britain's already shaky economy. The possibility that bus drivers may also come out on strike has got them running scared. That's why management has suddenly adopted a conciliatory stance. After refusing to consider even reconstituting the old negotiating machinery which LT unilaterally dumped, tube bosses last week pleaded for union leaders to come and have talks with them. And at the first set of negotiations on Tuesday, management offered drivers a £30 a week wage increase and a fortnight's extra holidays.

We can turn the management retreat into a rout by pressing home our advantage and going all-out to win. But first we have to sort out the problems that still dog the dispute:

Unity across the workforce

The most pressing problem we have to confront is how to forge unity across the workforce. The way the union leadership has handled the dispute has created divisions between different sections. While the NUR and TSSA balloted its members, Aslef—which contains most of the drivers—did not. This has meant that many drivers are unsure about whether or not to take action on Monday.

There is even some resentment against NUR and TSSA members. 'Some drivers feel "The other workers didn't back us during our strikes, why should we back them?"', says Tony. 'The union leaders have played right into the hands of

management.' These divisions are compounded by the fact that there will be different mass meetings on Thursday—drivers and non-drivers are meeting separately at the end of every shift. Management is already exploiting these differences. On Tuesday the employers offered a new pay deal to train crews in an attempt to persuade them not to join the strike.

We have to tackle these divisions straight away by organising across sections, departments and unions. We also need to make common cause with London's bus drivers who are balloting on Friday over their pay claim. Imagine our impact if the whole of London's public transport system ground to a halt! But in a breathtaking show of disunity, the TGWU is planning to hold the bus strike a week after tube workers come out! Rank and file tube workers must send delegations to bus garages this week to argue that the buses also come out on 8 May.

'The separate unions and the sectional divisions have weakened opposition to management', says Tony. 'What we need is all-out united action. We also need to talk to commuters and win their support. London Transport's plans are a threat to all of us and we need to unite against them.'

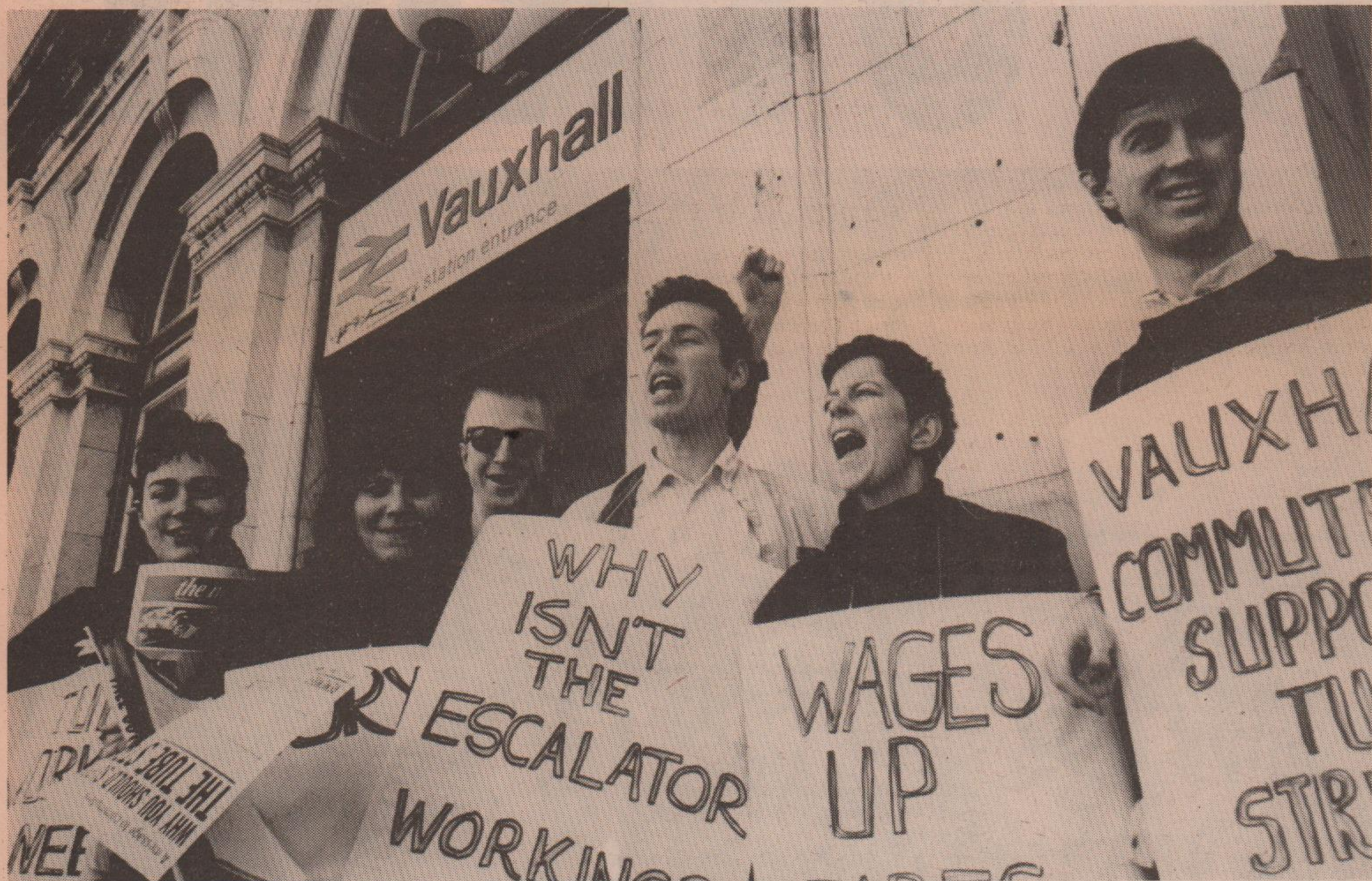
Mass meetings to involve all workers

There is a lot of confusion about the strikes among drivers and other underground staff. To prevent management reprisals and court actions, the drivers' one-day strikes were organised in secret with little consultation with members. This left many drivers in the dark, confused about what our strategy should be and resentful about not having been consulted.

'At the moment drivers have no strategy', says Tony. 'We've been reacting to the result of negotiations each time. There's been no planning, no clear idea of what to do next.' Many NUR and TSSA members are equally in the dark. Given the possibility of divisions in our ranks, it is essential that we have mass meetings of all workers (including bus drivers) to thrash out a common strategy that will bring London Transport to its knees.

Taking control of the strike

The union leaders were forced to call the strike because of the level of anger among the rank and file. But if we leave it in the hands of the bureaucrats they will stitch up a deal with management and sell us out. 'People are not taken in by Jimmy Knapp [NUR leader]', said Tony. 'He's like another arm of management.' It is essential that we take control of the strike out of the hands of bureaucrats like Knapp and start organising ourselves. The drivers have shown how effective we can be so long as we don't stick to the union rulebook.



Building solidarity: RCP supporters have been out this week to win backing from commuters for the tube strike

IRELAND

BRITAIN'S LOYALIST ARMIES

The recriminations continue over the discovery that South African agents have been involved in covert arms deals with Ulster Loyalists. Margaret Thatcher expressed grave concern at the implication that the Pretoria regime could be doing deals with paramilitary extremists in return for access to restricted arms technology. But if anybody is responsible for arming the Loyalist paramilitaries it is Britain, which set up and sustains the sectarian state to enforce its rule in Northern Ireland.

'What is another army among friends?' This was Tory spokesman Bernard Ingham's response to the formation in 1986 of Ulster Resistance, the Loyalist paramilitary organisation whose arms suppliers were arrested doing deals with the South Africans in Paris. Ingham's blasé comment reveals much about the forces behind Loyalist terrorism in Northern Ireland.

The British authorities affect a distaste for the political and military excesses of their Ulster Unionist colleagues. Yet the prime minister's right-hand man reveals their discreet appreciation of the services of Loyalism. Sectarian discrimination, intimidation and murder have long been inseparable from British rule in Ireland and the Loyalist paramilitaries are the frontline enforcers of Britain's determination to maintain the Union.

From the Ulster Volunteer Force of 1913 to the Ulster Defence Association today, the Loyalist murder gangs know that they can count on the support of friends in high places in the British establishment. In the twentieth anniversary year of the current round of troubles, it is useful to be reminded that the real enemies of the Irish people are to be found in Whitehall.

IRISH HUNGER-STRIKE COMMEMORATION



Saturday 6 May MARCH & RALLY Birmingham
Assemble 12 noon Broad Street/Cumberland Street

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 5 Mar 1989 • No 14 • 40p

A MESSAGE TO COMMUTERS

WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT THE TUBE STRIKE

ON MONDAY London Underground workers are due to start an indefinite strike against London Transport's 'reorganisation' plans. It is important that we show our solidarity with all those fighting for decent jobs, pay and conditions. And all passengers have an immediate and direct interest in supporting the strike. We all have a stake in fighting for a better and safer tube system.

Why are tube workers going on strike?

London Transport is preparing to privatise the tube system. But before it can sell it off to its friends in the City LT has to make it profitable. That means cutting staff, cutting wages and cutting safety standards.

Over the past few years LT has got rid of guards and made the drivers do all the work—but refused to pay drivers any extra. Now the tube bosses are trying to put into place what they call the 'business plan'. LT builders, cleaning services and depot maintenance are all now in private hands and hundreds of workers are back on the dole. Train maintenance and the lines themselves are the next to go. Depots are now run by managers, not engineers. And station managers have been told that their only concern is to make a profit. That means fewer workers, lower wages, worse conditions, more accidents. No wonder underground workers have had enough.

Why does it affect us?

We all know what it's like to travel on the tube: it's like a Hillsborough disaster waiting to happen every day of the week. Filthy stations, uncomfortable carriages, stuffed like sardines during rush-hour, not a train in sight the rest of the time. The system is literally falling apart. How often have you travelled on the tube and found an escalator not working? Or heard the station announcer blame 'signal failure' for delays on the line?

Nor is it simply the lack of comfort or never getting anywhere on time. London Transport doesn't give a toss about our safety either. The King's Cross fire was the result of years of neglect and the mania to put profit before all else. And what has LT done since

the fire? Installed new automatic gates in all the stations which make it even more difficult to leave! 'Tomorrow's underground' is today's deathtrap.

But if you think it's bad now, just wait till London Transport's 'business plan' goes through. The derelict underground system which passengers are forced to travel on today will seem like the lap of luxury compared to what we can expect in the future if management gets its way. And we'll be facing the possibility of a King's Cross at every station every time we travel. Why should we be treated like dirt and forced to risk our lives to provide rich pickings for City sharks? We should back the strikers and

insist that their jobs and our safety come before capitalist profit.

What can we do to support the strike?

- **Boycott the tubes:** if management tries to keep the system running by bringing in scabs, passengers should show their solidarity with the strikers by boycotting the tube.

- **Join the picket lines:** passengers who want to show their solidarity with the strikers should find out where the picket lines are on Monday morning and join them.

- **Come to a meeting:** in many areas there will be meetings about the strike. Come along to one and find out more about the dispute and how you can support the strikers.

- **Sign the petition:** at many stations there will be people with petitions supporting tube workers. Sign it yourself and get your friends and workmates to sign.

- **Get involved:** if you want more information, or if you want to get involved in backing the strike, phone us on 375 1702.



Simon Norfolk

TUBE WORKERS, BUS DRIVERS: ALL OUT ON 8 MAY—SEE PAGE 7