

the next step

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**Whatever
happened to the
British left?
see pages 4 and 5**

Tory plans for the NHS

'YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE'

Chris Beresford



The Tories want to make us pay in cash or pay with our lives

THE Tories say that the proposals contained in their white paper on the future of the health service will give patients what they want. In reality the Tories are creating a two-tier health service which will give people what they can afford to pay for.

A key proposal in the white paper is that major hospitals will be able to apply for a new self-governing status and opt out of health authority control. This is the first step on the road to privatising healthcare along the lines of an American-style system. A total of 320 major hospitals will be encouraged to become self-governing, providing an elite service

to those who can afford it, and the remainder will be left to deteriorate below even the third-rate standards that now prevail. The independent hospitals will be free to set their own wages and conditions for staff, serving as the thin end of the wedge in overturning national pay and conditions agreements in the health service altogether.

For the first time GPs will have a financial incentive not to treat their patients. Under the new scheme GPs who become budget-holders for their patients' hospital care will be able to keep half of any savings they make each year. Thus if they refer the

minimum number of patients for hospital treatment they will find themselves substantially better off. There will be a strong disincentive for GPs on a tight budget to take on the most vulnerable patients such as the elderly and the chronically sick who would need to be regularly referred to hospital. Under a new system of limiting cash to pay drugs bills, doctors may be forced to tell people with heart conditions, for example, that they cannot have the drugs they need.

The idea of a comprehensive health service available to all free at the point of delivery was always a

myth. As early as 1951 the Labour government introduced prescription charges for false teeth and spectacles. An endless series of cuts and closures since the late sixties has reduced the service to its present crisis. Whole sections of the service are run on charity, and the nurses are back on the streets with the begging bowls. Now the Tories new plans will mean that only those who can afford to pay will be assured of adequate treatment, and the rest of us will be forced to survive through self-medication and do-it-yourself healthcare.

editorial

3 February • No 4 • Editor: Joan Phillips

WAR IS NOT CRICKET

WHOSE side are you on in the Irish War? This was the central issue raised by the SAS shooting of three unarmed IRA volunteers in Gibraltar last March. Yet, instead of a debate about Britain's role in Ireland, ever since Thames Television's *Death on the Rock* documentary on the shootings, the media has been engrossed in a debate with the government about broadcasting standards.

Lord Windlesham neatly summarised the controversy surrounding his inquiry into the making of *Death on the Rock*. He said that the entrenched positions which many people hold about the shooting of the three republicans 'means that they are unlikely to be satisfied by any findings which fall short of complete vindication of their existing view'. In other words, those who support Britain's shoot-to-kill policy against Irish republicans will reject the findings of a report vindicating a documentary which showed the government in a bad light.

Yet the question of how Britain's conducts its war against the Irish has been successfully buried by the government, because everybody has been too busy talking about broadcasting standards to bother talking about colonial warfare.

The way in which the Tories shifted the terms of the debate on the Gibraltar killings is a good example of how the government deals with dissent today. The crime committed by *Death on the Rock* was to assemble evidence that put to question the official account of the SAS shootings. The documentary could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered sympathetic to the republican cause. But its attempt to be objective involved interviewing witnesses whose evidence indicated that what took place was a ruthlessly executed shoot-to-kill operation.

Fearing that this could raise dangerous questions about the counter-insurgency methods of her crack killers, Thatcher set out to discredit the programme and its findings. In the heated political climate created by demands for an inquest into the killings, the government accused the programme-makers of trial by television. To many people the prime minister's concern that the documentary could prejudice the outcome of the inquest stretched credulity to the limits, given that her government had issued enough disinformation to sway any jury. But by making a fuss about journalistic standards, Thatcher shifted the discussion away from the shootings and on to her favourite battleground.

In this of course the government was given every assistance by its friends in the media. The *Sunday Times* stepped

forward as the most sychophantic prize-fighter for the state. No effort was spared to destroy *Death on the Rock*. Reporters were despatched to blacken the names and the evidence of the witnesses. Carmen Proetta, whose testimony was crucial in establishing the calculated nature of the killings, was smeared as 'The Tart of Gib' by the *Sun*. By the time the inquest was convened, the integrity of nearly every witness uncovered by Thames had been impugned (see page 8).

By conducting the debate about *Death on the Rock* on Thatcher's terms, supporters of the programme allowed the Tories to shift the focus away from the question of shoot-to-kill. Indeed, so anxious were they to avoid being accused of taking the side of the IRA, that they were happy to talk about standards rather than shootings. Against an orchestrated campaign of abuse, the programme-makers found it easier to defend their journalism rather than what their journalism had discovered.

This is the significance of the Windlesham inquiry commissioned by Thames Television. The question of whether the government authorised a shoot-to-kill mission was no longer under investigation. Windlesham's brief was to investigate whether any irregularities occurred in the making of the programme. His conclusions about the journalistic methods employed by the *Death on the Rock* team are now considered the final word on the Gibraltar killings.

The report shows very clearly how the debate has shifted. Instead of asking 'did Spanish police trail the IRA unit to the border?', the question now is 'was Thames right to use this material in its documentary?'. There is no way this line of inquiry can discover anything about the real issues. Rather it raises the dangerous question of what journalists should be allowed to investigate. Indeed, Windlesham made clear that the report should be seen 'in the wider context of current affairs reporting of the measures necessary to counter terrorism'. This sounds ominously like the prelude to another clampdown on television coverage of the Irish War.

All shades of liberal opinion have welcomed the Windlesham report as a vindication of those who believe in media coverage free from government

interference. In fact its publication is an indication of how far the media establishment has failed to challenge the climate of censorship created by the Tories. A year ago the case for stricter censorship of the media was still only being mooted. Today television is sponsoring its own censors to give their verdict on its productions. An editorial in the *Guardian* in response to Thatcher's fulminations against the findings of the Windlesham report, showed that her opponents have learned nothing from the Gibraltar affair.

It was appropriate that the *Guardian* should use the game of cricket as a metaphor for the wrangle over *Death on the Rock*. Windlesham was the umpire who had stuck up his finger to the government, by concluding that the programme was not trial by television, distorted or biased, but a fair, balanced and impartial piece of journalism. And the government was the batsman who waved its bat, broke the wicket and refused to walk. Why could the government not have the good grace to be a sport and accept his findings, wailed the *Guardian*. The point is that the war in Ireland is not a game of cricket and the government knows this very well.

Thatcher realises much better than the angst-ridden *Guardian* leader-writer that winning the propaganda war against the IRA on the home front is vital to keep public opinion behind the British war effort. That is why she went to such lengths to cover up the truth about the Gibraltar killings. If people began asking too many questions about the shoot-to-kill policy, they could blow the cover completely on Britain's colonial war against the Irish people.

It is a tribute to Margaret Thatcher's success in British politics that the final outcome of the Gibraltar affair is that she should be judged by her remorseless offensive against the media rather than by her bloody retribution against republicans. Thatcher can get away with turning a potentially disastrous affair involving the cold-blooded killing of the three Irish republicans into a debate about what sort of reporting should be allowed because she is under no pressure on the Irish issue. The Irish Freedom Movement's forthcoming conference on the Irish War in British politics is an opportunity to begin to change this state of affairs (see page 6).

ASSESSING LIVING MARXISM

THREE months after the launch of our monthly political review, *Living Marxism*, members of the Revolutionary Communist Party met to discuss progress so far and plans for the future. In assessing the role of the review for the party's work it is important to set the discussion in the context of the overall state of British politics in 1989.

The depoliticisation of British politics which we discussed in an editorial in *the next step* two weeks ago has put traditional party politics in limbo. The inability of the main opposition parties to make any impact has left the political scene more prone to volatility today than at any time since the thirties. The disarray of the official opposition has led to political realignments, a prolonged discussion about electoral pacts and initiatives such as Charter 88. The malaise of the left, discussed on pages 4 and 5, means that important political developments are often ignored.

At a time when the Tories are under no political pressure from the working class the tendency for reaction to grow

becomes overpowering. It is hardly a coincidence that the government should have spent the past year of supine resistance from the opposition implementing one attack after another on our civil liberties. The Tories have a virtual free hand to do their worst, because there are no countervailing checks against them. The dangers posed by this situation make it vital that we keep one step ahead of our enemies.

The political inertia which grips all the opposition parties and the left means that working class protest remains confused and fragmented. While this low ebb in the class struggle reduces the opportunities for the party to intervene practically, it does make the task of intervening propagandistically all the more important. The emphasis that we have given to creating an intellectual focus for opposition to the establishment is one of the most important contributions that *Living Marxism* can make to extending the party's influence today.

Living Marxism can help to give a

greater coherence to the party's politics. It gives us far greater scope for analysing in depth the important developments in domestic and international politics, and for spelling out in detail the party's alternative to the existing opposition. In this way it can contribute to raising the political understanding of the party's members and supporters, and can attract a new audience for revolutionary communism among the significant minority who want to fight but who presently lack a clear political and organising focus. We have already had a glimpse of the potential of *Living Marxism*, from the excitement it has

generated among readers, and the impact it has made through its national distribution.

In March the party is organising a *Living Marxism* Weekend, which provides an opportunity for all our readers and supporters to get to grips with the ideas developed in the magazine over the past few months (see page 7). Through debating the issues over the weekend it will be possible to clarify political problems and provide new insights into present trends. If you want to come to the conference turn to page 7, and, if you have yet to read *Living Marxism*, send for your subscription now.

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letters

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NUS CENSORS ANTI-RACISTS

THE president of the student union at Wolverhampton Polytechnic has censored a leaflet which described how Gurdip Singh was brutally beaten by local police. The justification offered for the censorship was that the information contained in it was mere 'speculation'.

This was more than just a problem of an individual student bureaucrat: it was another example of the inability of NUS to fight for our rights. Increasingly we are told that fighting against oppression and supporting working class politics is beyond the scope of student politics.

Some left-wing bureaucrats at my college say we can't expect support from college employees for the loans issue, and that we shouldn't be too ambitious by raising broader questions: instead we should stick to organising a student-only loans campaign. I don't think these people are any use to us, and we should give them no support in the future.
Sue
Wolverhampton

REPRESSION AND REFORM

JOAN PHILLIPS painted a dramatic picture of political repression in Britain (*Ins*, 20 January). It is often easy to forget the scale of the state offensive over the past decade, as incursions on civil liberties as well as outright physical repression have taken place in an insidious way.

Although I have no illusions about the true nature of the British state, the article shocked me because it brought home the fact that

SPINELESS MIDDLE CLASSES?

I FOUND myself in general agreement with Mike Freeman's approach to the question of electoral alliances against the Tories. The fact that almost the entire spectrum of the opposition to Thatcher has become obsessed with this debate is disturbing. My only quibble with the article was the way it dismissed the middle classes as spineless in their political convictions.

Certainly the only conclusion to be drawn from the debate about electoral pacts is that all the opposition parties lack conviction in their own policies. But is such spinelessness a congenital defect of middle class people? I know plenty of professional people who consider themselves to be resolute opponents of the Tory government. Have they no role to play in organising resistance to the Thatcherites?

Jill Dunne
Manchester

there is a deliberate offensive going on, rather than just a series of random overreactions by the state.

Further proof, if proof were needed, was provided by the extraordinary police operation to snatch Viraj Mendis from his church sanctuary in Manchester. Such a blatant show of force cannot be explained away as an overreaction: it's obvious that the 50 police officers were there to drive home a message.

Given the scale of the state offensive it is vital that we spell out what is behind these increasingly frequent and audacious state attacks, and ridicule the idea that we can look to constitutional reforms to protect us from them, or to provide us with impartial redress.
Steve Harrogate
Coventry



IRELAND AND THE SOVIET UNION

SIMON KRAY (letters, 27 January) says that our position on the right of nations to self-determination in the Soviet Union reminds him of the left's 'unconditional but critical support' for the Irish freedom struggle. This is precisely the sort of trap you can fall into if you do not approach the question of nationalism in its specific context.

We support the right of Soviet nations to self-determination because we want to bring the presently estranged Soviet working class together in the firmest possible union. That is why such a relationship must be *voluntary*. A relationship that contains the slightest hint of force would always be used by the bureaucracy, nationalists or imperialists to strengthen their influence at the expense of working class unity.

In my letter of 13 January, I wrote that we would support the secession of a nation from the Soviet Union if its peoples decided that this was necessary to achieve relief from oppression. We would not withdraw that support from an oppressed nation that liberated itself from Moscow's rule unless it was enticed into becoming a tool of imperialism.

Until Soviet workers come to the aid of the isolated oppressed nations, the working class will remain under the divisive influence of nationalism. That is why we back a national movement against oppression even if it is led by non-working class elements. To refuse to do so would only consolidate the influence of the nationalists. Communists can only restore the besmirched reputation of Marxism in the Soviet Union by proving they are the best fighters against Kremlin oppression.

The British left's 'unconditional but critical support' for the Irish freedom struggle is a device for disguising its capitulation to British chauvinism with a Leninist phrase. It means that the left 'unconditionally' supports the Irish so long as they remain the meek victims of imperialism, and 'criticises' them when they strike back against their oppressor—particularly when they have the audacity to take that fight to the heartland of imperialism. Our attitude towards the national question in the Soviet Union has nothing in common with this.

Andy Clarkson
London



Simon Norfolk

Church sermons cannot stop black people being crucified by the British state

THE deportation of Viraj Mendis has aroused controversy about the right to sanctuary and the role of the churches in aiding deportees. According to the *Observer*, 'dozens of refugees are living an Anne Frank-type existence' hidden by church congregations. Many anti-racists welcome the involvement of the church as a powerful ally in the struggle against racism.

Nobody could object to somebody going into sanctuary as a last resort to avoid deportation. But there is a problem when such a desperate measure is elevated into a political strategy for fighting racism. The growth of the sanctuary campaign bears testimony to the weakness of the anti-racist movement today. Churches have become prominent in anti-deportation struggles because black people have nowhere else to turn. While the Tory government has stepped up its offensive against the black community, the anti-racist movement has all but collapsed.

Hostile

The fact that the church is now seen as the leading force in the fight against deportations reveals how far the left has retreated from the struggle to mobilise working class resistance to racism. In the past the left at least paid lip-service to the idea that working class people had to be won to the anti-racist cause.

But in the hostile chauvinist climate created by the Tories today, anti-racists have abandoned this task in favour of seeking out sympathetic allies in the church.

The turn to the church has led anti-racists to tailor their campaigns to suit the prejudices of the middle classes. Advocates of sanctuary in the churches have made it clear that they do not oppose immigration controls. 'We are not supporting the evasion of UK immigration law', declared David Haslam of the British Council of Churches. Paul Regan, a Methodist minister from Newham, argues that the refugees he has dealt with 'had permission to be here in the first place' but have 'slipped up over a technicality'. The problem with this approach is that it accepts the principle of immigration control, and objects to deportations only in exceptional instances.

Black people are not being deported because they have not filled in the forms properly or have failed to renew their visas in time. They are being deported because the British state systematically discriminates against black people and treats them as second class citizens. Immigra-

Fighting deportations

A SANCTUARY FROM RACISM?

Kenan Malik argues that sanctuary cannot defend black people against deportations

tion controls are the cutting edge of this offensive. They define black people as undesirable aliens whose entry into this country must be strictly controlled. It is impossible to build an effective anti-racist movement unless these ideas are challenged, and this the sanctuary movement has singularly failed to do.

Illusion

In fact by championing only those select cases which are deemed to be deserving, the sanctuary movement concedes the argument to the government that most immigrants are undeserving. 'We have to be very selective in the people we take', says Ronnie Moodley, an organiser of the Underground Railroad which claims to be hiding 52 refugees: 'We would never take a criminal.' Since the immigration laws treat every black person as a potential criminal, this approach cannot challenge the government's political monopoly of the debate about immigration. As supporters of Viraj Mendis discovered, all the government had to do was brand him as a criminal and a cheat, and the liberal opposition to his deportation crumbled.

The Viraj Mendis campaign proved in practice that making concessions and courting respectability is no defence against deportation.

His supporters argued that he was a refugee facing death if sent back to Sri Lanka. Rather than build a campaign to stop the deportation, they used moral arguments to sway respectable opinion. When Mendis lost his final appeal, he was forced into sanctuary. In the end his sole defence against deportation was the hope that a house of God could provide sanctuary against the forces of Mammon and of home secretary Douglas Hurd. The 100 police and immigration officials who battered down the church door should have disposed of the illusion that having friends in high places is any protection

against a ruthless Tory regime.

Indeed the Tories turned the campaign's quest for respectability to its disadvantage by making much of the fact that Mendis was a communist. The home office made him out to be a devious schemer who was exaggerating his political activity in support of the Tamils to avoid being sent back to Sri Lanka. The press went along with this crusade to pillory Mendis as a liar who did not deserve any favours. By going on the offensive and treating Mendis as a criminal who had flouted the immigration laws, the government confronted the campaign's law-abiding middle class adherents with arguments they could not win.

Friends?

Even some of his supporters complained that Mendis was not an ideal case. Labour's Ben Pimlott was not alone in arguing that 'Mendis' association with British ultra-left wing groups' helped 'give immigration laws a more favourable image'. With friends like these, who needs enemies? It is a measure of the campaign's failure that after the deportation the debate was not about how immigration controls violate the rights of black people, but about how the police violated the sanctity of the church.

There is nothing wrong with looking for support from any quarter in the fight against deportations or in providing safe-houses as a way of evading the immigration police.

But sitting in sanctuary in a church is not a strategy that will make the Tories lose any sleep. The police operation to snatch Viraj Mendis from his sanctuary was an argument for meeting force with force. The only force capable of providing decisive assistance against deportations is the working class, and winning this force to the struggle against oppression is the task facing anti-racists today more than ever.

what we fight for

◆
New
readers
start here

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.

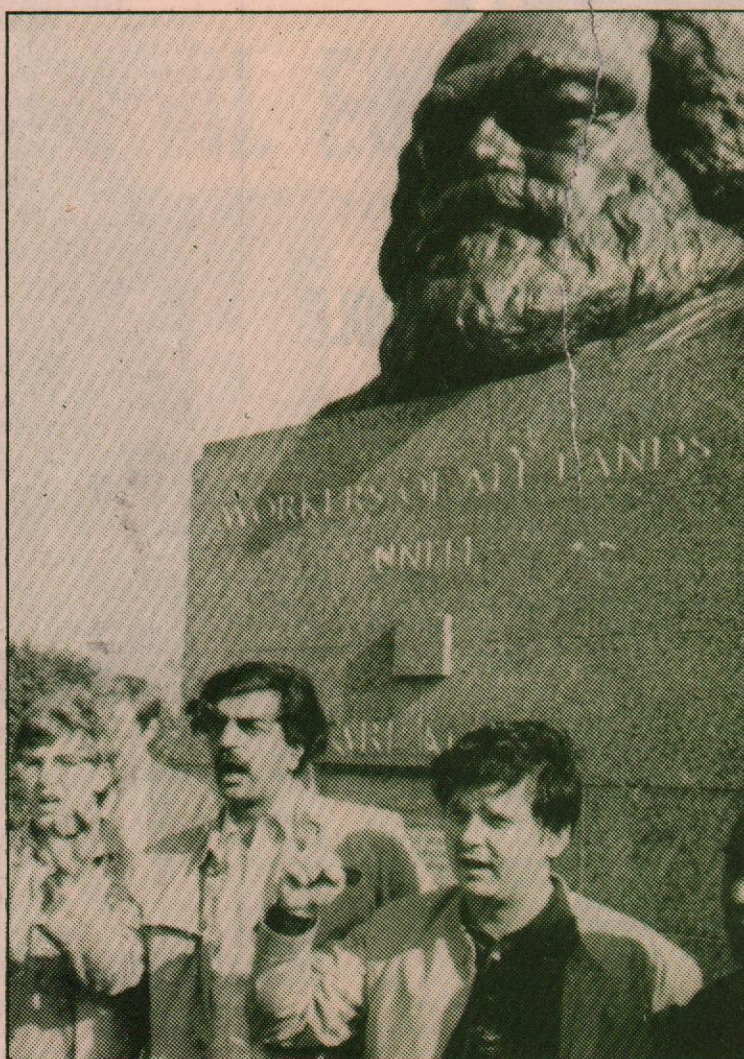
The RCP believes that the fight against oppression is central to the construction of an independent working class movement. Workers must defend the oppressed if we are to fight for our own liberation. This is why the RCP is wholeheartedly committed to the fight against racism. The struggle for the emancipation 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.



The left spent last year celebrating the twentieth anniversary of 1968—the year when it emerged in the upsurge of student, trade union and radical revolt throughout the West. This year the left is distinguished by its absence from the centre of British politics and the apparent irrelevance of its policies and activities. Whatever happened to the British left?

The late sixties and the early seventies were the formative period of today's left. In the previous two decades the left had languished in the climate induced by Cold War anti-communism and the capitalist boom. From the late sixties, however, a younger generation rebelled against the restrictiveness and complacency of the post-war order, identifying with third world liberation struggles and repudiating the excesses of Western military-industrial culture.

Meanwhile, trade unionists staged militant strikes and demonstrations against the early attempts of Labour and Tory governments to curb wages and restrict union activity. Several far-left groups grew rapidly, for the first time attracting some trade unionists to their predominantly student ranks.

Activism

The new left tended to exaggerate the scope of spontaneous youthful radicalism and union militancy, and to underestimate the problem of the prolonged political stagnation of the labour movement through the post-war years. Against this background, the aftermath of 1968 threw up various theoretical and organisational problems.

Instead of tackling them, however, the British left largely endorsed the prevailing mood of narrow activism, taking cover in the existing organisations of the labour movement—the unions and the Labour Party—and in the various campaigns operating in their shadow.

This strategy succeeded in disguising the left's underlying weakness and isolation, but only for a time. The Thatcher years have exposed the futility of the left's approach in each of these key areas.

From the start the trade unions were the main focus of radical left activity. Given the historical

strength of trade unionism in Britain and the traditions of workplace organisation and militancy encouraged by the post-war boom, this was not surprising. In the late sixties, the emergence of a layer of radical trade union officials in the major unions, in response to growing rank and file unrest, created unprecedented scope for militant organisation and broad left groups flourished.

By the early seventies, national strikes and mass demonstrations were commonplace and the engineers' factory occupations and the miners' flying pickets created widespread fears among the employers. The left saw rank and file organisations in the unions as the basic units of a revolutionary movement.

Austerity

Appearances soon proved deceptive. For most workers, the object of militancy was not to overthrow British capitalism, but to secure immediate improvements in living standards. When, after 1974, Harold Wilson's Labour government insisted that to safeguard the British system, workers would have to accept austerity measures, the unions acquiesced. Labour persuaded union officials to endorse its wage controls and public spending cuts by passing laws to enhance their status and by incorporating them into collaborative quangos at every level from Whitehall to the workplace.

The left criticised individual union leaders for 'selling out', but advanced no coherent alternative to Labour's policies.

The result was a sharp decline in industrial activity in the mid-seventies, together with a drop in living standards and a dramatic rise in unemployment. The loyalty of much of the left to the Labour government helped to dampen and delay rank and file revolt until it was too late.

The effect of the years of Labour government from 1974-79 was to erode the left's limited base in the rank and file and make it more dependent on left wingers in the union leadership. When the union bureaucrats themselves came under attack from successive Thatcher governments after 1979, the left became increasingly embroiled in defending the officials and their

British
politics
and the
left

NO LEFT

After 10 years of Tory rule
has been cruelly exposed

policies. However, the growing conflict between the commitment of union officials to traditions of collaboration with management and workers' need for an anti-capitalist strategy soon exposed the dangers of the left's approach.

The 1984-85 miners' strike was a watershed for the left in the unions. From the outset of the dispute it followed the NUM leadership in advocating the *Plan for Coal*, a scheme drawn up between the government and the union 10 years previously, as the basis for a settlement.

Yet the *Plan for Coal* called not only for higher output from Britain's mines, but it committed the NUM to raising productivity, and to the redundancies and the pit closures necessary to make British mining profitable. The left also endorsed the NUM leadership's bureaucratic conduct of the dispute, particularly its evasion of the ballot necessary to unite all the miners against the employers.

The defeat of the miners' strike discredited traditional left-wing policies throughout the unions.

While rank and file workers drew the conclusion that militant methods guaranteed failure, the initiative within the unions passed to the right-wing leaders of the engineers and the electricians. The remaining broad left groupings within the bureaucracy became defunct as former left-wing leaders either retired or took a vow of silence. After 20 years the far left was forced to seek shelter elsewhere.

Zenith

After the unions, the Labour Party provided a framework within which the left could operate. For the children of May '68, joining Labour involved some loss of face. In their not-so-distant youth they had dismissed or ignored the old party of the labour movement as incorrigibly dull and grey, as hopelessly middle-aged and middle of the road. For some far-left factions it meant returning to a party they thought they had left behind after the long grim Cold War years. Yet, as radical trade union organisations crumbled in the late seventies, and particularly after Thatcher's victory in 1979, erstwhile far-left wingers and factions flocked into the Labour Party.

Labour's 1979 defeat created a favourable opening for the left. Many trade union leaders blamed the setback on James Callaghan and Denis Healey and their wage curbs and public spending cuts. Tony Benn welcomed the left into the party to bolster his campaign to extend inner-party democracy and advance his own bid for leadership. In 1981 the left reached the zenith of its influence when Labour's

PLACE TO HIDE

the vulnerability of the left

argues Mike Freeman

conference endorsed its proposals on reselection and the creation of an electoral college to elect the party leader, and Benn came within an ace of beating Healey for the deputy leadership.

Yet the left's strength was illusory. While Benn calculated his support in the inflated figures of conference block votes, a closer scrutiny of the election results showed that the greater the rank and file consultation had been, the weaker was the support for the left. The left had won influence through manipulations within the machine, but its policies enjoyed little popularity among trade union members. When Michael Foot went to the electorate in 1983 with a detailed programme including many of the left's proposals, he suffered a catastrophic defeat.

If the right took the rap for 1979, it was the left that got the blame for 1983.

The new leadership around Neil Kinnock soon set about purging Militant and replacing the radical programme with explicitly pro-capitalist policies. The result was a growing divergence between hard

and soft-left factions, with the hard left around Benn and Heffer becoming increasingly marginalised.

While Kinnock's drive to crush the left was delayed by the miners' strike, by 1986 there was little trace of the radicalism of the seventies anywhere near the Labour leadership or the manifesto being prepared for the forthcoming general election. Accepting that it had become an embarrassment and an electoral liability, the left—now officially designated 'loony'—went silent.

The third sphere within which the left has long submerged itself to overcome its isolation is that of campaigns. At times when there has been an upsurge of public interest in a particular issue, or when things have been going badly in the unions and the Labour Party, the left turns to popular causes. These include international solidarity campaigns—Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Iran, Palestine, etc—women's liberation, anti-racism, gay rights or single-issue campaigns—the Anti-Nazi League, CND, Greenham

Common, anti-apartheid.

Such movements have often been successful in mobilising large numbers of people and creating an impression that the left is a powerful force in society. However, they also have a number of negative consequences for the left.

The left tends to avoid approaching these issues from a socialist, anti-capitalist perspective, in favour of presenting a liberal line, which criticises only particular capitalist abuses or excesses.

This approach aims to win middle class sympathy, rather than maximise working class support. Furthermore, the left often restricts its slogans and demands to what is acceptable to the labour bureaucrats who sponsor its campaigns.

For example, in relation to South Africa, the left calls upon British capitalists, who are long-established bastions of support to the apartheid regime, to impose sanctions against it. This is the policy approved by the Labour leadership and the TUC, not to mention the Commonwealth and the United Nations. However, it has been easily shrugged off by the British government for years and is no threat whatever to Pretoria.

By contrast a campaign for direct action by trade unionists against British companies involved in South Africa could create effective links of solidarity between British workers and the struggle in South Africa. But because it would offend the respectable middle class supporters of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, as well as the TUC and Labour, the left rules out such an approach.

Patronage

Because the left's campaigns have lost momentum in recent years, it has tended to look to the labour bureaucracy, particularly its representatives in local government, to sustain them. This strategy flourished in the mid-eighties when the left controlled the Greater London Council, a number of metropolitan councils and numerous town and borough councils. The result was the incorporation of a layer of radical activists on to the payroll of the state, through diverse quangos and special grants, and the provision of funds for radical campaigns.

These arrangements allowed left wingers to sustain the illusion of political engagement when popular support for their campaigns had withered away. Municipal patronage encouraged moderation among activists and cynicism in the public.

Now that the councils have been tamed and the grants cut, the left is forced to face up to the fact that its short cuts to the masses have left it more remote than ever.

Since Labour's third consecutive election defeat in June 1987, the

left has been unable to operate effectively in any of its familiar modes. This has had a number of consequences which have contributed to its current marginalisation.

The left today is characterised by its lack of purpose and direction. Over the past year it has latched on to one initiative after another in a desperate attempt to avoid being effaced from the political map. First there was Benn's campaign to refound the Labour Party, then his bid to win the Labour leadership with Eric Heffer, a series of conferences organised by the Socialist Society in Chesterfield, and, most recently, the launch of Charter 88 by the *New Statesman and Society*. Each new enterprise simply confirms the left's irrelevance and compounds its isolation.

Another feature of the left today is its tendency to seek alignments with middle class forces in a bid to construct a broad alliance against the Tories. The Charter 88 initiative, which unites prominent left wingers with renowned right wingers, as well as bishops and lords, is symptomatic of this general trend. The consequence of appealing to middle class liberal opinion is that the left has ended up adjusting its policies to exclude any that might offend potential supporters of the anti-Thatcher coalition among the ranks of dissident Tories and sympathetic bishops.

Obsessed

Finally, the left today is distinguished by its failure to address the task of mobilising working class resistance to the onslaught on democratic rights which is now in full swing. The mounting legal and political clampdown on the civil liberties of the Irish, black people, trade unionists and political activists provides an obvious focus for rallying opposition to the government. Yet the left is so obsessed with initiatives such as the futile quest to persuade parliament to take up the challenge of constitutional reform that it is incapable of organising collective resistance to state repression among those who could really make their opposition count.

Now is the time to reassess the whole project of what it means to be left-wing, and to tackle the theoretical and organisational problems which the British left has evaded for 20 years.

We need to establish a clear theoretical and analytical framework for making sense of the times we live in. From the upsurge of working class militancy in the sixties to the retreat of the official labour movement in the eighties, the left has consistently underestimated the importance of theoretical struggle. Creating a new intellectual tradition on the left is an urgent task facing Marxists today. Our new monthly political review, *Living Marxism*, can start to redress the balance towards theory, and provide a coherent analysis of the important developments which have shaped the class struggle over the past few decades. Unless we create an intellectual perspective which clarifies the independent interests of the working class, the opposition to the Tories will remain confused and fragmented.

Isolation

Another task facing Marxists today is to provide an independent organisational forum for rallying opposition to the system. After 20 years of organising in the shadow of the labour bureaucracy the left is incapable of projecting an independent political alternative to Labourism. This has had a depoliticising and demoralising effect on working class activists, who lack a leadership which can articulate their aspirations for radical change. Without an independent organisational focus which can unite the forces of the opposition, working class militants will never be able to overcome their isolation and convince others to take up the struggle. Seeking out and organising the significant minority of people who want to fight must be a priority for revolutionary communists in the year ahead.

● FROM MARX TO MANDARINS: In 1968 (above left) the left sang the songs of revolution. Today the British establishment calls the tune



Don Reed

For 10 years the Western powers have pointed to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as irrefutable proof of the need for vigilance against the menace of Soviet expansionism. With the withdrawal of Soviet forces from 15 February the West will be deprived of the main plank of its propaganda offensive against the 'Evil Empire'.

Attention is now focused on the uncertain future of the country, as mujahideen guerrillas lay siege to the capital, Kabul, and Western diplomats take flight amid fears of a descent into bloody chaos. The possibility of starvation among Kabul's two million inhabitants once the Soviet Union stops airlifting supplies to the city prefigures the devastation that may be in store for the rest of the country.

Jihad

The war leaves eight million out of a total 15m Afghans displaced including 3.5m in Pakistan and 2m in Iran not to mention 30m landmines which remain as a grim reminder of the war fought between the US and Pakistani-backed guerrillas and the Soviet-sponsored regime of president Mohammad Najibullah and his People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

No political settlement has been agreed, and the fragile unity of the many guerrilla groups is now collapsing.

United only against the Soviet military presence, they differ considerably over the terms of a settlement. The Soviet offer to include a few administrators from the ruling PDPA in a new government has led to squabbles between those who seek the regime's total removal and those who see little chance of stability without com-

Soviet tanks leave Afghanistan

END OF THE 'EVIL EMPIRE'?



As the tanks leave Afghanistan, the West loses its favourite anti-Soviet bogey

promise. They have so far failed to convene a general meeting because of disagreements over the division of representatives on such a body between Sunni and Shia religious groups.

Sunni hardliner Maulavi Yunis Khalis made clear the depth of hostility between the rival groups

when he threatened that the next Jihad (holy war) would be against the Shias. Pakistan is trying to persuade such hardline clients to accept a compromise, fearful that it could lose influence in the new government and the resulting chaos could spread across its own borders.

In contrast to the preoccupations of the mujahideen, Moscow's concern is not the precise terms of the settlement, but the effect of withdrawal on its international standing. By convincing world opinion that he is prepared to make any sacrifice to bring about world peace, Mikhail Gorbachev has considerably minimised the longstanding isolation of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's diplomatic initiatives flow from a recognition that such a course is the only road to renewal for an ailing Soviet system in desperate need of high-technology assistance from the West.

Honourable

Moscow is anxious to complete the withdrawal before the 15 February deadline. Gorbachev has appointed a high-ranking diplomat, the smooth-talking Yuli Vorontsov, as ambassador to Kabul. Vorontsov's frantic shuttle diplomacy, with calls for UN intervention, the return of the Afghan monarch and a pledge of \$600m of aid, has been packaged for international consumption.

Gorbachev's diplomatic successes have ensured that his disarmament proposals rather than defeat in Afghanistan are the focus of attention.

The Soviet withdrawal is unlikely to resemble the humiliating stampede out of Saigon following the USA's defeat in Vietnam. Many Western observers see it as an honourable settlement to the 10-

year conflict, and have even berated the guerrillas for refusing to accept the Soviet terms.

It is impossible to predict what will happen after the Soviet withdrawal. The best that Moscow could hope for would be the return of the former king from Italy. The restoration of the monarchy would be a spectacular success for Soviet diplomacy and could help restore stability in the shaky southern area. A moderate and unified Afghanistan would minimise the threat of instability infecting the Soviet Asian republics, fears of which led to the Soviet decision to invade in Christmas 1979.

At worst, Moscow could create a pro-Soviet Afghan stronghold in the prosperous region north of the Hindu Kush, and leave the rest to dissolve into another Lebanon. This key border region has already been partly Sovietised—95 per cent of trade for example is now with the USSR—and could serve as a non-fundamentalist barrier between the mujahideen and the Soviet Asian republics.

The Soviet Union has been able to extricate itself from Afghanistan with minimal embarrassment as a result of Gorbachev's skilful diplomacy. But for the people of Afghanistan who face starvation and chaos, the future after the Soviet withdrawal is likely to be anything but peaceful. For the West the Soviet disengagement will make it more difficult to conjure up the bogey of an expansionist Evil Empire. As the myth of the Soviet menace loses all rationale the real threat to world peace—Western militarism—will become ever more apparent.

Adam Eastman

An opportunity to get the twentieth anniversary year of Irish resistance to British rule off to a good start was wasted by the appalling organisation of the Bloody Sunday demonstration in London last weekend.

The annual Bloody Sunday demonstration is an occasion to commemorate the killing of 14 Irish nationalists by British troops in Derry in 1972, and to rally resistance to the murderous activities of the British occupation forces 17 years on.

The march was called by the Committee for British Withdrawal from Ireland, which excluded the Irish Freedom Movement from the organising committee, and squandered an opportunity to make an impact through its disorganisation.

Those who turned up at the advertised assembly time were forced to wait in the pouring rain

Bloody Sunday commemoration

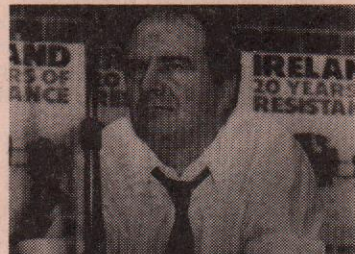
A wasted opportunity

for nearly two hours before the march moved off. They were then taken on a route which was twice as long as it should have been through largely deserted streets. Since there was no attempt to steward the march it quickly degenerated into an untidy straggle, leading to frequent stops and starts which allowed the police to take over the stewarding. The Irish Freedom Movement, which had the biggest contingent, was the only organisation which kept up a barrage of slogans. The rest of the march resembled a funeral procession, trudging silently through empty

streets.

All this reduced the march to a shambles, which could not possibly make an impact on anybody seeing it pass, and which could only demoralise those who were part of it. By the time the demonstration reached its destination it was clear that people with a manifest inability to carry out the simple technical tasks of organising a demonstration cannot be expected to advance the cause of Irish freedom.

Sometimes it would be better if a demonstration never happened if its only effect is to put people off and discourage them from attending



John Mitchell, sacked Irish shopworkers' union leader speaking at Friday's IFM Bloody Sunday rally

such an event again. Irish nationalists who have been resisting the armed might of the British state for 20 years deserve better than this. In the months ahead all those who support the cause of Irish freedom should redouble their efforts to make the most of every opportunity to strengthen the forces of resistance to the British occupation.

Guardian Angels fly in

Watch out, there's a crime panic about

NEW YORK vigilantes, the Guardian Angels, are training British volunteers to patrol the underground, and posing as a popular alternative to the police. But by preying on people's fears about crime, their campaign can only fuel the law and order panic, and strengthen the police who feed off it.

The authorities have rejected the challenge to their monopoly of force on the streets, arguing that a uniformed squad acting outside the authorised police force is not on. That people should take the law into their own hands fills the authorities with unease. But some people have welcomed the prospect of the Guardian Angels patrolling the underground at

a time when fears about crime are rampant. Are the Angels a popular alternative to more police powers in response to crime?

With their red berets, badges and racoon skins the Angels are like the gang that made good by taking the side of the peace-keepers. In fact their crime prevention statistics are as uninspiring as those of the British police. A study published by the American Justice Department showed that in San Diego, California, assaults against the public increased by two per cent in areas patrolled by the Angels, while they fell by nine per cent elsewhere. In Britain the Angels' first success was beating up two drunken beggars on the Victoria line.

To justify their existence the Angels end up inflating public fears about crime, as Dennis Kenney from the Police Foundation in Washington explained: 'In order to exist the Angels have to persuade the public that they are needed. Their survival depends on the perception of a crime problem.' The authorities may repudiate the Angels as a challenge to the authority of the police, but in so far as they promote the perception that crime is a problem they will be welcomed by those who want to make the case for more police on the streets. Since the Angels arrived the transport police have been offered another 80 officers.

The defining concept of crime today draws the Angels

towards reaction. For the US establishment, as for the British, crime has acquired explicit racist connotations, with mugging becoming synonymous with black youth. The activities of the Angels can only reinforce this connection. This became clear when they gave their support to Bernard Goetz, who shot four black men on a New York subway, shouting 'Here! Do you like that? Have some more'. The Angels allied themselves with racist bigots in applauding Goetz, and gave him a personal bodyguard.

An organisation which sets up black youth for more repression by endorsing racist stereotypes is no friend of the people.

James Heartfield

WHEN THE WAR COMES HOME

The Irish War in British Politics

Irish Freedom Movement Conference
Saturday 18 February 10am-6pm
Sir William Collins School
Charrington Street
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The Irish Freedom Movement has organised this anti-repression conference because we believe that there is much to be learned from the Irish experience—and much to be gained from uniting resistance to state repression in Britain with a movement demanding an immediate withdrawal from Ireland.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

Speakers include:

- Anthony Jennings, barrister and editor of *Justice Under Fire: The Abuse of Civil Liberties in Ireland*
- Janet Clarke, Broadwater Farm
- Tim Gopsill, editor of *The Journalist*
- Holloway Road 30 Defence Campaign
- Speaker from Sinn Féin also invited

Morning Plenary:

State repression in Thatcher's Britain

Workshops:

- The Prevention of Terrorism Act
- Britain's political prisoners
- The law and the Irish War
- Is Ireland a training ground?
- The wall of silence
- Kitson's counter-insurgency warfare
- Political policing in the eighties
- The Falklands Factor in British politics

Afternoon Plenary:

Building a resistance movement

Plus evening social.

Tickets cost £6 waged/£3 unwaged. Ring the Irish Freedom Movement on (01) 729 0414, or write to: Irish Freedom Movement, BM IFM, London WC1N 3XX.

The nuclear power debate

CAPITALISM: NO THANKS!

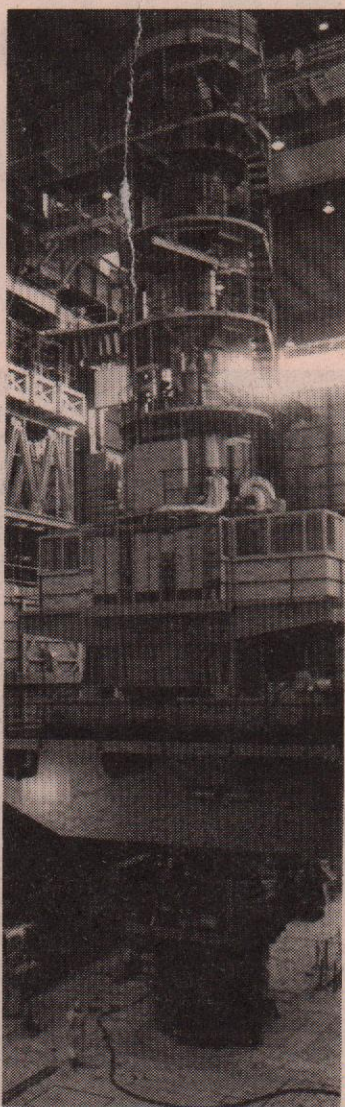
Following the disaster at Chernobyl in 1986, opposition to nuclear power has become an axiom of left-wing politics. For us the problem with nuclear power is not the technology itself, but the use to which it is put by the capitalist system.

The connection between the civil nuclear programme and the making of atomic bombs is often cited as an argument against nuclear power. Nuclear power originated in the drive to manufacture ever more destructive bombs, and only later was it applied to peaceful purposes. The Central Electricity Generating Board recently admitted that the production of electricity by coal has always been cheaper than by nuclear power. This substantiates the suspicion that if it were not for the fact that plutonium—the main bomb material—is produced as a by-product of the fission of uranium, there would be no civil nuclear programme.

But this is no reason to reject nuclear power or call for the closure of nuclear power stations. Many breakthroughs in science have been achieved through the pressures of military needs: the production of poison gases in the First World War led to advances in chemistry; the development of the hydrogen bomb after the Second World War led to progress in computer science.

The argument that we should oppose nuclear power because it is uneconomical is one favoured by the left.

The government's plan to levy a



Simon Norfolk

nuclear tax for the funding of the industry after privatisation has been seized on by those eager to highlight the uneconomic character of the civil nuclear programme. This argument is short-sighted because under a socialist system, where it is not constrained by military needs, nuclear power could be an efficient means of electricity production. It is also dangerous because workers in any industry cannot afford to let their livelihoods be determined according to whether or not the employer is making a profit.

Risks

A concern about safety is justifiably the reason why most anti-nuclear campaigners want nuclear power stations closed down. Here there are two factors to consider: the dangers of the technology itself, and the dangers caused by the use of it under our existing society. The first question cannot be fully answered yet. In the long term the risks from nuclear power, like those from any technology, will be reduced with the development of knowledge and technique. However, only when we have abolished the capitalist system will we ourselves be able to assess the real problems and costs of using nuclear power.

There is no doubt that the risks posed by nuclear power today flow from the cost-cutting policies of the governments and firms concerned. For example, it was revealed during the inquiry into the building of the Sizewell B plant that the original

design, which was considerably safer, had been rejected on the grounds of cost in favour of another model. The obsessive secrecy which surrounds the nuclear industry makes any definitive assessment of the dangers of nuclear power impossible.

Scientific

By the same token it becomes clear that the risks posed by nuclear power are caused by the capitalist system rather than by the technology itself. The question as to whether we should demand the closure of nuclear power stations until we are satisfied of their safety is thus a purely scientific one. The scientific question is: is nuclear power qualitatively more dangerous than other forms of electricity production?

As we demonstrate in this month's *Living Marxism*, by any rational assessment nuclear power is less dangerous than any other form of electricity production.

It is true that we must be wary of official figures, but this holds for all industries. There are no absolutes when it comes to safety in capitalist society: absolute safety is impossible under a system which puts profit before all else. The inquiry now going on into the Piper Alpha disaster will not cover the wider question of safety on North Sea oil rigs. That industries are unsafe is an argument above all for taking them over rather than for closing them down.

John Gibson

on the discussion of civilian casualties as evidence of tension between the military and political strategy. Days before the Ard Fheis, the IRA announced that it was disbanding its West Fermanagh unit. An IRA statement in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* explained that civilian casualties allowed critics to argue 'that the armed struggle is contradicting and undermining the political struggle'. It pledged to 'refine our activities so that they do not hinder but complement efforts to build a broad-based front against imperialism' (26 January). The *Observer* was quick to conclude that in future IRA 'tactics must be subservient to Sinn Fein's political needs' (29 January).

Dangerous

All this ignores the pressures on the republican movement from its supporters, which ensure that even if it wanted to, the IRA could not give up the armed struggle. For months the nationalist community in West Belfast has suffered an offensive by British Army search teams which have smashed up hundreds of homes. This everyday terror against nationalists goes largely unreported. But it explains why a crowd of local people hurled bottles and stones at police and soldiers when they came to collect the body of an RUC reservist killed by an IRA grenade in Tyrone last week. Incidents like this symbolise the spirit of resistance to the British occupation forces and explain why the IRA can't dump its arms. But they don't lessen the dangerous pressures on the republican movement.

Our job in this country is to give unconditional support to the liberation struggle, not to pronounce upon the tactics which the republican movement pursues. By mobilising working class support for Irish freedom we can limit the British state's room for manoeuvre.

Andy Clarkson

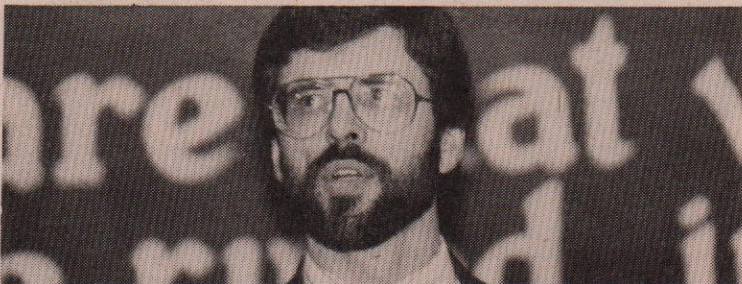
Sinn Fein

CAUGHT IN A DILEMMA

At their party's Ard Fheis last week Sinn Fein leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness called on the IRA to avoid civilian casualties. At the same time, they affirmed their support for the armed struggle against British Crown forces and Loyalist paramilitaries. Along with this development, the discussion at the Ard Fheis about a broad front reflects the pressures on the republican movement as it attempts to break out of political isolation and break the current stalemate in the Irish War.

The republican movement has a firm base of support among nationalists in Belfast and Derry and in rural areas along the Border. This ensures that the IRA cannot be beaten, but it is not sufficient to enable it to prevail decisively against the British. Ever since the 1981 hunger-strikes the British government has been striving to undermine Sinn Fein's electoral successes. The Anglo-Irish accord of 1985, and recent measures such as the abolition of the right to silence, the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein and the oath of non-violence for councillors are designed to intensify Sinn Fein's isolation.

Sinn Fein has pursued various avenues to try to overcome its isolation. In 1986 the party dropped its traditional policy of abstaining from the Dail in the South, and in 1988 it entered talks with the Social Democratic and Labour Party, in an attempt to appeal to constitutional nationalists to join a 'national consensus'. In an interview in January's *Living Marxism*, Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams explained the basis of his party's



Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams

appeal to Fianna Fail leader Charles Haughey and SDLP leader John Hume: 'We have first of all to try and show people that the leaderships which they have and the parties which they support are merely involved in verbal posturing....If in the course of doing that we create a situation where those party leaderships are forced to take up progressive positions...then that again is in the interests of the broader struggle.'

Enemies

Yet these initiatives have not improved Sinn Fein's position against its rivals. Charles Haughey has improved his standing by appearing to stand up to British demands for the extradition of Irish priest Patrick Ryan, who now faces trial in a Southern court. John Hume has rounded on the republican movement, accusing it of 'undiluted fascism' at his party conference last November: 'If I were to lead a civil rights movement in Northern Ireland today, the major target of that campaign would be the IRA.' (see *tns*, 9 December 1988) Sinn Fein is unlikely to secure many Fianna Fail or SDLP votes in the council

elections in May or the European elections in June.

The move into the political arena after the 1981 hunger-strikes secured significant gains for Sinn Fein. The election of republican representatives put Sinn Fein on the political map, confirmed its position as the legitimate representative of the nationalist community and discredited British claims that the IRA had no support among Northern nationalists. At the same time the electoral strategy has confronted Sinn Fein with new problems.

After the party dropped its abstentionist policy in the South, an Irish Sunday paper urged that this move be exploited by Sinn Fein's enemies: 'The imperative must be to encourage, entice, tempt, goad, bribe and if necessary trick as many of them as possible into being absorbed into the body politic.' (see *tns*, 14 November 1986). Similarly, Tory junior Northern Ireland minister Richard Needham has argued that the proposed oath of non-violence could drive a wedge between 'Sinn Fein's strategy of the ballot box and the armalite'.

Now the British press has seized

LIVING MARXISM

The February issue of *Living Marxism* is devoted to the issue of the environment. It includes an interview with Petra Kelly, Green MP in West Germany, and articles on: Can capitalism go Green?; The Greening of British politics; and Nuclear power: no thanks?

Plus an interview with Bernadette McAliskey; an eye-witness account of the Spanish general strike; sackings in the City; football fanzines; tabloid TV and much more.

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the next step

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Can sanctuary
stop
deportations?
see page 3

British journalists cover up Gibraltar truth

LIES ON THE ROCK

In the latest edition of the journal *Granta*, journalist Ian Jack recalls being woken up in the early hours in his Gibraltar hotel room by the strains of a sectarian song from Loyalist East Belfast: 'Hello, hello we're the Billy Boys...we're up to our knees in Fenian blood, surrender or you'll die.' It was members of the British tabloid press staggering home after another drunken debauch while out covering the Gibraltar inquest into the SAS killings of three unarmed IRA volunteers.

It was quite appropriate that the fumes of alcohol should ignite in the British media hacks the vicious sectarianism of the Loyalist mob. From the first news of the SAS assassinations, British journalists have lied, contradicted themselves and covered their tracks with a nonchalance which has shocked even seasoned observers. And where the men from the tabloids blazed a trail, the quality press followed in their wake. The *Sunday Times* made a name for itself for its slavish toeing of the government line. But

the integrity of these gentlemen has never been called into question. That honour was reserved for the Thames Television documentary *Death on the Rock*, which dared to question the official line on the killings.

The publication last week of the Windlesham report exonerated *Death on the Rock* but has not stilled the debate about the programme. For nearly a year the journalists who made the documentary and the witnesses who appeared in it have been the subject of a sustained campaign of vilification. The gutter press stuck to what it knows best—a not very subtle mixture of mudslinging, muckraking and libel. The quality press, led by the *Sunday Times*, orchestrated a campaign to discredit the 'flawed journalism' of *Death on the Rock* and to attack its 'shoddy broadcasting standards'.

The Thames Television team went to Gibraltar to interview witnesses ignored both by the police and the cream of British journalism. Within a month the team had amassed enough evidence to damn the official version of events. The documentary could in no way be considered sympathetic to the republican cause. Windlesham notes the 'hostile editorial stance of the programme towards the IRA and its methods'. However, the documentary's attempt to present an objective account of what happened in Gibraltar created outrage.

The debate about *Death on the Rock* shows that there is no such thing as 'objective' broadcasting standards, especially when it comes to the Irish War. The standard of broadcasting is determined not by the veracity of the report but by whether or not it echoes the official version of events. A closer examination of the evidence shows that it is the official upholders of broadcasting standards who have lied and twisted the facts to fit their story.

Death on the Rock reported that the three IRA volunteers, Mairead Farrell, Danny McCann and Sean Savage, were tracked all the way from Malaga, where they arrived in Spain, to the Gibraltar border by the Spanish security forces. This was in fact the official version of events immediately following the shootings and appeared in every British newspaper including the *Sunday Times*.

However, as the British authorities prepared their case for the inquest, they realised that this story would not do. If the IRA unit was trailed so meticulously why were they not arrested? Why allow them to come into Gibraltar, park their car and then shoot them down in the street? The obvious conclusion is that the volunteers were lured into an ambush and shot in cold blood.

By the time of the inquest the story had inexplicably changed. It now transpired that the incompetent Spaniards had lost the three when they arrived in Malaga. Savage and McCann had used the wily ruse of boarding a taxi, while Farrell simply vanished in the not very crowded terminal of the small provincial airport. The British press faithfully accepted the new version—and accused Thames of twisting the facts!

The case of Kenneth Asquez is revealing. Asquez was a bank clerk who witnessed the shootings. He was introduced to Thames reporters by a Major Bob Randall. Asquez told Randall, a regular customer at the bank, that he had seen a man place his foot on the chest of Sean Savage and fire repeatedly into his head. The gunman then put on a black beret and shouted 'Stop, it's OK, it's the police'. Asquez refused to appear on *Death on the Rock*, telling the programme's lawyer that he was afraid 'of the people involved'. Instead he gave a detailed handwritten account of what he had seen, but refused to sign it.

At the inquest, Asquez retracted his evidence, claiming he had made it all up after Randall had pressurised him and offered him money. This led to a torrent of abuse against Thames from the British press, and in particular the *Sunday Times*. What the *Sunday Times* failed to mention was that it, too, had originally used part of Asquez' evidence. The *Sunday Times* quoted an 'anonymous eye-witness' who described an SAS man shooting Savage in the back, then running up, putting his foot on Savage's chest and shooting him at point-blank range after shouting that he was with the police. The evidence of the *Sunday Times* 'anonymous eye-witness' was in fact a conflation of the evidence of two witnesses used by Thames—Diana Treacy and Kenneth Asquez.

The *Sunday Times* also concealed the fact that it was impossible for Asquez to have made up his story given that the detail it contained did not become public knowledge until the inquest. The fact that the SAS man was wearing a black beret and had identified himself as a police officer was only revealed in the coroner's court. At a loss to explain how he could have made up details that were true, Asquez said he must have picked them up from street gossip. The mystery of how details which were never made public could have become the subject of street gossip was never probed.

Another witness, British tourist Robyn Mordue, also saw the shooting of Savage. He received a number of threatening phone-calls warning him to 'stay away' from the inquest. The only people who knew that he was a potential witness were the Special Branch. If 'the people involved' whom Asquez feared so much had threatened him, too, it might explain why Asquez felt it necessary to change his story. But despite its impeccable journalistic standards, the *Sunday Times* did not see fit to publish any of this.

Truth for the Tories, and their friends in the press, is that which backs the official lies about the Irish War. For 20 years the British state has tried to hide its colonial war in Ireland behind a wall of lies and disinformation. The only way to break that wall is by taking sides in the Irish War. Mark Reilly

