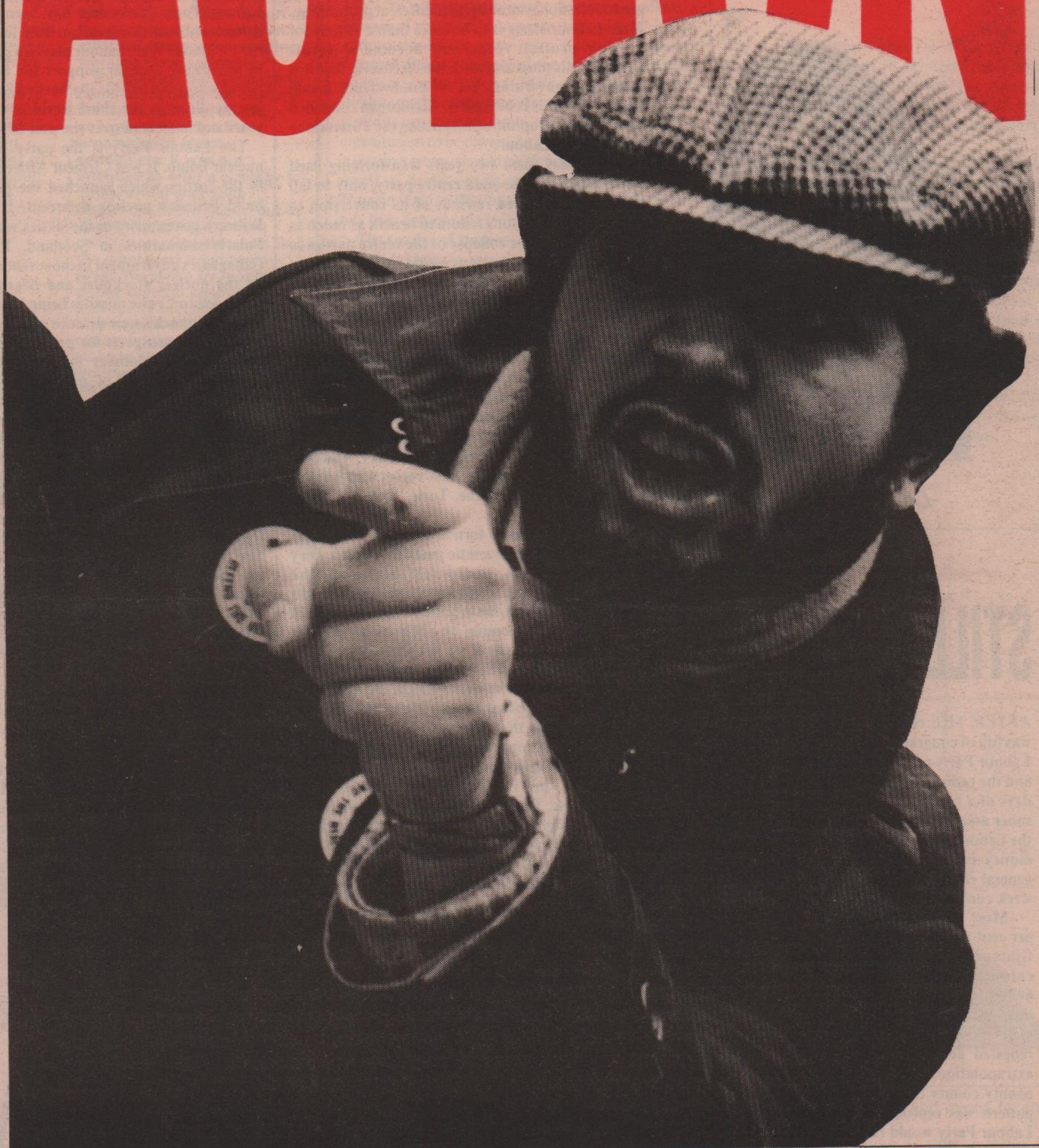


the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 12 May 1989 • No 15 • 40p

THE ANGER GROWS

NOW WE NEED ACTION



Pandora Anderson

Workers are voting for industrial action across the board. Opinion polls show rising opposition to Tory policies. There is a general mood of anger in the country. Meanwhile, the Labour Party adopts Thatcherism in its policy review, and carries on as if one by-election win will bring down the government. If the anger is not to be wasted, we need a new political focus that can turn it into effective action. See pages 2, 4 and 5.

FREE WINSTON
SILCOTT!
Page 3

POLL TAX: A
CHANCE TO
SAY NO Page 7



IS THERE A
FUTURE FOR
THE PLO? Page 6



Editor: Joan Phillips

STILL A LOSER

AFTER THE election results last week the press was full of congratulatory articles about a supposed Labour Party revival. While the mainstream media and the radical press fantasise about a return to the days of a two-party system, Marxists need a more sober assessment. We have said for some time that the Labour Party is finished as a political force. Our money is still on Neil Kinnock losing the next general election. An inspection of the elections last week confirms that this is a sound bet.

Most excitement was generated by the 12.5 per cent swing to the Labour Party in the Vale of Glamorgan by-election. This gave Labour's colourless candidate John Smith a handsome 6000 majority. Every newspaper declared that this would be enough to give Kinnock a working majority at the next general election if it was repeated across the country. The same dubious extrapolations were made on the basis of the county county election results to argue that if the pattern was reproduced in a general election the Labour Party would take power.

In fact the voting patterns reveal the continued stabilisation of the post-1983 political landscape. The Tory Party's base of support among the middle classes and a smaller layer of upwardly mobile working class voters remains solid. The Labour Party's traditional constituency in the working class has stayed fairly constant at a low level for several years now.

This stable electoral balance was borne out above all by the county council elections. The resilience of the Tory vote was remarkable given the unpopularity of the Thatcher regime. The Conservatives regained control of seven counties which they lost four years ago. They are in a stronger position now than they were two years before Thatcher's last landslide victory.

The Labour Party gained control of four counties, also doing better than in 1985. But it was a lacklustre achievement for a party which is supposed to be making a comeback. The geographical concentration of seats also confirmed the consolidation of the north-south political divide, with the Labour Party unable to recapture Tory

territory in the south of the country.

In the Vale of Glamorgan the Labour Party was the beneficiary of middle class disaffection with unpopular Tory policies such as the health service reforms. In Glamorgan the anti-Tory protest votes which would in other circumstances have gone to the centre parties went to Labour. In contrast to the Richmond by-election where the old Alliance parties captured the protest vote, in Glamorgan the Labour Party was the most obvious challenger to the Tory majority. Some of the council results suggest that there will still be tactical voting for the centre when it is seen as the strongest opposition to Thatcher.

A most revealing insight into the Labour victory in Glamorgan came in a television poll afterwards. In a survey of 232 people who had switched from voting Tory to Labour, just eight said they did so because they thought that the Labour Party was a more credible party than the Tories. The Tories lost in Glamorgan because of disenchantment with their policies, not because of any popular enthusiasm for the Labour Party. It confirms that only a series of major blunders by the Tories would allow the Labour Party to get back into government.

It is one thing to win the protest vote in by-elections or local elections: to win a majority in a general election is an altogether different proposition. If the Labour Party is to be more than a vehicle for passing protest votes and become a viable alternative it must convince the electorate that it is capable of governing. Yet all the evidence would suggest that this is beyond it. Glamorgan coincided with a national opinion poll putting the Tories three points up on Labour.

Labour has spent two years transforming itself into a middle-of-the-road centre party, only to fail to reap the expected rewards of its conversion to Thatcherism. Labour's failure to benefit as much as the Tories from the collapse of the centre parties in the county council elections would seem to call into question Kinnock's strategy of reorienting the party to appeal to middle class public opinion.

Yet the leadership's endorsement of the policy review proposals this week indicate that Kinnock is intent on shifting the party even further to the right. 'Our aim is to make capitalism work fairly', declared the Labour leader. Such claims are unlikely to cut any ice with middle class people who are aware that Thatcher's anti-working class policies are the only ones that make sense for capitalism today. And they can only alienate working class voters who want to see an alternative to the Tories not a Labour imitation.

As Kinnock tries to turn the Labour Party into the sort of social democratic party in which a Tory like David Owen would feel at home, the Revolutionary Communist Party is trying to build a movement in which the working class can have a voice. In the forthcoming by-elections in Glasgow Central and Vauxhall we are standing Linda Murdoch and Don Milligan to provide a political focus for all those who want to fight the system.

Our aim is not to make capitalism work fairly, but to unite against the system all those who suffer exploitation and oppression under capitalism. The Labour Party might be starting anew as a middle class outfit, but it is finished as a party of the working class. The future belongs to those who are prepared to fight to change the world. A vote for the RCP in Glasgow and Vauxhall will change nothing in itself. But it will indicate a recognition of the need to get organised against the system that survives at our expense.

A WAR PARTY

IT HAS been a long time coming, but Labour's abandonment of unilateralism has come at last. The policy review on defence has ditched unilateral nuclear disarmament, the policy which party leaders believe lost them the last two elections, and committed them to keeping US nuclear bases in Britain.

When it came to explaining the policy, party leaders seemed as confused as the rest of us. Bryan Gould could not get his mouth around the convoluted

phraseology. Asked to explain his party's conversion to a policy of nuclear deterrence, Gould stuttered that 'we have no intention of using it or threatening to use it as a deterrent'. So what is the point of having it, asked his bemused interviewer. Gould for once was lost for words.

These semantics have not pacified the left, which has bitterly attacked the new policy as a sell-out. The policy shift is indeed a capitulation to the Tories, who have used the unilateralism issue to question the Labour Party's patriotic credentials. Kinnock's abandonment of the policy is an attempt to bury the idea bandied about by the Tories that his party is not committed to the defence of Britain.

There was never anything progressive about the Labour Party's unilateralist policy. It was always a matter of what people read into it, rather than what it represented in reality. The disarmament slogan has allowed the Labour Party to connect with popular aspirations for peace and fears about the horrors of nuclear war. For the left inside the party unilateralism is the last totem of radicalism, as Kinnock has forsaken every other principle which it once held dear.

But for anybody apart from the left it is inconceivable that the Labour Party would ever have implemented its nuclear disarmament policy. The Labour Party leadership has been a consistent defender of British militarism from the Boer War to the Falklands War. Labour played a prominent role in mobilising popular support for Britain in two world wars, and has loyally backed British military interventions in the third world over the past 40 years and in Ireland over the past 20.

The Labour Party is the party of the British nuclear bomb. It was Clement Attlee's government in the forties which launched the programme to build Britain's nuclear deterrent. It was Harold Wilson's government in the sixties which stationed Polaris submarines in Scotland. It was James Callaghan's government in the seventies which built up the nuclear stockpiles and began the process which led to Cruise missiles being based in Britain.

Neil Kinnock's new defence policy is couched in terms of the prospects for peace in the new era of international diplomacy inaugurated by Mikhail Gorbachev. Instead of proposing to get rid of nuclear weapons in the lifetime of parliament, Labour pledges to negotiate them away in super-power arms talks. Yet the party which has tried to identify itself with the cause of peace is revealed as a party of war by the new defence policy.

The document begins by asserting Labour's determination to ensure that Britain is properly defended. It insists that the armed forces must be equipped to deal with any challenge that might confront Britain as a member of Nato. It pledges to step up British forces in Europe, and to strengthen its capacity to strike outside the Nato area. In other words the Labour Party upholds Britain's right to maintain a vast military garrison that is a menace to the peoples of the third world. It notes the necessity to 'anticipate and respond to any threat to Britain itself'. Kinnock's defence policy gives the go ahead to the deployment of massive military firepower to enforce British interests anywhere in the world.

The Revolutionary Communist Party opposes all forms of militarism, conventional and nuclear, and all alliances among imperialist powers, particularly Nato. We condemn Western military interference in the third world and support countries such as Argentina or Libya against imperialist aggression. We give our support to liberation movements in Ireland, the Middle East, South Africa and Central America.

A NEW SOVIET BOGEY

POOR OLD George Bush has the same problem as Neil Kinnock. In the absence of having anything substantial to say, he has undertaken a foreign policy review to provide his faltering administration with an image of dynamism. After months of deliberation the great minds of the national strategic review team have come up with one idea between them which is brilliant in its simplicity. It is to blame the Soviet Union for anything that does or does not happen anywhere in the world.

It works like this. If Syria bombs Beirut then the Soviets are to blame. If the Nicaraguans do not adopt free market democracy then it is the fault of the Soviet Union. If Libya continues to export terrorism then the Soviets are responsible. If North Korea does not stop threatening the South then the Soviet Union must be held accountable. The advantage of this policy is that it can invent threats where they do not exist, and accuse the Soviets of guilt by association, regardless of whether or not they have

anything to do with the country in question.

The aim of the new thinking in Washington is to counter Mikhail Gorbachev's diplomatic successes by presenting the Soviet Union as an obstacle to progress towards peace and democracy across the globe. Bush has blasted the Soviets for continuing to aid and arm the Sandinistas, the Cubans, the Libyans and the North Koreans. In essence it is a new variation on the old theme of the Soviet bogey. The big difference is that whereas in the past the USA was able to rally its imperialist allies behind its anti-Soviet crusades, today its attempt to scapegoat Moscow is likely to be greeted with scepticism as the Soviets renege on their commitments to former satellites.

The only useful purpose the new policy could serve is an ideological one for consumption at home. Washington's tirades against the illusory menace of Soviet interference in its self-proclaimed backyard has always served to cohere popular support for US intervention in the region. As America resorts to waving the big stick against soft targets in its backyard to compensate for its decline as a global power, blaming Soviet influence for insurgency in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras can legitimise further US marauding in the region.

IRAN'S PROBLEM

HASHEMI RAFSANJANI is doing another Salman Rushdie against the West to cohere support for the Iranian regime at home and for his own political ambitions. Rafsanjani called on the Palestinians to avenge their dead in the occupied territories by killing five Westerners for every Palestinian shot dead by Israeli troops. This latest death threat from Iran was especially galling for the Western powers coming as it did from somebody they had identified as the leading pragmatist in the fundamentalist camp.

Rafsanjani's anti-Western outburst is an expression of the tensions within the Iranian leadership generated by the internal problems which confront it. For eight years the struggle against Iraq allowed the regime to keep a grip on the Iranian masses by organising a popular crusade against an external foe. Since the end of the Gulf War last year the clerics have been deprived of this mechanism for suppressing domestic discontent after 10 years of turmoil and hardship. They desperately need to mobilise a consensus behind the regime to stay in control.

From their point of view it is irrelevant how that consensus is mobilised: the pretext could just as well be Salman Rushdie or the Palestinian question. Rafsanjani and the rest are not bothered about what happens to the Palestinians. All they care about is holding on to their power. And for Rafsanjani, who is making his own bid for power, the way to do this is outdoing even the most extreme mullahs. In the past Rafsanjani calculated that overtures to the West served his ambitions; today he reckons that threats against the West will further his career.

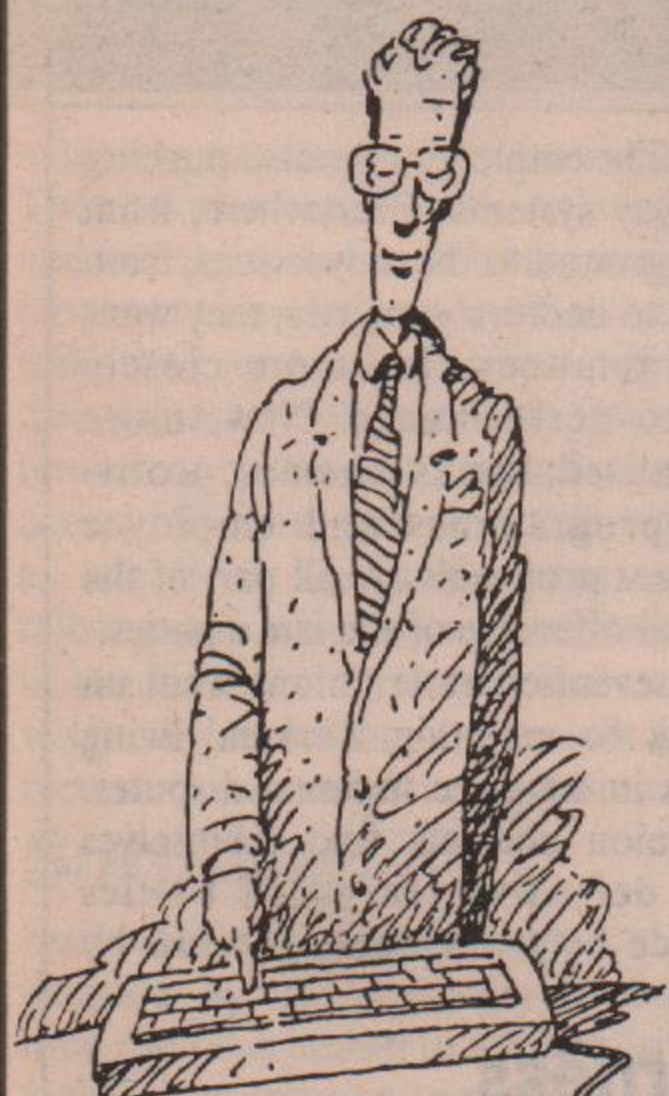
LIVING MARXISM

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 (T15), BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX. Telephone (01) 375 1485.



letters

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THE RED AND THE GREEN

ON Sunday 30 April a capacity crowd at Celtic Park, Glasgow, watched a momentous game. Two giants of world football, Glasgow Celtic and Liverpool, played a benefit match for the families of fans killed or injured in the Hillsborough tragedy.

Walking up London Road and Jaynefield Street were thousands wearing the colours of both teams. Nothing unusual in that, you might think; except that most individuals sported both colours. There was no segregation in the stadium, as Glaswegian and Scouser sang the same songs together.

Before the game we stood for a minute's silence in remembrance of those who lost their lives. The unbroken silence set the mood for the rest of the day. No matter what the score was, Celtic supporters and other Scots were there to show their support for the working class of Liverpool. And show their support they did. The chants of 'Liverpool, Liverpool' were from Scottish throats; 'You'll never walk alone' rising from the red-covered terracing made Parkhead seem like the Anfield Kop.

After the disgusting anti-working class statements from the police and the press, this was the sort of event that gives hope for the future. There was a great deal of anti-police sentiment but it never boiled over due to the nature of the event.

The world doesn't change just because the supporters of two football clubs sing each other's songs. But when thousands realise that friends died because of the actions of the police and government, and see their interests as being the same as those of other working class people, then questions begin to be asked.

On the day, however, the biggest question was about Celtic's defence—Liverpool won 4-0. John Barnes was magnificent and Kenny Dalglish, an ex-Celt, contributed to the damage. Derek Glasgow

TUBE STRIKE OPPORTUNISM?

I'VE just bought the latest copy of *the next step* at Oval tube station. I am a bit bewildered by your back-page article 'A message to commuters: Why you should support the tube strike'. This seems to argue the opposite of the RCP's normal line, which is to reject opportunist bids to win public opinion rather than working class solidarity.

In the NHS dispute, for example, *the next step* argued that appealing to the public as consumers of health services obscured the issue of workers' pay and conditions, and gave credence to the Tory arguments about spending and efficiency. Surely the transport union leaders will be trying to put forward a similar 'save our services' line to avoid organising an effective strike. If *the next step* calls for an all-out strike, but puts the emphasis on commuter comfort and safety, it will help the bureaucrats dissipate the militant mood that has been displayed recently.

I'm not against commuters supporting the strike, but I think the appeal should be made in terms of working class solidarity—we're not all brolly-carrying businessmen, you know!

Janice Ward
Camberwell

the next step replies

AS a party we have never argued that a focus on issues of conditions or safety is wrong in principle. Nor have we ever argued that it is wrong in principle to appeal for solidarity from consumers. In the context of the recent rail disasters, we have tried to connect with growing popular anger at the collapse of the transport infrastructure and of safety standards. In our campaign for abortion rights we have never posed the issue

in terms of the need to fight for better pay and conditions for nurses, but in terms of the need to fight for better and safer facilities for women. During the print strike at Wapping we campaigned for a boycott of the *Sun* by consumers.

We need to assess our intervention in different disputes in their specific context. As you say in the health dispute the question of deteriorating services was given prominence by the union leaders in order to evade the issue of pay and conditions. Similarly in the P&O strike the union bureaucrats made much of the threat to passenger safety in order to obscure the issues at stake for workers facing attacks on jobs and conditions. In both these cases we were critical of the way the union leaders sought to win middle class support at the expense of pursuing an effective strategy for winning working class solidarity.

By contrast our message to commuters does not obscure the issue at stake: on the contrary it clarifies the problem as it affects consumers. It was not intended to offer a strategy for strikers—that was done elsewhere in the paper—but to appeal for solidarity from consumers. Our view was that the employers would try to break the strike by mobilising public opinion against the strikers. In this situation an intervention which spelled out clearly why commuters have a stake in supporting tube workers could make a positive contribution to the strike. Our aim was to relate the experience of commuters travelling in filthy, overcrowded, delapidated conditions to the need to support the struggle of tube workers.

INCONSISTENT ON AFGHANISTAN



A LEBANONISED Afghanistan falling prey to imperialism is a prospect which horrifies most socialists. The editorial in the paper outlined clearly whose side we should be on (21 April). A pragmatic approach is needed here, although unfortunately this leaves us lining up with the Najibullah regime.

Thus a thorny question is posed. In order to undermine CIA-sponsored Islamic fundamentalists we should side with whatever force has the military and technical capacity to do so. Logically, however, this would seem to leave us supporting a continuation of the Soviet occupation.

Despite the fact that the Soviet invasion took place in order to stabilise borders and has since subjected the Afghan people to bloodshed and deprivation, the Red Army still threw up a considerable

barrier to the mujahideen snatching power. Russian tanks in Jalalabad gave the imperialist powers their strongest propaganda point of the eighties. They also acted indirectly as a recruiting sergeant for some of the most backward and reactionary forces in the region.

In 1979 we could legitimately side with the Afghan rebels' struggle against foreign intervention. To do so now would be to back the footsoldiers of the West. An independent working class movement is not a force in Afghan society. Perhaps we should argue for a Soviet return, wars and all, as the most immediate and practical obstruction to Western ambitions in the region. The cause of progress cannot afford another Lebanon.

Graham Bishop
Nottingham

In the colleges

THE LSE CONTROVERSY

WE BACK SILCOTT!

THE election by LSE students of Winston Silcott as their honorary president, and their refusal to back down before a hysterical campaign of intimidation and slander, should be applauded. Their action has helped to refocus public debate on the state frame-up of Winston Silcott, Engin Raghip and Mark Braithwaite.

By electing Silcott honorary president, the LSE students have helped to expose the institutionalised racism that passes for British justice. 'Because of the courage of the students, who have been prepared to take on board a very unpopular cause', said Silcott's solicitor Andrew Hall, 'they have succeeded where we have failed in the last three years, to bring public attention to his case'.

The LSE action has brought down on students a barrage of abuse from government ministers, college authorities and the gutter press. Education secretary Kenneth Baker condemned the action as 'shameful and despicable'. Tory MPs want government funding to be withdrawn from the student union. College governors have called for the union constitution to be rewritten. The *Sun* thundered that 'every last penny should be stopped from today'. As a result of death threats inspired by these rantings, Hossein Zahir, the student who nominated Silcott, has been forced into hiding.

The resolve of students who have stood up to this intimidation is an inspiration to students everywhere.

The case has been a boost for student politics, but it has also shown what is wrong with the NUS today. For the past two weeks NUS bureaucrats have been trying to distance themselves from the LSE students. NUS leader Maevie Sherlock disowned the union and condemned the election as 'inappropriate and insensitive'. NUS leaders forced the LSE students to hold another union general meeting to reconsider the decision. When this failed to produce the two thirds

majority required to overturn the election result, the NUS piled on the pressure for a secret ballot of all LSE students. The NUS attitude seems to be, 'If you don't get the result you want, keep changing the rules until you do'.

The NUS is worried that the government might cut off state funding for student unions. The Tories want to abolish the NUS closed shop, under which all students are automatically union members, and has threatened to take action if students get involved in political campaigns. Student leaders have spent the past year persuading the government that the NUS is not a political organisation. Bureaucrats have come down hard on any student activity that could be construed as political. A recent government survey showed that just 0.5 per cent of student income is spent on political activities.

The NUS is furious that the LSE action might scupper its campaign to persuade the Tories that student unions are tame bodies that pose no threat to the authorities. But what's the point of having a student union if it can only do what the Tories allow us to?

The LSE controversy, and the NUS response to it, shows the need for independent student unions.

Because the NUS is financially dependent on the state, the government can interfere in our affairs. One threat by the Tories that they might cut off funding is enough to make student leaders run to do their bidding. What we need are unions that are financially and politically independent of the state. Only by creating organisations that are funded and run by students themselves will we have unions that are accountable to students not to government ministers or *Sun* leader writers.

Students should show their solidarity with the LSE by passing the model motion below and electing Silcott as president of their own unions.

Kunle Oluremi



Winston Silcott: victim of British racism

THIS UNION NOTES

1. The decision of LSE students to elect Winston Silcott honorary president of the LSE student union;
2. The racist and hysterical campaign orchestrated by the press and Tory students to overturn this decision;
3. The failure of the Tories to overturn this decision at the emergency general meeting of the LSE union on 2 May;
4. That the response of the LSE authorities to these events has been an inquiry into the funding and constitution of the union;
5. That Winston Silcott has been made honorary president of SOAS union.

THIS UNION BELIEVES

1. That Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip were framed by the police;
2. That despite the fact that no evidence was brought against him, Silcott was convicted because of the racist campaign that was run

against him in the press and media for the 44 days of his trial;

3. That the stand taken by LSE students is an inspiration to all those fighting racism;
4. That all student unions should be able to run their own affairs free from interference from the media or college authorities.

THIS UNION RESOLVES

1. To show solidarity with LSE students and elect Winston Silcott an honorary member of this union;
2. To affiliate to the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign;
3. To send a letter of support to LSE students informing them of our decision;
4. To write to the home office demanding the unconditional release of the three;
5. To investigate the degree to which our own union is constitutionally open to management and government interference and to bring proposals to the next UGM about how we can change our constitution to remove this threat.

NO RETURN TO THE SEVENTIES

Mike Freeman argues that the left cannot come to terms with the new forms of class struggle today because it is still living in the past

RADICAL FANTASIES about a revival of seventies-style militancy underestimate the problems facing trade union activists today.

'A new wave of militancy is developing in British industry on a scale not seen since the epic battles of the 1970s. Millions of workers are mobilising for action...

'The confident perspectives of *Militant* have been totally vindicated. A new summer and autumn of discontent is entirely possible.' (*Militant*, 28 April)

Militant's exultant response to the recent successful one-day strikes on the London underground and at the BBC, and the threat of industrial action on the docks, the railways, in engineering, electricity supply and the fire service, reflects a widespread view on the left. There is a general celebration of the return of the forms of trade union militancy that prevailed in the seventies, culminating in the 'winter of discontent' in 1978-79 that helped to bring down James Callaghan's Labour government 10 years ago this month.

The Socialist Workers Party shared *Militant's* optimism over the revival of militancy. 'Suddenly strikes are in the news again', declared *Socialist Worker*, under the front-page banner headline: 'Tories fear pay revolt' (29 April). The article concluded that it was the job of trade union activists to 'turn the current anger over pay into the sort of action that could really ruin Thatcher's tenth anniversary celebrations'.

Far left anticipations of a 'summer of discontent' reflect a trend in the mainstream press to exaggerate the scale of the industrial disputes currently taking place. There are a number of reasons for this. Journalists on the more radical newspapers are eagerly looking out for any industrial discontent to spoil the atmosphere at the close of the Thatcher decade.

For the more right-wing media, talking up an upsurge of trade union militancy is the time-honoured device to discredit the Labour Party at a moment when Neil Kinnock's fortunes appear to be on the rise.

For Marxists, it is important to put the recent industrial disputes in perspective.

Much of the militancy currently under discussion is more potential than real: strikes on the docks, the railways, in engineering, electricity supply and the fire service have yet to take place. Actions that have been taken—on the tube and at the BBC—have been limited in scope and duration. The current disputes take place in the context of a steady decline in the statistics of union militancy throughout the eighties. It is worth recalling that it is only 12 months since another anticipated 'summer of discontent'—arising from disputes at Ford, P&O ferries and in the health service—failed to materialise.

It is also interesting to contrast the media's preoccupation with the flickers of militancy in Britain and their silence in response to the real trade union revolt that is currently shaking capitalism in Spain. Not only were the dead not buried in Madrid over the May bank holiday weekend, as in Britain during the winter of discontent, but the whole country was brought to a standstill by the second general strike within six months. The

mainstream press feels uncomfortable about discussing a real working class threat to the system in Spain, but is quite confident when it comes to debating the consequences of minor disruptions in Britain.

What is the difference between the current disputes and the winter of discontent? What is the significance of these disputes? How should Marxists intervene in them?

The most obvious difference between industrial disputes today and those 10 years ago concerns the issues under dispute. In the late seventies strike action

was generally directed against the government's attempts to restrain wage rises through incomes policies. Unions aggressively pursued industrial action at a national level against employers and the government to protect living standards against rising inflation.

Though pay is an element in many current disputes, it is generally only one aspect of a broad managerial drive to transform relations between employers and workers in the workplace.

In many of today's disputes employers are attempting to restructure industrial relations—by abolishing the National Dock Labour Scheme, by decentralising bargaining on the railways and in electricity supply, by scrapping the pay relativity system introduced in the fire service after the 1977 strike. Such measures have been introduced widely into British industry and services over the past decade to strengthen the hand of the employers.

Another aspect of current disputes is the way that employers are trying to impose new working practices. In the docks, the bosses aim to reduce manning levels; on the tube, they aim to extend one-driver trains; in engineering, the objective is to introduce more 'flexible'

working. The employers are also pushing for new pay systems. Everywhere, from the underground to the universities, from the docks to doctors' surgeries, they want to make remuneration more closely related to performance. New, more individualised, bonus schemes, profit-sharing programmes and employee involvement proposals are all part of the managerial offensive of the late eighties.

In the seventies trade unions went on the attack to maintain workers' living standards in set-piece national disputes. Today union activists find themselves fighting defensive rearguard battles workplace by workplace, section by section.

Bitterness

In the seventies workers took industrial action with high expectations. Though strikes were far from uniformly successful, they generally succeeded in keeping wage rises abreast of inflation. A number of major victories—by the dockers in 1972, the miners in 1972 and 1974—and many smaller successes gave militants a general confidence in the effectiveness of militancy. Trade union organisation was strong and union leaders were in a powerful position to bargain with employers and government.

Today the climate for trade unionism has changed almost beyond recognition.

Few now expect to achieve much through industrial action. The experience of the eighties has been of one setback after another, culminating in the major defeats of the miners in 1984, the printworkers in 1987 and the P&O strikers and health service workers last year. Trade union membership has slumped, and, more importantly, remaining members have little confidence in union organisation: scab unions have grown in many sectors and morale among activists is low.

Ten years of Tory rule have reduced British trade unions to a shell

The balance of forces has swung decisively to the employers. Labour market changes—the effects of permanent mass unemployment, the decline of manufacturing and the rise of services, the expansion of jobs for part-time women and white-collar workers as full-time male manual jobs have disappeared—have sapped trade union strength. The unions have become increasingly reliant on the public sector, and even here they are being squeezed by privatisation pressures and government cuts. Legislative changes have reduced employees' rights (in matters of redundancy, unfair dismissal, entitlement to various benefits, health and safety procedures, protection against low pay) as well as restricting trade union rights (over picketing, sympathetic action, strike action in general).

What then is the significance of the current round of industrial disputes?

The most striking feature of all the conflicts now taking place is the high level of hostility towards the employers and the government and the widespread willingness to take a defiant stand. These sentiments are confirmed by the high level of support for industrial action revealed by ballots among diverse groups of workers in recent months, from railway workers to BBC technicians to university lecturers.

The strong support for industrial action on the tube and at the BBC showed that workers are ready to take action as well as vote for action. There is undoubtedly a mood of intense bitterness at the way employers are seeking to impose methods of working and systems of bargaining that mean a drastic deterioration in working conditions as well as stagnating pay levels. Many workers are so angry that they are prepared to support forms of protest that they might previously have rejected.

Yet workers have little expectation of



Pandora Anderson

achieving much through industrial action. They have little confidence in their unions and fear the sort of ruthless repression the employers and the government have unleashed on trade unionists who have defied them in the past. Hence there is a tendency to favour limited forms of action—24-hour strikes on the tube and at the BBC, overtime bans on the railways, selective action in engineering—in the hope that these will make a point without provoking too much public recrimination and state repression.

Surprised

Such concerns are most apparent in the decision by the university lecturers to limit their disruption to refusing to mark, rather than refusing to set and supervise examinations. However, the same pre-occupation is evident across the spectrum—most notably in the TGWU leadership's squirming over the attack on the dockers.

In general the scope for such cautious forms of militancy is limited.

They are more likely to reassure the employers that they have not too much to worry about than they are to force them to back down. However, such actions can sometimes surprise even the workers concerned in their effectiveness. Undoubtedly both tube workers and BBC technicians were surprised at the impact of their recent protests.

Given the high level of animosity against the employers among many

groups of workers, there is always the possibility that limited protests can spark off a wider revolt, especially if such actions are seen to produce results. This is where the progressive potential of the current disputes is to be found.

Law

How should we intervene in trade union disputes today? It is important to begin from a recognition of the scale of the problems. Tens years of Tory rule, following five years of Labour rule, have reduced British trade unions to a shell and their leaders to an intensely conservative bureaucracy concerned only with its own survival. It is, therefore, futile to proclaim the 'resilience' of trade union organisation and the progressive potential of trade union leaders in the manner of *Militant* and *Socialist Worker*. The union machines survive but they are incapable of providing even basic organisation for industrial action, let alone political strategy.

The role of activists in the unions is to promote rank and file initiative and organisation in a way that can allow militants to break out of their isolation and win wider support for industrial action. This is closely tied up with redirecting militancy around a political strategy that can ensure the broadest unity in action. On the docks, this means campaigning for the extension of the dock

labour scheme to cover all dockers, in the non-registered as well as the registered ports. On the railways, it means campaigning for coordinated all-out action to put real pressure on the government, instead of the fragmented gestures of sectional unions.

In all industrial disputes the law has now become a central issue. As railway union leader Jimmy Knapp put it last week, 'it is becoming impossible to take industrial action within the law'. In a situation where all strikes are potentially illegal, workers have to organise action according to their own rules.

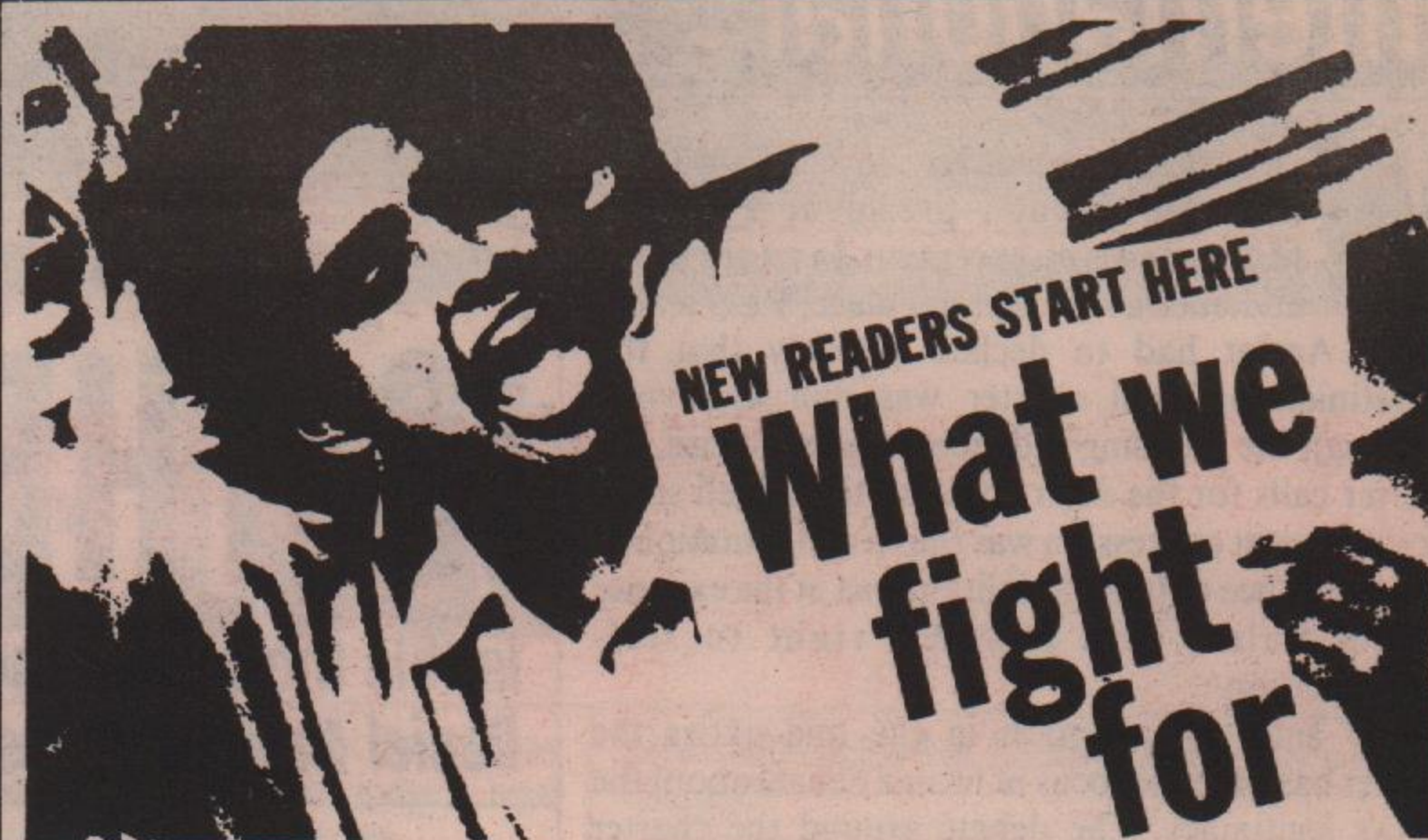
Sooner or later it is going to be necessary for the government's legal bluff to be called: it will be the class struggle not the courts that will decide the legitimacy of strike action.

It is striking that the left groups which rejoice at the prospect of a 'summer of discontent' have no political contribution to make to the current disputes. *Militant* concludes apocalyptically that 'sooner or later the unions will move back to the left' and that 'this will foreshadow a dramatic shift back to the left in the Labour Party'. No doubt Kinnock's new theme song will also enter the Top 10.

Preaching

Meanwhile, *Socialist Worker* has already got cold feet. In a special editorial this week, entitled quizzically, 'A summer of discontent?', it concludes that 'it would be foolish to believe that the rumblings in industry will all be translated into solid industrial action' (6 May). Now despondent about the prospect of the 'upturn' for which it has patiently waited through the Thatcher years, *Socialist Worker* counsels activists to take refuge in preaching about 'broad socialist issues', whatever that means.

For Marxists, there can be no return to the seventies. However, if we can begin to rebuild rank and file organisation around anti-capitalist strategies in the unions, then we can go forward to the nineties.



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.

Western leaders never give anything away for free and French president François Mitterrand is no exception. In return for an audience at the Elysée Palace, PLO leader Yassir Arafat had to declare publicly that the Palestinian national charter was null and void. Although the phrasing is deliberately imprecise, the charter calls for the destruction of the Israeli state. Arafat's latest concession was thus a reaffirmation of his acceptance of Israel's right to exist at the expense of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

Ever since its adoption in the mid-sixties the charter has been the focus of heated debate about the PLO's legitimacy. The debate around the charter reflects the conflicting pressures on the PLO. Western leaders have constantly called on the PLO to renounce the document: in other words give up the liberation struggle and recognise Israel. On the other hand the Palestinian people have supported the PLO precisely because of this commitment to destroy the Israeli state which denies them their rights.

Deadly diplomacy

By abandoning the charter Arafat has signalled his complete capitulation to Western pressure. Over the past decade the PLO leadership has inched ever closer to recognising Israel. In his Stockholm declaration of December 1988 Arafat finally put on public record his recognition of the legitimacy of the Israeli regime.

Arafat's latest pronouncement amounts to a liquidation of the PLO: if the Palestinians have no rights over Israel then there is no reason for the liberation movement to exist.

The commitments contained in the charter are certainly at odds with the practice of the PLO today. Article 2 declares that the whole of Palestine 'is an indivisible territorial unit'. Yet nowadays the PLO leadership no longer fights for self-determination for the Palestinians but talks nonsense about a two state solution. Article 9 declares 'armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. Thus it is the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase'. Today the PLO explicitly repudiates 'terrorism', and vigorously pursues international diplomacy instead.

Although the PLO is a spent force the Palestinian struggle is still a potentially liberating force in the Middle East. The Palestinian people are locked in struggle with a state that by its very existence denies them democratic rights. As long as Israel exists the oppressed Palestinian masses will fight back.

The Palestinian struggle also has a broader significance across the region. The West has promoted Israel as a strategic asset, in other words as a pro-imperialist stalwart, in the Middle East.

Given Israel's central role in the domination of the region the Palestinian question is central to the struggle for freedom across the Middle East.

Unfortunately the West's two-pronged strategy has succeeded in destroying the present Palestinian leadership as a progressive force. On the one hand

YASSIR ARAFAT IN PARIS

IS THE PLO FINISHED?

Is this the end of the Palestine Liberation Organisation?
Daniel Nassim assesses Yassir Arafat's Parisian statement

Israel, bankrolled by the West, has systematically and militarily devastated the PLO's organisational infrastructure. It has bombed PLO bases, massacred the Palestinian people, assassinated PLO leaders, and driven Palestinian fighters out of the Middle East.

At the same time, the West has encouraged the moderate Arab regimes to draw the PLO into an equally deadly diplomatic process. One of the PLO's gravest errors is enshrined in the charter itself. Article 27 states that the PLO 'shall not interfere in the internal affairs of any Arab state'. With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to see the disastrous consequences of the PLO's acceptance of this condition.

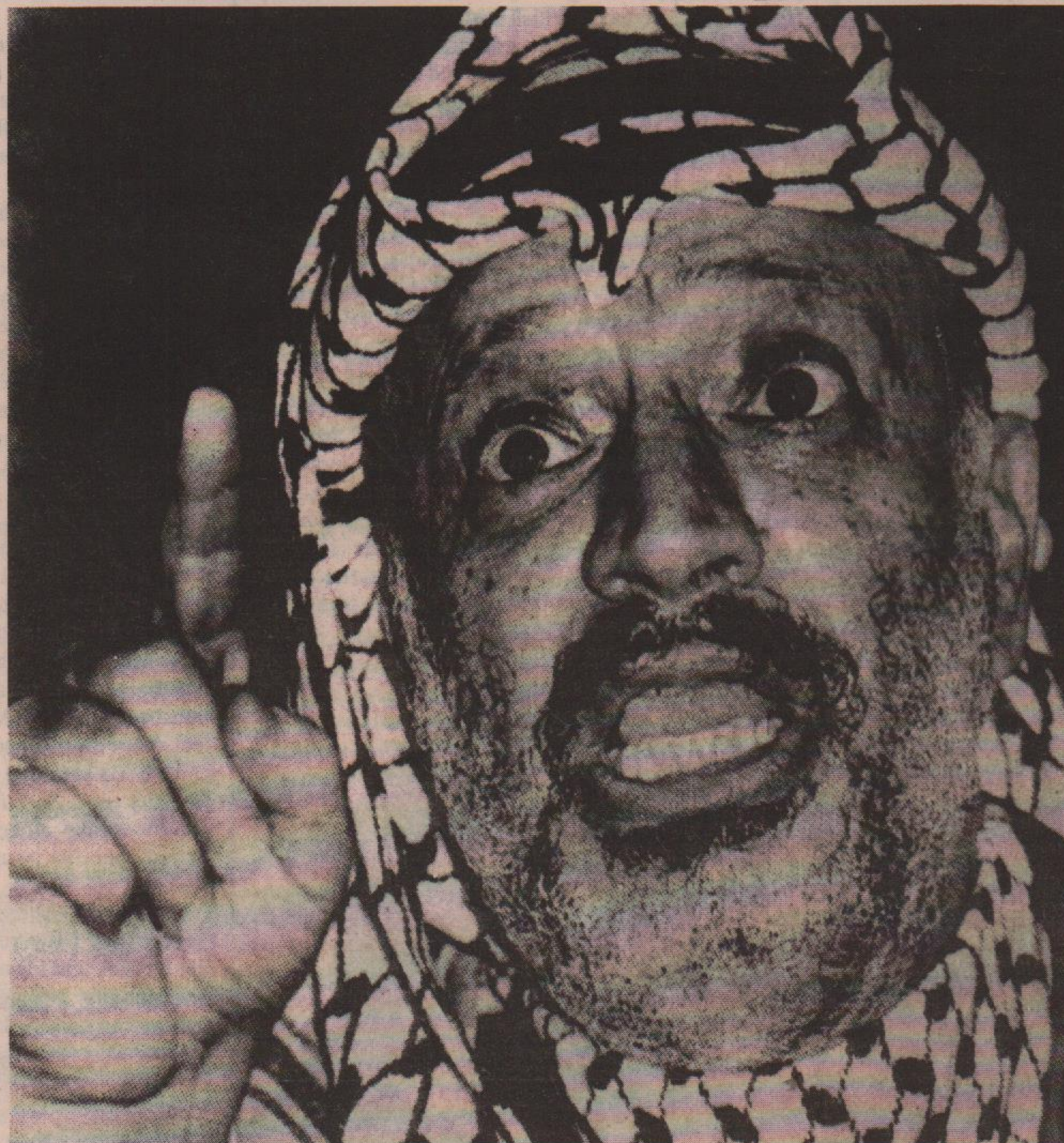
Instead of developing alliances with the Arab masses, the PLO leadership has always preferred to maintain good relations with the Arab regimes. This has exposed the organisation to sustained pressure from Arab governments. Besides the everyday pressures exerted by its financial dependence on these forces, the PLO has been attacked by Arab regimes on several occasions. Jordan and Syria have both launched genocidal attacks on the Palestinians in the past. Yet the PLO leadership is still incapable of making a decisive break with the Arab regimes.

Against all odds

The Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising) of the past 18 months has drawn out the consequences of the Arafat approach. Despite a mass upsurge of resistance in the West Bank and Gaza, the PLO has responded by placing even more emphasis on diplomacy. Indeed, an important impetus behind the *Intifada* was the conviction among many Palestinians that the PLO strategy was getting them nowhere fast. Just before the conflicts erupted in the occupied territories in December 1987, the Arab summit in Amman had decided for the first time ever to give greater emphasis to the Gulf War than to the Palestinian struggle.

The courage and resolve of those fighting against all the odds in the West Bank and Gaza shows the tremendous potential of the struggle to liberate Palestine.

If the heroism of the Palestinian and Arab masses was given a clear political focus they would be



Arafat doesn't even talk a good fight these days

unstoppable. A guiding principle would be to give real meaning to article 21 of the charter: 'The Arab Palestinian people, expressing themselves by the armed Palestinian revolution, reject all solutions

which are substitutes for the total liberation of Palestine and reject proposals aiming at the liquidation of the Palestinian problem, or its internationalisation.'

NATO ROW: THE LEFT'S GOT IT WRONG

KOHL IS A WARMONGER TOO



Like all Western leaders, Kohl is dressed to kill

'Don't Be Bullied Mr Kohl' said the CND placards outside the West German embassy on the eve of Margaret Thatcher's arm-twisting visit to the West German chancellor. Since the row over the upgrading of short-range nuclear missiles came to a head a few weeks ago, many on the British left have welcomed Helmut Kohl's decision to call for these German-based missiles to be negotiated away in talks with the Soviet Union. It would appear that chancellor Kohl

has become the number two hero of the peace movement, second only to Mikhail Gorbachev himself.

The West German premier has been congratulated in numerous letters to the *Guardian* for taking what is widely seen as a courageous stand against America and Britain. The Communist Party weekly, *Seven Days*, urged its readers to rally round the chancellor: 'Everything must be done to support the West German initiative.' (29 April)

Sanity, the monthly magazine of CND, has discovered progressive forces within the West German military establishment. Its May edition devoted three pages to an article by Rear Admiral Elmar Schmahling, the former head of West German military intelligence and the present chief in the Bundeswehr's leading defence think-tank. It quotes approvingly Schmahling's calls for an independent defence policy on the grounds that Nato's plans are bad for Germany.

Bully boy

It is criminally naive of the left to have illusions in the peaceful intentions of any imperialist power. Kohl or any other West German leader can be counted on to pursue their national interests vigorously and aggressively. Today this means pursuing a more independent foreign policy from that dictated by its US rival through Nato. The fact that Germany, even under the so-called American nuclear umbrella, has already built up its own considerable military machine should be proof enough of its war-making credentials.

Its military arsenal may be restricted by post-war convention, but West Germany is nevertheless a formidable military power. Over half a million German troops are in service today. Last autumn the government established a 4000-strong joint brigade with France. West Germany is a member of the Western European Union, the pan-European defence organisation. In addition, West German arms manufacturers are world-class. Alongside Britain, West Germany has the largest stake in the production of the Tornado jet, and it is a major backer of the development of the new Eurofighter

jet. Far from being the innocent victim of swaggering bullies like Bush and Thatcher as CND would have it, Kohl's bully-boy tactics in the third world make him an equal among Western warmongers. On every act of imperialist barbarism from bombing Libyan cities to rubble to shelling Iran into submission in the Gulf, German leaders expressed their support for Western warfare against the peoples of the third world.

Kohl's refusal to give way to Bush and Thatcher on nuclear modernisation does not reflect a conversion to the ideals of the West German peace movement as some have intimated. On the contrary, it should be taken as a warning that a culture of militarism is growing in Bonn. What Kohl and his admirals really object to is the fact that a global economic superpower like West Germany should be forced to accept the status of a second-rate military power. Its growing assertiveness within Nato is a sign that West Germany is taking the first steps towards an independent military strategy in defiance of the USA.

Fatal mistake

What some have mistaken for a growing consensus in favour of disarmament in West Germany is in reality the expression of a resurgent German nationalism. We are witnessing the return of great power politics, with economic and military conflicts among the imperialist giants becoming ever sharper. In the context of a heightening of national rivalries and the growth of militarism it is worrying that some on the left could see something positive in the stand that Kohl has taken.

The world will not be delivered to peace by imperialist warmongers like Bush, Thatcher or Kohl, and it would be a fatal mistake for the left to side with any one of them against the rest. If we want peace we have to fight to disarm the capitalist class which benefits from militarist adventures. That means popularising an internationalist outlook in the working class, one that rejects the culture of nationalism and chauvinism and identifies a common interest among people from all nations in opposing imperialism.

James Malone

The working class

A WEEK IN THE COURTS

HEADS THEY WIN, TAILS WE LOSE

For anybody who still believed that British courts dispensed 'blind justice', the events of last week were instructive. In two judgements the courts showed that the law is anything but the employers and the government want it to be.

On Thursday the high court awarded London Transport an injunction against the NUR, banning the tube strike due to start last Monday. The NUR had followed to the letter the Tories' restrictive trade union

legislation which aims to outlaw effective action. The union balloted its members and won a 7:1 majority in favour of a strike. So why did the judge ban it?

Because the wording on the ballot paper was 'confusing and unclear'. The form asked union members: 'Do you agree to support the executive committee in their fight to maintain their current agreement on seniority and to resist the imposition of organisational changes on satisfactory attendance procedures and

competitive tendering by taking strike action?' I may not have the benefit of the learned judge's legal background, but it seems pretty clear to me.

If we compare the attitude of the employers to the tube strike and the docks dispute we can see how they move the legal goalposts to suit their needs.

When union leaders finally decided to ballot for action against the abolition of the national dock labour scheme, port employers declared that the wording of the ballot paper was illegitimate. They said that it was calling for workers to support a political strike masquerading as a trade dispute. Apparently a strike is only permissible if it is concerned solely with terms and conditions of employment.

The forgetting Force

In the case of the tube strike, even the most incorrigible liar would find it difficult to argue that this is not a trade dispute. So the employers have come up with another objection: the problem this time is that the wording of the ballot paper is too wide-ranging because it contains references to disciplinary procedures and competitive tendering. In other words, and in direct contradiction to the argument used in the dock dispute, it says too much about terms and conditions! The only ballot paper acceptable to the Tories is one which reads: 'I agree that I do not want to take any form of industrial action.'

The day after the high court ruled against the tube workers who had voted overwhelmingly for strike action, a Bow Street magistrate ruled in favour of six members of the Metropolitan Police accused of running riot against striking printers. The magistrate dismissed charges against six officers accused of a cover-up after a police riot at Rupert Murdoch's Wapping plant during the print dispute. The evidence against the

police was substantial. So why did the judge dismiss the charges?

Because the 'unjustifiable delay' in bringing the case to court—it's now two years since the riot—was 'an abuse of court procedures'. 'Nobody interviewed more than a year later', claimed the magistrate Ronald Bartle, 'can reasonably be expected to remember events concerning a small period of what must have been a very hectic night'.

This ruling will be of interest to Michael Randle and Pat Pottle. The police arrested Randle and Pottle last week for their role in helping Soviet spy George Blake escape from prison. The crime which they are supposed to have committed happened 23 years ago.

Policemen can obviously be forgiven for being more forgetful than the rest of us.

The law has always been a tool of the capitalist class. The authorities have always tried to maintain the fiction of 'blind justice' by keeping the class prejudice of the courts as unobtrusive as possible. But as the Tories have become more up-front in their manipulation of the judiciary, any illusion that the law is impartial has been shattered. The blatant class bias of the British legal system was seldom clearer than in the courts last week.

Kenan Malik



Maggie's army is no respecter of our rights

FIGHTING THE POLL TAX

'IF LABOUR WON'T, THEN WE WILL'

Pandora Anderson

People in west London have been given an excellent opportunity to build up resistance to the much hated poll tax. On 25 May there will be a by-election for a seat on Hammersmith and Fulham council. The vacant seat is in Broadway ward which lies at the heart of the borough. Sheona York, publicity officer for Hammersmith Nalco, delegate to the local trades council and Revolutionary Communist Party member is standing as 'The Anti-Poll Tax Candidate'. She is standing to focus a broad opposition to the Tory tax, and to argue for the sort of campaign which is needed to beat it.

For the past three years Hammersmith council has been run by a Labour administration with a 30-seat majority. Like every other Labour council in the land, it has been preparing to collect the poll tax. As Sheona York says: 'It just isn't good enough. If they're not prepared to fight, we must make it clear that we are.' She is arguing for a campaign based on *working class action*, involving trade unionists, tenants, women and the unemployed; *united action between council workers and the community*, emphasising that the key will be the refusal of council workers to implement the tax, supported by the community; and *a readiness to break the law*, making it clear that we must be prepared to defy the legislation or we are doomed.

Here's a fiver

As you might expect, the campaign has attracted much enthusiasm and support from those on the left who have been opposing the tax. The branch executive of Hammersmith Nalco has endorsed her candidacy. As you might expect too, the local Labour activists are feeling very embarrassed about this challenge to the complicity of their Labour council in getting ready to implement the Tory law. In private they will tell you that they think such a candidacy is a good idea. A Labour councillor even offered to give a fiver on the quiet to the campaign funds. But the people in west London who seem most worried and embarrassed about the candidacy are local members of the Socialist Workers Party.

Three SWP members turned up last week to the meeting of the anti-poll tax sub-committee set up by the Hammersmith and Fulham Trades Council. The com-



And don't vote for a party that implements the poll tax

mittee, which I originally convened, has organised several meetings about the poll tax which have been addressed by speakers such as Gary Kent for the London Campaign Against the Poll Tax and Pete Turner, chair of the trades council. Neither the Labour council nor the local Labour Party has organised one public meeting against the tax.

Some of the trades council officers argued that while they individually supported the candidacy it was impossible for the trades council to do so formally because of its constitutional links with the Labour Party. The vice-chair of the local Labour Party attended to defend his party and attack the idea of an independent candidate. They were all outdone however by the three SWP members who opposed the candidacy for any reason they could think of.

First they said it was 'a diversion from the focus on the council workforce and the strategy of non-implementation'. As if that focus is something we should just talk to council workers about. As if this campaign is not an opportunity to pursue the discussion with the council workers themselves. After

all, the town hall is in the middle of Broadway ward. The argument collapsed completely when it was announced that the same Nalco council workers who had endorsed Sheona York's candidacy had also arranged to call a workplace lunchtime meeting of council workers from all unions to discuss the poll tax.

Having lost that argument, the SWP came up with another objection: 'You've got to relate at existing levels of consciousness, not where we would like people to be, and the overwhelming majority of those we want to involve are supporters of the Labour Party and are going to see it as divisive, as splitting the anti-Tory vote.' This recipe for never challenging the Labour Party for fear of being unpopular (as a matter of fact opposing the poll tax being collected by the Labour Party is very popular) sounded equally unconvincing.

How do you raise levels of consciousness unless you challenge the way people are thinking, and how do you challenge the way people are thinking unless you force them to choose? Elections provide one of the rare opportunities these days to have a public political discussion. We cannot abandon such an important political forum to the Labour Party, and allow it to monopolise the debate.

The gloomy party

Feebly, the SWP then argued that the committee 'only has limited resources'. Then they said that if the candidate did badly it would have 'a reverse effect' on the wider anti-poll tax campaign. Then they said we could 'put out propaganda in the ward without actually standing a candidate'. Then they said: 'As socialists you must make demands on reformists. It isn't true that every Labour councillor is for the poll tax.' Finally one of them put the cap on it by confessing that 'my trade union branch is affiliated to the Labour Party, and I've got to be honest about the fact that they wouldn't be happy about my continuing to represent them on this sort of campaign'.

It was a craven, timid performance. One of the trades council officers called them 'the gloom and doom party'. They were bigger defenders of the Labour Party than the Labour Party itself, bigger defenders of the trade union bureaucracy's link with the Labour Party than even the trades council's officers. It has of course been the pattern in recent months for Labour left campaigns to be staffed by substantial ranks of SWP members. The Benn/Heffer campaign, the Socialist Conference, the Time To Go show and so on. Even so, this was going a bit far.

As expected, the committee voted narrowly not to endorse the campaign. But because there are several people on it who do want to fight the poll tax, and aren't that bothered about offending the Labour Party in the process, it set about organising to make sure that the issue of the tax is raised in the ward during the election. The trades council is to sponsor a meeting on the poll tax inviting all the candidates, and is to leaflet the ward asking voters to question the candidates about the tax. That was a positive contribution from the evening's proceedings.

John Fitzpatrick

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?

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

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 12 May 1989 • No 15 • 40p

**UNDERGROUND WORKERS,
BUS CREWS, RAIL WORKERS,**

UNITE TO WIN

TUBE DRIVERS, underground workers, bus crews, railway workers—all have been taking action recently. But we could shut down the whole of London's transport system if we were united.

Such a prospect of total paralysis has rattled the employers and the government. They spent last week threatening court injunctions on the one hand, and trying to bribe us into submission with promises of higher wages or better holidays on the other. But we have yet to force them into conceding our demands by bringing them to their knees. We have our union leaders to thank for this. The threat of action spinning out of their control has shaken them too.

They have worked overtime to sabotage the strikes and ensure that any action is ineffective. Jimmy Knapp bowed to the court injunction banning tube workers from taking action and called off the strike. TGWU chiefs announced that the buses would come out on token one-day strikes, and then only a week after the tube strike. And Knapp announced that any action on the railways would have to wait until next month! With union leaders like these who needs employers as enemies!

Rank and file transport workers are fed up with these spoiling tactics by the bureaucrats. Knapp got a rough reception when he told tube workers on Thursday that it was

necessary to 'regroup and postpone the action' because breaking the court injunction would break the union. 'What's the point in having a union if we don't have any jobs?' asked one incensed worker. The underground workers, bus crews and railway workers who voted for action have shown two fingers to Knapp and his spineless attitude.

To turn this anger into effective action there are some basic steps we need to take:

Unity across the workforce

The action taken so far has been the result of different groups of workers deciding they have had enough and making a statement to the bosses in a series of unofficial walkouts. Many have been surprised at the impact they have been able to make with these one-day strikes. The effectiveness of the sporadic action undertaken so far has persuaded many workers that selective one-day strikes are the way forward.

It is good that so many people are prepared to put themselves on the line. But we could make a much bigger impact if workers in every section of the transport industry acted together. So far our protests have been patchy and divided: one group of workers doesn't know what another group is doing. This can only limit our effectiveness and risks the employers picking us off one by one. The sectional tactics of the union leadership have reinforced divisions among us.

What we need is a common strategy that can unite all workers across the transport network. If we all acted together our potential to give the bosses a real hiding would be considerable. We must forge unity among rail, tube and bus workers by setting up a strike committee involving all the unions in all the transport sectors and working out a common strategy to win.

Rank and file control

The union leaders have demonstrated that they are more concerned to safeguard their union machines than fight for our jobs, wages and conditions. If we are serious about fighting we have to take control of the action ourselves.

At last Thursday's mass meeting a tube worker from Bow station recalled his bitter experience of the P&O dispute and explained why we have to take matters into our own hands:

'Five months ago I was a P&O worker on strike. For seven days in the beginning of the strike we organised things ourselves. We went round the ports and got support everywhere. We were doing so well that Sam McCluskey took notice and came down to talk to us. We let him take control of the strike, let him speak for us. Four days later we had lost because he wouldn't break the law. They still have their offices, their cars, their typewriters and we have nothing. I started a new career with London Transport. Now I'm facing the same thing again. We have to break the law to win.'

The seafarers were betrayed by their union leaders. We must learn the lessons of their struggle and not allow the same thing to

happen to us. We cannot afford to let the union bureaucrats stitch up some sell-out deal with the employers. It is up to us to organise mass meetings involving all transport workers where we can decide how to pursue our struggle on our terms.

Our own rules

Last week's court injunction banning the tube strike showed that every strike today is potentially illegal. We cannot win if we play by their rules. The employers, and their friends in the courts, make up the law to suit their needs.

We need to draw up our rules and a framework for action according to what we need. Some workers on the tubes and railways have already shown that it is possible to organise in a new way. Our attitude should be to refuse to be intimidated by the law: our jobs are on the line and we need to take whatever action is necessary to win.

All-out action

Unofficial action by tube and railway workers has proved that we can bring business in the City to a standstill if we take it further. But if we continue with isolated one-day strikes the employers will be able to ride it out and our members will get demoralised.

What we need is all-out action: if we organised together we would be unbeatable. Some workers have raised doubts about how we could survive without strike pay if we had an all-out strike. But we are not talking about a long drawn-out strike: it would all be over within a week if we came out together. An all-out strike is the way to deliver a knock-out punch.

Denis Ryan