

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 6 April 1990 • No 12 • 40p

THE TRAFALGAR SQUARE REVOLT



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

See Pages 2, 4 and 5

WHY THE BIRMINGHAM SIX
ARE STILL INSIDE
Page 7



POLICING IN
THATCHER'S BRITAIN
Page 3

SOUTH AFRICA: THE BITTER
FRUITS OF COLLABORATION
Page 6

Editor: Joan Phillips

AFTER THE TRAFALGAR SQUARE REVOLT

THE ESTABLISHMENT response to last Saturday's Trafalgar Square revolt has been to try to identify the instigators and organisers, and to unearth the revolutionary conspiracy behind the eruption of anger against the government and the police. In reality, there was no organisation and no conspiracy—that indeed was the crucial weakness of this greatest upsurge of popular resistance against the Thatcher regime for many years.

For the home secretary David Waddington, the 20 Labour MPs whom he claims have endorsed non-payment of the poll tax were to blame for the wider defiance of the forces of law and order at the close of the national demonstration against the tax. While Westminster Tory MP John Wheeler blamed 'socialists' in general, other right-wing commentators targeted Militant and the Socialist Workers Party. Desperate to demonstrate the respectability of the Labour leadership, Roy Hattersley went further than most Tories in demanding tough and exemplary sentences and legal action against the SWP or anarchist groups if they could be shown to be responsible.

More radical commentators were well aware that Militant and the SWP played no role in organising the revolt. They sought to demonstrate their particular value to the establishment by pointing the finger at the anarchists. Militant MP David Nellist hoped that he could deflect the attack on his own group by offering anarchist groups as an alternative target for state repression. Tommy Sheridan, of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation which organised the march, and himself a Militant supporter, said he had 'no qualms about informing the police' about the identity of those responsible for organising the violence. *Tribune* editor Phil Kelly appeared on television to display his extensive intelligence on the group Class War. Within days investigative journalists had exposed underground anarchist and Maoist organisations previously unknown outside a few pubs in London.

Whenever there is a revolt against the established order, the ruling class blames the influence of a tiny minority of dissidents and extremists and seeks to discover the conspiratorial clique responsible. The British establishment simply cannot believe that ordinary people are so angry about the effects of government policies and so embittered against the police that they are prepared to fight back. If there was no conspiracy, then one must be invented; the alternative is too terrible to contemplate.

What really happened in Trafalgar Square and beyond last Saturday was that the suppressed resentments of a decade erupted in a night of revolt (see pages 4 and 5). The poll tax provided the catalyst, police provocation the final ignition. The revolt was not the work of a lunatic fringe of a passive and respectable mass. It directly involved thousands, with the broad sympathy of tens of thousands more, united in hostility against the

government and outrage at the violence of the police.

The revolt was not planned, organised or led by anybody. This was why, despite the courage and determination of the protesters, it culminated in mass arrests and hundreds of casualties. This is also why the revolt yields no immediate benefits, even for the campaign against the poll tax. While demonstrators are dragged through the courts, the government has already announced plans to push ahead with capping Labour councils which have overstepped its poll tax recommendations.

We salute the spirit of resistance displayed in the Trafalgar Square revolt. It has shown the government that it must now consider the consequences of mass defiance of its policies. It has also shown the police that they can no longer expect to charge into crowds and get away unscathed. We condemn the Labour leadership and those on the left who have added their voices to the chorus of reaction and assisted in the conspiracy witch-hunt.

We emphasise, however, that an outpouring of popular anger does not amount to a political alternative. The Trafalgar Square revolt underlines the need for a movement that can give direction, organisation and leadership to those who want to fight back against the existing system and build a better society.

It is a telling sign of the times that the biggest anti-government protest for many years took place largely outside the influence of the official labour movement and the left. The old left is irrelevant to the new spirit of resistance. We need to build a movement that can take it forward and direct it beyond riots towards revolution.

THE BIRMINGHAM SIX

'I DON'T LIKE you Mr Mullin. You're a member of the British Labour Party and that makes you a member of the establishment just like them.' This acerbic remark is made by an actor playing one of the IRA men alleged to have carried out the Birmingham pub bombings in the Granada Television docudrama *Who Bombed Birmingham?* It is intended to reinforce the frequently asserted lack of sympathy between Chris Mullin, now a Labour MP and the author of the book *Error of Judgement* on which the film was based, and the IRA. In the process, however, it establishes the true position of Mullin and many other investigative journalists, lawyers, politicians and churchmen who have taken up the cause of the Birmingham Six.

For Mullin and the rest, the case of the Birmingham Six, like those of the Guildford Four, the Maguires, and others, is a miscarriage of justice. They are concerned with the plight of all these victims of injustice, but they are also concerned with the effect of these cases in discrediting the whole system of British justice. They argue that these cases undermine the moral legitimacy of British rule in Ireland and the efficacy of the campaign to defeat the IRA, of which they fully approve.

The case against the Birmingham Six has long been discredited by the inadequacy of the forensic evidence and the evidence that their alleged confessions were fabricated and signed after savage beatings. Mullin's distinctive approach, however, is to go beyond proving the Birmingham Six not guilty to finding the real perpetrators of the bombings. The recent docudrama went a stage further than his book in naming the alleged guilty men, through the device of revealing a British Special Branch report. This shows that the authorities knew the real identities of the bombers in 1975, when the Six went on trial.

The consequences of naming four men (the name of a fifth was withheld 'for security reasons') are to widen still further the circle of guilt and suspicion around the Birmingham case. It sets these men up as targets for harassment or even assassination. It invites the Irish authorities (all those named are resident in the South) to pursue legal action against them, and the British authorities to seek extradition. It guarantees them a trial in conditions even more grossly prejudicial than those that customarily surround Irish political cases.

The IBA justifies broadcasting the names in the Mullin docudrama because it was 'satisfied' that the Granada evidence confirmed that the men were all 'terrorists'. But who is the IBA to set

itself up as judge and jury over five Irishmen? It is even more part of the British establishment than Mullin is. Back in 1971, Lord Aylestone, head of the former ITA, explained that his approach to the Irish republican movement was to ensure that it got 'no more coverage than the Nazis would have done in the last war' (see *The Irish War*, Irish Freedom Movement handbook, p163).

The Birmingham Six case involves a cover-up from the bottom to the very top of the British legal system. As a result of a series of investigative accounts of the case this cover-up has been unravelling at increasing speed for several years. We hope that it will soon result in the release of the Six, though the official responses to the Granada docudrama suggest that the British authorities are still going to try to bluff it out. We also hope that the exposure of the case does further discredit the British legal system and that it weakens the consensus of support for British policy in Ireland. If so the release of the Birmingham Six will all the sooner be followed by the release of all those Irishmen and women now rotting in British jails who will never get any help from Mullin, *World in Action*, Ludovic Kennedy or Cardinal Basil Hume—for the simple reason that they are guilty of the crime of fighting for Irish freedom.

FIGHTING FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

THE GOVERNMENT's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill was given an unopposed second reading by parliament on Monday. The government announced that it would allow a free vote on abortion time-limit amendments during a debate on the floor of the house. The debate will be guillotined to stop the bill being filibustered.

The bill will introduce legal time-limits on embryo experimentation for the first time, and will bring the process firmly under the control of the state. Last weekend Tory minister Geoffrey Howe threw the pro-abortion movement into confusion when he announced that he intends to add a personal amendment to the bill which would reduce the time-limit on abortion from 28 to 24 weeks.

Howe's amendment is likely to be accepted. Such influential figures as Margaret Thatcher and health minister Kenneth Clarke, as well as many members of the medical establishment, and the weight of public opinion, support a reduction to 24 weeks.

The response from women's rights campaigners has been divided. Co-ord, the parliamentary supporters of 'a woman's right to choose' support the proposed 24-week time-limit. Some have argued that it is time to 'concede the argument on 24 weeks for social abortion'. Others, such as Labour left wingers Ann Pettifor and Clare Short, along with some trade unions and more liberal medics, have argued that it is inappropriate to allow abortion to enter the embryology debate.

This discussion misses the point. Pro-abortionists have refused to take an unequivocal stance on the embryology bill itself; some left wingers have even argued that it should be supported. Yet the bill, even unamended, would mean a serious attack on women's rights.

By setting a time-limit after which embryos will be legally protected, the bill itself formalises the idea that at some stage fetuses have rights. The government has simply seized its chance to consolidate its advantage and push home the attack inherent in the bill.

While building on its gains in the formal sphere of parliament, the establishment is also carrying through the attack on abortion to the real world. In West Lambeth in London, the authority with the highest abortion rate in the country, the council has slashed the budget to three Brook abortion and contraception clinics by £45 000, leaving the area with no clinic on Saturdays. We can be sure that this is the shape of things to come.

The only way to fight for the abortion rights that women need is to be equally unequivocal in our response. We can accept no reductions in abortion time-limits; but neither can we accept a bill which will give rights to fetuses at women's expense.

BRITAIN PREPARES FOR WAR

'THE NEW EUROPE', warns defence minister Tom King in this week's defence white paper, 'will be full of uncertainty as well as promise'. Thus Britain's response to the end of the Cold War, the decline in East-West tensions and the coming reunification of Germany is not to reduce military expenditure, but to build up its armed forces. King insists on Britain's need to protect its position in a world made increasingly insecure by the collapse of the post-war balance of power.

There has been much recent discussion about the 'peace dividend'—the idea that the disintegration of the Stalinist world and the Warsaw Pact should enable Western governments to divert resources from military to civilian purposes. For King, 'peace dividend' is 'a phrase we do not use'. Given its weak position in an unstable world, Britain must prepare, not for peace, but for war.

Two defence analysts from Bradford University have noted how nuclear arms control agreements are being by-passed by conventional weapons that are just as lethal but are not subject to any negotiations. Their judgement is that 'firepower is being increased as personnel is reduced' (*Independent*, 26 March). King concluded his recent address to the house of commons defence select committee by calling for 'higher spending on the quality of equipment and its reliability'.

The defence white paper insists on the need to maintain the 'basic elements' of Britain's defence policy: 'A vital role for Nato and the presence of US troops in Europe, a need for nuclear weapons, a continuing British contribution in Germany, and flexible, versatile forces that can, when necessary, operate outside the Nato area.'

But, in the light of recent dramatic events in Europe, what is the role of Nato? If, as the white paper finally admits, the threat of Soviet invasion of Western Europe is non-existent, then what is left to hold the Western allies together? At their recent conference in Cambridge, Thatcher and West German chancellor Helmut Kohl agreed that Nato should be maintained, but for different reasons. Thatcher wants to preserve Nato's former role in Europe of keeping 'America in, the Soviets out, and Germany down'. Kohl sees Nato as a vehicle through which Germany can fulfil its political ambitions. How these divergent views can be reconciled within Nato in the future remains to be seen.

Other difficult questions are thrown up by the changes in the Eastern bloc and the resulting move towards German unity. Why should the USA be regarded as a European power with large numbers of troops in Germany? Why indeed should Britain maintain a vast army on the Rhine? As the irrationality of propaganda justifications of the old alliances is increasingly exposed, each Western country is building up its independent military capability.

The peoples of the third world, menaced by British forces from Belize to the South China Sea, are likely to be the earliest victims of Nato's 'out-of-area' operations. But in today's rapidly changing, nuclear-equipped world, nobody is safe from the Western warmongers. The defence white paper confirms the urgency of reviving a spirit of anti-militarism in Britain, an enfeebled power, but one that is still capable of inflicting terrible destruction in the world.

This is the last of the next step before the Easter holidays. The next issue will appear on Friday 27 April.

Publisher Revolutionary Communist Party, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX • c copyright
Printer Press Link International (UK) Ltd (TU).
Annual subscription rates (individuals) • Britain and Northern Ireland £26 • Europe and Irish Republic £34 • North Africa and Middle East (airmail) £34 • Americas, Asia, Central and Southern Africa (airmail) £37 • Australasia and Japan (airmail) £40 • Outside Europe — All destinations (surface mail) £44.
Circulation (01) 375 1485. Newsdesk (01) 375 1485. Fax (01) 377 0346. Correspondence to The Editor, the next step, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX
ISSN 014 350 X 6 April 1990. Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office.

THE MOVEMENT WE NEED

Saturday's riot showed the fighting spirit of the working class, but it did not provide a political alternative, writes Mike Freeman

Tony Benn said it was the biggest demonstration he had ever seen in Trafalgar Square. It was certainly the angriest protest I have seen in the square since the march following Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972, which culminated in a major riot in Whitehall. This time the riot began in Whitehall and spread into the square and far beyond. As I stood in Pall Mall East in the early evening, watching the smoke and cinders blowing across the square and surveying the broken windows and streets littered with debris, it was apparent that central London was witnessing the biggest popular revolt since the unemployed rampaged through the same streets in 1886 (see below).

It was a day of memorable images. After Orgreave and Wapping, the sight of riot police charging crowds has become familiar. What was remarkable about last Saturday was the number of times the crowd charged back. Defenceless demonstrators confronted the highly equipped and protected paramilitary forces with courage and determination. Brave people dragged total strangers from under the feet of police horses and brought them to safety. Protesters constantly regrouped and surged back against the police lines.

Explosion

A man climbed on to the summit of a towering crane and then at terrifying speed ran out along the jib to wave his placard from the very pinnacle. As he looked down on Nelson, the crowd cheered in acclamation. Later, in the evening a young black man climbed up (how?) on top of a double decker bus becalmed in Piccadilly Circus. He leapt on to another bus, harangued the crowd (and the riot police), jumped into the ready arms of the throng and jogged away.

This was no day of random violence. The crowd selected its targets with discrimination. South Africa House in Trafalgar Square was an early focus of attack; later South Africa Airlines at Oxford Circus lost every window. The Hippodrome, the Café Royal and other elite entertainment spots were singled out. Passing Rolls Royces, Mercedes and Jaguars fared badly. Nor were the demonstrators much interested in looting; this was mostly done by opportunists following on behind.

The Trafalgar Square revolt was a spontaneous explosion of anger and frustration against the government and against the police.

It was distinguished by its intensity and sustained character. It was sparked off by the determination of the police to keep the march going past Downing Street. It erupted into wider conflict when the police appeared to panic and drove first riot vans and then horses at speed through the crowd.

Many commentators, including the police and politicians, have attempted to distinguish between a mass of peaceful demonstrators and a tiny minority of hooligans. But this does not correspond to reality. The minority that was prepared to fight back was several thousand strong, and the bulk of the crowd was broadly sympathetic towards them. Indeed, the more the police attacked, the more outraged the majority

became. Instead of dispersing as instructed by police and official organisers alike, thousands stayed on around the square in solidarity. Many young working class people, who were not on the demonstration but had come into the West End for an evening out, joined in the fighting.

As the evening wore on groups of demonstrators rallied at points around the West End, chanting anti-poll tax slogans. Yet it was evident that the poll tax had become merely a symbolic focus for a galaxy of grievances against the government. The Trafalgar Square revolt was not against the poll tax as such, but against a decade of Thatcher's Britain. Indeed the march itself had not rallied dissident Tory loyalists from the shire counties, or even defecting Tory voters from the South-east—all of whom are undoubtedly opposed to the poll tax.

The march, and the subsequent revolt, were largely supported by those who are alienated from government policy right across the board.

By comparison with recent national demonstrations, Saturday's was overwhelmingly young and predominantly working class. The contrast with the previous weekend's anti-apartheid protest in Trafalgar Square was striking: that march was not only much smaller, it was much older and more middle class. The anti-poll tax demo was strikingly diverse. It included a group of Yorkshire miners and the two young women who live in the flat next door to me, who work in central London offices and are generally more interested in partying than in demonstrating.

Mangy

The anti-poll tax protest included many students and many young people who are out of work. These ranged from people who are on various training schemes and mostly live at home to the most conspicuous product of Tory social security reforms—young people who have been forced into homelessness and vagrancy. Gangs of bedraggled youths, living rough, begging, finding solace in alcohol, glue and drugs, often accompanied by mangy dogs on strings, have become a familiar sight in British cities. They have been prominent in recent anti-poll tax protests and were well represented in Trafalgar Square. This embittered legacy of the Thatcher years got some of its own back on Saturday.

Talking to people in the crowd I was struck by a sharp divergence. On the one hand, people were very angry, deeply alienated from the mainstream of British political life and, as the revolt showed, ready to fight back against the system. Yet, on the other hand, most young people exhibited a staunch indifference to considering any political alternative. Any form of Marxism or socialism appeared simply old-fashioned and irrelevant. Indeed, many were deeply cynical about politics in general, left-wing just as much as right-wing.

The activities of the established left during Saturday's demonstration illustrated this point. At the start of the march in Kennington Park, Militant stewards appeared to be playing a prominent

organisational role. Large numbers of people appeared selling *Socialist Worker* and distributing Socialist Worker placards. By the time the march reached Trafalgar Square, however, few stewards were to be seen and the attempt to sell socialist papers to the uninterested masses had largely been abandoned.

Many people still carried the Socialist Worker placards, but often with the distinctive logo torn off the top. This was done, not out of any particular objection to the Socialist Workers Party, but to register a general disdain for the left. By the time the fighting started the Militant stewards had disappeared altogether. Thus, far from organising or provoking the trouble as red-baiting journalists and politicians have alleged, the traditional left was incidental to it. Militant organised the march and the SWP mobilised for it, but both were swept aside by the angry, but largely apolitical, youth that turned up.

Futility

Other observers have recognised the marginal role of the left and have pointed instead at the black flags of 'anarchists' as evidence of covert organisation and conspiracy. In fact, anarchists in the traditional sense had even less of a role in Saturday's events than did the left. If, however, the term 'anarchism' is understood as a general hostility to any form of leadership, political party or indeed politics, then such an outlook was espoused, more or less articulately, by a substantial number of the participants in the Trafalgar Square revolt.

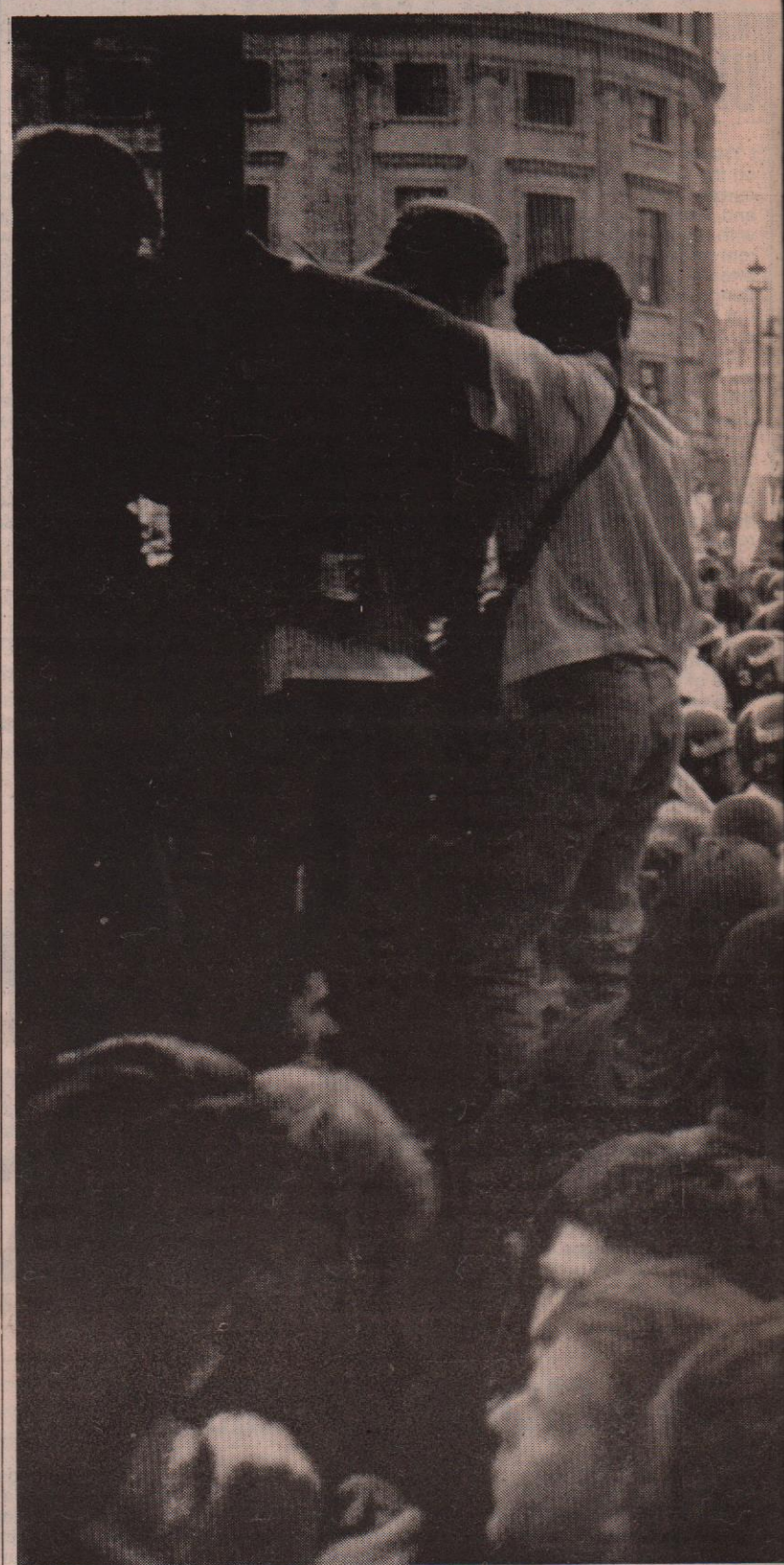
This sort of diffuse anti-authority, anti-left outlook has gained influence as the traditional institutions of the labour movement—the trade unions and the Labour Party—have been discredited in government and in opposition. It has been reinforced by the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which is generally interpreted as demonstrating the futility of any attempt to build an alternative to capitalism.

The truth of the Trafalgar Square revolt was that it was provoked by the police and organised by nobody.

This is why the police eventually came out on top, arresting nearly 350 people and injuring 75 people so badly that they needed hospital treatment. The march organisers have no plans to defend these victims of the police onslaught and no strategy to take forward resistance against the poll tax. Saturday's events have forcefully confirmed the assessment we made in the *next step* last week, that 'the growing momentum of recent poll tax protests disguises a serious lack of political direction'. The question we posed then is even more relevant now: 'Who is going to lead resistance to the poll tax?'

Let's look more closely at the plans put forward by Militant, through the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation which formally organised Saturday's demonstration. We can distinguish three aspects. First, it recommends that people do not pay their poll tax. But this is not a political strategy, simply an exhortation to individuals.

It does have the advantage, however, of



The Trafalgar Square revolt showed the potential of the working class; but only a

allowing Militant to claim the credit for the scale of defaults and arrears on poll tax payments in Scotland. 'We gave those planning not to pay the courage to see it through' says federation chair Tommy

Sheridan in this week's *Militant* (30 March). Sheridan claims that the fact that 42.5 per cent of people in Strathclyde have either not paid or are in serious arrears is the result of the federation's influence. In

THE PALL MALL

IT'S NOT THE FIRST

'ON THE afternoon of 8 February 1886 a meeting of the unemployed was called by the Fair Trade League in Trafalgar Square to demand public works and protective tariffs as a solution to unemployment. The audience of around 20 000 was composed predominantly of unemployed dock and building workers. This meeting was interrupted by the Social Democratic Federation who denounced the Tory exploitation of unemployment and put forward a programme of socialism and revolution. After some scuffling between the two groups, the SDF leaders led part of the crowd out of the square with the intention of dispersing in Hyde Park.

In Pall Mall however, after some provocation from clubmen, stones were thrown at the Carlton Club. After this, the march turned into a riot. All forms of property were assailed, all signs of wealth and privilege were attacked. In St James' Street all the club windows down one side of the street were broken, and in Piccadilly, looting began. By this stage the SDF had

lost control of the crowd and after a hasty meeting at the Achilles statue at Hyde Park corner, the leaders retired. The crowd did not disperse however. In Hyde Park they overturned carriages and divested their wealthy occupants of their money and jewellery. They then moved on to South Audley Street looting every shop along their route, and from there returned via Oxford Street to the East End. The progress of the crowd had been virtually unhampered since a misheard order had despatched the police to Buckingham Palace and the Mall. 'In a word', as the *Times* put it, 'the West End was for a couple of hours in the hands of the mob' and it considered the event more alarming than 1848. Not since 1832 had private property in London been so disturbed.'

(Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp 291-2)

Though the parallels between the events of February 1886 and those of March



revolutionary movement can realise that potential

fact, according to a parliamentary answer given last week, only 16.5 per cent of Strathclyde voters have failed to make a poll tax payment—and they are now facing coercive measures (*Guardian*,

30 March). What is Militant's response to this threat?

This is where the second aspect of its anti-poll tax strategy comes into play:

'If Neil Kinnock were now to throw his authority behind the millions not paying the poll tax, it would seal the Tories' fate and guarantee victory for Labour.' (*Militant*, 30 March).

It must be very reassuring for Glaswegians awaiting a visit from the sheriff's officer (bailiff) or facing deductions from benefits, to know that the editor of *Militant* is ready to swing his considerable influence with the leader of the Labour Party.

While Militant appeals to Kinnock to back a strategy of non-payment, he is already taking action in exactly the opposite direction.

On 28 March Labour's executive proposed taking disciplinary action against councillors who refuse to set poll tax charges or advocate non-payment (*Guardian*, 29 March). Kinnock has already forced Tower Hamlets Labour Party to remove a clause supporting non-payment from its manifesto for the May local elections. Lambeth has suffered a similar fate. In Liverpool, Militant councillors stayed away from the council meeting at which the poll tax was set rather than face disqualification by Kinnock for opposing the poll tax.

Millionaires

While Militant dreams about Kinnock coming to the rescue of non-payers, Labour councils around the country have already set poll tax levels and are moving ahead to complete the timetable for collection. The third aspect of Militant's drive against the poll tax completes its escape from this harsh reality:

'The defeat of Thatcher's poll tax by

mass non-payment will be an historic victory in itself, but it will also be a step towards the socialist transformation of society.' (*Militant*, 30 March)

Though Militant remains unclear about how this 'historic victory' is to be achieved, it is confident that the 'socialist transformation' will be brought about by 'a Labour government which takes the levers of economic power out of the hands of capitalist millionaires'. But, as Kenan Malik noted on these pages last week, Labour's top leaders spend much of their time these days in the City of London reassuring Britain's 'capitalist millionaires' that a future Labour government would be kind to them.

Proscribe

The absurdity of Militant's position is that in the very week when it was fantasising about Kinnock backing non-payment of the poll tax or expropriating the bourgeoisie, Labour's national executive committee was discussing further repression against Militant. Prominent right wingers want to proscribe the anti-poll tax federation and to discipline the two Militant MPs—Dave Nellist and Terry Fields—who are active in it. We can expect these pressures to accelerate after the events in Trafalgar Square. We can also anticipate that Militant and its supporters on the left will scale down protests against the poll tax for fear of further provoking the wrath of the Labour leadership, especially as the election draws closer. If this is what socialism has come to mean it is not surprising that the eyes of the nation's youth glaze over at the very mention of the word.

The combination of a tremendous

spirit of resistance and a lack of political direction evident in the Trafalgar Square revolt reveals the urgent need for a new form of political leadership in British politics.

The riot provided an emotional release for the pent-up frustrations of Britain's disaffected youth. But without a movement which can give a political shape and direction to such anger the authorities will always regain control.

We need to relate to the drive to fight back while challenging the anti-leadership, anti-party and anti-political prejudices that at present hold people back. It is necessary, but not enough, to show that without leadership, organisation and politics we cannot even defend ourselves against the police, never mind stop the poll tax.

Awareness

We also have to explain that the failures of Labourism and Stalinism are the result not of leaders, parties and politics in general, but of those particular left-wing traditions. We have to convince people that leadership is necessary to raise the awareness of the working class of its historic potential and to guide it towards its realisation. We need to show that a party is an indispensable vehicle for cohering the working class against the power of the capitalist state. We need to demonstrate the relevance of Marxist politics to the problems of today, from the poll tax to the Baltic states. The Trafalgar Square revolt showed that many people are ready to fight back against the system. Now we need to build the movement that can take this fight forward.

ALL RIOT OF 1886

TIME IT'S HAPPENED...

1990 are striking, two differences are worth noting. The first is that whereas the Pall Mall riot was followed by a wave of panic within the establishment, Saturday's revolt was received with the expected condemnations, but with no great sense of impending doom. In the late 1880s there was a great upsurge in donations to charitable agencies offering relief schemes for the unemployed in the hope that these would remove this menace from the streets. Today the British establishment is much more confident about its position, and Thatcher may well calculate that a law and order campaign around the Trafalgar Square events might even distract attention from the poll tax and turn the issue to her advantage.

The second, and related, difference is in the status of socialism as a rallying focus for the masses. In 1886 Marx had only been dead for three years and Engels was still active in London politics. The SDF had recently been founded as the first explicitly Marxist organisation in Britain.

Theoretically weak and politically unstable it may have been, but it attracted immediate support among intellectuals, politically aware workers and activists among the unemployed. As a growing movement throughout Europe socialism inspired workers and provoked deep fears within the ruling class. Today, after decades of Labourism and Stalinism, socialism is probably weaker in Britain than it was before the SDF was established.

William Morris, an early member of the SDF, but now more famous for his wallpaper designs, summed up the significance of the Pall Mall riot:

'What was the meaning of it? At bottom misery, illuminated by a faint glimmer of hope, raised by the magic word *socialism*, the only hope of these days of confusion. That was what the crowd represented, whatever other elements were mingled with it.' (Quoted in EP Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, p409)

THE BITTER FRUITS OF COLLABORATION

As president FW De Klerk sends his troops into Natal, Barry Crawford explains what lies behind the savage war inside the black community

Reports from the province of Natal make grim reading. The bloody fighting, which originally erupted in 1987, has now intensified to the point of civil war. The violence has claimed at least 3000 lives, the majority of whom are black and Zulu-speaking. With the apartheid regime sending its troops in this week, the carnage can only intensify.

Some Western commentators have located the cause of the near civil war in a power struggle between Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Inkatha organisation and supporters of the United Democratic Front who back the African National Congress. Others have put it down to indiscriminate criminal gangsterism. Neither account explains the real cause of the struggle. To understand what is going on we have to examine how apartheid has created divisions within the black community—and how today's reform process is intensifying those divisions.

In 1951, the newly elected nationalist government passed the Bantu Authorities Act which placed all Africans under a system of tribal institutions controlled by Pretoria. There was widespread opposition to the imposition of the act. In Natal black defiance was led by Chief Albert Luthuli, the local Zulu chief and ANC leader.

In 1952, the ANC launched a campaign of civil disobedience against apartheid laws, including the Bantu Authorities Act and the Group Areas Act. The Pretoria regime brutally crushed the opposition movement. Luthuli was dismissed as chief. The government's strong-arm tactics paved the way for the implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act.

By the mid-sixties state repression had broken the back of anti-apartheid resistance.

The ANC was banned and its leaders either exiled or imprisoned. The suppression of the ANC created a political vacuum inside South Africa and allowed government stooges like Buthelezi to achieve prominence. Buthelezi used homeland government structures as a platform for his political ambitions.

In the fifties Buthelezi was a supporter of the ANC. As a student he had been expelled from Fort Hare University for taking part in an ANC Youth League boycott in protest at a visit to the college by governor-general Brand van Zyl. The secretary of native affairs warned him that if he wished to succeed in his political ambition to gain the Zulu chieftainship his 'future record should be such that it would wipe out the Fort Hare escapade'. Two years as clerk in the department of native affairs in Durban did the trick. In 1953 he was appointed acting chief. Another four years of loyalty earned him the official title of chief of the Zulu tribe. In 1972 Pretoria appointed him chief minister of kwa-Zulu.

Untenable position

Buthelezi won significant support in Natal on the grounds that he could fight the apartheid system from within. At a time when the ANC had been crushed and internal opposition was at a low ebb, this argument had a certain resonance. The ANC itself backed Buthelezi's stance.

At the same time Buthelezi's relationship with the apartheid state enhanced his credibility as a respectable politician. Trips abroad to Buckingham Palace, the Vatican and several African capitals, all arranged by Pretoria's department of information, allowed Buthelezi to project himself as a leader of stature.

So long as the opposition to apartheid remained quiescent, Buthelezi could retain the support both of the ANC and of Pretoria.

However the growth of the black working class and the upturn in militancy in the seventies brought about a process of political differentiation within the black community. This eventually undermined Buthelezi's populist appeal and strained his relationship with the ANC.

In 1973 there were more than 160 strikes in Natal; more than 60 000 workers took action. Barney Dladla, a kwa-Zulu cabinet minister, played a prominent role in leading the strikes. As a result there was at first significant support for Buthelezi and the kwa-Zulu government among black workers in Natal.

However, the strikes placed Buthelezi in an untenable position. To stabilise the homelands and create a base of support for the stooge governments, Pretoria had created a black middle class, largely by channelling investment into the homelands through the Bantu Investment Corporation. The working class unrest was a direct threat to this new layer of businessmen, who demanded a crackdown on the strikes. The kwa-Zulu legislative authority expelled Dladla and attacked the workers, creating a rift between kwa-Zulu and the trade unions.

The 1973 strikes in Natal provided the impetus for a revival of the black trade union movement throughout South Africa.

Black students too became radicalised. In response



Buthelezi has intensified the war in Natal to win a place at the negotiating table

Buthelezi founded Inkatha in 1974, to establish a power base distinct from the kwa-Zulu government. Buthelezi used Inkatha to promote Zulu identity through celebrating past Zulu resistance to Boer and British invasion, and to present himself (falsely) as a direct descendant of the royal Zulu lineage.

Inkatha grew rapidly through the seventies, particularly thanks to the support it enjoyed from the ANC. ANC chief Oliver Tambo told a conference in Lusaka that it had pushed Buthelezi to 'use the legal opportunities provided by the bantustan programme to participate in the mass mobilisation of our people'. 'In the course of our discussions with him', continued Tambo, 'we agreed that this would also necessitate the formation of a mass democratic organisation in the bantustan that he headed. Inkatha originated from this agreement' ('Document of the second national consultative conference of the ANC', 1985).

The cooperation between the two organisations allowed Inkatha to present itself in the colours of the ANC. Buthelezi was able to argue that Inkatha was using the kwa-Zulu legislative assembly as a platform from which to promote the struggle against apartheid. In reality kwa-Zulu was using Inkatha, and its links with the ANC, to win greater support for the homeland.

The growing wave of militancy boosted the fortunes of the ANC. As the ANC gained in popularity and came to dominate black politics in South Africa, so a rift grew between Inkatha and the ANC. The formation of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) in late 1979 helped bring relations between the two organisations to breaking point. In 1980 Cosas launched a school boycott in the township of Kwamashu outside Durban. Students at kwa-Zulu's Ngoye University demonstrated against the presence of uniformed Inkatha members attending their graduation ceremony. The protests posed a direct challenge to Inkatha's authority since it controlled education in kwa-Zulu.

Paying with blood

Inkatha's violent suppression of both the protests marked a turning point for the organisation. From then on its survival depended solely on state patronage and its own capacity to suppress any opposition.

The formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) two years later posed an even more fundamental challenge to Inkatha's existence.

In response to Cosatu, Buthelezi formed a scab union, the United Workers of South Africa (Uwusa). Its leadership is made up of businessmen, ex-Inkatha officials and members of the kwa-Zulu legislative assembly. Uwusa initiated a campaign of violent intimidation of Cosatu members. Most notoriously Uwusa was responsible for violently smashing the miners' strike in Natal.

Successful strikes and stayaways, particularly in the Pietermaritzburg area, exposed Inkatha's eroding support. In 1987 Inkatha began a recruitment drive in the Mpumza area in greater Edendale. People who refused to join were assaulted; their houses were often burnt down. The police helped Inkatha establish vigilante armies to impose its rule.

The violent struggle between Cosatu and Uwusa has spiralled into civil war with Pretoria backing Inkatha's fight for survival. De Klerk's reform programme has intensified the violence. Many blacks saw the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC as a signal that one final surge would bring the homelands system tumbling down. At the same time Inkatha, backed by the state, increased its attacks. Buthelezi wants to sit at the negotiating table with De Klerk, alongside Mandela. To force Mandela's hand therefore Buthelezi is stepping up the war.

Mandela's emergence as a conciliator in the Natal war has played into the hands of Inkatha and the apartheid regime. While Pretoria's police and army are conducting business as usual in black areas, Mandela is under pressure to restrain ANC supporters. It will mean that black workers will be disarmed while Inkatha vigilantes and apartheid gunmen remain on the loose. Mandela's welcome on Tuesday for the introduction of troops into Natal can only mean backing for a clampdown on militant workers.

The main loser in the Natal war is the black working class. With both Inkatha and the ANC now collaborating with the Pretoria regime, black workers have been left isolated. There is little doubt that the authorities will now go on the offensive and crush any resistance they meet in the province. It is becoming clearer by the day that black workers will pay with their blood for the ANC's inability to challenge divisions within the black community and its acquiescence to De Klerk's programme to reform apartheid.

WHY THE BIRMINGHAM SIX ARE INSIDE

The Granada Television docudrama *Who Bombed Birmingham?* has raised again the controversy over the Birmingham Six. Kenan Malik explains why the men are still in prison

On Thursday 21 November 1974 two bombs shattered the centre of Birmingham. Two pubs—the Mulberry Bush and the Tavern in the Town—were devastated. Twenty-one people were killed, and 167 injured.

Three hours later five Irishmen—Patrick Hill, John Walker, Richard McKelney, Gerry Hunter and Billy Power—were arrested as they stepped off the boat train in Heysham in Lancashire to board a ferry for Ireland. Another Irishman, Hugh Callaghan, was later arrested in Birmingham. The following Monday the six men were charged with the bombings. A year later, in November 1975, they were convicted and each sentenced to 21 terms of life imprisonment.

The Birmingham Six have always protested their innocence, claiming that they were beaten and tortured into making their 'confessions'. The forensic evidence on which their convictions were based has long since been discredited. Police witnesses have confirmed that the six were assaulted, threatened with guns and deprived of food and water before making their statements. Nobody who has studied the case can be in any doubt that the six had nothing to do with the bombings. So why, 15 years later, are the men still in prison?

The continued incarceration of the Birmingham Six can only be understood in the context of Britain's war against the Irish people.

The Birmingham pub bombings were a turning point in the establishment's propaganda war to win domestic support for its occupation of Ireland. They played a key role in allowing the British authorities to discredit the Irish struggle by smearing it as a criminal conspiracy. No single event has played a greater role in underpinning the British government's criminalisation strategy. To admit now that the Birmingham Six are innocent would be a considerable blow to its war machine. For this reason the British authorities have obstructed every attempt by the Six to obtain their freedom.

Britain constrained

When the war first broke out in 1969, Britain's propaganda machine was caught unawares. The early media coverage revealed the brutality of the British Army and the Loyalist death squads all too clearly. There was much sympathy within Britain for the struggle in Ireland. After the carnage of Bloody Sunday, for example, when British paratroops shot dead 14 unarmed civilians in Derry in 1972, 20 000 people marched on Downing Street and fought pitched battles with the police.

In the eighteen months that followed Bloody Sunday, sporadic protests against the war rocked areas with large Irish populations such as London and the Midlands. In the week before the pub bombings, Birmingham was hit by a row over plans for a march to commemorate the death of IRA volunteer James McDaid, killed during a bomb attack on Coventry telephone exchange. Labour home secretary Roy Jenkins banned the march and bussed in 1300 police to contain the city's Irish community.

Support in Britain for the Irish struggle constrained the government's ability successfully to prosecute its campaign of terror. To undermine domestic support for the Irish struggle the authorities set out to criminalise the fight for freedom. They sought to portray the war as a law and order problem and the IRA as a bunch of psychopaths and murderers. The Birmingham bombings, and the reaction that followed, played a key role in winning widespread support for this viewpoint.

Tough measures

The pub bombings caused anger and shock among British workers. At the massive Longbridge car plant in Birmingham 1500 workers out of nearly 20 000 downed tools and walked out. Stewards at the British Leyland tractor plant in Walshwood Heath called on 'the official trade union movement to call a day of mourning in the city' (quoted in *the next step*, March 1980).

But while there was widespread anger within the working class about the bombings, overt hostility towards the Irish community was initially kept in check. The Birmingham *Post* reported that 'a call by the NF organisation for a strike yesterday in protest at the Birmingham bombings went unheeded in the Midlands and there was no repetition of Friday's spontaneous walkout' (26 November 1974).

The press and the politicians, however, took advantage of the anger to whip up a climate of anti-Irish hysteria. The *Daily Mirror* demanded an immediate repressive response from the government:

'The measures had better be tough' demanded its banner headlines. They were. Within a week the Prevention of Terrorism Act, with its draconian powers of detention and expulsion, was on the statute book. Support for the act was so overwhelming it did not even require the formality of a vote in parliament. The official campaign helped transform the initial working class reaction of shock and horror into a witch-hunt against the Irish community.

The most important reason for the creation of a popular consensus for repressive measures against Irish people, however, was the capitulation of the left to the lynch-mob atmosphere generated by the authorities.

'We do not preach surrender to acts of violence', claimed *Tribune*, the voice of the Labour left. 'Those who are guilty of them must be punished' (29 November 1974). The Communist Party newspaper, the *Morning Star*, claimed that 'whoever ordered this act to be done and whoever carried it out, it can only serve the cause of the sinister and reactionary forces in our society' (23 November 1974).

Even the far left joined the anti-Irish bandwagon. *Socialist Worker* attacked the bombings—'Socialists must condemn these senseless killings'—and then blamed the republican movement for the subsequent repression meted out by the British government:

'The bombings have hardened the determination of the government to continue its senseless violence

in Northern Ireland. They have banned the IRA and extended police powers with a draconian bill which will wipe out political and trade union liberties fought for by our class for more than a century.' (30 November 1974)

The support the left gave to the idea that Irish freedom fighters were common criminals who carried out 'senseless killings' showed how successful the government had been in its criminalisation strategy. The authorities took full advantage of the popular mood after the bombings, pushing through the PTA and proscribing the IRA.

The PTA has been the cutting edge of the state's criminalisation strategy and the government's main weapon in its prosecution of the Irish War in Britain. It was not designed to convict IRA bombers—existing criminal law was more than sufficient for this task. Indeed the police initially objected to the PTA because the extraordinary powers of arrest, detention and deportation without trial were an embarrassment, making public already-existing police practice.

The main effect of the PTA was *political*, criminalising the republican movement and its supporters and preventing the emergence of an anti-imperialist movement in Britain. Its role, as Roy Jenkins put it in introducing the bill to parliament, was to 'stem the infection from Ireland'. The PTA is an ideological weapon aimed at insulating British politics from the destabilising effects of the Irish War.

The PTA makes it an offence to raise support for 'terrorism'. The authorities have a free hand to determine what constitutes 'terrorism'. The act allows the home secretary to 'exclude' anyone whom he believes is involved with terrorism from Britain to Northern Ireland. Thus the threat of deportation hangs over every Irish person in Britain. Finally, the PTA empowers the police to arrest people without a warrant and to hold them without charges for up to 48 hours. Once that time is up, the police can apply to the home office to extend the period of detention for another five days, again without laying charges.

The PTA targets every Irish person as a potential criminal. Since 1974, half a million people, almost all of them Irish, have been stopped, searched and questioned under its provisions. Up till September 1989 6709 people had been arrested under the act; fewer than 600 had been charged. The effect of the PTA is to instil a climate of fear into the Irish community and to make any show of support for the Irish struggle a criminal offence. At the same time it has helped win widespread acquiescence from the British public to the government's criminalisation strategy. Since 1974 there has not been a single demonstration in support of the Irish struggle in this country to match the one which followed Bloody Sunday.

The importance of the Birmingham pub bombings in helping the British establishment decisively to win the propaganda war explains the continued incarceration of the Birmingham Six.

To admit now that the six have spent 15 years in jail simply because they happen to be Irish would be a tremendous blow to Britain's propaganda machine. Hence the authorities have obstructed every attempt by the men to win their freedom. From top to bottom the British establishment is involved in a conspiracy to ensure the men remain in prison.

Reality of war

In 1976 the then lord chief justice Lord Widgery refused to give them leave to appeal. In 1980 the master of the rolls Lord Denning dismissed their civil case for assault against the police. In 1988 the appeal court again turned down an appeal for a retrial. As Lord Denning explained in dismissing the case in 1980, the release of the Birmingham Six would have implications which no British court would be willing to risk:

'If the six men win it will mean that the police are guilty of perjury and they are guilty of violence and threats and that the confessions were involuntary and were improperly admitted in evidence; and the convictions were erroneous. That would mean the home secretary would either have to recommend that they be pardoned or he would have to remit the case to the court of appeal. That is such an appalling vista that every sensible person in the land would say "It cannot be right that these actions should go any further".'

Even more than with the Guildford Four, who were finally released last year 15 years after having been framed for the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings, the conviction of the Birmingham Six exposes the sordid reality of Britain's war against the Irish people. Their release would lift the lid on Britain's colonial war in Ireland. That is the 'appalling vista' that neither Denning nor any other member of the British establishment wants to contemplate. Hence the Birmingham Six remain under lock and key.

Those campaigners, like Labour MP Chris Mullin, who imagine that the Birmingham Six will be released because they now have irrefutable proof of their innocence are simply naive. The British establishment has known from the moment of their arrest that the six were not guilty of the bombings. But the propaganda importance of the Six means they remain inside.

It remains to be seen whether, as in the case of the Guildford Four, the government is forced to release the Six as a damage limitation exercise. But as long as Britain continues its occupation of Ireland, so Irish people will continue to be framed and imprisoned. Just this week three Irish people framed for conspiracy to murder former Northern Ireland secretary Tom King opened an appeal against their conviction in London. The Winchester Three will no doubt receive the same treatment meted out to the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six. The only way we can ensure that they, and all Irish prisoners languishing in British jails, are released is by ensuring a victory for the Irish people in their struggle for freedom.



Flying the flag for Irish freedom is a criminal offence in Britain

With the world changing at a dizzying pace, it has never been more important to get to grips with trends and events. The place to do it is at **Preparing for Power 1990**, our annual seven-day summer school.

This year's discussions at **Preparing for Power** will cover everything from the struggles in Eastern Europe to the crackdown on acid house parties, from Chaos theory to embryo experimentation. **As we enter the 'Nervous 90s', don't panic-prepare.**

Summer school organised by the Revolutionary Communist Party

preparing for power 1990

Friday 20 to Friday 27 July
Central London

16 specialist courses. A hundred additional workshops and discussions. More than 1000 attenders last year. Special discounts for early booking: until 1 June, a ticket for the full week costs £30 waged/£21 unwaged.

For tickets and further details, write to Preparing for Power (T), BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to RCP Association.