

the next step

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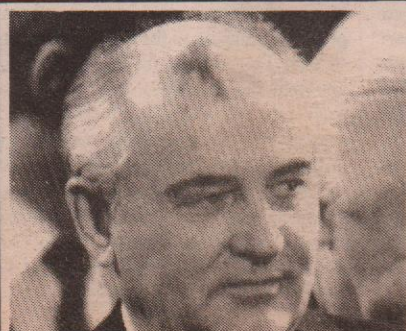
Tebbit launches racist campaign



STAND UP FOR BLACK RIGHTS

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Editor: Joan Phillips

Western Europe has a shameful record on race. The open nationalism of the Communist parties, particularly in France, helped confuse the working class and allow racism to take hold. The Labour Party in Britain has been responsible for putting some of the most racist legislation on to the statute book. The disintegration of the left, however, has made it even easier for the working class to become prey to racism and chauvinism. The necessity for a new working class movement capable of stemming the tide of racism and reaction has never been clearer.

HOSTAGE TO IMPERIALISM

THE RELEASE this week of the American hostage Robert Polhill after three years of captivity in Beirut has intensified media attention on the plight of the 16 remaining Western hostages in Lebanon. This focus on the hostages results in a seriously distorted perspective on real events in Lebanon and the wider Middle East and serves to justify further Western interference in the region.

It is understandable that the families and friends of those who have disappeared in Beirut should seek to maintain a high public profile for these cases as a way of keeping pressure on the government to negotiate their release. The friends of the British journalist John McCarthy have been particularly energetic and effective in keeping his fate in the news. Kidnapping is a sordid business and the plight of its victims and their friends and families arouses universal sympathy.

Yet it is important to note that Western governments are not reluctant to have public attention focused on the issue. Government ministers regularly attend commemorative events, greet victims' families at publicised receptions and make statements denouncing the groups responsible and demanding the unconditional release of the hostages. The US government's refusal to send a junior diplomat to Syria to receive Polhill last week, however, suggests more than a token refusal to negotiate—negotiations are evidently taking place all the time. It reveals that the Western powers are much more concerned about keeping the hostage issue alive than they are about getting the hostages released. It almost seems that they would rather the hostages stayed in captivity and remained a focus of Western grievance than help secure their immediate release.

The focus on the ill-treatment of a few Western hostages by Lebanese factions is a grotesque inversion of the realities of life in the Middle East. According to the veteran commentator on Beirut, Trevor Fisk, there have been thousands, possibly tens of thousands, of Lebanese hostages taken by various local militias, mainly backed by foreign powers, over the years since the civil war first erupted in 1976 (*Independent on Sunday*, 1 April). Most of these people have probably been tortured and killed, but none of their families knows their true fate. The Israelis are still holding hundreds of Shiite Muslims captive in prisons in Southern Lebanon. While the British press worries about Terry Waite, the archbishop of Canterbury's envoy, nobody hears much about Mahmoud el-Jiar, an Egyptian Muslim cleric, or Sheikh Abdul Kasim Obeid, a Shiite Muslim leader, both kidnapped by Israeli forces.

It is important to recall that while 17 Western hostages occupy the centre of world attention, nearly twice that number of Lebanese have been killed every day since the war began—a total of 150 000. In the time that Polhill was held by a Palestinian group in Lebanon, more than 800 Palestinians, many children or old people, died in the *intifada* against Israel. According to a US state department report, in 1989 alone some 400 died, between 5000 and 20 000 were injured and more than 9000 were imprisoned.

The Western hostages are the unfortunate victims of the bloodbath that the Western powers have created in the whole region. By focusing on the sufferings of the hostages and their families, Western governments are preparing public opinion to accept further military intervention by Western forces or local allies to secure imperialist interests in the Middle East (see page 6). The result will be even more death and devastation throughout the region.

A footnote. In July 1988 the US cruiser *Vincennes* shot down an Iranian civilian airliner over the Gulf, killing all 290 passengers. This week its captain, William Rogers, received from president Bush the legion of merit, 'for exceptionally meritorious conduct' during its period in the Gulf.

DOWN TO EARTH

'THIS IS a movement to change people's behaviour. It's really like a religious conversion.' Thus proclaimed Denis Hayes, the San Francisco lawyer who launched 'Earth Day' in 1970 and now celebrates the global expansion of the Green crusade. This year's celebrations last Sunday involved 3500 events in the USA alone, attracting an international television audience of 200m in 140 countries. Showbiz stars appeared in network spectaculars; there were marches, festivals and special church services. George Bush declared himself the 'environmental president' and Al Gore announced that he was the 'Green Democrat' contender for the succession in 1992. MacDonalds launched the MacRecycle USA and other major US corporations including oil, motor and chemical companies presented eco-friendly products, packaging and advertisements.

In Britain, people have a more restrained approach to religion than in the USA. Yet the Green revival has gripped Britain too. Last week health ministers Kenneth Clarke and Virginia Bottomley launched an official environmental campaign in the health service wearing t-shirts announcing that they were 'Working for a Greener NHS'. Meanwhile Labour's latest policy document promises 'Green taxes' to give an incentive to buy 'environmentally friendly goods'. Turn on any radio or television station at any hour of the day or night, or browse in any newsagent or bookshop and evangelical Green fever is likely to overwhelm you. Can anybody make sense of it—the success of a religious revival beyond Billy Graham's wildest dreams?

The Green phenomenon has two crucial features in common with religion—it offers an escape from the real world and it offers illusory solutions to the real problems of society.

The Green movement is escapist because it pretends to offer a universal perspective on the problems of the world that transcends existing conflicts over the direction of society. Greens argue that we should forget about our day-to-day concerns and unite to save the planet from the perils of global warming and ozone depletion. This is why the Green outlook, like traditional religion, finds ready support among conservative politicians around the world.

Conservation, preserving the status quo in society as in nature, has long been a central theme of defenders of the established order. The Green preoccupation with *individual survival* is another theme that causes little concern to the powers that be. So long as people restrict their ambitions to staying alive and dreaming of salvation in a future world, rather than with trying to change the existing order of society, the establishment will happily sponsor their activities.

The Green solution is illusory because individual activity cannot guarantee survival in the real world of a class-based society in which we live. Even the most limited action against local pollution requires collective organisation and effort. More generally, there is no prospect of effective action to protect the global environment as long as the world is dominated by the capitalist system.

At last week's international conference on global warming in Washington, Green president Bush resolutely blocked any attempt to curb the destructive effects of US industry on the global environment. The Du Pont corporation may have appointed a director for environmental affairs, but the world's biggest manufacturer of CFCs is unlikely to take the lead in protecting the ozone layer. When the leaders of the EC are unable to agree about a common currency, they are unlikely to accept measures to restrict acid rain that are likely to curtail the profits of manufacturing industry. Radical Greens may accuse right-wing politicians and businessmen of eco-hypocrisy, but the whole movement is guilty of deceiving itself and its followers into believing that it is possible for the capitalist system to tackle the problems of the environment.

Like religion, the Green movement is a retreat into mysticism and irrationality. It reflects a growing sense of pessimism about any realistic possibility of advancing practical solutions to the problems confronting human society. The collapse of the Stalinist world, and the apparent discrediting of Marxism as a viable alternative to capitalism, have reinforced the sense of despair that encourages the tendency to evade social problems and seek refuge in some form of religion. Yet the cynical manipulation of the Green issue by establishment politicians is likely to discredit this new religion even more rapidly. The centrepiece of the 'Greener NHS' campaign turned out to be pleas to hospital workers to walk or take a bike to work and to

turn down the radiators on the wards.

Our response to the Green religion is to make clear that the resolution of the problems of the environment depends upon the elimination of the anarchy of the capitalist market. The solution to this problem lies through collective organisation in society, not through the infantile quest for a Mother Earth and a father in heaven.

EDUCATING BRITAIN

'HOW CAN any child learn to be obedient, diligent and law-abiding from such people?' Such people, in the view of *Sunday Telegraph* editor Peregrine Worsthorne, are the 'ideologues' who attended as delegates the recent conference of the National Union of Teachers at Bournemouth. Worsthorne was appalled: 'One delegate wanted to get British troops out of Northern Ireland; another to improve the image of homosexuality in schools; and a third proclaimed "Break the law, not the union." (His pupils are likely to respond by breaking the law and the windows.)'

The editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* was not alone last weekend in urging the government to pursue its policies of enforcing tough local management of schools and imposing redundancies on recalcitrant teachers. For the *Sunday Times* teacher militancy and low standards of educational attainment are at the very root of national decline.

According to professor Sig Prais, quoted extensively in the *Sunday Times*, 'if you want to understand why the Germans produce better cars and kitchens than us, the answer is to be found in our education system'. He reckons that 'there is something very wrong: the farther down you go in the attainment range, the worse we show up'. Detailed statistics, said the professor, reveal how far British children are falling behind their peers in West Germany and Japan. Again, the answer is to be found in Kenneth Baker's pioneering Education Reform Act, which aims 'to instil into Britain's state school system efficiency, enterprise and choice in the hope that together they will produce rising standards'.

If all this sounds familiar it is because it has been a recurrent theme of the British establishment for more than a century. In 1867 Matthew Arnold returned from the World Fair in Paris shocked at the superiority of German industrial design in a number of key areas. He subsequently published a detailed report, *Higher Schools and Universities in Germany*, which attributed Britain's decline to the higher educational standards promoted by the Prussian state. He recommended extending scientific and technical education in Britain to enable it to keep up with the competition.

One of the features of senile dementia is a tendency to repeat yourself because you cannot remember what you said before. This is an affliction that now has in its grip the best ideologues of the British Empire. Another feature of the same condition is a tendency towards episodes of spite and vengefulness, a symptom that appears particularly common in the editorial offices of Sunday newspapers. The immediate targets of these splenetic outbursts are teachers forced to try to educate the nation's youth in increasingly strained circumstances on a pittance. Children forced to parrot dates of battles and lists of kings and queens while their teachers share around the books and the headteacher pays off the cleaners are unlikely even to be kept 'occupied and interested, tidy and punctual'. Worsthorne's personal core curriculum for the 1990s.

The truth is that Britain's low educational standards are a symptom of the decline of British capitalism, not its cause. Scapegoating teachers and reorganising schools may entertain editors and politicians, but it will not put Britain back on a par with Germany and Japan. We are witnessing the rising tide of reaction that accompanies the ravages of imperial decline.

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THE POLL TAX DEBATE

AS a regular next step reader, I have been dismayed at the line you have adopted on the poll tax, particularly in view of recent events in Trafalgar Square.

For several weeks you have been claiming that the anti-poll tax protests are little more than a middle class, ratepayers' revolt, which the RCP should have little or nothing to do with. Apparently your negative experiences in Scotland and west London (nowhere explained incidentally) led you to this strange conclusion.

But since when has that been a reason not to get involved in, and try to change, a movement's political direction? Not only is it patently untrue to characterise the poll tax protests as largely a revolt from the Tory shires (there weren't too many pearls and twinsets in evidence on last month's demonstration). You have also seriously underestimated how easily an issue like this can act as a catalyst for a much wider anti-Tory protest.

Mike Freeman's attempt at squaring the RCP's bizarre position with the reality of what happened in the West End on 31 March simply will not wash (the next step, 6 April). He acknowledges that the demonstration was largely working class, youthful and angry (presumably the kind of people you would not mind recruiting), but offers as a let-out for the RCP's failure to offer any leadership whatsoever the observation that 'the Trafalgar Square revolt was not against the poll tax as such'.

Freeman also tries to make much of the apolitical outlook of many of the protesters (true) and the ineffectual and reactionary politics of the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (truer still). But this is just so much whinging when the RCP is doing nothing more than 'saluting the spirit of resistance', displayed in Trafalgar Square, whilst ordering its troops to march off the other way (editorial, 6 April).

Instead of plaintively and repeatedly asking 'who is going to lead resistance to the poll tax' (next steps passim), how about the RCP giving us some indication as to how it should be done? Here is a ready-made issue for organising political action in the workplaces and on working class estates, and for exposing the duplicity of Labour councillors and MPs. Why not face facts, admit you have made a mistake and get on with building this new movement you talk about so much?

Mark Hull
Charteris



SIMON NORFOLK

NIGEL asks how can the RCP be identified as leaders if the anti-poll tax campaign is seen to be led by the traditional left (letters, 6 April). The truth of the matter is that the left is no more in control of events than we are, as the Trafalgar riot so clearly demonstrates. The left's political strategy for defeating the poll tax amounts to taking credit for those individuals who refuse to pay, and calling on the Labour Party and the TUC to defeat the tax. Taking the credit is dishonest, while calling on these empty shells of the labour movement is not only totally unrealistic but shows the left have long given up fighting for an alternative.

Appealing to the lowest common denominator, such as the widespread hatred for the poll tax, is no guarantee for defeating the Tories. The ambulance workers had popular support yet they lost. The Tories can get away with implementing the poll tax precisely because the campaign is led by diffuse middle class politics in the mould of angry ratepayers. It should not be forgotten that the recent upsurge of protests was triggered by the resignation of Tory councillors. I think there was a chance of politicising the campaign in a successful direction by emphasising the anti-democratic aspects of the tax, such as discouraging people from registering to vote and allowing councils to intensify official surveillance. However the left's traditional refusal to challenge the Labour Party has squandered this opportunity.

The sight of working class youth beating back the riot police is positive. But however brave the protesters, the rallying cry of 'No Poll Tax!' is clearly no match for a campaign of criminalisation by the state.

Toby Anderson
East London

VAUGHAN LESLIE has a point in his letter arguing against the next step's editorial on the poll tax: he says that the idea that workers will compensate for additional poll tax bills through wage claims is alright in theory but not guaranteed in practice (letters, 6 April). So while British Rail management have made the point that they expect a pay settlement above inflation and Michael Heseltine's estate workers are to receive the additional cost of their poll tax in their wages, the tax will clearly cut benefits and even those in work will suffer at least a lag in recovering the cost. However, this is to miss the point of the original editorial: exploitation at work, not taxation, is the typical relation of the ruling to the working class. Any campaign against the tax will obscure this fundamental relationship concentrating instead on what would seem to be a departure from fairness and justice. In this sense the anti-poll tax campaign obscures the interests of the working class in a cross-class campaign.

Leslie argues that the limited potential of the poll tax campaign for revolutionaries is not to do with the campaign itself, but the primitive state of the revolutionary movement. This is not a useful separation. That middle class opposition to the poll tax in Tory shires should become the focus for working class opposition to the government is a result of the historic failure of the official leadership of the working class. Far from being given, as Leslie argues, the state of class consciousness is intimately bound up with the progress of the revolutionary movement. The success or failure of that movement will decide whether the working class will continue to play second fiddle to middle class protest, or whether it will strike out on its own behalf.

James Heartfield
London

News focus

THE EMBRYO BILL

SUPPORT THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Anne Burton outlines the position of the Revolutionary Communist Party on some of the issues raised by the Embryo Bill

1. Support embryo research

We oppose government controls on embryo research. At present there is no legislation controlling what experiments can and cannot be done on human embryos. The Embryo Bill intends to ban some forms of research altogether, and to allow permitted research only on embryos up to 14 days old.

The bill assumes that there is something peculiar about embryos which means that they should be protected in law.

In effect it accepts that embryos are morally sacrosanct, unlike other human tissue which can be used in research without legal control. If parliament accepts the principle that embryos need to be protected in law, this will have grave implications for abortion rights. Anti-abortionists are already arguing that it makes no sense to ban experiments on 15-day old embryos while allowing more fully formed fetuses to be killed by abortion.

2. Free abortion on demand

When Mary Warnock drafted the report on which the Embryo Bill is based she deliberately did not include recommendations on abortion, claiming that 'it fell outside [her] terms of reference'. Nevertheless, abortion has become a central focus of parliamentary and public debate on the bill. Not only have anti-abortionists used the bill to raise the issue of rights for embryos, they have also used it as a vehicle to change the current law on abortion. This week MPs voted to amend the Embryo Bill to reduce the upper limit on abortions from 28 to 24 weeks.

We are against all attempts to increase restrictions on abortion—whether by giving rights to embryos, by lowering the time-limit up to which the operation can be performed, or by restricting the circumstances under which doctors can refer women for termination.

If women are to play an equal role in society they need the right to end unwanted pregnancies. Unfortunately the current law does not grant women abortion as a right. Under the 1967 Abortion Act, abortion remains illegal unless a woman is under 28 weeks pregnant and two doctors agree that she meets specified conditions. The Abortion Act gives women no defence against health authorities which refuse to carry out abortions after 12 weeks, or which make women wait up to eight weeks for appointments. It gives us no defence against doctors who refuse to refer women for abortion because it is 'against their conscience'.

While we will fight against every attack on our access to abortion we believe that it is impossible to maintain even the status quo by defending the current law. We need to go on the offensive by arguing for free abortion on demand, as early as possible and as late as necessary.

3. No restrictions on donor insemination

Some peers have tried to amend the bill in the house of lords to prevent lesbians and single women having access to donor insemination. For the establishment, sex and reproduction are inseparable and belong inside the family. The family is regarded as the bedrock of society and a guarantor of a stable social order. Society considers the family, and the roles played within it by men and women, to be 'natural'. If society is based upon such a natural order then it follows that to tamper with nature by allowing the free use and development of reproductive technologies may lead to social havoc.

We argue that reproductive technologies should be available to all, regardless of whether they are married or single, gay or straight.

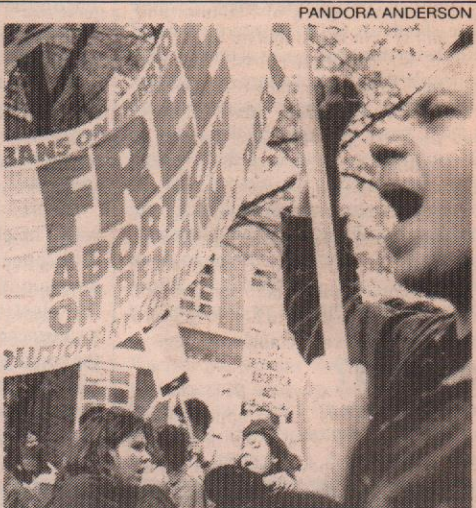
We are sympathetic to people's fears that unless the provision of fertility treatment is

regulated it is open to abuse. In the USA there are many clinics charging huge sums of money for IVF programmes that have very low rates of success. However, we believe that to hand over the supervision of such services to an establishment which is both anti-gay and opposed to women's rights can offer no advantages. Instead we should demand that the services we require should be made available through the National Health Service—that is the most effective way to put the charlatans out of business.

4. No regulations on surrogacy

Britain was the first country in the world to outlaw commercial surrogacy agencies. Parliament's concern about surrogacy has got little to do with worries about the exploitation of women or the morals of profiteering. The establishment's unease about surrogate motherhood arrangements stems from the same concerns that it has about the 'unnatural practice' of donor insemination—it goes against the grain of how things are meant to be.

Inviting the state to regulate surrogacy arrangements means allowing it to pry into people's lives. However concerned we may be about the consequences of women hiring out their wombs we do not feel that the state can be part of any acceptable solution.



PANDORA ANDERSON

Thousands joined protests against the Embryo Bill on Monday

5. No state licensing authority

The Embryo Bill proposes to set up a licensing authority which would, in the words of the Warnock report, 'regulate and monitor practice in relation to those sensitive areas which raise fundamental ethical questions'. These sensitive areas include all research and treatment involving embryos and treatment involving donated sperm and ova. The authority will also license infertility services and research projects. It will be accountable to parliament in general, and to the health secretary in particular who will appoint its members.

We do not trust the professional bodies which until now have imposed voluntary controls on research and treatment relating to reproductive issues—but we trust the state even less. It is ironic that some left-wing groups like the Socialist Workers Party which oppose state controls on abortion are calling for state control of research and are indifferent to state control of fertility treatment.

Until now the main debate over the Embryo Bill has been between the moral reactionaries and the medical profession. The interests of women have been largely ignored. We may be unable to defeat the Embryo Bill, but we need to ensure that people understand the issues at stake and put the fight for women's rights to the fore of our campaign.

GET READY FOR A RACIST OFFENSIVE

TEBBIT PREPARES THE PITCH

It is dangerous to dismiss Norman Tebbit as just another Enoch Powell, warns Kenan Malik; crusade could herald a new Tory offensive

'Which side do they cheer for?' Norman Tebbit asked rhetorically of Britain's black population last week. He went on to answer his own question, arguing that the majority of black people in this country would fail his self-styled 'cricket test': they would rather support India, Pakistan or the West Indies than England in a cricket match. That might show consummate taste in cricket, but for Tebbit it demonstrated an unpardonable degree of disloyalty. 'They hark back to where they came from rather than where they are', complained Tebbit in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*.

The former Tory Party chairman pursued the theme the following day during the debate in parliament on the government's Hongkong bill. The bill makes provision for 25 000 selected heads of households in the colony to receive British passports. The government's hope is that this will encourage stability in Hongkong in the run-up to the Chinese takeover in 1997.

Tebbit has been among the fiercest critics of the bill, and the leader of the Tory revolt against it. For Tebbit the scheme betrays the Tories' election pledge to prevent any further primary immigration.

These pledges were made, Tebbit told the house of commons last week, 'because these islands are already overcrowded and in the belief that great waves of immigration by people who do not share our culture, our language, our ways of social conduct, in many cases who owe no allegiance to our country was, and is, a destabilising factor in society'. He warned that 'if are not to see social upheaval arising from religious and cultural and ethnic differences, then we have more than enough to do to integrate existing communities without adding to that burden or exacerbating existing problems'.

Isolated?

Tebbit's comments caused widespread outrage. Commentators right across the political spectrum condemned them as tantamount to inciting racial hatred. Several Labour MPs called for him to be prosecuted under the Race Relations Act. Almost without exception newspaper leader writers considered that he had gone too far this time. In parliament his rebellion collapsed with just 44 Tory MPs voting against the government.

Even his traditional supporters deserted him. 'It's not cricket, Mr Tebbit', admonished the *Sunday Telegraph*, adding that his comments 'hit below the belt'. According to a *Sunday Times* poll of right-wing Tory MPs, one in two did not agree with his cricket test remark; one in four considered that his comments had damaged his political career. Robert Harris summed up the general feeling when he wrote in the *Sunday Times* that 'by his speech and his interview Tebbit has placed himself, like Enoch Powell and Oswald Mosley before him, beyond the pale'.

Tebbit's outspokenly racist remarks have certainly left him isolated, even within the right wing of the Tory Party. They are also likely to have caused considerable damage to his hopes of gaining the Tory Party leadership, which were slim even before the controversy erupted. However, it would be dangerous to dismiss him simply as a latter-day Powell, who has now made himself into the pariah of British politics.

Tebbit is ploughing a very different furrow from the one Powell followed in the sixties, and he is still likely to be a major contender on the Westminster scene.

Powell was always a maverick, whose ideas were often out of touch with the general mood of the times. In 1958 he resigned as treasury secretary in the Macmillan government in protest at the administration's refusal to adopt unfettered free-market policies. A decade later prime minister Edward Heath sacked him from the cabinet after his notorious 'rivers of blood speech' which warned of the dangers of immigration. Powell's images of the 'Tiber foaming with much blood', his description of immigrants as 'wide-grinning piccaninnies' and his strident call for compulsory repatriation were not only offensive but out of tune with the times, in an era in which the liberal consensus still held. Powell was always on the periphery of the Tory establishment and once out of the cabinet he was easily sidelined into the margins of politics.

Crusade

Tebbit, on the other hand, is a much more central figure in the Tory Party, and one who has helped shape the dominant political mood of the past decade. He cut his political teeth as one of the coterie around Margaret Thatcher which, in the seventies, helped fashion her distinct brand of politics and then enabled it to gain ascendancy inside the Tory Party. Throughout the eighties Tebbit was Thatcher's right-hand man, responsible for drafting policies on trade unions, employment and industry. He became Tory Party chairman in the run-up to the last election, and played a key role in masterminding Thatcher's third electoral triumph.

By 1987, however, Tebbit's relationship with Thatcher had become strained. The differences came to a head over the direction of the election campaign. After the election Tebbit returned to the backbenches from where, notwithstanding the cooling of his relations with the prime minister, he has assumed the role of the keeper of the Thatcherite conscience. In a period when many in the Tory Party have been questioning the aggressively pro-capitalist policies adopted by the government, Tebbit has reminded the doubters that there is no alternative for the British ruling class. The pace of the Tory onslaught and its impact on society has begun to worry even confirmed Thatcherites. In the face of this uncertainty Tebbit's task is to lay down the law for the Tories.

Outside of government, Tebbit has been uniquely placed to float ideas and tackle opponents in a way which would be impolitic for ministers.

Thus Tebbit has taken on established institutions—from the monarchy and the Church of England to the BBC—in an abrasive manner which those within the government would have found impossible to pursue. This has often brought him into conflict with even his own supporters. When, two years ago, he made a controversial attack on black Commonwealth countries, calling them 'tribal', the Duke of Edinburgh, not noted for his liberalism, felt compelled to criticise him. And even the *Sun*, generally his most sycophantic admirer, has felt it necessary occasionally to upbraid him for going too far. For Tebbit, such criticisms are the inevitable consequence of the role he has carved out for himself as the tribune of Thatcherism. It is in this context that we must consider Tebbit's new crusade on immigration.

Tebbit's latest outbursts show, not that he has put himself beyond the pale, but that the Tories are keeping their options open on the issue of race. The fact that

SIMON NORFOLK



Tebbit's finger-waving points to a new offensive against Britain's black community

home secretary David Waddington, a Neanderthal on the question of immigration and black rights, should move the Hongkong bill shows that the difference between Tebbit and the Tory establishment is not one of ideology. The party leadership has adopted a pragmatic course in maintaining a relatively low profile on the issues of race and immigration. However, by stirring up the racist pot, Tebbit is keeping the issue bubbling should the Tories find it necessary to embark on a racist campaign before the next election.

The Tories are the natural party of racism. Thatcher has long been adept at wrapping herself in the Union Jack and making a political virtue out of hatred of foreigners; Tory backwoodsmen, like rent-a-quote MP Terry Dicks, continually stoke up reactionary prejudices about muggers, drug pushers and illegal immigrants. The Tories recognise that, more than any other issue, that of race allows them to promote popular prejudices and put their opponents on the defensive.

The Tories exploited to the full the political advantages of racism in the

period prior to the 1979 general election. With her infamous 'swamp' speech, Thatcher made a direct pitch for the racist vote; the Tories came to power on one of the most chauvinist platforms in the post-war years.

Despite their natural instinct to play the racist card, however, the Tories have been remarkably reluctant to use it ever since. The government has not denied its racist credentials, but neither has it flaunted them. The issues of race and immigration hardly featured in the 1983 and 1987 elections. Indeed in 1983 the Tories made

his racist



a play for the black vote with their campaign slogan 'Labour say he's black, we say he's British'.

It is true that the authorities have orchestrated numerous scares about race and immigration—Tamil refugees, black muggers, Yardies, drug pushers, Muslim fanatics. But the government has refrained from turning such campaigns into a general attack on the black community. Certainly, Thatcher has never gone as far in power as she did in opposition. Indeed in some cases, as over the Rushdie affair, the Tories have taken exceptional care to

maintain a degree of restraint.

Thatcher's reluctance to repeat her pre-1979 performance has nothing to do with any new-found desire to stand up for the rights of the black community.

The Tories' more equivocal attitude since coming to power is purely pragmatic. The weakness of the opposition has meant that they have had little need to exploit the issue. At the same time the Tories recognised the need to minimise the socially disruptive effects of racism. The riots which exploded on the streets of the inner cities almost as soon as the Tories took office showed how the open enforcement of racism could unleash wider instability. Over the past decade, therefore, the Tories have largely kept this potentially explosive issue under wraps.

This is not to say that racist oppression is any less fierce that it was a decade ago. Racism has greatly intensified under Thatcher. Police brutality, immigration raids, racist attacks—all have increased over the past 10 years.

Harassment

A home office report published last year showed that more than half of young black men in London have been hauled through the courts. Last summer five black men died in police custody in London alone. Before Easter an inquest took place into the death of Germain Alexander, a black man who was beaten to a pulp in Brixton prison. Last weekend police and immigration officials broke up a wedding at Hackney registry office and hauled off the bride and two witnesses to the cells, as part of 'Operation Gold Ring', an investigation into alleged bogus marriages arranged for 'illegal immigrants'; more than 200 people have been arrested in the course of the investigation. The experience of the Stepney Four (see box) shows graphically how the police informally cooperate with racist thugs in enforcing the oppression of black people.

But while racism has gone unchecked on the ground, the authorities have been careful not to be seen to be openly promoting it. Unlike in France, Germany or Italy where respectable politicians have few inhibitions about declaring their racial prejudices, here they have largely held their tongues. Mainstream politicians in all the parties pay lip-service to the need to preserve a multiracial society and protect the interests of the black community.

It is in this context that we can see the importance of the Tebbit campaign. For the first time in a decade a senior Tory figure has embarked on an openly racist crusade and put immigration back on the top of the political agenda. Tebbit's verbal bouncers over Hongkong and the 'cricket test' are designed to soften up public opinion should the Tories want to make an issue of racism in the run-up to the next election. With the Tories trailing in the opinion polls, the economy heading for recession and government policies like the poll tax deeply unpopular, many Tories recognise that the promotion of racism could well be their only ticket to another election triumph.

Segregation

The decision this week by the education secretary John MacGregor to allow parents to select their children's school on racial grounds shows which way the wind is blowing. Two years ago, during the Dewsbury schools row, the then education secretary Kenneth Baker refused to back a group of white parents who were boycotting a predominantly Asian school. 'It is better to have a mixture', he advised, 'because that leads to greater understanding'.

Today the Tories take the opposite view. MacGregor rejected a ruling by the commission for racial equality that Cleveland local authority had infringed the Race Relations Act by allowing a white parent, Jenny Carney, to change her daughter's school. Carney claimed that there were too many Asians in the school and that her daughter was 'learning Pakistani'. MacGregor's decision opens the way for an openly segregated school system and is clearly aimed at appeasing racist support at a time when Tory popularity is at an all-time low.

The Tories' willingness to play the racist card can only have been increased by the performance of the Labour Party in the Hongkong debate. Given the open

rebellion in Tory ranks, the incoherence of the Tory arguments in support of the bill, and the deep problems the Tories already faced on a wide variety of other issues, Labour should have been, as the *Sunday Correspondent* put it, 'shooting at an open goal'. Instead Neil Kinnock, Roy Hattersley and Gerald Kaufman transformed what was an embarrassing situation for the Tories into a disaster for Labour.

The Labour Party has long recognised that racism is the electoral ace up Thatcher's sleeve. Hence, in his efforts to transform Labour into an electable party again, Kinnock has been desperate not to be outflanked by Thatcher. But as last week's debate on the Hongkong bill showed, it is very difficult to outmanoeuvre the Tories on the issue of race.

The Labour frontbench wanted to ensure that the Tories could not accuse the party of being soft on immigration.

The shadow cabinet decided therefore to oppose the government—but on the grounds, not that it was racist, but that it was 'elitist'. At the same time, to stop themselves looking like racists, opposition spokesmen refused to make clear what a Labour government would do, declaring ad nauseam that they did not want to play 'the numbers game'. It was a position that could hold no credibility. The result was a parliamentary disaster.

Hypocrisy

Labour's pusillanimity was clearly exposed in the commons debate. Former Labour minister Peter Shore demolished Hattersley's argument that the people of Hongkong should be given 'democracy in the colony' rather than a British passport. 'However far democracy has advanced in Hongkong', he pointed out to Hattersley, 'if the Chinese wish to roll it back they have the power to do so. We cannot offer additional confidence to the people of Hongkong by telling them that a Labour government will introduce democracy in Hongkong. It is no way out'.

Hattersley then accused the Tories of discriminating against British blacks: 'The bill... would increase their suffering by pushing them further down the queue. Their relatives would be left out as the new entrants are allowed in.' Such a shameless display of hypocrisy proved too much for Jim Sillars, once a Labour MP, now a Scottish Nationalist: 'I was utterly appalled to hear him [Hattersley] engage in divide and rule tactics between immigrant communities. I never thought I would hear that from him.' Sillars might have added that, as a minister in the Callaghan government in the seventies which presided over the scandalous 'virginity tests' for Asian brides, Hattersley has played a more ignoble part than most in ensuring that the relatives of black

people in Britain 'would be left out'.

'Roy Hattersley and Gerald Kaufman were chased around the chamber', declared Andrew Gimson in the *Independent on Sunday*, 'but neither had a single bolthole'. In the end the opposition achieved the considerable feat of contriving to appear both more racist and more incompetent than the Tories. Labour managed to make even Tebbit look honourable. As the *Correspondent* put it, 'at least Tebbit was straightforward about what he wanted. Labour merely sought to dress in a cloak of high principle'.

And where was the Labour left while all this was going on? Safe in their own boltholes, is the answer. Left-wing MPs were as concerned as the Labour frontbench that they should do nothing that might rock the boat or jeopardise Kinnock's chances of entering Number 10. They refrained therefore from organising any campaign to expose the Tory scheme as racist or to fight for the right of all Hongkong people to enter Britain if they so wish. Even the four black MPs remained studiously silent on the issue.

Instead around 25 Labour MPs, mainly members of the Campaign Group, decided to make a gesture by abstaining on the vote—and then, not to protest about the racist policies coming from both sides of the house, but because they did not want to 'enter the same lobby as Norman Tebbit'. In a week when virtually every left-wing Labour MP was queuing up to shake hands with Nelson Mandela, not one would lift a finger when they had a real chance to fight for black rights.

Retreat

It was left to the Liberal Democrats to expose Labour's sordid capitulation to the arguments of the racists, and to put forward the view that *everyone* in Hongkong should have the right to come to Britain. The fact that a middle-of-the-road nonentity like Paddy Ashdown, a former marine who supports immigration controls and backs Britain's war in Ireland, should appear to be the leading anti-racist in the Hongkong debate shows how far the anti-racist movement has collapsed.

The left's abandonment of the fight against racism has had disastrous consequences. It has allowed reactionaries on both sides of the racial divide to gain the upper hand.

As racism has intensified under Thatcher, young blacks have become increasingly frustrated and angry. A decade ago many would have joined left-wing organisations or anti-racist groups. Today they are increasingly isolated and feel that they have no choice but to look after their own. In the absence of a genuine anti-racist movement, many

young blacks have given up on politics altogether.

Even worse, the retreat of the left from the anti-racist struggle has allowed reactionary forces to provide an alternative focus for angry black youth. The widespread support among young Asians for the campaign against *The Satanic Verses* is the most graphic example of this. The way in which the anti-Rushdie campaign has become a vehicle for militant young Asians to vent their frustrations is a tragic illustration of the failure of the left to organise resistance to racism.

The growth of the Islamic Party is another illustration of the growing gulf between young Asians and the mainstream of politics. The party is putting up candidates in next month's local elections in towns such as Bolton, Blackburn and Bradford. It is possible that Islamic councillors will be returned in some wards. What is most striking is that the Islamic Party is no longer campaigning on the issue of Rushdie. It is simply articulating the frustrations of a community which today finds itself without a political voice.

Backlash

The failure of the left to fight for black rights has also allowed racists to gain a wide hearing within the white community. In areas like Bradford and east London, the arguments of the far right are gaining currency. When Asian youth organised a march against racist attacks last summer, ordinary white passers-by hurled abuse at them and applauded white youths who physically attacked the demonstrators. Last month hundreds of local people joined a white rights march. In Tower Hamlets the British National Party is organising a major intervention in local elections. Many Labour Party canvassers fear that the strength of racist feeling in the borough could allow the Liberals to retain power in the local elections next month.

The growth of reaction in both the white and the black communities, and the increasing signals from the Tories that they are about to embark on a racist crusade, shows the urgency of building a new anti-racist movement. We need a movement that is willing to take a clear stand on issues such as immigration controls, police brutality and racist attacks; a movement that refuses to subordinate the interests of black people to that of the Labour Party; and above all a movement that sees as its task the winning of working class support for the struggle for black rights. Workers Against Racism has set out to create just such a movement. It is not a moment too soon to join us.

BENGALIS VICTIMISED IN TOWER HAMLETS

DEFEND THE STEPNEY FOUR!

There are few areas where racism is more overt than the east London borough of Tower Hamlets. Discrimination is institutionalised in every area of life: the apartheid housing policy confines Bengalis to the most rundown estates; more than 80 per cent of the homeless are Bengali; of the 400 children who this year have been refused places at school, at least 300 are black.

The intensity of racial oppression is reflected in racial violence in schools, on the streets, on the housing estates. The number of officially reported racist attacks more than doubled last year. Parts of the borough have become effective no-go areas for black people.

In response to the growing tide of racist violence, Bengali youth have begun to organise themselves to fight back. In many areas groups of young Bengalis now patrol estates and streets where attacks are common. The response of the authorities has been to treat any young black who stands up to the racists as a criminal. The story of the Stepney Four shows how resisting racism is now a crime

in Tower Hamlets.

At the end of February a white youth, well known for his involvement in racist attacks, was stabbed at Morpeth school in Globe Town. Angry white parents organised a demonstration outside Bethnal Green police station, calling for official action against Bengali youth. Demonstrators demanded an inquiry into 'racial' violence against whites. Leaflets demanded 'rights for whites' and claimed that 'Muslims are taking over our East End'.

After the demonstration, a group of white youth, including stewards on the march, drove around Stepney, hurling racial abuse at Bengalis. They attacked a group of black youths and in the ensuing melee, one of the racists was stabbed.

The police, who turned up after the attack was over and the racists had dispersed, simply hauled in any Bengali who happened to be in the area. Malik Miah, Abdul Alim and Abdul Halim were arrested near the scene of the fight. A fourth Asian, a juvenile, was arrested a few days later. All four have been charged

with attempted murder.

'We have been attacked for years', said Sara Bibi, mother of Malik Miah, 'and the police have done nothing. Now one white man gets stabbed and the police arrest these boys for attempted murder, something they had nothing to do with. The police are using them as scapegoats'.

Workers Against Racism has set up the Stepney Four Campaign to defend the four Bengalis and to fight the criminalisation of black youth in the area. Our approach is simple: we oppose racists whether in or out of uniform; we oppose the attempt by the police to criminalise black youth; we support the right of black people to stand up to the racists in whatever way is necessary; and we organise to build working class support for the fight against racism.

Only such an uncompromising approach can tackle the racists and build a movement that can fight for black rights. If you want to get involved phone WAR on (01) 375 1702.

Nigel Lewis

GORBACHEV WALKS THE TIGHTROPE

Rob Knight examines the issues at stake in the Lithuanian crisis

The crisis over Lithuania's unilateral declaration of independence has rapidly escalated over the past week. President Gorbachev's decision to cut off oil and gas supplies has increased tension inside the republic. It has led to increasing Western criticism, but despite calls for the USA to introduce trade sanctions against the Soviet Union, no Western leader has as yet issued an outright condemnation of Gorbachev's strong-arm tactics. However, despite its bullying, Moscow has so far failed to force the Lithuanian government to back down.

The importance of the Lithuanian situation goes far beyond the shores of the Baltic Sea. The outcome of the crisis will have a strong influence on the process of transition to capitalism that is underway in the Soviet Union. It could also help fashion relations between the imperialist powers and between the Soviet Union and the West. The fact that a small group of old-fashioned middle class nationalists led by a professor of music and a woman with big shoulder pads can become the focus of international developments demonstrates the fluidity of world politics at the moment.

No compromise

The crisis was precipitated by the Vilnius government over-reaching itself. Lithuanian nationalists, riding on the tide of their own rhetoric, forced the issue by declaring UDI. Gorbachev was prepared to negotiate a gradual move towards autonomy, as he has done with Estonia and Latvia. However, he could not countenance an open defiance of Soviet authority.

For the Stalinist bureaucracy, control of the Soviet state is crucial if it is to hold on to power and ensure a managed transition to capitalism.

Gorbachev is aware that fragmentation is an inevitable consequence of the reform process, and is prepared to allow the republics a looser association with the centre. However, Moscow has made it clear that such change can only come through negotiation, not through an open defiance of the state.

The threat that Lithuanian independence posed to the integrity of the Soviet state forced Gorbachev to adopt a hard line. He made it clear, both to Vilnius and to the rest of the world, that this was one issue on which no compromise was possible. While Gorbachev has been prepared to back down, negotiate and compromise on many issues, such as German reunification, he could not countenance the precipitate break-up of the Soviet Union.

New Cold War?

Unless Moscow can force the Lithuanians to back down under economic pressure, there are only two other options open to it. Gorbachev himself could back down. This would encourage other republics to follow suit, hasten the disintegration of the Soviet Union and put to question the possibility of the bureaucracy continuing to manage a peaceful reform process. Or the Kremlin could send in the tanks to restore its authority. This would bring international condemnation, strengthen the forces of conservatism at home and slow down the pace of change.

If it came to the crunch it is clear that Moscow would rather slow down the pace of reform than lose control altogether.

Lithuania has also posed a dilemma for the Western powers, and in particular the USA. Western leaders have been caught between the desire to prop up Gorbachev and the temptation to play the Cold War card. So far the West has largely resisted a return to Cold War rhetoric.

Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union has developed very good relations with the West. Moscow has been willing to bolster Western influence in the third world. In southern Africa, for example, the Soviet Union has forced Swapo to accept an independence settlement in Namibia that is clearly in the interests of the white minority and has pushed the ANC into negotiations with Pretoria. The importance of Gorbachev for the imperialist powers has meant that the West has been reluctant to respond to Lithuania's call for support. Even its Baltic neighbours, such as Sweden and Norway, have been circumspect in their support for the Vilnius government.

Washington in particular has been careful not to

undermine Gorbachev. The USA recognises that if Gorbachev is unseated, there could be turmoil and chaos, not simply in the Soviet Union but throughout the Eastern bloc. As the main guarantor of international stability America is concerned not to take any action which might unleash such a possibility.

However the changing balance of power among the leading powers is putting increasing pressure on the USA and is making the possibilities of a return to a Cold War stand-off more attractive. The old world order, under which the USA maintained its hegemony through its leadership of Nato, is breaking up. The centre of gravity in world politics is moving away from Washington and towards Tokyo and Bonn.

In this situation, Washington might be tempted to delay the break-up of Nato by temporarily resurrecting the Cold War. Such a strategy though would be exceptionally risky. There is no guarantee that Washington could take the rest of the Western world with it in an overt diplomatic offensive against the Soviet Union.

Reactionary

Ironically the player in this game with the least to lose is probably Lithuania itself. Recent statistics show that Lithuania has enjoyed a higher income per head and faster growth under Gorbachev than any other part of the Soviet Union. The nationalism of the Lithuanian government is fuelled, not by injustice or oppression, but by a desire to win even greater benefits. That is why the anger and militancy associated with the struggles of the oppressed is virtually absent in Lithuania.

Lithuanian nationalism is largely artificial, constructed by local Stalinist bureaucrats attempting to create a popular base for themselves in alliance with the middle class.

At least in the medium term, the Lithuanians will achieve few successes from their policy of conflict with Moscow. The current crisis has made it clear that Lithuania is very dependent on the Soviet Union for basic energy supplies. It would have difficulty obtaining alternative sources, particularly as the Western powers are reluctant to back Vilnius. Unless Washington reverts to a Cold War strategy and institutes an emergency programme to beat the Soviet blockade, Lithuania has little choice but to back down eventually.

Lithuania's claim for independence is reactionary. Lithuanian nationalism is a creation of the local Stalinist bureaucracy in its search for a survival strategy. It can only intensify divisions and confusions inside the working class. The interests of Lithuanian workers would be best served by forging an alliance with Russian workers which can overthrow both the Stalinist bureaucrats and middle class nationalists who are in control today.



SUPERGUN DIPLOMACY

WHY THE WEST IS GUNNING FOR IRAQ

At first sight the British authorities' campaign against Iraq seems bizarre. The last-minute seizure at Heathrow airport of nuclear triggers commonly available in university laboratories, and the increasingly hysterical campaign to persuade the world that an oil pipeline is really a 'supergun' in disguise have more the qualities of a scene from *Dallas* than an episode of international diplomacy. In fact Western actions are not as irrational as they appear. The targeting of Iraq is the consequence on the one hand of Israeli reaction to changing international relations; and on the other of the West's increasingly interventionist stance in the region.

Israel is worried that the collapse of Stalinism and the recent changes in the Eastern bloc will lessen its usefulness to the West. The Bush administration might cut aid to Israel to allow it to divert funds to Eastern Europe. Washington has taken a more critical line with Jerusalem, attacking Israel for not

being 'forthcoming' in negotiations. The annual US state department report on human rights attacked Israel for the second year in a row.

Israel is worried too about the growth of Iraq as a major regional power. As a result of the Gulf War Iraq has emerged as the second military power in the region, after Israel itself, with one million men under arms. Saddam Hussein is trying to play a more prominent role in the Arab world too.

The Israeli authorities have therefore begun to stir up international fears about Iraq's war machine. The campaign has already put pressure on Iraq's military capabilities. At the same time it has given Israel the ability to reassert its traditional role of policing the region on behalf of the West.

Israel's anti-Iraqi drive has only made an impact because the Western powers have an interest in going along with the scare. The imperialists are happy to play up fears of nuclear proliferation and military

expansion because it allows them a greater excuse to intervene in the region. The threat of a nuclear Iraq would legitimise greater Western interference in the Middle East.

There are limits, however, as to how far the West can pursue its policy of pressuring Iraq. The imperialist powers are concerned to maintain good relations with the pro-Western Arab states. Hence, despite the scaremongering and black propaganda, the Tories have been reluctant to break diplomatic relations with Iraq.

The West's scaremongering against Iraq is a cynical propaganda ploy. Whatever Iraq's true military strength, it is clearly less than that of Israel; and it could not even begin to match the arsenals of the imperialist powers. Any concessions to the West can only strengthen militarism in the Middle East.

Daniel Nassim

The working class

HAMMERSMITH NURSERY DISPUTE

'AN EXAMPLE TO TRADE UNIONISTS'

After six months on strike, nursery workers at Hammersmith council have voted to return to work. But the struggle is not over yet. One of the strikers, Noreen Morris, is challenging Labour council leader Mike Goodman in next week's council elections.

John Fitzpatrick is an activist in Hammersmith Nalگو and a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party who played an active role in the dispute. He spoke to *the next step* about the lessons of the strike

WHAT HAS THE STRIKE ACHIEVED?

'At this stage the nursery workers have gained a little more, in terms of spinal column points, than what was on offer in the early negotiations. But they have not yet been awarded the full regrading which they sought and so richly deserve. The latest council excuse is rate-capping.

Because of their high morale and tremendous solidarity, the nursery workers have been able to dictate many terms of the return to work. On top of two lump sum payments and the recovery of some pay deducted because of the action, they have insisted on the simultaneous reopening of all the nurseries. Most importantly, they have not agreed to the management package. Their claim is still on the table and there will be a review soon.'

WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE SETTLEMENT AS A VICTORY?

'There has been no victory, but at the same time, much has been achieved. They are going back together with their heads held high, and with a sense of their own strength which was not there six months ago. They have every reason to be very proud of their record. As has been said many times, in terms of organisation, solidarity, flair and sheer guts they have been an inspiration and an example to trade unionists everywhere.'

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE DISPUTE HAD ON THE REST OF THE UNION?

'We could do with more members like the nursery workers in Hammersmith Nalگو. They have already made the branch a stronger and more determined organisation. By visiting scores of shop and departmental meetings they brought the branch back to life. Hundreds of members heard firsthand all the arguments about why it is in their interests to take industrial action in solidarity with another section of workers who are under attack.

'For a small section which is not crucial to the running of the council to win, the whole branch must be prepared to strike. That nearly happened in the vote for an all-out indefinite strike in February: on a 75 per cent turn out, 681 voted in favour and 823 voted against. Though the proposal fell, the high vote in favour of action was a historic achievement in these timid times. Next time we must go all-out from the start to win a majority and sustain the momentum of the dispute.'

WHAT DID THE DISPUTE REVEAL ABOUT THE LABOUR COUNCIL?

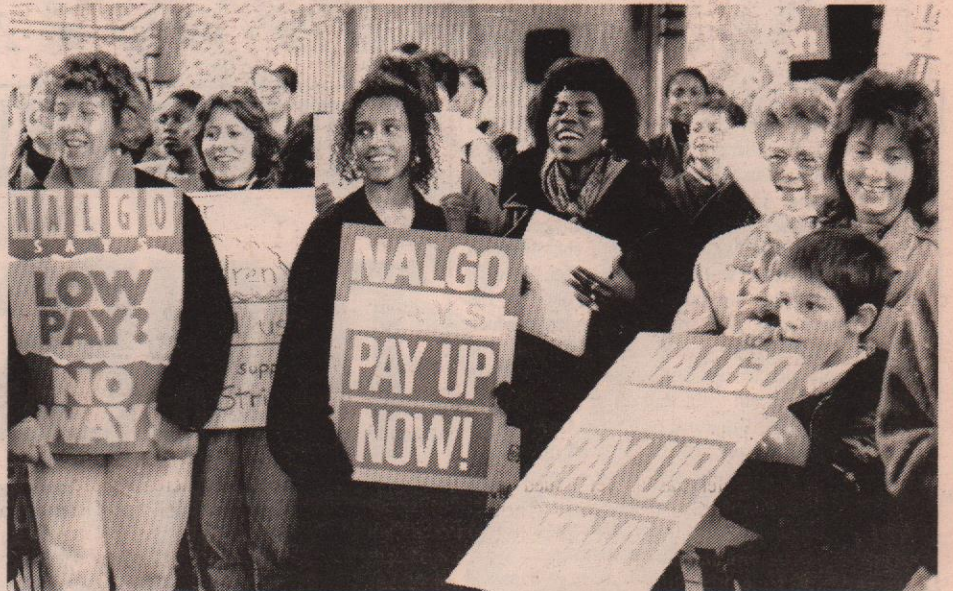
'It showed that a Labour council which will not stand up to Margaret Thatcher is willing to get tough with its low-paid women workers. Labour councillors are scurrying to implement the poll tax. They are happy to put the boot into nursery workers, while giving bonuses and perks to their managers. Their idea of fighting the Tories is gambling on the stock exchange or crawling to the high court. Not one of them had the guts to vote against the poll tax, resign or build a campaign of non-implementation and non-payment among workers.'

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

'The council intends to make cuts after the elections on 3 May. Their bitter attitude to the nursery workers undoubtedly stemmed from their resentment at being exposed as Thatcher's line managers, but also from their resolve to attack and weaken Nalگو. In this they will surely fail, at least if we learn

the lessons of this dispute.

'The idea of standing a nursery workers' candidate in the council elections emerged in the course of the dispute as a way of raising the public profile of the strike and keeping up the pressure on the council. Noreen Morris is going ahead with the campaign even though the strike is over to expose the cynicism of the council leadership and to make the point that the nursery workers intend to carry on their fight for decent pay and conditions. She has the support of many local trade unionists as well as that of council workers and local people who have supported the nursery workers' struggle. As she says, "Don't waste your vote—this time make it count for something. Make it count for nursery workers, for women, for children, and for you".'



Having taken on the council in their workplaces, Hammersmith nursery workers are now challenging Labour at the polls

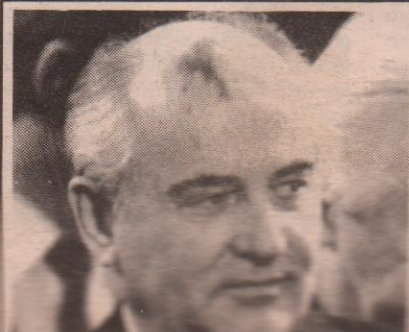
With the world changing at a dizzying pace, it has never been more important to get to grips with trends and events. The place to do it is at **Preparing for Power 1990**, our annual seven-day summer school.

This year's discussion 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

BLACK RIGHTS

See pages 2, 4 and 5



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Page 6

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE EMBRYO BILL
Page 3

the next step

Revolutionary Communist Party Weekly • 27 April 1990 • No 13 • 40p

Two days after the Trafalgar Square revolt, four CID officers turned up at Steve Cook's flat at 6.30 in the morning. Cook is chair of Islington Against the Poll Tax. The police told Cook that he closely resembled an alleged rioter whose photograph had appeared in the *Mail on Sunday*. Their search warrant gave them authority to look for clothing similar to that worn by the photographed man, and 'any correspondence which may relate to the organising of violent disorder'. The officers proceeded to turn Cook's flat upside down in their unsuccessful bid to fit him up.

The intimidation of people like Steve Cook shows how the Tories are out to criminalise all opposition to the poll tax. The authorities were humiliated by the thousands of protesters who stormed the West End at the end of the poll tax demonstration in March. Now they are exacting their revenge.

Hundreds of poll tax activists have been harassed over the past month. Many, like Steve Cook, have woken up to dawn raids. Poll tax meetings have been invaded by police officers. Anti-poll tax marches have been banned.

The crown prosecution service has set up a special unit to ensure that those arrested at the riot are well and truly fitted up. Lawyers from Manchester, Liverpool, Yorkshire and Birmingham have been roped in to staff the unit. They expect to drag at least 500 people through the courts. To make their task easier the authorities have ordered all 15 television and newspaper companies to hand over any film they have of the fighting.

Victimisation

Government lawyers have given notice that they intend to press for the maximum charges. One man has been charged with attempted murder after allegedly throwing a steel pole through a police car. Others are facing affray, riot and assault charges. The courts have decided to make an example of all those found guilty. Mario Acosta, a Spanish holiday-maker, was jailed for 28 days for stealing two bottles of perfume. Ronald McDowell was sent down for 14 days for stealing a pen.

The victimisation of poll tax protesters has not been confined to the courts. Labour-controlled Hackney council, not content with doing the Tories' dirty work by implementing the tax, has started harassing anti-poll tax activists. Three weeks ago the

with the centre. However, Moscow has made it clear that such change can only come through negotiation, not through an open defiance of the state.

The threat that Lithuanian independence posed to the integrity of the Soviet state forced Gorbachev to adopt a hard line. He made it clear, both to Vilnius and to the rest of the world, that this was one issue on which no compromise was possible. While Gorbachev has been prepared to back down, negotiate and compromise on many issues, such as German reunification, he could not countenance the precipitate break-up of the Soviet Union.

New Cold War?

Unless Moscow can force the Lithuanians to back down under economic pressure, there are only two other options open to it. Gorbachev himself could back down. This would encourage other republics to follow suit, hasten the disintegration of the Soviet Union and put to question the possibility of the bureaucracy continuing to manage a peaceful reform process. Or the Kremlin could send in the tanks to restore its authority. This would bring international condemnation, strengthen the forces of conservatism at home and slow down the pace of change.

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Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union has developed very good relations with the West. Moscow has been willing to bolster Western influence in the third world. In southern Africa, for example, the Soviet Union has forced Swapo to accept an independence settlement in Namibia that is clearly in the interests of the white minority and has pushed the ANC into negotiations with Pretoria. The importance of Gorbachev for the imperialist powers has meant that the West has been reluctant to respond to Lithuania's call for support. Even its Baltic neighbours, such as Sweden and Norway, have been circumspect in their support for the Vilnius government.

Washington in particular has been careful not to

AFTER THE TRAFALGAR SQUARE REVOLT

TORIES SEEK POLL TAX REVENGE

The government wants to criminalise all opposition to the poll tax, says Sharmini Brookes

is implementing the poll tax and victimising activists.

Hackney Nalgo's refusal to stand up to Murphy's victimisation is a graphic illustration of the defensiveness of the left over the poll tax in general and the Trafalgar Square revolt in particular. From the start of the campaign against the poll tax, the left has steered clear of any action that might be construed as 'illegal'. Almost before the last stone was thrown in

Trafalgar Square, left-wing spokesmen were already venting their anger on the rioters. An editorial in *Militant* condemned the 'unprovoked attacks on the police'. Tommy Sheridan of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation which organised the march warned that he would have 'no qualms' about 'informing the police' about any rioters he could identify.

Such political cowardice can only make it easier for the authorities to harass and victimise anti-poll tax activists. The Tories have made it clear that they are going all-out to criminalise anyone who opposes their iniquitous tax. We should be equally uncompromising in our defence of those at the sharp end of state repression.



SUPERGUN DIPLOMACY

WHY THE WEST IS GUNNING

At first sight the British authorities' campaign against Iraq seems bizarre. The last-minute seizure at Heathrow airport of nuclear triggers commonly available in university laboratories, and the increasingly hysterical campaign to persuade the world that an oil pipeline is really a 'supergun' in disguise have more the qualities of a scene from *Dallas* than an episode of international diplomacy. In fact Western actions are not as irrational as they appear. The targeting of Iraq is the consequence on the one hand of Israeli reaction to changing international relations; and on the other of the West's increasingly interventionist stance in the region.

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