

the next step

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Can electoral
pacts beat
Thatcher?

See pages 4 and 5

GIBRALTAR: It was murder! IRELAND: Troops out now!

IT'S a long way from Derry to Gibraltar. But for Irish nationalists they are separated by years not miles, as the scenes of shoot-to-kill operations and legal cover-ups. In 1972 the British government set out to whitewash the cold-blooded murder of 14 Irish nationalists by British paratroopers in Derry. In 1989 it is trying desperately to hide the truth about the SAS killings of three unarmed Irish republicans in Gibraltar.

The row over the *Death on the*

NO MORE BLOODY SUNDAYS! Rally

Friday 27 January, 7.30pm
Caxton House, 129 St John's Way
London N19

(Archway tube)
Speakers: Irish Freedom Movement;
John Mitchell, sacked general
secretary of IDATU, the Irish
shopworkers' union
Followed by disco with bar;
refreshments from 6.30pm
Admission £3 waged/£1.50
unwaged (rally and disco)

March

Saturday 28 January
Assemble 12 noon
Grange Park, Kilburn
London NW6
(Called by Committee for British
Withdrawal from Ireland)

Rock investigation of the Gibraltar executions shows that 17 years on from Bloody Sunday, the British authorities are still trying to cover up their colonial war against the Irish people.

On 30 January 1972, British paratroopers shot dead 14 nationalists in cold blood as they took part in a peaceful demonstration through the streets of Derry. On 6 March 1988, SAS assassins gunned down three unarmed republicans, Mairead Farrell, Sean Savage and Danny McCann, in Gibraltar. In both cases the killings were premeditated; in both cases the British authorities spared no effort to cover up the truth about the killings.

After the Bloody Sunday massacre, the British Army claimed that it had been fired on. Every independent witness rejected the Army's version. The Derry coroner described the killings as 'sheer unadulterated murder'. However, a government inquiry under Lord Widgery absolved the Army of any blame. To drive home the point, the Queen awarded Colonel Derek Wilford, the commander that day, the OBE for his services. And to make easier any future cover-up, the British authorities rewrote the rules of inquests in Northern Ireland, to bar coroners courts from returning verdicts of 'unlawful killing' by Crown forces.

After the Gibraltar killings, the government claimed that the three republicans had been shot by Gibraltar police in a 'gun battle' after planting a '500lb' bomb. In fact there was no bomb in Gibraltar, the three IRA volunteers were unarmed and

were killed by SAS gunmen. The Thames TV documentary *Death on the Rock* produced evidence that the SAS had laid a carefully-prepared ambush, that Farrell and McCann had their hands in the air when they were shot and that Savage was shot in the back as he tried to escape.

Death on the Rock caused outrage. It had broken the unwritten code which now governs the media: 'Thou shalt accept the official version as truth.' Having failed to prevent the programme being screened, the government launched a campaign through the press to discredit the documentary. Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* and its Wapping stablemate the *Sunday Times* led the backlash, accusing Thames of distorting evidence and pressurising witnesses.

To the embarrassment of the government, the inquiry into the making of the programme chaired by Lord Windlesham, a former Tory Northern Ireland minister, shows that the allegations against *Death on the Rock* were spurious. It is now likely that the government will introduce new reporting restrictions on coverage of its undercover war against republicans to prevent any future exposure of its shoot-to-kill policy.

From Bloody Sunday to Gibraltar the British authorities have followed a policy of terror against the Irish people. And for 17 years they have tried to cover up the fact that they operate a shoot-to-kill policy against anyone who opposes their right to rule in Ireland. But no amount of media whitewash can hide the Irish war. So long as Britain occupies Ireland, Irish people will continue to resist.



Phil Murphy

editorial

27 January • No 3 • Editor: Joan Phillips

BLASPHEMY, BANS AND BIGOTRY

THERE are two issues arising from the furore over Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. The first is the need to defend Rushdie against the clamour for censorship of material deemed by some to be blasphemous. The second is the need to defend Rushdie's opponents against the chauvinist outbursts of those who would use the controversy for racist ends.

The Satanic Verses, shortlisted for the Booker Prize and one of five contenders for the Whitbread Prize to be announced this week, has caused a storm of protest in the Muslim world. Salman Rushdie's novel has been banned in India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia and South Africa. Now it is the target of a vigorous censorship campaign among Muslims in Britain, who claim that it denigrates the Prophet Muhammad, his family and Islam. Thousands of Muslims have attended demonstrations in London, Bradford, Lancashire and other parts of the country, at which copies of the book have been burned.

It was after one such rally in Bradford that *The Satanic Verses* became the subject of political controversy, when WH Smith succumbed to pressure from protesters and police and withdrew the book from its shelves. A spokesman for Britain's biggest bookseller claimed that it had taken its decision for commercial reasons, because the novel was selling only 100 copies a week. The fact that it was number six in the best-seller list and rising suggested on the contrary that the move was a capitulation to censorship.

WH Smith has since been persuaded by the high sales generated by the row to put the book back on the shelves. But others have now stepped forward to press for censorship measures against

the book and blasphemy prosecutions against its author.

The controversy has led to some strange alignments among unusual political bedfellows. Some prominent left wingers have lined up behind the campaign to censor Rushdie, while notorious right wingers have pontificated about freedom of speech. Others on the left have denounced the Muslim book-burners as fascists, and fuelled the campaign by the right to give the row a racist slant. Let's take each issue in turn.

The left-wing MP for Bradford West, Max Madden, is an unlikely ally of the right. Yet he has tabled an amendment to a Tory early day motion deploring the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. His amendment, which has been supported by Bernie Grant and Brian Sedgemore, two Labour MPs with radical reputations, goes even further, demanding that the laws of blasphemy be extended to cover religions other than Christianity. Their argument is that Muslims are discriminated against because the present laws do not allow them to prosecute people like Rushdie for offending against their faith. Such a move would do nothing to challenge discrimination against Muslims. But it would reinforce repressive legislation that should have been abolished long ago.

There has been only one successful prosecution under the archaic blasphemy laws in well over half a century. In June 1977 at the Old Bailey *Gay News* was found guilty of contravening the blasphemy laws by publishing James Kirkup's poem *The Love that Dares to Speak its Name*. Mary Whitehouse objected to the poem because it had Jesus fantasising on the

cross about a homosexual affair.

In calling for the blasphemy laws to be extended, Madden and other left wingers are aligning themselves with the likes of Whitehouse, who is constantly bemoaning the fall into virtual desuetude of the laws against blasphemy. In another recent blasphemy row, Whitehouse and various Tory MPs threatened a prosecution against Martin Scorsese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which showed Jesus hallucinating about having sex with Mary Magdalene while on the cross. The way in which these sorts of religious controversies are acquiring a political focus is a telling sign of the reactionary times we live in. But what is most worrying about the debate over *The Satanic Verses* is that the left should be leading the charge towards censorship.

The question at the heart of the debate about *The Satanic Verses* is not a theological one about the humanity of the Prophet Muhammad. The central issue it raises for us is how it impinges on the drift towards censorship in Thatcher's Britain. It should be obvious that any attempt to outlaw views as blasphemous or insulting can only be to the advantage of those who are seeking to shift society in an authoritarian direction. There is no shortage of examples from recent months of how the state is assuming increasing powers to control through censorship what we see, read and think. As their system slips further out of control, the authorities are seizing every opportunity to strengthen their grip over society by promoting stricter measures of social control.

The left has often fallen into the trap of calling on the authorities to outlaw or censor views which it finds offensive. Many left wingers subscribe to a policy of 'no platform' against those who express reactionary ideas on issues such as racism. This has often involved the left in calling on the authorities to ban demonstrations by far-right extremists for example. The first problem with this approach is that it puts the onus of fighting racism on to the very institutions which are responsible for making racism respectable. The second problem is that it allows the authorities to strengthen their powers of proscription and lays open the left itself to bans and victimisation.

Similarly, any campaign to persuade the government to extend the blasphemy laws can only set a useful precedent for the authorities in helping to legitimise wider censorship. The real target of such bans will not be Satanists, but the establishment's political opponents. It is from this perspective that we should approach the row over the Salman Rushdie book. We are not especially concerned about the ins and outs of the dispute over its presentation of the Prophet Muhammad. But we are concerned about the way in which such controversies become a vehicle for advancing state censorship and repression.

The other issue which should concern us about the Rushdie row is the way it has become the focus for a racist tirade against Muslims. The speed with which a religious controversy was transformed

into a chauvinist crusade shows how almost any issue can be perverted for racist ends by the establishment. While we have no truck with book-burners, we are resolutely opposed to the racist slurs which have been thrown at them.

Predictably the *Sun* was the first to cash in on the controversy and give it a chauvinist edge. An editorial in the Murdoch mouthpiece declared in ringing fashion that freedom of speech is a precious British tradition which is in danger of being overturned by foreigners out to impose their own alien creed. Coming from a paper which has supported every act of censorship by the government, from the suppression of *Spycatcher* to the broadcasting ban on Irish republicans, this was flagrant hypocrisy. The *Sun's* outburst against the book-burners was nothing less than a racist attack on all things foreign, masquerading as a defence of freedom of speech.

The *Sun's* sister-paper the *Sunday Times* also gave an editorial lecture about the need to defend civilised British traditions of tolerance against the excesses of heathen foreign savages. After celebrating the triumph of the values of live and let live, the *Sunday Times* leader complained that decent British folk do not take kindly to religious frenzy in the streets. 'Muslim fundamentalism may be all the rage in the burnt-out ruins of Beirut or the twilight days of the Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran. But it is an alien force in Britain and will be seen as such when it erupts in public display.' In other words, most foreigners are fanatics who threaten to undermine British culture and civilisation. To drive home the message the editorial went on to defend the deportation of Viraj Mendis on the grounds that he transgressed the parameters of tolerance by flouting Britain's racist immigration laws.

Instead of standing up to this racist tirade, some left wingers agreed that the activities of the book-burners posed a problem for those who wished to see an end to racial discrimination. The radical *New Statesman and Society* drew a parallel between the burning of books by Muslims in Bradford and the burning of books by the Nazis in Hitler's Germany. It was impossible to avoid the conclusion that these left wingers were agreeing with the *Sun* and the *Sunday Times* that 'cantankerous Islamists' among Britain's Muslim population are a threat to decent British values. If this is how the left succumbs to a crude campaign of racist vilification, there is indeed a problem for those concerned to combat racism.

We should defend Salman Rushdie against all those who call for his book to be interfered with, taken off the shelves or censored, in the knowledge that the state censors, the police chiefs and the judges will ultimately use their powers against the working class. And we should resist all attempts by the media and the establishment to manipulate a controversy about religious censorship to foment chauvinist sentiment, in the knowledge that the spread of racism can only undermine the ability of the working class to resist the mounting assault on democratic rights.

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letters

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STABBED IN THE BACK

LAST week the London executive of the National Union of Students voted to abandon plans to hold an all-London anti-loans demo on Wednesday 1 February. Their excuse was that it would be hijacked by a handful of trouble-makers. An emergency all-London activist meeting voted to go ahead with the demo and organise it independently. This is a useful initiative but the meeting raised problems which need clarifying.

Some activists expressed reservations about their ability to get large numbers of students to the demo at such short notice. The problem is that rather than rank and file students consciously taking the decision to organise something independently of the NUS, we've been forced into a corner by their botch-ups such as a meeting place in the middle of nowhere, no publicity, etc.

The idea of a demo on 1 February was first raised at the NUS conference in December. We needed to start organising then. If activists had controlled events from the start we could have negotiated a decent route and sorted out technical problems long before now. As it is NUS have left us no choice but to go it alone at the last minute.

The problem is that even left-wing groups

have argued for the NUS to take the initiative. But lobbies of London NUS (which the bureaucrats avoided by holding their meeting an hour early) not only show naive illusions in the leadership but also a reluctance to organise the rank and file on our own.

It is not only that NUS leadership is subservient to moderate public opinion. The NUS is funded by the very institutions that are attacking students. It therefore operates entirely within the limits established by the authorities.

The argument that the NUS has pulling power, that official NUS backing means that students suddenly have the confidence to fight, flies in the face of reality. Most students don't even know who Maeve Sherlock is. All an NUS card means is cheap beer in a grotty bar, discounts in local hairdressers and a clique of bureaucrats who defuse any effective action.

Never again should we look to the NUS to lead our fightback. This time we've been forced to go it alone. We should seize this initiative and keep in control of future actions.

Peter Hale
New Cross



GADAFI AND HIROHITO

JONATHAN HEPWORTH says it is wrong for revolutionaries to redress the balance of the biased media treatment of Gadafli and Hirohito by 'going too far in the opposite direction' and supporting them (letters, 20 January).

This is absolutely correct. I cannot recall an article in the next step enthusing about Gadafli's Green Book, or praising the virtues of Hirohito. We merely point out the hypocrisy of the British press, just as we did when the war criminal Kurt Waldheim was

the subject of lofty condemnations from the British establishment, which has the blood of millions of people on its hands.

Just for the record, the article to which you refer clearly describes Hirohito as a war criminal, who was responsible in particular for the slaughter of countless thousands of Asians. But even Hirohito could not hold a candle to men like Winston Churchill when it comes to crimes against the working class.

There is an important difference between our attitude to Hirohito, former leader of an imperialist power, and to Gadafli, who leads a weak state dominated by imperialism. In any conflict between the imperialists and a third world regime such as Gadafli's we give our support unreservedly to the Libyan people.

Susan Reeves
Barnsley

AGAIN ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

ANDY CLARKSON makes some good points about national self-determination, but raises one important question (letters, 13 January).

I acknowledge that individual cases must be approached as such, and that in the case of the national republics in the Soviet Union, dismemberment would strengthen imperialism. But how can we support the right of a people to secede if, when they decide to do it, we immediately withdraw that support?

We might recognise that secession of the Soviet republics is not in the interests of the

working class, and therefore argue against it, if it was being proposed by non-working class leaders. But would we accept the decision if it went against us? Why support self-determination for a non-working class movement in the first place?

I find this contradiction confusing, and similar to the British left's 'unconditional but critical' support for the Irish freedom struggle.

Simon Kray
Glasgow

ET IN SCOTLAND

ON WEDNESDAY 11 January, protesters in Glasgow walked for over seven hours, visiting 14 Jobcentres, UBOS and DHSS offices. The Glasgow Campaign Against Social Security Cuts organised the event to highlight the Tories' Employment Training scheme (ET).

ET aims to fit 'square pegs' (the unemployed) into 'round holes' (slave labour schemes). In the process it will reduce the official unemployment figures, and enable the government to harass claimants. It is voluntary at the moment, but may well become compulsory. Next on the agenda is a 'not genuinely seeking work' clause, the basis for which is already incorporated in the Restart scheme. Hundreds of thousands of claimants will stand to lose benefits as a result.

It was therefore a pity that the Glasgow event wasn't better supported. The march was well received by both claimants and workers, but despite promises of support from the Youth Trade Union Rights



Campaign and West of Scotland NUS, nobody was informed and nobody was sent. In order to build on the support that obviously exists, a meeting will be held to arrange future activities. This will be held in Maryhill Burgh Hall at 7pm on Wednesday 8 February.

Debbie Steele
Glasgow

Thatcher and the greenhouse effect A LOT OF HOT AIR

Nigel Lewis exposes Tory claims to be doing something about the greenhouse effect

Simon Norfolk



The profit system pollutes the air

In a speech to the Royal Society last September, Margaret Thatcher professed her commitment to action against the ozone hole, acid rain and the greenhouse effect. Her conversion to the Green cause has been greeted with scepticism by many environmentalists who regard it as little more than a vote-catching exercise.

There is now a consensus that the greenhouse effect is the most pressing environmental issue, and it has thus come in for special attention from Thatcher. A recent top-level cabinet meeting came up with an anti-greenhouse package that proposed limits on aid to the third world to stop waste and environmental damage and an energy conservation scheme at home linked to an increase in energy prices to limit wasteful consumer habits. What is the nature of the greenhouse effect, and is there any substance to Tory promises of action to tackle it?

The problem of the greenhouse effect is that gases produced by the burning of fossil fuels—principally carbon dioxide (CO₂)—and some man-made chemicals—chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), methane (from the burning of natural gas and from beef and rice production) and other gaseous hydrocarbons (from car exhausts)—are keeping heat in the atmosphere. CO₂ is said to add 50 per cent to the warming process, methane is said to contribute 20 per cent, CFCs 15 per cent, and oxides of nitrogen 10 per cent.

Heat

Under natural conditions, heat from the sun reaches the earth and is absorbed. This energy is re-emitted from the earth. Gases in the atmosphere such as CO₂ and water vapour absorb some of this radiation, but 70 per cent escapes back to space. The effect of the CO₂ and water vapour absorbing the re-emitted radiation is to warm the atmosphere.

The greenhouse effect thus occurs naturally, as the natural levels of CO₂ and water in the atmosphere maintain a temperature conducive to climates where life can flourish.

The problem arises when human activity upsets this balance and increases the concentrations or adds new substances to the greenhouse gases. For instance, the burning of fossil fuels from the industrial revolution to the present has increased the CO₂ content of the atmosphere by 25 per cent. This 25 per cent increase in 100 years is set to double over the next 100 years, as industrial processes burgeon in the third world. It is estimated that the extra heat absorbed by an atmosphere

with double the concentration of CO₂ will lead to an average three to four per cent increase in global temperature 25 years hence.

The effects of this global increase in climate are not at all well understood. Many of the scientific models used to predict the likely outcome of the greenhouse effect fail to take account of the effect of the oceans absorbing about half the CO₂ which is put into the atmosphere or the consequence of the cooling effect of more cloud cover. Three studies of the effects of climate change on the American Midwest all assessed the rise in temperature along similar lines, but came up with an increase, a decrease and no change at all in the amount of rainfall in the region (*New Scientist*, 19 November 1988).

Profit

Attempts by scientists to rationalise the production of greenhouse gases come up against a seemingly insurmountable barrier: capitalism. The complex chemical nature of the greenhouse effect means that the widest knowledge of the emission of greenhouse gases is required, knowledge that companies and states are unwilling to provide for fear of being implicated in a pollution scandal. Information on the likely consequences of the burning of the Amazon forests in Brazil is withheld to prevent restrictive conditions being placed on Brazilian capitalists attempting to rob the soil in the region. Funding for scientists to research the problem is constantly denied them as money flows

into more short-term profitable ventures in the chemical industry or into agribusiness. Britain donates just £1.25m to the United Nations Environment Programme, one of the main international bodies dedicated to this type of research.

Arguments among capitalist powers, which say they are committed to eradicating the problem, expose the real reason for interminable wranglings: profit.

It is widely accepted, for example, that fumes from car exhausts contribute to the greenhouse effect. But while the USA has developed the catalytic converter to eliminate gases from exhausts, Britain has developed the so-called lean burn engine which minimises the emission of the gases. An international agreement on exhaust emissions is stymied at every stage by Britain's insistence on levels being set that would be advantageous to its lean burn technology, while the USA is seeking to squeeze Britain out of the market by setting levels making only its converter technology admissible.

Notorious

By far the biggest preventable culprit in the production of the greenhouse effect is carbon dioxide emission from power stations, the plumes of which contain 17 per cent CO₂. Recent studies have indicated that the decarbonisation of smoke stacks in the USA would use up 46 per cent of the output of power stations, and increase capital expenditure by anything from 70 per cent to 150 per cent. Investing in this technology is anathema to the energy magnates, whose only criterion for success is the upward profit curve. The Central Electricity Generating Board is notorious throughout Europe for its refusal to clean up its CO₂ and acid rain pollution.

Tory talk about combating the greenhouse effect is a lot of hot air.

The British government was involved in a meeting of 33 nations in Geneva last November, which agreed only to collaborate in assessing the greenhouse effect. Since then there have been more talks about talks, but no action. The barrier of profit which prevents the capitalist class from acting on issues of global significance such as the greenhouse effect is a powerful argument for the supersession of the present system and its replacement by one organised on the basis of social need, not private profit.

LIVING MARXISM On sale now!

THE February issue of *Living Marxism* is devoted to the issue of the environment, giving a fresh perspective on the problems of pollution, nuclear power and Green politics.

Can capitalism go Green? Frank Richards looks at how the market economy sells the environment short and identifies some gaps in the Green response.

Petra Kelly, MP for the world's foremost Green movement in West Germany, speaks to Sabena Norton about the crisis that threatens to ruin her party.

Red, white and Green. Nigel Lewis examines how Green ideas have become respectable at a time when the environment gets ever-worse.

No nukes here? John Gibson investigates whether nuclear power is a potential force for progress, a threat to humanity, or both.

Plus an interview with Bernadette McAlliskey; an eye-witness account of the Spanish general strike; British Coal provocation at Betteshanger pit; sackings in the City; football fanzines; the gay scene; tabloid TV and much more.

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what we fight for

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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) 729 0414.

Pact against the Tories?

THE GREAT

Mike Freeman looks at the clamour for electoral pacts and asse

Communist Party general secretary Gordon McLennan has added his voice to the chorus of calls for an electoral pact among the anti-Tory political parties:

'We ask all Communists, Communist Party branches and organisations to discuss the issues of proportional representation and possible electoral agreement, including in forthcoming local elections, with members of other political parties and democratic organisations, especially with colleagues in the Labour Party.... Such an electoral agreement will naturally encompass the withdrawal of Communist candidates in the next general election.' (Seven Days, 21 January)

In these terms the British Communist Party announced its intention to withdraw its own candidates in support of a pact between Labour and the centre parties as the only way to overcome Thatcher's apparent invincibility at the polls.

Instability

This declaration follows the initiative by John Evans, MP for St Helens and a prominent moderate on Labour's national executive, who first proposed a pact between Labour and the Democrats last month. While this strategy has long been promoted by David Owen's SDP rump, it has been formally ruled out by both Labour leader Neil Kinnock and Paddy Ashdown for the Social and Liberal Democrats. However, given the poor standing of the major opposition parties in the opinion polls, and the likelihood that forthcoming by-elections as well as local and European elections will bring little cheer, we can expect growing support for electoral pacts and coalition governments from both the Labour and Democrat ranks.

Given the decline in the Communist vote over many years, its decision is unlikely to have much consequence in any future election.

It is, however, significant as an indication of a general trend on the left. Before looking in more detail at the question of anti-Tory pacts, it is worth commenting on three features of left-wing politics in Britain today which are well-illustrated by the Communist Party announcement.

The first is the *instability* of the left. It is scarcely a year since Tony Benn launched his campaign to 'refund' the Labour Party, declaring that it was essential to restore the party's roots in the unions and in popular struggles. This campaign was rapidly superseded by another, featuring a series of private member's bills intended to promote constitutional reforms—a bill of rights, freedom of information, legal controls over the executive, reform of the house of lords, etc.

This too was soon overtaken, this time by Benn's joint campaign with Eric Heffer to win the Labour leadership. Meanwhile the Socialist Society organised a couple of conferences in Chesterfield aiming to galvanise the left, and made abortive approaches to the Greens, before apparently returning to its former quiescence.

Last November the *New Statesman* and *Society* launched Charter 88, adding proportional representation to Benn's list of constitutional reforms. While this ensured that Benn and other Labour left wingers would not endorse the Charter, it did succeed in winning sponsorship from prominent supporters of the centre parties—as well as several members of the editorial board of the *New Left Review*.

Drift

Looking back over the 18 months since Thatcher's third general election victory, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the left has lurched from one stunt to another without ever stopping to ask why each of its initiatives attracts less support and creates wider cynicism than the last. Now electoral pacts are the left's flavour of the month—what next?

The second striking feature of recent months is the *drift to the right*. There has been a notable proliferation of cross-party organisations and conferences and a new volatility in political affiliations, with the initiative coming from the right.

The success of Charter 88 in pulling prominent figures from the Socialist Society, such as Hilary Wainwright and Anthony Arblaster, along with its bishops, lords and ladies, and Democrat intellectuals like David Marquand, is symptomatic of the trend. The newly-

launched journal *Samizdat* boasts prominent members of the Labour and Communist parties as well as Democrats on its steering group. Its latest issue rejects pacts but urges the left to broaden its anti-Thatcherite project to 'include some on the Tory backbenches, where several of the prime minister's most effective critics are to be found'.

Ripe

The price of broadening opposition to the government to include Tory wets is that the left's programme must be narrowed by excluding policies which might alienate such potential supporters of the proposed 'popular front of the mind' as Edward Heath, Michael Heseltine, Francis Pym, etc. Hence it has become increasingly popular on the left to downplay issues that might create tensions with ardently sought friends, issues like 'socialism', 'trade union rights', 'anti-militarism' and 'a united Ireland'.

Instead the journals of the left are now filled with articles about the virtues of 'democracy', 'individualism' and 'the market'.

The third feature of the British left today that is thrown into sharp relief by the pact debate is the *evasion* of the urgent task of mobilising working class resistance to the mounting authoritarianism of the Thatcher regime.

In a significant editorial at the end of 1988 the *Guardian* declared 'Come in Charter 88. Your time is ripe' (29 December). The editorial proceeded to detail the gross restriction of civil liberty resulting from the British government's use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and its defiance of the European Court of Human Rights on this issue. Indeed this decision followed a year in which Ireland was repeatedly at the sharp end of the repressive drift of the British state—a year marked by the refusal to prosecute the RUC shoot-to-kill squads exposed by John Stalker, the SAS bloodbath in Gibraltar and the subsequent cover-up, the television ban on Sinn Féin, the removal of the right to silence.

Less

The significance of the *Guardian* editorial is that, though the time was indeed right, neither Charter 88 nor the British left in general has 'come in' and seriously challenged British terror in Ireland and its consequences in Britain. The rights of the Irish people is not an issue that mixes well with talk of electoral pacts, constitutional reform and proportional representation.

While the left's evasion of Ireland is nothing new, its drift to the right can be measured by the fact that even on a matter like anti-union legislation, which it once regarded as important, it now says little and does less. The same is true on an issue like racism: the recently-deported Viraj Mendis got more support from the Church of England than he did from the British left.

At a time when the need for extra-parliamentary mobilisation is greater than at any time for decades, the left has become more preoccupied with parliament than ever.

LIVING MARXISM

An assessment of the role of electoral pacts and constitutional reform in the strategy of the left will be explored further in a special feature on the state of British politics in the March issue of our monthly review *Living Marxism*, which is

available in March in your newsagent, or from Junius Publications. *Living Marxism* costs £1.50, or £15 for a 12-month subscription. Write to BCM JPLtd, London WC1N 3XX, or phone (01) 729 3771 for more details.

EVASION

sses the crisis of the left

This is all the more ironical because, while the possibilities of achieving anything in parliament today are lower than at any time in the post-war period, the scope for rallying resistance among the victims of Thatcherite austerity and repression are considerable. Let's turn to look at some of the issues raised by the proposed anti-Tory electoral pact.

Pact proposals begin from the recognition that there were many constituencies where the combined votes of the opposition parties easily exceeded the winning Tory vote at the last general election. John Evans proposes that Labour and the SLD identify 60 seats in which their combined votes exceeded 50 per cent of the electorate. In 30 in which Labour came second the SLD would agree not to contest the next election, and vice versa in the remaining seats (*Guardian*, 5 December 1988).

Weakness

Evans reckons that if the parties had made such a deal before the last election, Labour would now have 270 seats and the SLD 50. The Tories would still be the largest party, but Evans argues that they would have had difficulty pushing through unpopular legislation such as the poll tax, privatisation and the housing bill, and that Thatcher might even have fallen.

Scottish Labour MP John Reid proposes an electoral deal in 100 seats, which he calculates could produce a majority for an anti-Tory coalition.

The major practical weakness of the pact proposals is the assumption that Labour and centre party voters will obediently switch their votes according to the terms of the deal negotiated among the party leaders. All the evidence suggests that while Labour voters' second preference is overwhelmingly for the centre parties, supporters of the Democrats and Social Democrats split fairly evenly between the Tories and Labour when asked about their second preference.

Fudge

The same pattern is evident throughout Europe: working class voters vote for the centre in preference to the right when the left drops out, middle class voters are as likely to opt for the right as they are for the left when their centre party is out of the running. The advantage to the centre parties is clear.

Furthermore, deals at national level may well meet fierce resistance at local level where opposition parties with deep roots in the community would be reluctant to give up a long record of campaigning at council and constituency level to give a clear run to long-established political adversaries. This is particularly the case for Labour constituency parties in the South, where most of the SLD target seats would be. Such parties tend to be left-wing and intensely hostile to centre party politicians who are often well-known figures in local government.

The Labour leadership has enough trouble ensuring that local parties select individuals whom it regards as suitable parliamentary candidates. While Gordon McLennan may not experience much difficulty in persuading Communist Party candidates to stand down, Neil Kinnock can expect major ructions if he tries to force local parties to accept SLD candidates.

The horse-trading and manoeuvring around any pact arrangements run the risk of increasing the already high level of public cynicism about party politics and compounding the disarray of the opposition parties, rather than aggregating their voters. The Tories would have little difficulty in seizing the high moral ground and projecting a clear and distinct party profile against a cobbled-together opposition pact in any future election.

More seriously, the pursuit of electoral pacts can only shift the focus of opposition campaigning towards an appeal to the middle classes and the centre and away from any concern with the working class and the left.

In the debate on the Communist Party's executive committee Monty Johnstone, opposing the pact proposal, accurately summed up the sort of 'fudge programme' which would emerge from any pact agreement:

'It would mean the dropping of Labour's commitment to a non-nuclear defence policy, social ownership and the repeal of Thatcher's anti-union laws.' (*Seven Days*, 21 January)

While David Owen and other centre party figures have always been explicit about these terms, Labour supporters of a pact demand no policy commitments from the centre parties. Indeed some welcome any such realignment as a convenient way of destroying the residual influence of the left and Labour's traditional identification with the working class.

Choice

The move towards electoral pacts gives all the options to the middle classes and no choice at all to the working class. Once Labour is more closely allied to the SLD, middle class voters can choose between the Tories' aggressively pro-capitalist and anti-working class platform and the Labour/Democrat pact's attempt to present a similar set of policies in a more liberal package.

Such a choice, indeed only a more extreme form of the alternatives on offer in June 1987, offers nothing at all to the working class. In general, working class people who identify with their own class have no alternative but to vote Labour, to vote for a party that repudiates any concern for the interests of the working class.

An electoral pact encourages the politics of the lowest common denominator, the selection of policies which are most acceptable to middle-of-the-road public opinion.

It rules out any attempt to put forward the sort of creative alternative policies which are essential to protect and advance the interests of the working class into the 1990s.

Artificial

In a full-page article in the *Guardian* before Christmas, the novelist and Charter 88 sponsor Margaret Drabble summed up the defensive and defeatist outlook that now prevails on the British left. 'The history of socialist thought in this country', she argued, 'has had a deeply sober, moral and religious strain to it, and at the least one would expect a show of respect for the sincerity of disinterested citizens (including several Anglican bishops) who have thought long and seriously about such matters as social community, equality, humility, poverty and the light of God which burns in every man' (21 December). This sort of pious pleading seems unlikely to impress or deter a prime minister who has launched a crusade to 'eliminate socialism' in Britain.

Why are so many high-powered individuals and once-powerful organisations in such a state of confusion and crisis? Why all this concern to discover some new idea that can revitalise the opposition or to patch together some kind of artificial majority out of the disparate anti-Tory forces? The answer is that the existing opposition forces have failed to grasp the nature of the problem they are up against and hence their solutions lack coherence or conviction.

Important shifts in political life do not emerge from discussion circles and think-tanks or from reshuffling relations among different groupings in smoke-filled rooms, but reflect the changing balance of class forces in society. When the capitalist class is in the ascendant, the rest of society moves

towards the right; when the working class is making the running, the balance shifts towards the left.

Lacking a clearly-defined role in capitalist production, the middle classes shift according to the relative strengths of the major antagonistic classes, thus defining the position of the political centre.

All progress in matters affecting the living standards or civil liberties of the majority of society is the result of the pressure the working class can exert on the system. Hence the key questions are not what to include in some grandiose charter or with whom to form an alliance. The important matter is how to mobilise the maximum working class resistance against the capitalist state under the Thatcher regime.

The problem is not at the level of ideas or of electoral tactics. The problem is that the social basis for an anti-Thatcher alliance of the sort currently under discussion does not exist.

Spineless

Here the opposition could learn something from the prime minister. Thatcher's success has been achieved through the political mobilisation of key sections of the middle classes, supported by a smaller layer of upwardly mobile working class voters, around a well-articulated programme of chauvinism, reaction and old-fashioned petit-bourgeois prejudice. The only way that Thatcher can be effectively opposed is through the mobilisation of an alternative base among that section of society which is most alienated from the Conservative government - the working class.

The British middle classes are so fragmented in their outlook and so spineless in their political convictions that they could not even sustain the alliance between the Liberals and the SDP, never mind that between Labour and the SLD.

The working class, on the other hand, has an objective interest in uniting against the Tory government. The opposition in Britain is in a mess because it has constantly evaded, postponed and delayed the task of rallying the only force that can really end the tyranny of Thatcher's Britain. Mobilising the working class against the Tories requires not a pact among the parties of the past, but the struggle to build a party that can begin to create the society of the future through resistance to the decadent society of the present.

Pact politics leave workers on the sidelines and hand over the fight against Thatcher to the spineless middle classes





★ **Monday 16 January:** A bomb at Dungannon courthouse in County Tyrone causes extensive damage. The IRA later warns builders and contractors not to attempt to repair the building.

The West Fermanagh brigade of the IRA issues a statement explaining why it killed a former RUC reservist in County Donegal on Sunday night. The statement says that Harry Keys had been using his cross-Border visits to his girlfriend to spy on local republicans.

In talks with Libyan officials, Tory minister William Waldegrave warns the Libyans that they would have to end their support for the IRA before relations with Britain could improve.

Home secretary Douglas Hurd returns the cases of the Guildford Four to the court of appeal 14 years after they were given life sentences for a series of IRA bombings. Paul Hill, Gerard Conlon, Carole Richardson and Patrick Armstrong were framed on the basis of confessions which even many establishment figures now admit were extracted under duress.

★ **Tuesday 17 January:** A group of broadcasting journalists is given leave by the high court to challenge the government's ban on interviews with members of Sinn Féin.

★ **Wednesday 18 January:** Ian Catney, a 27-year old Catholic, is shot dead by two Loyalist gunmen at Smithfield shopping complex in West Belfast. The sectarian Ulster Volunteer Force claims responsibility, saying that Catney was a member of the Irish National Liberation Army. Both his family and the Inla deny the claim.

The Law Society of Northern Ireland calls for an explanation from junior home office minister Douglas Hogg over remarks he made about solicitors in the Six Counties. 'Certain solicitors in Northern Ireland', said Hogg, 'were unduly sympathetic to one or other terrorist organisation', indicating that he meant the IRA. The law society protested that the comments would put solicitors' lives at risk.

★ **Sunday 22 January:** The *Sunday Times* continues to earn its reputation as the state's most abject mouthpiece. With his unique access to 'police and intelligence sources', defence correspondent James Adams reports that an IRA active service unit is in hiding in London, preparing to launch a mortar attack on Buckingham Palace or the house of commons. Adams' friends at Scotland Yard's SO13 counter-insurgency squad told him of their discovery after raiding a house in Clapham before Christmas. As the man who was given the onerous task by his sources of changing the story of the Gibraltar assassinations from week to week, Adams' servile capacities seem boundless.

Mark Reilly

Mass protests in Czechoslovakia

THE CHILDREN OF BOHEMIA RISE UP

Violent demonstrations in Prague to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the death of Jan Palach, a student who set himself on fire in protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, marked the awakening of a new generation of opposition to the conservative Czechoslovak regime.

All protests are banned in the centre of Prague. So, when demonstrators tried to lay flowers at the site of Palach's self-immolation in Wenceslas Square, they were beaten, hosed down and tear-gassed by baton-wielding riot police. Youthful protesters yelled their defiance, and, undeterred, the demonstrators returned on subsequent days, only to be met with more bloody reprisals, and large numbers of arrests.

Spontaneous

The Czechoslovak regime has allowed no public opposition for 20 years. Although there was a change of leadership in late 1987, the new party leader Milos Jakes is a Stalinist of the old school, personally responsible for purging half a million errant party members after the crushing of the Dubcek reform experiment in the Prague Spring of 1968.

Soviet-style *glasnost* has made little progress under the Jakes regime.

Attempts to commemorate the 1968 Soviet invasion were violently suppressed last August. Jakes blamed the old Charter 77 group of dissident intellectuals for stirring up trouble, but it was obvious at the time that a new layer of oppositionists had emerged.

Charter 77 was the only opposition grouping in the country for many years after 1968. The group denied having any political objectives, calling itself instead the 'conscience of society'. Its stated aim was to get the government to observe the law and comply with international human rights agreements. Not surprisingly, it has failed to impress many younger activists.

Members of Charter 77, along



Prague 1968: the spirit of resistance is alive again

with various newer opposition groups, played a significant role in the recent protests. Indeed many were beaten and arrested by police. But there is clearly a new spirit abroad among the thousands of young people who took on the riot police.

A spontaneous movement of resistance is growing outside the established opposition groups.

Most of those who confronted the police were born after the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968. Increasingly resentful of declining living standards and persistent repression, young people have overcome the fear and resig-

nation which have immobilised the older generation for so long.

They are behind a series of spontaneous demonstrations over the past five years. In the first of several such events, they gathered in Prague in 1983 to remember John Lennon, and marched through the city chanting freedom slogans. Several rock concerts have since turned into anti-government demonstrations. The Jazz Section of the official Union of Musicians ran into trouble with the regime in 1985 for publishing allegedly unorthodox material, and leading members were jailed in 1987. Now it is a movement several thousand

strong, fighting for freedom of expression.

Another new group, the Children of Bohemia, was formed in May 1988. Initially regarded as inconsequential, the group was among the chief organisers of last August's anniversary demonstration. Organisers describing the invasion as 'a crime committed by the USSR on the Czech and Slovak people', and 10 000 people marched through Prague taunting the police as 'gestapo' and 'fascists'. Thousands more young people are drawn towards a growing ecology movement, particularly over the issue of the white elephant Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam project on the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border.

Novel

The resistance movement will of necessity develop along novel lines, impatience with the legalistic oppositionists of Charter 77 having led many young people to experiment with new forms of protest. It may even develop along the reactionary, religious or nationalist paths of so many East European dissident movements, communist politics having been discredited by the experience of life under the official communist regimes. But whatever shape the movement takes, it seems the new opposition is here to stay.

Faced with the emergence of a significant opposition movement, the government has tried to discredit it by claiming protesters are getting support from reactionary elements in the West.

The Stalinists are hoping to harness nationalist feelings and head off further unrest. The anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 has been declared a national holiday and its founding fathers have been rehabilitated as national heroes. Coming from a regime which is so widely despised, nationalist rhetoric of this sort will cut little ice. The battles of Wenceslas Square were just the start of a much bigger headache for the bureaucracy.

Russell Osborne

Brazil's leaders promise...

SUMMER OF BLOOD AND TEARS

Brazil's president José Sarney has announced an austerity programme to tackle the country's economic crisis. The prolonged public sector strike wave and the nationwide collapse of the government's credibility have piled pressure on the regime to take decisive action. Following hard on the heels of the government's humiliating defeat in the November local elections, the Summer Plan, as the economic programme has been named, is intended to reassert Sarney's faltering control over the country.

Crippling

The official goal of the programme is to reduce Brazil's crippling hyper-inflation, fast approaching 2000 per cent a year. But the target of the austerity measures is the working class, as Sarney made clear when he warned that 'if we want to avoid blood and tears, we must have sweat and sacrifice'. As the urgency of the current crisis forces up the stakes

for Brazil's rulers, they have abandoned the traditional slogan of growth at all costs in favour of a Thatcherite-style monetary squeeze.

Hampered by a \$120 billion foreign debt and \$50 billion internal debt, the Brazilian economy has never recovered from the body-blow of the world recession. Average growth rates in the eighties have been barely a third of those achieved in the seventies, and high rates of inflation have rendered Brazil's currency, the cruzado, almost valueless.

Perilous

The weakening of the domestic economy has thrown the debt question into sharp relief. The high interest payments on the debt are a burden the capitalist class can ill afford. In 1987 a drop in exports forced Brazil to suspend payments for nearly a year. But any long-term default would bring punitive sanctions from the West, and weaken the regime's ability to face down the working class.

Sarney's only option is to pass on the cost of the debt to the working class, yet this is a high-risk strategy. Attacks on working class living standards sparked off unprecedented class conflict last year. Strikes engulfed major state industries and services, forcing congress to legalise previously outlawed public sector strikes which it had no hope of stopping. The perilous position of the regime was emphasised when millions of workers backed the radical Workers Party against the government in the local elections. The ruling PMDB party was all but swept away in the industrialised southern half of the country.

Lifeline

The rapidly changing balance of class forces has led sections of the Brazilian establishment to question their support for the Sarney regime. Some industrialists, anxious to avoid both the debt burden and class conflict, have come out in favour of the radical

nationalism of the Workers Party. This is causing fears in the government and military that the presidential elections 10 months hence will bring a radical coalition to power promising to cut Brazil's ties with the imperialist camp. If the government fails to regain control of the economy it is unlikely that the elections will ever be held.

For the embattled Sarney regime and the military power-brokers, defaulting on the debt would be risking too much. To protect their lifeline to the West their only option is to make the working class pay for the debt crisis through austerity and repression. Increasingly the military is intervening directly in strikes and the running of the government. Brazilian workers meanwhile have proved that they are not prepared to sacrifice their livelihoods. Sarney may threaten blood, but it is by no means clear whose blood will be spilled.

Ian Haden

In a front-page feature a fortnight ago, the *Sunday Times* warned of 'an explosion in the use of crack' in Britain's inner cities. Crack is a crystal form of the euphoria-inducing drug cocaine, which is virtually impossible to buy in Britain. For years cocaine-users have made their own crystals by heating cocaine in a solvent. Known as freebasing, this process gives crystals that can be smoked for a quicker hit. According to the *Sunday Times* report, people come from all over the country to buy crack in Milton Court estate.

Steve Tippell at the Community Drug Project in Southwark discounts reports of a crack explosion: 'We don't like to play up crack. There are considerable differences between what's sold as crack in New York and what's called wash over here. Crack lasts about 10 minutes while the hit from wash lasts about four. The reason it's made into wash is because it's easier to handle and cut up as crystals than as powder.'

The Deptford estate was the scene of a police raid on a so-called

New drugs panic POLICE CRACK DOWN

James Heartfield visited Milton Court estate in Deptford, christened Crack City by the Sunday Times, and discovered a drugs panic in the making

crack factory last September. Judging by the police use of oxy-acetylene torches and a hydraulic ram to force their way in, anybody would have thought that the council flat was a fortified production plant. 'Get it into perspective', says Tippell, 'a crack factory isn't an industrial process. Anyone can make cocaine into crystals with a few basic household ingredients'.

The estate is an unlikely vice centre. Built in the 1950s it is well-

spaced with grass areas. There is a score of five-storey blocks interspersed with terraced houses and a handful of ugly tower blocks. There are signs of deprivation: some flats are boarded and both the library and the housing office are closed for repairs. There are worse estates in London. Local couple Mary and Harry dismissed the stories of Crack City with a laugh:

'Crack City! Where is it? It's just sensationalism.'

Some older people do worry about addicts on the estate. But drugs are emblematic of more general concerns about decay. Single mother Dawn Quirke has been trying to get a transfer from her twenty-second floor flat for over a year. Only when she made an issue of drug users in the flat above did she get the support of her local MP Joan Ruddock.

The drugs panic is no solution to the social problems faced by people on the estate. Bargaining

for more resources is not on, given the state of council finances. It does, however, give the police an excuse for a higher profile in the area. 'We haven't had a rise in drug-related cases', said Lewisham Action on Policing. 'We've had a rise in complaints against the police. The reason they're there is that more drugs justifies more policing.'

The police are eager to make a link between crack and blacks, and add another racist twist to the law and order panic.

Scotland Yard has set up a 17-man intelligence unit to study links between the growing cocaine market and the Yardies, members of a largely mythical Jamaican gang. Steve Tippell is not surprised: 'It's normal to blame foreigners. With heroin it was the Iranians. With cocaine it was the South Americans. With wash it's the Yardies.' From start to finish the authorities have concocted a drugs panic for their sycophants in the media, and set up the black community for raids and street searches.

Q When do the police pass up the chance of a crime panic? A When the victims of violence are gay men

Officially attacks on homosexual men do not exist, because Scotland Yard says that it would be impractical to collect statistics. Yet the Gay London Policing Group's (Galop) annual report shows that 28 per cent of its time is taken up with assisting the victims of anti-gay violence.

The refusal of the police to recognise attacks often amounts to collusion. A 20-strong gang of youths wielding chains, coshes and a baseball bat attacked five gay men outside a gay bar. One of the gay men ran to the local police station to report the attack. The police drove him back to the scene, dropped him on the pavement and drove off. The police station has no record of this incident. The local hospital, however, had to treat a broken knee, a broken nose and multiple cuts and bruises.

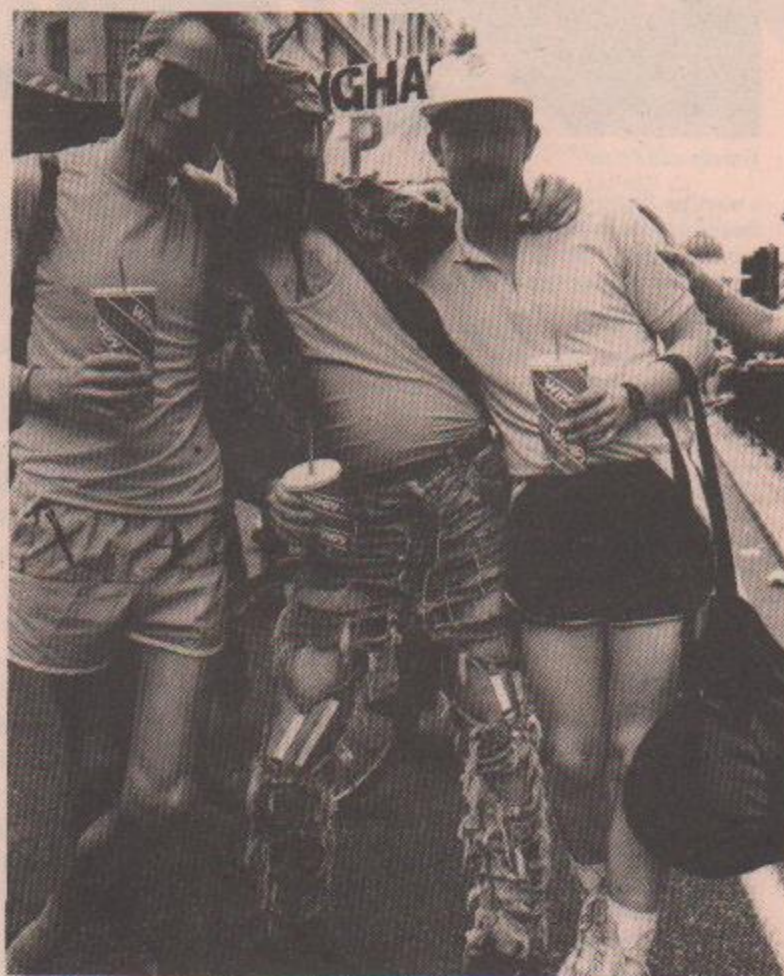
Usually police chiefs and government ministers are only too pleased to assuage us with tales of mayhem perpetrated by lawless thugs. So why ignore attacks on homosexual men? Galop's report provides part of the answer: 42 per cent of the cases it dealt with last year concerned people being prosecuted by the police. Most of these people (27 per cent) were in trouble for so-called sex offences; in other words behaviour which would be legal if

they were straight. The other 15 per cent were people charged with public order offences on demonstrations protesting against the government's anti-homosexual Section 28.

The failure of the police to record or even recognise the rising level of violence against gay men stems from their role in enforcing unequal laws. In their eagerness to hound gay men for transgressing society's discriminatory legal code, they are upholding the atmosphere of hatred being promoted by the government. Just how successful the campaign of hatred against homosexual people has been is made clear in the latest *Social Trends* report (Central Statistical Office, 1989).

In 1983 62 per cent of the population thought that homosexuality was always or mostly wrong. Today that figure has risen to 74 per cent. A sustained campaign by the media to vilify homosexuals, and repressive measures taken by the government, courts, police, licensing authorities and the church have fomented bigotry and brutality against homosexuals. It is the policy of the British state to deny basic rights to lesbians and gay men. It follows that the police cannot keep statistics on anti-gay attacks or do anything to stop them.

Don Milligan



Gays face increased violence and police collusion

responsible for overseeing the water sale, is notorious as the Tories' most pathological private marketeer. Yet this hasn't stopped him promising protection from overseas competition for British water. The government will maintain a 'golden share' in the industry, making it immune from takeover for at least five years.

Apologetic

The committee stage of the Electricity Bill has been marked by infighting among different interests. The Central Electricity Generating Board, independent power generators and the area boards responsible for distributing electricity all want the government to discriminate in their favour. The Tories plan to split the CEB into two companies—National Power and Power Gen—responsible for 70 and 30 per cent of existing nationalised power output respectively. The idea

of one company running two thirds of an industry does not usually qualify as a competitive market even in the most apologetic of Tory economic textbooks.

The government has promised an Esther Rantzen-type consumer watchdog to stop the electricity companies using their market monopoly to bump up prices. Yet the government itself has raised electricity prices by nine and six per cent in the past two years. Consumers will bear the brunt of the compulsion to make profits in the form of bigger bills and worse services.

The water and electricity privatisations are a far cry from the Tory image of go-getting entrepreneurs chancing their hand in the market. In both cases the existing state administrators will retain monopoly powers and we will pay for the privilege.

Tony Kennedy

Piper Alpha Profit before safety

Gavin Cleland lost his son on the Piper Alpha disaster which claimed 167 lives last July. Last week, as the public inquiry into the disaster opened in Aberdeen, he led a protest by relatives of the victims who are incensed that the rig owners, Occidental, have refused to bring up the 31 bodies still on the sea bed. The company intends to blow up what remains of the rig—including the bodies and what could be vital evidence about the cause of the disaster.

Lord Cullen, presiding over the inquiry, dismissed fears of a cover-up. But in an industry that constantly disregards safety in the drive for profits, few people take him seriously. On the day the inquiry opened, the case of a welder who was sacked after questioning safety standards on a rig was raised in parliament. The worker discovered that a crucial pipe was pressurised after repairs without being X-rayed, that second-hand equipment was installed when making repairs, and that welding work was skimmed to get the job done faster. When he complained he was sacked.

While the oil barons cover up the scandal of safety standards on the rigs, rig workers continue to fear for their lives. A disaster of Piper Alpha proportions was only just



avoided over Christmas when a 210 000-ton floating oil storage platform, the *Fulmar*, broke free of its anchorage and narrowly missed colliding with the neighbouring Clyde platform as it drifted across the North Sea. No alarms were sounded. A worker simply noticed that 'the platform was drifting'. Six months after Piper Alpha, rig workers are still being forced to risk their lives.

Derek O'Dwyer

The myth of the free market

THE TORIES are hoping that the sale of the water and electricity industries will restore some of the gloss to the tarnished image of popular capitalism. But all the evidence points to a government contriving to salvage a spent policy by careful packaging of shabby deals with big business. None of the various interests lobbying for government favours have much sympathy for high-minded principles about free enterprise.

The 10 regional water authorities are demanding measures to protect the industry after flotation on the market. They want immunity from prosecution in cases where their actions cause pollution, under the pretext of stopping crank anti-fluoride campaigners bringing

expensive legal proceedings against the industry. In reality they want the government to be liable for any costs arising from their own negligence.

With attention focused on the case of the South West Water Authority poisoning the water of some 20 000 consumers with aluminium sulphate, the industry's demands have caused the government some embarrassment. To improve their lobbying power the water authorities have recruited 10 sympathetic Tory MPs, 'the Friends of Water'. In keeping with the masonic-like nature of much parliamentary procedure, three Friends of Water happen to be on the standing committee considering the Water Bill.

Nicholas Ridley, the environment minister

the next step

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Taking liberties
with *The Satanic
Verses*
see page 2

The case of Gurdip Singh

Framed by police racists

Gurdip Singh, a 30-year old physics teacher from Wolverhampton, made the mistake of driving through a no-entry sign last October. He was stopped by the police and breathalysed. When the test proved negative, he was savagely beaten by the police. 'PC Branwell'—the officer who breathalysed Singh—'kept squeezing and twisting my neck', recalls Singh. 'I was terrified he was going to break my neck and kill me.' Singh still has to wear a neck collar as a result of the assault.

Last week, at Wolverhampton magistrates court, Singh was found guilty of resisting arrest, failing to give a breathalyser and travelling the wrong way down a one-way street. The police claimed that Singh received his injuries while struggling with police officers. Branwell also told the court that the lumps on Singh's body were 'like what you might expect from mumps'. A police surgeon testified that Branwell had sustained injuries similar to Singh's—though he could not provide any evidence of these injuries. Most people in the court didn't see

Rupert Gabriel



Gurdip and Jaspal

a mark on Branwell. Despite glaring inconsistencies in police evidence Singh was found guilty on all charges. His brother, and a passenger in the car, were convicted of obstruction.

'We hoped we might get some justice', says Singh's wife Jaspal, 'but we weren't too surprised at the verdict. There were so many mistakes in police statements, but nobody seemed to care. The magistrates always support the police'. Jaspal added, 'Before all this happened we believed in the British police. Now all our friends call them "bastards"'.
Krysia Rozanska

Police brutality sparks US riots

Miami burns

Clement Lloyd was riding his motorcycle through Miami last Monday to a party to celebrate the Super Bowl football final in the city. He never made it. As Lloyd sped past police officer William Lozano, the cop drew his gun and shot him through the head. Lloyd died instantly; his pillion passenger was critically injured.

Local youth who witnessed the shooting took to the streets in fury, hurling rocks and bottles at the police. Within hours the entire Miami police force, dressed in paramilitary riot gear, converged on the black ghettos of Overtown and Liberty City. Local blacks replied with bullets and petrol bombs.

Twenty years after riots in 125 cities across America rocked the US establishment, black people are still at the sharp end of police brutality. This time, however, the response of the authorities is likely to be different.

In the sixties, the government tried to draw the sting from black anger by drawing a section of the black community into the system. The 1968 government-sponsored Kerner Commission report on the riots called for the recruitment of black policemen and city hall officials, the establishment of job creation schemes to keep black youth off the streets and aid for black business.

Such an option is no longer viable. Pouring money into the ghettos was possible in the booming sixties. Today, with the USA facing record trade and

budget deficits, there are no resources available for such a strategy. Open repression is the order of the day.

The George Bush election campaign last year showed the kind of treatment black people can expect from the new Republican administration. Night after night the Republican TV ads singled out for special attention the case of Willie Horton, a black prisoner from Massachusetts who murdered a white woman while on parole. The focus on Horton was symptomatic of the way the establishment is scapegoating the black community for America's ills.

Black people in Miami are no strangers to the coercive face of the American state. Since the riots of 1968 there have been at least 18 major confrontations between local blacks and police. In May 1980 at least 18 people died in clashes between blacks and the police. Like last week, the street-battles were sparked off by the police murder of a black man, insurance agent Al McDuffie. A dozen police cars chased McDuffie's motorbike through the streets of Miami; when they finally cornered him, they split his skull and then tried to cover up the murder by making it look like a road accident. At a subsequent trial, an all-white jury cleared the policemen of all charges.

In his inauguration speech last week, George Bush called for a 'kinder, gentler' nation. But as far as black people are concerned there is little to look forward to in this vision of a new America.
Nancy Morton

Who's next after Viraj Mendis?

'GO OUT AND WHACK THEM'

At 7.30 last Thursday morning scores of police and immigration officials broke down the door of the Church of the Ascension in Hulme, Manchester, and smashed their way into the sacristy where Sri Lankan activist Viraj Mendis was sleeping. For 12 years Mendis has been fighting for the right to stay in this country. For the last two years he has claimed sanctuary in the church to escape the clutches of immigration officials. Earlier this month Mendis lost his final appeal against deportation.

As a supporter of the Tamil cause, Mendis faces possible death in Sri Lanka. Two Tamil activists who were forcibly deported by the home office last year are now languishing in a Colombo jail. Hundreds of political activists have been murdered over the past few months. But as far as the home office was concerned, Mendis was an 'illegal immigrant'. Despite the fact that both West Germany and Gibraltar indicated their willingness to accept Mendis, the home office refused to delay the deportation. Handcuffed to an immigration official and surrounded by police officers, Mendis was

bundled on to a plane for Sri Lanka at midday on Friday, as his supporters protested at the airport.

After this paramilitary-style police operation, home secretary Douglas Hurd went on the offensive and launched a new crackdown on black immigrants. He made it clear that others who contested the racist immigration laws and defied home office deportation orders could expect the same treatment as Mendis. The government announced new measures to harass black people, including the recruitment of 130 immigration officers to deal with deportations. 'Get lost, spongers' was the *Sun's* gleeful message to black people in Britain.

Immigration officials claim there are at least a quarter of a million illegal immigrants in Britain—that is one in 10 of the black population. The new home office crackdown is a licence to harass and intimidate every black person. 'The word is to go out and whack them', one immigration official told Sunday's *Observer*. 'It is going to be like Mendis—snatched and deported within 48 hours.' The deportation of Viraj Mendis is just the start of a new wave of home office terror for black people in Britain.

● Standing up to the racists: a protester outside Pentonville Prison last week



Simon Norfolk