

the next step

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How the
opposition keeps
Thatcher in
power
see pages 4 and 5

Clapham,
Purley,
Glasgow

BLAME BR BOSSES, NOT RAILWORKERS

WHO is to blame for the mounting toll of death and injury on the railways? British Rail bosses have not waited for the outcome of the official inquiries to point an accusing finger at their workforce. Each disaster has been followed by an official statement speculating that the crash could have been caused by human error on the part of the driver. Now BR chairman Robert Reid has written to his 130 000 employees telling them to pull their socks up and take pride in a job well done. Who do they think they are kidding?

After the Clapham crash in December British Rail executives claimed it was a one-off accident. After Purley they changed their story and scapegoated the driver. After Glasgow they tried to avoid the flak themselves by spreading the blame over the whole workforce. Do they seriously expect us to believe that three major collisions in as many months are an accident, or that train drivers have suddenly turned into reckless maniacs? The responsibility for all the deaths, injuries, pain and anguish lies with those who are now trying to scapegoat railworkers for the deficiencies of a decrepit system which puts capitalist profits before human lives.

There is nothing accidental about the fact that collisions, derailments and injuries have risen on the railways as investment in the national infrastructure has fallen over the eighties. The government has cut back its subsidy to BR by 35 per cent over the past five years. Over the same period accidents and injuries have risen by 30 per cent and collisions and derailments by 20 per cent. The Tories have ordered a further 25 per cent cut in subsidies by 1990 in the run-up to privatisation, which will come by squeezing running costs by getting rid of more jobs.

Government cuts in financial support amounting to £2 billion have already had a devastating impact on safety standards. The Network South East region, the most heavily used



commuter system in Britain, is severely undermanned. There is no doubt that drivers, signalmen and maintenance staff are being forced to work too many hours under too much pressure. According to the Railway Inspectorate's latest annual report, there are now on average four derailments and a significant collision every week.

Notably, the report stated that while 'the number of significant train accidents due to mechanical defects increased', the 'number due to staff error declined'. There have been many complaints of late about drivers passing through signals set at red and causing accidents. The real problem is that the archaic automatic warning system in use in British

trains cannot cope with congested suburban routes. The Purley crash in which the driver passed through a red light might never have happened if BR had invested in more sophisticated fail-safe equipment. Instead, it has halved the signalling sequences on stretches of the Purley train crash line and other busy suburban routes.

The people responsible for the abject safety standards and working conditions have the gall to lecture railworkers about safety standards. But railworkers who have spoken out about appalling safety standards have been victimised, gagged and sacked. Under BR's harsh new disciplinary code, any employee complaining about the corporation in public can be fired. BR has sacked two signalmen, Mike Lisicki and Stephen Jackson, who went on TV to expose the many safety lapses which contributed to the Clapham crash.

After every disaster government and company officials stress that nobody should attempt to use such tragedies to score political points. This is because they know very well that this would expose the insatiable quest for profits as the root cause of all the grief. Yet they are prepared to issue smears and insults against those who are forced to toil under the dangerous constraints imposed by a system which has no regard for the human cost exacted in the pursuit of private profit. If ever there was a time to get a political message across about the necessity to fight for a society organised according to need not profit, it is on the occasion of disasters when the sordid and corrupt character of the capitalist system is exposed for all to see.

editorial

10 March • No 8 • Editor: Joan Phillips

CENSORSHIP: NO EQUIVOCATION

IN an era of unsurpassed state censorship it is a supreme irony that we should have to reiterate the case for opposition to censorship of every sort. Yet the confusion on this question which informs every aspect of the debate about *The Satanic Verses* necessitates a restatement of fundamentals.

Our attitude is one of unequivocal opposition to all forms of censorship. We are uncompromising in our defence of Salman Rushdie's right to publish *The Satanic Verses* and resolute in our refusal to sanction any attempt to ban, burn or censor it. Our opposition to censorship is not based upon a commitment to any abstract principle of free speech. It is based on the understanding that any call for censorship can only give the state greater powers to suppress opposition to the system. The ultimate victims of the state's censorious and repressive powers will be the working class, the oppressed and the left.

It is necessary to restate this simple point because it seems to have been lost on many people on the left. It is entirely reprehensible that prominent left wingers have called for the novel to be banned on the grounds that it is offensive to Muslims. This was how Labour MPs Max Madden, Bernie Grant, Brian Sedgemore and others justified their demand for the blasphemy laws to be extended to protect Islam. Only last week Madden was at it again in the house of commons, tabling a motion urging the author to instruct his publishers to stop producing the offending book. And another Labour MP Keith Vaz called for the book to be withdrawn.

Our defence of the book has got nothing to do with its content: it is immaterial to us that many people find it offensive. But it matters very much to us that the left should even contemplate calling on the state to reinforce laws which are an offence against our rights. These laws began by treating mere disbelief in the established church as a threat to the security of the state; they later came

to be applied against dissenters, radicals and political agitators who threatened the social order; and were last used to prosecute a gay magazine for publishing a poem presenting Christ as a homosexual. We should be demanding their abolition, not their resuscitation.

It is not surprising that some on the left should have been found wanting when it came to defending *The Satanic Verses*. The left has compromised itself too many times in the past on the question of censorship to take an unequivocal stand this time around. Another irony of the current controversy is that Salman Rushdie's novel should have ended up in the restricted, locked shelves in the high-security room of the British Library, alongside pornographic books which many left wingers have long campaigned to be locked away on the grounds that they are offensive.

Pornography has long been a target for censorship for radical campaigners. Many feminists have argued that pornography causes men to see women as sex objects, and have called for tough action from the authorities to stamp it out. There have been numerous campaigns to ban newspaper nudes, restrict sexual violence against women on television, close down sex shops and censor pornographic films. We agree that pornography is offensive, but we disagree with campaigns to censor it.

The left's campaign against pornography has dovetailed with the establishment's crusade to strengthen moral standards and state institutions. Indeed, the authorities have cleverly manipulated concern about sex and violence to give legitimacy to new measures of censorship in the media. The Broadcasting Standards Council's new code of practice explicitly addresses the preoccupations of the left about the stereotyping of women on TV, and so gives officialdom legitimate remit to define what is morally acceptable. By joining the clamour about sex and violence, the

left has implicated itself in the drive towards censorship.

It is notable that few on the left cared to make a fuss about the recent conviction of a sculptor and a gallery director on charges of outraging public decency. The two accused had exhibited in a glass case a mannequin's head, wearing a pair of human fetuses hanging from its ears. The prosecution arose after a telephone call from the *Daily Mail* to Scotland Yard. The significance of the case lay in the fact that such an unprecedented act of censorship should have excited so little protest.

It is not difficult to see why. The outrage in the fetus earring case was entirely due to the sculptor's material: he had used real fetuses of some months' gestation. Had he sculpted models of fetuses no prosecution could have conceivably succeeded. In *the next step* we pointed out that the content of the work was irrelevant in determining our attitude towards its suppression (17 February). In the context of the growing trend towards censorship it was vital to take a clear position against another incursion on our liberties.

Some people took objection to our position (see page 3). Some have argued that the objectionable character of the fetus earring sculpture meant that it was not the best grounds on which to state our rejection of state censorship. On the contrary, we would insist that it is precisely because many people have found the work offensive and refused to defend it against state bans that we should press the case against its censorship. It is by appealing to people's sense of outrage and distaste that the authorities have got away with so much censorship already.

Our attitude towards censorship cannot be determined by what we find to be offensive or otherwise. This is the trap into which the left has fallen so many times, on the issue of pornography, fascism, anti-Semitism and now *The Satanic Verses*. If we approach the question of censorship by justifying the suppression of certain material on the grounds that it is offensive, we will be incapable of opposing the censorship of other material which our enemies consider offensive.

The racist, anti-Semitic and sexist views promulgated by the extremist far right are offensive to anybody committed to the cause of liberation. Our attitude is that they must be politically confronted and discredited by the left in the working class movement. The attitude of many on the left is to demand bans, proscriptions and censorship: the result is the Public Order Act giving the state extensive repressive powers which have been used against enemies the state finds offensive: political activists, black youth and Irish people.

In adopting a selective approach to censorship the left is playing a dangerous game. The left makes the first move by demanding official action in the cause of defending progressive causes. But the right always has the winning hand because its opponents have handed over the initiative to the state on the need for more censorship. There is no use in the left crying foul when the government puts its powers to use against our own people. The fact that the authorities have a virtual free hand to proscribe as immoral, obscene and illegal anything which threatens their system today is an indictment of the confusion which has prevented the left from resisting the drift towards censorship.

It is because the establishment sets so much store by fomenting a climate of reaction and censorship that it has been loath to go on the warpath against the bookburners. Some commentators could not grasp why the government did not respond in its habitual aggressive manner to the calls for censorship of *The Satanic Verses*, and many complained that it was too soft, cautious, tolerant and moderate in expressing its disapproval for the outrages committed against free speech. But Thatcher's conciliatory reaction can only be understood in the broader context of her administration's desire to encourage a climate of censorship.

This accounts for the second thoughts which many prominent figures are having about Salman Rushdie. His book has been denounced by the government as offensive, rude, of dubious artistic worth and anti-British as well as anti-Islam. He has been attacked for provoking trouble, making a lot of money, supporting Charter 88, criticising government authoritarianism, being an ungrateful immigrant, and simply for being here.

The idea that it is irresponsible to write a book which challenges cherished assumptions, established conventions and moral values in a manner which many find offensive can only foster a climate in which people come to accept that there should be some limits on our right to say what we like. In such a climate we should be forthright in our defence of the right to be offensive in the face of state bans.

The advance of coercion and tyranny in recent years shows the dangers of demanding state responses that strengthen the repressive apparatus of the state. From the perspective of the police state of the late eighties it should be clear that opposition to all forms of censorship is the only position consistent with a defence of democratic rights. If the left learned only this lesson then something positive might at least be gained from the Rushdie affair.

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letters

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REFLEX REACTIONS ON CENSORSHIP

KENAN MALIK'S article on the fetus earring trial makes clear the importance of this case when set in the context of the Tories' censorship offensive. What it does not make clear is why 'neither the issue of artistic freedom, nor of the distasteful nature of the work, is relevant'.

Can readers of *the next step* be trusted to get the main point about opposing censorship only if it is artificially isolated from all secondary aspects? That would indeed be curious, given that your feature article in the same issue had hard words for the patronising attitude so often adopted by the left in its propaganda.

Or perhaps these secondary aspects really are to be considered as of no consequence; which would be difficult to square with the same feature article when it speaks of the need 'to develop our theoretical grasp of every issue, from the nature of imperialism to the problem of the ozone layer'.

It is not surprising that a society which degrades and exploits human beings should also produce an iconography of degradation, whether commercialised through the media or thrown up by the cheap thrills substratum of the artistic world. But it is surprising that the RCP should adopt an attitude of benign agnosticism on such matters.

Certainly a new vision of humanity, freed of exploitation and oppression, cannot be simply conjured out of the air; but some tentative first steps can and must be taken towards that vision, by challenging bourgeois society in its cultural, as well as in its political and economic manifestations. As it is, it is left to the brutalisers themselves, the bosses and their state, to set themselves up as judges of what their own system has spawned. This is an irony which reflex reactions about censorship fail to point up.

It is to be hoped that *Living Marxism* will provide new opportunities for these broader issues to be addressed and a forum where our modern-day headshrinkers may be brought to account along with their hypocritical judges.

Louis Ryan
Paris



I FELT that the fetus earrings article was not the best medium through which to make the point of rejecting state censorship. Since there is no comment to the contrary, the reader may well assume that the party supports the production of work of this nature.

I feel that even under a communist society, where safe contraception and abortion on demand would be freely available, some people may still find fetus earrings offensive; abortion itself would be an emotionally difficult process for some at least.

Although there was a ban on publishing the photograph, the subsequent publication in *the next step* cannot be separated from similar sensationalising tactics of the tabloid press. I am sure it is not your desire to present yourselves as fanatical but this article is inviting the conclusion—loony left.

John Devlin
Coventry

RACISM & RESPECTABILITY

I HAVE been following the debate in your paper on the question of the sanctuary movement. It seems obvious to me that the starting point of any such debate must be: which way forward for the anti-racist movement?

For supporters of sanctuary the way forward apparently lies through an alliance with the churches and other dignitaries

based on an appeal to moderate middle class opinion. The current vogue for sanctuary fits in with the cult of respectability which is now much in evidence on the left.

In response to the ruthless posture of the government there is a tendency on the left to embrace moderation for fear that any militant action will invite the wrath of the Tories. I noticed that even Tony Benn dissociated himself from an initiative to commemorate the killing of Blair Peach by the SPG on the grounds that it was organised by a far-left group.

I believe our starting point for organising resistance to racism must be altogether different.

Instead of being bound by the limits of respectability, we should start by asking what sort of movement is necessary to defend the rights of black people, and then go out and fight for what we need. The option of moderation has been tried and failed: only a militant repudiation of the respectable racism of the establishment, based on opposition to all immigration controls, can provide the basis for building an effective anti-racist movement.

Trevor Jackson
Birmingham

NUCLEAR POWER: NO THANKS?

ALL the letters to *the next step* on nuclear power have made the point that the question of closing down nuclear power stations is central to the debate. I cannot agree. We are neither for or against nuclear power as such. Our aim should be to demystify the issue of nuclear power by looking at it, like all other energy sources, in the context of its use by the capitalist system.

Simon Quinn says there is a contradiction between recognising the secrecy which surrounds the nuclear industry, and rationally assessing the dangers of nuclear power (letters, 17 February). In fact we can assess the worst-case scenario which I did in the February issue of *Living Marxism*, or we can make an assessment of the dangers based on the history of the nuclear programme. In either case this requires an investigation of unofficial material, just as it would for any industry.

The letter from Toby Banks shows the dangers of treating the nuclear power industry as a special case (letters, 24 February).

He argues that the risks of coalmining are more clearly understood. But just because the physical process is better understood does not mean to say that the risks are: one of the great unknowns about coalmining is the increased cancer rate caused among the wider population by the waste poured into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels, not to mention its contribution to the Greenhouse Effect and other environmental problems.

The RCP does not have a party position on the issue of closure. It is open to members and supporters of the party to examine the situation and on the basis of the evidence put forward their views about the risks. As in all other industries we should demand an open, wide-ranging investigation of safety. The result of this might be a recognition that nuclear power is qualitatively more dangerous than other forms of energy production or that it is qualitatively safer.

John Gibson
Manchester

MARXISM TODAY, MARCUSE & MYSTIFICATION

I READ *the next step* (17 February) with interest, but some questions were raised. First, why is the concept of CPSLD (an editorial criticising the Communist Party's overtures to the Democrats) worthy of comment? Isn't it just another version of the popular front, ignoring the working class in favour of the bishops and liberal intellectuals?

Secondly, there is a lot of talk about demystification. What does it really mean? At college I was told that it was tied up with Herbert Marcuse, and those, like the Communist Party, who thought the working class was probably dead, but might come to life by the blinding light of demystified politics.

Finally, the depoliticisation of politics. It seems to be another way of describing *Marxism Today's* post-Fordism theory. It all seems a bit like the old *New Left Review* idea that the working class is in thrall to Labourism, and should be replaced by something better. Perhaps, but what?

George Cole
Tottenham



David Rourke

Muslims have no monopoly over censorship in the Rushdie affair

RUSHDIE, STUDENTS & CENSORSHIP

CAT STEVENS came to my college last week to speak on Islamic fundamentalism and the Rushdie affair. At the meeting there was a vote on whether Rushdie should be shot: over a third voted in favour. When *Today* splashed it over the front page the director of the polytechnic was horrified. Students from the Socialist Workers Party organised a meeting on 'Censorship and Rushdie' with an invited speaker. The director used a rule that the poly should be given three weeks' notice of anyone invited to speak to effectively ban the meeting.

The president of the student union—always ready to negotiate with the poly authorities—claimed

his hands were tied. We argued that if he wasn't going to fight censorship he should at least allow the meeting to take place in the student union building. He replied that the poly authorities owned the building, and the director would simply close down the union.

If the student union is owned by the poly authorities, it follows that it is also under the political control of the authorities. Until we have independence from the poly, local authorities and the state, we will always have to back down in the face of censorship, racism and reaction.

Theresa
Kingston Polytechnic

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) 375 1702.

Thatcher's one-party state

AN ELECTIVE

Joan Phillips looks at the state of British politics after the recent spate of by-

There has been a great deal of speculation over the past fortnight about the meaning of the Conservative slump in the opinion polls and the Labour Party's apparent revival. Some people have taken heart from the latest polls showing the Labour Party faring better than for some time, and from recent by-election results showing the Tory Party doing badly. But it would be wrong to read too much into these indicators, and to conclude that the official opposition is about to make a political breakthrough. Indeed,

any celebration of a Labour Party resurgence is simply wishful thinking.

The Labour Party's apparent improvement in the opinion polls needs to be considered in its proper context. In the early eighties the Tories were routinely denounced as the most unpopular government in living memory, and the Labour Party was often 10 percentage points ahead in the polls. Yet after the Falklands War Margaret Thatcher went on to win by a landslide in the 1983 general election. In the autumn of 1985 the

Conservatives were running third in the polls behind Labour and the Alliance and again in late 1986 they were beset by problems arising chiefly from the Westland controversy. Once again, however, the government turned things around and within a matter of months walloped the opposition in the 1987 general election.

For the Tories to lose their overall majority at the next election would require a bigger swing to Labour (eight per cent) than at any time since 1964. But even if Labour were racing ahead with a 10-point

LIVING MARXISM

The March edition of *Living Marxism* is on sale now. The new issue focuses on the debate about civil liberties and constitutional reform. Frank Richards looks at how Margaret Thatcher has exploited the historical strengths of the British establishment and the weaknesses of its opponents to monopolise modern politics. Mike Freeman raises some important problems with the opposition's response to the Thatcher dictatorship.

Plus: Whether Scotland? A round-table discussion with some prominent figures in

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THE DICTATORSHIP

Elections and opinion polls

lead in the polls today, any self-respecting psephologist would wager that Neil Kinnock's party had a better than even chance of losing the next election.

In fact, as the ups and downs in the polls reveal, the Labour Party cannot even sustain a one-point lead over the Tories for one month to the next.

A Harris poll in the *Observer* was the first to hint at an upturn in Labour's fortunes, putting it one point ahead of the Tories at 42 per cent, the party's highest rating since the early eighties. Next came a Gallup poll in the *Sunday Telegraph*, putting the main parties at level pegging on 35 per cent. Another Gallup poll in the *Daily Telegraph* last week again put the two parties at level pegging, this time on 37.5 per cent. But even more revealing was the change in the standing of both parties since an equivalent poll in mid-February: the Conservatives had dropped three points and Labour had dropped 1.5 points. In other words, the Labour Party is still losing support. By last weekend a *Sunday Times* Mori poll had the Conservatives back in the lead at 42 per cent and Labour trailing three points behind.

Default

There was little for Labour to rejoice about after the by-elections in Pontypridd and Richmond either. In the Welsh constituency Kim Howells, the Labour Party candidate, was relieved just to win the seat, with a significant dent in the party's majority after Plaid Cymru increased its share of the vote by 20 per cent. In Richmond the Tories experienced their worst result since the Orpington by-election in 1962, with their majority reduced from 20 000 to 2600. But there was nothing for the Labour Party to celebrate in this. While the rump of the old Alliance parties in David Owen's SDP and Paddy Ashdown's SLD together won 28 500 votes, the Labour candidate lost his deposit with a pathetic 2591 votes.

The two by-election results simply confirmed a trend in British politics which has been established for some time now: the political incoherence and organisational disarray of all the opposition parties. As long as the anti-Tory protest vote lacks a clear focus, Thatcher will continue to rule over a fragmented opposition. Labour's improved standing in the polls and the success of the centre parties in Richmond have come more by default than endeavour.

These developments reflect a mounting unease with the Conservatives, not any enthusiasm for the Labour Party or the centre.

Far from being the harbinger of dramatic new alignments, recent events underline the lack of political movement and the stability of political reactions in Britain today. The Tory Party's base of support among the middle classes and a smaller layer of upwardly mobile working class voters remains fairly solid. Similarly, the Labour Party's traditional constituency in the working class has stayed pretty stable for some years now. All the volatility of political reactions is in

between, among the morass of the centre parties vying for the allegiance of disaffected former Tory voters. The electoral balance is well-established: as long as it persists the Conservatives will always come out on top.

Given this stability in British political life, the Tories can afford to be confident about the future, and to press ahead in the provocative manner to which they have become accustomed. Of course, there is always the potential for such a confrontational approach to have a destabilising effect. But the government's problems remain manageable in the context of its overall dominance of British politics.

Dissent

What has changed in Thatcher's third term and contributed to the present Tory malaise is the problems her government is beginning to encounter among its own natural supporters. Just about every policy the government is now pursuing is highly unpopular. On the economic front the government is grappling with high inflation, high interest rates and high trade deficits. On top of this, a new insider dealing scandal is about to tarnish further the reputation of the City of London. Anxieties about the parlous state of the economy coincide with growing unease about other aspects of the Tory policy programme.

The government's plans for water privatisation, the health service, education and the legal profession have antagonised many people who have been devout worshippers at the altar of Thatcherism. Those in the medical and legal establishment who were ardent supporters of Thatcher's onslaught against the unions are less supportive now that she has turned her attention to the bastions of privilege and corruption over which they preside.

The anti-Tory revolt among vested interests in the professions is spreading to other areas too.

Thatcher is coming under enormous pressure from protesters in predominantly Conservative constituencies over the disruption to their lives and homes presaged by the Channel Tunnel rail link. As the government presses ahead with the third phase of the Thatcher revolution, it is bound to meet a growing clamour of dissent from many who made up the ranks of Tory loyalists in the past.

Prostrate

In the absence of a coherent middle class alternative to the Conservatives, however, dissent of this sort is unlikely to shake Thatcher's monopoly of political power. The British establishment is firmly united behind the government, and Thatcher faces no serious political threats. After 10 years of dictatorial rule, the Thatcherite ascendancy seems as unassailable as ever. The odd by-election might provide the occasional upset for the government. But none of the opposition parties can lay convincing claim to be alternative parties of government.

How did Thatcher establish her political ascendancy, and how can we account for the unique stability which is the hallmark of modern British politics?

It is not much use seeking an

explanation for the Tory supremacy in the trends in voting patterns over the past 10 years. The government may have won three general elections in a row, but Thatcher has failed to increase the Conservative percentage of the vote in the last two contests from its pathetically low level. Her support has stayed fairly stable at around 42-44 per cent, and in the 1987 election the Conservatives won a lower percentage of the vote than in 1964, when they lost. There is clearly no groundswell of popular support for the Tories.

Most people who vote, and the great majority who do not bother, oppose the Thatcher regime.

What has to be explained is how a government backed by a minority of the electorate has dominated society more than any other this century. The answer lies not in the voting figures, but in the peculiar strength of the Tories and the prostrate character of the opposition.

As Frank Richards argues in this month's *Living Marxism*, the Conservatives have played to their strengths, adjusting establishment institutions and policies to meet the challenge of new circumstances ('The dictator in Downing Street', *Living Marxism*, March 1989). The Thatcher regime's greatest success has been its ability to adapt to the conditions of protracted economic decline.

Catchphrase

In this regard the most important shift in British political life has been the way the Tories have overseen the transition from the post-war politics of consensus to a system of confrontation and dictatorial class rule. This transformation has come about as a result of the establishment's recognition of the need to strengthen the authority of the state, as the precondition for forcing through the unpopular measures required to sustain British capitalism.

The overriding theme of the Thatcher decade has been the elevation of nationalism as a key factor in British political life. Under Thatcher the Conservative Party has created a political climate in which any opponent of the government can be branded as unBritish, anti-democratic and an enemy within.

This is the significance of the Falklands Factor, which became a catchphrase during and after the Falklands War in 1982 when an unpopular Tory government rallied patriotic sentiment behind Britain's imperialist aggression against Argentina in the South Atlantic. The way the government played the nationalist card to do down its foreign enemy became the model for future campaigns against enemies within.

Cowering

Of course the Falklands Factor existed long before the Falklands War: British nationalism has long been the stock-in-trade of the establishment. But under Thatcher, it has become a permanent political practice. From Orgreave to Wapping to Broadwater Farm to Dover, Thatcher has appealed to national sentiment against what are branded threats to the British way of life to put her opponents on the defensive.

The consistent criminalisation of the opposition has been the classic innovation of the Thatcher era.

The consequence has been to strengthen the Falklands Factor in British politics. On this foundation Thatcher has faced down the opposition and built herself a reputation as a ruthless and apparently invincible foe. It means that whatever problems the government faces, and it has a lot of them, it can survive as long as it can exercise its authority against cowering opponents.

Thatcher's success is a tribute above all to the weakness of the opposition, and its inability to challenge the nationalist consensus which the Tories have constructed. The Labour Party's devotion to the British state renders it helpless in the face of the Falklands Factor. Indeed, the opposition has helped to consolidate the Falklands Factor by trying to pose as more consistent defenders of the national interest. Because it operates as part of the political consensus which accepts the authority of the capitalist state as legitimate, the Labour Party has been unable to offer a genuine alternative to the foremost party of the nation.

The Labour Party's loyalty to the British state dictates that it should seek to match rather than to challenge Thatcher's nationalist crusade. The history of the past decade has been one of the official opposition moving further and further to the right on to the political ground occupied by the Tories. The watchword of the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock has been moderation in everything. His policy review is designed to efface any remaining trace of radicalism from the Labour Party programme.

Cover

It is a measure of how far this process has gone that centre party politicians should now be arguing that Labour's programme no longer represents an obstacle to an electoral pact among the anti-Tory parties. The demoralisation of the opposition parties is such that they seem unable even to present a comprehensive rebuttal of unpopular policies such as the poll tax, the health service review or water privatisation.

The collapse of traditional party politics throws Thatcher's unrivalled control of the political agenda into even sharper relief.

The policy void which afflicts the opposition is paralleled by the absence of any forceful personality among its ranks. Paddy Ashdown's dithering antics over the past fortnight have demonstrated that he is an even bigger nobody than David Steel. Neil Kinnock's supposed rise in stature over recent weeks owes more to plaudits from the press which is keen to talk up his party's revival than to any transformation in his leadership style. David Owen would appear to have a bit more going for him as a potential prime minister, but he is universally despised as a self-obsessed egotist.

With the parliamentary opposition consigned to a state of limbo, Thatcher has been able to establish her sway over the state machine without any impediment. The advance of state repression under the Tories has given rise to much discussion among critics of the government about the trend towards 'elective dictatorship' in Britain. Lord Hailsham coined the

phrase in 1979, when he warned of the dangers inherent in the British constitutional system of a shift towards authoritarian control of the state apparatus.

In reality we have been living under an elective dictatorship for much longer than Thatcher has been in power. Ten years of Tory rule have simply brought this secret out into the open, and demonstrated that British democracy is but a cover for capitalist dictatorship. Over the past decade the Thatcher regime has expanded the state security forces, extended its repressive powers and crushed every manifestation of dissent in parliament, in the unions, in local government and in the media.

Pretence

The trend towards the establishment of a one-party state is dealt with at length in this month's *Living Marxism*. We pointed out how Britain's rulers in the past have always sought to disguise the true nature of the state as a naked instrument of ruling class coercion by making out that it was an independent institution standing above political conflict. Thatcher has dropped all this pretence and politicised state institutions such as the police and the judiciary, and even education and health, in an unmistakable fashion.

The way in which civil servants have become little more than lackeys of the government exposes the notion of state neutrality as a myth, and reveals the blatant class bias of the British state.

This assessment of Thatcher's unparalleled domination of the machinery of government was confirmed in a *Guardian* special survey last week. This showed how over the past five years the prime minister has bypassed the powerful secret cabinet committees which have traditionally been the motors of government policy, and stamped her authority on every corner of the state machine.

Thatcher not only chairs three of the five most powerful committees, she has resorted to using dozens of ad hoc committees to keep a grip on all aspects of government policy. In many instances, she has swept aside her own ministers in charge of important policy areas and imposed her own solutions without reference to her subordinates. The most dramatic illustration of such an intervention was her decision to introduce a host of repressive measures in Northern Ireland: these included the broadcasting ban on Sinn Féin, the abolition of the right to silence, an oath of non-violence for council candidates and a permanent Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Disarray

Thatcher's control of the state machine shows that behind the cover of elected government stands the might of the capitalist state. It reveals that the government is indeed a dictatorship, which enforces the needs of the ruling class against those who have no stake in the system. The immobilisation of the opposition at a time of growing state authoritarianism underlines the urgency of mobilising an anti-state, anti-capitalist movement that can rally the working class against the Thatcher dictatorship.

The mainstream parties have neither the will nor the capacity to organise such a resistance movement. The current clamour for some form of electoral alliance against the Tories confirms that they have no faith in their own policies or leadership. Far from solving the problems of the opposition, any form of electoral pact could only compound its disarray and decline. The shambles of opposition politics today is a forceful argument for starting afresh. The mobilisation of class forces, not the search for an electoral pact, is the only effective counter to capitalist tyranny.

*Rushdie, the West
and the Ayatollah*

A ROW NOBODY WANTED

When Ayatollah Khomeini issued his death threat against Salman Rushdie there were audible sighs of despair within ruling circles in both London and Tehran. For some time the Western powers have been doing their best to establish closer relations with Iran, and the moderates in the Khomeini regime had been doing their utmost to facilitate such a rapprochement.

The initial muted response to Khomeini's edict, which amounted to a rearguard action by Iran's radicals to redress the balance of forces in the regime against the moderates, revealed that both sides were hoping that it would not lead to an irreversible breach in their carefully cultivated relations.

For the West the affair confirmed the difficulties of reintegrating Iran into the imperialist fold. Since the Gulf ceasefire in August all seemed to be going well for the Western powers. Iran restored full diplomatic relations with Britain, and the moderates were even dropping hints about resuming relations with the 'Great Satan' in Washington.

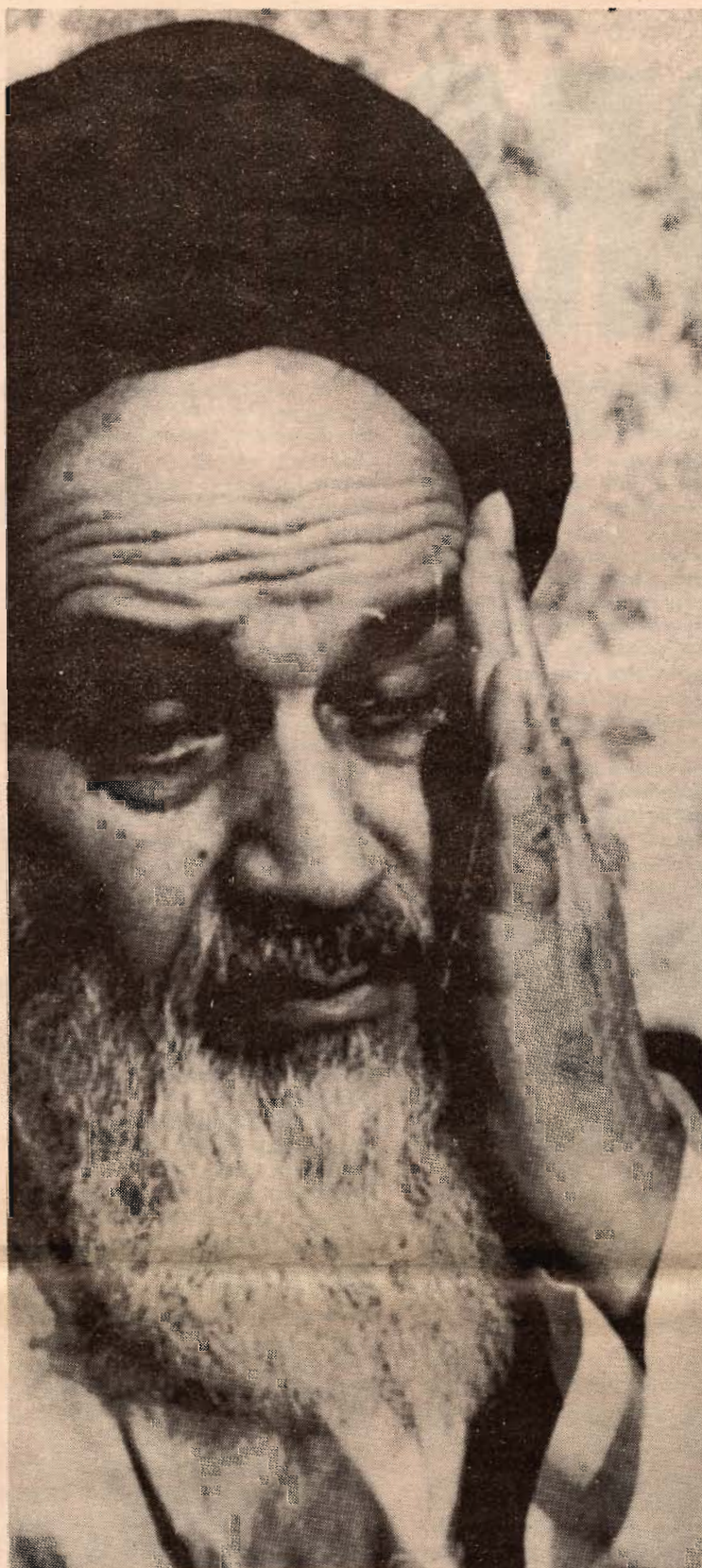
Subdue

After encouraging eight years of bloody warfare between Iran and Iraq, the imperialist world had hoped that anti-Western fervour would be replaced by war-weariness. But Khomeini's hardline reaction reveals that hostility to the Western powers is still a factor in Iranian politics.

After 10 years of turmoil and hardship since the overthrow of the pro-Western Shah, the imperialists have yet to subdue Iran entirely.

The tensions inside Iran are expressed in the conflict between radical and moderate clerics. Each wing is defined by its attitude to the Western powers: the radicals aspire to follow an independent road to Iranian development, while the moderates emphasise the need to improve relations with the West.

Iran's slowness to respond to the row over *The Satanic Verses* indicated that the moderates were gaining the upper hand. A hostile review of the book appeared in *Kahyan Farangi*, a cultural journal read by the Iranian elite, almost three months before Khomeini's execution order. Only after violent demonstrations in neighbouring Pakistan did Khomeini issue his *fatwa* against the British author.



Khomeini has tipped the balance in favour of the radicals within the Iranian leadership

By denouncing the author of *The Satanic Verses* as a blasphemer against Islam, Khomeini forced the moderates on to the defensive. It was inconceivable that anybody would dare condone an insult to Islam by defending a heretic like Rushdie. 'As long as I am alive I will not let the government fall to the liberals', declared Khomeini, making clear that his real target was those clerics who favour improved relations with the West.

If Khomeini's intention was to manipulate a religious controversy to put his opponents on the run, then his strategy certainly worked in the short term.

The reaction of the moderate president Ali Khamenei was instructive. Khamenei at first invited Rushdie to apologise for the offence he had caused. Before too

long he felt compelled to state that he was at one with the ayatollah in supporting the death threat against Rushdie.

The West's response to Khomeini's threats has been subdued. A year ago Western warships were blasting Iranian targets in the Gulf; today the imperialist powers have reacted with olive branches to what would once have been the occasion for a declaration of war. Such meekness does not mean that the West is becoming less interventionist. On the contrary, the Western powers are hoping that the results of a decade of concerted pressure on Iran will soon pay off. But the continuing volatility in the region shows that it will not be easy to establish a new pattern of imperialist domination.

Daniel Nassim

Yugoslavia

Pogrom in Kosovo

THE autonomous Yugoslav province of Kosovo is under a virtual state of siege. Troops and tanks patrol the streets, hundreds of the majority Albanian population are under arrest, public protests are banned and there is speculation that a night curfew is about to be declared. The government clampdown in Kosovo follows a successful general strike by Albanian miners at the Trepca zinc mine, in protest at attempts by Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic to exercise greater control over Kosovo. The strike forced the resignation of three pro-Serbian officials from the local party leadership.

Ethnic Albanians have been accused of plotting an armed revolt in the province. Lazar Mojsov, a member of Yugoslavia's collective state presidency, claimed that a blueprint for the revolt was in government hands. Such claims have encouraged demonstrations by thousands of angry Serbs, demanding an end to alleged violence against Serbs in Kosovo, the reinstatement of the three party officials and an extension of Serbian rule over the province. The situation in Kosovo is one aspect of an explosion of nationalist tensions in Yugoslavia.

Reforms

In common with the rest of Eastern Europe, economic decay is well advanced in the country. In 1987 the republics of Macedonia and Montenegro, as well as Kosovo province, declared themselves bankrupt. All are in the most backward southern part of the country. In the country as a whole inflation is rampant, foreign debt is out of control and over a million workers are unemployed. The pattern of economic decay follows a rough north-south divide, along which opposing nationalist camps in the Yugoslav bureaucracy now align themselves.

The more prosperous northern republics of Slovenia and Croatia, and the autonomous province of Vojvodina, enjoy living standards more akin to those of Western Europe. But in the poorest southern republics of Montenegro and Macedonia, and particularly in Kosovo, many workers earn only a third of the average northern wage. Here too, eight million Serbs, the largest group in a population of 23m, harbour longstanding grievances at being denied their dominant pre-war position.

Differences between north and south have crystallised around economic reform. There are few disagreements about the nature of the reforms needed: an end to government subsidies of consumer goods, an overhaul

in the management of enterprises and an effort to attract foreign and domestic investment. The debate is about how the reforms should be implemented. Northerners want more decentralisation, while southerners led by Milosevic favour more old-style centralised planning. The north fears that Milosevic's plans will damage the prosperous areas by forcing them to subsidise the south. The south is concerned that decentralisation will mean more subsidy cuts, unemployment, ruin and upheaval.

Concerned to protect their own positions, bureaucrats north and south have channelled growing working class resentment in a nationalist direction. Milosevic has tried to harness the anger of Serbian workers in a nationalist movement to strengthen Serbia's position in the federation as well as his own challenge for the national leadership. An anti-Albanian pogrom atmosphere is growing in Serbia: Albanian workers have been forced to Serbianise their names to avoid persecution.

In Slovenia, nationalism finds another focus. Angry at having to subsidise Yugoslavia's poorer regions, Slovenians have become vocal in their criticism of the Serbian-dominated national army. A campaign against the military in the local party youth paper *Mladina* led to the trial of Slovenian activists in 1988. Milosevic's anti-Albanian campaign has encouraged reactionary secessionist tendencies among Slovenian nationalists.

Tragedy

Yugoslavia's two million ethnic Albanians have a long history of resistance to their subordination in the Yugoslav federation. In 1968 they were granted greater autonomy after years of terror. This only served to heighten national feeling and in 1981 the army was sent in to crush another round of nationalist demonstrations. The present unrest is tame by comparison. While objecting to the extension of Serbian rule over their province, demonstrators insist on their loyalty to a united Yugoslavia and even carry photographs of Tito.

As troops and tanks impose a Serbian reign of terror in Kosovo, Slobodan Milosevic seems to have taken one more step towards a dominant position in the Yugoslav federation. The tragedy is that the working class should be venting its anger in chauvinist demagoguery, rather than in hatred of the Stalinist bureaucracy which has monopolised power for 40 years.

Russell Osborne

Venezuela erupts

The military occupies every corner, police vans speed through the city streets, violent clashes rage between shanty town dwellers and the security forces in which hundreds are killed, thousands injured and countless numbers arrested. A state of emergency is in force with a curfew from 6pm to 6am, no public transport, telephone lines down and shops and workplaces shut.

This could be a description of military rule under any third world dictatorship. But it is Venezuela, 2 March 1989, under a newly-elected social democratic president, Carlos Andrés Pérez, whose government had just enforced dramatic public transport price rises under an IMF-imposed austerity package. The violence did not stop the government going to Washington to sign the IMF letter of intent

which promised more of the same anti-working class measures in return for a stand-by loan of \$450m.

Venezuela has a reputation for 30 years of stability. But the country is also the fourth largest Latin American debtor (after Brazil, Mexico and Argentina) with a foreign debt of \$36.5 billion. Oil exports provide four-fifths of the dollars available to pay the debt. Yet, Venezuela's oil earnings have fallen dramatically since the oil price collapse in 1986. Last year oil earned \$8.4 billion, compared to \$15 billion in 1984. Today half of Venezuela's export earnings are swallowed up

simply paying interest on the debt.

Venezuela has tried to be the model debtor nation, one of the few Latin American countries to service not just its interest but also its principal loan. But lower oil prices and economic problems inherited from former president Jaime Lusinchi mean that after barely a month in office, Pérez has had to impose austerity measures under IMF diktat. In return for economic restructuring, he hopes to obtain credits of more than \$10 billion from the IMF and the World Bank over the next five years.

'Latin American democracy is

gravely threatened', declared Pérez a month ago, 'by now evident cases of political destabilisation are taking place in the continent because of the growing misery of our people'. The violent upheaval in a stable country like Venezuela illustrates the destabilising potential of the debt crisis on the whole region. The repression used to quell the disturbances shows what is in store for the masses of Latin America as their governments try to coax reluctant loans from the West by ferocious attacks on the working class.

Stefanie Boston

In her interview with Michael Buerke on the BBC's *Nature* programme, Margaret Thatcher posed as the champion of a worldwide campaign to save the Earth from environmental destruction. She made much of the fact that she was hosting an international conference in London to discuss a schedule for phasing out the use of CFCs (chloro-fluorocarbons).

What should we make of Thatcher's recent conversion to a CFC-free world by the end of the century? And are her environmental critics right to insist that anything short of an immediate and total ban on CFCs will lead to major human and environmental damage? A critical examination of the issue shows that while there is an environmental problem, it has been exaggerated by a selective use of the evidence available.

It also reveals that Thatcher's emphasis on ozone is motivated by political and commercial factors rather than environmental considerations.

CFC gases are used in a wide variety of consumer and industrial products and are thought to be destroying the thin layer of gas in the stratosphere known as ozone. The ozone layer prevents most of the sun's life-destroying ultra-violet radiation from reaching the Earth's surface. The latest research indicates that there may be a reduction in the ozone layer above the North Pole each spring. Ten years ago a hole in the ozone layer was discovered over Antarctica.

This research shows that CFCs could significantly reduce the ozone layer, but it does not show that they pose the catastrophic problem claimed by some scientists. There is still no proof of an ozone

Earth's atmosphere

THE OZONE FACTOR



Spray on: there are more important things to worry about

hole above the North Pole and although one does exist above the Antarctic it is not a permanent phenomenon: it appears each year with the return of the sun after the

Antarctic winter (for a further explanation see this month's *Living Marxism*). Moreover, the threat is certainly minute compared with major social problems such as

starvation, malnutrition and war.

Despite the absence of proof, previously unknown scientists now write regular columns in the national press proclaiming the

certain threat posed by CFCs. In their move into the world of journalism they seem to have left their science in the laboratories. *New Scientist* contributor John Gribbin issued a warning in the *Guardian* of a sudden global drop in ozone concentration similar to that experienced in the Antarctic each spring. This sensationalist and speculative approach may make good journalism, but it can only cause unnecessary popular alarm.

The climate of panic which envelops the ozone issue dovetails nicely with Thatcher's aims.

Unlike many other environmental problems such as the Greenhouse Effect, the capitalist class can fairly easily do something to protect the ozone layer. This is the main reason why the Tories give it such prominence. The second reason is a narrowly commercial one. Alternatives to the five key CFCs are already available. In the case of aerosols for example, substances other than CFCs will do the job. For other purposes more 'ozone-friendly' CFCs are available.

Falling

By the end of this year production in Britain will have been cut by 50 per cent: but we should question Thatcher's motives. The fact is that right up to the last minute Britain refused to sign the 1987 Montreal agreement which sought to cut the use of CFCs by 50 per cent by 1999. Only when the government was sure it could compete in the market for the alternatives did it sign and start to champion the ozone-friendly alternatives to CFCs.

Environment minister Nicholas Ridley put the record straight inadvertently at last week's ozone conference in London, arguing that environmental protection was an opportunity for business as well as a challenge. The world market in pollution abatement equipment is worth £100 to £150 billion, and growing fast. 'Although we still have a net trade surplus in this area, the UK's share is, I am afraid, falling.' (*Financial Times*, 2 March)

Lucrative

The main market for alternatives to CFCs is the third world. Hence Thatcher's propaganda aims to put pressure on these countries to accept a phase-out of CFC production. Many third world countries have just got hold of the technology to produce CFCs. In the case of China there is understandable annoyance at the attitude of the major capitalist powers. Having just been sold the old equipment by Italy and Japan, and while presently consuming less than one per cent of the world's total CFCs, China has been singled out as a problem because it aims to use CFCs to provide each household with a fridge by the year 2000.

The capitalist powers will probably agree on the means to phase out CFCs, and reap the lucrative financial rewards from imposing their will on the third world.

Their interest in the problem of the ozone layer is primarily a commercial one. They are also keen to use concern about the dangers to the Earth's atmosphere as a cover for their inability to deal with other environmental problems. And they are happy for the problem of the ozone layer to be elevated in such a way that it distracts attention from the far greater social problems caused by the capitalist system.

John Gibson

Broadcasting Standards Council

SEXISM AND CENSORSHIP

The Broadcasting Standards Council's draft code to clean up television attacks sexual stereotyping, but it also represents a further encroachment of state censorship.

The publication of the code last week surprised everyone with its anti-sexist rhetoric, and its demands for much more care in the use of unthinking stereotypes of women. Mary Whitehouse, who wanted sterner measures against the display of sex and violence on television, has condemned the code as liberal and permissive: 'After 25 years of campaigning for such a council, if this is all we get it is very disappointing.' But the BSC's code does not represent a moderation of the Tory crusade to censor television. Rather it reveals the extent to which the left has played a part in promoting censorship.

Appeal

At first sight there appears to be little common ground between Whitehouse's campaign to promote the Christian virtues of family life in broadcasting and the left's campaigns against sexual stereotyping in the media. When a member of Women Against Violence Against Women declared her support for Whitehouse in a BBC television discussion about pornography in the early eighties it could be dismissed as an ironic anomaly. But the concern of both pressure groups with curbing pornography on television found them agreeing on the need for censorship.

This concern to challenge the degrading images of women promoted by the media informed the National Union of Journalists' *Campaign for Real People*. But frustration at their lack of success



The Tories want to revive the old Madonna of motherhood, virtue and chastity

led many women's rights campaigners from persuasion to legislation as left wingers in local government embraced their concerns. The women's committee of the Greater London Council framed anti-sexist specifications for advertising on London Transport.

In 1986 Brighton's Labour council banned the sado-masochistic film *9½ Weeks*. Labour MP Claire Short put forward a private member's bill to ban page three nudes from newspapers.

The BSC has worded its censorship code in the language of

feminism to appeal to the broad consensus that exists on the need to curb sexist presentations of women. This consensus has allowed the official censors in the government and media to impose their own standards of morality. In fact the code goes way beyond previous restrictions on sex before 9pm. It seeks to address the moral values programmes express, demanding, for example, that broadcasters distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' violence.

Powers

The shift from proscribing certain acts to demanding broadcasts operate within a given moral framework is a key development which makes possible the proscription of anything which the authorities define as immoral, from the expression of support for those fighting for freedom from British rule in Ireland, to the presentation of a homosexual relationship.

The BSC code highlights the dangers of making any concessions to the authorities on the question of censorship. The sexual stereotypes which are daily paraded in television programmes are degrading to women. But we cannot support any move which would give the authorities even greater powers to determine what we can and cannot watch. The establishment will always use such powers to promote its own narrow worldview, and to outlaw any dissenting views as beyond the pale. Thatcher's reactionary crusade to restore the bigoted values of the Victorian era underlines the irony of appealing to her regime to redress sexist stereotyping through censorship.

James Heartfield

the next step

£1 solidarity price

Free speech and
censorship
see page 2

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 10 March 1989 • No 8 • 40p

Police tell Turkish workers

'SIGN YOUR OWN

DEPORTATION ORDER'

On a demonstration that you won't have heard anything about from your daily newspaper, 5000 Turkish workers took to the streets to shout their defiance against Britain's racist immigration laws. They were protesting against a paramilitary swoop by police and immigration officials on a Turkish clothing factory in Dalston, London, which went largely unreported in the national media.

The secrecy which surrounded the raid on the factory, the arrests and the deportations which followed, called to mind the police state methods of many a third world dictatorship. But there was nothing secretive about the way the Thatcher regime launched its latest anti-immigrant offensive in a blaze of publicity a month to the day before the police raid.

'The word is to go out and whack them' declared one immigration official after Tory home secretary Douglas Hurd announced a new crackdown on immigrants in January. 'It's going to be like Mendis—scratched and deported within 48 hours.' Hurd's announcement followed hard on the heels of the heavy-handed police operation to seize and deport Sri Lankan refugee Viraj Mendis. It was an invitation to the police to harass and intimidate any immigrant they could get their hands on.

The first people to get whacked under the Tory get-tough policy were Turkish workers at a clothing factory in Dalston. Haydar Medem described what happened. 'At 11.30am on Monday around 60 police officers with some immigration officials ran into the factory and blocked all the doors. They held up court orders and said we were all under arrest and that we had to obey orders. I thought the Third World War was starting. Only 50 of us work in the factory so

there was more than one police officer for each of us. While they spent the next two hours checking our identity we were not allowed to smoke or go to the toilet.'

Medem was taken to the police station at 2pm and questioned on his own for an hour. He was treated like a common criminal, only he was denied even the elementary right to make a phone-call. 'They searched me, made me take my shoes off and took my bank card and notebook. The interrogation room was very cold and I was very scared. I told the police several times that I wanted to make a phone-call to the Turkish Community Centre but they wouldn't let me. They kept me in this room until I was released at about 6.30pm.'

Nafiz Bostangi, president of the Turkish Community Centre, told us that as well as the 38 people who were originally detained, 13 husbands and wives were picked up over the next few days, bringing the total to 51. Of these, seven were immediately deported, 38 have now been released and six are still in custody. 'The seven who were deported signed their own deportation orders but they were forced to do this', said Bostangi. 'They

were told that if they do not sign the deportation orders they could be kept in police custody for months.'

The threat of being held at the mercy of the police and immigration officials was for some a more daunting prospect than returning to Turkey. Many Turkish asylum seekers have been kept in detention centres for up to seven months: 'These centres are like prisons and those in them are effectively serving prison sentences.' Bostangi believes that the raid has set a precedent for further attacks. 'The future will be very difficult for us. Recently the police have been more aggressive. Since Monday's raid I've heard that a bakery in Wembley was raided and on Friday another Turkish factory was raided.'

The threat of deportation is particularly acute for those who face persecution in Turkey. 'Everyone stands to suffer from the military junta in Turkey. But nearly all of those detained were Kurds and the situation is especially dangerous for them. If they speak Kurdish or continue their culture they will be persecuted. The English papers have reported how people in Kurdish villages have been forced to eat human excrement and how peasants have been beaten. Amnesty International figures show that 250 000 have been arrested and tortured since the 1980 military coup. In my opinion it is a couple of million.'

The oppression of the 12-million strong Kurdish population of Turkey has forced thousands to come to Britain to seek asylum. In Turkey the language and culture of the

Kurdish minority are suppressed, and Kurds are subject to discrimination, torture and political imprisonment. In Britain they are forced to live under the shadow of deportation, compelled to work in insecure and deplorable conditions and now forced to undergo the humiliation of raids, arrests and captivity.

The government is trying to drive a wedge between legal and illegal immigrants in Britain. 'I am sure those Turkish people who came to Britain through the proper legal process will support our action' said Dalston police chief Peter Twist. Bostangi is contemptuous of these divide and rule tactics: 'During the 1983 general election Thatcher found some black men to say "We're not black we're British". People wondered where did the Tories find these blacks? I say to the Hackney police "Where did you find these Turkish people?" He's speaking for himself not the Turkish community.'

We demand an end to the police raids, official harassment and home office deportations, and the abolition of all immigration controls. The working class must reject the official definition of foreigners as overstayers, illegals and criminals. Our attitude should be that immigrant workers are our allies, and our enemies are those in the home office, the immigration department and the police who peddle chauvinist ideas and persecute the victims of racism.

Jon Hann



Pandora Anderson

No worker is illegal: Turkish immigrant workers demonstrating in Dalston against British state racism