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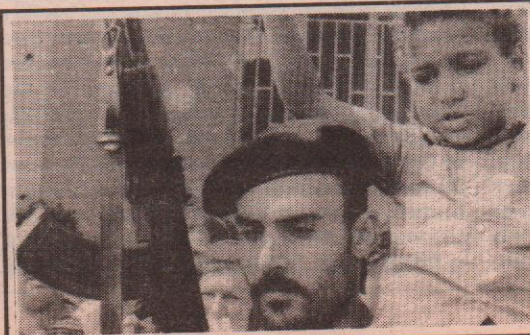
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CAN LABOUR WIN?

The results of last week's local council elections show that the Labour Party still has a long way to go before it can beat the Tories in a general election. Labour's successes, notably in the South West, the home counties and East Anglia confirmed the trends revealed by (continued on page 2)

'OUTING' AND GAY
LIBERATION
Page 2



HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY
Page 6

CAN THE ECONOMY SAVE
THE TORIES?
Page 3

CAN LABOUR WIN?

(continued from page 1)

the recent Mid-Staffs by-election and numerous opinion polls: Labour is beginning to win back support in the crucial Midlands and Southern areas which have been the key to three successive Thatcher victories. On the other hand, Labour's lead was less than half that of recent opinion polls. Neil Kinnock's team could easily lose a lead of 10-11 per cent in a hard-fought general election campaign.

The results revealed some disturbing trends for Labour. The Tories won major victories in London and the Social and Liberal Democrats emerged as the inheritors of enough of the Alliance vote to prevent Labour from winning parliamentary seats in key areas of the country. The council elections confirm that though many people are disillusioned with the Conservative Party, many are also profoundly mistrustful of Labour's alternative. For many, the disintegration of the economy and the Tory leadership will have to proceed a great deal further before they will come to regard Labour as the lesser evil.

The local elections are likely to push Labour still further on its apparently unstoppable trajectory to the right. The new policy document, revealing even more pro-capitalist policies, is to be launched shortly. The effect of the London results will be to provoke a renewed clampdown on the vestiges of the London left. Though the loony left has long been an endangered species, no doubt the Kinnock team will find a few specimens to offer up in ritual slaughter to appease the media.

Labour's drift to the right and the further humiliation of the left will clarify the broad themes of the Revolutionary Communist Party's analysis of Labourism and the demise of the old left. We too have to begin to prepare for the general election and to consider how we can take advantage of the realignments in British politics to build a revolutionary alternative to Labour. Whatever happens to Labour, that is the most important project for the next couple of years.

(See pages 4 and 5)

OUT NOW!

May 1990 No 19 £1.50

RIOTS
& THE LEFT

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A British Marxist in Eastern Europe

Joan Phillips journeys from Deutschland to Dracula country



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Editorial

11 May • No 15

THE ELECTIONS AND THE POLL TAX

'IF YOU DON'T like your poll tax bill, complain to the person who sent it.' This slogan, photographed against the background of 10 Downing Street, was the central theme of Labour's local government election campaign last week. The results revealed the difficulty facing the Labour Party and the left in deriving political advantage from the poll tax issue. They confirmed the position argued by the Revolutionary Communist Party in recent weeks, that the protests against the poll tax on narrowly economic grounds offer little scope for politicising resistance to the Tories.

The results showed that, in general, voters reacted to the poll tax according to the way it hit their pockets, and according to their perception of where the credit, or blame, lay. Where Tory councils imposed low poll taxes (Wandsworth, Westminster), they won landslide victories. Where Labour councils imposed high poll taxes (Ealing, Brent), they were voted out. Where Tory councils imposed high poll taxes (Chorley, Waveney), they too suffered defeats. Though there were exceptions to these trends (Haringey, Hackney) where other local factors were influential, in general voters appeared to be most influenced by the financial impact of the poll tax.

Voters were generally more inclined to blame the local council, than the prime minister, for a high tax. This was particularly evident in Scotland where Labour councils are already implementing the tax and Labour lost support as a result. There was however little evidence of a broader political revolt against the poll tax, a rejection of its undemocratic and regressive character that would have hit Tory support across the board.

The narrow character of the campaign against the poll tax in England was already evident from the way it was triggered off, not in the inner cities, but by the resignation of Tory councillors in West Oxfordshire. Given the heavy burden of the poll tax on many working class people, there is widespread support for the campaign against it. But the fact that inner city resistance is merged with the protests from burghers in the shires complaining about their contribution to the 'safety net' militates against the emergence of a coherent political response. Distressed social security claimants and angry suburbanites may be united in outrage against the level of their poll tax bill, but while that may unite them against the Tories, it is unlikely to unite them in support for Labour—especially when Labour councils are already implementing the tax.

SOVIET SCARES AND WESTERN FEARS

THE CLAIM last week by US president George Bush that Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev had faced the possibility of a military coup against him tells us more about Western fears of the changing world order than it does about Soviet politics. Significantly, Bush's warning came on the eve of the crucial 'two plus four' talks in Bonn that are to set the agenda for the unification of Germany. The coup scare reveals Western worries about German political influence at a time when Bonn is taking virtually unilateral initiatives on issues such as Lithuanian independence, and has forced Nato to concede to its demands on removing short-range nuclear missiles from its soil.

America and Britain orchestrated the coup scare to raise the prospect of a return to the Cold War—and hence the maintenance of a divided Germany—should Gorbachev be ousted by the Soviet military. The USA and Britain are using the coup scare to insist that Nato must now make concessions to the

Soviet Union in the 'two plus four' talks. Only such concessions, they argue, will stop the Soviet military from toppling Gorbachev.

One possible Western 'compromise' to maintain good relations with Moscow was recently advanced by British defence secretary Tom King: to allow Moscow to keep troops in East Germany for the next five years. The bizarre prospect of Soviet troops being based within a Nato member country indicates the determination of Washington and London to preserve the content of the post-war order, even if they are willing to dispense with the form.

Bush and Thatcher have accepted the principle of German unification, only to do everything within their power to undermine it in practice. The myth of a military threat to Gorbachev represents a convenient pretext for pursuing this objective. Despite the declaration in Bonn by the Four Powers and Germany that the Cold War is over, Nato's strategy of concessions to Moscow is designed to prop up the crumbling post-war order while avoiding the embarrassment of directly attacking Germany itself.

DOWN THE PECKING ORDER

AFTER TWO YEARS of wranglings, the pecking order of nations within the International Monetary Fund was finally resolved at Monday's interim Fund meeting in Washington. The USA retains poll position. Britain has been ousted from second place to make way for West Germany and Japan who now share that position. Reluctantly, the British negotiators have been forced to share fourth place with France. The realignment at the IMF serves to underline who are the real leaders in international finance and who are the 'also rans'.

For months Britain has recognised that it has little choice but to make way for the economic giants of West Germany and Japan. Japan's leap from fifth to second place is a reflection of the leading role it has come to play in the world. Japan is now the world's leading creditor nation. US Fund leaders were keen to keep Japanese credit on tap by giving Tokyo a bigger say in the Fund. This meant Britain had to be elbowed out.

Britain had hoped to save some face by maintaining a higher ranking than financially insignificant France. For the past few months British and French officials have squabbled over fourth and fifth places. This week's settlement resolves the issue by giving them the same ranking in the Fund and letting them share out the consolation prize of the new European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The resolution of the two-year dispute marks Britain's decline as a leading player in international financial affairs. Britain's leading position in multi-lateral institutions such as the IMF has long been a legacy of the post-war world order rather than any reflection of Britain's economic performance. The decks have now been cleared for the real world leaders—the USA, Japan and West Germany—to get on with the business of lording it over indebted third world nations, while the also-rans of Britain and France can be left to squabble between themselves.

GAY LIBERATION

REPORTS THAT British gay activists are considering following the recent American trend for publicly exposing prominent gays who keep their homosexual identity secret indicate a desperate response to an increasingly desperate situation. Last week the 49-year old actor Michael Boothe was found outside a public lavatory in Hanwell, west London. According to the police, he had been the victim of an 'extraordinary severe beating of a merciless and savage nature'. Still conscious, he stated that at least seven men had been involved in the attack. He died of multiple fractures and internal bleeding eight hours later. The Gay London Policing Group reports that at least a dozen gay men have been murdered in similar circumstances in the capital over the past three years.

In the USA the activist gay organisation Act-Up (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) and the paper *OutWeek* have pioneered the tactic of 'outing' in response to the growth of anti-homosexual hostility around the Aids issue. They call upon gay men whose homosexuality is not part of their otherwise public persona to come out openly in support of the campaign for legislative protection and more government funding for people with Aids and HIV infection—*as a direct act of identification in the media*. The actor Boothe was a prominent figure in the media. He was a British gay man who was known to the public.

editor Michael Mason have expressed some sympathy with 'outing' people like the three gay Tory MPs who voted in support of the government's Clause 28 attack on local council promotion of lesbian and gay issues.

'Outing' is a militant extension of the emphasis on 'coming out', the public proclamation of homosexual identity that was the central theme of the radical gay movement in the sixties and seventies. Yet 'coming out' never amounted to a strategy for gay liberation. It was an individual gesture that allowed many lesbians and gay men to break out of the closet of secrecy and guilt in which they had been forced to live their lives. But this was a much easier option for middle class gay men living in big city gay scenes and working in the liberal professions than it was for the great majority of lesbians and gays, living and working surrounded by prejudice and discrimination.

In itself 'coming out' did nothing to overcome the oppression of homosexuality. More gay men were prosecuted for their sexual activities after the limited legalisation of homosexual acts in 1967 in Britain than were before; during the eighties prosecutions of men for acts of 'gross indecency' have proceeded at a rate of more than 1000 a year. Nor did the radical emphasis on 'coming out' prevent the transformation of the gay movement on both sides of the Atlantic into a collection of respectable middle class pressure groups and state-funded quangos, a process accelerated by the movement's response to the Aids epidemic. Now that the anti-gay backlash is gathering momentum and, in a general climate of deepening reaction, governments are less inclined to listen to the gay lobby, the gay scene is turning in on itself. 'Outing' is the bitter result of the disintegration and decay of the movement for gay liberation.

The main responsibility for this process of degeneration, however, lies not with the gay movement, but with the wider left. For years the left ignored the question of homosexuality, leaving lesbians and gay men to confront their oppression in isolation and providing the establishment with another issue around which to divide and demoralise the working class. When the gay movement emerged in response to the left's neglect of the issue, the left patronised it and reinforced its individualistic and reformist approach. As a result the left has remained unable to combat reaction on the issue of homosexuality and the gay movement has become marginalised and fragmented.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party, by contrast, the fight for lesbian and gay rights has always been a key feature of our propaganda and activity. We intend to carry that struggle forward, neither by pleading for establishment recognition nor by exposing gay celebrities, but by fighting for the equal treatment of lesbians and gay men in all spheres of life.

MAY DAY

MAY DAY 1990 marks the end of an era. In 1889 in Paris the first International Socialist Congress, later to be known as the Second or Socialist International, declared the first day of May an 'international labour day'. On 1 May 1890 there were major demonstrations by the newly established socialist parties and trade unions in every European capital and May Day rapidly became established as a day for working class marches, rallies and meetings. Last week Mikhail Gorbachev was heckled at the May Day rally in Moscow while Labour's Frank Dobson would have been grateful for a few hecklers to fill the vacant acres of Clerkenwell Green at the TUC's London Labour Day rally.

Throughout Eastern Europe May Day 1990 was the occasion for renewed anti-communist, pro-Western demonstrations, and for general celebrations of the demise of the Stalinist order. In Leipzig right-wing youths carrying banners proclaiming 'Red is dead' clashed with organisers; in Sofia, marchers declared 'Workers of the world—count me out'; in Budapest and Prague official rallies were sparsely attended as workers simply took the day off. In Warsaw a few hundred geriatric members of the official unions assembled while British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd attended a Solidarity rally at the tomb of Father Popielusko; the Polish right chose May Day for a congress to promote its fervently religious, chauvinist and anti-Semitic policies.

In Britain, where May Day was only made a bank holiday by the Labour government in 1978, the official rally confirmed the exhaustion of the official labour movement. The combined forces of the TUC (membership eight million) and the Labour Party (individual membership 300 000) could muster only a few hundred—and the vast majority of these were Turkish Stalinists who retain an almost mystical attachment to May Day. Mrs Thatcher's scheme to abolish the May Day bank holiday next year in favour of a Trafalgar Day celebration in October will come as a relief to the overstretched activists at Congress House and Waltham Road.

May Day 1990 confirms the end of the century of labour's official celebration. The new century begins.

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FIGHT FOR COMMUNISM, BUT VOTE FOR LABOUR

LAST week we were given the chance to vote in the local elections. Many of us decided that as the Labour Party now only represents slightly more cuddly capitalism than the Tories we wouldn't vote at all. But why?

In our limited 'democracy', where we rarely have a chance to get involved politically in governing society, to throw away a vote is surely irresponsible. Plato defined the word 'idiot' as a person who is not involved in politics. Although voting in a local election constitutes negligible political involvement, it's all we've got.

We have to build a working class movement that will eventually take control, replacing capitalist 'democracy' with communism. But while the

RCP is relatively insignificant, surely we can play along with the current system and cast a vote, if only to express our disgust with the present government.

I suspect that for most people who don't vote, the reason is that they are not interested in politics at all. If I don't vote there is no electoral difference between me and those who just don't care. While I am living and playing a role in this society I want to have a limited say in determining how it will be run. Surely I should vote for the candidates whose views are nearest to my own, even if the options are only different forms of capitalism. Move society to the left, if only slightly. Vote Labour!

**Dave
North London**

SIMON NORFOLK



Hackney council: implementing the poll tax, victimising its opponents

POLL TAX CLIMBDOWN

HACKNEY council management conditionally reinstated Andy Murphy last Friday afternoon. Andy, a council finance officer, had earlier been suspended after telling the press that the poll tax rioters in Trafalgar Square were 'working class heroes' and that the police 'got what they deserved'. Management agreed to reinstate Andy after Nalگو members threatened to disrupt the council elections by striking last Wednesday.

The union leadership appeared willing to accede to management demands that key officials involved in the administration of the election should be exempt from the strike. Rank and file activists were not. At a meeting of activists called to organise the strike last Friday lunchtime, we vehemently opposed the leadership's request for exemptions. Later that afternoon management gave Andy his job back, obviously fearful of bad publicity and having the election disrupted.

But while rank and file action got Andy reinstated, the union leadership ensured that it happened on

management's terms. We discovered later that although Andy is now back at work, the council is continuing its 'investigation' against him and it is still possible that he will be disciplined. In the meantime Andy is banned from making public comments. Further, the union leadership appear to have agreed to discuss with management guidelines and conditions on future public statements by Hackney council employees.

Activists must vigorously oppose all attempts by management and the union leadership to restrict our right to free speech, our right to organise and to resist attacks by central government or their local managers in the council. While we are delighted that Andy's suspension has been lifted, we should demand his unconditional reinstatement and refuse to accept any conditions that management might use to gag us in the future.

**Sharmini Brookes
Nalگو convenor
Finance department
Hackney council
(Personal capacity)**

CHALLENGING GREENS

FOR the past 10 years I have been active in a local Friends of the Earth group, working on issues such as energy, planning and transport. In the course of that time I have come to the inescapable conclusion that the root cause of the world's problems is the capitalist system and that solutions to these problems won't be found until that system is overthrown and a truly equitable system based on Marxist principles is established. Coming to this conclusion has put me at odds with my (former) Green co-activists and I have now left Friends of the Earth.

Reading the editorial 'Down to Earth' (the next step, 27 April), I found much that I agreed with. However, there are a number of points I would like to raise. First, we have to recognise that we are facing serious global problems with the depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, tropical deforestation and the greenhouse effect. Dismissing the Green movement as an anti-working class middle class phenomenon, undoubtedly true as that is, will not make these problems go away.

Secondly, it has to be recognised that working class people often suffer the brunt of environmental problems such as industrial pollution, poor housing, traffic fumes and noise, poor public transport and dirt and dust from landfill waste disposal, to name but a few. Quite understandably, working class perceptions of what constitutes an environmental problem often differ from those of Friends of the Earth or the Green Party, hence their lack of representation in these organisations. However, this has not prevented working class people from organising themselves to fight against threats to the environment in which they live.

What we need to do is continue to challenge the Green movement on its appeasement of capitalism and to shatter the naive belief they hold that the capitalist system can be persuaded to tackle environmental problems. We also need to confront the irrational prejudices that 'deep Greens' hold about science and technology, clearly stating that the problem lies with capitalism's control of technology to suit its own purposes, not with technology itself.

Where working class communities are organising themselves independently of the Green movement to fight local environmental threats we should be there to explain the link between capitalism and environmental problems. These situations offer us a unique opportunity to get our message across clearly without having to cut through an impenetrable fog of Green philosophy first.

The Green movement is a fact of life and looks set to stay for a long time. Rather than sniping at it from the sidelines, we should be actively seeking to change the thinking of Greens at every available opportunity. We should be attending public meetings held by Friends of the Earth and the Green Party to challenge their stance to the capitalist system and to state clearly our case for a Marxist solution.

**Dave Amis
Essex**

The economy

PROSPECTS FOR REVIVAL

LOOKING FOR A MAJOR MIRACLE

Tony Kennedy assesses the prospects of an economic revival before the next election

Can the Tories engineer a revival of the economy in time for the next election? This is the major question being posed by the pundits trying to assess the pattern of political developments in Britain.

The more hopeful commentators, echoing Tory central office, argue that the economy may already be approaching its low point. In this scenario, Britain will avoid an outright recession and the economy will be back on a stable path of growth within a year. Chancellor John Major will be able to deliver some budget sweeteners in March 1992 and coax the electorate into giving the Tories a fourth term.

Other commentators take a more pessimistic view. Eyeing the historical evidence on the ups and downs of the economy, they suggest that the economic and electoral cycles are now badly out of line. They argue that the government should have seized the opportunity to have imposed shock remedies on the economy a year or more ago. Failure to have done so means that the Tories will now have to get by with high inflation and low growth—or recession—right up to election day.

academic theories which claim that it is wrong to include personal taxation and interest on borrowed money in the measure of inflation are now being dusted off to cast doubt on the credibility of the retail price index. Ministers insist that the 'underlying rate of inflation'—which is only marginally above that of the rest of Europe—is a more accurate measure. Such arguments are hardly likely to convince the millions whose living standards are being squeezed by huge mortgage and poll tax demands.

In the past, even when Tory policies were unpopular, people had some faith in their ability to run the economy and in the notion of the Tory 'economic miracle'. Britain appeared to be sustaining high growth levels and productivity increases. Today it is clear that the economic miracle, such as it was, has come to an end and cannot be repeated.

The Tories' past reputation for being able to engineer economic success was the product of exceptional and one-off factors. The expansion of credit, North Sea oil, shakeouts in major industries that boosted productivity levels—all helped to keep the economy moving forward. Today North Sea oil

SIMON NORFOLK



The Tories can wave goodbye to their economic successes of the eighties

The council election successes in Wandsworth and Westminster are not very reassuring—bribing a few boroughs with central government largesse is hardly a strategy that can be afforded on a national scale.

The Tories maintain that critics are exaggerating the scale of the problems facing the government. John Major insists that his 'policies are working' and that time will soon confound the doom merchants. In fact Major has only one 'policy'—keeping up interest rates in an attempt to contain inflation—and even that is not working. According to International Monetary Fund estimates, Britain's inflation rate will be the highest of the G7 group of the world's leading capitalist countries both this year and the next.

In fact the Tories' only real policy is to fix the figures. Over the past decade government ministers have become expert in manipulating statistics to suit their needs—such as the two dozen or so revisions of the unemployment figures which have so far brought the total down to 1.6m.

The Tories latest scam is to argue that mortgage rate payments and the poll tax should not be included in calculating the rate of inflation. Obscure

production has passed its peak; there are no more industries to shake out to improve productivity; the manufacturing sector is in a state of stagnation with no growth in output recorded over the last quarter; and there has been a rapidly rising number of bankruptcies in the small business sector. To cap it all Britain's invisible earnings, which in the past made up for the deficit in manufacturing trade, is itself now in the red. Hence there can be no repeat of the hype of the eighties.

At the same time, after a decade in power there is no one left to blame for Britain's economic failures.

By boasting about an economic miracle, the Tories effectively announced that their strategy had succeeded. Now that the economy is back in crisis the Tories themselves are the most obvious target of the political backlash.

Unlike in 1983 and 1987 the Tories will not be able to fight the next election on a record of political and economic successes. At best the Tories will be able to claim that they have avoided a major recession. If the Tories do win a fourth term, it won't be because the economy has saved them.

CAN LABOUR WIN?

James Heartfield examines the question that has been taxing politician and pundit alike since last week's local elections

'Kinnock poll axed' claimed the *Sun*. 'Tories in crisis' asserted the *Mirror*. 'Sweeping gains for Labour', reported the *Financial Times*. The *Times* preferred to stress 'Tory relief as London bucks Labour trend'. The varied, confused and often contradictory analyses of the local government

Labour yet to guarantee it a general election victory in 1991 or 1992.

At the same time the possibility of the Tories engineering an economic recovery before the next election seems remote (see page 3). The real question to ask is not whether the Tories create an economic miracle over the next year, but whether

Shadow chancellor John Smith has spent much of his time over the past few months trying to persuade the establishment on both sides of the Atlantic that their interests are safe in Labour's hands. Last month, Smith visited Washington and met with White House officials to reassure them about the intentions of any future

its distance from ruling class circles. The City might have been nervous about Labour in the past, but the party never had to resort to such public demonstrations of its trustworthiness to make its point.

Never before has Labour been so isolated from the British establishment. Even in 1924 the first Labour government

with policy. 'In some ways', argued Worsthorpe, 'a Labour government might be better placed to promote Thatcherism than would a fourth-term Mrs Thatcher'. Nevertheless, in Worsthorpe's eyes, Kinnock would never be a 'suitable, or even conceivable prime minister'.



Would you buy a second-hand cabinet from this man?

election results reflected the uneven nature of the results themselves (see box). On the key question of whether Labour would win a national election, however, there was a general consensus. Most pundits agreed that were a general election to be held tomorrow Labour would win; the projected majority in the house of commons varied from 66 to 74 depending on which set of statistics you used to calculate the figure. The pundits also agreed, however, that the Tories could recover and win a fourth term so long as the government could solve the problem of the economy. As usual, it was an assessment which confused as much as it revealed.

For a start, it is difficult to project national predictions from local election results. Midterm local election results tend to be more a reflection of the unpopularity of the government than of support for the opposition. The buoyancy of the centre vote is another unpredictable factor. If the Liberal Democrats were to repeat their performance at the general election it would seriously dent Labour's hopes of preventing a fourth Thatcher victory.

The fact that a 25 per cent lead in opinion polls was cut to 11 per cent at the ballot box suggests that Labour has not so much created an electoral breakthrough as been the beneficiary of a midterm protest. There was clearly an anti-Tory mood last Thursday—but voters showed they were not enthusiastic enough about

Labour can win if there is no economic upturn. More importantly, what difference would it make if Labour did win?

To answer such questions, we need to look further than just at the results from last Thursday's elections. Whether Labour will be returned to power next time round is not simply a question of the number of votes cast but of the party's ability to play a distinctive role in political life.

In the past Labour's distinct identity and place in British politics were forged through its relationship to the British establishment, the trade union bureaucracy and the working class.

The Labour Party acted as an intermediary between the establishment and the working class. The labour bureaucracy provided the social base for the party and its link to the working class. For the ruling class, Labour provided a means through which to contain working class unrest; for the union leaders a channel to corridors of state power; and for workers the party seemed to be a vehicle through which they could express their aspirations towards a better society.

In the 15 years since Labour last won an election, all three relationships have been radically transformed. To assess the question of Labour's electability, we need to examine the changing nature of Labour's relations in each of these three key areas.

It is clear that today Labour's relationship with the ruling class is fraught.

Labour government. Smith has launched what the *Independent on Sunday* called 'Labour's luncheon offensive', assiduously courting industrialists and investors in a series of business lunches. 'The object', explained the *Independent*, 'is persuade the City that he will not sprout horns the moment he moves into 11 Downing Street' (6 May 1990).

Last week Smith took this charm offensive a stage further when, in an interview with the *Independent's* business section, the Labour spokesman made concessions on unemployment, trade unions and public spending that would make even a Tory minister wince:

- 'I don't think I can take responsibility for companies making mistakes and unemployment resulting from that...I can't wave a magic wand.'
- '[Trade unions] can cause unemployment...I think they have to stand by the results of their own decisions.'
- 'If the economy is needing to be put right when we get in, that would be the first priority and we may have to postpone our social ambitions.'

Kinnock and his frontbench team are clearly determined to persuade the establishment it has little to fear from a Labour government. But the very vehemence with which Labour is trying to establish its creditworthiness is a telling indicator of

was buoyed by defections from the Liberal Party. Leading upper class figures like Beatrice and Sidney Webb tied the fledgling party into the upper echelons of the ruling class. Ramsay MacDonald's 1924 cabinet contained two viscounts, one lord and more Oxbridge graduates than Kinnock's redbrick university team.

In the Labour governments of 1945, 1964 and 1974, there was more ministerial experience and more gravitas than Kinnock could muster today. Neil Kinnock is the only member of his frontbench with any experience of cabinet government—and that as a parliamentary private secretary for education. His shadow cabinet lacks the figures who would have once been a bridge between a potential Labour government and the British establishment. Labour's isolation from the ruling class is the result of the way the traditional right within the party has been squeezed out over the past decade. That layer of Oxbridge upper class intellectuals that once acted as a conduit between Labour and the establishment is no longer there.

The real problem for Kinnock is that without this link, Labour faces an uphill task in winning the support of the ruling class.

As arch-reactionary Peregrine Worsthorpe pointed out in the *Sunday Telegraph* last weekend, the establishment's distrust of the Labour Party is not simply to do

'When the British people rejected Mr Churchill in 1945, his Labour successor had already served as deputy prime minister throughout the war. Surprising as their choice was, it did not make a laughing stock of Britain. The replacement of Mrs Thatcher by Mr Kinnock would.' (6 May 1990)

Kinnock's lack of stature makes the ruling class reluctant to trust him, so long as even a half-decent alternative is available. The response of the City to the election results underlines this point. Despite the overwhelming failure of the government's economic strategy, the mere fact that the Tories were not trounced on Thursday sent both shares and the pound sharply upwards.

The Labour Party's relationship with the trade union bureaucracy has undergone an equal transformation. 'Tea and crumpets in Downing Street', John Smith told the *Independent on Sunday*, 'seems a long way away'. So long away, in fact, that he cannot even remember that the phrase used to signify the cosy relationship that trade union leaders used to enjoy with Labour prime ministers was not 'tea and crumpets' but 'beer and sandwiches at Number 10'.

Today all that has changed. Last month Kinnock announced that the union share of the vote at Labour Party conferences would be reduced from 90 per cent to 70

per cent; this is the first stage in a process which will eventually eliminate the union block vote altogether, thereby severing Labour's historic links with the trade unions. The most remarkable feature of these changes is that he carried them through without protest from trade union leaders; indeed many acquiesced to organisational moves that would reduce their own power inside the Labour Party.

The significance of the change lies in the fact that the relationship with the trade union bureaucracy has been the defining feature of the Labour Party since its inception. The Labour Party was established to provide a parliamentary voice for the unions at a time when their ability to organise was coming under attack, through legal judgements like the Taff Vale decision. Labour's special relationship with the unions meant that it could play a unique role for the establishment, acting as intermediary between the capitalist class and the working class. 'Beer and sandwiches at Number 10' was an indication of the influence of trade union leaders in the running of the country through their relationship with the Labour Party.

volted against the Callaghan government's public sector pay restraints, proved to be the turning point. The Tory attacks on the unions in the eighties, the calamitous drop in membership and the bureaucrats' loss of national status have forced union leaders in the past decade to look for new alignments.

In this new and harsher climate of industrial relations, the link with the Labour Party is no longer the key, or indeed a necessary, relationship for the unions. The main preoccupation of union leaders is to ensure the survival of their organisations by finding a new relationship with the employers. Establishing sweetheart deals with the bosses, a process pioneered by the electricians' union, is a much more important survival strategy than clinging to the old relationship with the Labour Party. The fact that unions have endorsed the organisational changes promoted by Kinnock shows that they recognise that their relationship with Labour is all but redundant.

Perhaps the most profound transformation has occurred in the relationship between the Labour Party and the working class. Under Kinnock, the party has abandoned any identification with anti-

The most noticeable effect of the move away from the working class has been the demise of the left. The decision by Merseyside MP Eric Heffer to retire at the next election exemplifies the movement of the party from its trade union roots. Heffer, a veteran of the Liverpool shop stewards movement, does not fit the style of Kinnock's student union trained team.

What remains of the left in the Labour Party is not part of the traditional Labour left of which Heffer is a product, but rather the last remnants of the layer of middle class radicals who entered the party in the seventies. Exemplified by a figure like Ken Livingstone, the new left made its mark largely in local government. But as last week's elections revealed, even it is a spent force.

The left has been swept out of strongholds like Haringey, once the model of a 'loony left' council; Labour defeats in Ealing and Brent will simply accelerate the process by which the residual left is liquidated.

The collapse of the Green vote in the local elections is another indication of the exhaustion of middle class radicalism. The Greens' rapid move to the right

from Labour.

As the Labour Party became less responsive to working class pressure, so workers became more disenchanted with Labour. Disaffection from the Labour Party reached a peak after the experience of the 1974-79 Labour government. In the eighties Labour lost virtually all influence in skilled working class communities in the South and the Midlands and was largely thrown back to its traditional heartlands in the North and Scotland.

Thursday's results showed that large sections of the working class had come back to Labour. But it was clear that Labour gains in places like Milton Keynes and Southampton were more the product of an anti-Tory mood than of any great enthusiasm for Labour. The surge of Labour in the polls is not the result of any radicalisation or political differentiation within the working class but simply the product of disaffection with the Tory government.

What does all this say about Labour's ability to win the next election? The Labour Party has transformed its three key relationships and jettisoned its traditional role as the intermediary in class

suffer from their economic failures—and how much internal strife erupts in the Tory Party. If the inability of the ruling class to find answers to the fundamental problems facing British capitalism leads to widespread Tory divisions, then Neil Kinnock stands a chance of entering Number 10.

However, even if the Labour Party returns to power, it will be a very different beast from that which ruled in the past. Most importantly, having jettisoned its links with the labour bureaucracy and the working class the new model Labour Party no longer has the capacity to contain 'king class unrest.

Any upsurge of working class militancy in the future, therefore, will pose major problems for the ruling class and open up new possibilities for Marxists.

Whether or not the Labour Party wins the next election, it is clear that there is unprecedented scope for creating a new revolutionary movement. There is no organisation in Britain today that has claim to the allegiance of the working class as Labour did in the past. In the short term this has led to the growth of reaction as the ruling class is able directly

PANDORA ANDERSON



Relations between the two wings of the labour movement became strained in the seventies as the Labour Party was drawn into the orbit of the establishment and became less responsive to working class pressure. The winter of discontent in 1979, during which the trade unions re-

capitalist politics, or even any sense that it represents the interests of working class people. Kinnock has ditched every policy that might be conceived as left-wing or socialist. His new model party supports the free market, strict legal restrictions on union rights and a nuclear defence policy.

removes the left's last bolthole.

The crushing of the left and the jettisoning of the party's links with the working class reflect longer-term trends—on the one hand the drift of the party away from the working class and on the other the drift of the working class away

relations. Yet it has not acquired a new role. Whether or not Labour is returned to power, therefore, has less to do with the Labour Party itself than with the fortunes of the Tories.

Labour's chances depend, therefore, largely on how much damage the Tories

to influence workers. In the longer term it can only increase the possibility of creating a new anti-capitalist alternative.

BEHIND THE ELECTION STATISTICS

LABOUR'S SOFT UNDERBELLY

We can draw two main conclusions from last Thursday's election results: first, that Labour has gained substantially on the Tories since its disastrous 1987 defeat; and second, that Labour's lead is too soft to bank on a clear run at the general election.

Labour won 300 seats on an 11 per cent swing nationwide and made significant inroads into skilled working class areas in the Midlands and the South. The 1987 election had left Labour dangerously restricted to the North. Bar London, the constituency map was blue from the Midlands down. After Thursday Labour gained control of Basildon, Milton Keynes, Great Yarmouth, Southampton, Waveney

and Merton. Labour is beginning to win back voters among the skilled working class—the layer that sociologists often refer to as 'C2's—that deserted to the Tories in 1979.

Following on from Labour's victory in the Mid-Staffordshire by-election and its commanding lead in the opinion polls, the local election results seem to suggest that Labour has finally made an electoral breakthrough. However Labour's lead on Thursday is deceptive. Simple totals give an idea of the relations of the parties but obscure the political dynamic at work. In fact Labour's surge is the result not of positive enthusiasm for Kinnock's new model party but of the unpopularity of

the government.

Labour's performance showed several areas of weakness. First, the party suffered major setbacks in London. In the so-called Tory 'flagships' of Wandsworth and Westminster, Labour was humiliated; in both cases there was a seven per cent swing towards the Conservatives. In Ealing and Brent, Labour lost control of the boroughs. In Hammersmith, the Tories gained 13 extra seats. In Tower Hamlets and Sutton the Liberal Democrats did spectacularly well.

These figures show that there is only a faltering dynamic behind the surge in Labour Party votes. Where there is a low level of poll tax, then voters are willing to

stick with the Tories. This is true even outside of London. Labour has made much of its success in taking Bradford, one of Thatcher's low poll tax flagships—but the swing away from the Tories was only one per cent.

Labour support is also undermined in areas where the local Labour councils happen to be even more unpopular than the Tories—as in Ealing, Brent, Hammersmith and to some extent Camden.

Finally the figures show that while many voters are anti-Tory, many are anti-Labour too. Hence where the Liberal Democrats offer a credible alternative—as for example in Sutton—they can benefit from the unpopularity of the government.

The strength of support for the SLD remains a major problem for Neil Kinnock because his prospects of entering Number 10 depend crucially on Labour's ability to eliminate the centre parties. Of all the trends revealed by election results, the buoyancy of the Liberal Democrats will probably be of greatest worry to Labour strategists; it shows that, for all the organisational and policy changes, Kinnock's new model Labour Party is still a long way from being able to stake its claim to the centre ground.

HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY

Behind the recent focus on hostages, says Daniel Nassim, lies a shifting balance of power in the Middle East

The release of American hostages Robert Polhill and Frank Reed from captivity in Beirut has dominated much of the news in the West over the past two weeks. Their release has raised hopes that other Western hostages might also soon be free. Reed's release received particular attention in this country because he brought news that Briton John McCarthy and Irishman Brian Keenan were still alive. Reed's sharp condemnation of the British government for failing to take steps to get them released has renewed pressures on the British authorities.

In fact the hostage negotiations have got little to do with the fate of the hostages themselves. Rather, they provide a means by which Western powers can communicate with Middle Eastern states, such as Iran and Syria, with whom they cannot openly negotiate. The hostages are merely pawns in an intricate game of great power relations in the region. The recent hectic negotiations are a sign that important political manoeuvres are taking place in the Middle East.

The balance of power that has existed in the region for the past decade is breaking down.

The relationship between the West and the four major powers in the area—Iran, Iraq, Syria and Israel—are in a state of flux. The realignment in the Middle East is the result on the one hand of Iran's desire for rapprochement with the West; and on the other of the impact of the demise of Stalinism on the region. The combination of Iranian moderation and Soviet retrenchment is having a different impact on each of the main countries in the region. Let us examine each of them in turn.

Permanent conflict

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 sent shock waves through the West. The shah had been a bastion of Western influence in the region and under his rule Iran became an important ally of both Britain and America. The mullahs who took power in Iran after the 1979 revolution, on the other hand, promoted anti-imperialism as a means of winning popular support for their rule. As a result, there developed a state of virtual permanent conflict between Iran and the West over the past decade.

The devastating impact of Iran's war with Iraq, however, and the virtual collapse of the Iranian economy have forced Tehran to search for better relations with the West. For their part, Western powers are keen to restore links with Iran because of its economic and strategic significance. Iran is potentially the most powerful country in the region with a relatively large and highly developed economy, a substantial population and a strategic location.

Despite the rule of the mullahs, the West has always maintained some kind of relationship with the regime in Tehran. The hostages held by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon have provided a convenient cover for talks. Today, hostage negotiations are paving the way for the restoration of closer relations between Iran and the West.

Abandoning clients

There is enthusiasm in the West about the prospects of a reconciliation with Iran. Besides the recent release of two American hostages, talks between Washington and Tehran about Iranian assets frozen in the USA are proceeding smoothly. British Steel was recently awarded a contract to help rebuild Iran's crumbling railway system. The Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, recently had talks with his Italian and Irish counterparts.

The close involvement of Syria in the hostage negotiations is an indication that relations between Damascus and the West are also warming.

Increasing contact between Syria and the West is largely a product of the collapse of Stalinism. Over the past decade, the Soviet Union has been Syria's main patron. In its efforts to improve relations with the West, Moscow has been abandoning its client states throughout the third world. Accordingly, the Kremlin has cut back support for its ally and is putting pressure on Damascus to move closer to the West.

Last week's meeting between Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president and Hafez el Assad, his Syrian counterpart, was a sign of the direction in which things are moving. Syria broke off relations with Egypt 13 years ago after Cairo opened diplomatic relations with Israel. By restoring contact with one of the most pro-Western states Syria is clearly signalling that it wants to come in from the cold.

While the hostage negotiations show the closer links between Iran and Syria and the West, it is important not to overestimate the changes. The fact



The people of the Middle East, like the Western hostages, are pawns in an intricate game of great power relations

that even the USA needs to use the hostages as a pretext for discussion shows that there is still a strong undercurrent of anti-Western feeling in the region. Many local leaders feel nervous about having direct talks with leading Western politicians.

While Western relations with Syria and Iran are improving, those with Iraq and Israel are deteriorating. Better Western relations with Iran inevitably tend to mean a deterioration in ties with Iraq. For more than a decade the West has played one off against the other.

Iran is far better suited to the role of regional client for the West. But when this option is not available the West has tended to warm to Iraq. In the seventies Iran's relations with the West were exceptionally good. This meant that Iraq was largely ignored by the West. As a result the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussain developed closer ties with the Soviet Union and gained a reputation for radicalism.

After the overthrow of the shah, Western relations with Iraq improved sharply. The Western powers provided strategic backing for Baghdad during the Gulf War with Iran. A series of recent incidents, however, from the execution of journalist Farzad Bazoft to the Iraqi supergun affair, has indicated that relations between Iraq and the West are deteriorating once more, as the West concentrates on improving relations with Iran.

The West's relationship with Israel, for long its major proxy in the region, is also becoming more strained.

The USA has recently criticised Israel over its resistance to talks with Palestinian representatives and the settlement of Soviet Jews in the West Bank. Israel has only conditionally agreed to US requests to release some of its prisoners to ease the way for the other Western hostages in Lebanon to be set free too.

The cooler relations between Israel and the West are also a consequence of the shifting balance of power in the region. As the more radical regimes in the Middle East move closer to the West, so the imperialist powers have less need for Israel to play its traditional role of regional policeman.

The hostage crisis not only shows the shifting balance of power among the Middle Eastern states. It is also an indicator of different capacities of the Western powers to intervene in the region. While the USA and France have managed to free at least some of their hostages, no Briton has yet been released.

Britain's refusal to negotiate for the release of British hostages has nothing to do with any scruples about giving in to 'blackmail'. Nor can the failure of a single British hostage to win his freedom be simply blamed on the Salman Rushdie affair. It is rather a recognition that Britain now has much less political

leverage in the Middle East than it once used to. It is a testament to the decline of British power that the nation that was once responsible for carving up the region today has to wait at the back of the queue even when it comes to the question of getting its hostages released.

SOUTH AFRICA

CRIMINALISING THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

South African president FW De Klerk and black nationalist leader Nelson Mandela held a joint press conference last Friday to set the seal on three days of historic negotiations between the white minority government and the African National Congress. It was the first time the two sides had met since the ANC was formed in 1912. The joint communiqué indicated broad agreement on conditions for full-scale negotiations on ending the political conflict in South Africa. Mandela described the occasion as 'the realisation of a dream'. 'We are all victors', he told the press.

The joint communiqué stated that the ANC and the government had agreed on 'a common commitment towards the resolution of the existing climate of violence and intimidation from whatever quarter'. The two sides are committed to bring about conditions in which a constitutional conference can take place which will end white minority rule in South Africa.

This means compromise on both sides. For Pretoria it means reviewing the criteria and procedure for releasing remaining political prisoners and lifting the state of emergency. In return Pretoria has demanded that the ANC renounce the armed struggle. Mandela's commitment at the press conference to 'look very hard and earnestly into the whole question of armed struggle and take appropriate decisions' indicates

that such a trade-off is on the cards.

By linking the ending of the armed struggle with discussion about 'the existing climate of violence and intimidation', the ANC has allowed the apartheid regime to criminalise all resistance to the De Klerk regime. The ANC is effectively giving Pretoria the go-ahead to crack down on any violence that threatens the stability of the state. This can only mean the repression of black militants.

Criminalising all resistance to Pretoria's rule represents a major victory for South African capitalists and their international backers. De Klerk has set out to scrap apartheid but not the economic system which thrived upon it. He knows that black majority rule will go a long way towards 'normalising' the political situation. But De Klerk also recognises that the 'post-apartheid' society his reforms are designed to create will retain the inequalities of apartheid and thus the seeds of resistance. Linking the ANC's armed struggle to the continuing violence in South Africa's townships and homelands will enable the regime to exert more and more pressure on the ANC, isolate the militants and ultimately legitimise state repression in the name of 'law and order'.

Charles Longford

ARGUMENTS FOR COMMUNISM

The historic events which have convulsed Eastern Europe over the past year have brought profound changes to the international political arena. The end of the Cold War, the coming reunification of Germany, questions over the future of Nato—many of the political certainties of the post-war years have been swept aside.

The collapse of Stalinism has also had a devastating impact on radical movements internationally. In the third world it has put liberation struggles on the defensive and in the West it has discredited and disoriented the left. Across the globe the demise of Stalinism has put in question the very possibility of socialism.

In contrast to the general pessimism on the left, the Revolutionary Communist Party takes a very positive view of the new era in world politics. We recognise that while in the short term the collapse of Stalinism is likely to lead to a growth in reaction and to boost the confidence of the capitalist class, it also ushers in a new cycle of history and paves the way to recreate Marxism as a genuine alternative to capitalism.

On the surface, it appears that the pessimists are right and that capitalism is on the ascendant. During the past 12 months Communist parties have been

In the Middle East, Iran and Syria are making concerted moves to restore better relations with the West.

In the West, Communist parties are rushing to renounce their Marxist heritage. The Italian Communist Party, the biggest and most influential in Western Europe, is about to change its name; others will follow suit. The non-Stalinist left too has been hit hard, as the collapse of Stalinism has discredited left-wing ideas in general and reinforced the left's isolation.

The changing political mood has given new impetus to racism and reaction. With the Red Menace no longer a credible threat, Western rulers have been searching for a new scapegoat. Foreigners in general, and black people in particular, are likely to fit the bill.

Welcome development

The effect of these changes has been to create a profound sense of pessimism on the left. Many left-wing groups have openly embraced the market philosophy. Most doubt the possibility of building socialism.

For the Revolutionary Communist Party, the collapse of Stalinism is a welcome development and has not come a moment too soon. For more than half a century, Stalinism has been a barrier to the construction of a revolutionary movement. Since the thirties, left-wing organisations in the West, even those which explicitly disavowed Stalinism, looked to Moscow for their model of socialism. From the project of state planning espoused by Labour Party Fabians to the theory of imperialism promoted by the radical left, Stalinism has influenced the development of left-wing politics in the West.

At the same time the existence of a repressive regime in the Soviet Union provided Western propagandists with a model of socialism to deter radical trends at home. So long as the Stalinist bureaucrats ruled Moscow, communism would be identified with food queues, bad housing, travel restrictions and a police state. The sweeping away of the Stalinist regimes paves the way for building a new movement unencumbered by the legacy of the Soviet Union.

Not only does the demise of Stalinism clear the way for Marxism, but the new era of history it opens up also reveals ever more clearly the inability of capitalism to liberate humanity. For 40 years the division of Europe and the Cold War allowed the imperialist powers to stabilise international relations and contain class conflict. The Soviet threat allowed the imperialist powers, under the leadership of the USA, to establish a framework within which to contain potential rivalries.

A new era

Today that framework is fast breaking up, and with it the relative harmony of the post-war years. As the international balance of power changes so divisions among the major capitalist nations will grow deeper and more bitter. The end of the Cold War is already bringing to the surface rivalries which have been suspended for the past 40 years. America's conflict with Japan over its trade deficit, Britain's fear of a united Germany, the jockeying for position within the International Monetary Fund—all presage a new era of conflict and discord.

The collapse of Stalinism and the end of the Cold War opens a new cycle in history. It also opens the way to build a new revolutionary movement that can put positive arguments for the liberatory potential of communism. The RCP and *Living Marxism* are organising a series of events over the next few months to put the case for communism and liberation.

The central theme of Preparing for Power, the RCP's annual summer school in July, will be the collapse of Stalinism and its consequences for building Marxism in the nineties. There will be sixteen specialist courses, ranging from *Contemporary capitalism and Marxism and science* to *The roots of racism* and *New international relations*, and more than 100 workshops with speakers from Britain and abroad.

But you don't have to wait till July to discuss the state of the world and how to change it. *Living Marxism* is sponsoring a series of dayschools around the country on the theme 'Marxism after the death of socialism'. If you want to get to grips with an ever-changing world and find out the arguments for communism and liberation, make sure you come along.

LIVING MARXISM dayschools

marxism after the death of socialism

Saturday 2 June International Community Centre, Mansfield Road, Nottingham **Registration 10.30am**

Sunday 10 June Shepherds Hall, 71 Old Market Street, Bristol **Registration 11am**

Sunday 10 June Swarthmore Centre, 3-7 Woodhouse Square, Leeds 3 **Registration 10.30am**

Sunday 17 June University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1 (nearest tube Goodge Street) **Registration 10.30am**

Sunday 17 June Brighton Unemployed Centre, 6 Tilbury Place, Brighton **Registration 10.30am**

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.**

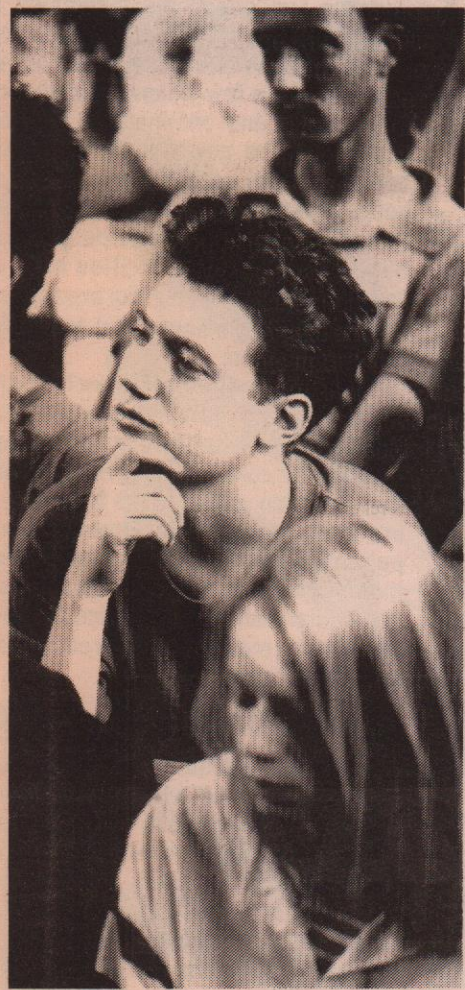
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swept out of office in virtually every East European country. The elections in East Germany and Hungary showed popular support for the restoration of the market and a return to capitalism. The Stalinists, under whatever name or guise they stood, were humiliated. Socialist groupings modelled on the social democratic parties of Western Europe were swept aside. The elections which are coming up in Czechoslovakia and Poland are most likely to show similar results.

Gorbachev's policy of international retrenchment has had a devastating impact on anti-imperialist movements in the third world. To maintain good relations with the West, Moscow is prepared to make deals with the imperialist powers and withdraw support from radical regimes and movements. In southern Africa, for example, the Soviet Union forced Swapo to accept an independence settlement in Namibia which was to the benefit of the imperialist powers and pushed the African National Congress into face-to-face talks with the Pretoria regime. In Central America, Soviet retrenchment helped the US-backed Uno coalition to defeat the Sandinista regime in the Nicaraguan elections earlier this year.

Commemoration DAY



Bobby Sands MP
died on Hunger Strike 1981

Speakers include:
Dodie McGuinness
Sinn Féin Councillor
The Reverend Kiyul Chung
General Secretary of the
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Peace and Re-unification
of Korea
Jeremy Corbyn MP
Teama Montero MEP
Henri Batastuna
Basque National
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James Connolly executed by the
British Government 1916

the next step

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THE BATTLE OF BOURNEMOUTH

THE RETURN OF THE HOOLIGAN PANIC



Spot the hooligan: uniformed thugs move into action in Bournemouth last weekend

It had to happen. The last weekend of the football league season—and the authorities could not pass up the chance to create a bit of bother about football hooligans. The conditions were ideal: a hot, sunny bank holiday weekend; the sleepy seaside resort of Bournemouth; thousands of visiting fans from Leeds; a ticket allocation of 2300 for the Leeds supporters when more than double that number were expected to come. And all this just a month before the start of the World Cup. It was just too good an opportunity to miss. And sure enough, last weekend we saw the return of the hooligan panic.

'The Battle of Bournemouth', screamed the Sun. 'Soccer at war', declared the Mirror. 'Sleepy Bournemouth awoke to a living nightmare', claimed the Daily Telegraph. It was the Times, however, which really had its finger on the pulse. 'Bournemouth, Birmingham, Chesterfield, Halifax, Sheffield, Cambridge, Aldershot', listed its editorial,

reeling off the 'hooligan spots' of the day. 'The rollcall reads like battles of the Civil War, an analogy which is regrettably all too apposite.'

Perhaps it was the excitement of his sudden elevation to the editor's chair, but aside from the Times' Simon Jenkins nobody else appeared to have spotted Cavaliers and Roundheads roaming round Bournemouth. The closest sighting was that of the Daily Telegraph reporter who uncovered '250 Leeds "generals"' arriving early in Bournemouth to prepare for battle. The Telegraph also claimed that the showdown with the police 'had been planned for months by Leeds supporters'. Other reporters contented themselves with describing in graphic detail the supposed terror and devastation that thousands of 'yobs' and 'animals' had brought to the town as they fought pitched battles with the police.

The press and politicians demanded

reprisals against Leeds supporters, against Leeds United football club, and against football officials for allowing the match to go ahead on a bank holiday weekend. Dorset police chief Brian Weight claimed that the Football League had turned down his request to change the date of the match; he demanded that the police should have the statutory right to vet and ban matches. Uefa officials considered that the violence had scuppered any chance of English clubs being allowed back into European competitions next year.

In fact the 'Battle of Bournemouth' was more akin to a police riot than a hooligan rampage. Indeed the whole affair smacked suspiciously of a set-up. Far from Leeds supporters having organised the battle in advance, it is clear that the police had planned their operation months previously. Even before Leeds fans had arrived in Bournemouth, the police were waiting for

them. The Dorset constabulary had called in reinforcements from five other forces, including mounted police from the Met. The local force had even hired a helicopter specially for the occasion.

From the moment the Leeds fans arrived in Bournemouth they were shadowed and harassed by the police. On the morning of the match riot officers surrounded the ground and formed a cordon to keep out Leeds supporters. When Leeds fans congregated near the beach riot police charged them. The idea that a few hundred youths dressed in little more than shorts had attempted to do serious battle with paramilitary police, horses and a helicopter is about as believable as Simon Jenkins' fantasy about Roundheads and Cavaliers.

Guinea pigs

Ever since the Heysel stadium tragedy in Belgium five years ago, when rampaging Liverpool fans caused the death of 38 Juventus supporters, the authorities have made great play of football hooliganism as a mortal threat to civilised values. The Tories have inflated a few violent incidents into a major panic and criminalised all football supporters. The government has used the hooligan scare to win backing for more police powers and greater state repression. Under the cover of a campaign against hooliganism, the authorities have used young fans as guinea pigs for experiments in new policing techniques and to legitimise police repression.

Every large football match today is accompanied by paramilitary-style policing. It has become accepted that visiting football fans can be corralled like a herd of animals from the train station to the football ground and back again. Before some matches the police have organised roadblocks at motorway exits to turn back 'troublemakers', in a similar fashion to the police operation to stop pickets moving round the country during the miners' strike.

Establishment campaign

The authorities have used the hooligan scare to organise a national network of surveillance on football fans. Plainclothes police infiltrate terraces and supporters' clubs. Police computers hold records on thousands of football fans; such intelligence is shared with police forces abroad. The Football Spectators Act passed last year allows the authorities the right to ban 'hooligans' from travelling abroad for matches for up to five years; it also allows the police effectively to impose a curfew by requiring fans to report to police stations at specified times.

The demand by Dorset police for the right to vet and ban football fixtures is simply an attempt to institutionalise already existing police practice. This season's game between Manchester United and Liverpool, for example, had to be rescheduled after police objections to it taking place on a Friday night.

The authorities have got away with such flagrant attacks on civil liberties because they are conducted under the guise of a battle against hooliganism. The 'Battle of Bournemouth' is simply the latest in the establishment campaign to criminalise football supporters. We must reject any attempt by the authorities to use such scares to legitimise yet more attacks on our rights. The real problem is not a handful of football fans, but a state machine that is steadily encroaching on our liberties.